

**Democratic Confrontations:  
Aesthetic and Civic Engagement in the Poetry of Carmen Naranjo**

by

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For my parents, Javier and Blanca Callejas. ¡Viva la familia!

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## INTRODUCTION: CARMEN NARANJO AND THE POETICS OF DEMOCRACY

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*Y la primera ley, creador: crear.*  
-Rubén Darío, *Palabras liminares*

The poet and politician Carmen Naranjo (1928-2012) was, as she once put it, a literary and political “problem” for Costa Rica (Arizpe 98). In both her artistic and civic careers, she repeatedly confronts the idyllic portrayal of the longest standing democracy in Latin America as a country with no social conflict. From a literary standpoint, she brings to the forefront an aesthetic of revolution within a non-insurgent urban space. From a political standpoint, the progressive policies she put forth as Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sports (1974-1976) created unease among conservative sectors that did not want Costa Rica to be associated with Central America’s leftist liberation struggles already strained by the polarization of the Cold War. Through both careers, her ideological affiliation with the *Partido de Liberación Nacional*, the social democratic party that emerged following the 1948 Revolution and the founding of the Second Republic, also places her at odds with the region’s intellectuals and poets whose visions for achieving social justice remained committed to socialism and militancy. Instead, her political poetry perplexes the narrative of militancy espoused by the Latin American left in that it does not reflect the same call to arms manifested in the revolutionary poetry of her precursors and contemporaries. While the context of Costa Rican specificity did not make her a stranger to the armed conflict of the isthmus, her use of the *guerrilla*-poet to carry out this rebellion in her poems poses a critical need to analyze the parameters of her revolution within a privileged space of democratic practice and discourse.

This dissertation explores the relationship between poetry and democracy in Naranjo’s political poetry through six major collections in which I trace the effect produced when the aesthetic forms of revolutionary struggle are transposed to a non-revolutionary context. To that

end, her poems target a culture of democracy that values consumerism—be it the consumption of material goods, resources, foreign ideals, and even words—as opposed to placing value on creative effort and production as forms of political participation and representation. Against the apolitical characteristics of a visible, but anonymous multitude, the lyric voice’s search for social awareness becomes an intimate quest to confront the words and symbols that have lost their meaningful and radical content, stamped by a post-revolutionary conformity that clings to the narrative of Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism. Drawing on recent theory bridging aesthetics and democracy in the work of Jacques Rancière, Davide Panagia, and Thomas Docherty, I argue that this confrontation is an aesthetic and political endeavor that sustains the activism of the lyric self, thereby offering a model of civic engagement that is intimately tied to the creative process, or what I refer to as Naranjo’s “poetics of democracy.”

In the 1960s, Central American poetry displays resistance in the form of revolutionary aesthetics and content. Primarily, poets respond to the emergence of insurrectionary movements against right-wing military dictatorships in the region and emphasize the collective struggle. My research on Naranjo’s political poetry provides an avenue for the inclusion of the Costa Rican social democratic perspective in the overall history of committed literature in Central America.<sup>1</sup> The use of theory bridging aesthetics and the polity allows me to identify a dual literary and political commitment in Naranjo’s verse that goes beyond protesting the injustices of a particular regime or state apparatus; she protests the language which misrepresents democracy’s core: the people. Thus, Naranjo forges political views within the lyric through radical resistance to signifiers, intense interrogation directed to the spaces of silences, and through making visible that which ruptures community, painfully (mis)represented in the collective subject “we.”

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<sup>1</sup> Here committed literature is understood to be a form of writing that also pursues a political, social, religious, or ideological goal.

Additionally, the study of Naranjo’s work is essential to a better understanding of the cultural role poetry has played in Central American revolutions, particularly given studies that claim it to be “politicized” for ceding to the dominant socio-political discourse (Zimmerman “Papel” 278). In response to conflicting debates between the literary avant-garde and political vanguard, the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal once defended the lyric as the best form to present his political commitment in the poem “Epístola a José Coronel Urtecho”:

<p>Yo prefiero el verso, usted sabe, porque es más fácil y más breve y el pueblo lo capta mejor, como los posters sin olvidar que ‘el arte revolucionario sin valor artístico no tiene valor revolucionario’ (Mao) (147, ll. 1-6)</p>	<p>I prefer the verse, you know, because it’s easier and shorter and the people grasp it better, like posters without forgetting that ‘revolutionary art without artistic value lacks revolutionary value’ (Mao) (147, ll. 1-6)</p>
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As several leftist political movements in Central America began to claim the use of violence as a means of social transformation, it was poetry and not the novel that became the platform for literary nationalism (Beverly and Zimmerman 48). Artists and intellectuals could no longer ignore the urgency behind this call to arms, especially when poets became targets of the most brutal regimes. Prompted by the assassination of the poets Otto René Castillo (Guatemala, 1936-1967), Leonel Rugama (Nicaragua, 1949-1970), and Roberto Obregón Morales (Guatemala, 1940-1970), the Salvadorean poet and militant Roque Dalton penned a provocative manifesto declaring that armed violence had invaded the domain of culture in Central America “hasta en el último rincón de la más hermética torre de marfil” [‘even in the innermost part of the most hermetic ivory tower’] (53). Without exception, he reminds all Central American writers of their historical responsibility to denounce injustice and that true revolutionary transformation requires militant action.

Lyricism remained central to the development of these revolutionary causes, and the attempt to breach poetry and social commitment creates a new generation of poets known as the



*Generación comprometida* [‘Committed Generation’], whose engaged political poetry has been categorized under several labels (*comprometida, social, de protesta, rebelde, testimonial, política, etc...*). Yet, given these poets’ priorities and denouncement of institutionalized social oppression, their work is best defined under the label *revolucionaria* and conveys what James Iffland refers to as “la poética de la emancipación” [‘the poetics of emancipation’] (12). This revolutionary impetus (also inspired by the success of the Cuban Revolution) motivates the *exteriorismo* poetics of Cardenal, the combat poetry of Dalton, the testimonial poetry of Claribel Alegría, and the *izquierda erótica* [‘erotic left’] of Ana María Rodas and Gioconda Belli. In their verse, the figure of the guerrilla-poet surfaces through the inscription of the lyric self who is explicitly anti-imperialist and critical of bourgeois values and who is situated in combat or in the countryside as a gesture to “remove poets from their pedestals and place them in the street” (Gold 150). Frederic W. Murray expands on the role of the poet in this revolutionary discourse:

...social protest: “protest” from the Latin *pro testari* meaning ‘to call forth a witness.’ The poet, then, comes forth as a witness in protest of perceived injustice of a social nature. In verse, the poet may denounce the economic conditions under which the majority of the population live, the social inequities inherent in a hierarchical society, the anomie of mass urban life, the cruelties and injustices perpetuated by an authoritarian/corporate political system, the brutality and violence of a police state, and the trampling of basic human rights. The poet may adopt, as an invariable stance or in any given poem, a tone that ranges from mild irony and/or indignation to biblical wrath and/or revolutionary exhortation. (16)

Following Murray’s definition, Naranjo models her social protest by evaluating the anomie of mass urban life, making visible a series of social relations within a common space in which consumerism threatens citizenship. It is against this privileged discourse that the lyric self politically negotiates her subjectivity and forms of expression as she faces the inscription of a collective “we” that has no sense of social and cultural responsibility. Naranjo questions the implicit universality and privileging of Western models of prosperity over the promotion of the

country's cultural heritage, which she considers to be more important than the economic concerns that would eventually drive her party to change its social democratic platform to a neoliberal one (Nelson 179).

According to Jean Franco, the commitment to liberation struggles translated into the literary formulation of an "anti-capitalist ethos envisaged as the opposite of the republican state" (8). She adds that the polarizing climate of the Cold War, waged as a war of cultural values between artistic freedom and communitarianism, exerts considerable pressure for writers and intellectuals to align ideologically with either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R (18). During this period, the visions of achieving social justice even through leftist politics remained at odds, pitting communist and non-communist factions against each other. As Patrick Iber notes:

Ultimately, intellectuals from Latin America could not break free from the Cold War's rigid binaries. With the Soviet Union demanding fealty from Latin American communists, the United States zealously supporting their repression, and Fidel Castro pushing for regional armed revolution, advocates of social democracy found little room to promote their ideals without compromising them. Cold War politics had offered utopian dreams, but intellectuals could get neither the peace nor the freedom they sought. (4)

This rigid binary helps explain why the social democratic poetry of Naranjo has not received the critical attention it deserves. On the one hand, her poetry did not reflect the same poetics of experience demanded of the leading revolutionary poets of the era. On the other hand, Costa Rica's literary tradition had its own set of committed writers of socialist and communist persuasion, many of whom were either banned or forced into exile following the 1948 Revolution. Finally, the growing interest, especially within North American academia, in Central American political literature and cultural production focused heavily on Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua for being sites of political instability and armed conflict (Rolón-Alexander 144).

However, the dismantling of the revolutionary movements in these nations on account of internal factions, *Perestroika*, the end of the Cold War, the Nicaraguan elections in 1990, and the Central American Peace Accords heavily affect the prominent role of poetry in service to these causes. Once considered the ideal mode of production for its portability and ease of distribution in conditions of poverty and clandestine missions, poetry loses its centrality as narrative forms like the *testimonio* and the novel become the preferred genres for writers to articulate their disillusion (Beverly and Zimmerman 49). Consequently, the socio-political commentary of Costa Rican poetry both before and after this era of armed conflict has been overshadowed due to a lack of scholarly interest in what was considered the region's most stable country with a unique standing as a "democratic enigma" (Molina 139). As I will highlight throughout my dissertation, Naranjo's own formulation of civic identity and commitment in her poetry hinges on the context of democracy's stronghold in Costa Rica, a country whose own history prefaces both the fervor and disillusion of Central American revolutionary poetry. As a civil servant and poet, she questions the political institutions, identities, and practices that were both reformulated and reinforced during the 1948 Revolution (also known as the Civil War of 1948) and the founding of the Second Republic.

### **The Second Republic and the Legacy of the 1948 Revolution**

Naranjo represents the younger generation that came to believe in the social democratic principles of the Second Republic as championed by revolutionary hero José Figueres Ferrer during his two presidential terms (1950-1954 and 1970-1974). These principles called for the government to play a stronger role in the type of social reform that would become the basis of Costa Rica's modern welfare state, long considered the greatest success of the country's democratic history. Latin America's difficulty in establishing, maintaining, and strengthening

democratic institutions makes the success of Costa Rican democracy so important, even more so when considering that it is the sole Central American country to survive the 1930s without electoral politics falling to dictatorship. The currents of democratic and social transformations in Central America comprise a long and complicated period in the political history of the region, marked by early attempts of democratic aperture in all five Central American nations (almost all thwarted) and closes with a panorama of Civil War and Revolution.

Costa Rica's own democratic success was not without its own violent struggle. In 1948, the country became more polarized than ever. Despite having instituted several progressive reforms—including labor laws, the establishment of a minimum wage, the decree for the creation of the Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR), and a social security and national healthcare system—the administration of President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia of the *Partido Republicano* lost the election. However, thanks to his party's alliance with the *Partido Comunista Costarricense* (PCCR also known as the *Partido Vanguardia Popular*), Congress remained controlled by *calderonistas*, who declared the votes to be void. When Calderón refused to accept defeat, the Costa Rican army and a militia of Communist fighters supported him. These actions prompted opposition leader José Figueres Ferrer to initiate an armed coup backed by insurrectionary groups from other Central American and Caribbean nations.

The 1948 Revolution was the bloodiest political period of insurrection in Costa Rican history, despite only 44 days of fighting, after which Figueres ousted Calderón's coalition. Many members of *Partido Republicano* left the country, while the *Partido Vanguardia Popular* (formerly the PCCR) was now banned, along with any associated unions. Tribunal courts were established to hold trials of officials who had been accused of corruption. Political prisoners overcrowded the jails. These inmates included renowned writers affiliated with the Communist

party such as Carmen Lyra and Carlos Luis Fallas.<sup>2</sup> Once released, the majority of these political prisoners—with the exception of five who were executed—sought political exile in Mexico.

Now considered a national hero, Figueres abolished the military as an institution. The end of the war marked the beginning of the Second Republic, and Figueres renewed a state commitment to social democracy through the creation of the *Partido Liberal Nacionalista* (PLN). The curious outcome of the war—the return to the welfare state program originally outlined by Calderón and the strengthening of electoral laws—reinforced the notion of the Costa Rican citizen not simply as an ideal aspiration but as a key actor in practical politics (Molina 142). Ironically, the political objectives of the defeated *calderonistas* shared a founding principle with the goals of the victorious *figueristas*: social justice and the exercise of the right to vote as the sources and objectives of legitimate political power.

In other words, the outcome of the Revolution did not signify the end of reform efforts, nor did it initiate a period of political repression (as was the case of Guatemala, for example). All social legislation and institutions created prior to the war remained in effect. After 1950, Costa Rica entered a period of political stability and economic growth. The policies developed for social welfare between the years 1950-1980 improved living conditions in both urban and rural areas. More importantly, the country consolidated its stance on antimilitarism and valuation of peace, democracy, and education, further evidenced when in 1987 President Oscar Arias Sánchez received the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in the Central American peace accords.

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<sup>2</sup> Despite their recognition as part of the Costa Rican literary canon, many writers associated with the Communist Party would be forced into exile in the aftermath of the war. This was the case of Lyra, whose literary production and essays reflected a proletarian aesthetic and cause. Fallas, also known as ‘Calufa,’ was an important political activist for the PCCR. In 1933, he was banished to the Atlantic coast following a clash between the police and union strikers. It was during this time that he became one of the leaders of the famous United Fruit Strike in 1934. It should also be noted that his most famous work *Mamita Yunai* (1940), in which he denounces the deplorable conditions of the banana workers, was referenced in Pablo Neruda’s epic collection *Canto general* (1950).

The political situation in Costa Rica during the 1970s presented substantial differences with the rest of the Central American region. Society did not undergo the same militarization given the abolition of the armed forces still in place, and no guerrilla movements developed, but Costa Rica did see an increase in social movements. Between the years 1972-1978, records indicate that 88 strikes were organized. 55 percent of these strikes occurred in the private sector, but people living in the urban slums led several acts of protest. In the coastal city of Limón, workers on strike and other sectors of the population paralyzed the main port until their demands were met. In the countryside, the struggle for land also provoked confrontations between *campesinos* and local authorities (Rojas Bolaños 156). Furthermore, the Civil War in Guatemala, the assembling of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, and the guerrilla efforts in El Salvador all had profound economic and political repercussions in Costa Rica.

The underlying factors that gave rise to this social unrest clearly indicate a compelling basis for reevaluating the assumption that the country is devoid of political and social crises, a fact that Naranjo argues is rather indicative of a cultural crisis. In her essay, “La crisis cultural en centroamérica” (1988), Naranjo notes how the democracy of an underdeveloped country runs the risk of its culture becoming “a game in which the people participate, but only as passive recipients” (238). Moreover, underdevelopment produces underdeveloped governments in which democracy ends up being largely a system of governmental and partisan self-defenses that fail to truly represent the people. She states:

Nuestra cultura democrática se ha ido también desgastando, sin esfuerzo de renovación. Ya no se cree en la crítica de un partido político, cuando alternativamente están en el poder o en la llanura, porque en la crítica no existe la buena fe de un análisis objetivo, o el examen sereno de una actuación que oriente mejor sus propósitos o la revisión bien intencionada y profunda que requieren los países. Se trata únicamente de halar nuestro propio molino, con una medida exagerada y negativa que capitaliza sólo desaciertos. Los que se defienden usan medidas semejantes y sólo señalan los aciertos. Todo esto pareciera que vivimos en países en que es imposible equivocarse, en donde la única

forma de sobrevivir políticamente es monopolizar la inteligencia con el lenguaje falso y falseador. (4)

[Our democratic culture has been wasting away by degrees as well because it lacks the spirit of change. People no longer believe in the criticism one political party makes of another when they are alternatively in power because in the criticism the good faith of an objective analysis does not exist, nor does the calm examination of performance that would better orient objectives nor the well intentioned and deep revision that countries require. It is only a question of blowing one's own horn in an exaggerated and negative way that capitalizes only on blunders. The defenders use similar means and only point out their successes. Thus it would seem that we live in a country where it is impossible to make a mistake, where the only way to survive politically is by circumventing comprehension with false words and a falsifying language.] (4)

As a political figure that worked tirelessly to distribute national cultural products to the sectors of society often overlooked, Naranjo encourages a more honest and critical reflection of her country's economic and social reality. Her main preoccupation is with the culture that accumulates this falsifying language, thus becoming the object of political and aesthetic concerns in her poetry. Although Naranjo's voice was heard as early as the 1960s, it was in the 1970s, a decade of cultural innovation and expansion under the government of José Figueres Ferrer (1970-1974), and later incumbent Daniel Oduber Quirós (1974-1978) that Naranjo became active in politics.

### **Carmen Naranjo: Her Life and Cultural Activism**

In an interview, Naranjo was once asked to expand on why there seems to be little attention to themes that directly concern women in her literary work. By way of explanation, she states, "he vivido mucho el mundo de hombres" ["I have lived a great deal in the world of men"] (qtd. in Picón-Garfield 227). This affirmation only serves to highlight the extent to which she was aware of the challenges she faced as a female public intellectual. In her collection of essays *Mujer y cultura (Woman and Culture, 1989)*, Naranjo reflects on feminism as being socially aware of the subordinate and unjust situation currently experienced by women. She adds that this

awareness translates into a feminist movement and a feminist attitude whose tasks are to recognize the important contributions (previously unknown or devalued) by women to the society, culture, economy, production, and reproduction within a country. Naranjo offers the following definition of what a feminist attitude and movement entails:

Una actitud feminista orienta hacia el combate de toda desigualdad y discriminación, ya provenga de la pobreza, del color, del ser extraño en una nueva sociedad, de credo o de pensamiento. Es un movimiento reivindicativo de justicia, de incorporación igualitaria, de vocación altamente democrática y de pluralidad en la forma de pensar y de organizar. (“El Feminismo” 195)

[A feminist attitude is oriented toward the combat against all inequality and discrimination, whether it stems from poverty, from color, from being a stranger in a new society, from one’s creed or one’s thought. It is a movement of vindication that seeks justice and egalitarian incorporation, and whose vocation is highly democratic with a plurality in its mode of thought and organization. (“Feminism” 195, my translation)]

This statement speaks to the wide range of experience and expression articulated in Naranjo’s literary and professional careers that has provided a democratic model of female leadership and creativity. She was the first woman to occupy important administrative positions in both national institutions and international organizations at a time when not many women ventured into the public political sphere. Her experience living a great deal in this “world of men” began with her childhood and would help her develop the strength to overcome many obstacles as she became more politically active.

Carmen Naranjo Coto was born on January 24, 1928 in the city of Cartago, the former capital of Costa Rica and where the coffee oligarchy exercised its principal political influence. Her parents Sebastián Naranjo Prida and Caridad Coto Troyo belonged to the growing middle class. As the only girl in a family of three brothers who teased her mercilessly, Naranjo states that she was born “fighting,” although this also relates to an early polio diagnosis. Moreover, her mother, who did not want another child, purposely disregarded and neglected Naranjo, who



acutely felt this maternal rejection. She candidly revealed that while her parents lived an unhappy marriage, she found comfort in the attention and guidance she received from her paternal grandmother and namesake, whom she affectionately referred to as “Mamá Carmen.”

At the age of three, the family relocated to San José, where Naranjo began her primary and secondary education at public institutions. At the *Escuela Perú*, she recalls being exposed to the world of classical Greek theatre, which she found very inspiring for “una chiquilla que estaba tratando de absorber la cultura” [a young girl that was trying to absorb culture] (“Mujer Palabra”). She often spoke fondly of her time at the *Colegio Superior de Señoritas*, the most prestigious college for women in the country. Impressed by the quality of her academic formation, many people assumed she had studied abroad in England or France, to which she would proudly respond that she was a product of Costa Rican public education. Nevertheless, when it came time for her to enroll at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) to pursue her master’s degree, she opted to pursue one in Spanish philology after being told that women were not admitted into the Department of Sciences. It was through this course of study that she found the literary vocation that would sustain her life’s passion.

As a self-proclaimed cultural activist, Naranjo had much success in both cultural and political posts where she had a public voice that would prove instrumental in the advancement of important legislation. While working at the *Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad* (ICE, or the Costa Rican Electricity Institute) and as director of the *Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social* (CCSS, Costa Rican Department of Social Security), she exercised considerable influence in the pushing for universal social security benefits, and she helped author the law for nationalizing the country’s electricity. Her first international experience as a civil servant comes with her appointment as ambassador to Israel, which gave her a firsthand encounter with armed conflict

during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Her time spent as ambassador allowed her to develop a close friendship with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who referred to her as “my daughter,” and the writer Rosario Castellanos, Mexico’s ambassador to Israel. Her greatest and most rewarding challenge, however, would come about with her tenure as Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Both Naranjo’s career in public administration and her career as a writer were driven by the desire to foment cultural action. Before the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports was established in 1970, Costa Rica’s priorities lay in pragmatic issues to the exclusion of artistic and even scientific development (Nelson 178). Under the government of Figueres, however, this Ministry was created for the first time, providing the power and financial resources to manage cultural affairs separately from education.<sup>3</sup> In 1974, President Oduber appointed Naranjo to be a member of his cabinet. Naranjo centered her efforts on the promotion of cultural policies based on the belief that the democratization of cultural heritage, and by extension political action, could only be fostered through education.

During the national assembly’s *Porvenir de la democracia costarricense: Hacia el tercer milenio* [*The Future of Costa Rican Democracy: Toward the Third Millennium*], which convened in 1989 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Costa Rican democracy, Naranjo provided the following vision for the development of culture in her country:

...he encontrado que lo fundamental es trabajar en términos universales dentro del país para que la cultura aunque sea un milímetro crezca en todo el territorio. Por eso encuentro que es indispensable que la cultura tenga medios modernos de comunicación....Todo lo que fortalezca el conocimiento debe ser implementado. Por eso es tan importante que las universidades se proyecten para valorar lo que

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<sup>3</sup> This was a revolutionary effort meant to unite the educated and the illiterate in a process of cultural training. At that time one-third of the population was comprised of students, yet the country still had an illiteracy rate of 14 percent. To give a little bit of background, the 1869 constitution declared that education would be “universal, free, and the responsibility of the state.” In 1887, education was made compulsory and secular. As of 1977, education comprised 35 percent of the national budget, an impressive statistic due largely to the fact that there is no budget for defense spending (Rovinski 14-21).

las comunidades tienen y desarrollarlo. No se necesita sacar a la gente de sus sitios sino llegar a ellos y lograr encender la espiral del desarrollo. (*Cultura* 20)

[...I have found that the most fundamental thing is to work in universal terms within the country so that culture, even if only a millimeter, grows throughout the entire territory. That is why I find it indispensable for culture to have modern means of communication.... Anything that can strengthen knowledge should be implemented. That is why it is so important that universities should reach out to appreciate what communities have and develop that. It is not necessary to take people out of their spots but rather reach them and fire up the spiral of development]. (*Cultura* 20)

Naranjo underscores that culture does not benefit from officialism; rather it is generated by a people and is of the people (235). She does believe, however, that governments can develop cultural policies to stimulate cultural awareness and encourage its diffusion and enrichment by all possible means.

Naranjo's essays on the democratization of culture, or the idea of promoting culture in all sectors of her country, were first compiled in her book *Cultura* (1978). These essays make clear that Naranjo views cultural action as a labor defined by two main principles: (1) the enrichment of a people resides in the growth of its culture, and (2) cultural heritage does not belong to a particular group but rather must be shared by all members of the society (*Cultura* 7-8). For her, a people's sense of identity depends on a responsible interaction with culture (*Cultura* 28). Of the four components she attributes to culture—namely, language, religion, customs, and creativity—Naranjo considers the latter to be the most important as she urges her fellow citizens toward “transformative authenticity,” or the pursuit of quixotic ideals (“Los Quijotes modernos” 290). In other words, our creative impulses are the real catalyst of action.

When Naranjo recommends a cultural policy, she is referring to a governmental policy that considers all sectors of society, raises awareness of the cultural heritage, and encourages its extension and development. While a mandated approach may not seem viable or even seem like

a totalitarian concept of culture, Costa Rican novelist Samuel Rovinski points out that the creation of a centralizing agency for cultural activities was rather the result of the persistence of writers, poets, artists, musicians, and scientists who, in a combined effort, informed the public of their works and sought to inspire creativity (“Cultural Policy” 15-16). Naranjo recognizes that cultural action cannot be dictated and needs a climate of freedom in which all can participate. For her, a cultural policy establishes norms, principles, and regulations to protect responsible freedom in creating and recreating cultural values (*Cultura* 17-20).

In the 1970s epoch of enthusiasm and innovation, a deregulated mass media was seen as one of the greatest threats to this spirit of creative participation. Concerned about the fact that radio and television were privately owned except for three radio stations, the Ministry of Culture studied the content of mass communication media. Only 1.29 percent of television programming was devoted to cultural films, largely financed by the government (Rovinski 46). Naranjo describes the effects of commercial television as “anti-culture,” the negation of traditional values and the depersonalization and placation of the populace (Nelson 180). To address this issue, she proposes the unsuccessful Radio and Television Bill in 1974, just one of the many motions for which she would not receive administrative backing and support.

Her tenure as Minister marks the golden age of cultural promotion in the country (Borloz Soto 10). Among her successes, she was directly responsible for initiating and establishing the Department of Cinema, the National Theater Company, and the Publishing House of the University of Costa Rica (EDUCA). Especially noteworthy was the *Colegio de Costa Rica*, a division of the Ministry that facilitated the presence and talks of such intellectuals as Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar, and Ernesto Sábato. Naranjo always expressed great pride in these accomplishments as she recalls, “la gente ya no me pedía únicamente bolas de fútbol; pedía

conciertos, obras de teatro, bibliotecas públicas...” [“people no longer only asked me for soccer balls; they requested concerts, theater plays, public libraries...”] (qtd. in Borloz Soto 11). For Naranjo, the best way to encourage this cultural engagement was to set the example. She therefore made it a point to continue to write and publish during her time as Minister to demonstrate the possibility of balancing her political responsibilities with her commitment to creativity.

On May 1, 1976, the leading newspaper of Costa Rica, *La Nación*, published a headline detailing the abrupt resignation of Naranjo from her ministerial post. She had recently overseen the funding by the ministry of a project entitled “Dar voz a quien no la tiene” [“To Give Voice to Those Who Have None”], a series of documentary films whose themes ranged from the destruction of natural resources, the presence of hunger, the state of the penitentiary system, among other politically sensitive topics.<sup>4</sup> While the initial reception of the films was enthusiastic, some members of the cabinet quickly opposed their distribution citing that it would not bode well to support films that highlighted the shortcomings of the current administration. One film in particular, Ingo Niehaus’ *Costa Rica: Banana Republic* (1976), a critique of foreign investment and domestic corruption in the agricultural sector, provoked the members of the cabinet to such an extent that it was banned.

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<sup>4</sup> Naranjo would continue to support other film initiatives. She joined forces with actor Oscar Castillo, director Antonio Yglesias, and fellow Central American writers Sergio Ramírez and Samuel Rovinski to establish *Istmo Cine* (Isthmus Cinema). Inspired by the *Nuevo Cine Mexicano* (New Mexican Cinema), the film house sought to promote Central American film production. They also supported international filmmakers who were interested in filming guerrilla activities at the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border by providing camera equipment. Thanks to these initiatives, Nicaragua, in particular, was able to establish a vibrant film scene during the 1980s until its collapse following the country’s Civil War. With respect to this project, Naranjo notes: “El cine de Nicaragua era el orgullo y la dignidad de América Latina, en un tiempo, lástima que todo se cayó como un muro en terremoto” [Nicaraguan cinema was the pride and dignity of Latin America, at one point, it’s a shame that everything collapsed like a wall in an earthquake] (qtd. in Gaitán, *La Prensa*).

In response to the attacks from her colleagues, Naranjo defended the films and her belief that she had an obligation as Minister to review the image of Costa Rica as a paradise of democratic principles with a high standard of living, an image that, in her view, was inconsistent with the experience of most of the population. For this reason, government officials often labeled her as subversive. On May 19, 1976—only 18 days after announcing her departure from the political arena—Naranjo wrote an article entitled “El significado de una renuncia” [“The Meaning Behind A Resignation”], in which she comments on the circumstances that led to her resignation:

Se ha criticado al Ministerio que dirijo por los programas de cine, en que hemos expuesto al país lo que está pasando con la realidad nacional. Es cierto que hemos incomodado hasta el cansancio con imágenes que todos tratamos de olvidar. Pero no es cierto que con ello estemos provocando subversión...La subversión se abona cuando ocultamos verdades que están creciendo y reproduciéndose y reclaman con justicia pronta atención. La subversión se propicia cuando vamos cediendo la independencia de una cultura propia en aras de una cultura ajena, que nos ve y concibe en términos de mercado. (174)

[The Ministry that I direct has been criticized for film programs in which we have exposed the country to the national reality. It is true that we have made some people uncomfortable to the point of exhaustion with images that we all try to forget. But it is not true that we are provoking subversion with all of this.... Subversion gains strength when we hide truths that are growing and reproducing themselves and demanding prompt attention and justice. Subversion becomes propitious when we cede the independence of our own culture for the sake of a foreign culture that sees us and thinks of us in market terms. (174)]

Naranjo’s clarification of what she takes to be the meaning of subversion is essential to understanding her political and cultural activism. She rejects the subversive label attributed to her support of the films because her intent was never to overthrow nor undermine the democratic system of which she was participant. In fact, she vehemently argues that the failure to recognize the “uncomfortable” images exposed in the films is the true act of subversion against the nation,

suggesting the means of its own undoing when it easily lends its culture to be appropriated and/or defined by a foreign one.

As corruption and lack of support at the governmental level became evident, so did Naranjo's disappointment. The episode that led to her resignation underscores the extent to which the Cold War polarized ideological affiliations such that any approximation to a state-sponsored cultural policy resembled too closely the leftist projects of neighboring countries. Sadly, what was once a vibrant ambience of creative fervor bolstered by government support quickly waned as the debate regarding how much the state should sponsor artistic endeavors proved inconvenient for the PLN. At play was the idea of sustaining the notion of Costa Rican exceptionalism to the point where the framing of a particular national image excludes marginalized sectors of the population. Likewise, Naranjo denounces the exclusion along with the censorship that impedes a dialogic space from which to contest this misrepresentation, or at the very least, provide a competing rendition. It is the voice of this activist—the one who denounces the image of a community marked by a weak democratic culture—that I identify as the lyric self throughout her poetry.

Naranjo's resignation ultimately inspired dozens of state employees to march and stage a protest in front of the *Casa Presidencial*, incensed by the Oduber administration's willingness to let go of the one member who truly espoused a commitment to cultural advocacy (Trejos de Montero viii). To these colleagues, Naranjo responded in the most fitting way possible: through poetry. In a poem titled "Compañeros" ["Comrades"], she reaffirms her commitment using revolutionary diction:

Compañeros  
no pregunten nunca  
si no me ven a la par  
si no me adivinan cercana

Comrades  
don't ever wonder  
if you do not see me alongside you  
if you do not perceive me near

si no me sienten  
hombro con hombro  
en dónde estoy  
porque estoy ahí  
a la par, cercana,  
hombro con hombro  
en la misma trinchera.  
Si no fuera así  
perdería la palabra  
y olvidaría que juntos  
hicimos el libro  
leímos el poema  
corrimos el telón  
colgamos los cuadros  
entregamos la bola  
y llegamos a la meta  
satisfechos y alegres.  
(63, ll. 1-21)

if you do not feel me  
shoulder to shoulder  
where I am  
because I am there  
alongside, nearby  
shoulder to shoulder  
in the same trenches.  
If that were not the case,  
I would lose the word  
and I would forget that together  
we made the book  
we read the poem  
we ran the curtain  
we hung the paintings  
we passed the ball  
and we reached our goal  
satisfied and happy.  
(63, ll. 1-21)

The poem is strong in its affirmation that her commitment to cultural activism is far from over. Her framing of this affirmation in revolutionary terms helps equate her political and artistic visions. To have fought in the “trenches” becomes a reflection on the successful collaborations and initiatives to promote culture. The lyric self negates the possibility of forgetting these accomplishments by validating the triumphs through their inscriptions. In essence, the speaker retains the last word. Along these lines, one cannot claim that Naranjo is calling for an armed revolution in her poetry. Much like she wished to operate within the state as a diplomat and minister, she resists the negative consequences of capitalism and external neoliberal pressures from within the system (Caso 142). Naranjo’s poetic rebellion is no less political in its effort to reject the imposition of a version of consumer capitalism imagined elsewhere nor one homogenized model for revolution.

Because of this incident and popular support for Naranjo, Oduber closed many doors for her to work within the public sector. This did not stop her from continuing her initiatives as she opted to go abroad to continue her work. From 1978-1982, she was the official UNICEF



representative for Costa Rica, first in Guatemala and then Mexico. In 1982, she returned home and became the director of the Museum of Costa Rican Art. Finally, in 1984, she became the head of the Central American University Publishing House (EDUCA) until her retirement in 1992. Despite these incursions into the private sector, she never truly stopped serving in politics. She personally drew up the *Ley de la Igualdad Social de la Mujer* (Law for Social Equality of Women), which was ratified in 1989. More importantly, she never stopped writing. Naranjo remains the country's most prolific writer, and in 1988, she became the first woman inducted into the Costa Rican Academy of the Spanish Language.

### **Costa Rica and the Development of Social Poetry**

As I have tried to underscore, Naranjo was a dynamic and controversial presence in Costa Rica whose work in the cultural arena, including political posts and publications in every genre, has achieved extensive diffusion in Central America. Though Naranjo initiates and ends her literary career with poetry, this part of her work remains largely understudied. Aside from the political marginalization of the social democratic viewpoint in Central America's revolutionary struggles and literature, this is also due to the overwhelming acclaim for her prose, which has received the most critical attention and award recognition.<sup>5</sup> Another factor is that unlike the poetry of other Central American countries, Costa Rican lyricism overall has not been the object of much critical study outside its national borders given its relatively young literary history (barely over a century). As a result, Costa Rican lyrical production failed to consolidate a strong presence in the most representative of Spanish America's poetic movements: *modernismo* and

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<sup>5</sup> For her narrative work, Naranjo has been awarded the *Premio Aquileo J. Echeverría* on two occasions (1966 and 1971) and the *Premio Magón* (1986) in her native Costa Rica. The Chilean government presented her with the *Medalla Gabriela Mistral* (1996). She received the *Orden de Alfonso Sabio* from the Spanish government in 1977. Finally, she received two doctorates *honoris causa*, one from the Universidad de Santo Domingo (1991) and the other from the University of Costa Rica (2003).

the *vanguardia*. Even if at a later stage, the leading figures of contemporary Costa Rican literature embrace these movements and participate in the literary culture of the day. The most significant impact of *modernismo* generally spans between the years 1888 and 1920, yet poetic works identified as *modernista* were still being published in Costa Rica as late as 1940 when *postmodernismo* and *vanguardismo* had already become the dominant forms of expression.

The late development of the *vanguardia* in Costa Rica produced two literary generations. The first generation includes those poets born between the years 1917-1927 and who published between the years 1950-1960. Those poets born between the years 1927-1937 and who mainly published between the years 1955-1965 comprise the second generation.<sup>6</sup> Relatively few differences separate the two. According to Carlos Francisco Monge, if there is a differentiating tendency between the two generations, it is the latter's noticeable emphasis on the subjective experience (27). He elucidates further, “en un primer momento el mundo es señalado y denunciado por su acontecer vertiginoso (primera generación); en el segundo, el mundo es interiorizado...y el desgobierno se instala en la subjetividad del hablante (segunda generación)” (27). [At first the world is signaled and denounced for its vertiginous events; in the second, the world is interiorized...the lack of order installs itself in the subjectivity of the poetic speaker (second generation)]. As poets of the second generation interiorize the perception of reality as chaos, their poems dwell upon the themes of egotism, the stasis of contemplation, and eroticism.

The legacy of the *vanguardia* as represented through these two generations made the function of the word and the search for an innovative language fundamental concerns in Costa

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<sup>6</sup> The most renowned poets of the first generation include: Eunice Odio, Alfredo Sancho, Arturo Montero Vega, Salvador Jiménez Canossa, Victoria Urbano and Eduardo Jenkins Dobles. Their work—some of which was written and published outside of Costa Rica—appears as early as 1946. The most prominent members of the second generation include: Mario Picado, Jorge Chapentier, Ana Antillón, Virginia Grütter, Ricardo Ulloa Barrenechea, Raúl Morales, Carlos Luis Altamirano, and Carlos Rafael Duverrán.

Rican poetry, now framed within a concrete literary period that would quickly reflect the subsequent developments of Spanish American poetry. This period marks a significant increase in the country's poetic production, thanks to improved opportunities for publishing and greater consistency in the meeting of literary groups, but so many years of poetic insularity impeded the formulation of a concrete poetic identity. Carlos Cortés wryly notes:

A finales del siglo pasado corría el chiste de que en Costa Rica no se cultivaba la poesía sino solo el café. Nicaragua—como la potencia poética regional, por ejemplo, o Guatemala—como fuente nutricia del realismo mágico indígena—para no hablar de México—o de otros países que son en sí mismos una gran imaginación imaginadora, *fábula de fábulas*—son entidades ideológicas preexistentes que recrearon los megarelatos latinoamericanos para consolidar su identidad literaria: El Dictador, La Revolución, La Guerrilla... Costa Rica formó su identidad cultural en los márgenes, en los límites, en los silencios de la historia... (115)

[At the end of the last century there was a joke that Costa Rica did not cultivate poetry only coffee. Nicaragua—being the regional poetic powerhouse, for example, or Guatemala—as the nurturing source of indigenous magic realism—to say nothing of Mexico—or of other countries that are in themselves a great imagining imagination, *fable of fables*—are preexisting ideological entities that recreated the Latin American meganarratives to consolidate their literary identity: The Dictator, The Revolution, The Guerrilla... Costa Rica formed its cultural identity at the margins, in the borders, in the silences of history...(115, original italics).

Of course, as previously noted, it does not help that many of Costa Rica's cultural figures went into exile (mostly to Mexico and Chile) either for their leftist/socialist/communist ideological affiliations or because they felt rejected by the country's conservatism, including the poets Alfredo Cardona Peña and Eunice Odio, the novelists Yolanda Oreamuno and Joaquín Gutiérrez, the singer Chavela Vargas and the sculptor Francisco Zúñiga. The marginalization of this ambiguous poetic identity, however, amplifies our understanding of Naranjo's unique contribution to the social poetry of her country and to contemporary Latin American poetry.

The few critics who have studied Naranjo's poetic work position her within the second Costa Rican *vanguardia* generation. By my view, this classification is both misleading and

limiting in our potential to understand Naranjo's poetic and political concerns. For one, the classification only takes into account her first incursions onto the Costa Rican poetic scene in the early 1960s, completely disregarding how her poetry later undergoes significant changes. By examining these changes, I situate Naranjo's verse not only among the *posvanguardia* and *posguerra* generation in Costa Rica, but also within the clamor for political participation and social revolution expressed by Central American poets in the second half of the twentieth century. Their revolutionary poetry was a direct influence of the *posvanguardia* initiative to democratize poetic content by creating a dialogue about what political causes could be expanded within the lyric form. As Pablo Neruda, one of the leading voices of the *posvanguardia* famously affirmed in *Canto general*, "no hay material antipoético si se trata de nuestras realidades" ["there is no anti-poetic material if it deals with our realities] (19). Neruda, who renovated the tradition of civic poetry by synthesizing his poetics and politics via a Marxist reflection on the class struggle, resorts to a more direct communication within poetry and even goes so far as to make concrete calls for armed revolution.

As the Latin American *vanguardia* gives way to the *posvanguardia*, Costa Rican poets also forge an ideological rupture from the prior *vanguardia* generations through their embrace of social poetry. These poets bring about a social realism to their verse in which history and daily life become the central focal points. Concrete references to the *patria*, the people, the fellow compatriot, the soldier, the proletariat, and the lover share with the poetic speaker a particular circumstance in which the lyric self comes to the defense of these victims of political power. Poets introduce nostalgia toward primitive origins to contrast with their urban settings and what they perceive to be the mechanization of man/woman. This idea of renovation carries with it a sense of utopia and a general faith in the future. On a formal level, their poetry employs

colloquial diction and popular lexicon to construct an aesthetics of realism. Many Costa Rican poets denounced the transnational exploitation of the banana plantation workers in Limón, or joined the student protests against the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). The poet Mayra Jiménez went so far as to join the Sandinista cause in Nicaragua, leading poetry workshops in Solentiname (the artistic community founded by Ernesto Cardenal on the principles of liberation theology) and writing testimonial poetry about the atrocities of Somoza's National Guard.

In the mid-1960s, a group of poets began meeting in Turrialba, a small town in the Cartago province that also lent the group its name. Its first members were Marco Aguilar, Carlos Rivera, Manuel Calderón, Edith Fernández, and Jorge Debravo—long regarded as the most important figure of Costa Rica's tradition of social poetry.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, the *Grupo de Turrialba* shifted to San José and changed its name to *El círculo de poetas*, where they were joined by Jorge Ibáñez, Julieta Dobles, Rodrigo Quirós, Arabella Salaverry, Laureano Albán, Luis F. Charpentier, Gonzalo Arias Páez, Germán Salas, Marco Retana, and Alfonso Chase. Their poetry poses ethical and historical concerns about man's place in society and extends to Costa Rica's standing in the world, clearly stated in the group's *Manifiesto del '65* published in the literary magazine *Polémica*:

Los suscritos, jóvenes escritores costarricenses: creemos que Costa Rica ya no es Costa Rica. Las ideas que pretenden construir nuestra nacionalidad, forjadas en un pasado muerto, son ya inadecuadas. La Costa Rica tradicional ha muerto. Está naciendo una nueva patria dentro de la visión universal del nuevo costarricense...EXIGIMOS a todos los costarricenses en todas las actividades, romper definitivamente con el histórico prejuicio de pequeñez que ha amordazado injustamente nuestra voz y lanzar sus ambiciones responsablemente, en un valiente reto con los grandes valores del pasado, presente y futuro de la cultura universal. (qtd in Gil Salas, 4)

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that the origins of Costa Rica's social poetry tradition are often credited to the publication of Isaac Felipe Azofeifa's poem "Canto civil por la paz" ['Civil Song for Peace', 1958]. Azofeifa, like Naranjo, was associated with the PLN.

[We the undersigned, young Costa Rican writers: we believe that Costa Rica is no longer Costa Rica. The ideas that pretend to construct our nationality, forged in a dead past, are now inadequate. The traditional Costa Rica has died. A new homeland is being born within a universal vision of the New Costa Rican... WE DEMAND that all Costa Ricans in every activity break away from the historical prejudice of smallness that has muzzled unjustly our voice and to lance their ambitions responsibly, in a courageous challenge with the grand values of the past, present and future of universal culture.] (qtd in Gil Salas, 4)

Between the competing renditions of the traditional Costa Rica and the *nueva patria*, *El círculo de poetas* find the former to be irrelevant and set out to create a receptive space for a new vision of both country and citizen (“nuevo costarricense”). They aligned themselves with the intellectual and political ethos of Latin America’s most influential social movements and currents of thought: Liberation Theology, Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, Dependency theory, Guevara’s *hombre nuevo*, and all discussions of renovating Latin American literature.

By framing their current situation in terms of “smallness” (“histórico prejuicio de pequeñez”), they emphasize the limiting scope of Costa Rica’s literary impact and recognition, both regionally and globally:

Comprendemos que esas obras pequeñas fueron creadas para satisfacer una patria pequeña. Pero de ninguna manera podremos aceptarlas como grandes. Cumplieron su función en su tiempo. ¡Ahora dejemos cumplir la nuestra en una patria abierta al mundo! ¡Márchense a los museos, márchense...! CREEMOS que la poesía es la verdad de la verdad. Que ‘un día la política será una canción.’ Que un día el hombre será un hermano...(qtd. in Gil Salas, 4)

We understand that these small works of art were created to satisfy a small nation. But in no way can we accept them as grand. They served their purpose in their time. Now let us serve ours in a country open to the world! March off to the museums, march off...! WE BELIEVE that poetry is the truth of truth. That ‘one day politics will be a song.’ That one day man will be a brother...].

This young generation of Costa Rican writers’ desire to be heard and to dialogue with universal culture is reminiscent of the cosmopolitan aspirations of Darío’s *Modernismo*—the language of the manifesto even echoes Darío’s famous line “Si pequeña es la patria, uno grande la sueña” [‘If

the nation is small, one dreams it big'] ("El retorno" 16, l. 67). Their artistic pursuit yearns to advance a different portrait of Costa Rica and to leave behind the smallness of its traditional literature for one that is fully aware of its social purpose. The call is not a call to arms, it is a call to "march" to the museums, thereby creating a direct confrontation with the notion of culture as individual enrichment. Instead, the call is to occupy traditional spaces of cultural activity in affirmation of a collective commitment or objective ("dejemos cumplir la nuestra"). Most importantly, the final lines reinforce poetry as the ultimate utopian promise. That is, it is the language of poetry that promises truth, and it is poetic language that will bear witness to the egalitarian freedom and solidarity of mankind as declared in the manifesto's call for brotherhood and invoked through the full context of the cited line to León Felipe, the anti-fascist Spanish poet exiled in Mexico who also fought in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the greatness of their poetry will depend on its social commitment and speaks to the escalating political oppression of artists and intellectuals, even in a "progressive" and "peaceful" country like Costa Rica which had its own share of exiled intellectuals affiliated with the Communist party (banned since 1949).

More than ever before, the "Manifiesto del '65" represented the social awakening of this generation of Costa Rican poets. It also enumerated several national problems including freedom of expression, the lack of support from the *Dirección General de Artes y Letras* and the concentration of power within the Editorial Costa Rica. In the 1970s, Costa Rica's political

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<sup>8</sup> The full passage comes from Felipe's prologue to his translation of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*: "¡Qué alegría cuando nos damos cuenta de que los pueblos están tan cerca unos de otros a través de sus poetas! ¡Qué sólo la política separa a los hombres! Un día cuando el hombre sea libre, la política será una canción" ["What joy when we realize that all nations are close to one another through their poets! That only politics divides men! One day when man is free, politics shall be a song"] (3). In turn, the Argentine poet and songwriter Jaime Dávalos modifies Felipe's words in his poem "Canto al sueño americano" to instead read: "el día en que los pueblos sean libres / la política será una canción" ["the day that all nations are free / politics will be a song"]. This last version was made into a famous song by Argentine folk singer Eduardo Falú associated with the "nueva canción" movement, which during the 1960s and 1970s emphasized folk elements with protest lyrics about social injustice. Naranjo herself quotes Felipe in her essay "Crisis cultural en centroamérica."

spectrum experienced a noticeable amplification. The *Vanguardia Popular* could once again contest elections, and other Leftist parties, including the *Partido Socialista*, the *Frente Popular*, and the *Movimiento Acción Revolucionaria Socialista* became active and flourished bases on university campuses. Likewise embracing this political fervor, the *Círculo de Poetas* openly linked their work to the demands of social justice and adopted a critical attitude to the ideological positions of the established order.

Thus, for obvious political affiliations to the *Partido de Liberación Nacional* (PLN), critical classification of Naranjo's poetry pits her against the social awakening of such groups like the *Círculo de poetas*, or even regionally to the *Generación comprometida* even as she shares the same concerns. As opposed to the social realism (literary trend) and Marxist leanings (political trend) of these groups, Naranjo along with Alberto Cañas, who both served as the country's first two ministers of culture, are the main representatives of the literature rooted in the social democratic perspective and its effects on the country's development. Moreover, Naranjo was the only poet of the two since Cañas dedicated himself mostly to theater and short stories. While unabashedly critical of the state of affairs and of the parsimonious and indifferent character displayed by the middle class, they nevertheless were loyal to and shared in the optimism of the Second Republic's social democratic agenda, at least initially.

Their enthusiasm and fidelity were not unwarranted. When the revolutionary hero and PLN founder José "Pepe" Figueres successfully secured his third term (1970-74), he made the promotion of cultural institutions and policies a priority, famously coining the slogan "¿Para qué tractores sin violines?" ["What good are tractors without violins?"]. During his administration, Costa Rica ushered in its golden age of cultural policy with the creation of the Ministry of Culture—first headed by Cañas (1970-74) and then by Naranjo (1974-76). However, the



unquestionable political, ideological, and social importance of culture within the social democratic platform eventually faced serious challenges with the onset of the economic crisis of 1980 and the consolidation of a neoliberal agenda in Costa Rican politics (Cortés 107-08). Although as can be surmised from Naranjo's resignation in 1976, the PLN had already displayed signs of an internal crisis much earlier in Oduber's administration.

As Jorge Valdeperas elucidates, the failed social democratic agenda manifested in the later work of Cañas and Naranjo as disillusion and resentment, producing a series of criticisms that easily unmask the internal conflicts of the Second Republic's "revolución pacífica y democrática" ['peaceful and democratic revolution'] but trapped in a "callejón sin salida" ['dead end'] (115). The poetry of Naranjo, who as a civil servant embraced a specific partisan affiliation, can be generally linked to a "civic" tradition, but in her departure from the political poetry of her precursors and contemporaries, her work complicates our understanding of the social and political turn of poetry in the second half of the twentieth century. If in other poets, there is an issue of direct communication, Naranjo's poetry contends with the opposite, with too much direct communication. She purposefully inscribes these meaningless conversations as a way of showcasing the degree they fail to communicate.

Two major factors that impact her writing are her knowledge of the intricacies of bureaucratic operations and the love for her fellow human being (Rubio 352). Most often, this influence translates as an inquiry into the complexity of the quotidian experience of the modern man/woman within the metropolis (Rolón-Alexander 146). Capturing this collective reality is highly significant throughout Naranjo's entire literary production. Both her prose and poetry insist on acute observations of social behavior and are clearly informed by her time working in various civic settings. In prose, Naranjo is credited with forging a break from the traditional

Costa Rican novel that had the tendency to romanticize the countryside and provide the image of the noble and sincere *hacendado* as the idealization of the origins of the upper class. My research shows that she likewise forges a similar break in her poetry as it delves further into the urban milieu that surrounds the poetic speaker. I will briefly trace the origins of this urban focus in her prose as a contrast to her early poetry.

### **Naranjo and the Urban Novel**

To understand Naranjo's narrative work, it is important to note the significant social changes Costa Rican society underwent in the 1960s, namely the consolidation of the middle class as a social stratus. Spearheaded by Naranjo, Costa Rican narrative channels attention toward the city and captures the way of life of San José's urban population. During this time, Naranjo publishes what will become known as her bureaucratic trilogy: *Los perros no ladraron* (*The Dogs Did Not Bark*, 1966), *Memorias de un hombre palabra* (*Memoirs of a Word Man*, 1968), and *Camino al mediodía* (*Path at Midday*, 1968). Each of these novels reflects a marked interest in the daily on goings of the middle-class man and woman, represented as figures blurred into anonymity.

From the beginning her novels are characterized by experimentation with form. *Los perros no ladraron* examines the influence of bureaucratic mechanisms on the individual. Bureaucracy itself is the protagonist of the novel. Naranjo's prose manages to show the gradual, but corrosive bureaucratic effect on the individual as the reader witnesses the routine day in the life of an unidentified employee, the *burócrata anónimo* ["anonymous bureaucrat"]. The novel is structured entirely through dialogue, and as the main character submits to a routine, he is portrayed as a man with no will, a mere passer-by who only commutes back and forth from home to work. *Memorias de un hombre palabra* is also an exploration of the vacuous life of a common

man, the “*hombre palabra*” from the lower middle class, but one that openly struggles to define his individuality. Finally, *Camino al mediodía* examines the shortcomings and struggles of the upper middle class, but this time through a concretely identifiable character Eduardo Campos Argüello, who strives to keep up appearances and fit into the model of success. Upon realizing the impossibility of such a standard, the anguished Eduardo commits suicide. Naranjo’s novel points to a much earlier death of the character—the death that comes about in the moment that Eduardo lets himself become dehumanized through consumerism.

By the 1970s, Naranjo begins to focus on the figure of the lost individual in the multitude. Her aim is to construct a revolution that instead of being based on the collective is geared toward an intimate introspection. The disillusion presented in her early novels becomes even more acute in the novels *Responso por el niño Juan Manuel* (1971) and *Diario de una multitud* (1974). In *Responso*, a group of young men Luis, Ernesto, Jorge and Oquendo experience an existential crisis, but address this crisis by creating a fictional character named Juan Manuel in order to project their woes. Meanwhile, *Diario* is arguably Naranjo’s most ambitious novel in terms of formal experimentation. She presents the novel as an official transcript of the voices of an urban multitude. The language used aims to capture the mentality, situations and problems of a typified middle class that acts, reacts, and feels through passive and stereotypical ways. There is no plot, but rather just a series of isolated actions and fragmented events that are accompanied by random commentaries, reflections, anecdotes, postcards, and a letter to give the impression of a collage. Throughout *Diario*, Naranjo presents a collective protagonist, not by means of representing the masses; instead, this collective protagonist is the sum of individual voices that converge at the end as the voice of the multitude.

