Waves in Time: Erosion and the Puerto Rican Subject Beyond Place, 1863-Present

by

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Abstract

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"Waves in Time*:* Erosion and the Puerto Rican Subject Beyond Place 1863-Present" explores the recurrence of the ocean as trope, as material, and as object of thought in Puerto Rican literature and art between the 19th and the 21th centuries. I investigate how the maritime mediates an aesthetic and political concern for the archipelago and beyond: the symbolic and material place of a Puerto Rican subject in space and time. Through an initial reading of Eugenio María de Hostos's *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), a foundational text for Puerto Rican literature and Caribbean political thought, I begin by identifying a cross-historical impetus to fix the subject and the place of Puerto Rico—a will to construct a terminal politics oriented towards a national future. Then, as the counterpoint to Hostos, I revisit key episodes in the development of Puerto Rican poetry to culminate in a study of Manuel Ramos Otero's queer migrant poetics. The argument underpinning this arc is that, against an anxious craving for permanence beginning around the time of Hostos's reformist discourse, we can read for a "poetics of erosion" that considers place as an ephemeral temporal and spatial practice. Erosion describes an aesthetic and political position that reanimates debates concerning the legibility of a Puerto Rican national subject by exploring negative affects, gestures, and forms that articulate an affinity for disintegration, transience, and decay. The broader theoretical intervention at stake in this project is a recasting of our given vocabulary for the critique of colonial forms of inhabiting the world as they are mediated by the expropriation of land, our increasingly-precarious relationship to ocean water, and the emerging subjectivities that attend to the dissolution of both symbolic and material infrastructures of the state and the nation.

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y para la luz misma

Introduction: *On Erosion as Gesture and Method*

que ya ni se quiere el para qué o más bien el de dónde.
solo un soy pleno y luciente, aunque esté luciente por el reflejo de la luna sobre las lágrimas

que el suicidio se pospone porque se quiere pensar que la muerte pueda ser puntual,
aún intuyendo que no lo será nunca. que la vida es una encadenación de casis,
que a veces solo se pide una ola en el tiempo que rompa la cadena brevemente;
y que aún sabiendo esto nos disponemos a esperar por esa ola en medio de la agonía.
-Ángela María Dávila, "¿qué pasa?"

I. Prelude

In *Homenaje al ombligo* (1977), Ángela María Dávila and José María Lima's cycle of poems written in two voices, an experiment in polyvocal lyric seeks to disintegrate the singularity associated with the lyric self in the pursuit of "mis más remotas voces" unsounded in the sea (6). The multiplication of speakers foregrounds the audibility of voices whose remoteness suggests a becoming sensible to what appears to be mute, but actually reverberates with speech. The effacing of singularity also hinges on the dethroning of the name: these poems describe a necessary "desnombrar," or a radical un-naming of the self as it grates against the always-coming tide: "no quiero nombre, / que me lo lleve el mar lavándolo / en mi arena, / que me lo arrastre el mar" (8). Although the book's index identifies each of the poems with their respective "author," the body of the text itself features untitled poems in a layout that allows for a continuity refusing segmentation and the identity of one speaking voice and instead offers a nameless *we* articulated through the ebb and flow of speakers that draw on images of seas, shores, tidal flows, and other marine metaphors. Written against the backdrop of increased repression of pro-independence symbols and a violent rise in surveillance and incarceration for dissident activity in Puerto Rico in the decades that followed the 1951 constitution of the last remaining colony in the West, this washing away of the singular, the fixed, the authored, and the named takes on valences beyond their innovation in lyrical forms. *Homenaje al ombligo* provides a point of entry into erosion as an aesthetic gesture with resonances in a history of political and social disruption, as well as a method or analytic for thinking about Puerto Rican art and literature as an archive of subjectivities in refusal of permanence and fixity.

Appearing halfway through the collection, "que pasa?" is both a prose poem prompted by a question as well as a defiant enumeration of facts in the refusal of time within the very constraints of temporality. The poem features a speaker who recounts what has gone on and what continues to go on while simultaneously affirming a potentially paradigm-shifting and brief present in which lyrical speaking registers an experience of agony beyond the promises of cohesion and sequentiality. The voice we attend to in "¿que pasa?" is at once singular, in a hermetic and melancholic yearning in line with the long mystical tradition that informs the collection to which the poem belongs, and yet also a voice that is overflowing, opening gradually towards the "nos" of an oceanic multiplicity of voices consecrated by that agony which names such an *we*.

The poem is, however, in a noticeably opaque and ambiguous relationship to index: who is this "nos", and what is the source of its trans-temporal agony? From where, other than this shoreless expanse of waves in the sea, does this voice speak? Its scale verges on the planetary: the moon, the waves, the cosmic vastness unmoored from land. We are quickly in the heart of the question of and the craving for what history—this hallowed narrative confluence of place, voice, and time under the sign of order and continuity—requires. We are also quickly in the heart of the problem caused by a subjectivity that does not cohere with regard to lyric's tethering to the historical, if we take the voice

of lyric to be, as it is in the Romantic, post-Romantic, and even modernist credo, a voice in the service of gradually clarifying subject that moves freely in its self-conscious historical being.

Can we speak of a voice in excess of the promise of a place of rest? Can that shared voice— the "nos" conscribed by the agony beyond one place and time—itself describe a place, if by place we take to mean a legitimate condition of enunciation, agency, and subjectivity? A voice beyond and between, in continuity with its own history, mediating the historical while also troubling its foundational aims and methods?

Through the ecstatic vision of a wave that momentarily replaces the trope of the chain as the orderly sequence of events, "que pasa?" considers an unlikely possibility, an unlikely place or position with regards to the future-oriented promise of place and liberation. It stages the possibility of recounting and telling "what has happened" and "what is happening" as a dynamic and shifting set of relationships that defy the stasis of a singular location and a singular voice, troubling the diachronic structuring of its speaker (and speakers') history. In the form of mystic speech, a grammar borne of the chasm produced by an experience in excess of an available language, "qué pasa?" names a *wave in time*—a felt force within the sequence of historical unfolding—that would mark, for a moment, some kind of swerve, a pivotal veering off course: "que la vida es una encadenación de casis, que a veces solo se pide una ola en el tiempo que rompa la cadena brevemente; y que aún sabiendo esto nos disponemos a esperar por esa ola en medio de la agonía." (36). I read this swerve not as the total annulment of the poem's constitutive agony, but rather, as an arrival to the elsewhere not afforded by the chain of "almosts" ("casis") that punctuate an ongoing history of revolts which have failed to redeem the agony. How do we read for and with a wave instead of a chain, and what critical openings does this tropological shift allow?

Here, I inevitably think of Benjamin's version of the dialectical historian whose active telling of history would in an instant redeem all previous forms of failed revolt: a history whose gaze is anchored in a past which has not passed until all the dead have risen, after the messianic arrival of a voice of redemption through which the unsounded voices of the dead finally speak. It is tempting and plausible to read "que pasa?" along these messianic lines if it weren't for the fact that this poem also resists its moment of redemption: it has already announced that arrival will not come, that there is nothing but the wave and the waiting always in the midst, in the middle, "en medio de la agonía" and not apart from or in sublation of it.

Another idea of the will, too, emerges in this stanza from "que pasa?" as the poem stages an opposition between suicide as an act of the will and "muerte" as a fate dealt, as history received rather than acted on the self. Here, too, it is equally tempting to read the death and suicide that open the stanza as an iteration of an anti-colonial death drive whereby "muerte" becomes a gesture of rest and freedom, at best, and defeat and surrender at worst. In the willed death denoted by suicide we could interpret the ultimate act of autonomy over an experience in time. Such a reading, however, would foreclose the activity and the complex relations at stake in this version of the thanatological in the same way Benjamin's sleeping dead are ossified in his formulation as passive figures awaiting a voice. Death as some antisocial shorthand, as its been recast in queer and postcolonial theorizations, also forecloses valences of the thanatological that are inseparable from the specificity of spiritual and life practices that would force us to be wary of a "Death writ large," a master-narrative of *thanatos*. Could death here be pointing towards an anterior or altogether different relationship to that which passes, to "lo que pasa"?