In the early 1980s, Naranjo publishes for the first time several short story collections that continue to represent the anonymous middle-class man and woman within this urban context. In *Ondina* (1983) she delves deeper into feminist concerns as her stories explore more erotic themes. Stylistically, she experiments with grotesque elements and disabled characters. *Nunca hubo alguna vez* [*There Never Was a Once Upon a Time*, 1984] is the first time she introduces children and adolescents as protagonists that also face cruel realities. Addressing political and social themes outside of her native Costa Rica, *Otro rumbo para la rumba* [*Another Course for the Rumba*, 1989] draws attention to the struggles and experiences of Central American immigrants in the United States. She also publishes two novels: *Sobrepunto* (*Overpoint*, 1985) the first novel she writes with a female protagonist and *El caso 117.720* (*Case Number 117.720*, 1989), an insight into the thoughts of Antonio, a medical patient whose illness doctors have yet to identify. Through these works, Naranjo consolidates herself as one of the leading figures of contemporary Central American narrative.

Naranjo's cultivation of the narrative form continues into the 1990s, when there is a noticeable absence of poetry, at least in recognizable traditional forms. She begins to experiment with hybrid collections that combine short stories, essays, and poetry. Such is the case in the following works: *En partes* (*In Parts*, 1994), *Pasaporte de Palabras* (*Passport of Words*, 1998) and *Los poetas también se mueren* (*Poets Also Die*, 1999). Another reason for the absence of strictly poetic works is that much of it remains unedited and unpublished. Among these pieces, there are four poetry collections that open the possibility for future research: *Al sur del sur* [*To the South of the South*], *Ventanas* [*Windows*], *En óleo la lluvia sabe, ve, huele, oye, y toca* [*In Oil the Rain Tastes, Sees, Smells, Hears and Touches*], and *Entre éste y otro tiempo* [*Between This Time and Another*]. At the turn of the millennium, she publishes another short story collection

*Girasoles perdidos* (*Lost Sunflowers*, 2003) and the novel *Más allá del Parismina* (*Beyond the Parismina*, 2004), which also follows a female protagonist.

### **Naranjo's Early Poetry**

Most critical appraisal of Naranjo's poetry contends that her poetic career begins with the publication of *Canción de la ternura* [*Song of Tenderness*, 1964]. Hardly any criticism addresses the publication of her first collection *América* (1961) in which there is a clear foray into political poetry. Naranjo's early attempts at political poetry are very much reminiscent of Neruda's *Canto general* (1950) in that *América* is a long poem, consisting of 880 lines paying homage to the struggles of the continent. Enrico Mario Santí identifies a prophetic train of thought—which he defines as a “sense of knowledge by vision or revelation”—in the poetry of Neruda that takes on a visionary, political and even apocalyptic mode (15). Similarly, Naranjo's poetic speaker scours the American terrain to then project herself as the *mestiza* daughter who experiences a historical awakening:

Y, no los veo, pero presiento  
a los que con temperatura audaz  
rompieron la monotonía de los días  
para clavar hondos puñales  
que dan lumbre a los almanaques.  
Y deben estar  
los que renunciaron a las mecedoras  
y con una meta alta, más alta  
que todas las hamacas,  
que todos los tenedores pálidos,  
que todos los susurrantes consuelos,  
más alta que los alivios y los descansos,  
que los hijos y la placidez del retozo,  
que la caricia y la sed de la carne,  
más alta que el sueño hambriento de uno mismo,  
clavó su mirada en el cielo  
y tuvo un paso firme.  
El mar me trae sus nombres  
y yo los reverencio  
porque de esa sangre vengo  
y con su fuerte luminosidad  
pretendo hablar de América.

And, I do not see them, but I can sense  
those that with an audacious temperature  
broke the monotony of the days  
to nail profound daggers  
that fuel the almanacs.  
And they must be there  
the ones who gave up the rocking chairs  
and with a goal so high, higher  
than all the hammocks,  
than all the pale forks,  
than all the whispering consolations,  
higher than all the reliefs and rests,  
than children and the placidity of the frolic  
than the caress and the thirst of desire,  
higher than hungry dream of oneself,  
staked its gaze toward the sky  
and had a firm step.  
The sea brings me their names  
and I revere them  
because I come from that blood  
and with its strong luminosity  
I intend to speak about America.

(94, ll. 160-81)

(94, ll. 160-81)

Like Neruda's *Canto general*, Naranjo aims to uncover the traces of an ancestral lineage whose footsteps she can follow. It is a personal encounter with the history of the continent, and whose indication of a historical awakening can be linked to the currents of thought promoted by the *posvanguardia*. Unlike Neruda, who presents the glorification of past events through the association with Machu Picchu, the heights that Naranjo envisions belong to no particular monument or landscape, but are rather constructed through the way she draws attention to the framing of aspirations and goals, lending almost an unidentifiable height and feeling of possibility: "y con una meta alta, más alta... más alta que los alivios y los descansos... más alta que el sueño hambriento de uno mismo" (ll. 167, 171, 174). Not unlike Neruda's poetic style, the anaphoric repetition gives a sense of urgency and of excitement that pushes away from the comforts of familiar experiences and feelings, serving as an early insight into Naranjo's desire to break free from a quotidian complacency, but that does not yet address a concrete social circumstance or dynamic.

In her follow-up collection *Canción de la ternura* (1964), there is an underlying concern to bring forth an unobstructed voice, that is, a pure vocal articulation, that has not yet conformed to societal hierarchy and is devoid of any formal linguistic imposition, exterior influence, or mediation of a particular context:

Desde donde nace la voz,  
la voz plena, sin ortografía ni sintaxis,  
la voz plena, sin los etcéteras de la impotencia  
la voz plena, sin los énfasis angustiosos;  
la voz plena, desnuda de síes y noes.  
(15, ll. 34-38)

From where the voice is born  
the full voice, without spelling or syntax,  
the full voice, without the etceteras of impotence  
the full voice, without the anxious emphases;  
the full voice, naked of yeses and noes.  
(15, ll. 34-38)

This push for "la voz plena" directly reflects the cultural impetus Naranjo urges to restore the fullness of language's communicative ability, an effort to restore transparency and the potential

for democratic recognition of this voice. Likewise, *Hacia una isla* (*Towards an Island* 1964), a tribute to her father, and *Misa a oscuras* (*Secret Mass* 1967), a rewriting of the Catholic mass, both demand that this interior voice be heard or be made manifest as a political interruption to the silence. In *Misa* she writes:

Hay figuras hermosas en los contornos  
de todas las jornadas silentes.  
Las palabras calladas  
y el ruido de afuera,  
exige que una voz se levante  
y encuentre la voz de adentro.  
("Confiteor" 17, ll. 50-55)

There are beautiful figures in the contours  
of every silent workday.  
The quiet words  
and the sound from outside  
demand that a voice be raised  
and thus find the voice inside.  
("Confiteor" 17, ll. 50-55)

The various manifestations of silence—to be sought in the workday, in the quiet volumes of external sounds, or even in the implicated silences at the end of each poetic verse—serve as a democratic reminder of the supplementary potential for a new voice to be both heard and inscribed. The title of the poem "Confiteor," Latin for "I confess," refers to one of the prayers that is said during the Catholic mass, prompted by the priest and repeated in chorus by the congregation as a collective acknowledgement of sins. Naranjo equates this rite of purging one's sins as the clean slate from which a new process of creation and initiative can take place through an intense interrogation of the silences that surround the lyric self.

### **Aesthetic and Civic Engagement in the Poetry of Naranjo**

Without denying the quality of Naranjo's early poetic efforts, my dissertation departs from the poetry she publishes afterwards between the years 1967-2007. In these collections, Naranjo directly addresses issues of visibility and representation within the polity. In her democratic vision to have this "voz plena" materialize, she signals an unfinished aesthetic and political project through the fragmented voices of the multitude. In making this point, I turn to recent theory that challenges the concept of democracy as a defined system of governance, an exercise of power, or a mode of social life. Instead, my use of the term "democracy" follows the

work of Rancière, Panagia and Docherty, who explore democracy as a spontaneous political practice that is contingent on aesthetics as an order of representation rooted in sensory experience. That is, aesthetics presupposes a limit of what is visible and what is not visible, of what can and cannot be heard. According to these critical theories, the aesthetic framing of a given community—what is shared or common (be it language or habits) within that community—serves as a fundamental basis for enacting democratic action, or the act of displacing and interrupting this aesthetic distribution. Any disruption of these relationships signals a confrontation, a polemical setting in which a subject can politically negotiate the limits of this order. For Naranjo’s poetics of democracy, the possibility of interrupting this distribution stems from a social democratic ideology that envisions enacting change within a post-revolutionary setting and without overturning the system—as most revolutionary poetry advocates. Rather, she wishes to hold the revolutionary values of the Second Republic accountable by measuring the language which purports to represent the power of the people.

I draw from Rancière’s concept of the “distribution of the sensible” (*partage du sensible*), which he explains as the dividing-up of the world and of people, or the process of apportioning who or what partakes of a given space (*Dissensus* 36). The implication is that there are neither voids nor modes of supplementing what has been accepted by a group as a way of exercising a particular occupation, that is, a way of being and doing that equates to a defined job, role, or presence within a corresponding place. This emphasis on the relation between occupation and place is crucial to the methodology with which I analyze the representation of the anonymous multitude and lyric self as potential political subjects in the poetry of Naranjo. On the one hand, it affords a closer look at how the quotidian multitude literally occupies the streets. Alternatively, this distribution also affords an exploration of how the lyric self elaborates a meta-poetic inquiry



of her occupation as a poet, one that has inherited a legacy of socio-political denunciation, but who continues to reflect on language as the means and reason for the work of the poet.<sup>9</sup>

Following Rancière, Panagia also advocates for the political potential of sensory experience whereby aesthetics can impel “an ethical practice of attending to the world” (*Political Life of Sensation* 11). Sensory perception is organized by what he calls “political narratocracy,” or the master narratives dictating the relationship between perception and political analysis (12). Put differently, narratocracy is that which conditions how we read political events. Through the political storytelling that governs our perception, we are trained to see (and by extension not see) certain things when we engage with the world. Often, sensory experience is taken for granted. Still, for Panagia, sensation is not explicitly comprised of sense or perception even though both are involved. For him, sensation is the registering of those “heterological” elements that interrupt previous forms of relating or making sense of an experience (2). These moments of interruption, called moments of disarticulation and/or disfiguration, are the basis of democratic life. He adds, “whatever the case may be, they are moments that exceed the limits that structure our daily living, and they interrupt the assurances that guarantee the slumber of subjectivity” (4). As I make clear through a textual analysis of Naranjo’s poems, it is precisely this “slumber of subjectivity,” or the numbing and indifferent feelings to a subject’s surroundings, that the poetic speaker tries to combat through a resistance to the signifiers and political narratocracies that claim Costa Rica to be a country with no social conflict.

In line with the aesthetic premise of democratic action, Thomas Docherty stresses that democracy implies knowing what is at stake in any aesthetic relationship, which he defines as the

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<sup>9</sup> Rancière’s analysis of a subject’s occupation, be it the extent of their visibility within a given place or their actual profession, does not disregard categories such as class standing and cultural affiliation, but rather makes apparent how these factors determine the limits and preconceived notions that hinder alternative ways of being and doing.

social relation established when subjects perceive each other. If a subject can constitute themselves as an “I” or as a “we,” then there is an aesthetic perception of community. Once this perception is established, democracy affords new possibilities for evaluating a subject’s identification with a particular community (*Aesthetic Democracy* ix). By presenting a distribution of an apolitical multitude amidst a hectic urban milieu, Naranjo’s poetry underscores the absence of a reciprocal, intimate recognition that also makes pronounced the need for solidarity to combat social injustices. The conceptual bridge between aesthetics and politics allows me to identify a poetics of democracy that pushes for a cultural notion of the social, or the culturalization of democracy by which Naranjo’s verse indicates that the power of the people rests on the direct aesthetic and civic engagement with the creative process.

In **Chapter 1 “The Substance of Multitudes,”** I examine the way Naranjo’s lyric self frames the metropolitan contours of the multitude, or the inhabitants of a city in *En el círculo de los pronombres* [*In the Circle of Pronouns*, written in 1967 but not published until 2003] and *Idioma del invierno* [*Winter’s Language*, 1971]. In these two collections, Naranjo presents the confines of a recognizable public sphere in which the appearance of the multitude overwhelms the sensory experience of the lyric self. Rather than interrupt this space with images of politically unrecognizable subjects, she forces the lyric self to confront her identity as part of the multitude and the numbing experience of living in the city, a fictionalized representation of San José. Unavoidably, this encounter entails facing a series of meaningless and hurried interactions that Naranjo herself describes as the “substance of multitudes” (*Círculo* 9, l. 10). In *Idioma del invierno* she struggles with the configuration of a city that has become unrecognizable because of the heavy rainfall, a rainfall that comes to symbolize the presence of superfluous words. As I

make explicit in this chapter, the lyric voice experiences a false sense of community as she evaluates the exclusionary mechanism of hierarchical pronouns that fail to represent the people.

In **Chapter 2 “Democracy as Resistance,”** I analyze how Naranjo challenges the political narratocracy of Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism in *Mi guerrilla* [*My Guerrilla*, 1977] and *Homenaje a Don Nadie* [*Homage to Mr. Nobody*, 1981], the only collections she published in the years immediately following her resignation as Minister of Culture (1974-1976). As the lyric voice traces the development of her revolutionary consciousness in *Mi guerrilla*, she confronts the veracity of “Tico” exceptionalism to undermine the ambiguous and replicated presentation of the *símbolo*. Accordingly, *Homenaje*’s main thematic thread—the lyric self’s numerous but strained efforts to dedicate a poem to the figure of *Don Nadie*—also confronts the placing of this simultaneously named and negated entity as a figure of equality within Naranjo’s sarcastic “tribute.” Both the *símbolo* and the *Don Nadie* represent without representing. In other words, they circumvent specific referents: the *símbolo* reinforces the ultimate level of abstraction while the figure of *Don Nadie* remains an invisible subject. Both are perceptible; neither is defined. I argue that this symbol and negated figure of *don nadie* represent a political struggle for visibility. To make sense of what can be perceived from these abstract figures but not yet articulated is arguably the greatest political cause of Naranjo’s poetic rebellion. So, while these collections are anachronistic to the revolutionary history of Costa Rica, they are not anachronistic to the resistance spurring Central America’s most pressing and recognized era of insurrection and the promotion and defense of cultural policies.

In **Chapter 3 “The Emancipation of the Lyric Self,”** I explore the way Naranjo reaffirms her poetic vocation as a political undertaking in *En esta tierra redonda y plana* [*On This Round and Flat Earth*, 2001] and *Oficio de oficios* [*Occupation of Occupations*, 2007]

published in the aftermath of Central America's liberation struggles. I read her verse as a meta-poetic reflection on the occupational parameters of the poet and the role of poetry during a time when both the poet (long under the expectation to commit to a poetics of experience that embraced a commitment to liberation struggles) and poetry (as a genre linked to utopian visions of revolutionary struggles) came to be associated with an overwhelming sense of revolutionary failure and fatigue. *En esta tierra redonda y plana* (2001) explores the latent remnants of war in Central America as the lyric voice counters the purported blanket narrative of post-conflict pacification with her own vision of democratic peace predicated on social justice. Meanwhile, *Oficio de oficios* (2007), the last collection Naranjo wrote before her death in 2012, presents a series of life movements and daily pursuits as a series of occupations. The lyric self holds each "oficio" in equal measure such that what might seem a banality (sewing, cooking, waking up, making the bed, getting dressed, brushing one's hair) is as relevant to her as the diligence attached to the experience of aging, getting sick, thinking, or dreaming. I argue that by leveling these "oficios," Naranjo emancipates the poet from any hierarchical obligation and expectation. The reformulation of these tasks reaffirms the conviction behind her creative vocation, thereby opening the poet to the pursuit of her own intimate and peaceful social awareness.

The poetry of Carmen Naranjo is a ceaseless political endeavor insofar as we view it as the pursuit of always countering and displacing one image with another image, of presenting a counter-representation to every aesthetic rendition. Jacob Blevins criticizes the tendency to label the lyric genre exclusively as a personal poetry, devoid of any inherent social and ideological components. He argues that the true paradox of poetry is that it is at once personal and interpersonal, simultaneously private and public (11). Naranjo's poetry and politics afford an exploration of that poetic paradox. In her work, there is a personal lyric self that contends with

poetic creation, but there is also an inscription of a public self in relation to the multitude that surrounds her, or how she views herself as part of an apolitical democratic culture that devalues the creative process. Regan Boxwell identifies Costa Rica as a “distinct literary space in which the revolutionary problematics that engulfed the other Central American nation-states during the 1960-90 period were mostly absent” (143). This dissertation explores ways of situating and reading Naranjo’s poetic work as a counter to that assertion. From a privileged space of democratic practice, Naranjo’s poetry confronts the linguistic contradictions of a post-revolutionary discourse susceptible to Cold War constraints, the neoliberal re-democratization of a supposed post-conflict setting, and most pressing, the apathy and conformity of her fellow citizens. As Alí Viquez asserts, Naranjo’s poetics points out the “logic of the oxymoron” (73). Her lyric self perceives a world where there are smart bombs, peace obtained by means of war, a democracy that does not really represent the population, and means of communication that do not communicate. Through it all, the figure of the poet remains firmly committed to addressing social and cultural injustices that surround her.

## CHAPTER 1: THE SUBSTANCE OF MULTITUDES

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*I love the true democracy of you.*  
-Julia Álvarez, “You”

Following the success of Carmen Naranjo’s first novel *Los perros no ladraron* (1965), a scathing characterization of apathetic bureaucrats within a large, undisclosed Costa Rican institution, her poetry also becomes a platform to contest the indifference displayed by a growing middle class within an urban landscape. Though they have not received much critical attention, both *En el círculo de los pronombres* (1967) and *Idioma del invierno* (1971) form a crucial part of the socio-political discourse framing Central American poetry during the 1960s and early 1970s. This chapter analyzes how Naranjo’s representation of the multitude, understood here as a collective body that cannot be identified as a revolutionary subject, differs significantly from revolutionary poetry’s emphasis on the utopian solidarity of the people and advocacy on behalf of the masses. Instead, the image of the multitude in her verse gives a false sense of unity. To that end, Naranjo’s metapoetry makes visible the ruptures within this urban polity, painfully misrepresented in the collective subject “we.”<sup>10</sup> The lyric “I” of these poems directly interrogates the very language that purports to embody the multitude and the city, further prompting, in my view, a defense of lyric poetry as a democratic practice in the work of Naranjo.

I first turn to *En el círculo de los pronombres* [*In the Circle of Pronouns*] to illustrate how Naranjo’s engagement with the multitude indicates a challenge of representation,

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<sup>10</sup> My use of the term metapoetry here follows the definition posited by Guillermo Carnero and Octavio Paz whereby the theme of this poetry is poetry itself and the poet’s relationship to both the text and the reader as he/she explores the limitations of language. Carnero elucidates further: “un metapoema es un poema que tiene dos niveles discursivos paralelos. En el primero, se trata de lo que habitualmente entendemos por poema. En el segundo... el poema reflexiona sobre su propia naturaleza, su origen, condicionamientos y demás circunstancias.... La metapoesía podría entenderse como un fin de trayecto, aunque de hecho se trata de un campo de posibilidades ilimitadas” (“La corte de los poetas” 44). [“a metapoem is a poem that contains two parallel discursive levels. In the first, we are dealing with what we habitually understand by poem. In the second... the poem reflects upon its own nature, its origin, conditioning and other circumstances.... Metapoetry can be understood as the end of a route, although, in fact, it is about a field of unlimited possibilities” (“La corte de los poetas” 44)].

figuratively and literally. Each poem focuses on a different personal pronoun that, in conjunction, constitutes the aesthetics of the multitude. Yet, these pronouns also represent a social distribution that reinforces bureaucratic classifications of uniformity and, at times, hierarchical inequality. Each pronoun's elucidation presents a series of meaningless and hurried interactions that Naranjo describes to be the "sustancia de multitudes" ["substance of multitudes"] (*Círculo* 9, l. 10). Particularly in the poems that expound on collective pronouns, the representation of the urban masses is rooted in an underwhelming sensory experience. These are figures shown to be mechanical, banal, and hollow with little capacity for feeling. As the title of the collection suggests, the inscription of these pronouns creates a circular path—a literal revolution—that deceptively circumvents any notion of progress while paradoxically revealing an absent, if not forgotten, revolutionary project. In my reading of these poems, I tie this metaphor to the challenges facing the social democratic initiatives of Costa Rica's Second Republic. Based on this premise, I show how the lyric self denounces the multitude's behavior and language as a post-revolutionary conformity that does not support the kind of active democratic culture Naranjo envisions for her country.

I then turn to her follow-up collection *Idioma del invierno* [*Winter's Language*]. Here, as the poetic subject seeks a better understanding of what forms the substance of her city, she ponders the ephemeral condition of language, and in turn, the poetic process itself through the image of constant rainfall, the city's defining visible and audible characteristic. Accordingly, the rain symbolizes all the forms of linguistic expression at her disposal. I show how the reconfiguration of the city in *Idioma* exposes the restless and fluid agitation that belies its formal construction, as the rainfall emulates the poetic process to the point where constructing the city is akin to constructing a poem, while the rain represents language. *Idioma* underscores the lyric

self's struggle to express herself, and whereas *Círculo* emphasized this struggle via a sense of confinement, the poetic voice of *Idioma* struggles with not disappearing amid the unraveling of the rain, which she sees as invisible as language and capable of erasing the features that make creative participation possible.

Finally, I link this struggle for recognition to the struggle of Costa Rica's literary visibility within a Central American tradition that Arturo Arias contends is already doubly marginalized. That is, it stands overlooked both by the "cosmopolitan center" and by countries exercising hegemony in Latin America (*Taking Their Word* xii). Arguably Costa Rica is left triply marginalized. Given the fervor and expectation of social commitment that predominates in Central American revolutionary poetry of that time, both *En el círculo de los pronombres* and *Idioma del invierno* amplify the discussion on the relationship between the personal lyric and the idea of social commitment. As I will demonstrate, Naranjo's model for civic engagement and social awareness is intimately tied to a creative role and reveals a new face of commitment as she begins to outline her own poetic revolution.

### **Democracy and Recognition: An Aesthetic Platform for Civic Engagement**

Up until now, there has been no study of Naranjo's lyrical trajectory through the lens of revolution and political commitment. At first glance, her poetry takes a sharp contrast to what has traditionally been accepted and encouraged as political poetry in contemporary Latin American literature, especially once poets moved away from the *hermetismo* of the *vanguardia* toward an interest in establishing direct communication with the reading public. This new political poetry reflected endeavors for social change and depended largely on the use of colloquial language, although the matter and purpose for which this conversational diction came to be incorporated resulted in polarized approaches. As Donald Shaw notes, "one wing moved



leftwards into committed social poetry and militant protest. The poets of the other wing remained primarily interested in exploring the everyday life they observed around them” (11). Both efforts were democratizing gestures that aimed to disavow the notion of poetry as an elite and inaccessible genre for any sector of the population (i.e., the working poor, the unemployed alphabets, women, the lumpen proletariat, the petite-bourgeoisie, etc...). In his poem, “Como tú,” the Salvadoran poet and militant Roque Dalton famously declared, “...la poesía es como el pan, de todos” [‘...poetry is like bread, it’s for everyone’] (1.9), while the Guatemalan poet and fellow militant Otto René Castillo shamed the apathy of intellectuals and warned that they would have to answer to the common man in his poem “Intelectuales apolíticos.” In this way, Central American poetry mirrored the region’s revolutionary aims to denounce the injustices of the ruling elite and to represent the voice of the people.

Within Latin America social and political poetry, representations of ordinary everyday reality differ in their symbolic importance. In some cases, the banalities of daily life typically constitute the unseen, often unspoken background to better highlight the extraordinary acts of heroism and the call to arms, while other poetry focuses exclusively on the struggles of underrepresented social actors in their quotidian lives. In sharp contrast, Naranjo does not intend to elevate these everyday interactions as a gesture of democratic inclusion or to represent the struggles of the common person or citizen. Instead, her depiction of the everyday reflects a different political purpose altogether, one that sustains a democratic impulse to revisit and to question the images, assumptions, and language of a seemingly indifferent community. While both *Círculo* and *Idioma* represent her earliest attempts to highlight this cultural crisis by interrogating the language of everyday events and reality, Naranjo emphasizes their apolitical element to call for an active social awakening of the entire populace.

Scholars have debated the extent to which the ongoing banalities of everyday life have an intrinsic political content. If, as Rita Felski puts it, everyday life “simply is the routine act of conducting one’s day to day existence without making it an object of conscious attention,” then these everyday interactions underscore their democratic quality in the sense that any individual can partake in a “shared experience of the mundane” (Felski 27). Put differently, because every human being experiences in some form (though with varying degrees) circumstances that they themselves consider insignificant or to be part of their ordinary routine, these daily banalities cannot be designated as political by default.<sup>11</sup> Jon Beasley-Murray stresses the role of habit as a way to identify the political importance within these daily life routines:

Habit drives and is driven by the unseen and barely audible hum of micropolitics that pervades our daily routines; it is like background noise in that we are almost oblivious to its ongoing importance, the ways in which it structures our all too familiar, endlessly repeated quotidian activities.... The everyday, routine, and almost invisible politics of habit contrasts with the often spectacular display that characterizes politics as it is more usually understood. (181)

In the face of what can be considered a more spectacle-driven display of politics (protests, speeches, advocacy, legislation, and other public demonstrations), Beasley-Murray insists on a presence of the political that runs the risk of being carelessly overlooked or taken for granted, of a politics to which we are “almost oblivious” and that is “almost invisible” as if he is suggesting that it is only a matter of paying closer attention. But for however much Beasley-Murray identifies a political strain operating through the unheard and unrecognized elements of daily life, it still serves to supplement a larger and more recognizable narrative. Both Felski’s

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<sup>11</sup> Felski favors an understanding of the ordinariness of everyday life from a phenomenological standpoint, which in her view avoids either demonizing or idealizing it, as opposed to the cultural studies approach that imposes an enormous symbolic weight on the ordinariness of everyday life. She views the everyday as a “way of experiencing the world rather than as a circumscribed set of activities within the world. Everyday life is simply the process of becoming acclimatized to assumptions, behaviors and practices which come to seem self-evident and taken for granted” (31).

apolitical framing and Beasley-Murray's micro-political framing of the ordinariness of everyday life are helpful considerations for why the initial display of the social in Naranjo's poetry does not have the same effect as in other social and political poetry of the era. For starters, her depiction of everyday life in the city does not overtly begrudge the adverse effects of mass urbanization, nor does it stress the plight of the working class. Whereas other poets seek to denounce specific instances of social injustice and the economic structures that condemn millions to perpetual poverty, Naranjo's focus strikes at a more fundamental issue: the challenge of denouncing inequality when our very language prescribes this semantic—and by extension social—disparity. This is what makes Naranjo's poetry unique in the overall spectrum of revolutionary poetry in the region. Moreover, the everyday life depicted in her poetry assumes relevance not to showcase—borrowing Beasley-Murray's term—the “micropolitics” of repeated habits in the face of a grander political movement, but to make it blatantly obvious that there is no such political counterpart or movement to which the inhabitants of the city can subscribe and enact. In other words, her poetry posits that there is no revolutionary struggle nor reform to undo the status quo.

As the setting for the banalities of everyday life, the city and its inhabitants become in Naranjo's poetry the aesthetic point of confrontation for the lyric self. In that sense, I view this confrontation as a form of civic engagement that questions what Jacques Rancière terms as the “symbolic constitution of the social” (*Dissensus* 36). That is, this approximation allows the lyric self to express discontent with the representations of everyday life on display in her poems, or what is heard and seen of her fellow community of citizens. Rancière's theories on the relationship between democracy, *dissensus*, and visual aesthetics guide my textual analysis and allow me to identify a political strain in Naranjo's poetry when the poetic subject perceives the

need to inscribe the appearance of the people, or the revolutionary subject that is the antithesis to the multitude acclimated to certain patterns of indifference.

For Rancière, politics has its own aesthetic foundation, or premise. When he refers to *dissensus*—the idea that politics serves to disrupt predominant forms of representation within a common sphere of experience—the emphasis is on how we access and perceive these forms of representations themselves. This access to symbolic appearances and/or configurations is first filtered through visual and auditory experiences. What we see or hear creates Rancière’s “distribution of the sensible,” and by extension, this distribution, according to his theory, sustains a notion of what is “supposed” to be heard, seen, and even done within a given social paradigm, or structured embodiment of a society where everything has its place. This supposition of what society does or does not allow and makes available or unavailable functions almost like a code of conduct. An underlying division that dictates the thinkable and conceivable creates a set of norms which then proceeds to establish a community that decides who is included or excluded, whose words are significant or insignificant, who is entitled to govern others and who is not.

Rancière presents his alternative view of the “political” against notions of politics as the exercise of power via a set of legitimate procedures. For that matter, he also does not consider politics to be the reinforcement of designated hierarchies generally presented as inalterable truths to a community’s members and citizens. For him, this reinforcement is highly symbolic, but not political. Instead, Rancière describes these delineated spaces and legitimate practices of the social order as the “police.”<sup>12</sup> To illustrate, he offers the scenario of a police force breaking up a demonstration using the following mandate, “move along, there is nothing to see here!” He adds:

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<sup>12</sup> Rancière’s concept of the police differs from the theoretical perspective of Michel Foucault, who in his *Omnes and Singulatim* lectures presents the police as an institutional apparatus with a controlling element over life and bodies. Though both Rancière and Foucault broaden the concept of the police beyond merely a repressive apparatus or even disciplining of bodies, the former does not designate the police as an institution of power.

The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see, and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation. Politics, by contrast, consists in transforming this space of 'moving-along', of circulation, into a space for the appearance of a subject: the people, the workers, the citizens. It consists in refiguring space, that is, in what is to be done, to be seen, and to be named in it. (*Dissensus* 37)

Both the police imperative and its rationale reinforce the function of the street space. It is not so much that there is nothing to see, as it is that there should not be something to see, and thus, nothing to do except move along. Again, for Rancière, the reinforcement of the status quo or the aesthetic distribution of the police is not political. He only considers "politics" to be that which alters the given distribution, or makes evident the possibility for altering that distribution or situation. In the scenario above, the perception that streets are primarily for circulating traffic would serve as the aesthetic foundation that allows for interruptions to be made noticeable. These interruptions or transformations—such as protestors occupying the streets—are the essence of political activity, but they are only political precisely because they present an alternative to the once visually and audibly recognized function of the streets, or what Rancière would consider to be the aesthetic representation of the streets.

Comparatively, Naranjo's urban verse hinges upon images of circulation, a continuous going-through-the-motions of everyday life that is indicative of a habitual sequence of actions and speech. Both *En el círculo de los pronombres* and *Idioma del Invierno* make the case for interrupting, if only momentarily, these instances of circulation (presented as traffic circles in the former and the water cycle in the latter) to recognize new modes of inscribing unseen or unheard elements of urban life and community interaction. From a privileged space of democratic practice and discourse, Naranjo's political poetry seeks to alter habitual ways of being and doing, and most importantly, of altering how language represents and speaks for the urban citizenry of her poems.

## The Literal Revolution: *En el círculo de los pronombres* (1967)

In *Círculo* (whose very title creates a space of circulation), Naranjo deliberately draws attention to how personal pronouns create a visible representation of community. Within this community, the voices of the multitude occupy the city through the juxtaposition of movement and immobility, thereby contributing to an overall impression of halted progress. Blending in an uninspiring fashion with no distinctive quality to them, these voices are drowned out by car horns, traffic lights are personified as they begin panting from exhaustion, and words are spit out like chewing gum: “la palabra es una goma de mascar / cuando pierde la menta se escupe” [‘the word is piece of chewing gum / when it loses the mint it gets spit out’] (“Yo” 17 ll. 48-49). Literally devoid of their flavor, words are not given a second thought, easily dispensed in a loss that goes beyond merely not sensing their taste; whoever uses these words has lost the awareness to make sense of their meaning.

Showcasing this insipid display are two poems dedicated to the first-person plural pronoun “Nosotros” (“We/Us”), the only pronoun to receive this attention twice. The first “Nosotros” also opens the collection with the indistinct character of the multitudinous throng:

desde lo alto puntos inmóviles  
pequeños pendientes de hilos  
marionetas con viejas agruras  
brazos y piernas y anteojos  
sonrisas gemidos destinos masificados  
atropellos en el aire  
una voz igual con bocinas  
semáforos jadeos  
estatuas de sal y pimienta  
sustancia de multitudes  
con mareas exigentes de hoy  
de esta hora de este momento  
vestidos de tiempo y urgencias  
(9, ll. 1-13)

from above immobile points  
small hanging threads  
puppets with old acerbities  
arms and legs and eyeglasses  
smiles groans destinations made for masses  
accidents in the air  
one voice equal to horns  
traffic lights panting  
statues of salt and pepper  
substance of multitudes  
with demanding waves of today  
of this hour of this moment  
dressed in time and urgencies  
(9, ll. 1-13)

Only from a high vantage point is it possible to objectively signal the obvious: this is a crowd that is not moving (“puntos inmóviles”). Even up close, their description as statues punctuates their immobility, and the fact that they are comprised of salt and pepper alludes to the Biblical story of Lot’s wife, who defies the angel’s warning to not look back as the iniquitous city of Sodom burns, and consequently, she turns into a pillar of salt. Through the quotidian use of salt and pepper, Naranjo offers a callous portrayal of an anonymous city, a bureaucratized state, and an impersonal society that all betray a proclivity for total obedience to the inert force of time—and letting it pass, moreover, with no reflection on the laws they obey. This multitude cannot recognize its own immobile state, kept busy by what seems urgent only in the present moment, as pressing as the repetitive inclusion of the preposition “de” to emphasize the inability to look neither back into the past nor ahead into the future, for it has to be “de hoy / de esta hora de este momento,” and because there is no historical reflection, there can be no utopian vision of progress. Therefore, Naranjo’s “nosotros” represents the Costa Rican collective adamantly set on the consensus of an imaginary rooted in paradisiacal insularity. Her description of the masses as “mareas exigentes” gives the impression that this is consistently the scene that takes to the streets. There is no mention of individuals; only fragments of individuals appear: “brazos”, “piernas” “anteojos.” The puppet strings that control them further underscore the mechanization of this multitude, reduced to a voice that amounts to little more than the sound of noisy horns. The substance of multitudes, ironically, expresses nothing substantial.

As a way of transcribing this noise throughout the poem, there is a constant interplay of voices, inscribed as random conversation inserts, that while signaling a common space of social interactions, also signals empty gestures or meaningless rules of behavior. These interspersed voices appear randomly and often anonymously using clichés and catch phrases: “mamá mamá

me voy / mamá mamá me quedo” [‘mama mama I’m leaving / mama mama I’m staying’] (10, ll. 34-35), “con permiso el tiempo apremia” [‘excuse me time’s a wastin’] (10, l. 41), “arturo fonseca a sus órdenes / arturito el chichi” [‘arturo fonseca at your service / arturito el chichi’] (12, ll. 65-66), “usted primero” [‘you first’] (12, l. 88), “usted lo dijo” [‘you said it’] (13, l. 94), “a usted las gracias” [‘thanks to you’] (13, l. 100), “muchas gracias / no hay de que” [‘thank you very much / don’t mention it’] (11, ll. 50-51), “ay de mí ay de usted ay de todos” [‘oh my oh you oh all of us’] (11, l. 46), “bienvenidos a bordo” [‘welcome aboard’] (13, l. 105). Essentially, these external voices both form part of and alter the experience of circling traffic into a circling of words. Even a bus stop comes into view as “una parada de palabras” [‘a bus stop of words’] (11, l. 49), reminding readers to pause and think about the words being exchanged. Naranjo’s inclusion of these typical and clichéd phrases makes even more apparent the fact that they do not add meaning, and at times, even rob meaning as filler words.

Furthermore, the hurried and impersonal interaction evident in the poem constructs a collective “we” as much as it also unravels a sense of collectivity in the portrait of the multitude. What seems to unite these individuals is empty repetition, once again emphasized by images of circulation and prompted by individual resignation as opposed to an exterior imposition: “un rosario de molinos aburridos / movidos por los tiranos de uno mismo” [‘a rosary of bored windmills / moved by one’s own inner tyrants’] (11, ll. 44-45). There is no differentiating marker of identity, only reproductions, which Naranjo demonstrates in narrative interjections that make this cyclical and weary routine more pronounced: “maría arrastra a sus mariquitas” [‘maria drags her mini-marias’] (9, l. 14), “juan dice adiós a los juanes” [‘juan says goodbye to the juans’] (9, l. 21), and “miguel se rasca margarita suspira” [‘miguel scratches himself margarita sighs’] (10, l. 28). The names included are not even capitalized, diminishing their importance as if any name,



or individual for that matter, can be substituted in its place, as they are all replicas of each other, anyway, (“maría-mariquitas,” “juan-juanes”). These proper nouns, like the personal pronouns, have become anonymous and stripped of all propriety, or common notion of what is appropriate, ethical behavior. Naranjo’s verse accurately mimics these absent-minded actions by presenting them as lethargic: “arrastra,” “rasca,” “suspira,” all actions that stress the lack of collective energy and meaningful purpose.

In doing so, the inclusion of these conversational exchanges and uninspiring snippets of daily life illustrates the negative side of the paradox Beasley-Murray identifies as playing out in the region as a whole: “Latin America is often envisaged as a site of passion and affect, but it is equally often supposed to be a place where nothing ever happens, where the state is characterized by endless bureaucratic delays to which its citizens swiftly become habituated” (*Posthegemony* 178). Naranjo’s presentation of an everyday commute within the city is a telling visual of the “police order” as described by Rancière—a space of transit in which the “nosotros”/ “we” alluded to in the title are visible, but not as political subjects. More so emphasized by the concluding image of a traffic sign which urges commuters to keep moving: “circule rápido / velocidades máximas y mínimas” [‘circulate rapidly / maximum and minimum speeds’] (14, ll. 108-09). Thus, the ending of the poem reinforces the status quo, and the possibility of identifying a political presence of the people remains bleak as we are left with a paradoxical portrait of a directionless, yet busily occupied multitude.

Rancière stresses the distinction between the Greek words *ochlos* (the multitude) and *demos* (the people). Whereas the multitude represents a community that is obsessed with solidifying its own image of order and unity, the *demos* aims to declassify, to fully undo and

question any and all social arrangements presented as natural.<sup>13</sup> Rancière's concept of the police distribution would be the articulation and acknowledgement of all social partnerships, groupings, legalities, roles, and norms embodied by the multitude, and only in presenting these distinctions can the *demos* then supplement a political response to those social boundaries. Furthermore, the distinction between the *ochlos* and the *demos* is not meant to simply posit one as pejorative and the other commendatory, though it can be reduced to that dynamic. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that the multitude represents a controlling element in society that oppresses any dissent or does not allow change, and, therefore, the people emerge as the predictable resistance. Rather, the participation of the *demos* can enact a subtler form of democratic action by signaling absences, and as we will see in *Círculo*, translates into signaling the need for silence amidst the urban clamor. Rancière's focus on what is already visible challenges the accepted capacities of thought to perceive spaces where the people can recognize that all along they had the capacity, indeed the imperative, for resistance.

In my reading of Naranjo's poetry, what is missing in the city is not the presence of its citizens, but the resistance that would make them active political subjects. For this reason, it is even more interesting to note, then, how Naranjo begins the second "Nosotros" poem found in the collection. The first line reads: "nosotros la multitud" ['we the multitude'] (31). When compared to the alternative expression "we the people" (which could bring to mind the first three words of the Preamble of the US Constitution, or the famous "Wir sind das Volk" of the 1989 Leipzig demonstration), Naranjo's use of the collective affirmation neither gives the sense of a

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<sup>13</sup> In recent political philosophy, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri articulate a concept of the multitude primarily from a socioeconomic perspective and as a figure of political subjectivity defined through economic conditions. Thus, multitude is a "class concept" (*Multitude* 103). Unlike Hardt and Negri, Rancière does not view the multitude as an active social agent. As Naranjo's depiction of the multitude stresses its conformity and passive state, I find Rancière's distinction between the *ochlos* and the *demos* to be more helpful in analyzing the leveling of the multitude to encompass all socioeconomic classes in Naranjo's poetry.

popular voice that sustains democratic governance, nor does it give a sense of demanding that a popular voice be recognized. Instead, this second rendering of Naranjo's "nosotros" is followed by a multitude that is somewhat perceptible, but easily overlooked in its current configuration:

nosotros la multitud	we the multitude
el necio sumado al genial	the fool added to the genius
el criminal junto al santo	the criminal next to the saint
el símbolo estampando figuras	the symbol stamping figures
transeúntes de las corrientes	pedestrians of the currents
apoyados en bastiones ajenos	relying on foreign bastions
para incendiar las cosechas	to set fire to the harvests
nosotros embarcados en la historia	we embarked upon history
con el fondo de las leyendas negras	with black legends in the background
donde se desnuda a cualquiera	where anyone is laid bare
nosotros con la máscara herida	we with the wounded mask
reverenciando vacas sagradas	venerating sacred cows
amos de las lógicas rotas	masters of broken logic
nosotros en medio de las tempestades	we in the middle of storms
con rumbo a los refugios	heading for refuge
instinto ordenante del yo absoluto	ordering instinct of the absolute I
nosotros en el círculo doméstico	we in the domestic circle
guardando nuestros nombres	safeguarding our names
parentescos de inmortalidad en tránsito	immortal relationships in transit
dádiva de vegetaciones enclenques	offering of sickly vegetations
(31, ll. 1-20)	(31, ll. 1-20)

The lyric voice provides an ample articulation of a seemingly endless array of roles, norms, titles, and experiences as she elaborates what constitutes this multitude. Opposites are purposely grouped together in a way that makes each individual character, ethical choice, or ideology indistinguishable from the other—instead everything falls under the banner of this absolute “I” whose self-interest impedes the perception of a fellow community. The symbol, whose very nature is its indefinable character, becomes complicit in this uniform and abstract multiplication; rather than mobilize feelings and sentiment, the symbol comes across as sterile and rigid, in turn reproducing the same sterile tracings (“el símbolo estampando figuras”). Likewise, these outlined pedestrians create a distribution from which we can no longer differentiate the specific

elements of the crowd. Perhaps even more significant is the image of these pedestrians being led by the currents (“transeúntes de las corrientes”), in what Naranjo construes as a passive mode of being.

In this first stanza, each appearance of “nosotros” expands the notion of an identical, consistent, and tame composition of the multitude whose own affinity to their everyday reality hinders them from seeing an alternate way of being and doing. For Naranjo, this level of conformity is the biggest obstacle to the promotion of an active and democratic political culture, especially when there is no individual effort by citizens to examine or question this collective identity and its representation. The “nosotros” depicted here has yet to discover what Thomas Docherty calls the “event of perception”:

Culture is extraordinary...[it] is not a state of affairs, not a mode or manner of living; rather ‘culture’ names an event in which the ordinary—a manner of living—discovers or reveals a foundation that is extraordinary, and whose extraordinariness makes possible a different manner of living. Culture can be defined as that event of perception—the root sense of ‘aesthetic’ (*aisthanomai*)—that calls a human subject to differ from itself, and to find or to constitute its very identity precisely through the specific mode of that differing. It therefore names the possibility of transformation, a change in our ordinariness that is occasioned by aesthetics or art. The name that we give to that change is history: our historical becoming and our becoming historical. (*Aesthetic Democracy* xiii)

Naranjo’s conception of the multitude reinforces a manner of living, a mode of being in which a populace makes little effort to constitute its identity through a process of differentiation.

Docherty’s claim that culture is an event of perception that reveals an opportunity to experience a “historical becoming and our becoming historical” is noteworthy given the poem’s tainted historical backdrop of the “leyenda negra,” alluding to the unfavorable and demonizing image of the Spanish empire and its execution of intolerable cruelty toward the indigenous population of the Americas. As the “nosotros” embarks on this historical journey, its past exposes a sense of shame and vulnerability through the idea of being laid bare (“donde se desnuda a cualquiera”). In

response, the “nosotros” hides behind “la máscara herida,” upholding a performance of this wounded past without critiquing its ramifications.

Despite the painful reminder of such a past—the “nosotros” simply dons the mask which gives semblance of dealing with a superficial wound. Thus, the mask stands as a purposeful desensitizing gesture to present two faces, one for public consumption and the other, quite different, more aligned to the private introspection of one’s sense of self. In the same way this “we” acts with two faces, it also speaks with two languages—one public and one private, that is, one language that models public consensus, while the other language harbors a private dissent, or a differing opinion: “dialogamos la unidad de acuerdos / monologamos el disenso” [‘we dialogue the unity of agreements / we monologue disagreement’] (34, ll. 69-70). Naranjo’s asyndeton is notable here. Her omission of any conjunction indicates a simultaneous and hypocritical speech, revealing a clear disparity between thought and action as her suppression of these connecting words reflects the same suppression of disagreement and/or self-imposed reticence in the face of revealing one’s inner thoughts. Naranjo calls out the pretense of the masks used to evade a constructive dialogue, needlessly allowing the injuries of a wounded colonial past to be replayed. Hence, she critiques the “monologue of dissent” because it represents the distance between what is really thought and what is actually said. Serving as the default response to avoid confrontation, it reflects silence, hesitancy and most tragically, conformity on behalf of the populace.

Just as worrisome is the characterization of this multitude as one that moves in a “círculo doméstico.” The word “domestic” implies a tamed multitude, trained to simply circle what is familiar and known as opposed to what Naranjo signals as the potential to explore the unknown: “nosotros en el resumen impotente / de vagones inexplorados” [‘we in the impotent summary / of

unexplored train coaches’] (32, ll. 23-24). The “nosotros” here lacks initiative despite having the potential (“vagones inexplorados”) for a meaningful inquiry into the representation of its cultural identity, or the “event of perception” which Docherty recalls as the root meaning of aesthetics. To synthesize, just as culture is extraordinary, democracy, too, is extraordinary according to Docherty because they both are the products of perceiving a way of being beyond the “ordinary state of affairs” (xiii). In its most basic form, the poem’s rendition of the multitude’s constituents represents the ordinary state of affairs routinely confronted by the poetic voice. Naranjo’s project of aesthetic engagement unfolds in the lyric voice’s effort to open the possibility of perceiving a different way of being or what Docherty posits is the chance for cultural—indeed historical—transformation.

In addition to the multitude’s lack of perception, Naranjo develops a stronger criticism via the suggestion that this collective “we” lends itself to an appropriation by a foreign culture or influence, if not a complete dependency. Instead of displaying an autochthonous political stance, Naranjo constructs an image of the collective “we” that is more akin to the dispositions of other political discourses and ideologies:

nosotros estampillas de correspondencia entre el vaticano y el kremlin entre berlin y la casa blanca el arbitrio de neurasténicos clamores mientras el arroz crece blanco sin sangre (33, ll. 13-17)	we stamps of correspondence between the vatican and the kremlin between berlin and the white house the discretion of neurasthenic clamors while the rice grows white sans blood (33, ll. 13-17)
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The intermediary surfacing of this collective “we” between emblems such as the Vatican, the Kremlin, Berlin, and the White House offers a scope of the Cold War’s major protagonists hoping to burnish their own political power to influence international opinion. Latin America figured prominently as the battleground between two competing ideological systems—the Western, capitalist imperialism of the United States versus the Eastern, communist

totalitarianism of the Soviet Union. Neutrality was not an option, especially for writers. As Jean Franco reminds us, it was the Latin American writers in the 1960s and 1970s that were more important than academics and politicians in influencing both the public's taste in literature as well as the public's monitoring of politically correct statements scrutinized by the rhetoric of polarized Cold War politics" (*Decline of the Lettered City* 5). Patrick Iber notes that these Cold War superpowers manipulated Latin American intellectuals to their own advantage, often exercising soft power by means of cultural institutions to enlist the "persuasive weight of 'authentic' local voices" (20). The Soviet Union operated their agenda through the World Peace Council (WPC), and not to be left behind, the U.S. tasked the CIA with the creation of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF).<sup>14</sup>

However, these competing agendas played into an opposition between the Latin American left that preceded the Cold War, namely, the divide between those that saw socialism and communism as the only viable alternative versus those staunchly against totalitarian regimes and who sought to reconcile socialism and democracy (i.e., social democrats). The case of Costa Rica following the 1948 Revolution exhibited this tension when it creates the social democratic Second Republic and ousts all communist intellectuals and party members from the country. On the other side of the spectrum were a group of conservative intellectuals who insisted on the autonomy of art versus the commitment of liberation struggles, but the degree of polarization was such that eventually even writers who identified as social democrats, like Naranjo, could not

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<sup>14</sup> Among those affiliated with the WPC were Argentine writer María Rosa Oliver, Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, Mexican painter Diego Rivera, and Uruguayan literary critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal. Among the anticommunist Left whose efforts the CCF supported were Mexican playwright Alfonso Reyes, Peruvian philosopher and politician Raúl Haya de la Torre, Uruguayan poet Sara de Ibáñez, Venezuelan writer and ex-president Rómulo Betancourt, and the exiled Spanish writer Julián Gorkin.

break free from the era’s rigid East-West binaries and likewise struggled to advance their social democratic agendas.

Certainly, Naranjo’s verse prompts consideration of how this polarization casts doubt on her own cultural activism. In the above excerpt from the poem, the pronoun “nosotros”—be it solely indicative of Costa Rican culture and politics or not—reads as an indecisive pawn that does not sacrifice anything or fails to act in a manner consistent with the militancy of other revolutionary projects—hence the white rice not stained by blood. It is worth noting Naranjo’s mentioning of rice, as it is not the last time she will use it as a point of reflection. Her final poetry collection *Oficio de oficios* (which I discuss in Chapter 3) contains a poem in which the lyric self admits she has only two unfulfilled wishes: “ser comunista de prédica y práctica / y vivir en China para sembrar arroz” [‘to be communist in speech and practice / and to live in China to plant rice ’] (“Oficio de poder y no poder” 48, ll.11-12). When read together, both mentions of rice can be tied to initiatives undertaken during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), specifically, when the urban “intellectual” youth was forcibly dispatched to the countryside to labor and to learn skills from the peasant farmers and workers.

Based on this context, Naranjo’s direct reference to the planting of rice insinuates a reflection on the shortfalls of the Second Republic’s cultural initiatives. The emphasis on the white rice serves as an indictment to the neurotic needs of the middle class, concerned primarily with frivolous matters (“el arbitrio de neurasténicos clamores”), but even those concerns fail to produce a coherent and united voice. Ruminating on that reality, the lyric self declares later on:

nosotros los de hoy	we the ones of today
sin voz y sin voto	without voice and without vote
viendo las nubes	watching the clouds
eco de nuestras lluvias	echo of our rains
(33, ll. 59-62)	(33, ll. 59-62)



The alliteration of the “v” and imitative quality of the rain’s echo underline the constant pitter patter of the dominant discourse. Naranjo’s portrait of the collective seems to point more toward an overall lack of awareness and purpose, much like the failed student protest with an unspecified cause in her other famous novel *Diario de una multitud* (1974).

In a period of guerrilla struggle, revolutionary ideals, and surmounting political instability, the emergence of revolutionary literature in Central America during the 1960s witnessed a fundamental break with the previous literature of social realism on the isthmus, where being a writer also meant being a public figure in opposition to the region’s brutal dictatorships. Naranjo belonged to the younger generation at the forefront of innovative discursive practices inspired by the literary experimentation taking place elsewhere on the continent.<sup>15</sup> However, this generation did not confuse formal experimentation with steering clear of social content, though they did undertake a major challenge in reconciling the two literary objectives. As Arias notes, “it was no longer enough to write about ‘political themes.’ The work had to exceed the boundaries of the ordinary; it had to be politically transgressive and linguistically innovative as well” (9). Much of this experimental and social literature had to address the issue of defining and representing the social or collective subject of the revolutionary struggle in a unique way. Without a doubt, Naranjo’s unfavorable image of the collective stands out in this effort.

Both in her prose and poetry, Naranjo depiction of the collective “we” contrasts significantly from the portrayal of the popular character, or the people, in the literature of her

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<sup>15</sup> Most notably, Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1966) inspired a lot of the formal innovation of his close friends Roque Dalton and Claribel Alegria. In Central America, the work of Miguel Ángel Asturias with his *Hombres de maíz* (*Men of Maize*, 1949) and *Mulata de tal* (*The Mulatta* 1963), as well as the work of Yolanda Oreamuno with *La ruta de su evasión* (*The Route of their Escape*, 1948) were innovative precedents in the region’s literature.

contemporaries. Ileana Rodríguez details this difference when she compares Naranjo's collective protagonist to the characterization of such protagonists in the novels of fellow Central American revolutionary writers:

Naranjo reproduces people's speech, writing, and reading in order to stress that the popular character has lost its unity, its individuality. The popular character is not here the poor little man of Ramírez and Arias, or Argueta's lovable peasant woman; neither is s/he Asturias's or Dalton's humble Indian, let alone Morales's or [Tomás] Borge's heroic *guerrillero*, nor for that matter does s/he embody Che Guevara or Alegría/Flakoll's massacred people. S/he is constituted as a popular non-subject—assorted, eclectic, disparate, dispersed. (116)

Of the work she wrote during the 1960s, Naranjo stated that one of her objectives was to “dificultar su lectura” [‘to make difficult its reading’] (qtd in Barboza 5). Through the fragmented representation of an undetermined multitude, Naranjo seeks to challenge readers to make meaning out of chaos and disorder. As early as her first novel *Los perros no ladraron* (1966), and as I have demonstrated here through *En el círculo de los pronombres* (1967), her experimentation with reproducing the quotidian and fragmentary exchanges of these random subjects and voices in both prose and poetry produces an “inventory of social inanity” (Rodríguez 118). But whereas utter nonsense and textual disorder constitute the social subject in Naranjo's novels, the lyric voice of her poems finds herself acutely aware of how breaking out of the vapid multitude means dealing with linguistic and conceptual struggles.

The situational solitude, isolation, impotence, and the sense of entrapment and anguish that predominate in Naranjo's urban novels are all feelings the lyric “I” confronts as an interior struggle. Perhaps this is the reason why Naranjo's verse received less credit for its innovation than her prose. After all, poetry as a genre is no stranger to the idea of a fragmented self. As Julia Kristeva argues, poetic language intrinsically generates “discordance” within the self, engendering an “unsettled and questionable” lyric subject (*Desire in Language*, 136, 140). For a

poem like “Nosotros” that aims to represent the collective subject, the deliberate inclusion of the first person singular also unsettles the presumed first-person plural: “disimulada carga de *mi* conciencia / sembrada de plurales pretextos” [‘surreptitious burden of *my* conscience / planted with plural pretexts’] (31, ll. 21-22, emphasis added). Contributing to this social meaninglessness weighs heavily on the lyric voice. She recognizes a need to go against the multitude, but opts to divest herself of all responsibility and action, a pattern she later corroborates in the poem “Yo” (“I”/“Me”): “yo una suma de expropiaciones / un inventario inconcluso / un punto sin acción y voz / en el círculo de los pronombres” [‘me a sum of expropriations / an unfinished inventory / a point without action and voice / in the circle of pronouns’] (16, ll. 23-26). Once again, even in a poem whose title is meant to focus on the individual, the poetic subject conforms to the regulation of the circle and capitulates into a plural identity (“suma”, “inventario”, “pronombres”), which is to say, the multitude.

Like the rest of the pronouns, the “yo” falls in line, so to speak. In fact, each pronoun examined in the collection fails to breach this orderly configuration, pointedly highlighted through Naranjo’s emphasis on geometric properties: lines, angles and, of course, circles. Thus, an obvious affinity to form marks the social dynamic and representation of the popular collective subject in her poetry. For instance, the third person plural entities—both male and female—in the poem “Ellos Ellas” (“Them” or “They”) gravitate toward lineal groupings:

ellos desfilan en los directorios	they file into the boardrooms
suicidas de los sentidos	suicide victims of the senses
trazan sus rayas verticales	(they) trace their vertical lines
y sucumben de cuerpo entero	and fully succumb
polvo horizontal de las propiedades	horizontal dust of properties
(40, ll. 40-43)	(40, ll. 40-43)

Not to be excluded from their male counterparts, the women also follow suit: “ellas siempre en hileras” [‘they always in rows’] (40, l. 31). Whether vertically or horizontally, the multitude marches in file and gathers in rows with such ease and precision. There is no resistance to be found, no challenge to the linear order. That they “succumb” to these traced lines, following a predetermined path instead of creating their own, points again to the negative notion that these are passive and not active, political subjects. These entities, already anonymous, become even more generalized as Naranjo reduces them solely to form; they have become the lines that limit their existence.

As Naranjo’s poetry engages with these indiscernible, repetitive human clusters, the resulting image of the multitude serves as the aesthetic platform for projecting her political concerns to awaken the social consciousness of readers. Given her tenure as a public servant in several roles, she was keenly aware of the model of civic responsibility promulgated by the democratic ideals of the still young Second Republic. Arguably, the lyric voice’s observation of the indifferent and conforming masses directly opposes the active citizen called for by José Figueres Ferrer in his aim to redefine the political culture of that era.<sup>16</sup> With its synchronized

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<sup>16</sup> In 1955, President José Figueres Ferrer (“Don Pepe”), who was president on three occasions (1948-49, 1953-58, and 1970-74), published *Cartas a un ciudadano* (*Letters to a Citizen*) in which he outlined the parameters of his vision for the Second Republic and Costa Rica’s social development. In one of the letters titled “La responsabilidad ciudadana” (‘Civic Responsibility’), he states: “En general, creo que en Costa Rica nos hemos acostumbrado a esperar más del gobierno que del ciudadano. Esto es peligroso. Puede así debilitarse el valor del individuo, que es insustituible por ninguna virtud pública. Y puede perder vigor nuestra democracia si depende solamente de los gobernantes. La responsabilidad ciudadana es muy grande en un sistema político de soberanía popular. El pueblo no puede ser soberano mientras no ejerza su soberanía. Y ese ejercicio debe ser activo, serio, concienzudo, y no meramente pasivo, en la ilusión de que los gobiernos pueden por sí solos mantener los principios, y pasar al país a la generación siguiente con la fisonomía moral que los ciudadanos conciben como ideal de su patria.” [‘In general, I think that in Costa Rica we have become accustomed to expecting more from our government than from the citizen. This is dangerous. It can debilitate the value of the individual, which no public virtue can replace. And our own democracy can lose vigor if it depends solely on the governing leaders. Civic responsibility plays an enormous role in a government of popular sovereignty. The people cannot be sovereign without exercising their sovereignty. And that exercise must be active, serious, conscientious, and not merely passive, with the illusion that governments alone can maintain the principles and hand over the country to the next generation with the moral physiognomy that the citizens conceive as the ideal of their homeland’] (169).

motion and geometric patterns, *Círculo*'s multitude coalesces into a state of regimentation as if to indicate a crisis of both form and substance. This crisis accounts for the feelings of listlessness and dissatisfaction arising from Naranjo's perception that Costa Rica was not fully living up to the social reform ushered in by the Second Republic. Chiefly, the loss of the individual, or the lyric self, to the multitude jeopardizes the idea of self-representation she finds so crucial to popular sovereignty and creative potential.

In *Crowds and Democracy*, Stefan Jonsson studies how the image of the masses became for many intellectuals and artists an aesthetic benchmark to test the viability of the newly developing democracy of the Weimar Republic in Germany (1918-1933). He points to the didactic element of aesthetics, revelatory in the lesson it offers politics:

Aesthetics teaches a lesson about politics and society that politicians and political experts are predestined to deny and that often remains hidden for those who are living in society. What lesson? That the political arena always will fail to represent society. That the borders that determine who may be seen and heard in public life are contested. Democracy, the representation of the people by the people, is an unfinished process, marked by a constant struggle to sort out the proper representatives of the people. (xvii)

Democracy's promise that the collective can and should always be represented offers a litmus test for the sovereignty of the people, and the degree to which they take an interest in politics and current events indicates a project of civic engagement. In furtherance of this active civic participation, the right of citizens to self-determine how they will be represented or how they will be seen or heard can be conceived as an aesthetic engagement. Within Naranjo's verse and on a larger scale within the nascent experiment that was Costa Rican democracy, this aesthetic engagement is tied to "*tico* exceptionalism," or the leading perception Costa Ricans have of themselves as distinct from their Latin American neighbors. In the next chapter, I will delve deeper into the implications of the political narratocracy imbedded within the concept of *tico*

exceptionalism. For now, I concentrate on how Naranjo's homogenous and regimented representation of the multitude undermines the uniqueness of the leading achievements of the Second Republic as the poetic speaker continues to challenge the apathy of the multitude.

*Circulo* stresses the relation between the individual and the collective, and in doing so, forms part of a continuous attempt within contemporary Latin American poetry to represent the collective within a lyric tradition generally understood as a poetry of the self. Nearly all the leading figures of the *posvanguardia* sought to represent the experience of the masses (and as I will also expand in the next chapter, Central American revolutionary movements privileged poetry to encourage the masses to construct new nationalisms by democratizing artistic creation). To unify behind a common cause was imperative. Vallejo's "Masa" ('The Masses') is a famous example. The poem begins describing the remains of a battle scene. A fallen combatant awaits his death. The cause for which he sacrificed his life is unclear and in the past. One man approaches imploring the soldier not to die, but the corpse continues toward death. Progressively, the number of men pleading increases (two, twenty, a hundred, a thousand, millions and so forth), but to no avail. It is not until all the men of the earth collectively surround the corpse, uniformly and in solidarity with the human condition, that the corpse slowly gets up embracing his fellow man and marches forward.

But Naranjo's multitude displays no such moral cohesion or impetus, no grandiose gesture of solidarity and understanding like Vallejo's *masa*. The crowds simply converge by habit or happenstance. On the streets there are mass gatherings, but with no established aim or reason for protest: "carreteras de hombres / sin marchas militares" ['highways of men / with no military marches'] ("Nosotros" 34, ll. 63-54). Considering that military marches are the epitome of synchronization to exhibit state order and discipline, their replacement with the "carreteras de

hombres” seems to suggest that the masses fall into the same regimentation. Perhaps the absence of military marches alludes to Costa Rica’s abolished armed forces, a fact that contrasts starkly with the frequent imagery of armies marching as military dictatorships in Latin America silenced all opposition. Real or imagined, the effect of this regimentation as we have seen in the second “Nosotros” points to the same outcome: any dissent is suppressed (“monologamos el disentiemento”). As a result, Naranjo’s political poetry contends with something more pressing: a “nosotros,” indeed an entire Costa Rican collective, that struggles for political expression and recognition (“sin voz y sin voto”) even while supposing no repressive state apparatus such as the military rightwing rule of neighboring countries. At the same time, Naranjo presents a lyric self—this “yo”/ “ella”— who does not capitulate fully to this multitude as she indirectly denounces the crisis of self-representation and consensus. Her lyric self is dissensus personified.

If, as Jonsson suggests, democracy is an unfinished process with a constant struggle for representation, the incongruity of the outcome Naranjo highlights above cannot be stressed enough—particularly for a country with a longstanding democratic tradition such as Costa Rica. Elsewhere in Latin America, the end of the Cold War would mark the transition from authoritarian, military *juntas* and leadership to civilian governments. Of course, Costa Rica preceded this historical turn of events by several decades. As it was, the Civil War of 1948 affirmed a strong commitment to popular sovereignty and democratic institutions already in place even before violence broke out. In addition to disbanding the army, the newly amended 1949 Constitution introduced suffrage for women and granted full citizenship to the country’s black population. Yet, when these historical facts are juxtaposed with Naranjo’s description of the multitude as one “sin voz y sin voto,” her verse underscores that the collective “we” in its current inscription has failed to include all sectors of the population. Suffrage does not always

guarantee visibility and equality; it also depends on participation. Until those questions of political substance are resolved, multitude will continue to circulate—in a literal revolution—instead of carrying out any substantive cause.

Unsurprisingly, this second “Nosotros” poem ends on a rather dismal note with images of darkness and opacity to emphasize the futility of leaving a mark: “nos encontramos en la penumbra” [‘we find ourselves in the shadows’] (34, l. 70) and reinforced once again in the final line: “reverbero de tintas oscuras” [‘reverberation of dark inks’] (34, l. 78). By resorting to the image of dark “tintas” (*ink*) specifically, we see a struggle of representation that is tied to the act of writing. This leads to a reflection of another incongruent outcome of the Second Republic alluded to within Naranjo’s verse. In line with the Second Republic’s spirit of renovation and social democratic reform, postwar welfare state programs facilitated universal education and raised the country’s literacy rate. The years 1950-69 witnessed the first visible forms of the state’s promotion of culture through the establishment of the Editorial Costa Rica, the Asociación de Autores, several national literary awards, and the Dirección de Letras y Artes (precursor to the Ministry of Culture that Naranjo would eventually lead). By the 1970s, the consolidation of state sponsored cultural initiatives reached its height of support thanks to the platform of the *Partido de Liberación Nacional* (PLN), but despite all these efforts, support for what was once a strong tenet of the revolutionary objectives after 1948 soon waned in the face of a growing economic and political crisis in Central America. Despite the resulting increase in literary production, the inconsistent funding and promotion of authors affected both domestic and international recognition of Costa Rica’s literary scene.

*Círculo* seems to anticipate this cultural and revolutionary inertia as Naranjo addresses the role language plays in the cultural entrapment and consumption of revolutionary causes. In



“Él” (“He/Him”), she places the image of the revolutionary man within traditional artistic platforms to capture a neat and carefully controlled representation displayed only for exhibition instead of action: “él colgado de los museos / impreso en todas las letras / con el alma de papel / grita violento libertad y pan” [‘he hung from the museums / printed in all the letters / with the soul of paper / shouts violently liberty and bread’] (25, ll. 59-62). The immobile setting of the museum and the fixed print of the page give the impression of stationary passivity, almost like a type of ossification. It also supposes a distance from the present moment, a cultural relic of a revolutionary past.

However, the violent shout of the popular slogan “libertad y pan” in the final stanza undermines the notion that the revolution is either stagnant or a thing of the past, especially considering the present tense of the verb “gritar” and the ambiguity of the conjugation. Whether we are to assume that “grita” agrees with the subject “él” meaning “he shouts” or that its conjugation also implies the informal command “shout,” the various possibilities associated with implicit subject address allow us to perceive the revolutionary imperative and direct plea for action, if only momentarily. While Naranjo alters the visual consumption of the revolutionary, it does not erase the fact that his shout remains trapped, all the while matching the lyric voice’s own struggle to shout and be heard.

As the poem continues, the poetic voice shifts from describing this *él* in third person to explicitly addressing him in the second person: “vos sos vos serás vos fuiste” [‘you are you will be you were’] (25, l. 51). Appearing in the same line, the present, future and past tenses of “to be” form an experience for this *vos* (and by association *él*) of a simultaneous cyclical presence and destiny. As the poetic voice speaks not only directly to this *él* but also to the imagined interlocutor (*vos*), the prophetic undertone suggests an opportunity to imprint and shape one’s

own historical contribution by drawing attention to the abstraction of the image in essence: “en la cruzada de las imágenes / queda la historia de tus sandalias” [‘in the crusade of images / stays the history of your sandals’] (26, ll. 73-74). The lyric self engages this second person in a poetic endeavor, creating a space for a cultural footprint to be traced by likening the basic progression of images to a military crusade. Whether the image stands alone or whether it encodes a specific history seems secondary to the idea that the image will and must continue forward. In a way, the poem’s emphasis on the perpetuity of the image stresses that not only our history but the dynamic capabilities of the artistic process itself depend on the advancement of these images.

The poem culminates with the uncontrolled circulation of expressions and symbols: “ademanes libres al viento / símbolos tras los cristales” [‘gestures free in the wind / symbols behind the crystals’] (26, ll. 77-78). The elusive depiction of the symbols gives a sense of lack of control (“libres al viento”) as much as the prior image of the man shouting liberty and bread modeled the call for revolution. Still, there seems to be an inaccessible and unfinished project, an obstruction reinforced by the “ademanes” as signs that escape all grasp while the “símbolos” are visible only through a crystal windowpane. Thus, the museum’s exhibition of these symbols, gestures and slogans creates a non-dialectic space devoid of words. All the while the poetic voice remains trapped as a spectator to the hint of creative elements at her disposal.

Given the specificity of the Central American identity marker embodied in the pronoun *vos*, its use allows us to read Naranjo’s poetic frustration as one that speaks to Costa Rica’s political and literary isolation. On the one hand, despite Latin America being a prominent stage for the Cold War tensions and state of affairs experienced at a global level, Costa Rica was not seen as a major concern for the U.S. due to the banning of the Communist Party and the country’s democratic stability following the 1948 Revolution. In fact, for many scholars, the

covert CIA operation in Guatemala's 1954 elections marks the first U.S. intervention in the region to perceived Cold War ideological threats. However, Kyle Longley argues that the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948 marked the origins of the Cold War in Latin America because U.S. support for Figueres resulted in a comparable outcome to that of Guatemala: "the removal of a perceived threat of communism" (173). Despite this historical precedent, critical attention (particularly North American scholarly interest) has focused on the more overt "political" literature from neighboring Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Rancière's notion of politics as the struggle of an unrecognized party for equal recognition in the established order allows us to overturn the dismissal of Naranjo's poetic oeuvre—and Costa Rican literature as a whole—as politically insignificant simply because Costa Rica does not contend with an immediate revolutionary struggle, the claim being that there is no political movement from which to subscribe and advocate in her lyricism. More than the distance from the immediacy of neighboring conflicts in the region, her verse calibrates the distance from Costa Rica's own revolutionary precedent, a legacy not as widely recognized as the Cuban Revolution (1959), nor in sync with the pressing causes of the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979), but nevertheless deserves to be more than a global and regional afterthought.

Naranjo's verse makes even more pronounced the lyric isolation of the poetic "I"—caught between the apathy of the multitude and the ease and convenience of conforming to that same multitude. Insofar as she faces the task of reconciling an individual voice and identity to that of a larger community, her work reveals how lyric poetry naturally lends itself to a democratic practice of confronting the inclusive and exclusive elements of representation. Clare Cavanaugh points to the inherent inquiry posited by the mere presence of the genre's poetic subject:

The very nature of the ‘lyric I,’ or ‘lyric speaker,’ or ‘lyric hero’—the term varies from critic to critic and country to country—embroils us in problems of definition. ‘I,’ ‘you,’ and ‘we’: these terms may be the lyric poet’s stock in trade, but their meanings are anything but clear. Like all personal pronouns, they are what Jakobson calls ‘shifters.’ Their referents are contextually determined, and alter depending on who uses them, and how, and when. My ‘I’ is your ‘you’; your ‘we’ may not include me, just as my ‘you’ may be either inclusive or exclusive in English at least. My ‘we,’ finally, may strike you as mere rhetoric, a linguistic trick inadvertently expressing not solidarity, but solipsism. And vice versa. (Cavanaugh 34)

In *Círculo*, Naranjo explicitly undertakes the meticulous enterprise of surveying and defining each personal pronoun. This attempt to account for all segments of society serves as a reminder that pronouns are semantic markers of social relationships between individuals that classify a social hierarchy. Throughout the collection, Naranjo exposes the ruptures and the structures of inequality within the community rooted in the grammatical functions of these pronouns.

In the third poem of the collection, already from the onset its very title “Tú-vos-usted” makes visible the hierarchies manifested in the informal and formal constructions of the second person pronouns “tú,” “vos,” and “usted.” When compared to the all-embracing and accessible “you” of the English language, the second person distinctions in Spanish are fraught with inequality. Therefore, instead of showing a united collective entity using the more conventional plural “ustedes” (‘you all’), Naranjo intentionally displays the ruptures in community through the hyphenated configuration “Tú-vos-usted”. Carrying on in the same vein as previous poems dedicated solely to one pronoun, Naranjo attempts an exhaustive compilation of the roles, norms, titles and experiences of the multitude, though reserved strictly for the “tú” and “usted”:

tú el desconocido	you the stranger
con la voz en tono alto	with the voice at high pitch
tú el extranjero	you the foreigner
el dueño de otro idioma	the owner of another language
tú el sabelotodas	you the know-it-all
con los derechos de llave	with the access rights
tú el histórico	you the historic

apergaminado en tus héroes  
 tú el siempre amo  
 con el mapa de tus propiedades  
 usted el pelagatos  
 un hombro en las legiones  
 usted el sencillito  
 olfateando las loterías  
 usted mi libro abierto  
 (19, ll. 1-15)

wrinkled up in your heroes  
 you the always master  
 with the map of your properties  
 you the nobody  
 a shoulder in the legions  
 you the little simple one  
 sniffing the lotteries  
 you my open book  
 (19, ll. 1-15)

Naranjo begins by employing “tú,” the informal pronoun for “you” most often used to give the impression of familiarity. Ironically, its use here gives the opposite impression as the lyric voice addresses a “tú” that is a *desconocido* (‘stranger’) and *extranjero* (‘foreigner’). The representation of this “tú” as the “dueño de otro idioma” (‘owner of another language’ l. 4) further reinforces this unfamiliarity and signals a communicative obstacle. By pointing out the high pitch voice and the acknowledgement of the tú as “dueño” (*owner*) and “amo” (*master*), the poem disdainfully emphasizes the superior ranking of this “tú.” Also, the ironic employment of the pronoun “usted,” which in theory is used to demonstrate respect, conveys the opposite when the lyric voice belittles and mocks this “usted” by identifying it as a “pelagatos” (*nobody*) and with the diminutive “sencillito” (*little simple one*). In practice, the use of “usted” can come across as condescending with the intent of creating a distance predicated on superiority. Moreover, Costa Rican Spanish displays a predominant use of “usted” even in cases when the formal address is not required, a phenomenon known as “ustedeo” (Quesada Pacheco 23). Thus, the use of *usted* can express both distance and intimacy, although recent scholarship also indicates that the recent preference for *usted* is a distancing linguistic gesture to separate any association to the influx of Nicaraguan immigrants who also use the *voseo* (Michnowicz, Despain, and Gorham 1). The poem’s tripartite title of “Tú-vos-usted” undermines the traditional binary system of pronouns of address where “vos” would serve as the familiar pronoun

expressing solidarity and “usted” would be the polite pronoun indicating power and status to show the colonial isolation from the linguistic development of Spanish, but also the de-familiarization and lack of solidarity that comes from choosing to not employ the *voseo*.

The *usted* also contributes to the sententious use of language: “Usted y sus refranes” [‘You and your sayings’] (21, l. 58). Resorting to an abundance of pithy aphorisms or maxims, the *usted*’s communicative abilities are not open to dialogue, preferring instead to repeat dogmatic proverbs. The association of these expressions with the implication that the *usted* is probably addressed to a wise and elder person may seem fitting, but the effect here serves to showcase the limitation of the *usted*’s mechanic and non-reflexive use of language. The poem continues to downplay the importance of this *usted* and any traditional honorific by listing in lower case the names of Costa Rica’s historical actors involved in the Central American Filibuster war: “usted y don ricardo / y don juanita mora y el general cañas / drogas de historia plana / en el almacén de las ignorancias [‘you and don ricardo / and don juanita mora and the general cañas/ drugs of top brass history / in the warehouse of ignorance’] (22, ll. 63-66).<sup>17</sup>

Lessening the importance of these names contrasts significantly with the fact that they belong to the top brass, supposedly representing the highest ranking military officers and political leaders. Relegated to a storehouse to be hidden away from the present memory, their inclusion here underscores the forgotten and, apparently, irrelevant past.

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<sup>17</sup> The Filibuster war was a military conflict between filibustering multinational troops (led by William Walker) and a coalition of Central American armies in 1854. The conflict was a result of the civil war that had erupted in Nicaragua between the conservatives and the liberals, the latter of whom turned to Walker for support (Quesada Camacho 34). “Don ricardo,” is actually Richard Farrer, the British Consul in Costa Rica who gave political asylum to “don juanita mora” or Juan Rafael Mora Porras, who was president of Costa Rica four times. Mora is recognized as a hero for leading the victory against Walker. However, he was deposed in 1859, sought exile in El Salvador, but returned to Costa Rica and was executed at the hands of a firing squad in 1860 under the orders of then president José María Montealegre. Two days later General José María Cañas, secretary general during the war and Mora’s brother-in-law, suffered the same fate for accompanying Mora to Costa Rica in an effort to restore his presidency (Quesada Camacho 72). This is an interesting throwback in Naranjo’s poetry of a historical precedent and example of Costa Rican political participation in the region’s affairs.

Between the dominance of the foreign “tú” and the irrelevance of the bygone “usted,” the pronoun “vos” struggles for visibility. If we recall the colloquial preference for the *voseo* in Costa Rican Spanish, we can read this “vos” as Naranjo’s direct appeal to her fellow Costa Ricans to confront the status quo. Not many lines are dedicated to its presence compared to the other two pronouns, but its middle positioning within the very title of the poem introduces it as a potential dissident figure and posits the need for more inclusive dialogue. Nonetheless, it is not exempt from an accusatory scrutiny:

y vos hermano	and you brother
la misma patria de nervios	that same fatherland of nerves
vos poroso en esta orilla	you porous in this shore
vos sin la carroña de los plurales	you without the carrion of plurals
listo a viajar jerarquías	ready to travel hierarchies
(19, ll. 16-20)	(19, ll. 16-20)

Instantly, the lyric “I” extends a gesture of kinship with this “vos” as she proceeds to call him “hermano” (*brother*), literally undoing any sense of unfamiliarity in comparison to that established with the other pronouns. More so than the depiction of the “tú” and “usted,” this “vos” appears vulnerable and incomplete in the description of its porous nature. But this “vos” stands out in a positive manner as it has not yet been tainted by the “carroña de los plurales,” whose meaning can refer to either putrefied flesh or to denominate a group of lowlifes. Regardless, the poetic speaker maintains her disdain for the current collective configuration implied in the plural association with this scum. She sees the potential of the “vos” to stand independently and to make its own mark. That said, the positioning of the “vos” at the margins comes as no surprise to the lyric self, who clearly notes that nothing has changed and that finding the “vos” at the shore is not so much the product of outside forces as it is an internal struggle motivated by fear and insecurity (“la misma patria de nervios”). The choice to inhabit the shore sustains the hierarchy implied in the configuration *tú-vos-usted*, reinforced through the imperfect

rhyme “orilla/jerarquías” (ll. 18, 20). The notion that the “vos” is all too willing to travel these hierarchies does not necessarily mean that it is willing to disrupt them, but the presence of this “vos” disrupts the traditional dichotomy of *tú/usted*. The shoreline’s edge demarcates a physical limit where the pronoun carefully positions itself at a distance, but the lyric voice is quick to debunk the collective perception that is used to justify these socially measured roles: “respeten las distancias: / todo un mito” [‘mind the distances: / all a myth’] (21, ll.56-57). In other words, Naranjo plays with the cautionary perception employed in the traffic rule of keeping a safe distance between cars to suggest that these hierarchical distances can be contested.

Naranjo highlights the conforming nature that proves to be the biggest obstacle to this democratic impetus: “Vos sin morirte de hambre / te figurás las fatigas / en el ritmo conformista / de encoger los hombros / Vos inconsciente en tu triángulo / con ocho horas asalariadas” [‘you without dying of hunger / you conjure up the exhaustions / in the conforming rhythm / of shrugging your shoulders’ / ‘you unconscious in your triangle / with eight salaried hours’] (20, ll. 33-38). This is a “vos” that barely registers its safe triangular trajectory. Conformity, after all, is comfortable—safe even—as the manner of being and action for this “vos” is protected and defined by the guarantee of a salaried compensation. With everything measured and accounted for there is no sense of urgency to question the above bureaucratic existence, one that is marked once again by a strict adherence to form and isolation.

David Graeber notes that we have become so habituated to the workings of bureaucracy that it is hardly a matter of contemporary attention, and if at all discussed, the concept is often contextualized using the same terms established in the 1960’s and 70’s. He recalls:

The social movements of the Sixties were, on the whole, left-wing in inspiration, but they were also rebellions against the bureaucratic mind-set, the gray functionalism of both state-capitalist and state-socialist regimes, the soul-



destroying conformity of the postwar welfare states. In the face of social control, Sixties rebels stood for individual expression and spontaneous conviviality. (4)

In Latin American literature and culture, this anti-bureaucratic mindset manifests itself even prior to these decades of tumultuous social movements. In Roberto Arlt's *Los lanzallamas* (*The Flamethrowers*, 1931) and Mario Benedetti's *Poemas de oficina* (*Office Poems*, 1956), the office as the locus of the urban-bureaucratic condition becomes the space in which to reflect upon the shortcomings of the economic and political system at large. In "Rebelión de las amanuenses" ['Rebellion of the Amanuenses'], Benedetti goes so far as to declare that Uruguay is the "only office that has reached the status of nation-state" (qtd in Jordan 82). In short, office culture mirrors national culture.

Occasionally, the confines of the office also serve as a reflection on civic engagement within a democratic society. Though it was a commercial flop in his native Mexico, Miguel M. Delgado's film *El ministro y yo* (*The Minister and I*, 1975) offers one such reflection performed by Mario Moreno Cantinflas in the central role of a rural notary public hired by the minister to reform the bureau. After much frustration and personal attacks from his superiors, he resigns but not before launching into a diatribe in which he glosses and defines bureaucracy as "ejercer el poder desde el escritorio" ['to exercise power from the desk'] to provide a counter to the notion that it is synonymous with incompetence. He then defines democracy as "el poder del pueblo por el pueblo" ['the power of the people for the people'] to remind his superiors and co-workers that they also form part of the *pueblo* and that their civic function should efficiently serve everyone since they depend precisely on the financial payments extracted from the masses to sustain their salaries and benefits. Thus, his resignation and rant filters the voice of the *pueblo* in a stand against the superior attitude of these civil servants.

In his study of narrative writings on bureaucracy in early to mid-twentieth century Southern Cone literature, Paul Jordan notes that sociologists of the time recognized that bureaucracies depended on the constant stream of income and resources leading some like the German sociologist Max Weber to consider bureaucracy as only realizable under “advanced capitalism” (4). What is more, Weber views democracy as having a natural affinity to bureaucratic regulations because it supposes that the “democratic ideal of the levelling of differences is implemented” (4). Yet, Jordan is quick to point out the contradicting relationship identified by Weber between the two:

Thus far, bureaucracy emerges as an instrument, in itself neutral, which may be in the service of different interests. However, in the specific case of the democratic interest the relationship is problematic: Weber considers that specific ends desired by the democratic interest entail bureaucracy—but also that, at the same time, democracy itself by its nature is opposed to bureaucratic rule. (4)

Weber rightly points out that bureaucracy is a threat to democracy; it transforms citizens into clients and facilitates the mechanization of speech and thought. If bureaucracy aims for social organization and regulation, democracy’s instinct will be to naturally challenge the classification that upholds any bureaucratic endeavor, especially when bureaucracy becomes hierarchical, partisan, corrupt, and indifferent. The decision to undertake this democratic confrontation, however, is the sole responsibility of the people, if not the individual.

With a view to connect this paradox to Naranjo’s verse, I am inclined to agree with Jordan’s conclusion that the central issue of these bureaucratically-oriented works is really a confrontation between “creativity or bureaucracy, conformity or autonomy. It is an issue of profound implications indeed: it is the fundamental question of how individual and society are related” (2). For Naranjo’s lyric voice, it is a question that surfaces as far back as Spanish American *modernismo*: that of detailing the subjective experience of the poet in relation to

society. In fact, in other poems, her description of the figure of the poet is reminiscent of Darío's tragic poet in "El rey burgués" who ends up a jester: "nosotros en busca del salmo / estañones de orines herrumbrados / donde se asoman palabras abstractas / y el poeta es el bufón de las antesalas" ['we in search of the psalm / bottomless rusted urine pits / where abstract words lean in / and the poet is the buffoon of entrance halls'] ("Nosotros" 32, ll. 36-37). Despite the tragic ending of Darío's poet left to freeze in the garden of the bourgeois king, his verse always seems to showcase some semblance of hope, often in the appeal to the golden dawn that promises a new beginning. In sharp contrast, Naranjo's image of the dawn offers no solace to the poet: "la aurora se mide en cartas de nardo / un poeta llora la piel triste de sus mensajes" ['the dawn measures itself with tuberose letters / a poet cries the sad skin of its messages'] ("Todos" 44, l.35-36). A bleak and sad outlook awaits the poet now left to contend with the societal and institutional underpinnings of bureaucracy.

Replacing the figure of the poet is the figure of the eight-hour salaried bureaucrat represented by the pronoun "vos" whose "ritmo conformista" ("conforming rhythm") extinguishes all poetic autonomy. The word "conformista" is especially noteworthy as it entails a complete submission to form or the idea of becoming similar in form, nature or character—all of which can contribute to establishing a sense of communal and/or national identity. However, the affinity for form over substance can dangerously suppress (even if out of one's own volition) one's very being and the means to express and inscribe that being. Naranjo's poetic representation of the multitude accentuates that suppressive tendency to denote a cultural crisis within Costa Rica. The ending of "Tú-vos-usted" touts the consequences of this containment: "Vos deletreando los alfabetos / donde cabe tu nombre y se fuga tu vida / hablás y no escribís tus soledades" ['you spelling out the alphabets / where your name fits and life flees / you speak and

do not write your solitudes’] (“Tú-vos-usted” 22, ll. 71-73). This is the most striking example of how an entire existence—indeed an entire identity—can be contained by mere form. In this case, the identity of this “vos” has been reduced to the customary order of alphabetic characters that constitute any given name. Spelling, presented here as a mechanical act, also indicates a creative obstacle, or stopping point even though paradoxically it is the basis for all writing. The ability to spell (form) is not enough to validate these solitudes, which is to say, these individual experiences, for they necessitate further elaboration (substance). Each pronoun comprising Naranjo’s multitude reveals the struggle of representing a society in flux, but also outlines the potential to substantiate a meaningful purpose for this community. Similarly, Costa Rica remains in flux as it continues to address the 1948 revolution’s legacy of promoting the democratization of culture, an aesthetic and civic endeavor that is perpetually unfinished.

Read within this historical context, the poetic “I” of *Círculo* generates a sense of political urgency as she pushes for relevance and meaning in the final poem of the collection “El eterno retorno del caos” [‘The Eternal Return of Chaos’]:

<p>Las arpas están calladas teoremas verdes y azules brillan bajo el agua esa agua en que me muero y se hace un largo espejo centinela. ¿Y qué? No hay nada más que ladrillos para el miedo ladrillos para las paredes levantadas en nuestras avenidas internas. ¿Y qué? Las lámparas se apagan para siempre un día igual se caen los góticos eucaliptos. ¿Y qué? Un mundo de vegetales se quedan en pizarras blancas. ¿Y qué? La acidez de la memoria.</p>	<p>The harps are quiet blue and green theorems shine beneath the water that water in which I die and turns into a long sentinel mirror. So what? There is nothing left than bricks for the fear bricks for the walls erected in our internal avenues. So what? The lamps switch off forever one day just as the gothic eucalyptuses fall. So what? A world of vegetables stay in blank chalkboards. So what? The heartburn of memory.</p>
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¿Y qué? Avanzan los papeles y las cerraduras.	So what? The papers and locks move forward.
¿Y qué? Sólo una lluvia de arenas y cenizas.	So what? Only a rain of sand and ashes.
¿Y qué? Máscaras y cloroformo.	So what? Masks and chloroform.
¿Y qué?	So what?
¿Y qué?	So what?
¡Y qué! (49-50, ll. 47-73)	So what! (49-50, ll. 47-73)

The fact that this is the only poem not dedicated to a pronoun or series of pronouns indicates that the primary focus is no longer the multitude; instead, the poem categorically shifts attention to the lyrical tradition when the calm, but eerie beginning poses a dilemma: the harps are quiet. Recalling the root sense of lyric poetry as a song accompanied by the lyre, the silence of the harps challenges the lyric voice to reflect on the genre's *raison d'être*, and in confronting that purpose, the lyric voice is also left exposed under the careful watch of the sentinel mirror. What draws even more attention to the self-awareness of the poetic process is the first cynical interjection of “¿Y qué?” (l. 52). That is, her rhetorical interjection fulfills an important function of enunciation that stands in contrast with the original direction of the poem, thereby setting the poetic text at odds with the attitude of the poetic voice.

Thanks to the repeated interjection “¿Y qué?,” the competing and challenging attitude of the poetic voice becomes all the more apparent. Without this rhetorical interruption, the remaining lines would easily complement each other to form a recognizable, if not predictable, poem rooted in romantic melancholy. However, enhanced by the crescendo of “so what?,” the lyric voice's interruption of the poetic process thwarts that effort, revealing her frustration through the exclamatory climax: “¿Y qué? / ¿Y qué? / ¡Y qué!” (ll. 71-73). This response models the political interruption of the policed street as suggested by Rancière. Even if it is not a standard recognizable form of protest, it is a protest nevertheless that comes by way of

interruption. By bringing such a direct attention to the very words being circulated, Naranjo's call to meaning persists even if we are left with momentary glimpses of resistance with unresolved purpose, bolstered all the more by another exclamatory crescendo "Todavía no. / Todavía no. / ¡Todavía no!" ['Not yet. / Not yet. / Not yet!'] (54, ll. 156-58) and the cynical despondence of the rhetorical "¿Para qué?" ['What for?'] (57, l. 241) near the end of the poem. We can read Naranjo's meta-poetic inquiry at this stage as one that questions the relevance of her verse when compared to the thematic lobbying for social change and revolution prevalent in the rest of Central American poetry.

Like *Círculo*'s earlier poems, the poetic subject of "El eterno retorno del caos" struggles with discerning meaning among the abundance of filler language and voices. Alongside random and innocuous interjections like "¿Ya está la comida?" ['Is the food ready?'] or "¿Dónde están las camisas?" ['Where are the shirts?'] (55, ll. 175, 177) comes the poem's central and concluding mandate: "No pidás voces / pedí silencios" ['Don't ask for voices / ask for silences'] (57, ll. 242-43). Again, the specificity of the mandate cannot be ignored—the conjugation of the *voseo* speaks to a Costa Rican frame of reference, one that Naranjo has portrayed through an ambivalent multitude drowned by its own appeasement and comfort. The call for silence, then, becomes a political strategy in that it preempts the expectation or hope for a worthwhile vocalization, a way to filter thoughts and produce meaningful utterances. The mandate also allows for silence to be recognized for what it is: an absence pure and simple. In turn, her verse allows us to theorize the democratic possibility of representing the people, rather than merely reproducing the multitude, or within a specific context, reproducing the bureaucratic conformity of Costa Rica's post conflict institutions as well as the literary conformity Naranjo's verse points out. As we will see in her follow-up collection *Idioma del invierno* (1971), the poetic voice

wrestles with this conformity as she confronts the language of the city to then explore the relationship between the personal lyric and the idea of social commitment.

### **Aesthetic Agitation and the Substance of the City: *Idioma del Invierno* (1971)**

Long before Naranjo's work drew attention for its urban aesthetic and unapologetic depiction of the mechanical interactions of the city's multitudes, her fellow Costa Rican writer Yolanda Oreamuno identified a national literary crisis tied to the "saturation" of folkloric literature ("Protest against Folklore" 224). According to Oreamuno, this type of literature—characterized by both the idealization and struggles of the peasant in the countryside—offered city readers a convenient and distant way to experience sympathy and to express temporary remorse only to immediately dismiss these feelings. Even more disconcerting than the notion of a desensitized audience, Oreamuno finds that the "excess" of folklore serves to sustain a foreign, myopic and partial myth of what the region offers along with its most pressing concerns. She wishes for a literature that would diverge from the abundance of agrarian portraits to showcase the urgency of other problems via a new "aesthetic agitation" (225). Contrastingly, the key to arousing such agitation was to be sought in the urban landscape:

On the other hand, the city, the office worker, the growing bureaucracy, the semioriental sybaritic life of our bourgeoisie, the way our respective nationalities have adopted tendencies and fashions previously very European and now very Yankee, cry out for a voice, an accuser, a rebel, and someone to discover new beauties and old suffering. The very particular idiosyncrasy of our worker—so sadly molded to the factory and innately ill-equipped to assimilate its rhythm—demands, with all the force of an existing reality, a powerful, faithful, and talented hand to portray it. (225)

Oreamuno frames her observation of Costa Rica's urban struggles as part of a larger Latin American struggle for progress in its attempt to imitate European and U.S. models of economic development and political influence. She is clearly aware, as suggested by Raymond Williams, of what the city and the countryside implicate in terms of notions of progress and the social

experiences of historical realities tied to the metaphorical urban and rural dichotomy (“The New Metropolis” 279). Costa Rica’s agrarian narrative thus reinforces its subservience to the metropolitan dominance of Western Europe and the U.S. Her call for someone to “discover new beauties” (an aesthetic concern) and “old suffering” (a social concern) converges into a political project that counters the convenient agrarian representation of Costa Rica to present its national idiosyncrasies via an urban aesthetic. At the heart of her plea, she is challenging those who control the image of her country. Nearly thirty years later, Oreamuno’s call for an aesthetic of urban agitation in Costa Rican literature finds its most solid response in the work of Carmen Naranjo.

*Idioma del invierno (Winter’s Language, 1971)*, a short and succinct collection of seven parts with untitled poems, reflects on the dynamic relationship shared between poetic language, the poem and the poet within an urban setting. An epigraph introduces the malleable composition and overarching characteristic of Naranjo’s city—this is a city marked by the rain: “Llueve en esta ciudad / llueve...lluvia polvo envidia / llueve noches y días / llueve sonidos de otras lluvias” [It rains in this city / it rains...rain dust jealousy / it rains nights and days / it rains sounds of other rains] (1, 1-4). Like the description of the rain carrying sounds of other rains, the rest of the poems echo and comprise multiple reiterations of this fact. The title of the collection suggests that winter and the rain are synonymous (especially considering that Costa Rica’s winter season coincides with the rainy season), but this link is more obvious in the shift from “winter” in the title to “rain” in the text of the opening poem. The poetic speaker attempts to reconfigure the urban landscape through a metapoetic system of trial and error:

Pongo marfil y no va  
 En esta ciudad no hay marfil  
 Pongo oro y no dice  
 En esta ciudad no hay oro

I put down ivory and it does not go  
 In this city there is no ivory  
 I put down gold and it does not say  
 In this city there is no gold



Pongo plata y no rima	I put down silver and it does not rhyme
En esta ciudad no hay plata	In this city there is no silver
Pongo el idioma de la lluvia	I put down the language of the rain
Agua aguacero aguazal	Water downpour puddle
Pongo paraguas y sombrillas	I put down parasols and umbrellas
Pongo garúa y llego a mi ciudad	I put down drizzle and I reach my city
(1, ll. 6-14)	(1, ll. 6-14)

In search for an apt representation, the speaker finds that neither ivory, nor gold, nor silver fit as corresponding substances of the city she attempts to evoke. Rather, these substances halt any further development of description since they all lack a complementary point of aesthetic breadth and articulation (“no va”, “no dice”, “no rima”). It is not until the speaker tries out the rain that she can finally latch on to a concrete language from which to elaborate. Like the rain, the words in line 8 fall easily as an alliterative gradation that creates a path to the speaker’s city (“agua aguacero aguazal”). The rain is her language of transcendence, falling above everything and nothing, and associated with the idea of an essence or germination of meaning.

The poetic speaker continues experimenting with the linguistic construction of the city in the second stanza (“y no pongo nada / y lo quito todo / terrazas y luces / balcones y torres / y quedan las lluvias”) [‘and I don’t put down anything / and I remove everything / terraces and lights / balconies and towers / and the rains remain’] (1, ll. 11-15). Even after the speaker strips bare all the architectural and structural details, the rainfall remains the primary feature of the city. As it falls in vertical disorder, the rain acquires new forms and ceases to be just water. Naranjo’s use of the rain thus emphasizes its fluidity and the continuing shift of meaning and re-signification to underscore its communicative potential but also its communicative struggle. The instant it lands it becomes something else: “del agua abstracta / alfombra de yerba / terraza de algas / salió ese sueño / de cielos y barcas” [‘from the abstract water / carpet of grass / algae terrace / emerged that dream / of skies and rowboats’] (2, ll. 27-31). While the water seems to

promise replenishment and evergreen surroundings, the final stanza showcases the opposite effect of the water's intended fecundity.

The poetic speaker personally identifies the rainfall as a cyclical outpouring that marks her return, and by inscribing herself as the source of the rain, all language is filtered through her as an intended act of love and creation:

Yo lluevo porque amo  
lluevo vertical mi regreso  
y no fecundo espigas  
a veces lluevo palabrerías  
cuando llover no puedo  
tanta lluvia de tantas cosas  
gotas y gotas de miseria  
en la ceremonia del viaje  
sobre la memoria del agua.  
(2, ll. 32-40)

I rain because I love  
I rain vertical my return  
and I do not fertilize sprigs  
sometimes I rain logorrhea  
when I cannot produce rain  
so much rain of so many things  
drops and drops of misery  
in the ceremony of the journey  
over the memory of the water.  
(2, ll. 32-40)

Each return renews the effort to create even as it disintegrates something substantial. The speaker performs the act of raining, or she becomes the rain, though she highlights the struggle to communicate, often ending up with “palabrerías,” or incoherent, jumbled up words, that though they flow in constant abundance, come across as empty. Thus, each return follows a miserable pattern of existence susceptible to an erasure by the rain with water serving as an unreliable vehicle of memory (“gotas y gotas de miseria / en la ceremonia del viaje / sobre la memoria del agua”). As the constant deluge of rain befalls the city, this same rain, which is to say, language, is trapped in an endless repetition that falls short of actual speech. We are left only with raindrops, and even more tragically, the echoing of raindrops.

As Carla Rodríguez Corrales notes, the poetic experience of *Idioma del invierno* confirms the possibility of expression, but also the anxiety of the encounter between the poetic subject and language (39). The task, moreover, is not simply to write poems, “pues equivaldría a esquivar con una sombrilla o un paraguas la poesía. La exhortación es empaparnos de ella, vivirla,

dejarnos que nos viva, revestirnos de lluvia, hablar su idioma, hasta llegar a ser lluvia” [‘for it would equate to dodging poetry with an umbrella or parasol. The exhortation is to drench ourselves in it, to live it, to let it live through us, to sheathe ourselves in rain, to speak its language, until we become rain’] (Rodríguez Corrales 39). While this linguistic outpouring of the self is often slippery and evasive, Naranjo’s prerogative in depicting the city is to be one step closer to apprehending a notion of the lyric self as a citizen intimately tied to a creative role. That is, the rain places the city in contact with that which is its opposite: nature (the natural phenomenon of the rain) and the rural countryside, and the spatiality of nature within the city emphasizes the link between poetry and the homeland. Here, the lyric voice quite willingly overflows and becomes the source that drowns all recognizable forms in an act that professes love for the creative process and for her homeland (“Yo lluevo porque amo”).

To assume a creative role, the lyric self of *Idioma* first embraces the creative possibilities inherent in the language of the rain: “y la lluvia es costumbre / de hilos y más hilos como el cuento” [‘and the rain is a habit / of threads and more threads like the story’] (6, ll. 31-32) and later affirming that the rain is creation *per se*: “La lluvia es dueña de luz / hace ocasos evaporados” [‘The rain is owner of light / (it) creates evaporated sunsets’] (7, ll.1-2). Through its embodiment of the rain, the poetic voice also experiences its fickle and plural nature—from tepid and pleasant to vigorous and frenetic—as Naranjo celebrates the varying degrees of rainfall: “goce azul de llovizna” [‘blue pleasure of misty rain’] (5, l. 5), “un abanico de garúas” [‘a fan of drizzles’] (7, l. 23), “la orgía del diluvio” [‘the orgy of the torrential downpour’] (4, l. 34), and “El jazz de la tormenta” [‘The jazz of the storm’] (8, l. 32). Against the assumption that the rain/language could therefore be considered repetitive given its cyclical trajectory, Naranjo’s imagery reminds readers that the rain does not always materialize in the same way, with the

same intensity nor with the same frequency. It occupies space differently each time so that even though what falls from the sky is always water, this rainy language does not always say the same thing.

By the same token, Naranjo's emphasis on the constant rainfall echoes the biblical account of the great flood intended to wash the world and to start anew. While the changing forms and various manifestations of the rain are important, so is the way it cleanses and transforms to make way for new creations. Noting this articulatory possibility is central to the political project of Naranjo's verse. Her aesthetic engagement via the rain is one that warns that left to its own devices, the rain (i.e. poetry, poetic language) can also fall into an indiscernible pattern: "Llueve en esta ciudad / sin íconos ni clavicordios / llueve tan semejante / que deja de llover lloviendo" ['It rains in this city / without icons nor clavichords / it rains so similarly / that it ceases to rain while raining'] (9, ll. 1-4). The metapoetic reflection continues in observing the absence of imagery ("íconos") and musicality ("clavicordios") within the city.

Consciously, the poetic speaker gravitates toward the speed that the rain can acquire to express a sense of urgency and a desire for her voice to be heard with the same force. Contrary to the monotonous dullness of the first poem's epigraph, the second poem's epigraph speaks to the volatile force of the rain: "Velocidad y grito / mágico poder de la lluvia / grotesco ejército / y en la retaguardia la muerte" [Velocity and shout / magic power of the rain / grotesque army / in the rearguard of death] (3, ll. 1-4). The personification of the rain as a "grotesque army" underscores its unnatural or deformed shape, but once again stressing the importance of giving proper form to content, of shaping a substantive cause. It also foreshadows the tropes of militancy that Naranjo develops further in her next collection *Mi guerrilla* (1977). For now, she briefly hints at recognizable forms of growing unrest in the poem's first stanza:

De la gota y la gota  
 el charco se hizo serpiente  
 un ritmo de marea  
 cobrando altura de grito  
 empezó a gulusmear  
 nidos de subterráneas fuentes  
 y ni cerraduras ni rejas  
 ni letanías ni el santo santo  
 amurallaron las corrientes  
 desatada gimnasia del agua  
 (3, ll. 5-14)

From the drop and the drop  
 the puddle became a snake  
 a rhythmic tide  
 gaining the height of a shout  
 it started to snoop  
 corners of subterranean fountains  
 and neither locks nor iron bars  
 nor litanies nor even the holy holy  
 walled off around the currents  
 unbound gymnastics of the water  
 (3, ll. 5-14)

Once again, the image of the serpent and the growing force of the water contain biblical undertones from the Book of Genesis.<sup>18</sup> Recalling the serpent’s instigation of Eve’s curiosity and the story of Noah’s Ark and the Great flood, both biblical accounts result in something unleashed, something that can no longer be contained—whether it is the knowledge of good and evil, or the literal rain prompted by God’s disillusion with humanity. For better or worse, both narrations rebel against an expected status quo, refusing to conform and accept what is given in the risky pursuit of knowing or creating something else. Similarly, in the above stanza, the figure of the serpent-water with its slithering curiosity advances a portrait of constant movement that cannot be derailed, or for that matter, contained: (“y ni cerraduras ni rejas / ni letanías ni el santo santo / amurallaron las corrientes”). Stealthily, as the serpent evades entrapment, we catch glimpses of the water’s rebellious nature that ultimately culminates in combative imagery in the poem’s second stanza: “Sin bombas ni tiros / ni los lanzallamas / sólo mar de barro / y las piedras peces / hizo guerra el agua” [‘Without bombs nor shots / nor flame-throwers / only the mud of the sea / and the rocks fish / did the water make war’] (3, ll. 15-19). Rather than resort to

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<sup>18</sup> Naranjo’s work frequently alludes to the episodes in Genesis. In 1976, she publishes *Por Israel y las páginas de la Biblia*, a collection of essays based on her experiences as Costa Rica’s ambassador to Israel. In these essays, she analyzes the cultural ties of both countries and comments on the need to establish peace among all nations. In her essay “Noé y el éxodo del agua” [‘Noah and the Exodus of Water’], she questions the characterization of Noah as just and perfect, noting that he mechanically and selfishly carries out God’s order without advocating on behalf of his fellow men. She also accentuates the fact that the “diluvio” makes it so that mankind now must answer for what we create.

conventional weapons of guerilla warfare, the unconventional use of water speaks to its unstoppable force, suggesting that language is the most powerful, if not the only, weapon at the lyric self's disposal in this city of rain.

Yet, for all the ease with which the water steers its course, Naranjo makes note of its debilitated capacity for resistance and rebellion in the penultimate stanza: “Se hizo puñales / tan blandos tan fieros / como el dormitar / de venas abiertas / por filtros de muerte” [‘It turned into daggers / so tender so fierce / like the dozing / of open veins / through filters of death’] (4, ll.30-34). The striking image of open veins gives credence to the notion of an unleashed fury, but also to an agonizing process of slowly bleeding to death.<sup>19</sup> Up until this point, Naranjo charts the relatively unobstructed and docile manifestations of this liquid flow into figurative and colloquial language: “caía en metáforas simples” [‘it would fall in simple metaphors’] (3, l. 21) and “corría en decires de camino” [‘it would flow through marched sayings’] (3, l. 23), but ultimately, the flow of water meets its end. In addition, the final stanza holds that it was a gruesome death occasioned by the “brutalidad del mando” [‘brutality of authority’] (4, l. 35). An overriding order or regime of command abates the freedom that initially characterized the rainwater, jolting the water into feeling the pain of oppression: “ay los alaridos del agua ...ay las navajas de la lluvia” [‘oh the shrieks of the water’... ‘oh the razor knives of the rain’] (4, l. 36, 40). The lyric voice seems to be lamenting the former complacency of the water, thereby emphasizing the need to capitalize on its potential force before it reaches a point of slow and halted momentum and where the clarity of water falls into muddied obscurity: “ahogos sucios de lodo” [‘dirty drownings of

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<sup>19</sup>While both were published in 1971, it is difficult to say whether Naranjo's *Idioma del invierno* may have been influenced by Eduardo Galeano's *Las venas abiertas de latinoamérica* and his use of the image of open veins as a metaphor for the exploitation of Latin America by its colonial predecessors, the idea being that its riches have been suctioned and transmuted for exterior consumption and benefit. However, in her collection of short stories *Otro rumbo para la rumba* (1989) Naranjo uses the metaphor of rainfall as a cultural commodity of exploitation in her short story “Y vendimos la lluvia” [“And We Sold the Rain”], in which a small, fictitious tropical country (an obvious allusion to Costa Rica) devises a scheme to sell rain to an Arab emirate as a way of avoiding bankruptcy.

mud’] (4, l. 37). The mud compromises the purity of water as a sign of obscurity that parallels the state of Costa Rica’s lyric tradition within the overall scope of Central American political poetry. As the rain falls prey to its own power (indicated in the poem’s epigraph as constituted by both the speed and shout of a grotesque army), it is unable to escape the death that is always lurking in the rearguard.