Ángela María Dávila writes a maritime voice of open waiting, a lingering and vagrancy in history, to suggest an anteriority in the midst of time, a wave crashing against the temporal sequence of the ordered world which gnaws at the chain of linked episodes of a history which does not make sense but which produces new senses of an experience in a place and time structured by colonial forms of inhabiting the world, a wave in time that marks a refusal of the temporality of redemption by way of

a meditation on a disposition to disoriented waiting, a wave which might be at odds with political instrumentalization because of its avowed brevity, a transience which might make it unfit and unusable for the "sturdier" future-oriented teleologies of the liberatory and the decolonial. I have come to understand this disposition, present in key episodes in the literature and art of the Puerto Rican archipelago between the 19th and 20th centuries under study here, as a sensibility of *erosion*.

II. Waves in Time

Waves in Time explores the recurrence of the ocean in Puerto Rican literature and art between the 19th and the 21th century in order to investigate how a sustained attention to the maritime mediates a central aesthetic and political concern for the archipelago and beyond: the trouble with locating and fixing a Puerto Rican subject in space and time. I identify such an impetus to fix and overdetermine the subject and the place of Puerto Rico with the will to construct a sturdy and terminal politics oriented towards a national future, whether this future takes the shape of an autonomous province of the Spanish empire, the colonial legal construct of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA), or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico), or the utopian vision of an autonomous, sovereign, and free state yet to come.[1] By placing critical attention on the way water circulates in this constellation of texts and artworks, I seek to create a discursive opening in which I pursue the possibility of an alternative, anterior, or appositional site beyond the stable common place and time for the subject of Puerto Rico.

My argument is that, against an anxious craving for subject and place-permanence beginning around the time of the Antillean Confederation, we can read key moments in the canon of Puerto Rican literature for a trope of *erosion* that treats location, time, and subjectivity as ephemeral, perennially temporary, and fugitive to the capture that would make such subjectivities available to the formation of the state. I seek to move beyond discourses that fix or discipline "place" and the collectives they claim to interpellate and protect. Erosion names an aesthetic and political position that reanimates debates concerning a stable and legible Puerto Rican national subject by exploring the value of "negative" affects, gestures, and forms such as disintegration, disappearance, silence, and dissolution. These forms key us into a condition of illegibility and opacity coextensive with this subject and its life worlds. These axes of interpretation recuperate an affinity for the fugitive, an ontological proximity to dissolution and evanescence that marks the condition of the Puerto Rican and this subject's relationship to a place and time in common.

Thus, a coeval argument my project makes is that Puerto Rican literature regarding the sea presents us with subjects, voices, and sensibilities that articulate various forms of inhabiting the colonial world otherwise, even within colonialism's impositions of temporal, sensorial, and imaginative arrest. I want to pursue, with rigor, the possibility of an already existing condition that, while incommensurable with to the *will to fix*—both as the will to arrest motion and the impetus to correct and cure a condition of endless vagrancy—that runs through the sequence of Puerto Rico's historical archive, nevertheless presents itself as an interruption to the order of things: *olas en el tiempo*, waves in time that momentarily open and activate a common thread: a Puerto Rican sensibility that moves and communes with and through erosion, a sensibility whose refusal is specifically a refusal to be rescued or rendered stable within colonial and postcolonial trajectories in

[1] The ELA (Estado Libre Asociado, or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as it is known in English), names the political relation that began in 1952 with the constitution signed by then-governor Luis Muñoz Marín. It codifies into law the colonial relationship through which Puerto Rico is not a part of but a territory of the United States, beholden to federal law, yet lacking representation within the U.S. Congressional and Senate governing bodies.

the broader Caribbean and the Americas as a precondition to ontological, historical, or political solvency.

While a shared engagement with the waters that surround the archipelago foreground an occasion for comparison among the texts and artworks under study in this project, each presents an irreducible occasion to reflect on the historical and political conditions that inform the version of the sea that emerges in them, as well as on the crises in subjectivity and historicity they make available to critique and exploration. In each episode under consideration here, the sea shifts shapes, taking on varying and incommensurable voices, acting on land and people differently each time. The sea appears at times as an antagonist to the dream of continental land expanse, a chronotope of erosion as antithetical to political projects of permanence. At others, the sea is the amatory Other of lyrical triangulation, and we bear witness to a collaborative and utopian sea as an archive of resistance and unity beyond death. In yet another possibility, the sea acts as the promise of disintegration and we encounter transformed queer subjects and queered places that model wasting away as a legitimate condition of being and relating.

In all cases, however, the sea is a threshold and a precondition to meditations on transient spatialities and subjectivities, where the archipelago becomes a place from which to think about possible forms of inhabiting the precarity of a world marked by coloniality. Considering water in this project thus demands that I remain with the problem of habitable land and with the possibility of sedimentation, erosion's counterpart. What wastes away, and what, for a moment, takes shape to offer another turn or swerve in the continuum of an ongoing history—a chain—of subjugation?

III. Erosion in a Tidalectic Worldview

Reading erosively sidesteps the forward-backward and past-present directionality that the study of nation in relation to literature has often taken, and instead highlights a series of sedimentations and erosions in mutual implication and endless repositioning in time and space. Barbadian poet and theorist Kamau Brathwaite offers a critique of these binarizations in his concept of the tidalectic. Elizabeth DeLoughry, who has written extensively on Brathwaite's neologism in the context of both Pacific and Caribbean ocean literatures, describes the tidalectic as a geopoetic-historical alternative to Western epistemologies which foreclose complex and layered dynamics at play in the Caribbean sensibility:

> Challenging the binarism of Western thought, the ocean and land are seen in continuous relation—as shifting points of contact, arrival, departure, and transformation. Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an "alter/native" historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This "tidal dialectic" resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics foreground "alter/native" epistemologies to colonialism and capitalism, with their linear and materialist biases. In contrast to Western models of passive and empty space, such as *terra* (and aqua) *nullius*, which were used to justify territorial expansion, tidalectics reckons a space and time that requires an active and participatory engagement with the island seascape. In keeping with Caribbean thought and aesthetics, tidalectics also challenge the Western bifurcation between nature and culture and position both as always already modern. (DeLoughry 94)

Tidalectics foregrounds an orientation towards the world that is attuned to the inherent and meaningful porosity between land—where the nation has sedimented and fixed itself into visibility,

legibility, and permanence—and the maritime, the dialectical other, the antithesis of nation insofar as it obfuscates this will to arrest motion and disintegration. From the standpoint of tidalectics, an oceanic orientation acts on the constitution of subjectivities, cultures, aesthetic modes, epistemologies, and histories on the shore, where fixed land and fluid water meet. A tidalectic framework therefore highlights an unresolved movement which entangles histories of the territorialization of land and the expropriation of the oceans (via commerce, travel, and colonial expansion) with affects, gestures, and experiences in excess of those material legacies. Here, Brathwaite's own emphasis on the "alter/native" forces us to contend with the irreducible: what is native to a sensibility autonomous from colonial histories while avoiding the essentialisms that cast the "native" as a fiction of originary purity and stasis. Brathwaite, as DeLoughry reminds us, avoids the fetishization of the native by placing whatever's "native" into dynamic and constitutive conversation with the irreversible mark of coloniality which cannot be spirited away, but which instead engenders new complexities, new sensibilities which shape our understanding of both the autochthonous and of the Western concepts coming onshore. If, as Derek Walcott notes in his metaphoric equivalence between the maritime and the historical, the sea remembers (and re-members) all, then tidalectics is an instrument which affords us paths of reading and thinking with the emergent shapes and the ways of knowing and sensing that become expressed through them.[2] Erosion represents one such "alter/native" framework present in Puerto Rican literature and art.

IV. Erosion: Sensibility and Methodology

As a corollary of a tidalectic worldview, erosion helps us read for a refusal of permanence in cultural production implicated at the crosscurrent of Western-continental orientations and Caribbean-archipelagic material realities. In my project, erosion is made visible and thinkable through a reading practice sensitized to the encounter between form and informality. Regarding the visible and what becomes available to critical inquiry, DeLoughry suggests that the vessel is what makes tidalectics legible by connecting "routes and roots" via histories of travel and movement (DeLoughrey 98). In my study, I consider works of literature and art to be such figurative and literal vessels of a maritime sensorium—repositories of knowledge and fabulation—that register an encounter between forms and which open up new ways of thinking about space, time, and subjectivity.