Though the experience of oppression fuels a need for resistance, the dire warning in Naranjo’s verse is against the passive experience of the rain that lacks complexity of form and thought (especially if we recall its translation into simple metaphors and typical sayings). The implication stands that for too long the rain has fallen with little consequence or attention, the result of no form given or translated into action. The final two lines of the poem make evident the destructive violence of water as it causes cracks and ruptures in the people and anticipates death: “hombres con grietas de lágrimas / y el cielo con requiems de fuente” [‘men with crevices of tears / and the sky with requiems of fountains] (4, ll. 43-44). With these final images, Naranjo conjures up a desolate picture of the lacking vitality of poetic creation and the need for a renewed aesthetic agitation.

Despite the possibility offered by the idea of shapeless water, when it comes to the rainfall, Naranjo underscores its linear default: “Bajo la lluvia esbelta / recto declive de la línea” [‘Beneath the svelte rain / straight descent of the line’] (9, ll. 1-2). In its adherence to a vertical manifestation, the rain—and the linguistic journey it represents—succumbs to the same tendency as the multitude of Naranjo’s *Círculo*. That is, language, like the inhabitants of the city, easily conforms to a mechanical and repetitive pattern that then poses the risk of becoming indiscernible. With the potential to both speak and represent the populace, the rain remains a compilation of contours that needs to be substantiated.

This brings us back to the lacunae of urban experience within Costa Rican literature that Oreamuno signals in her essay. Though it does not relate the specific circumstances of the factory proletariat, Naranjo’s lyricism deftly supplements the demand to portray the struggles of those who inhabit the city by underlining its uniformity predicated not on a united front or cause, but prompted by fear. Due to this paralyzing fear, the final poem in this first part of the collection stresses the mechanical reproduction of these figures and their inability to assimilate to any rhythm:

<p>Ciudad con perfil de agua          rostro líquido de espejos          donde miro dobleces          de tantos hombres vegetales          temerosos de luz          sobre la tierra alambrada          de tantos hombres minerales          con quieto miedo a las campanas          que osan acusar cantando          la inútil propiedad del polvo          (9-10, ll. 20-29)</p>	<p>City with the profile of water          liquid countenance of mirrors          where I see folds          of so many vegetative men          frightened of light          over the barb wired earth          of so many mineral men          with motionless fear of the bells          that dare accuse by singing          the useless property of dust          (9, ll. 20-29)</p>
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As the visibility of the city depends on the contours outlined by the water, an aqueous portrait forces the multitude to confront its own reflection. Her sight confirms the presence of the multitude (“tantos hombres”), but because of the way they fold onto themselves, they become indistinct, rendered invisible by their inactive and passive state (“vegetales”). Much like the designation of the pronoun “vos” as the “misma patria de nervios” in *Círculo*, these men have been conditioned by fear to not question or to even shed light on the apportioning of the land that in turn, conditions how they are to inhabit that space and/or territory.

To such a degree, Naranjo’s description of mineral men in a land separated by barbed wire transposes rural struggles to an urban context, and, in fact, evokes the same imagery punctuated by the popular protest songs of the *Nueva Canción* movement of the 1960s and



1970s. In their advocacy for a more egalitarian society, these songs would often detail the worsening social conditions that would drive people from rural areas to migrate to the city. Latin American poets of this era often directly cited the lyrics from Uruguayan singer songwriter Daniel Viglietti's "A desalambrar" (1969), later made famous when sung by the Chilean poet and singer songwriter Victor Jara, himself executed in 1973 by Pinochet for being a communist.<sup>20</sup> The song's title is an invented word that adds the prefix "des-" to negate the action of the infinitive "alambrar" ('to fence off an area with wire'), alluding to the idea of the *campesinos* reclaiming the land from the wealthy and exploitative landowners. At its core, the phrase became a leftist call for liberation. Unlike the political call to "desalambrar," Naranjo's image of the "tierra alambrada" is rather indicative of a Rancierian police state in that it symbolically constitutes the social distribution of these mineral men committed to a space out of which they cannot or will not transit. Their motionless state reflects a fear of movement and emphasizes the need to become visible as political subjects.

Throughout both collections, Naranjo's verse reinforces conditions of political stasis, but always uncovering the disconnect between form and substance. In the above stanza, what begins as the fluid profile of the city ends up in the "useless" composition of the dust. That is, there is no path for the water to connect, nourish or activate the mass of dust, no way for the water to give it form or life, if we again recall the biblical genesis and inevitable return of man to that same dust. In later collections, Naranjo will once again take up this allusion to the dust as representative of the cyclical trajectory of man to reflect on how form becomes substantiated and how poetic symbolization is a recurring process. For the remainder of *Idioma*, the lyric voice of

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<sup>20</sup> Most notably, Ernesto Cardenal cites the song's lyrics in *Oráculo sobre Managua* (*Oracle over Managua*, 1973).

her poems continues to contemplate on the quality of substance as she seeks a meaningful connection, a tie to a community that is both receptive and dynamic:

Pienso en la sustancia y veo el cielo  
deshabitada frontera del tiempo  
en la fragua de invisibles gestos  
que no llegan a cantos ni discursos  
en el silente teatro sin cortinas  
donde las sombras fantasmas de tantos  
ante un público de estatuas ciegas  
hablan y gimen monólogos de miedo  
en el idioma apático del atril  
(13, ll. 1-9)

I think of substance and see the sky  
uninhabited frontier of time  
in the forge of invisible gestures  
that do not result in songs nor speeches  
in the silent theater without curtains  
where the ghost shadows of so many  
appear before a public of blind statues  
they speak and moan monologues of fear  
in the apathetic language of the podium  
(13, ll. 1-9)

Regretfully, her inquiry amounts to a desolate exhibition. Considering that the most basic definition of substance is anything that takes up space, her immediate thought to connect the concept of substance with the vastness of the sky and time already presupposes the daunting task of giving it form. All that Naranjo's contouring images and tools (the sky as border, the blacksmith's forge) manage to do is give definition to emptiness. Paradoxically, though the poetic "I" manages to "see" the sky, that very same sky confirms that there is nothing to see ("gestos invisibles") and nothing to hear ("que no llegan a cantos ni discursos"). Thus, any attempt to create poetic content ultimately encounters a perfunctory setting devoid of contestation, but it is not the case that these gestures, shadows and monologues are indiscernible; rather, they have been accepted as invisible and inaudible.

Pointedly, Naranjo's verse attributes this reality to the spectator role undertaken by the fellow members of her community, further holding them accountable for not actively employing their given senses. As such, the image of a "public of blind statues" epitomizes the state of numbness and insensitivity that reinforces Naranjo's tracing of the multitude as an amorphous group lacking a clear structure or purpose. Her critique of the passive and formulaic performance or spectacle of expression can be simply summarized as the product of not using our senses: we

do not wish to see, to listen or to feel reinforced by these statues that are blind, deaf, mute and unfeeling. In short, we do not wish to truly engage with each other. There is no equal or dynamic means of communication as underscored by the image of this audience merely receiving language from an elevated podium or lectern (“atril”), an image that also weighs on the lack of reception for the arts. Artistically and politically, there is no gesture of trying to comprehend that which wishes to take form or to the representation of a cause that would attract a group of committed followers. Devoid of this tactile, visual, and auditory reciprocity, it is unsurprising to the lyric self how substance can easily follow a trajectory of evasion as she concludes: “y así la sustancia se esconde” [‘And that is how substance keeps itself hidden’] (13, l.10). In light of the social movements taking place throughout Central America, the hidden substance mirrors the absence of political fervor and the declining commitment to the promotion of culture within Costa Rica as its citizens fall into a post-revolutionary conformity.

Seeking that sense of mutual validation and/or recognition, the poetic speaker initiates a tireless pursuit in search of herself. Already in the third part of *Idioma*, she explores this desire for reciprocity as a sentiment of love in which she addresses an “other” that could very well be poetry itself as the rain mediates their encounter to the point of identifying this “other” as the rain: “Te empecé a querer bajo la lluvia / porque eres lluvia de primavera” [‘I began to love you under the rain / because you are spring rain’] (21, l. 1). In the only poem that comprises the fourth part of *Idioma*, the city serves as the designated meeting point that foregrounds, even prompts, the fusion between the self and the language of the rain, or poetry: “en esta ciudad nos conocimos / en esta ciudad de lágrimas y lluvias” [‘in this city we met each other / in this city of tears and rains’] (25, ll. 1-2). Structurally, these lines both open and close the poem carrying out the same function of reciprocity as the use of the reciprocal verb structure “nos conocimos” (‘we

met each other'). However, variations of these initial lines appear as indented asides that complement the poem's ten main stanzas to showcase a repetitive bleak urban setting whereby the city is revealed to be a "ciudad de rumores y lluvias" ['city of rumors and rains'] (25, l.22), "ciudad de gritos y ruidos falsos" ['city of shouts and false sounds'] (27, l. 59), "ciudad de inventarios y cementerios" ['city of inventories and cementaries'] (27, l. 65), and finally, "ciudad de ruinas sin historia" ['city of ruins without history'] (28, l. 83).

Presented in this manner, Naranjo's description of the city seems to condemn the urban landscape to a gloomy future. Trapped in a continuous and general circulation of melancholic rainfall (*lágrimas, lluvias*) amounting to little more than a confused ruckus of din (*gritos, ruidos falsos, etc...*), the city fails to project a distinctive presence; it is even unaware of its own history. Yet, this is precisely where Naranjo's poetry models a form of civic engagement that is intimately tied to the creative process. The poetic speaker yearns to undo the sensorial indifference she previously witnessed and was complicit, even if somewhat reticent as a member of the spectator audience (i.e., the "nosotros") of blind statues. Hers is a gesture of outreach and recognition where the antidote is poetry. The visual and tactile validation she seeks can only be confirmed via the encounter between the self and the language of the rain: "por tu frente se mira mi frente / y mira tu palabra y mi palabra...por tus ojos se tocan mis ojos...por tus manos crecen mis manos" ['through your forehead my forehead sees itself / and sees your word and my word... through your eyes my eyes are touched...through your hands my hands grow'] (25, ll. 3-4, 7, 11). In the act of purposefully gazing, of embracing new perceptions, the lyric self undergoes a continuous poetic metamorphosis where she can both see and transform herself through the language of the rain, a collaborative and reflective effort that results in an act of love: "el amor es el espejo de la mirada" ['love is the mirror of the gaze'] (25, l. 29).

In the face of such reflection conditioned by this act of love, the lyric subject becomes more than just a prolongation of that poetic “other;” they are fully immersed, coexisting one in the same. Love facilitates the ability to see each other and experience a communal reciprocity of engagement and feeling while offering the opportunity for interior reflection: “El amor mira con una mirada aguda / mira de frente los ojos y las manos / mira el pasado que traes y la figura interior / que viaja contigo desde el origen de la memoria” [‘Love sees with a high-pitched stare / it stares directly at the eyes and the hands / it sees the past you carry and the figure within / that travels with you since the origin of memory’] (25, ll. 17-20). These lines reinforce that above all, love requires a sharp gaze, perceiving with the eyes what can appear directly in front of us, and truly taking the time to give meaning to that perception. Such level of attention and recognition beckons the same consideration, almost challenging the notion that the stare can be ignored considering the synesthesia “una mirada aguda” (‘high-pitched stare’) assaults not one, but two, of our basic senses. This is a gaze that demands to be seen and heard.

Without disregarding that this direct gaze is an intimate moment of recognition between the self and its poetic ‘other,’ Naranjo’s poetic encounter models what it takes to relate to our fellow beings and to foster a democratic culture of active participation. The reflection of the gaze binds the lyric self to the ‘other’ in a relationship of love that confirms the self exists (is visible, is heard) only insofar as the ‘other’ (call it rain or poetry) is also capable of saying and being. Therefore, the political visibility of the lyric self depends on the visibility of the other and the willingness to surrender to poetic inscription so that she may be represented and recognized.

In *The Political Theory of Recognition*, Simon Thompson links recognition in a relationship of dependency to democracy:

On the one hand, democracy is the arena in which citizens determine the laws, policies and institutions which best promote parity of participation. On the other

hand, individuals must be recognized in order for them to be able to play an effective role in democratic deliberation. In short, democracy determines recognition, while recognition constrains democracy. (156)

The struggle for recognition sustains democracy and its practices, and Naranjo's verse confirms that lyric poetry—that fusion of the self with language—is a democratic practice of inclusion and recognition, one that easily wanes in front of passivity and disbelief in language's ability to represent the self as part of a collective presence that does not capitulate into the multitude.

Boldly against that disbelief, the poetic speaker professes in an earlier part of *Idioma* her faith in language, placing her full trust in the rain to affirm her presence: “y creo en tu presencia / pues nazco de ti sin más ceremonia / que sentir el impulso de tus imanes” [‘and I believe in your presence / after all I am born from you with little fanfare / than that of feeling the push of your magnets’] (22, ll. 27-28). Through the wordplay of the first-person conjugation “creo” (meaning both ‘I believe’ and ‘I create’), the poetic ‘I’ also affirms her ability to create. The voices of dialogue produced by the encounter between language and the self are thus able to configure new realities and new spaces as evidenced in the fifth part of the collection: “Le preguntaré a la lluvia cuándo y dónde haré la casa, nuestra casa. Responderá que mañana y en el cristal pintará los abecedarios turbios de su idioma derramada...un mantel decorará nuestra mesa, de cuadros rojos y blancos, por donde jugarán tus dedos la rayuela en acción de los pensamientos” [I will ask the rain when and where I will build the house, our house. It will respond that tomorrow, and in the windowpane, it will paint the murky alphabets of its spilled language...a tablecloth will decorate our table, made of red and white checkers, where your fingers will play hopscotch in the action of thoughts’] (31, ll. 1-3, 24-26). Here, Naranjo's foray into prose poetry interrupts the lineated convention of poetry to foster a moment of reconciliation between the lyric self and the rain within a setting of prosaic familiarity, while still emphasizing poetry's capacity to create, to exist

and to dialogue, but more importantly, to envision a setting where thought becomes action and not an afterthought, a central tenet of Naranjo's aesthetic and civic engagement.

The resemblance of the above lines to prose perhaps indicates no obstacles in their articulation, as prose offers a sense of completeness to poetry's otherwise fragmented form, but also prose poetry is open to change. The use of the future tense serves as a stark reminder that this project has yet to be completed. Though she can envision a utopian promise of collaboration, the lyric "I" has trouble viewing herself as an active participant, or as the force behind the aesthetic agitation of language that can substantiate her poetic revolution:

Soy sólo un terror de gritos y ruidos	I am only a terror of shouts and sounds
ese martillazo que levanta nervios	that hammer blow that puts nerves on edge
esa puerta violenta que cierra el viento	that violent door closed by the wind
esa granada que estalla sangre en la calle	that grenade that shatters blood in the street
esa voz alta y altanera que grita peligro	that voice loud and arrogant that screams danger
(27, ll. 53-57)	(27, ll. 53-57)

Naranjo inscribes the poetic speaker as an entity that is the means of social agitation, but not the agent. Hence, she repeats images that represent the effect and means of forceful action rather than the cause: the terror felt, the blow of the hammer, the shut door, the thrown grenade, and the voice that cautions against danger, but does not act against that danger. Admitting to this fragmented portrait, the lyric speaker eventually surrenders to a poetic destiny of manifesting as an incomplete poem: "lloraremos la lluvia impotente de nuestro poema inconcluso y de nuestro evangelio sin propaganda" ['we will cry the impotent rain from our unfinished poem and of our gospel without propaganda'] (32, l. 30-31). Though the act of crying may hint at a mournful or melancholic process, it is also an act of giving release to the helpless rain (what is unsaid, what has yet to be said) with the promise of a collective effort given the use of the first person plural ("lloraremos") to construct another house, another city, another poem.

Fittingly, *Idioma* ends with a downpour of signifiers, neatly falling in two columns.

Reminiscent of Juan José Tablada's *ideogramas* or the *poesia concreta* of 1950s Brazil,

Naranjo's final poem of the collection contours the image of the rainfall, or perhaps even the crying of the impotent rain alluded to earlier:

calles	ciudad	streets	city
parques	lluvia y	parks	rain and
carnavales	murmullo	carnivals	murmur
yedra	el agua	ivy	the water
inmóvil	ballet	immobile	ballet
escapate	de cabezas	closet	of heads
siempre	sin memoria	always	without memory
llueve	llueve	it rains	it rains
tanta soledad	tu mano es río	so much solitude	your hand is river
lluvia envidia	tu cuerpo mar	rain jealousy	your body the sea
sonata verde	ojos de luna	green sonata	moon eyes
suená	yerbabuena	it sounds	peppermint
tiempo	llueve	time	it rains
caliente	rojo	hot	red
espacio	rojizo	space	reddish
de cemento	y la ciudad	of cement	and the city
habitación	ya no es	room	is no more
solitaria	se acabó	solitary	it's done
llueve	sólo llueve	it rains	it only rains
	(41, ll. 1-19)		(41, ll. 1-19)

Visually, Naranjo emphasizes the fragmentation of the rain, reminding readers that for however much language and the poetic speaker have managed to reach a point of fusion, coherence and/or transcendence, the rain is unceasing, and so, the poetic task is infinite, but so are the possibilities.

If we view the presence of the rain as a Rancierian police state that continues to circulate in an utterance of inarticulate sounds, then Naranjo's poetic imperative to create a poem from the language of the rain is both an aesthetic and political project of recognition. Left uninterrupted, the rain dissolves any discernible appearance, confirmed by the ultimate disappearance of the city itself ("y la ciudad / ya no es / se acabó / sólo llueve"), and this is the same risk facing the inhabitants of the city, a multitude that does not dialogue, that overlooks each other, and that



lacks the same direction as the poem's format—directionless in that it can be read vertically or horizontally. By far the greatest risk is the repetition of language in an imitation of the rainfall (“llueve / sólo llueve”). Moreover, the singular word or minimal phrasing of each line accelerates the reading of the poem and creates a sense of aesthetic agitation tied to the city.

Indirectly, both *En el círculo de los pronombres* and *Idioma del invierno* dialogue with the fervor of social commitment that predominates in Central American revolutionary poetry of that time, while remaining faithful to Naranjo's own project of aesthetic and civic engagement. Unlike Ernesto Cardenal's *exteriorismo*, Roque Dalton's egalitarian defense of poetry for the masses, or Gioconda Belli's erotic revolutionary dyad, Naranjo's political poetry focuses on the power of language as the fundamental inscription of the self and society. For all the shortcomings Naranjo points out, there is some hope to be found in the democratic promise of (re)forming and deciding the representation of our collective image, an aesthetic and political undertaking. In any case, poetry has and always will continue to be precisely that: the conditional possibility of inscribing (our)selves, and the next chapter showcases how Naranjo endeavors to inscribe herself as a guerilla-poet in response to the political and poetic manifestos of Central America's *generación comprometida*.

*We have frequently printed the word Democracy  
...a word the real gist of which sleeps, quite unawaken'd.*  
Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*

Democracy permeates every symbolic construct of Costa Rican national identity and pride. These symbolic constructs firmly cement the small Central American country as one of “peace and democracy,” a “nation of teachers and not soldiers,” “a centenary democracy,” and to further singularize its regional status, “the Switzerland of Latin America.” Yet, the enormity of the symbolic weight tied to this Costa Rican exceptionalism—that of a politically neutral, nonviolent, consensus-building, peace-loving, agrarian, and homogenous nation—affords a conventional (if not illusory) portrait that obscures the political and cultural struggles confronting its democratic tradition, particularly considering the reformist outcomes of the Revolution of 1948. Long reinforced by the state and internalized by its citizens, the ideology of “*tico* exceptionalism” functions like what Davide Panagia calls a “political narratocracy,” or a master narrative that dictates the relationship between perception and political analysis.<sup>21</sup> In other words, upholding a pacifist and democratic self-perception reinforces the assumption that Costa Rica faces a political and social context different from that of its neighbors.

This chapter analyzes how Naranjo challenges the political narratocracy of Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism in *Mi guerrilla* [*My Guerrilla*, 1977] and *Homenaje a Don Nadie* [*Homage to Mr. Nobody*, 1981], the only collections she published in the years immediately

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<sup>21</sup> Panagia’s take on the concept of political narratocracy prompts consideration of the antagonism within aesthetic theory between allegory and the symbol (as posited by Schilling, Coleridge, Goethe) as a radical opposition rooted in the perception that the relationship between meaning and expression in the allegory is arbitrary (and thus, inferior) to the motivated unity that sustains the relationship in the symbol. However, I view Panagia’s political narratocracy more aligned to Walter Benjamin’s analysis that these two concepts are not antithetical. Rather, allegory is a hidden structure that supports symbolic experience. In other words, allegory is what makes the symbol possible, and conversely, allegory can also dismantle the supposed unity of the symbol.

following her resignation as Minister of Culture (1974-1976). By transposing the figurative language of revolutionary poetry to a non-revolutionary context, Naranjo's verse is both in alignment and, yet, uniquely at odds with the social awakening and revolutionary aesthetic of her national and regional contemporaries, a generation of writers that embraced socialism and armed conflict as the only viable solutions to Central America's most pressing social concerns. Considering Costa Rica's historical and cultural exceptionalism and her own ideological affiliation with the *Partido de Liberación Nacional* (PLN), Naranjo's resistance stems from a privileged space of democratic practice even as her verse confronts the images that contradict the idyllic democracy projected as a national attribute. To that end, her work's aesthetic and civic engagement questions the long-established political narratives and symbols that come across as trite and devoid of radical meaning.

In his assessment of Costa Rica's sociocultural imaginary, Carlos Cortés's study *La invención de Costa Rica* notes that transcending the current metaphors of a democratic paradise is not the issue: "no es que algo tan absurdo como el eslogan de la 'Suiza centroamericana' no sea fácilmente depositado en el bote de la basura—como el afiche turístico que en realidad es—sino que, por el momento, no hay nada en su lugar" ['it is not that something as absurd as the slogan 'the Central American Switzerland' cannot be easily deposited in the trash bin—like the tourism poster it really is—but rather that, at the moment, there is nothing to take its place'] (16). Costa Rica stands as an abstract and negated signifier, at best substantiated insofar as it can be associated with a "developed" European country altogether. At its core, his observation speaks to a practice of self-deception tied to aesthetics that reinforces the (re)presentation of Costa Rica as a neatly packaged vacation special.

Similarly, Naranjo's poetic speaker faces this quandary of definition and meaning, of having to produce, if you will, a new slogan. As the lyric voice traces the development of her revolutionary consciousness in *Mi guerrilla*, she adopts the *consigna*: "Sin el símbolo, símbolo serás" ['Sans the symbol, symbol you will become'], thereby stressing the absence of a suitable replacement through the ambiguity of the symbol, literally. Accordingly, *Homenaje*'s main thematic thread—the lyric self's numerous but strained efforts to dedicate a poem to the figure of *Don Nadie*—plays out the same absence through this simultaneously named and negated entity at the center of Naranjo's sarcastic "tribute." Both the *símbolo* and the *Don Nadie* of these two collections manage to represent without representing. In other words, they circumvent specific referents: the *símbolo* reinforces the ultimate level of abstraction while the figure of *Don Nadie* remains an invisible subject. Both are perceptible; neither is defined. To make sense of what can be perceived from these abstract figures but not yet articulated is arguably the greatest political struggle on display in Naranjo's poetry. Furthermore, the resistance to signification embodied by the *símbolo* and *Don Nadie* sustains a political struggle for visibility to imbue this form and figure with metaphorical possibilities—even as they reflect the marginalization of Naranjo's social democratic poetry in the region overall.

Certainly, *Mi guerrilla* and *Homenaje a don nadie* exhibit an angrier and more biting tone than Naranjo's earlier poetry collections, even mirroring the archetypes of revolutionary poetry in form and diction. Nevertheless, the absence of a definitive revolutionary cause undercuts the genre's overtly political content and intention—and with good reason. The circumstances of Naranjo's life and work as a civil servant did not demand the same poetics of experience as those Central American poets directly involved in the armed conflict of their respective countries. Strictly speaking, Naranjo was not a revolutionary fighter; she was a

politician whose cause was clear: the democratization of culture. For that reason, the militancy of her verse is striking. More than revolutionary change, the lyric self's personal introspection of citizenship and poetic vocation within democratic society demands genuine representation and communication. Her activism underscores another imperative: to create poetry. In this endeavor, we see an equally important struggle through the metapoetic questioning of traditional metaphors in *Mi guerrilla* and in the multiple attempts to dedicate a poem to "Don Nadie" in *Homenaje*, indications that not even Costa Rica was immune to the confrontation between creative expression and the state. So, while these collections are anachronistic to the revolutionary history of Costa Rica, they are not anachronistic to the resistance spurring Central America's most pressing and recognized era of insurrection and the promotion and defense of cultural policies.

#### **The Anachronism of Revolution: *Mi guerrilla* (1977)**

A closer look at the revolutionary aesthetics of Naranjo's verse reveals an obvious anachronism for the simple reason that Costa Rica already had experienced its designated time and space for revolutionary discourse occasioned by the events of 1948. Predictably, (and rather unimpressively), the popular poetry of that era is characterized by effusive patriotic sentiment allegorizing the birth of the Second Republic, romanticizing the struggle and exalting the figure of Pepe Figueres as the father of the *patria*. While these poems hold tremendous historical insight into the national spirit of consensus and consolidation of democratic ideals, they mostly represent the viewpoint of the victors. Upon winning, the National Liberation army unleashed a violent repression against its political adversaries including the closing down of various newspapers and literary magazines that published the work of *calderonistas* and members of the *Vanguardia Popular*.<sup>22</sup> Thus, most of the compiled poems served a political purpose bordering

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<sup>22</sup> Of the 77 poems compiled, only 6 survive of those written by members of the *Vanguardia Popular* and *calderonistas*, popularly known as "mariachis" for the ponchos they wore in combat.

on classifications of propaganda and indoctrination. The anonymity of many of the poems outlines the people as the central collective protagonist and author of the nation's reconstruction. As one anonymous poem titled "A la patria" states, "hagamos de esta tierra un Edén" ['Let us make an Eden out of this land'] (*Cien años de poesía popular* 124, l. 15). This is not a call to arms; it is a gesture of pacification that reinforces the idyllic portrayal of Costa Rica.

Chronologically and thematically, Naranjo's verse is a clear departure from this effort, and nearly thirty years later, read solely within the context of Costa Rican history, with its now abolished military and stance of neutrality, *Mi guerrilla's* call to arms seems out of place in its attempt to emulate the revolutionary journey of the guerrilla-poet. Each of its five parts represents a different stage of social awakening and commitment to the cause and the means with which the poetic speaker will carry out her *guerrilla*: (1) *Inicio de consignas* ['Initiation of slogans'], (2) *Instrumentos* ['Tools'], (3) *Mea culpa*, (4) *Proclamas* ['Proclamations'] and finally culminating with (5) *Guerrilla*.

However, in the absence of a direct revolutionary cause from which to produce a poetics of experience, the first part *Inicio de consignas* fittingly offers an abstract slogan with no direct correlation to a specific movement:

<p>Sin el símbolo, símbolo serás. Tu carne es polvo de regreso, tus ojos afán de camino, tu amor quizás espejo y agonía, y tus pasos un rastro de fósiles con caras heridas sobre el palpito del hueso. (27, ll. 1-8)</p>	<p>Sans the symbol, symbol you will become. Your flesh is the dust of return, your eyes thirst for the road, your love perhaps mirror and agony, and your steps a trail of fossils with wounded faces over the heartbeat of the bone. (27, ll. 1-8)</p>
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Again, there is no citation of a preexisting revolutionary slogan such as Che's "Hasta la Victoria Siempre" or Sandino's "Patria Libre o Morir." Instead, Naranjo's "Sin el símbolo, / símbolo

serás” prophesies a poetic regeneration or existence, and she directly addresses this “tú” so that her slogan is a more direct appellation for an intimate revolutionary consciousness. From the onset, she suggests that our very incarnation is metaphorical, existing beyond a literal presence such that our flesh already presupposes our mortality, and our eyes indicate that we have a lifetime to see and a path to traverse ahead of us. That we are more than the simple contours of our physical bodies is a powerful reminder that our bodies represent life and death, and as such, they are the original metaphor, the original symbol. In this way, Naranjo masterfully transitions from the ambiguity and abstraction posed by the idea of the symbol to a very real interrogation of human purpose. The last lines carry a sense of historic responsibility and mission. Both the lyric speaker and the reader embody the past and are the living testimony of all who came before (“tus pasos un rastro de fósiles”), standing as the ultimate testament to the evolution of life on earth and humanity’s struggle clearly laden with pain and suffering (“agonía”, “caras heridas”). Through this recognition of human suffering, the poetic speaker makes the case that there can be no plausible excuse for indifference.

The next stanza goes further, however, in suggesting that without a designated meaning, the symbol can be as harmful a tool as the rifle itself:

Aprenderás a vivir hiriendo  
aun sin el fusil del que manda  
porque tu imperio es de instantes  
y el acabóse te rodea burlándose.  
El símbolo no es nada,  
no duele, no llora,  
no tiene hambre, no muere:  
un gesto lastimoso te relame  
porque tu valentía es puro miedo  
y tu nobleza una sonrisa de tránsito.  
(27-28, ll. 9-18)

You will learn to live wounding  
even without the rifle of the one in power  
because your empire is made up of instances  
and the last straw surrounds you laughing.  
The symbol is nothing,  
it does not hurt, does not cry,  
does not feel hungry, does not die:  
a pathetic gesture licks you again  
because your bravery is pure fear  
and your nobility a transient smile.  
(27-28, ll. 9-18)

The overwhelming sense of detachment—both physical and emotional—warns of an equally oppressive empire or regime even with violent dictatorships at the helm (“aún sin el fusil que manda”). Left alone, the symbol negates, but this fact also presupposes an alternative possibility: that of giving definition and meaning to the symbol. This central premise of Naranjo’s revolutionary poetics in *Mi guerrilla* insists on the poetic potential to create meaning or to determine a creative purpose. If by default we are born as a symbol, biblically destined to return to dust through the cycle of life and death, then the symbol’s inability to feel simultaneously gives pause because before any action or commitment, the guerrilla-poet must clearly have a defined cause for which they are willing to live and for which they are willing to die. Instead, Naranjo’s *consigna* and meta-poetic exploration of the symbol reaffirms a state of ambiguity, one that can be read as the ambiguous political and literary positioning of Costa Rica in the region overall.

Still, that ambiguity is meaningful when considering how the cultural imaginaries and legacies of other Central American countries (Nicaragua as a poetic powerhouse or Guatemala’s indigenous magical realism come to mind) recreated the “mega-relatos latinoamericanos”—the Dictator, the Revolution, the Guerrilla—to consolidate their own literary identities (Cortés 115). Costa Rica, on the other hand, with its prevailing political narratocracy of democratic exceptionalism, formed its cultural identity at the margins of these master narratives. *Mi guerrilla* thus contends with a certain dissonance in its attempt to forge a revolutionary poetics within a non-revolutionary context, reason for which Naranjo’s poetic speaker rues the lack of meaningful commentary and dialogue:

Todo está dicho, nada es nuevo  
salvo la última crema para las arrugas,  
la sensacional caída del competidor,  
la marca del prestigio y la oportunidad,  
esa oportunidad de oportunidades,

Everything has been said, nothing is new,  
except for the latest wrinkle cream,  
the sensational fall of the competitor,  
the brand of prestige and the opportunity,  
that opportunity of all opportunities,



en la cacería del primero yo y después mierda  
Símbolo eres  
y el símbolo, que no respira ni eructa,  
un día se alarga en filos  
que buscan la lágrima y la sangre.  
Por ese día levanto mi copa  
y brindo a tu salud.  
(32, ll. 139-50)

in the hunt for me first and to hell with the rest.  
Symbol you are  
and the symbol, that does not breathe nor burp,  
one day extends its blades  
seeking teardrops and blood.  
In honor of that day I raise my glass  
and toast to your health.  
(32, ll. 139-50)

The poetic voice bitterly reflects on the seemingly exhausted state of discourse framed in terms of capitalism and consumerism that drive the egotistical individual. Any sense of self, or subjectivity, is hindered by the transformation of this citizen into a consumer, the ultimate ideological movement of the economy of the free market. While there is a parallel to the Marxist denunciation of capitalism evident in other revolutionary poems of the era, the ideological affiliation remains ambiguous, stressed by the interpellation of the subject through the notion of the symbol. Unlike the transformation of subjects in other revolutionary movements and poetry—Cardenal’s “los hijos de Dios”, Guatemala’s “ciudadanos leales”, or Marx’s “proletarios del mundo”—that transformation has yet to manifest for the poetic speaker, whose direct confrontation of the “symbol” represents a political and aesthetic struggle to identify and to address this post-revolutionary collective subject and popular cause within a Costa Rican context. Most importantly, her confrontation hints at the ambiguity of Costa Rica’s conceptualization of democracy, itself, as the country transitions from a social democratic platform to a neoliberal one.

In the above stanza, this struggle is best exemplified through the hyperbolic assertion that “everything has been said, nothing is new.” The implication remains that if indeed everything has been said, and nothing is new, then all possibilities of representation have been exhausted, with no chance of even reconfiguring the existing forms of inscription and content. Cortés echoes this sentiment as he remarks on the effects of democratic consensus in Costa Rica:

¿De qué podemos hablar nosotros si, a diferencia del resto de Latinoamérica, nuestra construcción imaginaria—nuestro imaginario sociocultural—se basa en el acuerdo del consenso y en la igualdad socioeconómica y racial—¿la igualación simbólica? Se basa en la sublimación de los conflictos y el silente disimulo de las contradicciones desde hace un siglo. La democracia política, por ejemplo, no se ve como un choque de fuerzas sino como su anulación, no como un proceso histórico sino como un atributo nacional ahistórico, atemporal e inmóvil, como una variante de la democracia natural de los fisiócratas y de la utopía del eterno presente. (115)

[What can we possibly talk about if, unlike the rest of Latin America, our imaginary construction—our sociocultural imaginary—is based on the agreement of consensus and on socioeconomic and racial equality—the symbolic levelling? It is based on the sublimation of conflicts and the silent overlooking of the contradictions since a century ago. Democratic politics, for example, is not seen as a collision of forces but rather its cancellation, not as a historic process but as an ahistorical, atemporal and static national characteristic, as a variation of the natural democracy of the agricultural ruling class and of the eternal present's utopia. (115)

Despite his frustration, Cortés offers two possibilities of democratic undertakings: the first is the idea of consensus, resulting in the symbolic levelling of individuals that can lead to the muting of conflict and commentary. The second undertaking involves the collision of forces sustained by a continuous process. Likewise, Naranjo initially characterizes the “símbolo” as a negated entity that does nothing and feels nothing (“el símbolo no es nada / no duele, no llora, / no tiene hambre / no muere...no respira, no eructa” etc...). As the symbol cancels its own presence out, Naranjo confronts the symbol with the symbol, or rather the lyric speaker foretells of an inevitable destiny of confrontation whereby the symbol will violently clash with itself because it will yearn for any kind of feeling, substantiated either by the emotional evidence of a teardrop or the physical proof of blood. Therefore, Naranjo's revolution rests on the democratic resistance to the symbol, a poetic and political endeavor to counter the claim that all has been said, or in broader terms, to counter the perception of Costa Rica's democratic exceptionalism as one that immediately supposes the absence of conflict or social problems.

The lyric self of *Mi guerrilla* is all too aware that if Costa Rica's exceptionalism is not deconstructed ideologically, the political narratocracy only perpetuates a double falsehood of isolation and difference. In the second poem of *Inicio de consignas*, the lyric speaker's unfeeling and insensitive self-portrait is nevertheless juxtaposed with the harsh state of affairs:

Ningún descubrimiento, sólo una pregunta  
 con respuesta de otras preguntas y silencio.  
 Ninguna aventura, el prosaico ritmo  
 de un reloj con alas de mariposas secas.  
 Sin testimonio, nada más una frase inconclusa  
 y la puerta cerrada a los caminos.  
 Un retrato en donde me veo con ojos símbolo.  
 Monstruo insensible al vicio de ser,  
 estructura fiel a la línea norma,  
 la mirada sangre de dolores ciegos,  
 la señal borrada en la frente,  
 un templo escondido en la lluvia  
 y más allá el trópico con signo de calentura,  
 bananos que se pudren  
 en cementerios de frutas y hombres,  
 cañaverales que cortan manos y sacan ojos,  
 el grano rojo del café,  
 la flor blanca del naranjal,  
 el verde radiante de la hortaliza  
 y la tierra con cercas, con dueños,  
 con salarios y hambre:  
 esa cámara de tortura  
 en la inquisición de la época.  
 (33-34, ll. 33-55)

No discovery, just a question  
 With response of other questions and silence.  
 No adventure, the prosaic rhythm  
 of a clock with dry butterfly wings.  
 Without testimony, nothing more than an unfinished phrase  
 and the door closed to the paths.  
 A portrait in which I see myself with symbol eyes.  
 Monster without feelings to the vice of being,  
 structure loyal to the guideline,  
 the gaze blood of blind pains,  
 the sign erased on the forehead,  
 a hidden temple in the rain  
 and further past the tropics with sign of fever,  
 bananas that rot  
 in cemeteries of fruits and men,  
 sugarcane fields that cut hands and gouge eyes out,  
 the red grain of the coffee,  
 the white flower of the orange grove,  
 the radiant green of the vegetable garden  
 and the land with fences, with masters,  
 with salaries and hunger:  
 that torture chamber  
 in the inquisition of the era.  
 (33-34, ll. 33-56)

The first part of the excerpt highlights the confinement of the lyric self, surrounded by silence and enclosed settings that reinforce the limitations of her perceptive capabilities as well as the lack of discursive content (“sin testimonio, nada más una frase inconclusa”). Two images of the eyes frame the central dilemma of imperceptibility. On the one hand, the lyric self describes her “ojos símbolo,” which is to say, incapable of feeling much less standing witness to the pain and suffering of others—pains which are also described as blinded (“dolores ciegos”). These are the eyes of the unaffected citizen, the outside observer. On the other side of the spectrum, line 49 offers the image of gouged eyes in an allusion to the deplorable working conditions and exploitation so characteristic of the “banana republics,” or Latin American countries under the

economic and political influence of American fruit corporations (most notably the United Fruit Co and the Cuyamel Fruit Co) (Harper 15). These are the eyes of the exploited *campesino*, equally unable to give firsthand testimony or eyewitness account to his or her experience, but one that clearly resembles the level of atrocities committed throughout the region.

In *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*, Peter Chapman reminds us that a republic did not have to produce bananas to qualify for the title; a complicit government that abetted the tactics of the United Fruit Co. and shared the sentiments of the U.S. government would suffice (6). He gives the example of Nicaragua which did not grow bananas in any great commercial quantity, but the ruling Somoza family's support and assistance with the CIA-led Guatemalan coup of 1954 and the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 secured a favorable impression from Washington (as well as arms). The cruelty of the Somoza dictatorship fits easily into the revolutionary narrative of resistance against converting the countries of the region into banana republics, but the poem's indirect allusion to the same context challenges the exceptional narrative of Costa Rica. After all, it was president Tomás Guardia who brought the railroads to the country for the United Fruit Co in the 1870s, and Minor Keith, who led the company as the "uncrowned king of Central America," operated his central office from Costa Rica well into the twentieth century. Though both the "ojos símbolo" and the gouged eyes are incapable of serving as witnesses to this account, the pairing of both images makes it possible for readers to discern that the exploitation of large-scale agricultural plantations in Costa Rica and the complicity of its political leaders is neither different nor isolated from the history of the region overall.

To further drive this point, Naranjo showcases conflicting imagery when it comes to the portrayal of the Costa Rican countryside. Pleasant symbols of an idyllic, agricultural paradise ("el grano rojo del café / la flor blanca del naranjal / el verde radiante de la hortaleza") coexist

alongside images of rotten bananas, the personification of sugarcane fields that mutilate bodies and fences that mark properties of exploitative landowners and corporations. These juxtaposed images undermine the political narratocracy of Costa Rican exceptionalism. Purposefully, Naranjo's word order when she describes the rotten bananas "en cementerios de frutas y hombres"—that is, placing "frutas" before "hombres"—makes the bananas an ontological "other" against these "hombres" and reinforces the value placed on the profit of the export over the consideration of the worker's life and hints at the class consciousness the lyric self is beginning to develop within her own context.

According to Panagia, one of the key challenges posed to contemporary democratic theory is how to engage the image. He questions the construction of the modern citizen as a reading subject, whose aim is to understand the meaning of something or to vocalize text into speech. Instead, he argues that the contemporary modern citizen is a "viewing subject" (*Political Life of Sensation* 99). As such, the eyes become a complex organ of political participation, but Panagia also challenges the political effects of visibility, drawing upon the visual and aesthetic theories of Louis Marin, Michael Fried, and Gilles Deleuze to consider that not only the eyes but the entire body is involved in the process of configuring and reconfiguring an experience. The effects of a painting, for example, cannot be reduced to ocular visibility, or merely seeing it; it can also involve a "haptic visibility," where a subject "can assume a tactile relationship to one's object," or as Laura U. Marks puts it, "as a kind of seeing that uses the eye like an organ of touch" (109). Throughout the seven untitled poems that comprise this first part of *Mi guerrilla*, the poetic speaker's foray into class consciousness and subsequent revolutionary consciousness is filtered through the idea of sensory experience, as the lyric voice engages with uncomfortable imagery.

For instance, when the poetic speaker declares her eyes to be “ojos símbolo,” she nevertheless can “see” by means of engaging other senses, allowing herself (and by extension, readers) to feel the temperature of the tropical fever in the distance and almost taste and smell the rotting of the bananas. Panagia would describe this multiple sensory engagement as a “democracy of the organs,” but he is quick to point out that the experience is momentary and temporary (119). In other words, sensation is fleeting and naturally precedes the process of understanding and articulating what has been seen, felt, heard, smelled and tasted. For that reason, he gives primacy to that moment of confrontation with the image as its own referent. To attend to that new appearance or sensation is the basis of democratic politics because it requires a response, an admission on behalf of the viewing subject, and this response is not necessarily to give a name to this experience, or to justify its presence with conventional terms already in place. As Panagia insists: “I admit to the appearance, to the ‘monstrance’ of a new political subjectivity, not because I am obliged to recognize it and give it a name, but because it is present before me” (152). More than the explanation, what matters is the acknowledgement that one’s senses have been jolted by the appearance of a new image.

In *Mi guerrilla*, the poetic voice’s journey of *toma de conciencia* [‘social awakening’] entails recognizing the desensitized engagement with everyday images and practices. Throughout the first part of the collection, Naranjo highlights the ease with which we can choose to disregard what our senses perceive. In the penultimate poem of *Inicio de consignas*, the poetic “I” declares: “Es muy fácil no ver” [‘It is very easy to not see’] (42, l. 1). She then illustrates examples of what can be overlooked even though it stands out: the fertilizer behind the rose, the destitute family that does not go to the restaurant, the hungry vagabond

missing from the party, and so forth, largely because of the discomfort these images would provoke if acknowledged in those settings.

Like our sense of sight, the rest of the senses can be conditioned to anticipate and filter the influx of new images, sounds, smells, tastes, textures and information at the risk of dismissing what could be important, like when she similarly states that, “es muy fácil no oír: poner el radio y buscar la música” [‘It is very easy to not hear: to turn on the radio and search for music’] (43, l. 20). Though she presents the gesture of scanning the radio stations for music as an automatic, natural reflex, we are nonetheless reminded that it is a purposeful choice, one that again can easily lead us to ignore the news the radio can provide: a bomb in a building, the jails overflowing with political prisoners, and massacres at rivers between borders (43, ll. 23-25). It is precisely this type of imagery that predominates in the revolutionary poetry of Central America’s *generación comprometida*, although here Naranjo presents them as generalized and even distant examples to show the ease with which the voices of the suffering can be ignored.

So, by comparison, Naranjo’s inclusion of these images of violence and injustice results in a different effect than that of her revolutionary contemporaries. One of the leading poetic tendencies of this generation was Cardenal’s mode of *exteriorismo*, which encouraged a documentary style of poetry, “a register dependent on an investigative and intertextual poetics, drawing upon histories and objects in equal measure” (Cocola 109). He thus emphasized a notion of poetry that was objective and focused on elements of real life, concrete things, proper names, data, statistics, facts and quotations as a contrast to *poesía interiorista*, or the subjective poetry that was comprised of abstract words and symbols. This approach was in consonance with Dalton’s reflection that poetry was not “hecha de sólo palabras” [‘made of words alone’] (“Poemas clandestinos” 34). As Reginald Gibbons observes, *exteriorismo* can be read as “an

attempt to find a poetic principle that would disallow the kind of language that was characteristic of or acquiescent to, political and commercial powers” (qtd in von Hallberg, *Politics*, 284). By referencing the true names of events, *exteriorismo* held that the poem would not register as detached or as having a privileged poetic speaker.

Following the tenets of *exteriorismo*, Naranjo lists specific historical references and personalities only to show that this endeavor can still come across as detached. The lyric speaker continues:

<p>Es fácil no recordar: cerrar el capítulo de la crueldad y decir hasta aquí porque es mejor olvidar campos de concentración, el millón de muertos en España, la discriminación de colores y palabras, el sargentón con alma de fusil. Es fácil pensar que Gandhi fue un loco más, Ho Chi Minh un pobre chino impaciente, El Che Guevara un turista frustrado, Mao un general con suerte que rima ideografías, Fidel Castro un cubano con puros hediondos que hizo de palabras paredones con sangre y tiene una barba de pelos rebeldes. Es fácil sentir que Rodesia está lejos, el infierno de la India es cosa ajena, Irlanda es un problema en lengua extraña, y el negro con escopeta una bestia salvaje. (43-44, ll. 32-47)</p>	<p>It's easy to not remember: to close the chapter on cruelty and to say that's enough because it's easier to forget concentration camps the one million dead in Spain, the discrimination of colors and words, the grand sergeant with a rifle soul. It's easy to think that Gandhi was just another crazy person, Ho Chi Minh a poor impatient Chinese, Che Guevara a frustrated tourist, Mao a general with luck that rhymes ideographies, Fidel Castro a Cuban with reeking cigars that from words created firing walls with blood and has a beard of rebellious hairs. It's easy to feel that Rhodesia is far, the hell of India is a foreign thing, Ireland is a problem in a strange language, and the black man with a shotgun is a wild beast. (43-44, ll. 32-47)</p>
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The verbs that follow the repeated declaration of “Es fácil...” [‘It is easy...’] detail the process of engaging with the appearance of any given image or referent. Namely, the infinitives *ver* (‘to see’) and *oír* (‘to hear’) affirm that we initially experience images through our senses, while the infinitives *recordar* (‘to remember’) and *pensar* (‘to think’) indicate the way we process information using our intellect, memories, prejudice, political narratives and anything else filtered through social constructs. Thus, our senses and our intellect work together to give meaning to the raw material of the image, which brings us to the complexity encompassed by the infinitive *sentir* (‘to feel’).



On the one hand, *sentir* means having the sensation of something through touch. On the other hand, it also expresses emotions and emotional states. Naranjo's use of *sentir* combines both definitions to reflect upon the material experience—that meeting of the sensual world with the sensate body—and the feelings generated through such a meeting. In the case of *Mi guerrilla*, this meeting is the confrontation of the poetic speaker with an array of images that allude to numerous political and social conflicts around the world. Thinking back to Panagia's interest in "haptic visuality," the use of the verb *sentir* within the poem allows us to perceive the effects of touch and feelings of solidarity (or lack thereof) when confronted with the images and symbols of political strife. To feel that something can touch us or that we can perceive that something is tangible and within reach conditions our feelings of solidarity because it is to recognize and admit that we are affected.

Likewise, the specific inclusion of Rhodesia, India and Ireland prompts the poetic speaker to remark that it is easy to "feel" that these countries are far and foreign, but she is not merely commenting on the geographical distance, or the physical barrier to the act of touch; she is commenting on the ease with which we cannot (or refuse) to associate the social and political climates of injustice within those contexts to our own. As the poem concludes, it is as easy as carrying on with our daily routine: "Es facil ser indiferente: es sólo coger el día / partirlo como un huevo / la mitad de luces claras envueltas en bulla, / la otra silente en la médula de la penumbra, / que para qué más: de noches y días / se hace la vida y también la muerte." [It is easy to be indifferent: just take the day / break it in half like an egg, / one half amid bright lights wrapped in noise, / the other silent in the heart of the shadow, / and for what else: of nights and days / is life made up and also death'] (44, ll. 49-54). On a formal and thematic level, Naranjo's verse would seem to satisfy *exteriorismo*'s aim of *concientización* even going so far as to

denounce the indifference to the momentous occasioning and impact of such incidents and events worldwide.

However, the multiple declarations of “Es fácil...” and its accompanying infinitives signal a potential shortcoming of *exteriorismo* in that implicitly we can read one infinitive that has not been emphasized, but whose action the poetic voice easily performs: it is also easy “to say” the names of these political figures and geographical locations. Unless the reader is well-versed in the context of these references, the sense of alienation to the causes represented persists and undermines *exteriorismo*’s supposed political efficacy. From this point forward, *Mi guerrilla* confronts both the abstraction of metaphorical language and the concreteness of *exteriorismo*’s objective language in equal measure.

In “Instrumentos,” the second part of the collection, the lyric voice submits a series of natural elements (water, fire, earth, wind, the sun, the flower) and animals (the bee, the cat, and the serpent) to an exhaustive scrutiny which could be read as a metapoetic interrogation of the relevance of these natural metaphors, a deliberate affront to the *poesía interiorista* rejected by revolutionary poetry’s embrace of *exteriorismo*. Serving like a cross-examination of their poetic inscription, she finds that each of these elements lacks commitment to the cause as they no longer seem to reveal new truths, and they are indifferent, if not complicit, to the state of injustice: “el agua no, / el agua no tiene el canto nuevo” [‘Not the water, / the water does not carry the new song’](47, ll. 50-51), “el sol no, / el sol no deslumbra ni alumbra” [‘Not the sun, / the sun does not dazzle nor illuminate’](49, ll. 63-64), “Y el viento... hoy sopla a favor del injusto” [And the wind... today blows in favor of the unjust’] (52, ll. 26-27), “y la serpiente huye sin lema libertad o muerte” [‘and the serpent flees without the slogan liberty or death’] (57, l. 16). This last image of the serpent is particularly cogent as it implies the loss of revolutionary

fervor. More importantly, it exemplifies the loss of symbolic association, or rather, the tenuous capacity for a symbolic legacy or history to endure.

Presented from this point of view, and in keeping with the serpent's other obvious allusion to the biblical banishment from paradise, the relationship between what is said and what is symbolized through the written word posits for the lyric self another capital sin which she repeatedly confesses to be "el pecado mortal de las palabras" ['the mortal sin of words'] (71-72, ll. 163, 171, 184, 190, 198, 209, 217). Her admission of guilt and self-accusation substantiates the third part of the collection, aptly titled "Mea culpa" (Latin for "through my fault"). In consonance with the revolutionary poetry of that era, Naranjo's verse rejects bourgeois values and elitism to then address the relevance of her poetics. In the Bible, the word was synonymous with the truth, the proclaimed Gospel. The idea of the word made flesh carries creative implications, and a responsibility beyond its inscription, but the lyric speaker notes that sometimes the inscription of the word presupposes "el apocalipsis de las interpretaciones" ['the apocalypse of interpretations'] (72, l. 199). Put differently, each word must face the judgement of interpretation, or else risk becoming meaningless.

Naranjo's main critique, then, is the collapse of all interpretation, or that which can reconcile word and circumstance. Emphatically, the poetic "I" admits to her biggest fault: "He pedido justicia en voz alta / y no he hecho nunca justicia" ['I have clamored for justice / and I have never carried out justice'] (73, ll. 228-29). Recognizing the dissonance between speech and action solidifies the lyric self's *toma de conciencia*, adding that "a mi culpa llamo guerrilla" (75, l. 308). We thus experience her *guerrilla* as her self-reproach and as a poetic rebellion that seeks emancipation from a language of consensus. Overall, *Mi guerrilla* predicates that it is not sufficient to give name to something; the poet's task—and even one's democratic civic duty—is

to ascertain relevance and to constantly hold representation accountable to its meaning and application.

As Naranjo demonstrates, this level of accountability can be applied to both figurative and objective language. In theory, the lyric voice expresses disillusion with the former, but in practice, her interrogation of these natural metaphors results in a poetic exercise that sustains the potential to imbue these elements with new meaning. As if to challenge *exteriorismo*, she again stresses that the declaration does not always constitute the most revolutionary act:

Es fácil mentarle la madre a Hitler,  
catedrático del crimen,  
es fácil maldecir a Atila,  
criticar a Stalin, burlarse de Nerón,  
combatir el imperialismo inglés,  
proclamar la democracia  
y el creio en los derechos humanos,  
amar al blanco y al negro,  
al amarillo y al judío.  
Es fácil hacer discursos,  
odiar al español de la conquista,  
al cristiano de la cruzada,  
al musulmán de la guerra santa,  
al asesino y al tirano,  
al fanático y al verdugo.  
Es fácil señalar las causas de la pobreza,  
las razones de la injusticia,  
las raíces del privilegio:  
la inteligencia da para todo.  
Es fácil ser sutil y razonable.  
(76-77, ll. 234-53)

It is easy to insult Hitler's mother,  
academic of crime,  
It is easy to curse Attila,  
to criticize Stalin, to make fun of Nero,  
to combat English imperialism,  
to proclaim democracy  
and the belief in the human rights,  
to love the white man and the black man,  
the yellow and the jew.  
It is easy to make speeches,  
to hate the Spaniard of the *conquista*,  
the Christian of the crusade,  
the Muslim of the holy war,  
the assassin and the tyrant,  
the fanatic and the executioner.  
It is easy to signal the causes of poverty,  
the reasons for injustice,  
the roots of privilege:  
intelligence can justify everything.  
It is easy to be subtle and reasonable.  
(76-77, ll. 234-53)

The references to famous tyrannical and authoritarian figures (Hitler, Attila, Stalin and Nero) reinforces an opinion of consensus. To compare the ease with which one can curse Hitler's mother with the ease of proclaiming democracy establishes a symbolic levelling that warns of a dangerous parallel: both declarations have ceased to be radical. The poetic speaker seems to be pressing for more concrete actions, emphasized by these verbs of declaration and easy speech that Naranjo maintains in the infinitive form. Overall, these declarations stand as accepted and

proliferated narratives, as the political “narratocracies” that have shaped contemporary political discourse from a Western perspective, and arguably setting the course for a Global North-South divide.

The confirmation of Costa Rican exceptionalism is analogous to these superficial declarations, and we must bear in mind the political institutions, identities, and practices that were reformulated because of the 1948 Revolution, but were not fundamentally transformed. Like the serpent devoid of its motto, the poetic voice laments the loss of revolutionary fervor that fought to affirm this identity in the first place. She later remarks, “Señores miserables aquí están los salvadores / con fraseos de labios políticos: / voten por mí que garantizo / la orgía democrática / en que todos tenemos derecho / a ser más y a ser menos” [‘Miserable ladies and gentlemen here are the saviors / with the phrasing from politician’s lips: / vote for me as I guarantee / the democratic orgy / in which we all have the right / to be more and to be less’] (79, ll. 36-41). Far from an ideal assertion, she instead describes the democratic reality of her country as a lascivious indulgence, whose mere utterance is enough to secure votes, but not represent real transformational change.

In this self-examination lies *Mi guerrilla*’s strongest critique: it is easy to make proclamations. What is not easy is to create and to transform. Narratives can be just as dictatorial (and the Latin root *dicto* is key here—to say, to repeat often) as tyrannical practices, and they can only be undermined by the very words which purport to uphold them. As a form of redemption, the lyric speaker reclaims the natural metaphors she once found trite:

¡Qué descansen sin paz mis remordimientos!  
Pido que lleguen a la nada  
y que de la nada,  
entre gato y serpiente,  
con la fuerza del agua,  
con el poder del fuego,  
con el furor del sol,

May my regrets rest without peace!  
I ask that they reach nothing  
and from nothing,  
between the cat and the serpent,  
with the strength of the water,  
with the power of the fire,  
with the fury of the sun,

con la sencillez de la tierra,  
con la altivez del viento,  
con el gesto abierto de la flor  
y el canto labor de la abeja,  
alcancen la bayoneta cargada del hombre bueno.  
(77, ll. 356-67)

with the simplicity of the earth,  
with the superiority of the wind,  
with the open gesture of the flower,  
and the labor song of the bee,  
reach the loaded bayonet of the good man.  
(77, ll. 356-67)

The prepositional switch from “en paz” to “sin paz” conveys the desire to rescue these metaphors from death and bring them back into use. With a new sense of purpose, the lyric self once again embraces the use of figurative language as the solid ammunition needed for her poetic resurrection/insurrection. The resistance to objective language and the ambiguity of these natural metaphors issues a challenge to rethink their meaning and commitment to any cause, while the *hombre bueno* stands as the guerilla-poet of Utopian promise and potential. In this way, Naranjo defends lyricism as a revolutionary undertaking that resists anchoring or ascribing one meaning to any given image and as a democratic practice that allows for these images to be included in her cause once again.

Perhaps that is why Naranjo’s verse also gives primacy to the sensation, to that moment before naming that Panagia considers to be the basis of democratic confrontation and politics. In the last stanza of the fourth part “Proclamas,” the poetic voice embodies the symbol and draws a parallel between poetic creation and life itself as a process of constant regeneration:

Y yo,  
que símbolo soy,  
consciente símbolo de los símbolos,  
conozco la voracidad del lamento  
y me lamento con fuerza:  
no se nace para pensarse:  
se nace para vivir el fuego  
y consumirse  
en el rito de nacer y morir,  
y se nace y se muere  
tantas veces  
que duele la piel y el alma  
de nacer y morir  
sin vivir.

And I,  
as symbol that I am,  
conscious symbol of the symbols,  
know the voracity of the lament  
and I lament myself vehemently:  
one is not born to think oneself:  
one is born to live the fire  
and to consume oneself  
in the rite of being born and dying,  
and one is born and one dies  
so many times  
that the skin and the soul hurt  
from being born and dying  
without living.

(80, ll. 65-78)

(80, ll. 65-78)

Naranjo forges a poetics in which the struggle of representation is equivalent to the struggle between life and death. To live through the fire and to consume oneself is to live fully aware of all sensations and to fully articulate that experience. In short, to live is to feel. Within that intermediary temporal space between life and death, the process of constantly undergoing symbolization sustains the creative impetus of the guerrilla-poet and stands as her cause. If only momentarily, the lyric voice contemplates the possibility of a life where she did not exercise a profession as a poet:

Y si lograra vivir  
vivir sin símbolos  
fuego de cara, cuerpo y nombre  
me enredaría en la selva  
de Haití o de Rodesia o del Palacio de las Naciones  
para morir germinando  
sin que importe ser simple símbolo  
(81, ll. 79-85)

And if I managed to live  
to live without symbols  
fire of body, face and name  
I would entangle myself in the jungle  
of Haiti, or of Rodesia or the Palace of Nations  
to die germinating  
no matter how simple a symbol  
(81, ll. 79-85)

Given a choice, she does not hesitate to accept the idea of martyrdom. She would willfully give herself to the cause, even if the outcome did not materialize in the desired result. The answer for her must be in the attempt. For many revolutionary poets from Central America, there was an immense appeal to respond to a vocational calling beyond the written word, and lyric voice envisions that option through the conditional alternative that situates her in the public sphere either by becoming a revolutionary in the jungles of Haiti or Rhodesia, or even working in the United Nations, but again, the imperfect subjunctive (“y si lograra vivir / vivir sin símbolos”) reinforces that she cannot really divest her poetic calling from these other vocational pursuits because her aesthetic and civic undertakings carry the same mission: to confront these symbols and the causes that substantiate them.

This willingness to die for the cause aligns with this central tenet of confrontation. To die, even as a symbol, promises the germination of something new in fulfillment of the poetic destiny of returning to dust prophesized in the collection’s opening line. Her cause is, always has been and will be a defense of poetry’s commitment to create symbols. *Mi guerrilla* thus presents a compelling argument for poetry as that which supersedes all immediate revolutionary causes; poetry is a revolutionary practice all its own. While poetry can never account for an experience in its totality, that has never been the ambition of the genre itself. Nonetheless, its fragmented character, indirect communication and ambiguous metaphors with elusive meanings perhaps serve as truer testaments to the struggles of democratic representation than *exteriorismo*’s specific referents.

Democracy thus poses the challenge of a cyclical aesthetic and political undertaking. To that effect, the poetic self’s utopian aspirations and militancy garner both strength and articulation through the most important symbol of her poetic insurrection, the *guerrilla*:

La guerrilla, la simple guerrilla  
 que quema el ocio intelectual  
 idolizado en pedestales de títulos  
 patentes y comercios de cultura  
 para trabajar con ideas mentales y manuales,  
 trabajar siempre en la siembra constante  
 que ciclo es de crecimiento  
 en la verticalidad que anhela la llanura  
 (82, ll. 26- 34)

The guerrilla, the simple guerrilla  
 that burns the intellectual idleness  
 idolized on pedestals of titles  
 patents and cultural commerce  
 to work with mental and manual ideas  
 always working in the constant sowing  
 whose cycle is of growth  
 in the verticality yearned by the plain  
 (82, ll. 26- 34)

Intellectual idleness is a formidable enemy. Naranjo describes even the traditional defenders of culture—academia, the literary elite—whose validation depends on fancy titles and laurels, as complicit in bureaucratic and listless cultural transactions. Yet, this denunciation is secondary to a more engaging image: the plains that can yield a harvest. To combat idleness requires an active sowing in theory (“ideas mentales”) and in practice (“ideas manuales”). Taken as such, the potential to reconfigure the landscape invites the prospect of reconfiguring the image of the



nation as the vertical aspiration of the plains underscores its utopian desire to become its opposite, even though the plains can never truly change their geophysical presence. Yet, this verticality, the idea that something wishes to surface from the earth, also evokes the geophysical presence that marks Central America's landscape: volcanoes.

According to Mark D. Anderson, geophysical processes become institutionalized as markers of political spaces within Central American foundational narratives, where volcanoes acquired historical centrality as a trope of national and political unity and permeated every literary movement and genre (109). One can recall Darío's use of volcanic imagery in "A Roosevelt" (1904) and "Momotombo" (1907) to contest U.S. intervention in Panamá. In time, poems like José Coronel Urtecho's "Oda al Mombacho" (1931) mocked Darío's patriotic symbolism of "Momotombo," while the escalating armed conflict of the region prompted a rewriting of these volcanic representations as tropes of social revolution, such as Claribel Alegría's *Cenizas de Izalco* (1966), and Dalton's "Parábola a partir de la vulcanología revisionista" (1974), to name but a few. However, Anderson notes that following the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979 and the peace accord that ended the Salvadoran civil war in 1992, these volcanic representations once again served as institutional patriotic symbols that were "reincorporated into the national imaginary" (111). Within this context, Naranjo's verse sketches a landscape of solidarity with the region's foundational narratives of violent historical struggles, as well as a desire to be firmly associated with its literary tradition. After all, Costa Rica is a land of volcanoes, too. Moreover, the emphasis on the potential verticality of the land, while not explicitly identified as a volcano, nevertheless can be read as a desire to upend the post-revolutionary status quo mired in bureaucratic frustrations. This return to the soil is perhaps her most militant effort, an embrace of the symbol's destiny to be the "polvo de regreso" alluded

to in the collection's opening lines as, once again, the land is at the lyric self's disposal so she can at least have the aspiration to create anew.

As if to exercise a mental and manual labor of democratic practice, the poetic "I" chooses to advance a portrait of multiple plazas, the traditional setting of public gatherings, to envision a *guerrilla* that is both individual and collective in its civic engagement:

La guerrilla tiene perfiles  
de plazas llenas en donde cabe alguien más  
para decir en coro  
hoy es un buen día y mañana será mejor:  
las cárceles están vacías,  
el hombre no es extranjero en la tierra,  
ama y no teme,  
lo aman y no le temen,  
la explotación es palabra en el diccionario  
con exilios de práctica y sistema,  
un equilibrio natural  
se asienta en los rincones del canto  
y se canta la paz de una guerrilla  
insaciable en busca de lo bueno  
lo puro,  
lo justo,  
lo humano,  
lo noble,  
lo grato.  
(83, ll. 35-53)

The guerrilla has profiles  
of filled plazas that can accept one more  
to speak as a chorus  
today is a good day and tomorrow will be better:  
the jails are empty,  
man is no longer a foreigner on earth  
he loves and does not fear  
he is loved and not feared,  
exploitation is a word in the dictionary  
its practice and system in exile,  
a natural balance  
settles in the corners of the song  
and a song of peace emerges from a guerrilla  
insatiable in its search of the good,  
the pure,  
the just,  
the humane,  
the noble,  
the pleasant.  
(83, ll. 35-53)

The political potential of Naranjo's aesthetic engagement lies within the paradoxical image of a filled plaza that can accommodate one more, which recalls the democratic prospect that Rancière designates as the "supplement." Within the public sphere of the plaza, the multitudes can coalesce into the voice of the people, and in Naranjo's verse the emphasis on the song ("los rincones del canto") conveys a defense of lyricism as her enterprise of resistance. That is, the emergence of her *guerrilla* as another paradox—a *guerrilla* which sings of peace—allows readers to contemplate how lyric expression can destabilize the fixed meanings (and by extension practices) of this earth's most recognizable forms of injustice and violence. Presented in this manner, her *guerrilla* counters any fixed rigidity that gives the semblance of finality.

Despite not sharing the same poetics of experience as her revolutionary contemporaries, Naranjo nevertheless is a key protagonist in the development of the cultural policies that stem from the oldest democracy in Latin America, and she shares a common desire to envision a more just and representative process for her country. By ending the collection subtracting all metaphorical associations to the concepts of *lo bueno*, *lo puro*, *lo justo*, *lo humano*, *lo noble*, and *lo grato*, Naranjo reaffirms their definitive meanings (further underscored by the definite articles) to establish a benchmark of accountability such that readers can imagine a world devoid of exploitation and where the concept of foreigner ceases to exist. Above all, Naranjo's verse allows readers to contemplate an existential point of reference for democratic values that can assert more than just political freedom and can, instead, like her *guerrilla* revisit their conceptual underpinnings. This turn to the non-metaphorical, or the non-symbolic exemplifies that ambiguity does not undermine the political and emotional power of the symbol. Sometimes, it can be its greatest source of resistance.

### **The Search for the Legitimate Individual: *Homenaje a Don Nadie* (1981)**

Naranjo is not the first Latin American intellectual and poet to dedicate significant musings on the figure of *Don Nadie*. He earlier appeared in Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) as the linguistic progenitor of *Ninguno*, the meek, reticent and silent spawn of the former's imposing, arrogant and loud voice. However, both father and son, following Paz's characterization, serve as hidden and/or negated subjects—*Don Nadie* by embracing the costume, the appearance of importance, while *Ninguno* just hopes to not be seen. Neither knows how to stop the erasure of simply being, but the most tragic aspect of their invisible status is that it is self-imposed. The replication and extension of this practice leads Paz to conclude, “Y si todos somos Ninguno, no existe ninguno de nosotros” [‘And if we all are None, none of us

exists’] (15). Simply put, there can be no “we.” Naranjo, too, confronts the same dilemma, but unlike Paz’s rendition, her sarcastic disposition toward the figure of *don nadie* criticizes the passive and paradoxical negation of his political subjectivity, and more importantly, speaks to the frustrations with her own poetic vocation. For the poetic speaker, this negation dismantles the avenues for civic engagement and democratic resistance. Thus, Naranjo’s *don nadie* initially comes across as the antithesis to the *hombre bueno* of *Mi guerrilla*, or as the selfish individual who has lost sense of the original idealism behind the democratic promises of the revolution.

Consisting of 18 poems, *Homenaje a Don Nadie* departs from the same premise as Naranjo’s earlier collections. Much like the paradoxically visible and invisible multitude of *En el círculo de los pronombres*, or even the empty contour of the *simbolo* in *Mi guerrilla*, a visible yet negated and/or unknown entity serves as the only representation from which to negotiate a collective and personal subjectivity. Undeterred, the lyric speaker dedicates her metapoetic musings to this *don nadie*:

cuando no te conocía  
ni me conocía  
escribí un poema  
con título solemne: homenaje a don nadie.  
un poema antitodo  
repique de tinaja rota  
(7, ll.1-6)

when I did not know you  
nor knew myself  
I wrote a poem  
With a solemn title: tribute to *don nadie*.  
A poem anti-everything  
a ringing from a broken jar  
(7, ll. 1-6)

The verb *conocer* in Spanish speaks to a familiarity. To know someone or to know oneself is to confirm an intimate recognition or at the very least, a public acknowledgement of previously having seen or heard that entity. The lyric self establishes neither, and in failing to do so, reveals a desire (albeit facetious) to make that connection with the honorary subject of her poem’s tribute. Thus, from the very beginning, her metapoetic undertaking affirms the struggle for inscribing the self and embodies the poetic speaker’s rebellion. After all, she employs the poem as a stance against the establishment, the status quo, anything and everything (“un poema

antitodo”). Yet, the image of the broken *tinaja* above lessens the impact behind the revolutionary impetus of the lyric speaker. On the one hand, the fact that said poem emerges as a peal of sound from the jar indicates that it has the sonority to be heard. On the other hand, the poem’s *raison d’être*—that of being against everything—still fails to define her specific cause. In other words, the social clamor of the poem remains hollow. Like the broken vessel, we are merely presented with poetic fragments, but the poem in question is not yet poetry, the lyric speaker cannot yet recognize herself, and thus, the substance of the *poema antitodo* and her own subjectivity dwell in the same negation as *don nadie* himself.

Moreover, the poem’s anti-everything stance outlines the daunting prospect of substantiating her cause, which Naranjo filters through the lyric self’s search for the at once elusive and ever present figure of *don nadie*, whom she never manages to reach. She tells of unanswered phone calls and written letters with no response. She searches for him on the streets by reading her poem like a missing person poster to strangers, all of whom say it reminds them of a distant cousin. Unable to communicate with *don nadie* directly, she attempts to sketch his portrait but cannot draw his eyes “porque los ojos son íntimos” [‘because the eyes are intimate’] (8, l. 29). The importance given to the visual and mutual recognition of the gaze is reminiscent of the “mirada aguda” from *Idioma del invierno*, but here the absence of that gaze indicates that there is no recognition between the lyric self and her poetic ‘other.’ These are not eyes that communicate with each other, much less understand one another because there is no common meeting point of recognition. If, as established earlier, the struggle for recognition sustains democracy and its deliberative practices, the inability to draw *don nadie*’s eyes signals a lack of focus within a democratic paradigm of representation and inclusion. Like the unsubstantiated political cause of her lyrical rebellion, the subject/object of Naranjo’s *homenaje* remains unclear.

In part, the poem's attempt to posit an anti-everything stance accounts for this lack of clarity, but primarily, the issue rests with the poetic voice's dismissive attitude:

ya no lo dibujo ni le escribo	I no longer draw him nor write to him
don nadie se me hizo presencia	<i>don nadie</i> made himself present to me
mejor no lo encuentro	better if I do not find him
de por sí no es necesario	it is not necessary per se
(9, ll. 44-47)	(9, ll. 44-47)

By its very intrinsic construction, the phrase *de por sí* (“per se”) implies a value judgement that downplays the importance of the subject, the object or event in question. Hence, not only are the subject and the object of the poem dismissed, but so is an alternative point of view to resist the status quo. The inclusion of *de por sí* here is not incidental. This is a phrase Naranjo spent considerable time analyzing as a linguistic crutch, one that reflects a national pattern of filtering initiatives through the lens of disdain, impotence, fear, resignation and ultimately, passivity.<sup>23</sup>

Maria Isabel Carvajal Araya considers Naranjo's musings on “de por sí” as the degree to which civic engagement is perceived to be productive:

La elección del costarricense de optar por la indiferencia, por la apatía, puede tener su génesis en el descontento, en la desilusión, en el desencanto hacia las instituciones y en general a los campos de poder que poco a poco han ido socavando las voluntades, porque, bien puede pensar el costarricense: ¿Para qué voy a exponerme por esta o aquella causa, si los que deben actuar, obligados por su posición política, no lo hacen? ¿Cómo nadar contra la corriente de los intereses que mueven a los dueños del poder, si con ello el ciudadano se estaría exponiendo a quedar fuera del sistema por el cual trabaja y del que no puede prescindir? (13)

[The choice of the Costa Rican to opt for indifference, for apathy, may have its genesis in discontent, in disillusionment, in the disenchantment towards institutions and in general to the fields of power that little by little have been undermining the will, because the Costa Rican may well think: Why should I expose myself for this or that cause, if those who must act, bound by their political position, do not do it? How to swim against the current of interests that move the owners of power, if with this the citizen would be exposed to be outside the system for which he works and cannot do without?] (13)

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<sup>23</sup> Naranjo dedicates an entire chapter to the phrase “de por sí” as one of five phrases characterizing Costa Rican identity in her collection of essays *Cinco temas en busca de un pensador* (1977).

Of course, within a Costa Rican context, this perception of civic engagement as futile is not without basis. One could look to 2007's ratification of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States despite large public outcry, including demonstrations that took to the streets, or even Naranjo's disillusionment with efforts thwarted by her own administration during her tenure as Minister of Culture. Certainly, the poetic voice's response to the pursuit of *don nadie* stems from disenchantment, but the comfortable retort of "de por sí no es necesario" can be read as more than just indifferent resignation; it is the performance of indifference that hints at the lyric self's ultimate quest to justify her aesthetic and civic vocation.

Likewise, there is nothing incidental about her search being predicated on the tasks of drawing and writing; these are, after all, the *modus operandi* of the artist. The fact that *don nadie* can materialize without the mediation of such tasks seems to suggest a circumvention of the artistic undertaking, almost resigned to the idea that her participation or contribution within an aesthetic platform is no longer necessary or will have little impact, if any. The poetic voice's precipitous dismissal of her search for *don nadie* thus gives the impression of quotidian apathy to belie the fear of confronting her own impact and/or presence as both a citizen and an artist. To the extent that *don nadie* can be anyone or anywhere, everyone and everywhere, at once recognizable and unrecognizable, the negation of *don nadie* illustrates a parallel negation of the poetic self: "quise ser infantil / y resulté insolente / pretendí dibujar lo cotidiano / y me esfumé en evidencia" ['I tried to be childlike / and I proved insolent / I tried to draw the everyday / and I vanished in evidence'] (9, ll. 48-51). Once again, Naranjo presents the lyric voice's aesthetic ambitions as too broad in the attempt to draw the everyday. The key to avoiding the negation of the self lies in surpassing the quotidian, in making that leap from the ordinary to the

extraordinary that can be recalled as Docherty's definition of culture as the event of perception that marks the formation of identity when a subject differs from itself. Here, the attempt to encompass everything is equivalent to portraying nothing. That is not to say that the *don nadie* of these quotidian routines is an unworthy subject, but even he must be elevated into a plane of visibility and comparison; his presence cannot be aesthetically a given, nor is his presence political by default.

Acknowledging naiveté on her behalf, the lyric voice's admission of defeat in her pursuit of *don nadie* is intimately tied to the sense of failure she feels in her poetic vocation:

subí por la altura de mi destino	I climbed the heights of my destiny
y aterricé con zozobra	and landed with trepidation
busqué aire de literatura	I searched for literary air
y anclé con pies descalzos	and anchored barefoot
en ripio que no alcanza	on rubble that does not reach
canto y llanto	song and sobs
(9-10, ll. 52-57)	(9-10, ll. 52-57)

Her poetic journey is fraught with insecurity, her bare feet exposing her vulnerability as they land on the literary defeat of her unheard superfluous and trite words (“ripio que no alcanza / canto y llanto”). She deems her words have gone completely to waste. Gone is also her arrogant presumption that she could dedicate the content of this poem to *don nadie* without having met him, which is to say, without really substantiating the meaning of who *don nadie* is or what he means to her. The lyric voice's former dismissal of *don nadie*, though momentary, is reminiscent of the attitude of the sailors in Plato's seafaring analogy in *The Republic*, where they take over the ship's navigation to follow their own whims, though they know nothing about navigation and what is more, they are convinced that the art of navigation is not necessary (488a-489d). Plato's Socrates suggests that these sailors are akin to the citizens of democracy, who lacking political expertise undermine the state with their own egotistical aspirations and overconfidence. This



leads Socrates to justify the oligarchic stance that only one such one individual can hold the knowledge of the craft of government. In contemporary terms, Rancière argues that intellectual contentions against democracy (whether liberal, realist, or Marxist) rest on the same disdain for the oxymoronic mass individualized society that pursues nothing but the limitless growth of capital, and that sociologically, enables private interests to undermine the notion of a common good. He adds, “underneath the universal citizen of the democratic constitution, we must recognize the real man, that is to say, the egotistical individual of democratic society” (*Hatred* 35). In other words, the egalitarian promise of democracy does not preclude narcissism and self-interest over the common good, nor does it eliminate the desire to maintain the hierarchical relationships that exist among isolated individuals, even at the expense of one’s own self-deception. There are still two faces of the individual, one public and one private.

Naranjo nuances the concept of individualism further in her essay “A mí qué me importa,” whereby she makes the distinction between the *individuo* (‘individual’) and the *egoísta* (‘egotist’) to highlight what has transpired into “el individualismo anárquico del costarricense” [‘the anarchic individualism of the Costa Rican’] (*Cinco Temas* 57). Put differently, the egotist is the mediocre Costa Rican citizen who has been consumed by their own selfishness and personal comfort to such a degree that it dilutes the independent thought of the individual to question the status quo. In selfish pursuit of material stability, the egotist bypasses any commitment to the social well-being of the nation if it even minimally affects his or her convenience. He or she does not display a level of human consciousness that would outline a mission for social responsibility. What is more, because the preoccupation is solely with what is in reach or incumbent upon them (be it material possessions, titles of recognition and the like), any perceived distance from those limiting aspirations results in self-denial: “entonces sólo cabe la negación aun más voluntaria,

más evidente, más enfática. La negación obvia que trata de ocultar la sensibilidad resentida” [‘then there is only the negation even more voluntary, more evident, more emphatic. The obvious negation that tries to cover up the resentful sensitivities’] (*Cinco Temas* 61). Once again, Naranjo is underscoring the search for authentic feeling, and while her verse supplies ample proof of the egotistical *don nadie*, the poetic voice seeks the legitimate individual—the supplement to the replicated masses and the one who will push her to see outside of herself while validating her individuality. Ultimately, she cannot afford to relinquish her search for *don nadie* so easily because doing so would be to dismiss herself.

By the end of this first poem, there is a noticeable shift in attitude as the lyric voice leaves behind the mask of indifference. Far from her initial arrogant and naïve dismissal of him, the lyric voice humbly realizes that it is, in fact, necessary to find *don nadie* to lend credence to the tribute and to validate her aesthetic and civic vocation. More than ever, her search holds greater hope of reversing her failed poem’s lack of breadth as she steadfastly awaits the legitimate reciprocity embodied in the potential meaningful connection with *don nadie*: “el don nadie legítimo / lo leerá sin anteojos / y encontrará mariposas / en renglones no escritos” [‘the legitimate *don nadie* / will read it without glasses / and will find butterflies / in unwritten lines’] (10, ll. 61-64). Her vision confidently asserts that when the true *don nadie* reads the poem, there will be an immediate understanding that requires no explanation because the poem—content, purpose and potential meanings—will afford a level of clarity whereby the previously unseen subject can see himself unequivocally, hence the nonessential glasses. Ego set aside, the validation of the self and the visibility of the poem depend on the reciprocal recognition between her and *don nadie*, a process encouraged by the tenets of perception and observation inherently demanded of her poetic craft.

This notion of being seen, whether in relation to having one’s literary contribution recognized or merely having the ability to be perceived as “somebody” rather than “nobody” encapsulates Naranjo’s aesthetic and civic concerns. Following her poetics of democracy, the question remains how to determine the legitimacy of the non-entity, of this elusive *don nadie* who in many ways is not unlike the “butterflies” of the unwritten lines of future poems yet to materialize. The reciprocity of their gaze (that of the poetic self and *don nadie*), or the possibility of contemplating one’s fellow man/citizen holds the promise that anyone should be able to recognize themselves by reading these lines, and that future lines will both perceive others and let oneself be perceived. For Naranjo, this promise of perception is as much a necessary component of the creative process as it is of the democratic one.

As such, Naranjo’s verse stresses that the differentiation of the individual matters. Harking back to Paz’s own warning of the impossibility of constituting a “nosotros” with the “ninguno,” she believes that the loss of the individual amounts to the loss of the collective. In short, the individual is still the fundamental building block of the collective. In *Homenaje*’s second poem, each stanza begins with the central question “¿Quién es quién en esta tierra?” [‘Who is who on this earth?’] (11-14, ll. 1, 11, 23, 34, 42, 53). The interrogative pronoun is personal; it seeks the individual, but also interrogates the local and global systems (in that “tierra” can also refer to the land, country or globe) which have subjected the individual to legitimize their external worth, as directly addressed in the opening stanza:

¿Quién es quién en esta tierra  
 en donde sólo importa  
 la credencial  
 la tarjeta de crédito  
 el costo beneficio  
 los números que hablan  
 los registros de la pericia  
 el sonoro soy

Who is who on this earth  
 where what only matters is  
 the credential  
 the credit card  
 the cost benefit  
 the numbers that speak  
 the records of expertise  
 the sonorous (I) am

el pasaporte oficial  
el llegar de primero al aplauso?  
(11, ll. 1-10)

the official passport  
the first arrival to the applause?  
(11, ll. 1-10)

In response to the question of who is who, the default answer is not the specific name of an individual. Rather, what takes precedence is the value of identification based on external validation—be it financial value, political value or social value. Within this given world order, individuals are first and foremost what they can supply. Any presupposition of an “I” exists by means of proper documentation—credentials, credit cards, passports, each preceded by definite articles to underscore their importance in legitimizing human presence on this earth. In other words, “who” matters less than “what” within a Cartesian upending that would instead claim, “I have documentation, therefore I am.” Even linguistically, the poetic voice points out how the Spanish verb construction “soy” undermines the individual expression of “yo” given its implied presence within the first-person conjugation. The ease of the alliterative “sonoro soy” rolling off the tongue scorns the ease with which we dismiss the need to explicitly establish one’s subjectivity. If this dismissal is possible at such a basic, linguistic level, then the dismissal or negation of the individual who cannot prove his or her solvency should come as no surprise, nor how the territorial dispositions of those in power supersede the universality of the human condition, manifesting in hierarchical underpinnings that dictate which passports are more important than others, or even who has access to one. It is this disregard for subjectivity that allows Naranjo, after all, to arrive at the possibility of addressing a *don nadie* in the first place.

Though an honorific prefix, Naranjo’s use of “don” clearly denotes anything but the respectful address and high social status afforded to it. Instead, it proclaims the hierarchical undermining of an individual’s egalitarian aspirations—and perceived social failures. Behind the one who arrives first to receive the applause is the second-place finisher that history typically

forgets. Of course, *don nadie* connotes a person of little value and importance, a rung so low on the social ladder that lack of recognition is a given, but what Naranjo's verse signals is how most relationships function on some level of subordination and/or invisibility that pose difficulties for the individual to surface:

¿quién es quién en esta tierra	who is who on this earth
de máquinas y maquinistas	of machines and machinists
de servidores y servidos	of servers and those served
de relaciones públicas	of public relations
de ejecutivos y asesores	of executives and consultants
de presidentes y séquitos	of presidents and entourages
de militares y víctimas	of soldiers and victims
de cazadores y presas	of hunters and prey
de imitadores y modelos	of imitators and models
de grandes catedráticos sin discípulos	of great professors without disciples
de ávidos discípulos sin maestros?	of avid disciples without teachers?
(12, ll. 23-33)	(12, ll. 23-33)

Some of these paradigms of subordination are glaringly obvious—the subservience of the server, the prey's submission to the hunter, or the oppression of the military victims—but there is still an element of mutual reliance. The machine needs an operator, the executive relies on consultants, the entourage assists the president and only the model can provide a standard for imitation. Moreover, the pedagogical validation of a successful apprenticeship would be difficult to measure if the professor/master did not have pupils on whom to impart their teachings and craft. From the most mechanical operation to the highest ranks of legitimacy and power, these hierarchical relationships of subordination and/or dependency are the product of carefully managed public images and roles. Beyond a critique of modernity or capitalism that would lament the loss of the artist or the exploitation of the worker, Naranjo criticizes the hypocrisy that drives and undermines the concept of “relaciones públicas.” That is, if the goal behind the management of public relations is to promote the goodwill between the public and another official entity (be it a corporation, an academic institution, the government or even a specific

individual), then the preference for a favorable image compromises the transparency of said image by which a community of individuals can see themselves in relation to that public representation.

Sustaining this favorable public image depends on the political and aesthetic negotiation of who and/or what can be seen and heard. For the lyric voice, at stake is not just the loss of the private persona overshadowed by the public image, but also the subversion of artistic scope and morality. She goes on to ask who is who in this world “con el cuento contado / con la canción gritada / con la poesía silenciada / con la pintura adornada / con la verdad amaestrada / con la justicia aniquilada” [‘with the story told / with the song shouted / with poetry silenced / with the painting embellished / with the truth trained / with justice annihilated] (13, ll. 36-41). Naranjo’s use of past participles to describe these artistic forms and moral principles underscores the concluding semblance regarding their purpose, while leveling the jeopardy of this perception’s effect on each cultural tenet. On the one hand, the idea of the “truth trained” again compromises the transparency required to assess the actual state of a matter. On the other hand, she employs past participles based on utility and function—thus, a story is told, a song shouted, a painting adorned as if their scope ends at merely being redacted, heard or embellished, but at least they are afforded a description befitting their craft. Meanwhile, it is striking that she opts for the past participles “silenciada” and “aniquilada” as respective modifiers for poetry and justice, considering that neither participle refers to the means of carrying out their concept’s representation, but specifically to the obstruction of their realization. In this way, Naranjo aligns the task of poetic versification and legal administration when it comes to the representation of the individual. Her concept of poetic justice functions on the premise that that which ensures the emancipation of the lyric self is the same which guarantees the freedom of the individual within

a modern democracy. Said otherwise, to silence poetry and to annihilate justice would amount to the obstruction of the equitable representation and treatment of all individuals, or as it may be represented in poetry, the lyric self.

Indirectly, the relationships of subordination highlighted in Naranjo's verse pose a line of questioning as to the potential surfacing of individual subjectivity when relationships are cemented on equality, of who is who between citizen and citizen, between human and human, or even simply between the pronouns "you" and "I." Directly, the poetic self's interrogation of who is who is commensurate with the need to establish that perception of equality, yet fully aware that doing so must begin with knowing oneself, as the final stanza of the poem culminates in this most pressing and fundamental question:

¿quién es quién en esta tierra  
dentro de circunstancias y apodos  
dentro de acomodos y alambradas  
dentro de por sí y para qué  
dentro de a mí qué me importa  
dentro de mejor pájaro en mano que cien volando  
dentro del refrán que mutila sin consolar

....  
dentro del quién es quién  
y quién sos vos?  
(13-14, ll. 53-63)

who is who on this earth  
under circumstances and nicknames  
inside accommodations and fences  
behind per se and for what  
behind what do I care  
behind a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush  
inside the proverb that mutilates without  
[comforting

....  
within who is who  
and who are you?  
(13-14, ll. 53-63)

The anaphoric use of the preposition "dentro" underlines the intensity with which the poetic "I" seeks a deeper, internal understanding of individual character and worth. To that end, Naranjo's stanza first questions the indirect appellative shortcuts that avoid any self-referential construction using the pronoun "yo," resulting instead in a superficial and fragmented presentation of the individual as nicknames bypass full names and social standing takes precedence in protocols of identification ("dentro de apodos y circunstancias"). Further demonstrating this circumvention, the expression "a mí qué me importa" is only a minimal attempt to establish the self-referential pronoun "yo/I." While in English the stance of indifference can explicitly be translated to include

the pronoun “I,” in Spanish the phrase emphasizes the passive and reflexive construction embedded in the use of “a mí” (to me) and “me” (myself), object pronouns that undermine the active voice and agency typically afforded to subject pronouns. By emphasizing the reflexive threshold whereby both subject and object are the same, the use of the expression once again prompts a reflection on the egotistical individual within a portrait of a Costa Rica as a neoliberal democracy. Again, Naranjo’s inclusion of the phrase “a mí qué me importa” is not random; along with “de por sí,” it comprises one of the five phrases she analyzes in *Cinco temas en busca de un pensador* and whose redundant and self-referential passivity she ties to the notion of a circular deception of progress within the national imaginary (57). Furthermore, the stanza’s culminating question “¿quién sos vos?” directly links this national interrogation of identity to a Costa Rican context given the use of the *voseo*.

More important to note, however, is that the rationale behind the question “who is who” also gives credence to the power behind naming, and specifically, to the political struggle in defining civic recognition. As Rancière suggests, naming frames political subjectivity:

Political subjects exist in the interval between different names of subjects. Man and citizen are such names, names of the common, whose extension and comprehension are litigious and which, for this reason, lend themselves to political supplementation, to an exercise that verifies to which subjects these names can be applied, and what power it is that they bear (*Hatred* 59).

For Rancière, a subject becomes political when forced to negotiate his or her visibility within a paradigm of social, or common, legitimacy. As indicated above, this can entail the question of who is entitled to the legal rights afforded via citizenship to the more fundamental recognition that would humanize an individual. By this definition, political struggle dwells in the space required to undo the distance between man and citizen, or as Naranjo’s verse suggests, between nobody and somebody, which is to say, to expose the ramifications behind the power of naming



the poetic object that mirrors the conditions of the poetic subject. As can be recalled in the case of *Homenaje*, the lyric “I” poses her search for *don nadie* as one that seeks “el legítimo don nadie,” as if to indicate that there are clear parameters for the legitimate verification of this entity. Paradoxically, the all too familiar and contemptuous social designation of *don nadie* remains a moniker of invisibility. In fact, it stands as the most fitting example within the nomenclature of the common given the perception of *don nadie* as ordinary.

At the same time, any notion of the common invariably evokes an egalitarian principle of belonging, whether it be to a community, a nation, a culture, etc. In the third poem of *Homenaje*, the poetic speaker relays an account of discovery, a foundational fable rooted in the primordial visual discernment between man and man:

<p>Una vez un hombre          creía ver a otro hombre          y se enredó en el discurso          de te descubro y me descubro          su historia es tu historia          mi historia          pues al fin y al cabo          todos leemos el silabario          y el 1 y 1 son 2          y damos iguales primeros pasos          primeros tropezones y primeros besos:          historia universal          con archivos de memorias y desmemorias          (15-16, ll. 10-22)</p>	<p>Once a man          thought he saw another man          and he became entangled in the discourse          of I discover you and I discover myself          his story is your story          my story          because in the end          we all read the syllabary          and 1 plus 1 equals 2          and we take the same first steps          first stumbles and first kisses:          universal history          with archives of memories and amnesias          (15-16, ll. 10-22)</p>
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Her account of this common origin speaks of an “entangled” discovery, no doubt attributed to a discourse that is a product of assumption rather than verification. Man is only thought (i.e. assumed) to have been seen, and consequently, there is little contention against the assumption of a linked history between these two men. Moreover, the desire to see oneself as the same reflection of the other speaks to a problem of symmetry that then obstructs the ability to recognize difference. To borrow Rancière’s phrasing, Naranjo’s use of *hombre* as a “name of the common” establishes a recognizable levelling plane that makes allowance for a different undoing

altogether, one that reduces the narrative of man, or of personal identification, to a universal history because if 1 and 1 equals two, then your history plus my history equals our history.

Yet, it is that assumed common history that also sets up a litigious confrontation. Part of the lengthy title of the third poem declares that observation and contemplation are no longer enough because “la perspectiva simula un paisaje falso / que no crece en el alma / ni transita en dificultades” [“perspective simulates a false landscape / that does not grow in the soul / nor transits difficulties”] (15). In other words, what is visible cannot be assumed reliable, especially when that perspective does not consult with the intuition that would validate that landscape, or to frame it in poetic philosophy, when the presented form does not match the idea, or substance, behind it. This warning aligns with the ideological drive that frames Naranjo’s aesthetic and political precept in that every image can and should be questioned, whether that be the image of Costa Rica as a tropical paradise of democracy or the proliferation of *don nadie* as the standard Costa Rican citizen. Merely observing cannot lend itself to resistance, as underscored in the above passage through the lack of transiting through difficulties, or facing difficult questions. That surface must be undercut, and all that contemplation amounts to is passivity, or perhaps more alarming, to conformity, to the idea that a community has acquiesced their identity to a single form of representation. And the accomplice to that conformity? Silence.

Hence, the poetic speaker’s recognition of *don nadie* seems to be calling upon an audible component, or something to spark her memory as a way of reversing the “desmemoria.” As the poem progresses, she admits to seeing this *don nadie* as she strolls along park benches, but that she does not, in fact, know him because they have not been introduced. Only when she hears him issue a polite greeting and some commentary on the weather does she begin to recall his name and from where he comes: “entonces te digo amigo / con acento de cerveza / comprendés y

comprendemos / identificados estamos: / mía es tu historia” [‘Then I call you friend / with an accent of beer / you understand and we understand / identified we are / mine is your history’] (17-18, ll. 52-56). The basis of identification lies in a common language, and more acutely, in the identification of a marked accent, that which would place emphasis on a significant Costa Rican context once again underscored by the *voseo* conjugation “comprendés.”

It is this search for an accented differentiation, for a visible and an audible moment of interruption that motivates the poetic speaker’s motion for equal recognition against the abrogation of the self and of community. All too aware of the constant overlooking—be it reciprocal or objective—she adds, “tercos y necios florecemos / cuando todos no nos ven / porque de todos somos / y en todos estamos” [‘stubborn and foolish we bloom / when everyone does not see us / because we are comprised from everyone / and we are in everyone’] (19, ll. 90-93). The use of the adjectives “tercos y necios” reinforces the image of a population whose aesthetic default is that of an obstinately fixed community whose “blooming,” or growth does not progress forward, but merely remains in the same place.

Similarly, the poetic speaker finds the notion of being unseen as unreasonable given that in the first-person plural conjugations is the ontological definition of this “we” (“somos todos”) as well as an affirmation of its ubiquity (“en todos estamos”). The indefinite and absolute implication of this aesthetic possibility highlights the paradoxical visibility of these easily overlooked beings. She continues:

cuando concretarnos es necesario  
 lo concreto nos confunde  
 pues confusión es seña y contraseña  
 de todos nosotros y de aquellos  
 que no nos conocen y nos conocen bien  
 en multitudes acusantes  
 de sos igual igualito igualado  
 igualizante.  
 (18-19, ll. 99-106).

when defining ourselves is necessary  
 what is concrete confuses us  
 as confusion is both clue and password  
 of all of us and of those  
 that do not know us and know us well  
 among accusing multitudes  
 of you are equal identical overfamiliar  
 equalizing.  
 (18-19, ll. 99-106)

In defining a communal identity, the lyric voice notes that there are concrete reference points at hand, but rather than providing definition, these fixed references establish the opposite: indiscernibility. Her use of the word confusion, more than a sense of bewilderment, conveys the act of fusing together these entities into one identity (form) that erases all distinction. The alliterative gradation at the end of the stanza makes salient that what should be a levelling gesture of equality reads instead as a mechanized reproduction of sameness. In succession, Naranjo calls out these designations of equality to point out a flawed system that diminishes the notion of being equal to identical, as underscored by the diminutive *igualito*. Even more degrading is the transfiguration of equal into *igualado*, a term meant to offend anyone that presumes to be on equal status instead of knowing his or her place within a given social and institutional hierarchy. It is the final designation, however, that merits careful consideration given that the word *igualizante* does not exist in the Spanish language. Naranjo's neologism thus reminds readers that though the verb *igualar* (to equalize) and the noun *igualdad* (equality) and their variants are present in the language, that equalizing measure or action cannot yet be described as having been put into practice.

Arguably, Naranjo makes the case for how the promise of equality within a characterization of democracy so central to Costa Rican identity has not yet fully materialized, or for which there has not been sufficient clamor, or popular outcry. If throughout Naranjo's poetic repertoire the signaling of silences is pervasive, it is in *Homenaje* where Naranjo illustrates that what accounts most for this resonated silence is the incorrect *locus* of enunciation:

<p>Y si levantamos la mano y pedimos la palabra          compañeros del alma          gritan silencio:          hable el que pueda decir algo.          silencios recetados          terribles y profundos silencios</p>	<p>And if we raise the hand and ask for the word          comrades of the soul          shout silence:          may he who can say something speak.          prescribed silences          terrible and deep silences</p>
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mientras hablamos en calles  
protestamos en autobuses  
(20, ll. 107-114)

while we speak in the streets  
we protest on buses  
(20, ll. 107-114)

As a form of addressing an equal and of displaying camaraderie, the use of the word *compañero* reads as an attempt to rally the masses through a rhetoric consistent with Latin America's most prominent revolutionary movements. Here, however, its use does not convey the urgency to address matters of equality. For all its intended effect, the image of the raised hand as an empowering gesture of protest also falls short when the accompanying rally cry is silent. There is no interruption to be found, or in Rancierian terms, there is no contestation of a police order as the streets continue to be the site of their original intended use: that of transportation and everyday conversation. Any notion of protest remains within the comfortable confines of taking the bus, rather than blocking it. Even the silences follow a preordained path to the point of being burdensome. Within this frightening, or at the very least, worrisome scenario, the sheer act of raising one's voice in political solidarity can only be conceived via doubts as underscored by the lyric self's subjunctive plea for anyone to speak up.

Naranjo showcases these pronounced silences as products of incongruent occupations, that is, as silences that manifest in spaces and instances that ideally would be reserved and occupied for public clamor. Instead, the political will, voice and presence of the people is little more than background din, a distortion of the manifestation that far from being a public demonstration leads to a private censorship of the self. As a result, the appearance or representation of the community does not reveal the truth of its circumstances. The oxymoron "gritos silenciados" certifies that incongruent representation:

Y los gritos silenciados nos transfiguran:  
tigre cuando se necesita el buey  
serpiente cuando parlotea el loro  
lagarto cuando muere el colibrí  
danta cuando trina el canario

And the silent shouts transfigure us  
tiger when an ox is needed  
serpent when a parrot rambles  
lizard when the hummingbird dies  
tapir when the canary trills

atún cuando da leche de vaca  
tiburón cuando se enlaza el caballo  
sapo cuando se busca a don nadie  
siempre inoportuno y ausente  
en lista de amantes vocacionales  
para el misticismo empleado  
en la transnacional religiosa de la ganancia  
(20-21, ll. 125-136)

tuna when it produces cow's milk  
shark when tacking up the horse  
toad when looking for don nadie  
always inopportune and absent  
in the list of vocational lovers  
for the mysticism employed  
in the religious transnational of profit  
(20-21, ll. 125-136)

Naranjo's use of transfiguration, while describing the state of changing appearances, also alludes to the event of Jesus's transfiguration as recalled in the Catechism of the Catholic church. While speaking to Moses and Elijah on the mountain and with Peter, James and John as witnesses, Jesus's appearance transforms. His face shines like the sun and his garb dazzles in white light as a revelation of the promise of glory beyond a material realm. Rather, the figures disclosed in Naranjo's verse offer distorted countenances of various animals with untimely appearances, often overcompensating in need. She symbolically postulates the aggressive, predatory nature of the tiger against the domestic strength of the laboring ox to showcase an instance of mismanaged efforts, if not the overall mismanaged occupation of time and space employed by this collective "we." Given that the ox (and the accompanying oxcart renowned for its elaborate hand painted designs) stands as the Costa Rican national symbol of labor, indeed an emblem of economic and artistic resourcefulness, the poetic subject evidences the distortion of an autochthonous undertaking that has deviated from its original project of cultural growth and progress.

The remaining transfigurations continue in this vein of dissonance between what is suitable and what is employed, which still goes back to the idea of incomplete or thwarted vocational pursuits. At the end of the stanza, the lyric voice's search for *don nadie* culminates with the transfigured materialization of the toad "siempre inoportuno y ausente," though in this instance the description ambiguously befits either. That is, neither the toad nor *don nadie* ever make an appearance when most needed. They are prone to evasion, much like the defense

mechanism of the toad's jump and inconspicuous nature; it survives by remaining hidden. Furthermore, the term *sapo* carries a negative connotation in Central America as it is used to describe someone who is a tattletale, and within Central American revolutionary vernacular, the term designates regime sympathizers and informants. At the time of *Homenaje*'s publication in 1981, Costa Rica is far from being an authoritarian state, and yet, following a decade of turbulence and anti-government demonstrations not seen since the years before the 1948 revolution, the country ushered in a "neo-liberal refashioning of Costa Rica's economic and cultural policies" (Harvey-Kattou 15). Oduber's administration already presented signs of that direction with the reduction in government spending. Additionally, the censorship of the Ministry of Culture's projects represented for Naranjo a capitulation to this neo-liberal turn and a betrayal to the PLN's post-revolutionary social democratic reforms. Compromising the integrity of her work would amount to being a *sapo* on behalf of a government whose aim was to push a homogenous narrative of democracy and peace.

At the notion of this complicity, the poetic voice similarly exhibits her distaste for what she deems an occupational love affair ("amantes vocacionales") in service to neoliberal profits ("en la transnacional religiosa de la ganancia"), which was exactly the kind of transnational corporate exploitation of workers that Niehaus' censored documentary *Banana Republic* sought to expose. Much like the allegorical distortion of Jesus's transfiguration, the "misticismo empleado" categorized here is far removed from the mysticism within Christianity that seeks to close the abyss between the material and divine worlds through asceticism and prayer. This is clearly a union based on convenience and profit—neither is it sincere in its prayers nor is it truly inclined to reject the connection to material wealth. Consequently, it does not inspire much faith in the poetic speaker. Meanwhile, the everyday citizen is none the wiser. The poetic voice adds:

“bailamos juntos lo oscuro del anonimato / nos estafan en nombre del libre comercio / y del juego inescrupuloso de precios” [‘together we dance the darkness of anonymity / they scam us in the name of free trade / and in the unscrupulous game of prices’] (21, ll. 148-150). The profane juxtaposition of religion and neoliberalism exposes a tainted set of affairs; indeed, a dirty love affair between the government and foreign interests. The facts corroborate Naranjo’s critique. Amid its own economic crisis, Costa Rica was not immune to the pressures from international financial institutions and governments, especially the United States, to institute neoliberal reforms. However, the effects of these supposed macroeconomic growth policies (specifically, the decision to float the national currency in 1980) resulted in devaluation, increased prices (from 18% in 1980 to 65% in 1981), inflation, a decline in per capita GNP and a rise in unemployment (Edelman 166). In dollar terms, what was once the highest per capita income in Central America at \$1,540 dropped to less than \$300 (Edelman 166). This economic setback undermined the political narratives of democratic welfare and prosperity so fundamental to Costa Rica’s national image.

Yet, the economic crisis still serves as a backdrop to what Naranjo considers to be a more pressing cultural crisis in which *don nadie*’s projection as an everyday citizen is one driven by cowardly self-interest:

Estúpidos personajes del rezo  
no nos atrevemos  
en el ruego por nos  
con compás de válidos egoísmos  
a decir en voz muy alta  
rueguen por nos por nos por nos.  
(22, ll. 157-162)

Stupid characters of prayer  
we do not dare  
in the pray for us  
with compass of valid egotisms  
to proclaim very loudly  
pray for us for us for us  
(22, ll. 157-162)

With specific reference to the words uttered during rosary prayers, the poetic voice selects the self-referential categorization as “personajes” in confession to the performance of collectivity.



That is, individuals easily say the words “*ruega por nos*” on behalf of the collective, but are surreptitiously motivated by their own selfish, lascivious desires, visually and audibly made concrete through the vulgar, pornographic union of “*por nos*” as “ *pornos*”. Moreover, when prayed in unison, these same voices can overlap and make the central plea indiscernible, or even a mechanical, whispered utterance rather than posing as an ecclesial united front. Consequently, this collective plea amounts to an unheard performance, nestled comfortably within an uncontested Costa Rican identity marker as a Catholic nation. The prayer extolls this national virtue as much as it is a stark reminder that the national image supersedes national well-being. Naranjo’s direct attack on the egotistical whims of society highlights the neoliberal emphasis on hyper-individualism that she views as a threat to her vision of democracy for Costa Rica. Any national unity still rests on the idealization of the individually conceptualized *tico* that also perpetuates a distorted view of the country. As Mavis Biesanz et al note:

...Most Ticos are probably unaware that they are subject to a continual ‘ideological bombardment’ that assures them they live in the best of all countries—that there is no other as democratic, peaceful, and beautiful or any as concerned with its citizens’ welfare. Presidential speeches, campaign oratory, editorials, school lessons, and celebrations all stress these themes, as they have since the late nineteenth century. (Biesanz et al 79)

Liz Harvey-Kattou points out, however, that it was not until the 1970s when Costa Rica’s internal image and norms were actively challenged through the proliferation of anti-hegemonic cultural creation in the country even as the Ministry of Culture was created to promote these very same underpinnings of national culture (15). Naranjo’s verse was no exception and was one of the earliest sites of critiquing the ways neoliberalism’s emphasis on the individual compounds the consequences of this ideological bombardment.