The encounter between form and dissolution structures the practice through which I put into relation and critical comparison key episodes in the development of the Puerto Rican erosive sensibility. I have assembled an archive that begins in my first chapter with the foundational figure of Eugenio María de Hostos. This first chapter, devoted entirely to Hostos's epistolary novel *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), seeks to anchor my argument in a point zero, a originary formulation of the problem of the Puerto Rican place and time as it becomes articulated negatively through the yearnings of one of the key figures in 19th century Caribbean and Pan-American thought. As I move into my second chapter, I perform a literary genealogy of the "poetics of the wave" in which I track the erosive sensorium in the development of 20th century poetics in Puerto Rico. As a chapter dedicated to fleshing out a vocabulary—an epistemic and aesthetic toolkit for an oceanic sensibility–

[2] I am referring to one of Walcott's most widely-circulated poems, "The Sea is History," which opens with "Where are your monuments?" and from that question puts into dialectical opposition the concreteness of the Western historical index and the fugitivity, fluidity, and invisibility of another, maritime history. Towards the end of the poem, "history" begins after the silence of the lyrical speaker: "and in the salt chuckle of rocks / with their sea pools, there was the sound / like a rumour without any echo. This passage from the visibility of Western history to the sonority of a maritime history thematizes one such model of alter/nativity: a learning to hear and feel for tidalectics as a precondition for a history untethered from indexicality, legibility, and fixity.

–that departs from the grammar of fixity inaugurated in Hostos, the discrepancy in length of this chapter in comparison to the rest of the thesis attests to a strategy of genealogy deployed to highlight lines of continuity over the course of a period that spans the greater part of a century. The 20th century bore witness to consecutive transformations in Puerto Rico: the foundations of infrastructures of U.S. domination over Puerto Rican soil, the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and revolts and riots both in the archipelago and abroad. In this second chapter, I elaborate the central tropes and figures of the erosive counter-archive by reading for cross-historical resonances among three key poets of the century: Julia de Burgos, Francisco Matos Paoli, and Ángela María Dávila. Thus, the chapter is concerned with definition work, with an emerging vocabulary, and with the establishment of a through-line of continuity across a century of poetry. These poets inaugurate a sensibility which I develop further my third chapter, which, in an deliberate counterpoint to the first, returns to the monographic strategy by centering one story by one author: Manuel Ramos Otero's "El cuento de la Mujer de Mar" (1979). My reading of Ramos Otero's short story highlights how his text absorbs and further elaborates 150 years of Puerto Rican writing around erosion. The vocabulary articulated in the 20th century poets becomes inscribed in Ramos Otero's desirous textuality through the voice of a migratory, queer, and physically ill storyteller. Informed by the poetics of erosion, Ramos Otero's errant *cuentero* recasts Hostos's *peregrino* as a figure in refusal of the available forms administered by the land-oriented logics of fixed foundations.

Erosion becomes apparent in Hostos's narrative work as it comes formally undone and thematically centered on death and the decay of the protagonist's lover's frail body. The novel performs the impossibility of its completion to suggests a fundamental crisis in closure and coherence, a crisis which the narrator confronts by fearfully gazing upon the sea that shores up histories of colonial subjugation and Black suffering that refute the organizing capacity of *Logos*—the law of Empire, the spiritual key of *Weltgeist*, and the written word of the literary text. Thus, the sea, death, and the erosion of given forms are already triangulated from the outset of a Puerto Rican discourse on its own relation to historical unfolding and its location in relation to the geopolitics of the 19th century Caribbean. Death and decay are the means through which the novel thematizes the intrusion of time, itself thematized through the Atlantic waters crossed by the novel's titular pilgrim.

Erosion continues to function as both an aesthetic sensibility and a methodology for reading the development of 20th century Puerto Rican poetic innovation in the second chapter of the dissertation. The dance between form and formlessness is grounded in this chapter by a consideration of sound and embodiment in relation to the trope of ocean water that functions as the keystone for this genealogy. In assembling the vocabulary of the poets of the ocean of the 20th century in Puerto Rico, I seek to track voices that mark the shore, the tide, and the open sea as sites of contact with the release from form and singularity—a willed and conscious disintegration of the body's form and of singular lyric voice in a thanatological disposition that establishes a key tension between these poets and the Hostosian foundational text. In these thematized transformations we encounter a multivocal *grito* (scream) which activates cross-temporal alliances with uncounted suffering and revolt in the history of Puerto Rico. Ocean water returns here as a mediator, and I read scenes of paralinguistic excess and corporal disintegration in Julia de Burgos, Francisco Matos Paoli, and Ángela María Dávila in order to flesh out pathways towards a sensorium that refuses legibility and permanence even as it renders sensible the weight of a history marked by death and subjugation, a history swirling in the sea waters that recur as tropological keys in these key episodes of Puerto Rican poetic history. At stake here, too, is a conversation regarding the ethics of literary representation: how can art account for unsounded violence, for the silent and the submarine resistance to ongoing catastrophe? Additionally, erosion as a grounds for comparison appears in my reading of these poets within the context of the principal currents of Caribbean poetics. Through this comparison, I seek to contribute an expansion of our given readings of Puerto Rican poetic

development beyond the borders of a national literature and think and read Puerto Rican 20th century poetry as deeply engaged with central questions of Caribbean poetics such as those articulated by Aimé Césaire and Virgilio Piñera.

At the crossroads of material and corporal disintegration, a queer migrant sensibility in Manuel Ramos Otero's narrative, itself inflected through temporal meanderings of poetry, provides an alternative framework with which to consider the relationship between diasporic space and nation of origin, migratory circuits of community, and minoritarian sexuality in my third chapter, devoted to Ramos Otero's celebrated short story, "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar." The queer migrant Puerto Rican subjectivity—the creature of *sexile*, following Lawrence LaFountain-—erodes the practice and concept of location and belonging by highlighting how Puerto Rican literature imagines Caribbean spaces where subjects of experience give a language to their wasting away at the margins of infrastructure, habitability, and community's possibility. A communing with the trace of migrant ghosts, sediments of the Puerto Rican exilic condition sensitized through Ramos Otero's narrative, foregrounds new conversations on the Puerto Rican literary canon; the story's narrator becomes a medium for the ghosts of dead writers, and a perverse alliance with the writers of the nation makes possible the intersubjective exchange among errant pilgrims of multiplied experiences of displacement, dispossession, and nonlinear temporality.

This queer migratory sensibility also offers dynamic ways of reading bodies marked by the weight of the sensorial and historical archive of illness and diagnosis as foundational epistemic discourses in the development of the Puerto Rican national subject. Reading for erosion within this historical archive activates connections between the legacy of the *tropics as pathology* (in the archive of geographical determinism and degeneration theory) and the contemporary legacies of the AIDS pandemic as both are interwoven in the eroding bodies written by Manuel Ramos Otero. In other words, illness is a shape erosion takes as it comes into contact with the weight of the archive of foundation I examine in Hostos. This shape, which in Hostos's *La peregrinación de Bayoán* becomes displaced into the feminine other, is explored and exalted in Ramos Otero through a sensibility of perverse play. The sign of illness, as Daylet Dominguez argues, became a foundational symbolic infrastructure for articulating a Puerto Rican subjectivity from the moment of its inscription into a history, beginning in the 18th century. In Ramos Otero's queer migratory poetics, archives of illness inflect Caribbean time and space to suggest resonances between the foundational malaise—the living-dead being of a Puerto Rican body—and sexual dissidence against the backdrop of urban migratory locations. A double refusal takes place here in light of these sedimented histories: the refusal of the cure implicit the legacy of a literary and essayistic tradition of *letrados* striving to correct this foundational ontological sickness, as well as a refusal of assimilationist forms of community.

Through Ramos Otero's interweaving of *eros* and *thanatos*—an eros which vibrates within erosion—in the amphibian architectures of the Hudson River piers, we can think of an expanded Caribbean sensibility that articulates a practice of location that departs from the given terms regarding center and periphery in the study of a diaspora. As a methodology, erosion contributes to a corpus of emerging critical vocabularies in Caribbean Studies that attend to an inherent state of flux and transience in the region. Recent interventions in the field, such as Carole Boyce Davies' concept of the "twilight zone," propose such a Caribbean: a way of considering body-space relations beyond a telos of territorial stability. Instead, the porous and the transient are taken seriously as an aesthetic and critical position that expands the interpretative possibilities for the present rather than place a unilateral wager on a future that is increasingly precarious. The dance between erosion and sedimentation highlights the shapes a common place and time can take and the way one history, a history dragging the disappearing island and its placeless peoples, reveals new ways of pursuing the study of imperial urban space.