In other words, abetted by the narrative of peace and democracy, the Costa Rican citizen falls into a solipsistic bubble aided by post-revolutionary social welfare programs whose

existence precludes these same citizens from having to question the need for further social consciousness. After all, social welfare is the responsibility of the state's social democratic policies, and yet, in Naranjo's verse, this democratic characterization of Costa Rica still posits the need to extrapolate the next move as a nation and as a human community. The lyric self continues to seek out *don nadie* for answers:

Yo llamo tu ausencia de dónde estás  
y te pregunto por este universo  
que habitamos en el estudio extravagante  
de lo que no nos interesa:  
la fuente misma del llanto  
la parsimonia de un lento gesto  
perdido entre tantos gestos  
y ese levantarse del grito  
en la sordera del silencio.  
(21, ll. 137-145)

I call out your absence from where you are  
and I ask you about this universe  
that we inhabit in the extravagant study  
of all that does not interest us:  
the very source of weeping  
the stinginess of a slow gesture  
lost among so many gestures  
and the rising shout  
in the deafness of silence.  
(21, ll. 137-145)

The fact that the lyric "I" frames the invitation to ponder all that does not "interest" her and *don nadie* as "extravagant" underscores the extent to which these expressions of human suffering—tears, gestures, shouts—are not at the forefront of their sensorial perception, and similarly, that their contemplation constitutes going beyond what is due or expected from either of them.

Through the indirect object pronoun "nos", the poetic voice includes herself as complicit in this equation of privileged apathy. However, unable to specifically pinpoint *don nadie*'s whereabouts permits the lyric self to consider a universal presence that therefore substantiates and extends her inquiry as a universal concern for the casual dismissal of human expression, which appears above as forms of communication that are wordless, but also indicate some degree of social clamor and protest (*grito, llanto...*).

Altogether, the stanza is yet another irrefutable metapoetic inquiry. That these nonverbal expressions fall on deaf ears still posits that they are within reach of perception; it is just a matter of taking interest. Naranjo's poetics of democracy further stresses that not only are they

accessible through our senses and emotions, but she levels these expressions of human experience into one *canto*. As the poetic voice notes:

En mi respiración está la tuya  
en mi palpito va el tuyo  
en mi digestión late la tuya  
en mi mentira rima la tuya  
en mi verdad grita la tuya  
en mi angustia se embarga la tuya  
en mi gobierno se desilusiona el tuyo  
en mi canto  
llora el tuyo  
llora con dolor que conozco  
y duele como si un universo  
cayera en el punto más sensible  
de nervios aventureros.  
(22, ll. 163-175)

In my respiration is yours  
in my heartbeat goes yours  
in my digestión pulses yours  
in my lie rhymes yours  
in my truth shouts yours  
in my anguish seizes yours  
in my government is disappointed yours  
in my song  
cries yours  
cries with pain that I know  
and hurts as if one universe  
were to fall on the most sensitive point  
of adventurous nerves.  
(22, ll. 163-175)

The lyric voice outlines a progression of sensibilities (physical, mental and emotional) to construe tenets of solidarity, a path through which to identify with this invisible counterpart embodied by *don nadie*. In this manner, the very fact that this “we” shares the capacity for respiration indicates that they also share the capacity to understand the disillusionment that can result from their respective governments, or even more treacherously, from the repressive qualities of neoliberalism. Their ambiguous partnership legitimizes a construction of the self that could stand for anyone, positing the (uni)versal idea of speaking in one poetic versification as a democratic enterprise (“y duele como si un universo / cayera en el punto más sensible / de nervios aventureros”). At the same time, the mutual recognition and solidarity alluded to above remains within the realm of unrealized potential when noting the enjambment where the voice’s *canto* should ideally meet a reflection of the other’s *llanto* in lines 170-71. This break in continuity exposes an obstruction of representation in the poet’s attempt to shed light on the predicaments facing her fellow being, as well as a sense of a missed opportunity for public collaboration. In the general inquiry about the universe presented in these stanzas, what the lyric voice is really asking is the degree to which poetry, or culture overall, should be the platform to

provoke a reaction, or as she literally puts it, to strike a common nerve. Indirectly, she is expressing her frustration at not being able to reconcile her civic and artistic engagement, not unlike the kind of frustration one might experience as a Minister of Culture who cannot promote a series of films decrying a people's exploitation.

Naranjo's verse as a whole extends to the larger question of what role the state should have in promoting culture or, conversely, what is the role of culture in raising public consciousness and influencing policymaking in a state subject to external pressures that undermined the country's covenant between economic growth and social protections. These interrogative remnants of the revolution expose a critique of Costa Rican democracy where despite significant egalitarian and progressive measures has also produced public indifference. To that point, the figure of *don nadie* results in a paradox because on the one hand he encompasses this notion of complicit apathy, but on the other hand, he also facilitates an erasure from which to envision new structures and the negation of all hierarchy, in itself a very revolutionary concept. For the lyric voice, this gesture of erasure helps fortify her ultimate vision for the exchange and creation of words:

Y vos simple don nadie  
querés quemar  
biblia y estructuras  
clases y realidades  
que son fuego y queman  
son dolor absurdo y duelen.  
Hombro a hombro  
vos con tus trifulcas y con las mías  
yo con tus realidades y con mis sueños  
quemaremos olas y vientos  
aguaceros y mugidos  
ocios y sudores  
fríos y hambres.  
Entraremos a un teatro barroco  
dueños de palcos y butacas  
y allí inventaremos la palabra.  
(23, ll. 176-191)

And you simple mr. nobody  
want to burn  
bible and structures  
classes and realities  
that are fire and burn  
are absurd pain and hurt.  
Shoulder to shoulder  
you with your brawls and with mine  
I with your realities and with my dreams  
we will burn waves and winds  
downpours and bellows  
pastimes and perspirations  
chills and hunger.  
We will enter a baroque theater  
owners of seats and boxes  
and there we will invent the word.  
(23, 176-191)

Through the figure of *don nadie*, the poetic voice calls out the illogical, yet striking, pain caused by such external social structures like religion and class conflict to then posit her own clear utopian intention. It is not to comfortably disregard these painful realities of sensation and experience; the aim is to destroy them with the same fire. Even more importantly, she indicates that this creative and political process is not an individual undertaking, enlisting *don nadie* by leveling his struggle with hers within a democratic paradigm of equality (“hombro a hombro”). As the locus of struggle, the singular setting of a baroque theater is also a purposefully edged choice. A place already so adorned with ornate detail that it would seem the epitome of extravagant articulation becomes the site whereby the poetic voice defiantly claims that there is still more that can and must be said.

Underscoring this creative impetus thus forms the political crux of Naranjo’s verse, which further emphasizes the intervals between what is written and unwritten, what is said and unsaid, what is seen and unseen. Considering once again the notion of identifying intervals through which to negotiate political subjectivities, the poetic voice’s own vocational introspection explores the precipice of the unnamed as her ultimate aspiration:

No tengo carta de presentación ni vos tampoco.  
 nombre el que está de moda  
 ya pasó la de los santos  
 y la tradición de repetir  
 nombres de padres y de abuelos  
 si nombrarte pudiera  
 no te nombraría  
 si nombrarme pudiera  
 no me nombraría  
 profesión: animar la naturaleza muerta  
 y caer sin paracaídas  
 desde el décimo tercer piso del sueño  
 a la calle de los codazos.  
 misión: equivocarse siempre  
 perderse en el bosque de los ejemplos  
 con una pierna rota  
 y la brújula con vocación de ocaso  
 oficio: venderte un disfraz de don nadie

I don’t have a cover letter and neither do you  
 name: whatever is in fashion  
 gone are the days of being named after saints  
 and the tradition of repeating  
 the names of fathers and grandfathers  
 Had I the chance to name you  
 I wouldn’t name you  
 Had I the chance to name myself  
 I wouldn’t name me.  
 Profession: to animate the dead nature  
 and to fall without a parachute  
 from the thirteenth floor of a dream  
 down to the street of elbow jabs.  
 Mission: to always be mistaken  
 to lose oneself in the forest of examples  
 with a broken leg  
 and a compass with a sunset vocation  
 occupation: to sell you a mr. nobody costume

para el distinguido desfile de apellidos y rangos  
y vos y yo sin saber aun de colecciones  
en donde ávaros melancólicos  
envidian la avaricia ajena  
vocación: sembrar de sapos  
en la noche de los desvelos  
los cielos rasos de otros  
(23-24, ll. 192-216)

for the distinguished parade of last names and ranks  
and you and I still not knowing about collections  
where miserly melancholics  
are jealous of foreign avarice.  
vocation: to sow with toads  
in the sleepless nights  
the ceilings of others.  
(23-24, 192-216)

Foregoing the use of a cover letter, a professional and bureaucratic medium of supplementing one's own personal narrative or credentials, the poetic voice admits to the gravity of finding apt justification for her creative pursuits within social conventions, which is also a stalwart characteristic of meta-poetry. Indeed, as Matthew Marr asserts, "modern poetry, in nearly all of its assorted incarnations, is tied to a legacy of vocational seriousness which has a long history in the genre" (87). In the above stanza, the lyric voice's sense of self and of purpose is so intimately tied to the creative process that any obstruction to that endeavor amounts to an overarching sense of futility and romantic melancholy, the latter of which John Vernon contends has always "dominated" the tradition of modern poetry (304). As an extension of that tradition, contemporary Latin American poetry does not yet have the luxury of surpassing that complex of seriousness because it has the added task of reconciling the poet's aesthetic and civic engagement in service to an unfulfilled mission, especially in Central America where poetry has often been the catalyst for social change.

With respect to Naranjo's verse, the poetic "I" is mindful that this crisis of literary and national identity stems from the fact that the image proposed for the nation does not yet match the reality of its circumstances, though, of course, also abetted by historical, social, political, and administrative factors. In the above stanza, the shift away from traditional, ancestral names to trendy ones speaks to that cultural crisis as the lyric voice seeks not contemporary whims, but rather an authentic identification from which to root future representations. All she has at her

disposal, however, are these readily and familiar names perpetuated by social convention, which, if read as Rancière's "names of the common," are the interval identity markers by which the poetic self can measure *don nadie's* political subjectivity (as well as her own). That is to say, the concept of nobody still presupposes a potential affirmation that promises recognition as somebody. Toward that effort, the power of naming presumably is the task of the poet, but the two hypothetical "if" clauses of the imperfect subjunctive ("si nombrarte / nombrarme pudiera") suggest that at the present moment that task remains unattainable, muddled by an unclear and directionless path forward.

Regardless, for as much as the poetic voice claims this impediment, the respective independent clauses in the conditional tense ("no te nombraría" "no me nombraría") also demonstrate the agency and intention behind her resistance. Even if she had the ability or confident assertion of knowing what name to give, she would choose otherwise. Her steadfast refusal to supply a name sustains both her and *don nadie's* struggle for visibility such that his imperceptibility stands testament to their negation as well as complicity. In creating an avenue for political accountability (both in the sense of being counted and in the sense of answering for a certain civic responsibility), she strategically negotiates the inherent anonymity of *don nadie* to express a general reproach on the populace without resorting to specifics. By naming nobody, she is, in fact, addressing everybody. If deconstructed visually and audibly, "nombrarte" and "nombrarme" reinforce the obstruction to her poetic and political resources and gives the impression of a dehumanized or erased individual ("nombre" = "no-hombre," or 'no man'), the erasure of artistic representation ("nombrarte" = "no-hombre-arte," or 'no-man-art'), and the lack of revolutionary militancy to defend this artistic and political representation ("nombrarme" = "no armar" or "no bearing of arms"). It bears repeating, however, that what she finds most at fault is

grounded in the aesthetic, in donning this public costume of *don nadie* and therefore assuming the aesthetic representation of complacent mediocrity.

This pretense alludes to Paz's characterization of *Don Nadie* as the citizen that embraces the mask and costume, but Naranjo's verse stipulates that the onus is on the citizen as much as it is on the poet to question the performative negation of this aesthetic filter. In exploring that obligation, she expands on the nuances that give definition to her poetic livelihood: profession, mission, occupation and vocation. Like the names, she cannot supply her job title in conventional terms. Both of these components—name and occupation—function as social masks that speak to expectations to validate one's credentials (Who are you? What do you do?). These would seem to be simple questions and answers—in Latin America, a citizen's name and occupation even appear in one's passport in succession—which makes the lyric voice's circumvention all the more noticeable. If the inability to name indicates a crisis of identity, the inability to name her job title indicates an occupational crisis, or perhaps more simply, that the title falls short of conveying what the job entails in theory and in practice.

To compensate, the lyric voice opts to first dwell in theorizing the parameters of her profession, which involves risks and painful consequences as suggested by the falling from the metaphorical height of her thirteenth-floor dreams (and that, too, without a parachute). This gesture, seemingly suicidal in nature, echoes the same gesture of poetic martyrdom alluded to in *Mi guerrilla*, where the lyric self would also willfully entangle herself in the rainforest, the loci of guerrilla fighting, even if the end result would mean death and decomposition in the soil. These gestures of willful abandon and martyrdom place enormous trust in the pursuit of materializing the written word even at the expense of its symbolic death when lacking a space of receptivity (i.e. readers) to imbue it constantly with meaning.



This endeavor ties back to the mission statement in *Homenaje* as another register of the poetic voice's vocational purpose that implies these confrontations with symbols are inevitable and constant ("misión: equivocarse siempre / perderse en el bosque de los ejemplos"). Mistakes, too, are inevitable and unintentional consequences, and the poetic voice's humble acceptance of that fact tells and foretells instances of disillusion and strife. The image of the broken leg while traversing this forest (which would seem more penetrable when compared to the entanglement of the rainforest/jungle) indicates that the odds are against her from the onset. Moreover, the "pie quebrado" in Spanish refers to a form of 14<sup>th</sup> century poetic versification. The "pie quebrado" is a short line, or break, employed following an octosyllabic couplet. Despite this broken leg, or interrupted verse, the lyric voice persists in her vocational commitment to poetry even if she can devise that her mission has an end ("vocación de ocaso"). The challenge of accomplishing such a task with the hindrance of a broken leg could very well describe Naranjo's tenure as Minister of Culture in Costa Rica, a country like the seemingly traversable forest with all the advantages of a peaceful democracy versus the example of those countries that were witnessing proxy wars being fought between superpowers in the jungles of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia during the Cold War. While Costa Rica remained at the periphery of armed conflict, it was not without its own democratic confrontations against an idyllic image that repeatedly revealed a setting laden with obstructions to the truth of its state of affairs within both cultural and political planes.

If her "profession" and "mission" theorized the scope and downfalls of her chosen craft, the third prompt "occupation" resembles more the actual confrontation with the outcomes of her job. To state her occupation as the practice of metaphorically "selling" the costume of *don nadie* reveals the lack of authenticity that compromises the integrity of her work and makes her complicit in perpetuating the façade in lieu of directly addressing a less pleasant or credible

reality, such as the foreign avarice mentioned above. Locally, the costume permits *don nadie* to join the “distinguished” parade of last names and ranks, upholding the ceremonious pretense of uniformity. Toward the end of the collection, Naranjo revisits the image of the parade, but this time to explicitly expose what she identifies as “la tremenda verdad de las desigualdades” [‘the tremendous truth of inequalities’] (73, l. 57). She states, “la igualdad es un desfile / en que sólo se notan los altos los blancos / y los que llevan rótulos y banderas” [‘equality is a parade / in which only the tall and the white get noticed / and the ones who carry signs and flags’] (71, 53-54). For however much *don nadie* purports to be a part of this cohesive and integrated formation, his phenotype, skin color, credentials and even legal status will always be measured up against an idealized prototype of national identification that belies the country’s internal diversity. It is an image of exclusion that functions as a mechanism of erasure predicated on Costa Rica’s “myth of whiteness” and desire for foreign validation (Townsend-Bell 3). *Don nadie*, therefore, stands as the ultimate figure of illusion and disillusion, a subverted ode to an overlooked consequence of homogeneity: the false sense of egalitarianism.

Throughout *Homenaje*, Naranjo debunks the myth of equality by mocking *don nadie*’s proclivity for the everyday citizen’s illusion of grandeur and importance:

la igualdad se ríe de vos	equality laughs at you
líder de los iguales	leader of the equals
porque tu paso es también paso de otros	because your step is also the step of others
tu sonrisa pertenece a tantos	your smile belongs to so many
tus anteojos remedian la miopía de muchos	your glasses correct the myopia of many more
(71, ll. 5-9)	(71, ll. 5-9)

The derision with which the lyric voice addresses *don nadie* confirms the latter’s insignificance, meant both in terms of importance and in terms of his inability to stand out as a meaningful signified subject. Indistinguishable from the multitude, he is also unable to create an objective discernment that would confront the narrow-minded intolerance of this collective myopia, and

the fact that he still wears glasses stands in direct contrast to the earlier “legítimo don nadie” whom she knows will clearly read her poem without them. She further scoffs at his self-deception, noting that he drinks the same lukewarm coffee as every *fulano*, that he eats the same rice and beans as every beggar, that his baldness is just like every other baldness, that all the *doña nadies* ignore him just the same, and that he has tricked himself into thinking that Greta Garbo’s smile on the big screen is reserved just for him (71-72, ll. 10-32). Of course, this illusion is easily shattered when *don nadie* steps out into the rain right after the film ends: “después te desola porque llueve de verdad” (72, l. 33). Temporarily, the intimacy of the movie theater appears as an egalitarian space where each individual considers the image of the smile as proof that they are seen, but to paraphrase Guy Debord the passive spectatorship of the image really reveals a collective consumerism of illusions (47). The evasion from reality can only hold for so long, and Garbo’s smile eventually preempts the disillusion epitomized by the rain as the uncomfortable unmasking of the deception.

As evidenced throughout Naranjo’s oeuvre, rain carries an enormous symbolic weight, falling as the vocational output of poetic language, and thus serves as the vehicle for confronting, and indeed resisting, any fixation on the illusion behind an image. Returning, then, to the poetic voice’s earlier professional introspection, her vocation in theory also reads as a futile evasion. In an attempt to mitigate the sleepless nights of worry, she sows *sapos* that only jump to the ceilings of other sleepless nights. Her nocturnal unrest, however, parallels a social awakening rightly fraught with anxiety because what keeps her awake at night is the sense of helplessness against the simulacrum of equality, and she is acutely aware that this illusion persists due to both a lack of introspection and extrospection: “y uniformado de don nadie / por dentro y por fuera / no abris la ventana ni dialogás con el espejo” [and wearing a uniform of don nadie / inside and out / you

do not open the window nor do you dialogue with the mirror] (70, ll. 55-57). The unopened window and the silence with the mirror deflect any chance of objective perception and deliberation as *don nadie* yet again avoids any confrontation with the reality of his present circumstances. *Homenaje* thus stresses the idiosyncrasies of *don nadie*'s political negation: he is only unseen and unheard because he refuses to see and to hear himself beyond societal convention. At one point, the lyric voice sums up the source of *don nadie*'s self-imposed negation as coming from a feeling of social resentment based on avarice: "no sos realmente el que nada tiene / pero te disminuye el no tener todo" ['you aren't really the one who has nothing / but it diminishes you to not have everything'] (31, ll. 48-49). *Don nadie*, then, is a misnomer, an unwarranted sidetrack that hinders the poetic voice's search to legitimize and to give proper tribute to the invisible individual who has been denied his or her subjectivity.

Because the invisibility of this mediocre and egotistical *don nadie* is inward, Naranjo's verse suggests that he does not evince the same struggle for political visibility of those who truly do not have representation, even by name, and who are thus susceptible to the convenient manipulation of historical narrative. In *Cinco Temas*, Naranjo argues that the egotistical individual views the past, in particular, as an abandoned historical monument that need not be revised or analyzed (60). Curiously, the image of a historical monument allows the poetic voice to expound on the implications of eroding the memory of armed struggle in the penultimate poem of *Homenaje*. The monument stands testament to "el héroe don nadie" (102, l. 161), remembered as "el soldado desconocido / el sin nombre / el anónimo" [the unknown soldier / without name / anonymous'] (102, ll. 162-64) enough to justify a tribute for his sacrifice while his monument solidifies an image of struggle conferred to the past. As the cause for which he fought is relegated to a distant memory, the discernment of *don nadie* becomes more obsolete:

el don nadie nadie  
al que nadie hizo caso  
y sin rostro sin nombre  
sin religión sin huesos  
sin familia sin sexo  
un gobierno vacío  
en reino de vaciedades  
construyó un monumento  
para el don nadie perfecto:  
una vela sin alguien a quien velar  
una frase sin eco  
una cara sin sonrisa  
una palabra sin voz  
un sexo sin abrazo  
una cara sin ojos  
porque los ojos son íntimos  
(102-103, ll. 173-188)

the real nobody  
to whom no one paid attention  
and faceless nameless  
religionless boneless  
without family sexless  
an empty government  
in the realm of emptiness  
built a monument  
for the perfect Mr. Nobody  
a candle for no one's vigil  
a phrase without echo  
a face without smile  
a word without voice  
a sex without embrace  
a face without eyes  
because the eyes are intimate  
(102-103, ll. 173-188)

The double emphasis on *nadie* discloses the authentically negated figure of the real *don nadie* who suffers a deeper degree of invisibility and marginalization on account of what the lyric voice further nuances as *el don nadie perfecto*, which is to say, the perfect symbol for consensus and appeasement because there is no clear identity (face, name, religion, gender) to contest. The face with no smile prevents any expression while the lack of eyes indicates a superficial connection bereft of any intimacy (and her second mention of this unreciprocated gaze). Naranjo presents the monument's semblance as permanent, but not reverberating; any significance behind the echoless phrases and voiceless words has no reach. As a measure of Costa Rica's post-revolutionary unfolding, the egotistical *don nadie* stands as the antithesis to the revolutionary ideal of an egalitarian and progressive social democratic nation, his anarchic individualism a betrayal to the state for which so many died.

The lyric voice prefaces the monument's contradistinctive attempt to render substantive tribute via an empty placating gesture with the most pressing truth: the real *don nadie* would not have a statue dedicated to him at all. She declares, "y sabés y lo has pensado / no hay nada para

don nadie” [‘and you know, and you have thought it / there is nothing for a nobody’] (101, l. 151-52). For that matter, she points out that he would not be bestowed with any form of recognition and designations of privilege, and like the monument, no other forms of cultural and social frameworks have properly yielded means of inclusion for him: “ni salud ni tierra / ni vivienda ni cultura / ni sueño ni discurso / ni pintura ni plan / ni escultura ni alimento / ni empleo ni espacio / ni justicia ni bienestar” [‘neither health nor land / neither housing nor culture / neither dream nor discourse / neither painting nor plan / neither sculpture nor nutrition / neither employment nor space / neither justice nor wellbeing’] (102, ll. 154-56). These denied avenues of representation and basic rights indicate that his aesthetic and civic exclusions are parallel. Likewise, all labels are not reserved for his classification, leading the lyric “I” to conclude that “no hay don nadie poetizado” [‘there is no poeticized Mr. Nobody’] (101, l. 141). Of course, in stating the absence she is creating a poetic space for the legitimate *don nadie* to occupy, and on some level, *Homenaje* as a published collection is the direct artistic platform to make amends for that history of exclusion. The more compelling metapoetic inquiry, however, deals with the resonance of the lyric self’s own words and whether they are destined to stand as empty as the monument’s tribute to the unknown soldier.

The final poem addresses that bleak prospect by revisiting the image of the broken *tinaja*, the original source of the poetic voice’s poem to *don nadie*, only this time there is no *repique*. All sound is impeded by what she describes as “la zona sorda de la tinaja” [‘the deaf zone of the clay pot’] (104, l.1) In the further absence of light and song, no seed can sprout, and specifically, the seeds “del ruiseñor, / del trigo y del hombre” [‘of the nightingale / of wheat and of man’], which allude to the nightingale’s symbolic association with natural poetic creation (at least within the romantic tradition) such that the cultivation of poetry depends on the same mechanism

of cultivating the land and giving life to mankind (104, ll. 4-5). Naranjo's final poem depicts a setting that serves as a reminder that neither poetry, nor the harvest, and even man can be introduced for recognition without proper cultivation and reception. Like poetic creation, democracy is contingent on this reciprocal participation to guarantee equal access to vocal and visible representation, and any obstruction to that signals the precipice of political struggle.

Within this homage, Naranjo strategically positions the legitimately excluded *don nadie* at the brink of recognition to carve out a political and artistic locus of democratic resistance, where the lyric voice emphatically resists naming him to expose both the potential of his surfacing as well as to signal the very mechanism that obstructs his due recognition. In this manner, his misnomer sustains her creative and political impetus:

en tu nombre de don nadie  
nace y muere el legítimo hombre  
que inventó la creación  
afamó la fábula  
trascendió el mito  
naufregó en la esperanza  
descubrió la naranja  
y sembró el arroz.  
(105, ll. 24-31)

in your name of Mr. Nobody  
is born and dies the legitimate man  
that invented the creation  
made famous the fable  
transcended the myth  
floundered in hope  
discovered the orange  
and planted the rice.  
(105, ll. 24-31)

Naranjo reorients *don nadie's* negation as a point of departure to imbue him with metaphorical possibility. By correlating him with an equally reduced and nameless contour—that is, the figure of man, himself—she accentuates that all creation, including man, begins from nothing. Man is the underlying common denominator in both supplying the muse and the undertaking of the achievement. Giving him a specific name would bind his experience to one singular event or narrative, whereas the poetic voice's resistance aims to surpass the finality of any inscription, reason for which she portrays him as fluid enough to be the main character of a fable, but also remarks on his ability to transcend the myth, i.e. confront the semblance of fact.

Up until this point, *Homenaje* hints that *don nadie* is always elsewhere. Following Rancière's logic, the possibility of inscribing his presence prompts the authentic benchmark for political action because it would mean introducing a previously uncounted object or subject (*Dissensus* 7). Certainly, in that vein of political action Naranjo brings *don nadie* to the forefront as she juxtaposes him with the obviously counted *don alguien*, who unlike *don nadie*, "no hizo camino" ['never forged a path'] (105, l.31). Yet, in this final poem, the poetic voice assertively confirms the uncounted *don nadie*'s whereabouts among the soil: "el don nadie es de tierra / sabe y huele a tierra / por eso las lluvias lo mojan / y lo respetan los pinos" ['don nadie is of the soil / he tastes and smells of soil / that is why the rains drench him / and the pine trees respect him'] (106, ll. 40-41). By grounding him to this terrestrial composition, she links his presence to any account of struggle and change on this land, the same land that she lists as witnessing the death of peasants, the mutilation of workers by machines and the imprisonment of political prisoners of war. To recognize *don nadie* is to give testimonial acknowledgement of any injustice and to reverse the "ignorada historia de su rebeldía" ['the forgotten history of his rebelliousness'] (106, l. 55). To not see *don nadie* would imply losing sight of the struggle that came before, continues and is to come, and especially considering the notion of a forgotten rebellion within a Costa Rican context, it would mean a dismissal of its own history of simultaneous democratic resistance and affirmation as epitomized by the Revolution of 1948.

Symbolically, *don nadie*'s emanation from the soil poses a disruption that announces the cultivation of something new, but it also echoes the image of the "polvo de regreso" from *Mi guerrilla* as that biblical reminder that all creation meets its disintegration. To locate *don nadie* among the soil is to offer the most levelling premise and retort of a common shared origin and destination. Any demand for establishing identity and purpose beyond that is superfluous and/or



laden with pretension, as exhibited in the antepenultimate stanza through the questions “quién sos que querés / a dónde vas” [‘who are you what do you want / where are you going’] (108, ll. 86-87). Intentionally, these questions scheme what the lyric voice categorizes as “esa interrupción cruel” [‘that cruel interruption’] because they aim to intimidate *don nadie* into marginalized oblivion, unequal status and political negation since he cannot furnish the proper documents and credentials on account of his “maleta vacía” (108, l. 85, 90). As the final stanza suggests, the most fitting response to these questions is to pay them no heed:

todo queda en silencio  
y es que don nadie no responde  
al acoso del interrogatorio  
pues en la dulce mudez  
de su espejo interno  
confiesa que lo quieren los suyos  
y para qué más de lo demás  
(108, ll. 99-105)

everything stays silent  
because Mr. Nobody does not respond  
to the harassment of the interrogation  
for in the sweet muteness  
of his internal mirror  
he confesses his own people love him  
and for what else the rest  
(108, ll. 99-105)

In other words, the best response is silence. While an obvious refuge and defense mechanism for him, *don nadie*'s silence here is different. It is personified as sweetly appealing to the senses, and it stems from a humble recognition that does not depend on external validation, but rather is confidently at peace with an interior reflection that reconciles both his private and public persona. With a clear conscience, he sees his sense of self redeemed by and as a product of what matters above all, the intimate acceptance from his loved ones, or the people he considers his own. It is this *don nadie* that merits respect from the pine trees, and for whom the rain (i.e. the poetic word) awaits to give a deserving and endless tribute.

Like him and those who came before, there will be many perceived *don nadies* whose efforts will continue to go unrecognized, the trials and tribulations of their life's work susceptible to oblivion for remaining in the attempt, for not meeting an impossible standard, and as opposed to the egotistical and conciliatory *don nadie*, for not meekly acquiescing to the consensus

demanded of them. This endless political struggle reflects the lyric voice's metapoetic struggle since the beginning of the collection as she attempts to construct a poem in honor of *don nadie*. Ironically, having done just that (and at great length, too), the title of this final part suggests that she is, in fact, not really finished: "Última parte / en donde gatea el final sin final / Que el poema carece de telón" ['Last part / in which the endless end crawls / for the poem lacks a curtain'] (104). She deliberately creates a sense of closure that is meant to feel like a drag, evoking the progress that has also advanced slowly, if at all, while the curtain-less poem speaks to the work that still needs to be done. In this manner, Naranjo's verse makes the claim that poetry is that privileged site of resistance because the genre does not conform to the Aristotelian precept of denouement. Rooted in truth, poetry does not offer the neat resolution for the dilemma embodied by *don nadie* but does extend the democratic promise that his inclusion is possible.

Both *Mi guerrilla* and *Homenaje a don nadie* carve out the conviction that drives the poet's profession while defying the very perception that poetry is personal, and that politics is public. Given Naranjo's vast and diversified record of public service while simultaneously carrying out her career as a writer and poet, there was no distinction between her public and private occupations because her vocational calling remained predicated on the creation and contestation of the image. Committed to that poetic and political cause, Naranjo will continue to defend this joint avenue of aesthetic and civic engagement while exposing the occupational hazards of being a poet in Central America in her later verse. As explored in the next chapter, her final two collections set a precedent for examining the aftermath of the cultural revolutions that were byproducts of the region's emblematic armed struggles.

*Oficio de poeta.  
Menos mal.  
Así, en vez de castigarme a ciegas  
con el pasado  
y de llorar a solas  
puedo sentarme frente a una máquina tan gris  
como el ambiente  
mover los dedos rápidos  
y decir que todo es una mierda.  
Ana María Rodas, “Apunte”*

The same interrogative phrase that encapsulated the social democratic cultural initiative of the second Figueres administration (1970-1974) served as the title for another Ingo Niehaus film that unlike *Costa Rica: Banana Republic* was easily approved for the film festival sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports during Naranjo’s tenure. Focusing on the founding of the Children’s Symphonic Orchestra, *¿Para qué tractores sin violines?* [‘Why Tractors without Violins?’] (1974) perfectly aligned with the narrative of a peaceful democracy that having repudiated warfare through the abolishment of its military, could now dedicate itself to the cultivation of its social and cultural progress. The film follows the effort of a young boy and member of the symphony orchestra, Ivan, as he balances soccer practice with his violin rehearsals in preparation for the debut performance at the National Theater. The opening scene, in which Figueres, himself, gives a speech to introduce the children, makes it so that his appearance center stage directly reflects the centrality of developing a cultural policy by the state. The baroque theater serves as the perfect backdrop for an administration credited with ushering in the golden age of cultural programs and institutions in Costa Rica. With Figueres surrounded by children in possession of violins, the film suggests that the question’s creative urgency for the country is not only self-evident, but that state funding for the fine arts has been secured for future generations.

A closer look at the documentary, however, reveals the problematic ambiguities of such an undertaking. For one, the perceived cultural vacuum is still attributed to a narrative that rests on the lack of social conflict. At one point, the film's narrator states, "nuestro país es un país sin drama, para bien o para mal" ['our country is a country without drama, for better or for worse']. That is to say, the content that is missing to produce the spectacle of theater (for worse) is akin to the missing content that would supply a spectacle of social unrest (for better). While hyperbolic in its assessment, the overarching implication of this statement posits the need for a national reorientation of the importance of cultural activity, but only insofar as it maintains the uneventful peace that differentiates Costa Rica from the "dramatic" conflict of its neighbors. To some degree, Figueres' juxtaposition of violins and tractors held enough self-explanatory justification for the institutional endorsement of culture. In practice, the PLN's social democratic model provided all the resources—especially financial—to support what arguably has been the most recognized and sustained cultural policy within Central America since the Ministry of Culture's inception in 1970. For all these efforts to facilitate the fine arts, including the *Plaza de la Cultura*, *Teatro Popular Melico Salazar*, *Teatro Nacional*, *Instituto de Cine*, the *Centro Nacional de la Cultura* (CENAC) and the *Festival Internacional del Arte* (FIA), most of these initiatives suffered from lack of public enthusiasm, budget cuts, and institutional pauses that stemmed from ambivalent objectives. Put differently, the forms were all there, but from where to derive the content and for what purpose remains unclear to this present day.

In response to this predicament of policy, Carlos Cortés retorts, "¿Para qué violines sin ideas?" ['Why Have Violins without Ideas?'] as the title of an essay in which he explores how the failure of these state cultural initiatives resulted from competing social democratic and

neoliberal interests even within the PLN. Specifically, the incentive to democratize culture suffered from fundamental tensions influenced by the heightened suspicions of the Cold War era:

El modelo socialdemócrata fue víctima de su propio ensueño: nacer bajo el Estado benefactor y empresario de los setenta y en un espacio público que toleraba las ‘desviaciones’ de izquierda y la crítica. El proyecto neoliberal, tanto fuera como dentro de Liberación Nacional—el partido socialdemócrata—nunca ha entendido la cultura ni siquiera como ‘circo de pueblo’ y sigue viendo a este sector como monopolio ideológico de un grupo, cuando no abiertamente izquierdizante o sospechoso de cosas peores. (190)

The social democratic model was a victim of its own dream: born under the welfare and entrepreneurial state of the seventies and within a public space that tolerated the leftist ‘deviations’ and social critique. The neoliberal project, both outside and within the National Liberation—the social democratic party—never has understood culture even as a ‘village circus’ and still sees this sector as the ideological monopoly of one group, if not openly leftist or suspected of worse things. (190)

Supposing that central-peripheral tensions understandably emerged in debating whether the loci and promotion of culture should reside in the elitist metropolis or extend to the modest regional outskirts, it is evident that even the most socially progressive stalwarts of the PLN believed that culture, and more importantly, public sectors of cultural promotion, were not politically innocuous. They may have tolerated ideological deviations, but that did not lessen their apprehension toward willfully allocating resources to what they considered a clear cultural projection of leftist politics. If there was one thing they shared with the neoliberal wing of their party, it was that they did not want Costa Rican culture to reflect the same “drama” of its neighboring countries, even at the expense of retracting their once ardently defended ideas to democratize popular engagement with the arts via bureaucratic institutionalization.

Given these parameters, it is unsurprising, then, why Niehaus’s documentary *¿Para qué tractores sin violines?* did not face the same level of censorship as *Costa Rica: Banana Republic* (prompting Naranjo’s resignation from her ministerial post). The National and Children’s Symphonic Orchestras were comfortable, if not tepid, initiatives that did not transgress

traditional sites of showcasing the arts. Meanwhile, the presence of exploited banana plantation workers on the big screen uncomfortably approximated Costa Rica's lingering social and economic inequalities to the social tensions that spurred the bloodiest epoch of armed conflict in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s. Even though the culmination of these revolutionary struggles coincided with the end of the Cold War—symbolically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989—the geopolitical antagonism still reverberated across the isthmus through the perceived ideological victory of capitalist democracy over Marxist socialism. As a result, governmental cultural policies geared toward the democratization of culture were either relegated to the background or eliminated altogether.

For Costa Rica, the end of the Cold War granted momentum to the country's transition from a welfare state to a neoliberal one under the presidential administration of Óscar Arias Sánchez (1986-1990 and 2006-2010) and further distanced the PLN from its social democratic origins and post-revolutionary reform measures. The state's programs of cultural outreach and promotion suffered budget cuts while the Ministry of Culture's initiatives succumbed to the purview of the private sector and even transnational outsourcing.<sup>24</sup> More than a sense of obstructed policy for the democratization of culture, Cortés identifies a precipitous (even readily agreeable) capitulation to neoliberal interests that resulted in “una orfandad institucional...en donde sobran los violines, pero escasean las ideas” [‘an institutional orphanhood...in which there is a surplus of violins, but a scarcity of ideas’] (109-110). The market reference here cannot be overlooked. The surplus of violins speaks to a miscalculation of supply and demand, as if to suggest there are not enough consumers of national culture, or rather this decline in demand

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<sup>24</sup> In his second term (2006-2010), President Arias Sánchez subcontracted the organization of the *Festival Internacional de las Artes* to a Spanish/Colombian businessman.

evokes a missing sense of civic engagement that would foster the culturalization of democracy. The shortage may be that of ideas and purpose, but it is also unclear who would be willing to buy (into) them.

At its core, Carlos Cortés's question of "para qué violines sin ideas?" is really asking whether this model of ideas makes sense, and the cynical disillusion behind his rhetorical rejoinder claims a resounding failure. This failure at once approximates and distances the case of Costa Rica from that of other Central American countries once the isthmus enters an era of peace after decades of fighting and brutal dictatorships. The so-called *literatura de posguerra* that emerges in Central America confronts what Mark Falcoff designates as "not merely the terminal crisis of Communism as *practiced* in certain Latin American countries, but of something more powerful still—the expiration of revolutionary fantasy, the dream of an event which has not yet taken place" (1). In the face of thwarted revolutionary efforts that amounted to little change, many Latin American writers encountered challenges to push forth absolute calls for the revocation of the former world order, as past victories translated into the present as defeats. Though Costa Rica did not experience a synchronous period of conflict and revolutionary loss, the poet Alfonso Chase frames the utopian legacy of the 1948 Revolution as a parallel terminal crisis: "la Segunda República ha muerto. Hay que crear una Tercera República con la participación de la gente" ['The Second Republic has died. A Third Republic must be created with the participation of the people'], (qtd in Chaverri "Le tienen miedo a la cultura" 118). This parallel disenchantment and figurative demise of the Second Republic is essential to understanding Naranjo's poetry as a response to the end of utopian socialism and to the narrative of leftist defeat in the region.

Panagia initiates his study of the political potential of aesthetic experience with the affirmation that, “there is nothing quite like the sensation that accompanies an idea” (1). By this he means that feeling that settles the idea as a recognizable object, like when something “clicks” into place, when one comes across just the right word to describe a thought, or even when one sees an image in a magazine and, suddenly, the vision of how one wants to decorate their apartment becomes clear. For Panagia, sensation affirms that the ruminations of one’s imagination are possible, or at the very least, have the potential to be represented. However, the experience of sensation can also produce doubt. He explains:

Such experiences, though frequent, are short lived because the intensity of the moment passes rather quickly. We are also suspicious of them: there are experiences about particular things that often don’t make sense to us, or at the very least if the sensation persists, we try to make sense of it by fitting it into some kind of context or life-schema. Speaking nonsense, for instance, is perceived as an unwelcome failure that needs to be overcome with better thinking, more deliberation, and the kind of storytelling that will help make sense of the world and justify our place in it. But the thing about the activity of sense making is that it always takes sense itself for granted; we always already know the shape and sound an utterance must have in order for it to have meaning or to count as political speech; we are never really content in addressing nonsense as we rarely feel comfortable with its disruptions. And yet, moments of sensation punctuate our everyday existence, and in doing so, they puncture our received wisdoms and common modes of sensing. (2)

Doubt surfaces when that sensation cannot translate into an instance of signification, or meaningful expression. Thus, Panagia is more interested in exploring sensation as that intermediary impact between contact and cognition, of which both sense and perception are important registers, but not the basis of political disruption. For him, the political disruption lies with sensation as an “experience of unrepresentability in that sensation occurs without having to rely on a recognizable shape, outline, or identity to determine its value” (2). In other words, a political struggle ensues when the sensation that accompanies the appearance cannot conform to the conditions of readability, articulatory capacity, and perception.



With a view to connect the implications of this political struggle of sensation to the experience of revolutionary loss—that sensation of what could have been but seems irretrievable in the face of peace and re-democratization, this chapter analyzes Naranjo’s final two collections published in the aftermath of Central America’s liberation struggles. I read her verse as a meta-poetic reflection on the occupational parameters of the poet and the role of poetry during a time when both the poet (long under the expectation to commit to a poetics of experience that embraced a commitment to liberation struggles) and poetry (as a genre linked to utopian visions of revolutionary struggles) came to be associated with an overwhelming sense of revolutionary failure and fatigue. Because of this perception, many of Central America’s leading poets made narrative turns to novels and memoirs in the late 1980s and 1990s, but even within prose, Arturo Arias notes that, “a certain past intoxication with revolutionary utopias has given way to a heavy hangover” (*Taking Their Word* 22). In the same vein, Beatriz Cortez finds that “una estética del cinismo” [‘an aesthetics of cynicism’], or an overall sense of pessimism with the failure of insurgent movements, permeates the narrative fiction of the postwar, globalized era in Central America (25).<sup>25</sup> Cortez identifies a shift from the tone of political outrage and protest that characterized revolutionary art to a more intimate tone and exploration of subjectivity. She adds, however, that the designation of this postwar or post-conflict aesthetic should not be limited to a sociohistorical temporality, but rather understood as a sensibility that encompasses a contrast

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<sup>25</sup> Yvette Aparicio’s *Post-Conflict Literature in Central America: Searching for Home and Longing to Belong* offers the only study of Central American post-conflict poetry but through its intersections with the short story. She explores the aesthetic renditions of home and the homeland compared to revolutionary poets’ conceptualization of the homeland and the future. She traces how this new generation of post-conflict poets and short story writers inherit memories of dismembered and decomposed homelands that nevertheless appeal more to their sense of belonging and (re)membering than the spaces of citizenship supplanted by transnational globalization. However, her study does not include Naranjo, though it is the first to analyze the works of Costa-Rican contemporary poets Susana Reyes, Juan Sobalvarro, and Luis Chaves.

with the utopian faith in revolutionary projects that had dominated the political and cultural imaginary of the region well throughout the century. In other words, an aesthetics of cynicism is not exclusive to the conventional periodization of *literatura de posguerra*.

My study of Naranjo's post-conflict poetry engages in a distinctly different tracing of disenchantment. Her post-conflict sensibility does not confront the same conceptualization of utopian loss, but rather confronts the utopian branding of Costa Rica that prefaces and validates the transition to neo-liberal peace and re-democratization in the region. Like her contemporaries, Naranjo also followed suit with the pattern of abandoned poetic production in favor of narrative fiction. Exactly two decades passed before *En esta tierra redonda y plana* [*On this Round and Flat Earth*] (2001) and *Oficio de oficios* [*Occupation of Occupations*] (2007) marked her return to poetry. I draw from Beatriz Cortez's reading of this cynical aesthetic as a sensibility rather than a chronological periodization of cultural production (i.e., what was published following the end of the wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala) to amplify the continuity of the cynical underpinnings of Naranjo's poetics of democracy. That is, a cynical lens has always driven Naranjo's aesthetic and civic engagement to hold both the word and the image accountable for any dissonance in meaning and misrepresentation. I argue that Naranjo's poetics of democracy does not dilute the urgency for social justice; rather she reaffirms her dreams for democracy and for her poetic vocation as she counters the purported blanket narrative of post-conflict pacification with her own vision of democratic peace predicated on social justice.

I begin with Naranjo's *En esta tierra redonda y plana* (2001), a collection divided into two parts. The first exposes the latent remnants of war in Central America through the lyric self's struggle to recall any sensation associated with the memory of the region's revolutionary fervor. The second is concretely identified by the title "Este dolor incontenido de Centroamérica y otros

poemas” (“This Uncontained Pain of Central America and Other Poems”) in which she inscribes a clear socio-political denunciation that readily addresses the postwar sensibility of the isthmus as an irrepressible content. While these two parts represent a shift from an intimate solitary retrospection to a public contestation, it is the complementary meeting of the two that marks Naranjo’s aesthetic and political convergence. That is, the second part reads as the supplementary content for the poetic form outlined in the first part. Together, they postulate Central America as an unfinished project of democratization that still necessitates the creative fervor of the poet.

I then briefly pivot to *Oficio de oficios* (2007), the last collection Naranjo wrote before her death in 2012. Here, the lyric self writes from the vantage point of senectitude. The poems read as a highly biographical measure of Naranjo’s ethical considerations in her daily life pursuits, which she presents as a series of “oficios.” The lyric self holds each “oficio” in equal measure such that what might seem a banality (sewing, cooking, waking up, making the bed, getting dressed, brushing one’s hair) is as relevant to her as the diligence attached to the experience of aging, getting sick, thinking, or dreaming. She extracts a new sensory experience from each of these “oficios” that allows her to envision a different mode of being and doing. I argue that by leveling these movements of life, Naranjo emancipates the poet from any hierarchical obligation and expectation. Though she never explicitly addresses the task of writing poetry, the reformulation of these tasks reaffirms the conviction behind her creative vocation, thereby opening the poet to the pursuit of her own intimate and peaceful social awareness.

### **The Formulation of Peace in Costa Rica**

Naranjo’s last two collections confront the region’s conceptualization of peace, itself, despite Costa Rica leading its formulation. To better understand how Naranjo equates peace with

social justice, it is necessary to address how the discursive formulation of peace, like culture, could not evade the geopolitical pressures of the Cold War. For Central America, the 1980s witnessed a period of armed conflict and extreme brutality (toward both soldiers and civilians, alike) that resulted in approximately 200,000 deaths and a refugee crisis that prompted 2,000,000 citizens to leave their countries (Dunkerly 1). In 1990, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua marked the end of the last revolutionary conflict of the Cold War era. Shortly after, the 1992 Peace Accords signaled the end of more than eleven years of war in El Salvador, followed by the 1996 Peace Accords declaring an official cease-fire in Guatemala after nearly thirty-six years of internal warfare. By many estimations, these accords were the culmination of a peace plan famously attributed to the efforts of president Óscar Arias Sánchez, who even before the mediation process had been finalized, received the Nobel Prize for Peace in October 1987. A year before, Arias Sánchez campaigned as the PLN candidate who would be an active defender of peace in Central America, a campaign whose message of peace successfully appealed to Costa Rican voters.<sup>26</sup>

On the domestic front, Arias Sánchez's rhetoric of fighting for peace also garnered much support from intellectual circles who viewed his stance as a defense of sovereignty against North American intervention via the Reagan administration's propagation of these wars to deter the

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<sup>26</sup> Though nearly 40 years had passed, the memory of the revolution's bloodshed was still potent enough to sway a citizenry whose collective imaginary equates peace with the absence of conflict. Arias Sánchez positioned himself against the former PLN administration of Luis Alberto Monge whose policies exposed Costa Rica to potential war when Monge ceded to U.S. political and economic pressure and allowed the CIA to set up posts along the northern border with Nicaragua in exchange for financial assistance. Similarly, his campaign characterized his rival candidate Rafael Calderón Fournier as an aspiring warmonger by associating him with the *calderonismo* that prompted the Revolution of 1948 as well as the attempted coup against Figueres in 1955. In effect, voters' rejection of Monge's ambiguous neutrality and the bellicose characterization of Calderón Fournier secured Arias Sánchez the presidency.

influence of the then extant Soviet Union. Echoing Arias Sánchez's specific call to end financing for the CIA-backed *contras* in favor of democratic changes in Nicaragua, Naranjo and fellow intellectuals formed the group *Soberanía* ['Sovereignty'].<sup>27</sup> Initially, the group aimed to position Costa Rica's vision of fighting for peace in solidarity with a greater Latin American precept of sovereignty "con Bolívar y Martí al frente, junto con Joaquín García Monge, y otros que antes y después han luchado por nuestra soberanía para unir esfuerzos en la noble causa de la concordia y la paz entre hombres y naciones" ['with Bolívar and Martí at the Forefront, along with Joaquín García Monge, and others who before and after have fought for our sovereignty to unite efforts in the noble of cause of harmony and peace among men and nations'] ("Encuentro por la paz" 19).<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, they published a manifesto of principles in *Seminario Universidad* that stressed social justice as an integral component of peace:

No podrá haber paz, mientras existan tugurios; no podrá haber paz, mientras no haya trabajo, justamente renumerado y al alcance de todos; no podrá haber paz, mientras no haya una justa y equitativa distribución de la riqueza; no podrá haber paz, mientras deambulen los niños, nuestros niños, por esas calles sin Dios y sin ley; no podrá haber paz, mientras algunas mujeres, nuestras mujeres, se vean compelidas a entregar sus cuerpos y hasta sus almas para llevar un poco más de pan a sus hogares; no podrá haber paz, mientras el campesino, no encuentre tierra para sostener a los suyos y darnos de comer a los demás. ("¿Qué es la paz?" 5)

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<sup>27</sup> Along with Naranjo, the group included writers, university professors, journalists, and artists, among them Isaac Felipe Azofeifa, Yolanda Rojas, Laura Vargas, José Rafael Cordero Croceri, Daniel Camacho, Lily Guardia, Rodolfo Solano Orfía, Carlos Morales, Jacinto Ordóñez, Julio Jurado del Barco, Cristina Zeledón and Luis Guillermo Herrera. *Soberanía* organized the *Marcha por la Paz* ('March for Peace') on October 24, 1986.

<sup>28</sup> The group's earlier mention of Joaquín García Monge is key here to understanding that implicit regional Leftist support as well as the continued link between an aesthetic and civic engagement espoused by Latin American intellectuals. García Monge was a novelist who founded the influential literary magazine *Repertorio Americano* and was also an active political militant credited with the founding of the *Partido de Alianza de Obreros, Campesinos e Intelectuales* ['Alliance Party of Workers, Peasants and Intellectuals'] in 1929. The party dissolved in 1931 to cede way to the Costa Rican Communist Party that would eventually be banned following the Revolution of 1948.

There can be no peace while there are still slums; there can be no peace while there is no work, justly compensated and within reach for everyone; there can be no peace while there is no fair and equitable distribution of riches; there can be no peace while children, our children, roam the streets without God and without law; there can be no peace while some women, our women, feel compelled to sell their bodies and even their souls just to bring a bit more bread to their homes; there can be no peace while the peasant cannot find land to support his family and feed the rest of us. (“What is Peace?” 5)

Between the lines, the vision of peace that clamored for social justice and liberty as an extension of a Latin American history of struggle meant an indirect support for the region’s revolutionary causes that clearly originated from a left-wing ideological position, such as the Sandinista movement, while also amplifying preoccupations of human rights activism and gender equality consciousness.

Though Arias Sánchez, unlike his predecessor, made a concerted effort to reach out to the Nicaraguan government as part of his peace plan, he nevertheless was mindful of not jeopardizing Costa Rica’s relationship with the United States. As his administration gained central prominence in the peace mediation, David Díaz notes that the additional scrutiny from *Soberanía* and the U.S. created a verbal trap for the Costa Rican president:

La alianza no declarada entre intelectuales, la lucha por la paz, y el Gobierno de Arias dependían [*sic*], por mucho, del lenguaje. Cualquier palabra que viniera de Arias con referencia a la guerra, la paz, los Estados Unidos y Nicaragua era fuente [*sic*] para ser evaluada y procesada por los analistas. En ese sentido, los intelectuales podían siempre sentir las mismas dudas que Washington experimentaba acerca del papel de Arias en el conflicto regional. (7)

The undeclared alliance between intellectuals, the fight for peace, and the Arias government depended, largely, on language. Any word that came from Arias with regards to war, peace, the United States, and Nicaragua became sources to be evaluated and processed by analysts. In this sense, the intellectuals could always experience the same doubts as Washington about the role of Arias in the regional conflict. (7)

As it turned out, Arias Sánchez failed to shrewdly navigate this discourse of peace among vacillating suspicions from both sides. Domestically, *Soberanía* quickly reproached the president’s remarks during a speech he gave at the United Nations when he claimed the

Sandinistas had metaphorically killed the figure of their namesake Augusto César Sandino, the Nicaraguan freedom fighter against US occupation in the 1930s, by what he perceived to be the menace and betrayal of a totalitarian, Marxist government.<sup>29</sup> Despite the proven ramifications of this declaration in contemporary hindsight, at the time such a statement represented for Naranjo and other *Soberanía* intellectuals a verbal concession with those enabling the conflict at the expense of denigrating the historical struggle of their neighbor. Discontent notwithstanding, the looming possibility of an escalated conflict prompted *Soberanía* to unify their support for Arias Sánchez at least during the early years of his administration and especially in view of the added prestige of the Nobel Peace Prize further consolidating Costa Rica's favorable global image as a peaceful democracy in the region.