V. Versions of Death: Erosion and the Thanatological

At key points in my analysis, I will draw attention to the ways that the texts and artworks under study in this project implicitly or explicitly address, thematize, and represent deaths both literal and symbolic. As a commonplace in literature and critique, death is a slippery thing to write and think about. Death and its accompanying figures—the ghost, the haunting, and the voices from beyond—are often treated as entry points for thinking about the intersection of the past and the present, the past's persistence despite the forward progression of time. Benjamin's writing on the dialectical historian, quoted earlier, presents us with such an image of the dead rising and redeemed by a revolutionary history. Deconstruction in turn gives us a language for thinking death in relation to the interplay of presences and absences in the sign, pertinent to the making of meaning and knowledge, and in the case of literature, we are wont to speak of the written word as a textual cemetery—of writing as a ghostly practice of marking with and speaking with (and for) the dead. Interventions in queer theory inflected by psychoanalysis, notably Lee Edelman's discussion of the death drive as a way towards an oppositional subjectivity countering the social demands of heteronormativity, mobilize death as a charged antagonistic politics to combat reproductive time and its concomitant limited social configurations. Through all these discursive figures and theoretical models, of course, we come up against the actually ineffable weight of real and ongoing deaths that escape language because language cannot account for the brutal and accelerated loss of life that has become coextensive with the state as a practice of necropolitics.

Although these vocabularies and valences of death inevitably influence and indeed inform my reading practice, I also want to think through the relationship among death, erosion, and alternative subjectivities in Puerto Rico that emerges through its own literature and art. My conviction with this reading practice—to read and think with texts and works of art as already taking part in theorization—is that the way death moves through Puerto Rican literature can help us expand our vocabulary regarding the thanatological and the political by reminding us that death is marked by registers unaccounted for and at times rejected by our critical vocabularies. Death, and the conversation the living have with death and the dead, is more dynamic than any master narrative of a "Death writ large" that in the case of Puerto Rico, from where and with which I think, death is a prism refracting various ways in which a literature has considered and sketched out subjectivities that have grated and continue to grate against the impositions of Western modernity, subjectivities decidedly *outside of time*. Puerto Rican cultural and literary critic Melanie Perez suggests a foundational death (of the Father, of Order, or the Law) as a key throughline in the development of writing in the archipelago:

> Algunas consecuencias de la muerte de un orden, para quienes habitamos en la parte del planeta que fue introducida a los tiempos modernos—esa temporalidad de la prisa, la idea del progreso, de la superación continua de las condiciones de vida, de la explotación de la naturaleza, la idea de la participación ciudadana en el gobierno—es que pasamos a ocupar un tiempo histórico fuera del tiempo (así se siente), puesto que estamos desprendidos del mundo premoderno… a la vez que nos salimos del tiempo lineal de la modernidad mientras el ángel de la historia (Benjamin) nos impulsa hacia la quiebra económica del país (17, my emphasis).

The shapes and approaches to death within my archive indeed mutate over the course of the project: in the case of foundational fictions in the 19th century (observed in Hostos), emergent political and literary subjects contend with death and perishability as they look to Logos in order to escape a historical, geographical, and symbolic zone marked by thanatos in the form of illness, degeneration,

and the specter of bondage. There, a melancholy politics ensues which in turn discloses a striking uneasiness with the history of the flesh; a phobia of desire, and consequently with the transience of an embodied Caribbean that resists or ruptures the organizing and permanence-granting capacity of the Letter. In other words, death, like the ocean, is a problem for and of slippery foundations.

My approach shifts in the second chapter, when I consider the way the ocean mediates poetic interventions that articulate refusal and illegibility. The sea, which in Hostos marks a dreaded aporia to the transhistorical *Logos* that would secure legibility of a Puerto Rican subject within the grammar of empire, returns in the second chapter likewise as a thanatological location. A sea-change does transpire, however: in the genealogy I assembled for 20th century Puerto Rican ocean poetics, that liminal littoral zone's ambiguity between form and dissolution provides a geopoetic vocabulary with which to express a fugue from legibility that is thematized as a willed death: voices seek the loss of their name, bodies long for the release from the body's form, and whole communities are founded in poetry through the dismemberment of one corpus. Disintegration and death in this genealogical reading point towards the generative dispersal of singularity.

These tropological concerns organized under the sign of the thanatological meet the sensitized flesh of the body in Manuel Ramos Otero's narrative, where we must consider lived proximities to death by way of exile, drug addiction, and illness expressed in literature through subjectivities on the edge of disintegration. Narrativity here grants a voice to a living-dead zone that in turn opens up critical paths towards thinking a persistence of living-dead subjectivities throughout the course of Puerto Rican writing. Once more, I position Manuel Ramos Otero as a figure that absorbs a historical literary current in order to underscore the repeated encounter with key coordinates of a Puerto Rican subjectivity untethered to a narrative of subjective teleological clarification. Once freed from the hermeneutic gridlock of the nation, a Puerto Rican subjectivity in Ramos Otero can contend with death as part and parcel of the sensibility of erosion. Again Melaine Pérez observes in her discussion of a national literature inflected through death that writing in Puerto Rico has continually insisted on speaking of the dead, of the deaths "de la nación, de los padres de la nación, sean héroes nacionales, populares, anti-héroes, de los sueños muertos de la nación, de las pequeñas muertes cotidianas" in a literature, a culture, and a lived social nexus marked by epistemic ruptures, foundational dispossession, and a history of violent death by way of two consecutive colonial orders (Pérez 28).

Death in these cases suggests its mobilization in a refusal of the order imposed by the logic of bare life at play in a colonial context of politics and subject formation. This path of interpretation aligns with the valorization of the unproductive we can observe in recent interventions in both theory and cultural production.[3] Here, death and desire, eros and thanatos, are mutually implicated in a dance in which subjects consciously attend to their own perishing in time through pleasure and self-annihilation in a terminal giving over to the Other that troubles the temporality of the reproductive subject of modernity and the state. Death, like the ocean, emerges as a spatio-temporal alternative to progression in what Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia theorizes through the language of vagrancy and uselessness: a practice of haunting through which the living dwell in close proximity to perishing and interrupt circuits of productivity and progression. In this transitive haunting—or mediumship—the voices and spectral bodies of the dead act on the time and space of living actants while the living move through geographies and temporalities inflected through the sedimented

[3] A few salient examples of the prominence of fatigue, uselessness, vagrancy, and other forms of the unproductive in recent art, literature, and theory in Puerto Rico can be observed in the works of performance artist and choreographer nibia pastrana santiago, Eduardo Lalo's hybrid works *Donde* (2005) *Los países invisibles* (2013), as well as Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia's *De la queda(era): imagen, tiempo y detención en Puerto Rico* (2021).

ghosts in a history of meanderings mapped out through affinities beyond the spatio-temporal logics of the state.

Nevertheless, I run the risk of being misread as a champion for a specious counter-politics through which negativity becomes a "new positivity" in an facile binarization of the normative world turned on its head: thanatos, along with defeat and renunciation as the only viable options, would amount to a primordial colonial death drive in the form of solipsistic anti-social suicide from which no community could ever come to be. Thanatos, as the last possible route through which a subject sidesteps the impasse of the historico-political and reclaims autonomy over time and space, would actually escape from the political and possible action merely spirited away. To this potential misreading I can only reply that what interests me about the way death moves specifically through Puerto Rican literature is precisely its capacity to enact unaccounted-for alliances that complicate any easy gloss of death as a terminal or static condition. This interpretative path also offers a complement to the archive of other living-dead figures such as the zombie: a common glyph for the body and the subject as it is constructed under the sign of racial capitalism through chattel slavery.[4] Though colonial capitalist expropriation and dispossession do indeed inform the proximity to death articulated in some of my readings, death ultimately circulates in my analysis as a transitive threshold and rarely as a fixed or permanent condition that subjugates the body. The oscillating passage between the living and the dead helps me elaborate a network of communion and communication that in turn instantiates new organizations of the communal by reconfiguring the *we* of Puerto Rico as neither entirely in the realm of the living, where sovereignty and politics have a discursive stake over the organization of community, nor a doomed and passive necropolis, where there is nothing to be "done" by relinquish autonomy.

As a matter of textual analysis and cross-historical comparison, the commons instantiated by way of the thanatological foregrounds in my project a study of literary kinship that activates circuits of mutual readership, alliance, collaboration, and friendship outside state politics and geographic fixity, a Puerto Rican commons emerges which is able to hold together histories of dislocation, disintegration, and perennial flight that do not exclude the articulation of a *we*. Though both writers produce texts in which living-dead subjectivities and precarious bodies erode, their intertextual conversation, articulated through shared moribund states of exile, illness, and yes, proximity to the ocean, suggest forms of the common that, though transient and emerging on the run, attains the "collective density" and subject-forming capacity that Glissant locates in the active "exploration" of a complicated, dislocated, and painful Caribbean time (Glissant 64).[5] Death is an aspect of this

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[4] The zombie in the Caribbean literary, political, and syncretic spiritual imagination, whose presence is felt deeply in Haitian cultural history, has been a fundamental organizing sign through which to symbolize, register, and critique the state of self-dispossession at stake in the body under enslavement and colonialism, as well as a means through which to articulate racialization and racialized embodiments in both the Caribbean and as an exported racist trope in the United States and European popular culture. The nightmare of mindless, infinite labor beyond death, adjacent to the trope of possession as an analogy for the disempowerment and lack of sovereignty inherent in the colonized condition, marks a unilateral imposition of the living-dead condition. I want to distinguish my articulation of death from this important Caribbean trope of the zombie by underscoring the transitivity and oscillation between life and death I've tracked in my readings. At stake for me here is not the extension of capital into the necrotic state, but rather the way through which key articulations of subjectivity in Puerto Rican literature and cultural production respond to death as an *aspect* of life and not separate from it. For a discussion of the zombie from an ethnographic and uniquely hemispheric sensibility, see Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (1938). For a survey of scholarly considerations on the cultural, political, and aesthetic history of the zombie from a variety of academic disciplines, see Sarah Lauro's edited volume: *Zombie Theory: A Reader* (2017).

[5] From "The Quarrel with History"; "This exploration is therefore related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament. It leads to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future, without the help of those plateaus in time from which the West has benefited, without the help of that collective density

dislocated temporality, and my attention to the circulation of the thanatological in my writing responds to a sensitivity for unlikely ways through with Puerto Rican and Caribbean literatures and cultural forms have developed autochthonous figuration for being in communication and in common.

This final point begs me to address the role of spirituality and technologies and practices of devotion specific to the archive I am attending to. I conclude these preliminary reflections on the thanatological by returning to the sea as a framework and methodology that also touches on the matter at hand. As I mentioned before, part of what reanimates this conversation on death hinges on knowledges and practices unaccounted for in our given vocabulary to discuss death critically. I am indebted in my reading to the legacy of writers and practitioners for whom the sea, as a realm of the dead, is likewise a dynamic material space, a powerful cultural symbol, and a fundamental spiritual conduit. As a zone of beginnings and endings, the sea moves in my archive through registers of spiritual practice common to Caribbean contexts marked by the transatlantic legacies of enslavement and racialized murder. In such cases of hybridity, creolization, and spiritual syncretism, the sea is both mother and mortician, salve, saint, and terror all at once, a conjoiner as well as a disruptor. Versions of the wisdoms of the deities of the sea, of Yemayá, and other ocean virgins, populate this maritime imagination. The sea, then, already explodes tidalectically with oppositions that do not seek resolution. Many of the texts under study in this project are likewise implicitly or explicitly informed by a worldview in which consort and communication with the spiritual aspect of the ocean is not separate from quotidian life practices. Thus, I align myself with Caribbeanist thinkers like Kamau Brathwaite, whose tidalectic I've discussed, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's *Ezili's Mirrors*, M. NourbeSe Phillip's *Zong*!, and Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, who have taught me to read ocean water for voices, histories, genders, subjects and communities in the submarine (dis)unities that shape Caribbean space, Caribbean bodies and the pasts and futures imaginable through an attention to the waters we contend with as subjects in relation to an ocean that gives as much as it destroys, that clarifies as much as it obfuscates, and which sediments as much as it erodes.[6]

VI. Eroding the Canon

While I place marked emphasis on key disruptive figures in literary and aesthetic innovation in Puerto Rico in my analysis—notably the development of vanguard poetics in the 20th century that culminate in the queer migratory poetics deployed by Manuel Ramos Otero—I nevertheless seek to reinvigorate the reading of hallowed and arguably ossified figures in the development of a Puerto Rican national literature. There are various reasons for this deliberate remaining with the canon. There is, of course, the issue of historical rigor my argument requires: a reading practice that

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that is the primary value of an ancestral cultural heartland. That is what I call a prophetic vision of the past." I want to suggest here that such a "collective density" —which Glissant identifies with rootedness, homelands, and places of origin (Africa as continental certainty in his case vis-à-vis the creolized Caribbean—emerges in Puerto Rican writing precisely through subjectivities shaped by a "painful notion of time," subjectivities that articulate and are articulated by placelessness and precarity. This density is a density of sedimented dispossessions that speak to each other and thus engender a site from which to enounce a "we" in spite of the relative lack of density Glissant identifies with the Caribbean subject.

[6] It is also important to note the importance of specifically Black epistemologies and cosmovisions inseparable from these contributions. The historical rupture of the Transatlantic slave trade inaugurated the violent implication of the West in the archive of the sea. Creolized Afro-diasporic pantheons give a shape to the voices of the sea as mother, redeemer, taker of souls, and as resting place of the dead, and these spiritual knowledges have become methodologies for scholars thinking though our relationship with the ocean beyond trade routes and logistics.

tracks an immanent critical current latent in even the texts by authors for whom impermanence and transience present an ontological and epistemic problem as well as an impasse to future sovereignty. This reading practice speaks of a critical framework informed by the value of negativity which allows me to read the canon against the grain of its own proposed ideological and literary project. As episodes in the pursuit of a Puerto Rican literary identity, texts recognized and valued as canonical congeal in them the very historical and epistemic crises that foreground my argument about their erosion. I move in and through the oscillation between sedimentation and the disintegration at play in the canonical in order to illustrate the infinite conversation between the critical voices in a literature and the bulwarks of an accepted literary tradition.

Rather than disregard the presence and historical gravitas of a literary tradition, genealogy, or canon in Puerto Rican literature, I have deliberately chosen to read *with* the canonical. There could hardly be a more canonical way to begin thinking about Puerto Rican literature than through the writings of Eugenio María de Hostos, a foundational and variously paternal figure in the development of Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and Pan-American thought and to whom I devote the entirety of the first chapter of this project. As a landmark text for both Puerto Rico and the Hispanophone Caribbean, *La peregrinación de Bayoán* offers a valuable point of departure in its deliberate act of literary cartography that sketches out a reformed region imagined as a future in relation to empire and to continentality. The novel's titular pilgrim activates a future circuit of inter-insular and transatlantic travel and readership whereby Puerto Ricans, legitimated by the spiritual and legal law of the Crown and the common letter of linguistic unity among Hispanophone provinces, have triumphed over the death, rot, and solitude of the surrounding waters. As a fictional diary of a sea voyage (essentially Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage in reverse), it also becomes useful as a palimpsest of the history of inventions of the Caribbean, dragging into its aesthetic and ideological orbit overlapping and vexed histories of maritime travel. In reading Hostos's *Bayoán,* we read a natural history that tarries with 18th and 19th century theories of degeneration as well as with the specters of a Black Atlantic in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade, the Haitian Revolution, and the voyages to Cádiz during the period of reform. But we also read a curious experiment in writing Puerto Rican and American subjectivity, an experiment whose condition of emergence is coeval with a meditation on the relationship between the scatterings of land and the waterways that conscribe, separate, and put them into relation with each other and with the colonial world. As such, the canon opens up as an archive of the senses: a collection of developing sensibilities, ways of feeling, seeing, hearing, and speaking the infinite dance between land and ocean which becomes the material for and the counterpoint to the political projects in the centuries that follow. The density of this canonical text makes it available for us as a toolkit for a subjectivity which we may read genealogically, as a foundation of the desire for legibility, or in the mode of literary autopsy through which the seemingly inert remains of a failed political vision can be reexamined to read more thoroughly the continuities and discontinuities between the alleged past and the present. Thus, to erode the canon here is to return to its sedimented value as bulwark of a national identity and not just stop there, but rather seek to reanimate the contradictory sensibilities alive in it, tidalectically, as a series of waves on the shore, in order to flesh out emergent vocabularies of possible experience there.