However, behind this desired vision of peace and Arias Sánchez's characterization as an anti-imperialist hero, his narrative of pacification eventually lost favor with intellectuals who read his policies as a concession to foreign influence. In a series of vignettes published under the title *Los poetas también se mueren* ['Poets Also Die'] (1999), Naranjo examines this state of peace as the deceiving antidote to the restless sensation needed for social awakening and change:

Ella estaba consciente de que si hubiera nacido en tiempos de guerra habría alcanzado el rango de heroína, pero le tocaron años de paz en que se debía sacudir duro para despertar y predicar la catástrofe para la siembra de las alertas, porque la gente se acomoda en los sopores, en las agruras y en las siestas con las cortinas cerradas que pretenden ser el escenario de la noche. En tiempos de paz hay un peligro enorme de engañarse con la dulzura de una vida trivial, de un consumo desmedido y de un agotar los recursos naturales. En época de guerra, que no debe entenderse como lucha armada, la presencia de una serie de dificultades y problemas se deben superar para que sobresalgan los valores residentes en la fortaleza y el ingenio. La paz se entiende en términos que limitan

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<sup>29</sup> On September 24, 1986 Arias Sánchez said, "Queremos que, en La Haya, el mundo entero vea la verdad oculta en Nicaragua donde Sandino fue traicionado. Hace siete años Sandino resucitó para celebrar la libertad de un pueblo. Una vez más lo han asesinado" ['We want here at The Hague, for the whole world to see the hidden truth in Nicaragua where Sandino was betrayed. Seven years ago, Sandino resurrected to celebrate the freedom of a people. Once more they have assassinated him.'] (Arias Sánchez 30).

y no permiten crecimiento alguno, más bien encierran en un ambiente mediocre. Todo esto lo pensó mientras diseñaba estrategias de desestabilidad y ponía tormentas en un cielo azul de verano. (“Pretextos, protestas y textos” 97).

She was aware that if she had been born in times of war she would have already reached the rank of heroine, but she lived in years of peace in which one had to shake oneself hard to wake up and to preach the catastrophe for sowing alarms, because the people adjust to the stupor, in the bitterness and in the afternoon naps with the drawn curtains that claim to be the stage of night. In times of peace, there is an enormous danger of tricking oneself with the sweetness of a trivial life, of an unrestrained consumption, and of an exhausting of natural resources. In times of war, which should not be understood as armed conflict, the presence of a series of difficulties and problems should be overcome so that the residing values found in strength and ingenuity may shine. Peace is understood in terms that limit and do not allow any growth whatsoever, instead enclosing in a mediocre environment. All this she pondered while designing destabilizing strategies and placing storms in a blue summer sky. (“Pretexts, Protests and Texts” 97)

While echoing *Soberanía*'s interpretation that fighting for peace means fighting for social justice, Naranjo remains consistent in her critique against the lack of civic engagement rooted in the self-deception of a peaceful setting. The drawing of the window curtain to the outside world stands as the ultimate gesture of indifference, metaphorically drawing the curtain on any social problems and thus reinforcing the illusory narrative of a country without “drama.” For the heroine/non-heroine of the above passage, this type of peace tastes bitter, and she craves instead its conventional antithesis, war. Yet, here, war means combating the implications of an idea of peace synonymous with conformity and the absence of conflict. It means resisting the culture of consumption that has become even more pronounced, while also resisting the illusory and romantic narrative of the country in which she lives: peaceful, happy, democratic, different, and even superior to its neighbors. Again, the drawn curtains obstruct a clear vision of the circumstances as they stage the supposed encounter between lovers at night, but it is only the illusion of night, while the calm, blue sky outside alludes to the Costa Rican anthem: “bajo el límpido azul de tu cielo / blanca y pura descansa la paz / bajo el límpido azul de tu cielo / ¡vivan siempre el trabajo y la paz!” [Under the unsullied blue of your skies / peace rests, white and pure



/ under the unsullied blue of your skies / may peace and labor forever live!']. If the blue sky protects those ideals of peace and progress, the brewing of the storm speaks to the aesthetic disruption and political confrontation consistent with Naranjo's poetics of democracy to show that something is amiss. Ultimately, she presents a figure of resistance whose creative and political impetus remain undeterred by the perpetuated narrative of peace, which Naranjo views as the complacent endurance of mediocre circumstances, and, at best, a temporary pacification to redress the grievances of social injustice in the region.

### **The Hangover of Peace: *En esta tierra redonda y plana* (2001)**

From the onset, the title of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* presents conflicting qualifiers—and perhaps one might instinctively posit the easy dismissal of the nonsensical “flat earth” against the logical, scientifically proven “round earth.” Yet, Naranjo's placement of these adjectives together evokes the tension that surfaces between objective and subjective perspectives, or that confrontation between a perspective that impartially aims to represent fact and a perspective based on personal feelings, tastes or opinions. From a distance, it is obvious that the earth is round, but up close, standing on the ground, that objectivity can disappear. Similarly, the postwar sensibility of Central American literature is a constant tension of perspective to make sense of utopian failures; the aftermath of war is both immediate and distant, and thus, too subjective for one plausible narrative. To borrow Arias's phrasing, the poetic voice suffers from the clouded effects of a “hangover” of peace as the imposed outcome from the narrative of revolutionary defeat. From a mediated distance and on a signed set of accords, Central America becomes a region of “peace,” but the warring adjectives of the collection's title best elucidate the internal struggle of the lyric self to come to terms with the disillusion of her

utopian dreams, between an objective narrative of defeat and the subjective feeling that the battle is still not over.

In the first half of the collection, with noticeably shorter poems from Naranjo and titled simply with Roman numerals, the lyric self struggles with recollecting even small details. In poem “II,” the semiotic entities of the sign and the symbol hover teasingly within reach, juxtaposed with the trivialities of daily life, presumably the content for peacetime indulgence:

Impertinente signo del olvido las llaves dónde están la cita era antes no después y ese nombre en la punta de la lengua. Impertinente te acordás claro que sí y yo con persianas de dónde y cuándo. Impertinente símbolo de mejor apuntar y apunto destino sin saber por dónde qué inmenso es el olvido. (12, ll. 1-17)	Impertinent sign of oblivion the keys where are they the appointment was before no after and that name at the tip of the tongue. Impertinent you remember of course you do and I with curtains of where and when. Impertinent symbol to better aim and I aim destination without knowing where how immense is oblivion. (12, ll. 1-17)
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The personification of the sign and the symbol as “impertinent” gives the impression of an unwarranted disruption, almost as if these minimal foundations of expression have the audacity to demand the attention of the lyric self, who is presently preoccupied only with her immediate routine. Their independent functions, however, represent a call to first devise what surrounds her (“signo”) and then to make sense of what these things represent (“símbolo”) as her experience of forgetfulness prompts a deeper consideration to pinpoint what has been marked absent or erased. These unknown variables—the what, where and when of the matter—still elude her memory and dwell at the precipice of oral articulation (“en la punta de la lengua”), but they also seek written

articulation given that the meaning of the verb *apuntar* is “to jot down.” More importantly, the verb’s additional meaning “to aim” pontificates on the need for the lyric self to identify or reclaim a sense of purpose and direction as much as it values the act of inscription, itself. For the lyric voice, the immensity conferred to this projection of oblivion posits a sense of urgency to reclaim the past. After all, the instinct to jot something down is often done in a hurry to avoid immediately forgetting one’s train of thought. Yet another meaning of *apuntar* as the act of aiming or pointing a weapon is in obvious consonance with the urgent clamor of Central American revolutionary poetry as a verbal weapon against social injustice. When tracing the post-conflict cynicism incumbent in Naranjo’s work, the urgency here acutely stems from not wanting to forget both the merits of the 1948 revolution as well as the unfulfilled objectives of its promised democracy. Her urgency will eventually extend to a reclaiming of the entire region’s painful struggle.

For many poets in Central America, especially women poets, the aftermath of these revolutions manifests into a vocational angst as they confront the unsettled testimonies of their former lyrical denunciation and the perceived social mandate to neatly categorize these revolutions and armed struggles as a thing of the past. In Poem “VI,” the lyric self reflects on her attempts to follow that imperative, presenting the archives of her social and cultural denunciation as an intentional and stubborn decision. In that sense, her attitude reads as impertinent as the sign and symbol that dared to interrupt her musings before. She affirms:

Me atreví a archivarte  
y te archivé  
en la t de testimonio.  
Época de tu época  
respondona en silencios  
mezquina en altitudes  
valle de quehaceres  
para develar tiempos

I dared to archive you  
and I archived you  
in the t of testimony.  
Era of your era  
mouthy in silences  
stingy in altitudes  
valley of chores  
to uncover moments

en que mejor  
es no hacer nada.  
(16, ll. 1-10)

in which it is better  
to not do anything.  
(16, ll. 1-10)

The short length of the poem contrasts with the revelation that at one point the poetic speaker was capably defiant and vociferous, even labeling herself “respondona,” an unabashedly, gendered noun that negatively connotes a lippy or insolent female. The label could imply an unwelcome interruption from someone seen as speaking out of turn, perhaps even too readily able to supply an answer or excuse. With respect to Naranjo, this characterization is contextually applicable to several scenarios throughout her career as a public servant and poet, especially as a woman opining amidst a patriarchal milieu where women were expected to remain unseen and unheard. Yet, rather than rebellious, the use of the word “respondona” here strikes more as petulant considering the circumstantial silences that were still the outcome of these measured quips. Her responses remain muted, exhibiting no concerted effort on her behalf to outwardly instigate a dialogue. Locating herself among high altitudes reinforces that communicative stinginess as she comfortably descends into the “valle” of quotidian chores that translate to inaction. She might have an answer for everything, but not enough conviction to put forth the effort, or perhaps more somberly, not enough external assurance to consider it worthwhile.

That we are presented with the contours of a testimonial endeavor, but not the testimony, itself, highlights the dismissal and irrelevance of her previous efforts; the details remain secondary. Though the specific content is unknown, the decision to choose a repository under the label *testimonio* presumably indicates it was related to some form of social denunciation, but Naranjo’s portrayal of the lyric voice’s resigned cynicism here contrasts heavily with the urgency that defined testimonial literature from Central America during the 1980s, in which the genre took on a radically anti-literary and revolutionary character as much as it also outlined

dreams of forming a peaceful post-war society.<sup>30</sup> John Beverley, who is often credited with defining *testimonio* as a genre, stressed that the novel was the literature of the bourgeoisie while the *testimonio* was the literature of the proletariat, (*Against Literature* 85). As this anti-literary genre became synonymous with revolution, the Left, and subaltern resistance to oppressive dictatorial regimes, its validity suffered under the socio-temporal constraints that would eventually deem it inconsequential once these overt paradigms of oppression seemingly disappeared. Even Beverley declared the demise of the genre's utility when he states, "the moment of *testimonio* is over" and that testimonial texts "have become a nostalgia; that new forms of political imagination and organization are needed; that, like everything else in life, we have to move on" ("The Real Thing" 77-78). Yet, both the space and the direction to which the advocacy behind this historical witnessing must move on is an unsettled question, and it consequently also amounts to shelving the collective memory and identity that the *testimonio* purported to represent. Lacey Shauwacker notes that this gesture of resignation acquiesces to neoliberalism's demand for closure:

Postwar governments eager to implement neoliberal economic policies including unregulated enterprise and privatized social services, for example, justify amnesty and impunity, upon the same premise that epistemological and temporal closure is necessary to political development. For neoliberalism, such closure facilitates historical oblivion, not memory. ("Tengo que gritarlo")

By this account, moving on, then, would imply forgetting, rather than creating a space for the acknowledgement and remembrance of the historical injustice and struggle within the cultural imaginary. Like the above archived account of the poetic speaker in poem "VI," testimonial

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<sup>30</sup> Most notably, the publication of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) denounced Guatemala's military oppression and helped propagate the belief that the end of the armed struggle would bring about social change, while John Beverley's essays "Anatomía del testimonio" (1987) and "Margin at the Center" (1989) vacillate between ascribing a literariness quality to the genre.

literature has been shelved as irrelevant or exhausted in a post-conflict era, and thus, the need to directly access its testimonial claim diminishes in favor of a neat categorization. Though as Arias counters, the shelving of testimonial literature is the result of a U.S. centered and reductive criticism “because the politics with which it was invested were conceived in the United States in complete disregard with the status of testimonial writing in the continent” (“Enunciating Alleged Truths” 253). The external disregard for the political utility of these accounts does not deter the continued flourishing of *testimonio* throughout Latin America. Likewise, while the archival gesture in the above poem attempts to relegate and to limit the poetic voice’s discourse to a specific epoch in the same way that Beverley calls for both temporal and epistemological closure, Naranjo’s verse resists that closure. In other words, for however much the archiving of the poetic voice’s testimony dissuades her faculty of remembrance, the loss of memory cannot erase the silence nor the absence, therefore making the cultural crisis even more prominent.

Abraham Acosta notes that despite *testimonio*’s “critical and institutional ascendancy, the demise of Left-wing projects in Central America [left] in its wake a vacuum of alternative emancipatory critic-theoretical programs and a crisis of intellectual disillusionment” (“Of Failed Retreats”). Of course, Acosta’s assessment, much like Beverley’s, hinges upon the conventional framing of the *testimonio* within the binary of fiction/nonfiction (i.e., as the antithesis to traditional literature), the privileging of the subaltern voice over that of intellectuals, and namely, as a genre rooted in authentic prose. Although, as Laura Webb notes, many critics in their attempt to define *testimonio* have, in fact, “not demarcated the term, but rather highlighted the breadth of its scope....*testimonio* can and does take many different shapes and forms and consistently challenges, thwarts, and denies attempts at classification” (“Testimonio: The Assumption of Hybridity and Genre”). As noted in the Introduction, the verse of the *generación*

*comprometida* in Central America exhibits numerous examples of the hybridity of testimonial poetry with its attempt at historical witnessing and urgent call for revolution. Like the *testimonio*, poetry came to be regarded as a more democratic alternative to the literary privileging of the Boom's novels and canonical authorship, to the extent it was presented as such in its accessible portability and the poetry workshops that ran alongside literacy campaigns (Thakkar 19).

Naranjo's own referentiality of the term *testimonio* in "Poema VI" is a convergence of genre that likewise converges her political and aesthetic concern for the casual dismissal of the testimonial struggle for recognition. Despite the significant contrast in the conventional definitions of their genres, both *testimonio* and poetry succumbed to the neoliberal push to oblivion given the perception of their respective genres as tied to the vestiges of armed revolution and projects aimed at the democratization of culture in Central America. If Figueres' rhetorical interrogative about violins and tractors epitomized the spirit of the Second Republic's cultural revolution in Costa Rica, the Sandinista revolution of neighboring Nicaragua campaigned with the assertive declaration "el triunfo de la revolución es el triunfo de la poesía" ['the triumph of the revolution is the triumph of poetry']. The euphoria of this slogan permeated graffiti murals in the capital city of Managua and appeared on a large poster canvas behind the poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal when he accepted his appointed role as Minister of Culture in the newly formed government.

Advertently or not, ascribing this conditional element of triumph conversely presupposes that the failure of the revolution would also mean the failure of poetry. In effect, the triumph of the revolution in Nicaragua proved short lived, if not prematurely declared. Factions within the Sandinistas, the toll of civil war with the *contras*, the end of the Cold War, and the party's electoral defeat in 1990 contributed to the unraveling of the revolution. Like Costa Rica,

Nicaragua’s cultural politics would contend with the consolidation of a neoliberal economic model and an unclear ideological commitment to the arts that corroborate Acosta’s appraisal of a cultural vacuum stemming from both literary and political disillusionment. The incongruent outcomes of the region’s revolutions notably leave behind an unsettled question of how to perceive the efforts of the texts in solidarity with the precept of social change (whether from the canonical center, like poetry, or the margin, like *testimonio*). Implicitly, the meta-reflection of the *testimonio* comes under the purview of post-testimonial writing, or the more recognizable category of “memoir” for not having the same political urgency of *testimonios*. Sergio Ramírez’s *Adiós, Muchachos: Memorias de la revolución sandinista* (1999), Gioconda Belli’s *El país bajo mi piel* (2000) and Gabriela Selser’s *Banderas y harapos: Relatos de la revolución en Nicaragua* (2017), to name but a few, are examples of post-testimonial narratives and/or memoirs that address the intellectual, political, and cultural disillusion in the post-conflict era. Meanwhile, “subaltern” figures associated with the *testimonio* such as Rigoberta Menchú turned to writing poetry of their own. Regardless of the revolutionary impetus and subsequent intellectual disillusion shared by the two genres, the *testimonio* and its variants seek to articulate and to advocate for closure, while poetry as a genre resists closure.

Thus, Naranjo first tackles the notion of poetry as failure, or as an incomplete or insufficient effort. In poem “III,” the lyric voice offers a hypothetical conjecture of the infinitive “pensar” (*to think*) to show that, in practice, the exercise of thinking is not enough:

Y si pensar fuera suficiente	And if to think were enough
Pienso	I think
a veces lloro río	sometimes I cry I laugh
Pienso	I think
a veces siento no siento	sometimes I feel I don’t feel
Pienso	I think
a veces nazco muero	sometimes I am born I die
Pienso	I think



	nunca es suficiente		it is never enough
Pienso		I think	
	apenas comienzo		I barely start
Pienso		I think	
	soy casi sexo		I am almost sex
Pienso		I think	
	me encanto		I love myself
Pienso		I think	
	me desaparezco		I disappear
	porque si pensar supiera		because if I knew how to think
	me doblaría ausente		I would double myself absent
	para desaparecer pensando		to disappear thinking
	que un día fui pensamiento		that one day I was the thought
	de alguien que pensaba		of someone who was thinking
	y al pensar tal vez sentía		and while thinking maybe felt
	quizás insuficiente		perhaps insufficient
	inicio de un canto		beginning of a song
	que pensar es acto		for thinking is the act
	de movilizar ausencias.		of mobilizing absences.
	(13, ll. 1-27)		(13, ll. 1-27)

The imperfect subjunctive of the initial hypothetical conjecture conditions for the lyric self an opportunity to explore a second possibility different from the implied failure, or insufficiency. She exercises this second possibility through the repetition of the first-person present conjugation “pienso,” but the first three enactments of the verb produce conflicting actions—crying and laughter, feeling and non-feeling, birth and death—that seemingly undo or negate each other, but their simultaneity suggests no transition, and given that they form part of this hypothetical imperfect subjunctive, the lyric speaker’s present dwells in the past subjunctive. As her thoughts vacillate between sadness and joy, sensation and numbness, the beginning, and the end of mortality, what is clear is that moving on has not yet become a possibility she accepts.

The affirmation “nunca es suficiente” moreover implies that her preference would still be to feel and live through these experiences in their entirety, consequences and all, rather than just think through them, hence the continued emphasis on the precipice of completion, but never fruition (“apenas comienzo”, “soy casi sexo”). One cannot help but read this as a continuation of

the poetic voice's musings in "Proclamas" from *Mi guerrilla* in which she vehemently stated, "no se nace para pensarse" ['one is not born to ponder oneself'] (80, l.6) followed by the imperative to be fully consumed by the fire, by the prospect of sensation that would validate the purpose of one's mortality "en el rito de nacer y morir" ['in the ritual of being born and of dying'] (80, l. 9). Instead, as the stanza of that poem reveals, the source of her "voracious" lament is a different emotional and sensorial experience altogether: the pain of regret, of experiencing life without really living, and that, too, multiple times, which perhaps speaks to a collective mechanization or to an experience of multiple lost possibilities for her: "y se nace y se muere / tantas veces / que duele la piel y el alma / de nacer y morir / sin vivir" ['and one is born and one dies / so many times / that the skin and the soul hurt / from being born and dying / without living'] (80, ll. 10-14). Metaphorically, the skin and the soul suffer from the pain of not bringing to fruition the respective form and content of her ultimate medium of purpose: the words of her poetry.

Like "Proclamas," poem "III" serves as a metapoetic reflection of vocational purpose and limitation, a delineation of the poetic and intellectual parameters within which the lyric voice knows at least how to operate. That is, she knows that to think implies careful consideration, reason for which she modifies the original hypothetical conjecture so that instead of assessing sufficiency, she speculates how best to employ the thought process so that its value can also lie in what it fails to produce. She does not seek immediate answers or to make sense of the absence just yet; she wants to first attend to the absence and acknowledge the vacuum. Of what she is certain is that she would disappear, and her deliberate choice not only to disappear, but to reproduce her absence invites the possibility for someone to recall her. She finds solace, literally, in the thought that she once occupied the thought of someone else, or that someone else

sympathized with her, and in doing so, validated that her thought was worth thinking and that her struggle is worth remembering.

The various iterations of “pensar” as an infinitive, noun, gerund, imperfect and present verb tenses in the poem stand testament to an ongoing action and solidarity of thought that clamors both for what could have been and what could still be. In this way, the lyric voice reframes the insufficiency of these absences as productive points of departure that specifically guide this thought to a poetic endeavor through the prospect of a “canto” (“y al pensar tal vez sentía / quizás insuficiente / inicio de un canto”). She, therefore, reaffirms perhaps the most important possibility for her: the initial conceiving of a poem. For the lyric self, as well as for Naranjo, the need to signal these absences propels her efforts at mobilization, a simultaneous aesthetic and civic engagement with a lingering testimonial impulse to recall both the dreams and the failures of the region’s revolutionary past and latent impetus. It is to recall the sensation that accompanied the utopian hope of her ideas. The shortfalls of Central America’s revolutions and armed struggles do not take away from the righteous thought behind the causes they represent. By declaring in the final two lines of the poem that to think is equivalent to action, she reaffirms the poet’s obligation to serve as an intellectual mediator and validates the worth of her perspectives and efforts both in the private and public spheres even if they prove inconclusive.

Indeed, poem “III” underscores that limitation of thought begets limitation of action. Consistently, Naranjo’s verse attributes this inaction as stemming from the perception that what has been said is a given and that nothing more can be added nor questioned. Though I will discuss Naranjo’s final collection *Oficio de oficios* later in the chapter, it is noteworthy here to reference her poem “Oficio de pensar” [“Occupation of Thinking”], in which she expands on the obligation to pay homage to a whole tradition of thinkers precisely by giving extensive thought

to their philosophical ruminations, whether that be to doubt them or to understand them better.

The proper reception of these pronouncements entails more than merely repeating them as she calls for an active engagement and reception. She adds:

Deber se conjuga con hacer esfuerzos  
por derrotar el silencio con silencios fértiles  
por ganar la propiedad de una voz clara  
por traer luz a la oscuridad más cerrada  
y cultivar la paz en respeto a la armonía  
de este agonizar tan agudo  
en la pasión desbordada  
de pensamientos inconclusos.  
El oficio de pensar  
puede ser escribir  
en una pizarra negra  
múltiples preguntas  
para olvidar por siempre  
obvias respuestas.  
(58, ll. 12-25)

Obligation is conjugated by making efforts  
to defeat the silence with fertile silences  
to gain ownership of a clear voice  
to bring light to the most enclosed darkness  
and to cultivate peace in respect of harmony  
from this agonizing so acute  
in the overflowing passion  
of inconclusive thoughts.  
The occupation of thinking  
can be to write  
on a black chalkboard  
multiple questions  
to forever forget  
obvious responses.  
(58, ll. 12-25)

The appearance of the word “deber” plays with the visual recognition of it as both a noun and a verb in that it can read as the noun “obligation,” but it also follows the recognizable form of the infinitive in Spanish with its “-er” ending. As if to avoid misinterpretation, the poetic speaker is quick and clear in prompting its conjugation, which is to say, she stresses that this obligation should model the preferred trajectory of converting thought into action, theory into practice, and commitment into effort.

In a similar reorientation of her multiplied absences as an encouraging platform for fructiferous thought, Naranjo nuances an open-ended prospect of silence (“silencio fértil”) against the abstention negatively associated with regular silence, and markedly, any mechanism or element that would obstruct visible and auditory representation. To that end, the fertile silence supports a receptive parameter for the emergence of a clear voice, while the shedding of light combats the darkness that threatens to opaque presence. Ultimately, the voice and light lead to an

elaboration of peace “en respeto a la armonía” and congruent with the acknowledgement of suffering (“de este agonizar tan agudo”), which is a different conceptualization from the neoliberal staging of peace that would relegate these feelings to oblivion. For Naranjo, any harmonious setting is only possible to the extent that it acknowledges what is truly felt, even if it cannot yet be represented. Following Panagia, this exploration of the “experience of unrepresentability”, allots the poetic speaker an honest exploration of feeling, as she begins by identifying the exhibition of anguish and the overflowing of passion, or sentiment (“pasión desbordada”) that elicits a deeper recognition and analysis. Subsequently, this agony of doubt permeates the inconclusive thoughts that need to be formed into questions so the remnants of the past can be thought through as many times necessitated to construe the basis for due remembrance. The final lines of “Oficio de pensar” underscore that the questions pose more value than a neat resolution, more than the repetition of conventional “obvias respuestas.”

The lyric self of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* concretely locates herself at the precipice of the millennium to present her testimony in the poem “XXIV”:

<p>Cuando alguien diga  mil novecientos noventa y nueve  contestaré presente  ahí estuve  agonizante y viva  entre presagios de guerra  voracidad de imperio  miles de asesinados  en mi tierra grande</p>	<p>When someone says  nineteen ninety-nine  I will answer present  I was there  dying and alive  among omens of war  voracity of empire  thousands of assassinated victims  in my gigantic land</p>
<p>el concepto nacionalismo  hecho transnacional circunstancia  y esa imagen confusa  de la patria sin bandera  sin himno sin escudo</p>	<p>the concept of nationalism  made transnational circumstance  and that confused image  of the homeland without flag  without anthem without shield</p>
<p>y el pueblo con mano extendida  por el pan</p>	<p>and the people with extended hand  for bread</p>

por la justicia  
por la libertad

for justice  
for freedom

puertas tan anchas para pocos  
y tan angostas para muchos  
(37, ll. 1-20)

doors so wide for a few  
and so narrow for many  
(37, ll. 1-20)

As she gives account to the warfare and geopolitical influence for which so many lives were targeted, her testimonial voice simultaneously represents the silenced dead and the surviving witnesses (“agonizante y viva”), while the shifting future and past verb tenses in the first stanza (“contestaré”, “estuve”) confirm the concurrent past, present and, likely, future affront to the continental sovereignty that has afflicted Latin America (“mi tierra grande”) for so long. The lyric speaker’s simultaneous testimony of both dying and being alive defies the conventional timeline that would call for her to move on or to surpass the collective memory of this historical trauma. The specific mention of the year 1999 evokes the ubiquitous apocalyptic prophecies made by Nostradamus, the French astrologer best known for his poetic quatrains containing alleged predictions for the future, but the apocalyptic prophecy also has Biblical undertones. In particular, the ominous “presagios de guerra” portends a future battle of good versus evil yet to materialize that is reminiscent of Biblical reference to the Armageddon, that final war waged on Earth between the forces of God and demonic leadership to bring about the end of times. Set to arise when the need to undo the oppression of believers is greatest, it is this final battle that prefaces the world’s Final Judgement when all will stand trial before God.

Thus, the year 1999 is not as important or significant as the semblance of finality it represents. Its inclusion in Naranjo’s poem designates an arbitrary temporal marker from which the poetic speaker puts the legacy of this regional conflict on trial and by association her own poetic and political legacy. Hence, she stresses that justice has not been delivered for her people, whose outstretched hand evokes that of a destitute beggar asking for alms. Coupled with the

designation “voracidad de imperio,” the image ascertains that rather than giving, imperial motives have greedily devoured the riches that could have been distributed to these very hands. Biblical scripture details that the doors or gates to the Kingdom of Heaven reserve a narrow welcome, if not outright denial, for those individuals who cannot divest themselves of greed and riches. In the New Testament, a wealthy young man asks Jesus what he must do to secure the treasure of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. He is advised to sell his possessions and give to the poor. Seeing the young man dejected by the prospect, Jesus responds, “it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 19: 23-26). In the final lines of “XXVI”, Naranjo inverts that Biblical affirmation when she pairs the width of doors “para pocos” (i.e, the powerful) while the doors of terrestrial justice and riches remain narrow “para muchos” (i.e, the people). Like the outstretched hands that mark the inequality between the privileged and destitute, the exploiters and the exploited, the oppressors and the oppressed, the poem undermines the current notion of a post-conflict, peaceful setting and anticipates the continued fight for a just society.<sup>31</sup>

While the lyric voice of *Mi guerrilla*’s “Mea Culpa” expressed her remorse for not having enacted the justice she preached, the lyric self of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* assumes a more clinical and objective stance. In the second stanza of the poem “XXIV,” she finds fault with what she first identifies conventionally as a national crisis of representation. Her remark on

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<sup>31</sup> Read in its entirety, Naranjo’s poem places her testimony in dialogue with Liberation Theology, the synthesis of Christian thought and political activism whose socio-economic analysis identifies the sin of greed as responsible for undermining the well-being of the poor and the powerless in society (termed as the Church’s “preferential option for the poor”). Developed by Latin American Catholic priests committed to social movements and armed revolt, most notably the Salvadorean priest Óscar Romero and the Nicaraguan priest/poet Ernesto Cardenal, Liberation Theology emphasized the theological call for a just society as the measure to denounce poverty and human rights violations. Figures like Romero and Cardenal saw themselves as the voice of the voiceless. The authoritarian Right-wing governments of their respective countries held both their religious and literary activities in contempt of the state, reason for which Romero was assassinated in 1980.

the dismantled concept of nationalism “hecho transnacional circunstancia” indirectly engages with the critical turn to postmodern debates applied to Latin Americanist discourse and spearheaded by John Beverley, José Oviedo and Ileana Rodríguez in the early nineties. These debates sought an alternative theorization on the relationship between literature, culture and politics in a post-Cold War, post-Central American armed conflict setting. As Graciela Montaldo notes, Latin American postmodernism heralded a new era:

It therefore became accepted that a new chapter was beginning, one marked by aestheticization, weak thought and minor politics. Universalist logic and the politics of the multitudes were abandoned by local logics and minority politics. Women, the indigenous, ethnic minorities, and migrants all made demands for their rights, and society fragmented into multiple identities in a reversal of Latin American modernity’s general movement toward homogenization. (161)

Specifically, these debates analyzed the negotiations of collective identity within the fluid contours of transnationalism, broadly understood as the diffusion and extension of social, political, and economic processes from individual states to a global system. Postmodernism thus functions on the premise that recognition of Latin American cultural production does not emanate “from an advanced capitalist center outward toward a still dependent neocolonial periphery (conveniently leaving the power of agency at the hands of the center)” (Beverley and Oviedo 4). Rather, postmodernism conceives of a peripheral center that attends to the impact of how these postcolonial “contingencies”—the unresolved crisis of the political Left, the dominance of neoliberal economic models and the challenges of (re)democratization—destabilize traditional notions of modernity’s nation-state as a space of demarcated geographic borders and fixed citizenry.

Categorically, the postmodern debate with regards to Latin America aims to debunk the narrative of one historical project or grand myth of modernization (be that of development, revolution, or emancipation) in the disillusioned wake of the Left’s failed mobilization in the



region. Yet, for all these efforts at demystifying the illusion of one modernizing avenue, Ronaldo Munck notes this postmodern angle still consolidates one narrative of failure brought about by foreign aggression and interference: “it seems that the appeal of the ‘noble savage’ is still a powerful one: better a glorious failure than a critical realistic confrontation with the world around us” (17). In other words, Latin American postmodernism sustains the conventional demarcation that centralizes this villainous foreign aggressor as the downfall of the Third World’s noble cause of “an alternative non-capitalist modernity” rooted in socialism (Beverley and Oviedo 5). Postmodernism’s Latin Americanist proponents struggle with divesting this alternative from their benchmark analysis of “the long-term viability of democratic construction in Latin America” (Beverley and Oviedo 6). For them, the revolutionary experiments for political autonomy in Cuba and Nicaragua, Allende’s “peaceful socialism” in Chile, and even traditional print-based media clearly failed due to the force of the United States’ political and cultural hegemonic drive in the hemisphere (Beverley and Oviedo 5).

Consequently, Latin America, especially under the auspices of neoliberal re-democratization, propels postmodernist thought to urgently address the relationship between aesthetics and democracy. As Beverley and Oviedo underscore, “what is at stake in the Latin American discussion is the relation of the problem of democratization and social integration to the new sense of cultural and aesthetic agency postmodernism posits” (10-11). Given the role traditional literature partook in the utopian constructions of a new world order for the region, a reorientation of this relationship beyond parameters of political commitment and artistic autonomy helps nuance the complexity of these perceived revolutionary and literary failures ascribed to certain genres, particularly that of poetry in Central America. Of course, as we have seen in the study of Naranjo’s oeuvre, the case of Costa Rican democracy persists as a relevant

example and/or benchmark of uninterrupted democratic viability that prefaces the postmodernist debate in Latin American studies. Still, Naranjo questions this democratic viability if what sustains it are superficial myths that present Costa Rica as a “natural” democracy and the Edenic construction of a tropical Arcadia, or as Cortés suggests, “la utopía en acronía” [‘a timeless utopia’] that does not exactly translate into the progressive undercurrents of Utopian visions (15). Her poetry underscores that any disillusion is predicated on both the aesthetic and political dismantling of the image.

In the second stanza of poem “XXIV,” more than a commentary on modernity’s cohesive nationalist project (“el concepto nacionalismo”) versus the postmodern optic of transnational states to decentralize hegemonic centers (“transnacional circunstancia”), the lyric voice once again positions the image itself, as the fundamental point of departure for her aesthetic and civic engagement: “y esa imagen confusa / de la patria sin bandera / sin himno sin escudo.” Pointedly, this subtraction of patriotic symbols confronts the *patria* with its own critical introspection. If within the framework of Latin American aspirations of modernity, the consolidation of national and regional signifiers was a crucial part of campaigns for self-determination, revolutions and democracy, Naranjo presents the image of this “confused” patria to criticize the extent to which these campaigns purported to enact projects of national liberation at the expense of compromising national identity. Ultimately, she points to what is a failure of definition, if not betrayal, to the original cause of inclusion and representation for the people who comprise the nation. Viewed from this inward turn, nationalism and projects of liberation in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Latin America unravel not only because of external imperial forces, *perestroika*, or the signing of the peace accords. Symbolically, the battle was lost much before, when a Soviet model permeated Cuban politics, when a law decreed the Sandinista red-black horizontal bicolor the de facto

secondary flag of Nicaragua, or even when a country like Costa Rica proudly flaunts the title of being called the “Switzerland of America.”

In other words, the problem with these aesthetic and political confluences is that they amount to empty allegories and superficial symbols of the nation and discourage independent imaginings of what these *patrias* could be beyond revolutionary dictates. Within Latin America’s revolutionary hindsight, if the illusion rests on full emancipation and the national diffusion of culture, the disillusion arises when the image of the *patria* cannot be emancipated from these conditional symbolic addendums that muddled measures of citizenship, cultural policy, and artistic freedom. To varying degrees across Central America, specifically, these social movements and the emphasis on the democratization of culture capitulated to the very oppression and censorship against which they fought. Granted, Naranjo’s experience in Costa Rica as a poet affiliated with a socialist democratic ideology is in no way commensurate with the level of political persecution and artistic obstruction encountered by many of the revolutionary poets in neighboring countries, even at the hands of their own parties and movements (the cases of Roque Dalton and Ernesto Cardenal stand out in that respect). Yet, their shared experience of interrupted civic engagement brings to the forefront the occupational parameters of the contemporary Central American poet, particularly given the tradition of Latin American modernity’s *letrados*, the designation Ángel Rama uses to reference those lettered intellectuals who used writing to consolidate the idea and the image of the nation. More importantly, because she knows she will not suffer the same level of repercussions, Naranjo uses her civic and poetic platforms within a privileged space of democracy to denounce the lingering social injustice even in peacetime, much like the heroine of her vignette.

Whether the goal is the democratization of culture or civic representation for all, Naranjo's poetry resumes a lyrical urgency that contrasts significantly with the overarching cynicism articulated in the narrative works of the *literatura de posguerra*. With the aim of enacting peace and social justice, the poetic voice gauges what matters most to her in poem "X":

¿Me importa importa?  
 Poco me importa  
 si falta una coma  
 o un punto  
 si la b grande  
 la lleva beso  
 o si en la suma  
 alguien se equivoca.  
 Poco me importa  
 la ley que me quita  
 o la ley que me da  
 pues de leyes no se vive  
 ni se come  
 pero sí me importa  
 que de leyes sí se muera.  
 Poco me importa  
 recordar tus olvidos  
 adivino tus reproches  
 los mismos reproches  
 los eternos.  
 Me importa una cama  
 me importa un techo  
 un pan un amor  
 para ese todos  
 que los políticos disuelven  
 en unos cuantos.  
 (20, ll. 1-26)

Does it matter matter to me?  
 It matters little to me  
 if a comma is missing  
 or a period  
 if the letter b  
 is how you spell kiss  
 or if in the sum  
 someone messes up.  
 It matters little to me  
 the law that subtracts  
 or the law that adds  
 from laws one does not make a living  
 nor does one eat  
 but it does matter to me  
 that from laws one can die  
 It matters little to me  
 to remember your forgetfulness  
 I can guess your reproaches  
 the same reproaches  
 the eternal ones.  
 What matters to me is a bed  
 what matters to me is a roof  
 a bread some love  
 for that all  
 that politicians dissolve  
 into a few.  
 (20, ll. 1-26)

The question of defining meaningful policy surfaces through the arbitrary character of the laws parsed for comparison. On the one hand there is the whimsical arbitrariness of orthographic rules, an aesthetic addition or subtraction deemed seemingly innocuous by the lyric voice ("poco me importa / la ley que me quita / o la ley que me da"). On the other hand, there is the legislative threat of unrestrained arbitrariness, bordering on autocratic, of laws that would sanction death

("pero sí me importa / que de leyes sí se muera"). The latter represents for her a contravention of the inviolable human right to life, especially if these capital punishment laws do not afford due process or when governments use executions to silence their opponents. The comparison between the arbitrary regulation of these laws should not be understood as the contraposition of superficial aesthetics versus discriminatory politics. Rather, aesthetics conditions the lyric self's identification of political struggle and defines her civic engagement. To that point, she enumerates her grievances through a series of images that formulate her standard of peace and social justice: the right to a bed, a roof, bread, and love. So, while these laws do not legislate the parameters of her poetic occupation ("pues de leyes no se vive / ni se come"), they do give her vocational purpose, one that would denounce the most pressing political threat to democracy: the aesthetic subtraction of the privileged "unos cuantos" from the inclusive "todos."

Together, the list of things that matter most to the poetic voice (the bed, the roof, bread, and love) become symbols of human rights and equitable welfare, conventionally understood as the public or governmental responsibility to ensure every citizen has the minimal provisions for a good life. She presents this list as a democratic confrontation that challenges how to safeguard these items as rights within a model of social inclusion by rule of law. Therefore, the idea of securing these initial tangible items (the bed, the roof, the bread) speaks to the need for laws to guarantee health, shelter, and sustenance while the intangible acknowledgement of love broadens the notion of what constitutes the human right to love given its many facets (romantic love, familial love, love of work, love of learning, love of God, etc.) Even within human rights treaties, love does not factor explicitly as a protected right, though it is an integral component in the formulation of family rights, religious freedoms, the right to marry, and the freedom from

discrimination against sexual orientation, all of which serve as legal frameworks that impact the degree to which humans can freely express their love for others.<sup>32</sup>

In short, the lyric voice stresses that laws which have a direct impact on social welfare matter. Moreover, the placement of “un pan” and “un amor” in the same line levels their importance in her defense of humanity’s needs. For however obvious and unequivocal these basic tenets may seem to her, she insists on naming them outright to underscore the political struggle for social justice still pending. By the end of the poem, her reaffirmed ideological commitment unapologetically dismisses any official discourse that stipulates oblivion and reproach to the utopian visions she had in the past (“poco me importa / recordar tus olvidos / adivino tus reproches / los mismos reproches / los eternos”). In a supposed post-conflict era, her concern for egalitarianism transcends the systematic periodization that designates experiences as “post-anything”—the prefix is as inconsequential as the placement of a comma or the choice to opt for a “B” instead of a “V.” What is immutable for her is human dignity, and as such, she cannot compromise on her humanity, on that which connects her to the greater human experience of love (“un amor”) and of poetic creation (“un pan”). Octavio Paz once described poetry to be the “pan de los elegidos” [‘bread of the chosen ones’], while the Salvadorean poet and militant Roque Dalton famously linked bread to the defense of poetry as an egalitarian pursuit: “creo que

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<sup>32</sup> For most of her life, Naranjo, herself, closeted her sexual orientation as a lesbian for fear of workplace discrimination and legal retribution. Though she lived to see the 1971 ratification of the decriminalization of homosexuality in Costa Rica, she would not live to see Costa Rica become the first (and only) Central American country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2020. By comparison, the U.S. did not ratify this decriminalization until 2003, and within Central America, Nicaragua and Panama would follow suit only until 2008. El Salvador and Honduras ratified laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in 2010 and 2013, respectively. Guatemala has yet to ratify laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

el mundo es bello / que la poesía es como el pan, de todos” [‘I believe that the world is beautiful / that poetry is like bread, for everyone’] (“Como tú” ll. 8-9).

Hence, just as the poetic voice cannot disavow her poetic commitment, neither can Naranjo. Her unwavering aesthetic and civic engagement position the poem within a tradition of Central American social poetry that advocates on behalf of the written word as a symbol of humanity and that, moreover, demands its utterance. In *Canciones de amor y pan* (1965), Jorge Debravo (founder of the *Círculo de Poetas* in Costa Rica) refers to a spectrum of classification in which the lyric self’s measure of humanity depends on his freedom to employ words in “Soy hombre”:

Soy hombre, he nacido,  
tengo piel y esperanza.  
Yo exijo por lo tanto,  
que me dejen usarlas.

I am man, I have been born,  
I have skin and hope.  
I demand as such  
that I be allowed to use them.

No soy dios: soy un hombre  
(como decir un alga).  
Pero exijo calor en mis raíces,  
almuerzo en mis entrañas.  
No pido eternidades  
llenas de estrellas blancas.  
Pido ternura, cena,  
silencio, pan, casa...

I am not god: I am a man  
(like saying seaweed).  
But I demand warmth in my roots,  
lunch in my entrails.  
I do not ask for eternities  
full of white stars.  
I ask for tenderness, dinner  
silence, bread, house...

Soy hombre, es decir,  
animal con palabras.  
Y exijo, por lo tanto,  
que me dejen usarlas.  
(ll. 1-16)

I am man, which is to say,  
animal with words.  
I demand, thus,  
that I be allowed to use them.  
(ll. 1-16)

The beginning affirmation “soy hombre” establishes two parameters of identification—the skin that gives him form, and the hope that gives him an expectation of ideas, both of which meta-poetically set up the potential to reconcile his condition of man into expression. However, the parenthetical simile that likens his condition of man to that of algae offers no distinction between

the organisms with respect to their condition of existence. Thus, he views himself as an entity without feeling or cognitive reasoning, traits and characteristics that distinguish man from plants, which also places Debravo's poem in dialogue with Darío's estimation that trees and rocks are lucky to not have to feel the pain and agony of human consciousness in "Lo fatal."<sup>33</sup>

Unlike Darío's poem, the lyric self of "Soy hombre" demands to experience sensation and consciousness as a link to his humanity and greater historical collective roots ("pero exijo calor en mis raíces"). His petition for "ternura, cena, silencio, pan, casa" are not so different from what Naranjo's poem listed as important, and like Naranjo, Debravo's yearning for "pan" again speaks to the vocational pursuit of earning one's "bread and butter," (i.e., creating poetry). Both Naranjo and Debravo similarly list "pan" as a human plea to indulge freely in the creative pursuit of the word, to earn a decent living, and to give meaning to one's life. A rephrasing of Naranjo's earlier line would be applicable here: "de eso sí se come y sí se vive."

To that point, the poetic voice acknowledges a further designatory transition from animal to human when he politically negotiates what separates the two ("Soy hombre, es decir, animal con palabras"). The clear distinction is the ability for speech and for abstraction of thought beyond our repertoire of senses, or capacity to feel. No other species has true language with open-ended grammar, no other species has dedicated time to the pursuit of knowledge and the sciences, to the pursuit of literature, music, and art, or for that matter, any pursuit that does not contribute directly to reproduction or survival. In the final line of the poem, the poetic voice's ultimate plea for words is tied to the hope that they will help him make sense of what is not yet

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<sup>33</sup> Dichoso el árbol, que es apenas sensitivo,  
y más la piedra dura porque esa ya no siente  
pues no hay dolor más duro que el dolor de ser vivo  
ni mayor pesadumbre que la vida consciente"  
(919, ll. 1-4)

Fortunate is the tree that is barely sentient  
and more so the hard stone that no longer feels  
for there is no greater pain than that of being alive  
nor greater sorrow than conscious life  
(919, ll. 1-4)



understood, or that they will one day represent what has yet to be represented. Words confirm his most humane quality as well as his poetic aspirations, especially when the combination of his demands illustrate the elements to create poetry: the use of his skin represents form, the sentiment of hope represents the fostering of an idea, and the use of words the means with which to reconcile the expression of form and content. Yet, insofar as he cannot use or vocalize these words, the poem signals an unfinished project of representation that dwells at the political precipice of sensation. When it comes to Central American social poetry, these two poems represent distinct eras (the revolutionary fervor of the 1960s and the post-conflict disenchantment of the 1990s), and their poets represent two different ideological affiliations (Debravo's socialist commitment to Naranjo's social democratic one). Yet, their poetics rely on the same imagery to communicate their shared concern for human and/or social welfare. Thus, Naranjo's poem sustains the illusion of hope embedded in Debravo's poem.

*En esta tierra redonda y plana* seeks that same sensation of hope and revolutionary fervor. The collection's post-conflict sensibility vacillates between disenchantment and hope, each measured by the extent to which the lyric voice can discern the collective resonance of feeling from poetic creation. In two consecutive poems "XVI" and "XVII," she offers a litmus test to compare the immediacy of the aesthetic experience between a poem and poetry, respectively. "XVI" begins with the meta-poetic account of the lyric self's sensorial response to the reading of a poem:

Poema de otro poema

leo y todo se parece a lo que leí una vez  
 despacio  
 más despacio que antes  
 como la primera flor que se acabó  
 sobre las demás flores de siempre

veo y todo se parece a lo que vi una vez

Poem about another poem

I read and everything resembles what I once read  
 slowly  
 slower than before  
 like the first flower that reached its end  
 on top of the same flowers as always

I see and everything resembles what I once saw

hondo  
más hondo que antes  
sobre el murmullo quejoso del viento  
el eco sin responso de siempre

deep  
deeper than before  
over the complaining murmur of the wind  
the unanswered echo as always

oigo y todo se parece a lo que oí una vez  
agudo  
más agudo que antes  
con letanías de campanas  
para redoblar la misma muerte de siempre  
(26, ll. 1-16)

I hear and everything resembles what I once heard  
sharp  
sharper than before  
with litanies of bells  
to double the same death as always  
(26, ll. 1-16)

As an inversion to Panagia's description of the sensation that accompanies an idea, this instance of reading produces no new sensation for the poetic voice because everything resembles what she has been exposed to previously. In fact, her reading of the poem exacerbates the effects of this sameness—the slowness drags even more, the depth extends further, and the high-pitched sound becomes more piercing—indicating a compounded homogenization of ideas. If we read Naranjo through the postwar lens of cynicism, there is no distinction that confirms a proliferation of revolutionary ideals—and revolutionary change even less so. Instead, the replication of sameness underscores a continuation of the status quo. The litany of bells produces the sense of one solemnizing and indisputable sound, an evocation of ecclesiastical authority that is synonymous with hierarchical power structures.

Moreover, the lack of sensation coupled with the absence of ideas dilute the conviction behind the ideals she once held:

creo y todo se parece a lo que creí una vez  
liviano  
más liviano que antes  
con las caras de dioses  
tantos dioses  
para el terrible dios de siempre  
(26, ll. 17-22)

I believe and everything resembles what I once believed  
light  
lighter than before  
with the faces of gods  
so many gods  
for the terrible god as always  
(26, ll. 17-22)

If the utopian aspiration was to eradicate such hierarchies and to create “el nuevo estado revolucionario,” the lyric voice's inability to discern any difference suggests the contrary; the

same hierarchy persists, such that any state that emerged (secular, democratic, communist, etc.) all produce a parallel disenchantment. She reiterates this disillusion when she traces the continued oppression of imperialist motives through the poem “Este dolor incontenido de centroamérica,” appearing later in the collection and in which she proclaims, “y el fascismo volvió con disfraces democráticos” [‘and fascism returned under the guise of democracy’] (154, l. 178). She ties the plight of Central America into one experience of sovereign infringement. The means of oppression are executed differently, but the outcome is the same. In the case of Costa Rica, despite undergoing a series of nuanced transitions—the liberal reforms of 1924, the alliance between *republicanos*, communists and the church in 1943, the founding of the Second Republic in 1948, the social democratic platform of the PLN in the 1960s, and the neoliberal turn in the 1980s—its complex articulation between the state, society, and the nation remains neatly categorized under the word “democracy” as a compounded homogenization of ideas that creates an omnipresent myth of citizenship and cultural identity. The pressure to adhere to these markers of citizenship and identity discourages the reinvention or reformulation of Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism.

Just as the reformulation of this democratic exceptionalism seems futile, the same quality applies to cultural production, hence why the poetic voice indicates that this is a “poem about another poem.” The replication of form makes more pronounced the absence of ideas, or a sense of purpose for her poetic endeavors. As Beatriz Cortez points out, given the clear focus of revolutionary discourse as that which contributes to the popular cause and to the urgency of denouncing social injustice, the “expiration of revolutionary fantasy” opens up the reevaluation of cultural production in the region: “el final formal de las luchas revolucionarias en América Central patrocinó, no solamente la re-evaluación de aquellos proyectos políticos que antes habían

sido incuestionables, sino también la reinención de la producción cultural en Centroamérica [‘The formal end to the revolutionary struggles in Central America prompted, not only the reevaluation of those political projects that were once unquestionable, but also the reinvention of the Central American cultural production’] (26-27). Yet, Cortez identifies the stages of this reinvention in contemporary postwar fiction as a thematic turn to the disenchantment of urban life with its violence, corruption, and chaos, all factors that prompt authors to explore the private, intimate sphere once again as a site for the construction of subjectivity. Naranjo’s earlier prose and poetry prefaced that urban thematic turn, but her expression of disenchantment deals with an urban, peaceful setting mired by bureaucratic obstacles. Nevertheless, the overwhelming sense of resemblance encountered by the lyric voice reveals the struggle to reorient her experience of cultural production and purpose. Like Naranjo, she has seen this attempt at reform before, but to no avail, and even as she shares the intimate experience of reading this poem on her own, there is not much comfort in her solitude.

As the resemblance that surrounds her significantly compromises her ability to make new meaningful connections through the acts of reading, seeing, hearing, and believing, the final stanza asserts that at least one act continues to establish a notional appeal—albeit one tinged with the feeling of sadness—and that is the act of love:

y amo  
y todo se parece a lo que amé una vez  
triste  
más triste que antes  
porque algo se fuga  
en la misma fuga de siempre  
(26, ll. 23-28)

and I love  
and everything resembles what I once loved  
sad  
sadder than before  
because something escapes  
in the same escape as always  
(26, ll. 23-28)

This final stanza opens slightly different than the previous ones. The break between lines 23 and 24 makes it so that the expression of love is decidedly noticeable and separate from the

conclusion of resemblance that accompanies the other verbs. Unlike her ideological conviction and the disillusion with her artistic resonance, the love she feels is unquestionable and supported by the constancy of resemblance. Its tragedy resides in the experience of interruption, or rather, the sensation of something fleeting speaks to an unfulfilled experience. Within a post-conflict sensibility, the abrupt break allegorizes the unexpected dissolution of the revolutionary struggles in the region while still taking a moment to memorialize what she once held (and still holds) dear. Her nostalgia thus reads as a simultaneous sentimental attachment as well as a recognition of loss. On a meta-poetic level, the revelation at the beginning of the poem that “XVI” is, in fact, about “another poem” grants additional consideration to the wandering “fuga de siempre” in terms of the poetic search for the elusive meaning behind words and images, reminiscent of Naranjo’s search for the ever-elusive *don nadie*.

For the lyric voice, the perception that something has escaped confronts her with the task of recovering and/or activating meaning from what she describes as tragically being the same. In other words, it also affords her the possibility to seek that lost meaning conditioned by her approximation to the poem, itself. That resonates with Paz’s view of poems as sites of possibility insofar as they become sites of active participation between the poem and the reader/listener:

El poema es una posibilidad abierta a todos los hombres, cualquiera que sea su temperamento, su ánimo o su disposición. Ahora bien, el poema no es sino eso: posibilidad, algo que sólo se anima al contacto de un lector o de un oyente. Hay una nota común a todos los poemas, sin la cual no serían nunca poesía: la participación. Cada vez que el lector revive de veras el poema, accede a un estado que podemos llamar poético. (*El arco y la lira* 19)

The poem is an open possibility to every man, whatever his temperament, his mood, or his disposition. Now, the poem is nothing but that: possibility, something that only gets animated upon entering contact with a reader or a listener. There is a common note to all poems, without which they could never become poetry: participation. Each time the reader truly revives the poem, he accesses a state we can call poetic. (*The Bow and the Lyre* 19)

Following this premise, Naranjo's meta-poetic framing of the lyric self's experience while reading this poem reveals the opposite of an animated revival. At first, her encounter with the poem comes across as a lifeless projection ("la misma muerte de siempre") and even lethargic ("despacio / más despacio que antes"). Her present actions ("leo," "veo," "oigo," "creo," "amo") confirm a past that seemingly cannot be revived as promised by what Paz identifies as the poem's possibility. Of course, in Spanish the verb "revivir" takes on the additional meaning of not only "to bring something back to life" but also "to relive" an experience. Given the contextual imperative of a neoliberal, post-conflict era to forget the conflict, the expression of a lingering love reads as a gesture of nostalgic resistance.

Furthermore, Naranjo's poem challenges the reanimation of what is perceived to be expired and irretrievable—or even that which could be perceived as an unquestionable given. The static reproduction evident in the poem (the same flowers, the litany of bells, the faces of gods) is the antithesis to any revolutionary impetus or dynamic encounter made possible only through active participation. This is the kind of dynamic revival that Paz would consider to be the experience of accessing a poetic state. "XVI" conspicuously draws attention to the lyric voice's experience of the poem as a site of dulled sensation and rote ideas, yet its compounded images form a communicative precipice contingent on the additional reciprocity of participation. Even if in the poem itself, the lyric voice may not have been able to enter the poetic state, someone else's reading might, and she explores this prospect further in the next poem "XVII," in which she concretizes her ideal poetic state as one tied to an experience of democratic and collective participation. She opens with her own definition of poetry:

Una poesía es poesía  
si agregás algo  
si inventás una palabra  
si canta en tu corazón

Poetry is poetry  
if you add something  
if you invent a word  
if it sings in your heart

si mueve tus manos  
si crece en tu alma

if it moves your hands  
if it grows in your soul

digamos juntos  
poesía de los dos  
luego diremos poesía de los tres  
mas tarde cuatro haremos poesía  
y cuando ya entre la noche  
estaremos cantando  
poesía de todos.  
(27, ll. 7-13)

let us say together  
poetry of us two  
then we will say poetry of three  
later four of us will make poetry  
and when night falls  
we will be singing  
poetry for everyone.  
(27, ll. 1-13)

By addressing a second person, the lyric voice, like Paz, emphasizes the indispensable participation of the reader/listener, and the conjugation's change in accented stress to the last syllable (*agregás, inventás*) calls upon a Central American audience given the predominant use of the *voseo* in the region. Naranjo's aesthetic and civic engagement remains predicated on the poetic disruption brought about by the addition of an image or the invention of word to challenge the current forms of representation at her disposal. The stipulation that poetry can only be poetry if it confirms a complementary addition or invented word establishes the inclusive and democratic parameters of this poetic state. Here, the intent is not a direct transcription of experience nor a hermetic withdrawal. Instead, the poetic voice values the personal interpretation of her reader, and she measures the resonance of her poetics to the extent that it can embodied by this second reader and herself—hence, the sensation must reach and form meaning within “tu corazón,” “tus manos,” and “tu alma.” The continuity of poetry depends on the democratic addition, not division, of these individuals as they congregate, thereby also promising future inclusion. More importantly, her focus on the culminating enunciation of poetry underscores that the political struggle lies with the imperative to say the word (“digamos juntos,” “luego diremos”). Therefore, against the cynical and dismal frustration of poem “XVI”, the poetry

described in “XVII” reads as a hopeful aspiration, which is to say, poetry represents the dream of democracy, while the isolated poem of “XVI” reminds us the event has yet to take place.

As the twilight of the Twentieth Century coincides with the perceived twilight of socialist revolutions in Latin America, Paz analyzes the place of contemporary poetry in his essay “La otra voz” [‘The Other Voice’] (1990).<sup>34</sup> While these social movements inspired hope among artists and intellectuals, he criticizes literature’s subservience to ideology and the indoctrination these states dictated. Despite his reference to the bloodshed of armed conflict and despotic cases of socialist bureaucracy, he acknowledges the legitimacy of the questions posed by these utopian movements in their vision for a more equitable and just society. Their dissolution, however, reveals yet another threat for literature: the dictates of a market that is “ciego y sordo, no ama a la literatura ni al riesgo, no sabe ni puede escoger. Su censura no es ideológica: no tiene ideas. Sabe de precios, no de valores” [‘blind and deaf, it does not love literature nor risk, it does not know nor can it choose. Its censorship is not ideological: it simply does not have ideas. It knows of prices, not values’] (125). The diagnosis regarding the absence of ideas reflects Cortés’s same consternation regarding the receptivity of culture in Costa Rica, and for Paz, specifically, the receptivity of poetry, but Paz emphasizes that the singularity of modern poetry resides not in the attitudes and ideas of the poet, but in the voice of the poetic “I,” which he refers to as “la otra

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<sup>34</sup> It is important to note that Paz writes from a conservative viewpoint that designates these movements as pejorative, and while he is correct in noting the end of certain socialist revolutions in the region (namely, the Sandinista Revolution and the liberation struggles of Central America), many examples of leadership and administrations across the Leftist spectrum come to the forefront in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador in the Twenty-First Century. As for Costa Rica, though many administrations embraced a neoliberal turn, the resurgence of new center-left parties have succeeded in displacing the dominance of the two traditional ruling parties (the PLN and the PUSC). Most recently, the *Partido Acción Ciudadana*, or PAC (Citizen’s Action Party) has won two consecutive elections in the country.



voz” [‘the other voice’] (133). This other voice, he argues, is transhistorical; it is always the projection of elsewhere, and it can be animated by whomever reads the poem.

Going a step further and recalling the hope put forth by the lyric speaker of poem “XVII,” Naranjo’s poetics of democracy conditions an aesthetic and civic engagement that would foster a cultural notion of the social, or an interpersonal commitment to value creative pursuits. She envisions a pluralistic dialogue that takes place through the word as a receptacle and space of encounter, a democratic tribune where different attitudes can coincide polemically, but productively. Thus, the poetic word has a democratic precept in its ability to be the poet’s voice and that of another, but it also has a revolutionary precept, creating its own rebellion for not conforming to a market commodification nor a utilitarian condition. To that end, her post-conflict poetics remains committed to an exploration of her poetic vocation as an undertaking of collective outreach, an extension of the poetic and political legacies of committed poetry in Central America, though she continues to question the role of the poet and of poetry in this endeavor.

Thus, the lyric self of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* is not in search of ideas—her thoughts have already solidified what matters to her, but she is acutely aware of the need for the poet to create or to encourage a space of reception whereby these ideas can resonate and/or be reformulated. In “Poemas para recitar en voz alta en un restorán vacío” [‘Poems to Read Out Loud in an Empty Restaurant’], Naranjo presents the figure of the poet seated alone in an empty restaurant and whose emptiness at first glance stalls the reception of poetic language:

La sonoridad de las metáforas deja gotas de grasa en las servilletas  
geografía de incompletas biología  
con tendones de peines y cepillos de dientes  
sobre el ruido de cucarachas meciéndose en cama de mesas  
un tiempo y un lugar para comer  
un establo de caballos y un garaje para el carro  
(112, ll. 1-6)

[The acoustics of metaphors leave drops of grease on napkins  
geography of incomplete biologies  
with tendons from combs and toothbrushes  
above the sound of cockroaches rocking on a bed of tables  
a time and place to eat  
a horse stable and a garage for the car]  
(112, ll. 1-6)

The opening line presents the acoustics of metaphors that cannot be heard because they form drops of grease that fall on napkins, but this silence is negated if we follow the instructions suggested by the poem's title. Read out loud, the reader can experience the acoustics through the vocalization that grants sound to the grease drops. Thus, the directive to read out loud occasions an interruption into what is otherwise a predictable setting and a specific mode of being and doing, namely the consuming of food in a restaurant ("un tiempo y un lugar para comer"). The remnants of the food as grease drops, along with the broken tendons of a comb and toothbrush, symbolize an incomplete project. Furthermore, the setting reads as anticlimactic, of an event whose ending was either unsatisfying, was not really an ending, or was not the catastrophic end it purported to be (attested by the classic apocalypse-friendly cockroaches). The juxtaposition of the horse stable (an antiquarian representation of transportation) against the car garage (the modern representation of transportation) reads more than just perplexing. Rather, these images are antagonizing, that is, the presence of the horse stable alongside the car garage antagonizes the notion of real progress and social balance. As such, the setting of this empty restaurant stresses the portrait of a desolate aftermath with little to no substantial change much like the post-conflict effects in the aftermath of revolutionary experiments in Central America.

Just as this setting does not yield a sense of advancement, the figure of the poet doubts that her words will yield any worth given the logic of the market, further emphasized by her ordering silences from a menu "con precios y nada gratis" ['with prices and nothing free'] (112,

l. 8). Suddenly in the fourth stanza, a word draws her attention as it rolls between the tables and turns into a plate of steak and fries, thereby marking its current circulation of value:

una palabra rodó entre las mesas	a word rolled between the tables
una palabra que lloraba	a word that was crying
y se convirtió en bistec	and it turned into steak
con papas fritas y tomate	with french fries and tomato
los otros poetas	the other poets
mirando por las ventanas	peering in through the windows
exclamaron milagro	exclaimed miracle
porque la palabra fue aceptada	because the word was accepted
dejando sonidos de monedas y eructos	leaving behind sounds of coins and burps
(112, ll. 20-28)	(112, ll. 20-28)

The rolling of the word brings attention to yet another circulatory rendition in Naranjo's verse—except this time instead of pronouns circling about the streets, she presents the word attempting to navigate the circulation of currency, and if the personification of the crying word is any indication, it is not a willful nor pleasant traversal. Still, the word successfully manages to exchange itself for something considered of value to the incredulous reaction of a group of poets peering into the scene from outside the restaurant windows. Their exclamatory consensus that determines this financial exchange as a miracle showcases the event as an exception, not the norm, and further implies the marginalization of both poetry and the poet within the market regulation of this post-conflict setting. The overall effect of displacement—especially given the group of poets standing outside the restaurant for the chance to even get a glimpse of the word—speaks to the passive spectatorship of cultural production instead of an active engagement in its creation and dissemination.

Echoing the dismayed response of the lyric voice in poem “XVI” when everything she reads resembles something she already read, Naranjo presents another scene of reading in the fifth stanza that leaves the figure of the poet at a loss for yielding significant meaning beyond that of market value. Her reading material is comprised solely of classifieds advertising houses,

used bikes, contraceptive pills, cats, furniture, sex, forgotten memories, and even the art of selling, but in the eighth stanza, the poetic voice makes clear that all but one thing is not for sale:

Todo se vende y se compra  
menos la poesía  
porque nadie quiere testimonios  
de rosas marchitas  
trenes con muertes  
guerras de palabras mansas  
biografías de intimidades oscuras  
voces que rozan lluvia  
vedettes que desnudan  
escamas de infinitas pieles  
a veces simples máscaras  
en soledades de horas  
o promiscuidad de tertulias  
(113, ll. 51-63)

Everything is sold and bought  
except for poetry  
because nobody wants testimonies  
of withered roses  
trains with deaths  
wars of placid words  
biographies of secret intimacies  
voices that graze the rain  
starlets that undress  
flakes of infinite skins  
sometimes simple masks  
in the solitude of hours  
or the promiscuity of gatherings  
(113, 51-63)

This stanza insinuates that poetic content is not enticing, and therefore not marketable. Yet, Naranjo inverts the appeal of promiscuity to stress that it is poetry's pursuit of intimacy, not merely casual gratification, that accounts for the alienation of the average consumer. For the lyric voice, poetry does not offer the illusory escape, nor the purchasing power to buy desires. Its aim is to present a mirror to society by peeling back the layers or unmasking the appearances in search of a genuine connection and dialogue. This unmasking has been the political and creative impetus driving Naranjo's verse. Her poetry seeks that reciprocal and intimate gaze that would truly allow people to see themselves ("en soledades de horas") and each other ("promiscuidad de tertulias") without the pretense of appearances. Understandably, the embrace of this naked vulnerability is not easy to sell—indeed, it is the antithesis of "selling out," literally for its lack of appeal to the mainstream market, and figuratively, for the refusal to compromise on one's personal integrity. Following the logic of the post-conflict and pacifying neoliberal imperative to "move on," the market trends may deem testimonial poetry (or any traditional poetic content for that matter) to be passé, but the lyric self of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* insists on confronting

this archived content as an aesthetic and civic responsibility to make representation (of people, of history, of feelings, of art) more inclusive. Only then can a more open, effective, and fair dialogue about the reformulation and direction of ideas be had.

Thus, what begins as frustration at the lacking commercial viability of the word and the limitations of the poet turns into a glimpse at the emancipatory potential of poetry. Naranjo brings our attention back to the initial encounter with the poem, but this time the encounter is between the poem and an ant personified as the proletariat:

cada poema tiene una hormiga  
que huele y huele cada palabra  
después se la carga en la espalda  
y se la lleva lejos con pasos pequeños  
de animal pequeño que limpia pisos  
por el placer de encontrar  
la gracia virgen de la paloma

each poem has an ant  
that smells and smells each word  
after she carries it on her back  
and she takes it far away with the small steps  
of a small animal that cleans floors  
for the pleasure of finding  
the virgin grace of the Dove

esa hormiga llama a otras hormigas  
con voz de líder evangelista:  
“hermanas hormigas proletarias perseguidas  
discriminadas labriegas  
tenemos botín para la protesta  
palabras furiosas palabras tristes  
palabras sonoras palabras violentas  
nuestra lucha ya no es esperanza”  
(114, ll. 73-87)

that ant calls to other ants  
with the voice of an evangelical leader:  
“sisters ants persecuted proletariats  
discriminated peasants  
we have the pillaged loot for the protest  
furious words sad words  
sound words violent words  
our struggle is no longer just hope”  
(114, ll. 73-79)

Though the poet has furnished the words and though the supposed labor of the ant is to clean the floor, the ant’s sensory experience produces an aesthetic judgement that momentarily disrupts her occupational undertaking as she smells each word to determine which to carry on her back. Her sense of smell chooses which specific word merits sharing with her colony of ants, but as she opts to declare the surplus of words that fund her proletarian cause, her fellow ants have an equal part in the creation of poetry, too. Because of this collective participation and reception of these words, poetic meaning can circulate elsewhere, and she can envision a different subjectivity beyond her identity as a proletariat/worker ant. The value of these words suffices to

carry out her revolution (“nuestra lucha ya no es esperanza”). Similarly, the circulation of these words beyond the poem affirms the occupation of the poet: “y cuando el hormiguero es más veloz que la pluma / el poeta se duerme despertando girasoles / y oye su nombre su claro nombre de poeta” [‘and when the anthill is faster than the quill / the poet falls asleep awakening sunflowers / and hears her name her clear name of poet’] (115, ll. 88-90). These words have surpassed the condition of the poet; they form the basis of her emancipation. Yet, it is the proliferation of meaning that comes about through the collective reception of these ants, the other voices as Paz would say, that creates a vision where culturalization is not simply a burden she must carry on his back alone—it is a task that can be shared.

Naranjo’s verse stresses that the opposite of representation is not participation, but rather exclusion. Therefore, participation enhances the democratic parameters of representation (be it aesthetic or civic). Naranjo transforms this given empty restaurant into a site of poetic creation where even the ants that carry away the crumbs on a tablecloth become the collaborating distributors of the poet’s words, but the scene also connects to the cultural dilemma facing contemporary Central American poetry in the aftermath of the region’s bloodiest conflict. The crumbs represent the residuals of those experiences, and like the ants finding worth in the effort to collect these crumbs, so, too, does Naranjo find it worth retrieving and making sense of the legacy of these wars, despite the perception that there is no market or public reception for “testimonios / de rosas marchitas.” Just because someone may not want to buy this poetry does not mean it would not be valuable to hear, but Naranjo’s also insinuates the political implications of a poetry that may have lost its appeal for reversing what was once its appeal of inaccessibility turned general access. It is no longer exclusionary, but by virtue of its democratization it has now been excluded.

Toward the end of the poem, the poet receives a package containing a bombardment of defiled, profane images and content that read like a series of prostituted images for market consumption: a switchblade with the seductive eyes of Che Guevara, a lascivious love letter, and a poster of Charlie Chaplin with his fly open showing his erect penis. These licentious attributes diminish and desecrate the revolutionary importance of the political and cultural endeavors these figures also represent (Guevara's role in the Cuban Revolution and his Marxist commitment throughout Latin America, Chaplin's revolutionizing of film comedy coupled with his own plea for anti-fascism), a mass consumption of their pop iconography that violates the poet's sensibility. Naranjo then follows up with random images in prose form accompanied by parenthetical explanations that give the effect of a photo montage or collage, and further establishes a political confrontation between the prosaic versus poetic content. Faced with the cumbersome task of sorting through this content, the poet eventually discards all of it, immediately relieved of carrying this weight and thus rejecting the demands of the market. His steps become lighter, more confident as he now clearly sees the purpose of his vocational calling:

consejo gratis para hacer útil la poesía ho hay lectura vana dice un proverbio hasta hoy desconocido	free advice on how to make poetry useful no reading is done in vain says a proverb that to this day remains unknown
siempre hubo collage en la creación un poco de todo mal distribuido	there was always a collage in creation a little bit of everything badly distributed
el poeta de las transformaciones el mago de las palabras el que entra de puntillas y rompe silencios el que crea amor y repite la gracia de los besos que se hacen más besos el que se acuesta con hormigas que son sus amigas y con ellas roba palabras armonías sensaciones que otros tuvieron y no supieron decir ni encontrar salió del restorán con más páginas llenas	the poet of transformations the magician of words the one who enters tip-toeing and breaks silences the one who creates love and repeats the grace of the kisses that become more kisses the one who sleeps with ants that are his friends with whom he steals words harmonies sensations that others had and did not know how to say nor find he left the restaurant with more pages filled

y la calle se amotinó con nuevas poesías  
(117, ll. 140-158)

and the street welcomed a mutiny of new poetries  
(117, ll. 140-158)

The utility of poetry is the invitation to parse through it in the same way that the poet once had to parse through the distribution of this collage, or what Rancière’ refers to as the distribution of the sensible. The creativity of the poet to represent the images, experiences, and sensations that others have not yet put into words depends on the redistribution of this collage which Naranjo emphasizes as a timeless endeavor—there has “always” been a collage with which the creative process has to contend, and if so, the poet’s redistribution or rearrangement of those disparate elements is a political interruption of aesthetic representation that will continue. In this way, poetry transcends the dictates of ideological commitment, the market, and even a defense of artistic autonomy from the social. Like the image of these “nuevas poesías” taking to the streets, Naranjo’s verse reaffirms the political and creative impetus to disrupt the dominant way of being and doing as her poetic rebellion fights for representative possibility. Insofar as these poems must be read out loud in this empty restaurant, she establishes a creative and political link between the struggle for visual and audible representation within this unreceptive space.

The final stanzas showcase the poet taking to the streets now joined by the same group of poets formerly standing outside the restaurant. She represents a renewed hope, a new leader to follow, but the more important poetic conscription is the implied call to attend to the dirty tablecloths of the restaurant, each individually inscribed with the words *sueño* [‘dream’], *noche* [‘night’] and *utopía* (117, ll. 162-66). Seemingly abandoned, these dreams and utopian visions beckon a re-reading to attend to these words, while the night calls for a true romantic embrace not imitated by the drawing of the curtain. The poetic voice concludes “resultan inútiles y torpes / los llantos los gritos las palabras / que no se oyen” [‘they prove useless and clumsy / the cries the shouts the words / that are not heard’] (118, ll. 172-74). Correspondingly, the poetic voice of



*En esta tierra redonda y plana* maintains that the utopian dreams and struggles of Central America deserve to be rearticulated to better attest to their impact and future undertaking.

Particularly in the second half of the collection, Naranjo thematically emulates the testimonial urgency to denounce the lingering oppression and injustice that assails the region. From this point forward, her poems differ not only because they have titles and are significantly longer, but they concretely address the past and present political climate of Central America. In “Canciones para una guitarra rota” [‘Songs for a Broken Guitar’], she addresses the transmigrant plight of Central Americans escaping their homelands. The lyric self of “Ritual de bombardeos” [‘Bombing Ritual’] explores the possibility of an interiorized poetics only to be interrupted by the constant bombing outside. “Canción de cuna para un niño salvadoreño” [‘Lullaby for a Salvadorean Child’] offers a lullaby for a child killed by bombs. “Guatemala: Una ventana abierta a la muerte” [‘Guatemala: An Open Window to Death’] details the disappearances and assassinations of fellow poet Alaíde Foppa, student activist Oliverio Castañeda, opposition leader Manuel Colom Argueta, and founder of Guatemala’s Social Democratic party Alberto Fuentes Mohr. The inclusion of these poems offers a countering portrait to the post-conflict narrative of peace and oblivion. While the first half portrayed the struggle of the lyric self to recall the archived content of these testimonies, the second half reads like an unrestricted downpour of retrieved content.

Arguably, Naranjo’s most impactful testament to the struggles of the region culminates in the nearly 300-line poem that also gives title to the second half of the collection “Este dolor incontenido de Centroamérica.” Here, the poetic “I” traces the conflicting constructions of identity and cultural imaginaries that marginalized indigenous origins, created a spectrum of whiteness for mestizo aspirations, and undermined sovereignty in every member nation of the

isthmus. Naranjo presents an ode to the pain and suffering caused by the emancipatory struggles and history of imperialist repercussions in the region. The title, itself, underscores that Central America's pain cannot be contained nor repressed, while evoking Paz's image of the jar that instinctively pours the wine, which is to say, this poetic content cannot be stopped. Like Debravo's poem, they are words that demand to be used. Moreover, the word "incontenido" suggests that this painful content has not been given form, indirectly positing the need for the poet to address the historical collage of oppression.

Yet, for all her summary of exploitation and death that she extracts from the cases of Nicaragua, Panamá, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, "un pavoroso silencio / reina en Costa Rica" ['a dreadful silence / reigns in Costa Rica'] (155, l. 220). Once more, the accentuation of this difference distances her context from the surrounding nations and reinforces the framing of a country without drama, but also with no voice. Hence, her creative and political struggle lies in the interruption of this lingering regime of silence. To that dreadful silence, she adds the following dismal characterization: "es mi país un país de momentos / sin recuerdos ni memoria" ['my country is a country of moments / without memories nor memory'] (156, ll. 234-35). The claim that her country is one without memories nor memory speaks to the absence of reflection—both personal and collective—such that her fellow citizens cannot see themselves clearly in relation to their surroundings, thereby reinforcing their exceptionalism and indifference to such a degree that they see the pain, injustice, and struggles of their neighbors as something foreign. From their subjective viewpoint, they cannot objectively see the reflection of this pain and injustice as something that can reside within Costa Rican borders. The poetic voice of *En esta tierra redonda y plana* urges the opposite, to acknowledge and to make sense of the pain, and in doing so, creating a point of solidarity between Costa Rica and the rest of the isthmus,

while encouraging an honest reflection of the country's own painful cultural and political crisis. She ends the collection with an open-ended question: "¿Quiénes vendrán después / por este dolor incontenido / de Centroamérica?" ['Who will come afterwards / for this uncontained pain / of Central America'] (157, ll. 281-83). For Naranjo, Central America provides the contours of the poem, and this final question pleads for a collective ("quiénes") remembrance and recognition of the region's untamed pain (i.e., poetic content), a plea to which the poet will always answer.

### **The Occupation of the Poet: *Oficio de oficios* (2007)**

In English, there is not much redemption for the word "illusion." Its definition primarily stipulates the deceptive and misleading qualities of its assault on the senses; it is the opposite of "real." In Spanish, on the other hand, the word affords an additional connotation of hope and excitement, irrespective of whether it is grounded or not. Someone may exclaim "¡Qué ilusión!" ['How exciting!'] at the mention of good news, and if the pronoun "se" is attached to "ilusionar," the verb enacts the process of getting inspired and/or the reflexive sensation of being the recipient of hope. Therefore, the verb "ilusionar" can mean both "to inspire hope" or "to create false hopes" while "ilusionarse" can translate as "to raise one's hopes up" or "to delude oneself." Considering the post-conflict panorama of the isthmus, the verb fittingly reflects the tension to reconcile both the hope inspired by the region's revolutionary causes and the disillusion with their aftermath. In response, Central American *literatura de posguerra* provides an acute critique to the foreign influence that meddled to undermine sovereignty as well as a national sabotage stemming from the illusory promises of post-revolutionary reforms, and particularly in narrative fiction, defaults to a cynical assessment.

However, Naranjo's poetry stands out for her ideological affiliation to the PLN's social democratic platform whose initiatives she helped promote and embraced with good intention, an

ideological commitment that marks the distinction of her disillusion within Central American post-conflict meta-poetry.<sup>35</sup> *Oficio de oficios*, Naranjo’s final poetry collection—indeed final publication—presents a lyric self whose disillusion rests on the perception that she was not able to effectively reach the masses with her message of social consciousness. By Naranjo’s semantic understanding, her examination of the verbs “ilusionar” and “ilusionarse” questions her aesthetic and political roles not only in supplying the illusion (i.e., the way she presents it), but also her reception of the illusion (i.e., the degree to which she believes in it) in “Oficio de ilusionar”:

En la comedia de los malos entendidos  
 corren paralelos como sinónimos  
 ilusionar ilusionarse  
 a pesar de sus graves diferencias.  
 ilusionar es izar fantasías  
 en el pensar y sentir de los otros  
 sin importar su grado de engaño  
 y el dolor frustrante de la irrealidad.  
 Ilusionarse consiste en perseguir  
 esperanzas sin raíces  
 en el territorio de uno mismo  
 para despertar con las manos  
 vacías y la mirada desolada.  
 (61, ll. 1-13)

In the comedy of misunderstandings  
 run parallel like synonyms  
 to create hope to raise one’s hope  
 despite their grave differences.  
 to create hope is to hoist fantasies  
 in the thoughts and feelings of others  
 without caring for its degree of deception  
 and the frustrating pain of irreality.  
 to raise one’s hopes consists of chasing  
 rootless hopes  
 in the territory of oneself  
 only to awaken with empty  
 hands and the desolate look  
 (61, ll. 1-13)

The emphasis on the empty hands and the desolate gaze gives the impression that there is nothing to show for her efforts, but they also signal a longing for the ideals that were treasured despite not having fully materialized into the desired revolutionary changes. Recalling Naranjo’s elucidations on the cultural crisis affecting the region, this lexical excursion also speaks to the hope that the word as a valid instrument of creation would be both instrumental to art and history. Given that the poem evaluates the verbs *ilusionar/ilusionarse* rather than the noun

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<sup>35</sup> A fruitful comparison would be *Órbita* (1996) by Isaac Felipe Azofeifa (1909-1997), who was also one of the founders of the PLN, and who later left the party to form two center-left parties: Partido del Progreso (through which he ran a presidential campaign) and Fuerza Democrática.

*ilusión* reinforces that the problem is not with the illusion, itself, as much as it is a criticism on how the illusion was carried out or the reception of this illusion. In her assessment, the intention behind the enactment matters the most in differentiating between the two verbs. She notes that “ilusionar” can be the action of introducing the hope/illusion to others (“en el pensar y sentir de los otros”) with little to no regard for the consequences should that hope or illusion shatter. While the deception may be attributed to naïveté, she emphasizes the manipulative agenda behind the verb as she later makes note of its “deseo de dominio sobre los demás” [‘desire for dominance over others’] (l. 23). Within Latin America’s revolutionary hindsight, her verse indirectly confronts how some of the most prominent revolutions of the Left theoretically manifest as the illusion of emancipation but, in practice, did not translate into emancipation, even replicating the same mechanisms of oppression and control over the populace as Right-wing dictatorships had exerted previously—and with harmful consequences to the realm of culture.<sup>36</sup>

However, the verb “ilusionarse” speaks to the solitary experience of self-deception and self-reproach. In other words, as the disillusion directly punctures the hopes and dreams of the self, she has no other target of blame but herself. To that point, the poem emphasizes that the onus to critically attend to these illusory appearances begins with the individual’s perception:

Ilusionarse puede ser deformante  
y amargar la visión de cada quien  
con la imagen cromática

To raise one’s hope can be distorting  
and embitter each one’s vision  
with the chromatic image

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<sup>36</sup> The case of Heberto Padilla (1932-2000) stands as one of the most negative developments of the Cuban Revolution. Padilla’s poetry collection *Fuera del juego* [‘Out of the Game’] (1967), an exploration of the relationship between poetry and history, was found to be counterrevolutionary for exalting the individual before collective concerns. After being jailed and tortured, Padilla was brought before the Cuban Writers and Artists Association (UNEAC) in 1971 to confess and to repent for his “crimes.” Most recently, the Movimiento de San Isidro in Cuba is protesting state censorship and imprisonment of artists. In Nicaragua, the most notable example was the state persecution of the poet and priest Ernesto Cardenal by the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega, the same revolutionary party under which Cardenal once served as Minister of Culture.

que nos aleja de ser como somos  
ni más simpáticos  
bellos o brillantes  
de los dictados espirituales  
y corporales que ordenan  
un sinfín de imposibilidades.  
En el juego sueño sueño juego  
que viajamos por la vida  
ilusionar ilusionarse  
nos asaltan frecuentemente  
con sus tentaciones de evasión  
(61-62, ll. 26-39)

that keeps us from being who we are  
neither nicer  
more beautiful or more brilliant  
than the spiritual and  
corporal dictates that order  
a myriad of impossibilities.  
In the game dream dream game  
that we travel through life  
to create hopes to raise one's hopes  
frequently assault us  
with their evasive temptations  
(61-62, ll. 26-39)

While these verbs are not interchangeable, *ilusionar/ilusionarse* share a common denominator in the ramifications of their distancing effects, or their shared tendency to facilitate evasions from genuine collective and self-reflections. This disparity aligns with what Naranjo's poetic oeuvre consistently identifies as a cultural crisis rooted in the passive and unquestioned acceptance of illusory images and political narratocracies. The synesthesia of the bitter vision underlines the unsavory distortion of the chromatic image—as the eyesight emulates the inability of the photographic lens to refract all the wavelengths of color to the same focal plane, thereby producing a blurry, dispersed image. Through these lenses, the aesthetic rendition obstructs an accurate reflection in the face of the leveling awareness that no amount of nicety, beauty or brilliance can evade the limits of human mortality (los dictados espirituales / y corporales que ordenan / un sinfín de imposibilidades”). More crucial to note is the link between mortality and impossibility, and as the collection progresses, Naranjo makes the case that this mortal limit can also be a misleading notion of impossibility to detract from cementing hopes and imagining creative possibilities. Therefore, though the lyric voice experiences trepidation at the prospect of reanimating her hopes, ultimately, this prospect reaffirms her creative and political impetus, as she posits that every life movement is an opportunity to renew the conviction behind her ideals.

Given the context of Naranjo's civic and cultural tenure, arguably comprised of much achievement, *Oficio de oficios* serves as a humbling meditation on what she perceives to have been the shortcomings of her occupational pursuits. As we have seen in earlier references to such poems as "Oficio de poder y no poder" ['Occupation of Being Capable and Not Capable'] and "Oficio de pensar" ['Occupation of Thinking'], each of the 38 poems accordingly reframes a series of verbs as the exercising of a profession. By equating each activity to an occupation, Naranjo levels their relevance and importance as the poetic voice confronts each "oficio" as a measure of authentic representation within both her aesthetic and civic engagements. On one level, this concept of occupation refers to the tasks of a job, but on another level, the concept beckons how one occupies their time and space, or put differently, how one lives the life they have been given. The lyric self presents this reflection from the vantage point of senectitude, keenly aware of walking towards the end of life, building the consciousness of mortality, and what she can produce in the time she has left, but more importantly, on the life imprint she will leave behind.

In line with the bleak imagery of revolutionary aftermath, the initial poems of the collection reinforce the shattered illusions of the lyric self's state of disenchantment. In "Oficio de amanecer" ["Occupation of Waking Up"], she begrudges having to wake up, sleeping in as much as possible to avoid carrying out the same daily routine. This state of lethargy and stupor evokes the description of complacent mediocrity from Naranjo's vignette, but more strikingly, is the vehement expression of anger that drives her desire to forget the dreams she had the night before ("con honda rabia / de olvidar el sueño"). She has given up completely on her former revolutionary dreams as she adds:

Vacía amanezco  
de palabra y pensamiento

I awaken empty  
of word and thought

sembrada de silencios y limitaciones  
con la piel reseca hecha boronas  
y una sonrisa de piedra  
en el laberinto de mi historia.  
He envejecido sin aprender  
el oficio de amanecer.  
(25, ll. 21-28)

sowed with silences and limitations  
with my dry and crumbling skin  
and a smile of stone  
in the labyrinth of my story.  
I have aged without learning  
the occupation of waking up.  
(25, ll. 21-28)

The absence of words and thoughts marks her state of disenchantment, the effects of which noticeably appear in the form of her dry skin, comparable to parched land that cannot reap anything beyond silences, but these are not the “fertile” silences she referenced in “Oficio de pensar” because there is no contemplation. Nor does her skin exhibit the growth and productivity that results from a loving encounter if we compare Naranjo’s extension of this metaphorical cultivation later in “Oficio de amar” [“Occupation of Loving”] when she writes that “sólo el amor crece fecundo y pródigo / fértil de cosecha permanente” [‘only love grows fruitful and lavish / fertile from permanent harvest’] (31, ll. 23-24). Instead, the portrait of aging presented here gives a sense of abandoned cultivation, a desolate prospect for creating something new like the gaze and empty hand that result from the act of “ilusionarse.” Through this portrait, Naranjo filters an unproductive status of poetic cultivation. Furthermore, the lyric self’s dry skin turned into *boronas* (‘crumbs’) evokes the crumbs occupying the tables of the empty restaurant, only without the ant to carry their meaning elsewhere.

With the implication that her life and her poetics hold no more possibility nor hope, she struggles to find a reason to live: “con un deseo infinito / de que llegue pronto la noche / y sea un noche eterna” [‘with the infinite desire / that night may arrive soon / and that it be an eternal night’] (25, ll. 18-20). The stony constitution of her fossilized smile (“sonrisa de piedra”) stands at odds with the description of her fatigue, anger, and sadness despite the pleasant facial expression. Her life story thus imprints as a disingenuous, static smile that does not speak to



intimacy, especially considering how she juxtaposes the smile with laughter in “Oficio de reír”

[‘Occupation of Laughing’]:

Y la sonrisa se ensaya  
en la soledad del espejo  
pero sólo se puede reír  
ante los ojos que te ven con ternura  
y ante los ojos que se llevan los tuyos  
en ese acto generoso de amor  
(78, ll. 28-33)

And the smile is rehearsed  
in the solitude of the mirror  
but one can only truly laugh  
before the eyes that see you with tenderness  
and before the eyes that carry yours  
in that generous act of love  
(78, ll. 28-33)

Standing in front of the mirror does not offer the intimate, reciprocal gaze that would create a trusting and loving environment where she can express herself fully. Her laughter can only be reserved for those who truly see her. This is the beginning of how Naranjo carves out an intimate social awareness. She measures intimacy as the awareness of the degree of this intimate reciprocity between the lyric “I” and those who surround her, and vice versa. Her hope for solidarity rests on this personal and public gesture toward an inward justice, or as the shift from ideological reciprocity to affect. For now, the “sonrisa de piedra” reads as a pessimistic conclusion supported by the unsettling admission that she has aged without renewing the conviction behind that pursuit of vulnerability. Naranjo’s post-conflict sensibility, however, reframes the act of waking up as the revolutionary impetus for *toma de conciencia*, or the awakening of social consciousness, and *Oficio de oficios* reaffirms that this social awakening is at once an intimate and social aspiration contingent on creative possibility, as the rhythmic association between “aprender” and “amancer” indicates that she has much yet to learn, and experience, in this life.

Even so, it is one thing for the lyric voice to admit this hope to herself, but a very different risk to share her authentic representation with others since she is all too aware of the social propensity for false categorization and misrepresentation. As if to construct a defense

mechanism against the illusion, in “Oficio de hacerse el tonto” [‘Occupation of Playing Dumb’], the pretense of being mute and slow-witted offers an avenue for the lyric self to avoid offering explanations to a public that she feels will not be open to understanding who she is, and so, she disdains “la exhibición manoseante / y el aplauso que anuncia con necedad / lo que eres ni quieres ser” [‘the fondling exhibit / and the applause that foolishly announces / what you are nor wish to be’] (47, ll. 90-92). Structurally, the space of the exhibit functions as the meeting point between the object of art and an audience. It is the space that makes the artist’s ideas public, but the qualifier “manoseante” indicates that the approximation of this audience to her art is unwelcome, as if the adulation and recognition are bestowed without her consent. To be susceptible to these unwelcome advances speaks to how the lyric self disapproves of the way she as the figure of the poet is being consumed, misallocated, and misinterpreted—hence the rejection of the external commodification of “what” she is (“lo que eres”) by placing the conjunction “ni” immediately to categorically negate the nonsensical designation, while the absence of a subject pronoun emphasizes the overshadowing of “who” she is (“ni quieres ser”). Furthermore, she does not seek superficial praise nor the extraction of her work to fit the conventional categorization of those who try to possess her within the politically innocuous market setting of this exhibition.

On a larger scale, Naranjo’s poem comments on the diminished importance of culture for the government that only supports her cultural production and ideas provided there is no transgression into the spaces they deem outside the realm of culture, thereby converging her aesthetic and political struggles for representation. The second person address offers an intimate awareness that calls for a greater social sentience as the lyric voices urges commitment not to a political party, nor to a revolutionary agenda, but a commitment to the representation of the self:

Se trata de confirmar tu estilo  
tu vida personal y única  
tu libertad de escoger lo diferente  
tu confesión muda a no claudicar  
y tu gesto firme de rechazo  
a cualquier atajo que desvíe  
tu forma de vida en la austeridad del silencio.  
Se pretende coincidir con tus ideales  
lograr un matrimonio perfecto  
entre la prédica y el ejemplo  
entre la creencia y la práctica  
entre el deseo pasajero  
y la victoria del amor verdadero y eterno.  
Se persigue con denuedo y afán  
ser vos misma a pesar de vos misma  
(47, ll. 93-107)

It is about confirming your style  
your personal and unique life  
your liberty to choose what is different  
your mute confession to not surrender  
and your firm gesture of rejection  
to any shortcut that deviates from  
your way of life in the austerity of silence.  
The aim is to coincide with your ideals  
to achieve the perfect marriage  
between the sermon and the example  
between the belief and the practice  
between the temporary desire  
and the victory of true and lasting love.  
What is chased with bold commitment  
is to be yourself in spite of yourself  
(47, ll. 93-107)

Thus, emancipation for the lyric self is the freedom to choose how she identifies beyond the simple and obvious categorization of the pronoun “vos” (“ser vos misma a pesar de vos misma”), a rejection of the comfortable and conforming enunciation of “I am.” There is nothing radical in this tautological construction of the self, which we have seen as a consistent criticism throughout Naranjo’s verse in the identical distribution of the replicated “nosotros,” the indistinguishable falling of the rain, the multiple stampings of the symbol, and the cloning of *don nadie*. In Naranjo’s conceptualization of democracy, these replications do not translate into equality. For her, the legitimate power of the people lies in the aesthetic and political interruption of cultivating an internal and external acceptance for difference and in refuting the passive acceptance of one narrative.

Most importantly, she can now view her life pursuits not as failures, but as the culmination of every effort to meet this measure of difference and nonconformity in theory and in practice. Like the singularity of her poetic *guerrilla*, the aim of her rebellion was to permeate every life movement with this standard—not only leveling her pursuits but creating new ones.

The last poem “Oficio de oficios” explores what has been the ultimate occupation: to live her life unapologetically. She states:

La conformidad no existe  
en la rebeldía crónica  
creadora de oficios  
en que se persigue el viento  
para crear el vendaval.  
de eso se ha hablado  
en estas páginas que un día  
estuvieron blancas y vacías.  
Si las llené con solidez  
y algún destello de belleza  
que algún indicio quede de ellas.  
Si así no lo hice  
que cualquier creencia me condene  
y mi pedazo íntimo de tierra  
me expulse para siempre  
y me prohíba ejercer  
el oficio de los oficios  
en el nombre elemental de la inercia.  
 (“Oficio de oficios” 87, ll. 41-58)

Conformity does not exist  
in the chronic rebellion  
creator of occupations  
to pursue the wind  
so as to create the gale.  
That is what has been discussed  
in these pages that one day  
were blank and empty.  
If I filled them with substance  
and some flash of beauty  
may a hint remain of them  
If I did not do so  
may any belief condemn me  
and my intimate piece of land  
banish me forever  
and prohibit me from exercising  
the occupation of all occupations  
in the elemental name of inertia.  
 (“Occupation of occupations” 87, ll. 41-58)

This final stanza reads as the colophon of Naranjo’s life, the finishing touch that testifies to a consistent aesthetic and civic engagement predicated on confronting the limits of representation. It is the validation of her occupation as a poet who now sees herself clearly and invites others to do the same.

## CONCLUSION: DREAMS OF DEMOCRACY

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*No hay nada quijotesco ni romántico en querer cambiar el mundo.  
Es posible. Es el oficio al que la humanidad se ha dedicado desde  
siempre. No concibo mejor vida que una dedicada a la efervescencia,  
a las ilusiones, a la terquedad que niega la inevitabilidad del caos y  
la desesperanza. [...] Lo importante, me doy cuenta ahora,  
no es que uno mismo vea todos sus sueños cumplidos,  
sino seguir, empeñados, soñándolos.<sup>37</sup>  
--Gioconda Belli, *El país bajo mi piel**

After serving abroad as a journalist and diplomat, the poet Rubén Darío, the leading figure of Spanish American *Modernismo*, returned to his native Nicaragua in 1907 where he gave a speech titled “La Patria” [‘The Homeland’]. In it, he compares himself to *The Odyssey*’s Ulysses, for having navigated through the world but always yearning to return to his homeland, personified as Penelope weaving and unweaving its destiny in anticipation of that moment in which to embroider the word “engrandecimiento” [‘aggrandizement’]. By this Darío does not mean the pejorative sense of making something appear grander than it is, but rather the hopeful pursuit of elevating the nation’s status, a sentiment he echoes in his poem “El retorno” [‘The Return’] when he states “Si pequeña es la patria, uno grande la sueña” [‘If the homeland is small, one dreams it big’] (116, l. 67). Darío sees this dream as partially realized in the way his modernist verse leveled a cosmopolitan dialogue not only between Nicaragua and the rest of the world, but also paved the way for Spanish America’s literary emancipation from the Spanish tradition. His return is thus categorized as triumphant, lauded by his fellow citizens for attaining international poetic renown. He ends his speech with the following reflection:

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<sup>37</sup> “There is nothing quixotic or romantic in wanting to change the world. It is possible. It is the age-old vocation of humanity. I can’t think of a better life than one dedicated to passion, to dreams, to the stubbornness that defies the inevitability of chaos and disillusion [...] What is important, I realize now, is not the fulfillment of one’s own dreams, but the stubborn determination to continue dreaming.”

El azul era para mi vida un color simbólico. Tengo el placer de decir que no me quieren más los estudiantes de Nicaragua, que los estudiantes de Buenos Aires, de La Habana, o de Madrid. Andaluces, vascos, o gallegos, los fundadores de nuestra Familia, nos trajeron una esencia de Arte y un amor al idealismo. Dios eterno y único haga que lo que es un hecho en Literatura pueda realizarse para Centroamérica en Política por ley histórica y por necesidad de nuestra civilización. He dicho. (141)

Blue was for my life a symbolic color. I have the pleasure of saying that students from Nicaragua do not love me more than the students of Buenos Aires, Havana, or Madrid. Andalusians, Basques, Galicians, the founders of our Family, brought us an essence of Art and a love for idealism. May the eternal and only God permit what is a fact in literature a reality for Central America in Politics by historical law and by necessity for our civilization. I have just said it. (141)

Blue symbolizes Darío's ideal search of poetic language and serves as title to the collection that revolutionized poetic structure and affirmed the originality of his Spanish American voice, *Azul* (1888). But Darío's literary idealism models for him a greater socio-political dream, one that entails translating the "hecho en Literatura" for Central America. Flavio Rivera Montealegre contends that this "fact" refers to unity (130). In other words, the reconciliation of the idea and form to create the ideal should be echoed in the geopolitical unity (if not complete consolidation) of the original five Central American nations, all of which had recently convened at the Central American Peace Conference in Washington a few days before Darío's speech to promote more cooperation, peaceful stability, and justice among them.

Certainly, this context influenced the political impetus of the speech's final statements, but we can also read a simultaneous revolutionary and democratic dream rooted in the political impetus of the literary fact, itself. That is, Darío's *modernista* verse models an emancipatory benchmark for Central America, a democratic leveling in *Modernismo's* dialogue with other traditions, and a commitment to renovating the poetic word. His dream that Central American politics catch up to the achievement of its literary production centralizes the need for thoughtful engagement with culture as a measure of accountability, even more so in the emphatic

proclamation “he dicho,” as if to speak this cultural and political mirroring into being, the dream as lofty as the infinite blue color (of the sky, of the ocean, of Hugo’s azul) that signaled the limitless possibilities of the poetic ideal.

In 1975, Naranjo publishes a singular poem (indeed, the only poem she published during her ministerial term) in the Universidad Centroamericana’s (UCA) literary magazine titled “Ritual para dos (Una carta a Rubén en el correo de los pájaros)” [‘Ritual for Two (A Letter to Ruben in the Mail of the Birds)’]. She opens with the apostrophic beckoning of Darío to establish a hypothetical dialogue between poets. She portrays him as bored with the ceremonial confines of his poetic renown, bogged down by a string of qualifiers that limit his verse to one neat classification, and occupied with giving conferences and poetry readings that repeat the same discussions. His life and work have been scrutinized by *letrados* who feel confident that they know everything there is to know about him (reminiscent of the lyric voice’s complaint in “Oficio de hacerse el tonto” toward the “exhibición manoseante” of those who wish to control her representation and self-definition).

Her lyric voice identifies with the figure of the poet as she claims to write a letter to him that is also a letter for her, a gesture in which she writes herself into the same ritual of poetic endeavor as Darío. Thus, the portrait of the Nicaraguan poet becomes a reflection of her own frustration with the cultural reception of her work. She writes:

estás cansado de recorrer apologías  
aplausos y canciones darianas  
pero te entenece ver un niño tartamudo  
en el silabario de la voz azul  
montando el sueño de tu princesa triste  
un niño así es tu única vida  
en el peregrinaje veleidoso del pan literario  
similar a la litera de un barco perdido  
en una calle de luz artificial para el gong de la moda  
estás cansado de viajar en entusiasmos

de santo grande o pequeño milagroso  
caravanas como en tu pueblo y el mío  
para la lluvia para el destino para el pretexto  
sin la fe del inocente estremecido por siniestros  
aconteceres de la tierra en busca de su figura  
y se olvidan de dónde vienes hermano del maíz  
y de la caña y del día dormido sobre el otro  
no saben de tu largo camino en casa de puerta y ventana  
con corral para las mulas y canto de gallos y gallinas  
frente a la quietud de un farol tempranero  
iluminando al gigante de la palabra sumergida  
olvidan cuánto lloraste ante el paisaje de tu lápiz  
la agonía de figuras no vistas en tu tiempo  
la faena de fama y tortura de cadenas de espinas llorosas  
las concesiones dolientes a las espigas de tu altura  
oh Rubén y tu miedo a una sola vida  
(46, ll. 43-68)

[you are tired of traversing defenses  
applauses and *Darian* songs  
but you are moved by a stuttering child  
in the syllabary of the blue voice  
riding the dream of your sad princess  
such a child is your only life  
in the fickle pilgrimage of the literary bread  
similar to the berth of a lost ship  
in a street of artificial light for the gong of the latest trend  
you are tired of traveling in enthusiasms  
of grand saint or small miracle-worker  
caravans of your people and mine  
for the rain for destiny for pretext  
without the faith of innocents shaken by catastrophic  
events of a land in search of its figure  
and they forget from where you come brother of the maize  
from the sugarcane and from the day asleep over the other  
they do not know of your long journey in a house with a door and window  
with a stable for mules and the song of roosters  
facing the stillness of an early rising lighthouse  
illuminating the giant of the submerged word  
they forget how much you cried before the landscape of your pencil  
the agony of figures not yet seen in your time  
the task of fame and torture from the chains of weeping thorns  
the painful concessions to the ears of your height  
oh Ruben and your fear of only one life  
(46, ll. 43-68)]



Naranjo presents the traversal of the poet's own verse as a predictable encounter that no longer inspires any feeling for Darío. Rather, the appearance of the stuttering child revives the fatigued poet to create meaning. He is moved upon seeing the child's initial struggle with language, or the original moment of aspiration for poetic utterance ("en el silabario de la voz azul") in the same pursuit of the "vaga ilusión" ('vague hope') of Darío's princess from "Sonatina." Naranjo portrays Darío as identifying with the child's struggle at the same that he yearns for this moment of struggle—for the sensation of new ideas that necessitate giving them form. For Darío (and by extension, Naranjo) this struggle is the central calling of his poetic vocation ("pan literario") while the fear of this "only life" is the prospect of not being able to give form to the articulation of these ideas ("la agonía de figuras no vistas en tu tiempo").

Naranjo also notes that this agony is further burdened by the dreams not yet realized for the *patria* ("aconteceres de la tierra en busca de su figura"), which are also hindered by the negative aggrandizement of language and the establishment of cultural patrimonies that distract from the reality of the nation's circumstances ("de santo grande y pequeño milagroso / caravanas como en tu pueblo y el mío / para la lluvia para el destino para el pretexto"). The lyric speaker subtracts the glorifying aggrandizement of Darío when she democratizes the inclusion of his humble origins in Metapa, an idealization that serves as a reminder to the people of these nations ("tu pueblo y el mío") that would "forget" that the creative process can begin anywhere and that stresses the importance of the democratization of culture. Of course, in her restoration of Darío's humble origins, she also emphasizes his Central American identity when she addresses him as a fellow "hombre del maíz," to articulate a vision of historical solidarity (the reference to the Mayans as "people of the corn") and literary solidarity (the title of the novel written by Guatemalan Nobel Prize in Literature Miguel Angel Asturias).

Most importantly, this solidarity creates a leveling space to position herself as part of that literary legacy, and as this dissertation has purported to show, as part of a continuous political project to resist the mythification and consensus of her country's democratic exceptionalism. To that end, the poetic voice posits the democratic and revolutionary dream to take up the collective song (i.e. poetic tradition) of the poets who came before her:

me hablo en busca del héroe con abismos palabras y gritos  
me hablo en busca del seguidor con Rubén por grada y estatua fibrosa  
me hablo pensando en la voz de un nuevo Rubén unida a la de Whitman  
para levantar en la poesía el evangelio de hombres nuevos  
pan amor—qué se yo—quizás la palabra aún no sea  
el concepto vivo para llamar el sagrado llamado de una poeta  
y entonces se abren las puertas a un sueño bueno  
se puede pensar en lenguas tan universales  
como son las del amor y las del dolor  
las melodías de los arrullos frente a las cunas  
las señales de miedo en la brevedad del momento  
el reverso metal del ojo ante el laberinto del tiempo  
(47-48, ll. 128-139)

[I speak to myself in search of the hero with abysses words and shouts  
I speak to myself in search of the supporter with Ruben as tier and fibrous statue  
I speak to myself thinking of the voice of a new Ruben united to that of Whitman's  
to lift up in poetry the gospel of new men  
bread love—what do I know—perhaps the word has not yet come to be  
the living concept to beckon the sacred call of a poet  
and then the doors can open to a good dream  
one can think in languages so universal  
as are those of love and of pain  
the melodies of the lullabies in front of cribs  
the signs of fear in the brevity of the moment  
the reverse metal of the eye before the labyrinth of time  
(47-48, ll. 128-139)]

The repetition of “me hablo” evokes the opening lines of Whitman’s “Song of Myself” (“I celebrate myself, I sing myself”), but here the distinction with the verb “hablar” indicates that her song has not yet materialized, or that it does not yet have the collective outreach she envisions given its reflexive construction—that is, her dialogue remains with herself (“me

hablo”). She aspires to reconcile her poetics with her political platform (“levantar en la poesía el evangelio de hombres nuevos”), while the reference to “hombres nuevos,” an idea promoted by Ernesto “Che” Guevara to reflect the ideological prioritization of the welfare of whole over the individual, also positions her verse in direct dialogue with the revolutionary discourse of contemporary Latin American poetry.

Still, as we saw throughout her poetry, her popular uprising manifests as an intimate quest for social awareness that is still predicated on the transformative power of the word (“pan amor—que sé yo—quizás aún no sea”). Her aesthetic and civic engagement seeks to conceptualize her own poetic gospel of emancipation even at the expense of dismantling the illusory images, symbols and narratives that claim to unify the nation. Even in a post-revolutionary, post-conflict setting, her poetics of democracy refuses to be post-political, always in anticipation of new questions. If Dario wished for a blue sky, then Naranjo aims to interrupt the sky with storms, not to discredit her country’s democratic accomplishments, but to reinvigorate its dreams of democracy.

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