Reading with tradition this way performs a mode of historical and aesthetic comparison and constellation which does not collapse discrete histories and material conditions, but which seeks to suggest unforeseen or unaccounted for instances of dialogue, affinity, and kinship that exist beyond the organizing rubrics of literary philology, chronology, and historiography. I can read for the surprising resonances created by new questions posable to the archive from the vantage point of a present that recognizes a past acting in it, questions that lead me, for example, to stage a conversation between Hostos and Manuel Ramos Otero as versions of the Puerto Rican sea pilgrim,

or to decalcify the overdetermined legacy of Julia de Burgos as a nationalist mother figure and read her anew in relationship to the queer Black poetics in Ángela María Dávila's polyvocal oceanic lyric. Once more, the ocean as a trans-temporal concern for Puerto Rican literature offers a site of mediation through which the past, present, and future of the archipelago and its possible subjects of experience can enter into new relations and new potential paths for examining the ongoing political condition of the colony.

In the historical and material context of a colonial territory in which autonomy has taken the shape of a relative cultural sovereignty often read as a supplement to a lack of legal sovereignty, my reading practice also suggests a path towards literary study that moves beyond the reproduction of the national allegory modes of the past century modeled by Doris Sommer's famous Jamesonian intervention. A vast and important set of refutations to the national allegory argument already exists, and I want to contribute to this conversation by insisting on Puerto Rico, a colony in the present stuck in what such a model would consider a limbo of perennial infancy, as a liminal site from which to continue thinking about the failures of this teleology, what it might foreclose by a reading anchored to the temporality of a national future. Moving in my study through a vexed history in which literature, art, and cultural production—as spaces of critical aesthetic semblance and representation—function as autochthonous discursive zone in which a place and time of the Puerto Rican subject can be articulated, I am driven to reconsider the relationship between the literary and the national when both are untethered from orientations that affirm the self-evidence of a utopian political horizon or where we stop at merely describing such a production as the filling of an ontological or political void. I want to consider seriously the inherent refusals to such instrumentalization that already speaks within this literary history. Does a literature that avows its "uselessness" with respect to instrumental projects of nation, place, and people, as Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia suggests in his reading of Puerto Rican literature and culture, help us clarify a sensibility unmapped by the timeline of faith in posterity? If so, what new senses of place and time can be recuperated for our critical vocabulary as we continue to engage in the study of the literature of an area and a people?

VII. Future Time is an Ocean: Contemporary Erosions and Beyond

Finally, I want to consider the ways in which erosion offers methodological avenues for looking at the present moment in Puerto Rico, in the wake of 2017's paradigm-shifting landfalls of Hurricanes Irma and María and the intensification of indebted citizenship and disaster capitalism under the PROMESA bill of 2016.[7] In many ways, conditions of production under the visitor economy and the rise of crypto-utopias and their concomitant "digital nomads" require that this conversation depart from the binary of colony and empire to account for the deterritorialized stakeholders in the gutting of Puerto Rico. This historical juncture demands that I consider the ethical implications of transience and disintegration in the context of material realities multiplied by the natural and unnatural disasters continually faced by the oldest colony in the present, within the very real and metaphorical vanishing of a people displaced by disintegrating land and receding shorelines, the criminal negligence of local and federal aid, and the exponential precarization of a viable future within the archipelago.

[7] PROMESA is the acronym for the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act, a federal law signed by Barack Obama tasked with managing Puerto Rico's illegal debt. For a thorough analysis of the material and economic conditions of this new turn in neoliberal colonialism and financial dictatorship, see Rocío Zambrana's *Colonia Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico*, as well as Ed Morales's *Fantasy Island: Colonialism, Exploitation, and the Betrayal of Puerto Rico.*

While critique assumes insufficiency of thought, an insufficiency central to the critical mode which cannot but continue pursuing critique, there is also an impasse to hope if we examine the situation from the vantage point of current material. It is at this juncture that theory grates against the demands of the living world, forcing us to contend with an uncomfortable yet generative insufficiency we must visit and revisit as we mobilize our concepts. Surely, steps within the juridico-legal provisions allegedly guaranteed by the state could be taken to alleviate the speedy loss of land and people to expropriation, extraction, speculation, and unregulated profiteering. Restrictions could be placed, tax haven laws abolished, and funds could be allocated to the bolstering of an infrastructure cognizant of and oriented towards the particular susceptibilities of the geo-maritime place Puerto Rico inhabits.

And yet this is not what is happening. The projected political and social horizon seems to double down on the evisceration of Puerto Rico's place and time. As became apparent after María, U.S. Domination over the archipelago's space replicates insularity by continuing to circumscribe another truly impenetrable island around the real island: federal laws continue to exert control over shores and ports which were unable to let aid in after 2017's devastating hurricane season. The archipelago is slated to become a playground for technocratic speculators while local government agencies act in consort with private interest to accelerate the dispossession of a people through dubious public-private alliances ultimately aligned with profitable collapse, most notably in the privatization of the electrical grid.

It is necessary to ask, what happens now? What can be practiced in the present to make possible a Puerto Rican future? Or, to articulate the question within the paradigm of this project, what are the critical interruptions in the now if the future appears increasingly impossible? How do we inhabit disintegration? As I consider recent artworks that respond to the post-PROMESA and post-María moment, disintegration re-emerges in the 21st century as gesture and a sustained material concern through which a new generation of artists articulates subjectivities in erosion. Works such as Yiyo Tirado Rivera's 2020 series *Castillos de arena* (see fig. 1), in which the artist recovers archival architectural plans for hotels along the Puerto Rican shoreline from the 50s to the present and models them with sand, activate hermeneutic circuits that put into relation the legacies of the tourism economy, the accelerated pace of climate change, and the ocean as an actant on Puerto Rican place and time. As the artist has stated in conversation with the Whitney Museum of American Art, the purpose of these works is to "fall apart," much like the existing hotels carelessly built around artificial beaches at edge with the rising tides will also be claimed by the crashing Atlantic waters in due time. The name "castillos de arena" is imbued with a sense of semiotic play, resonating with its use in colloquial speech, where it denotes a lofty or unrealistic vision. The sandcastles thus decry the crass disconnect from reality in the stakeholders of the visitor economy, whose craving for beachfront investment amounts to a twisted and unchecked pipe dream. The *Castillos* also invoke a maritime-oriented temporality in which the sea emerges as a factual and absolute redeemer. Erosion marks the eventual demise of the infrastructures of exploitation. In a gesture that resonates with the corpus of erosion I read for in Puerto Rican literature, here, too, recent Puerto Rican art engages ocean water as an interlocutor and mediator of alternative accounts of time. In the context of increased U.S. attention to Puerto Rican art practices heightened after the landmark 2022-2023 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *No Existe un Mundo Post-Huracán*, Tirado Rivera's work also troubles the capture and grip of art institutions and their demand for permanence, tangibility, profitability in the market. Metonymically, the *Castillos de arena* slowly dissolving inside the plexiglass cases within the concrete and glass of the sterile museum walls—themselves at the edge of the Hudson River, a stone's throw from the defunct cruisy west side piers in the midst of the imposing verticality of the American metropolis—recapitulate motifs of illegibility, fugue, transience, and impermanence proper to a radical grammar of Puerto Rican refusal

in the face of epistemic and material capture. A subjectivity oriented towards the sea assembles itself to suggest that Puerto Rican time is implicated in an oceanic time.



Figure 1: Yiyo Tirado Rivera, *La Concha* (2022). Sand, binding agent, wood. Dimensions variable. Image source: Whitney Museum of American Art website.

Matters of Spirit: Foundations and the Puerto Rican Problem in Eugenio María de Hostos's *La peregrinación de Bayoán*

I. *Foundering Foundations: An Introduction*

As a foundational fiction, Eugenio María de Hostos's *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863) fails so notably that Doris Sommer excludes the text (and Puerto Rico entirely) from her canon of Latin American national romances. Dismissing Hostos's story of late-Romantic anguished love between Bayoán and the convalescent Marién (keys for Puerto Rico and Cuba, respectively) as an "intriguing attempt at Pan-Caribbean (amorous) alliance" replete with "conventionally allegorical," "puritanical," and "sentimental" threads that make it too literal and unfit for her study, Sommer further justifies her omission by alluding to mid-19th century Puerto Rico's lack of a consolidated nation or government to either "celebrate or project" (Sommer 50). This exclusion, however, might begin to clarify why *Bayoán* remains a largely unexplored document *about* the writing of foundations. Though Puerto Rico's lack of an autonomous government and the rigid one-to-one allegories presented in the book curtail a reading that searches for the republic to come, I want to suggest that these shortcomings themselves are available, via negation, for a foundational Caribbean poetics. *La peregrinación de Bayoán* is a text whose failures allow us a glimpse at a core issue of Puerto Rican and Caribbean thought and aesthetics from the 19th century onwards: the problem of locating and founding a proper *place* and a *time*, prior even to the idea of a consolidated republic or to any heterosexual romance that could transpire there.

From a literary genealogical and historiographical point of view, the text is fundamental for Puerto Rico in its dual attempt, as Daylet Dominguez notes, to legitimize the political project of liberal reform as well as the authoritative language of exploration and discovery:

> El periplo tiene como objetivo reavivar las reformas que prometían convertir la colonia en provincia y a sus habitantes en ciudadanos de la nación española. En ese sentido, el viaje de Bayoán adquiere matices políticos y se inserta en una doble tradición: por una parte, se piensa en la genealogía de los viajes de los diputados a las cortes de Cádiz, entre 1810-14 y 1820-23; por otra, dialoga con los viajes de "descubrimiento" y colonización. Bayoán escoge el 12 de octubre como la fecha inicial de su travesía y organiza su escritura a través de un diario; pero su trayectoria invierte el recorrido de Colón al desplazarse de la colonia a la metrópolis. Afincado en esas dos tradiciones, Hostos… aspiraba a renovar las relaciones entre imperio y colonia mediante *el viaje como práctica política. La peregrinación* puede ser leída, siguiendo a Richard Rosa, como la ficción reformista caribeña por excelencia (*Los fantasmas de la razón 29-66*). (Dominguez 185, my emphasis).

Its positioning alongside discourses of discovery and colonization, discourses ultimately implicated in the production of an authorized knowledge about a place, suggests that Hostos's textual experiment seeks to take up the conversation on a Caribbean epistemology, to go back and rewrite this trajectory and perhaps begin anew to reframe colonization as the birth of an American spirit. As a text that performs travel, *La peregrinación*'s act of foundation also suggests that Puerto Rican literature emerges as a literature of a people in constant circuitous movement. Bayoán thus models in this hybrid diary a migratory consciousness, a modality of being, writing, and speaking forever adrift in a sea and in an idea of historical unfolding in which he ultimately finds no home or resting

point. He anxiously attempts to do away with that sense of errancy, but at every corner, can only confront the dark and "chaotic" abyss of the wide Atlantic. His is a craving for a place in a prefigured Antillean Confederation, where the relationship between empire and colony would mutate into a harmonious, Spanish language-based alliance between metropolis and the Caribbean provinces. But this desire is at odds with a fundamental fact of placelessness that the failures of his diary consistently point towards. And these failures, I will argue, shed light on what Bayoán's pilgrimage anxiously disavows. This is why *La peregrinación* serves as the perfect point of departure for this study, for he was one of the first but certainly not the last in tarrying with this foundational and constitutive crisis when writing the community to come and in thinking about the particular possibilities for and the limits to a Caribbean commons.[8] The disavowed "stuff" is the matter of the Caribbean.

If the finding and the rendering into words of the "there and then" is what's at stake here, then Puerto Rico presents, for Eugenio María de Hostos, the so-called "Ciudadano de América," a real problem—the basic aesthetic and political problem of *representation* within political, racial, and historical discourses of the 19th century. Through the novel's myriad ruptures, we can continually ask the question: what is the *logos*—the Letter—that names Puerto Rico and, more broadly, America? Can any of this be represented? And if not, what is that which cannot be identified or located in the available words, in the available worlds?

La peregrinación de Bayoán wants to argue for the legibility and non-contradiction of a Puerto Rican subject within the imperial Logos of Spain. His plan fails; Puerto Ricans are destined to be eternal migrants in slippery relation to the legibility presumed in the categories of homeland, *patria*, and nation. The novel thematizes this failure by way of formal gestures of incompleteness, collapse, and silence. In my reading, I will seek to highlight the emergence of a question posed negatively by the novel's fractures: can there be a Puerto Rican voice separate from the historico-legal and spiritual grammar of the Empire? This question will guide a reading in which I underscore how the text points towards a set of longings and obsessions that recur to the image of the ocean as both matter for what encloses Puerto Rico and as a metaphor for a state of ontological and epistemic desolation, dread, and death.

La peregrinación is a foundational text and not a "foundational fiction." The epistemological and generic category of "fiction" supposes the organizing narrativity of the nation to be—a structural and logical coherence of the letter or sign under which the raw materials of this narration are subsumed, absorbed fully by the will to narrate. At stake for me in the distinction between narration and text is the latter's openness as a system of interwoven but never fully-sublated elements. In other words, a foundational text marks a point zero in the organization of a sensibility (in this case, a sensibility of nation), an open archive of subjectivity considered in transitive relationship to its historical material. These units of sensibility emanating from the foundational text can then be read dialectically beyond the foreclosures implied in the generic closure of a national allegory. While there is certainly a melancholic longing for a *telos* that makes *La peregrinación* available for Sommer's argument regarding the unifying fictions of neighboring nations-in-formation in Latin America and the Caribbean, what interests me in reading Hostos are the partial and disorganized

[8] Which is not to say that *La peregrinación de Bayoán* is the first work of literature in Puerto Rico. Manuel Alonso's compendium of "cuadros de costumbre" *El gíbaro*, whose first volume was published in Barcelona in 1849, could arguably be considered the first book seeking to define a national character by looking at the spirit of the island from a place of European exile. But even this text is brought into question. Puerto Rican writer and scholar Mayra Santos-Febres argues for Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's play *La cuarterona* (1867), whose primary concern is with racial identity, as the first work of Puerto Rican literature. Precise origins are not important here, and every new origin will inevitably engender a new genealogy. But I want to insist on the foundational quality of Hostos's text because of its marked philosophical, formal, and aesthetic concerns with representation.

soundings in the pursuit of a knowledge about a place and a time: the archive of fundamental preoccupations, obsessions about the sensing body, the surrounding ocean, and the shape—political, geographic, and spiritual—of the commons in Puerto Rico and within Caribbean. I seek to remain with those unruly shards of textual subjectivization as I make this foundational text available to a cross-historical conversation with the Puerto Rican sensibility developed in the twentieth century.

In making one of the first sustained philosophical attempts in the history of Puerto Rican literature to write an autochthonous subjectivity into the progression of Latin American, Caribbean, and world history, Hostos inadvertently carves out a critical position through which his novel addresses the opacity of a condition at the antipodes of the language of the Spanish imperial law and of late-Romantic notions of history as an ever-clarifying movement towards totality. "There," in the islands, there are shards: elements of a history and a way of life that do not cohere with Bayoán's sought-after evolution of an American Spirit. So Hostos stages a spiritual exercise—a pilgrimage, implying a conscious form of travel in which the journey itself purifies the soul from the base limitations of the body—in an attempt to distill a language with which to sublate the unruly particulars, the facts of his historical milieu and his location.

Seeking to rise above these and enter the universalizing flow of World Spirit, Hostos's Bayoán enters a crisis in which the body, desire, femininity, and blackness destabilize a political agenda that aspires towards ideas of freedom and legitimacy at odds with what has happened and what is happening. The fact of a Haitian Revolution has by then upended the meaning and the practice of freedom. Toussaint L'Ouverture's breath in the "common wind," to borrow Julius Scott's formulation, forced any and all political discourse thereafter to contend with the blackness of revolutionary spirit, with the flesh of the revolution, and with American space as a zone marked by the unsounded pain, the unwritten history of suffering activated by any reimagining of the Atlantic passage.[9]

These anxieties of the flesh are manifest in the text as a true *morphic phobia*, a fear of form and of body I will take up in what follows. Transience and corporeal decay, witnessed in the body of Bayoán's dying lover Marién, prefigure and allegorize the gnawing wave of time that frustrates an underlying desire to be outside the very history from which he speaks, the history he wishes to absolve in order to actualize his ideal "hombre nuevo," a new American subject that completes and perfects Europe. Bayoán's failure is a failure to disown a colonial past that is not past, a subjugated condition that cannot be undone. Against the grain of the text's own admitted political and spiritual pursuits, I will read scenes of the flesh's disavowal to begin to trace a counter-genealogy in praise of this erosive, unsettling fact: the matter, the flesh, the experience of dérive and eternal ontological homelessness constitutive a of Puerto Rican and Caribbean subject and its concomitant time and place.

II. *"¿No volverá el deseo a aguijonearme?"*: Ghostly Torments of the Flesh

It would be relevant, but certainly not surprising, to claim that *La peregrinación de Bayoán* deeply engages erotic desire, a desire entirely of and for the flesh. After all, as a text with an explicit

[9] Julius Scott deploys the metaphor of the "common wind" to track the proliferation of revolutionary discourse—by way of formal and informal networks of print media as well as word-of-mouth—in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. His analysis forces us reconsider the trope of segmentation and isolation within imperial cartographies of the Caribbean before, during, and after the uprising. Reading Hostos through Scott's proposed open Caribbean—a geopolitical and geopoetic figure substantiated through his archival research—forces us to content with Hostos's anxiety about the materials of a Black revolt that trouble the logic of his proposed grammar for the American subject. For an example of how Scott interprets and theorizes this archive, see "'Ideas of Liberty Have Sunk So Deep': Communication and Revolution, 1789-93" in *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (2018).

foundational itinerary for Puerto Rico and the Americas, one can read both political and corporal desire into this imperative: a will to create and procreate the *patria*. And yet in this sense, as we will explore here, Hostos makes such a neat interpretation impossible. Marién, the adolescent virgin daughter of Guarionex, the paragon of the benevolent *hacendado* for Bayoán and an allegorical key for Hispaniola, becomes our pilgrim's object of desire after a brief encounter in Cuba. Within the text, her body undergoes a transformation: from an angelic presence edging on the absence of a body to a prisoner of an overdetermined body, sick to her very core, and ultimately dying. In the emerging epistemologies of Latin America and the Caribbean by the mid-19th century, and Puerto Rico is no exception, the sick body founds a canon in which geographical determinism identifies degeneration, decay, and indolence as inherent qualities of a ontologically fragile body and natural world malnourished by the climate of the tropical latitudes. This genealogy is coextensive with and legitimized by Fray Íñigo Abbad y Lasierra's *Historia* (1788), the first official history of Puerto Rico:

> Una extensa tradición literaria, ensayística y científica convirtió la Historia de Abbad en un referente central, desde *El gíbaro* (1849) de Manuel Alonso y *La charca* (1894) de Manuel Zeno Gandía, pasando por los trabajos de Salvador Brau y Francisco del Valle Atiles, hasta llegar a *Insularismo* (1934) de Antonio S. Pedreira y el *Prontuario Histórico de Puerto Rico* (1935) de Tomás Blanco. [...] La historia del Abbad fija en el imaginario literario y científico de la isla la idea de un cuerpo social "enfermo" e "indolente" como metáfora de la identidad nacional: el relato de la degeneración deviene en ficción fundadora." (Dominguez 205).

Following Bayoán's first encounter with Marién, he struggles to find words, and in conversation with his diary —the empty page of the diary being part and parcel of the white page of his beloved and pristine *conciencia*-– frantically writes: "para contarte esto quisiera, papel, *rayos de luz*" (129, my emphasis). Writing of her, of the impression left by her in Bayoán's consciousness, necessitates a kind of writing that would reject even the materiality of the word itself: luminous writing, a form of inscription that would no longer leave the trace in the world but which would fulfill the dream of a modality of being untouched by the world of things, even by the pen that discloses thought: it would be *Logos* itself, revealed and experienced in flashes of light. And yet by the end of the text, Marién's downward spiral into desacralized embodiment points towards a central crisis within *La peregrinación de Bayoán*'s logogenetic ontology: the ruling tension between the limits of both the letter and the flesh.

Adriana Johnson's analysis of *La peregrinación de Bayoán* sharply outlines the complications that this text presents to the ruling paradigm of nineteenth century national romance described earlier. Not only, or even most interestingly, does it fail with regards to the foundational fiction model famously championed by Doris Sommer; this text departs from its contemporaries in presenting an irreconcilable chasm between the political and the erotic:

> Hostos's text, we should remember, founders with respect to Sommer 's model, not simply because the romantic union fails, but because of the presence of a competition between political duty and erotics. If the fecundity of the national romances stems from the fact that the couple is driven to imagine an ideal relationship in an alternative society it is not the case with Bayoán. Rather than being fertile, his romance with Marién impedes him from dedicating himself to the very project of an alternative and desired society. (Johnson 68).

Johnson goes on to suggest that Marién's body comes to index, albeit obliquely, the problem of articulating the *patria* from the space of the colony, since "true independence" has not yet been achieved. Marién, then, becomes a "barrier to the desired future. Why? Because the patria engendered by the romance would be a misleading promise of nation-hood without true independence: a neo or postcolonial predicament" (Johnson 70). As a metonymy for the colonial condition, Marién cannot guarantee the axes of stable nationhood: nations that would be "sustainable not only in *space* (territory) but also in *time* (future) (68). The territory of her body degenerates in illness, and the promise of children of the patria embodied in the overdetermined and patriarchal reading of the female body as a vessel for citizenship, remains forever incomplete.

But Johnson rightly points out that the colonial condition alone would not account for this failure. Texts in the nineteenth century Hispanic Caribbean corpus such as *Sab*, *Enriquillo*, and *Cecilia Valdés* demonstrate that a national romance could indeed be produced while under the contradictory colonial matrix (AJ 71). Following Sommer, Johnson attributes this failure to Hostos's particular vision of *patria*, one that looks beyond the logic of nation: a *patria* with internationalist and transatlantic yearnings where the nationally-inflected or "bordered" paradigm of loyalty to one's country exclusively would come to be regarded as limiting and out of sync with an endeavor that is ultimately *human*, evoking "not an isolated place but the particularity of a positioning within the inter-connected global system… The particular exceeds the interpellation of a nation-state" (71). Failure in this case would ultimately be productive, indicative of Hostos's expansive vision vis-à-vis the independence paradigms in Latin America predicated on the insularist logic of self-containment. For the Antillean space would come to be, as Johnson suggests in her essay as she reads the novel alongside Hostos's mature political writing, "a house of pilgrims," loci of transit and relation, interstitial spaces of strategic placement within a global network between America and Europe. Marién, then, could never be the end of the pilgrimage, but the cause for its necessity.

I agree with both moments of Johnson's analysis. They foreground my own considerations here. It is illuminating to consider that the consummation of the symbolic union between Marién and Bayoán would in fact detract from a future universalist pilgrim network that would come to define Eugenio María de Hostos's project as fundamentally internationalist, as a world-system beyond the insular and national paradigms bolstered by his contemporaries. However, I hesitate to believe this would explain or account for the *materia prima* of the complicated poetic system that serves to buttress these imagined and inscribed worlds, whether of local or internationalist scope. For what concerns me here can be said to lie within a space prior to the text's value as a productively failing foundational fiction, even though the aporias revealed through its condition as a failure with respect to narration certainly inspire and direct my observations. I remain interested in the *poetics* of this text, in its wager placed on the ontological and creative capacity of the word, which reveals itself in Hostos's diary as a theological system, a cosmogony by way of the word that certainly aims towards political futures, but which cannot be dislodged from the will to foreground these futures in a meditation on an experience that already confirms and discloses the sovereignty of Puerto Rican and American being; an experience Bayoán seeks to demonstrate and represent for Spain. The trace of this will in *La peregrinación de Bayoán* is ultimately what I call its poetics. This poetics is both the ontogenesis and the expression of an autochthonous subjectivity within the text, the retelling of the Americas as a matter of experience. If, as Johnson reminds us, textual and national narration in *La peregrinación de Bayoán* consistently fail, could the novel (which, as Johnson also reminds us, was never called a novel by Hostos) be read instead as a poetics? Could we instead direct our attention to its experiment on experience, the semblance of originary experience included in the idea of a poetics, in order to read *La peregrinación* as the expression of a desire (in Hostos's own words) for what is not yet there in history, in the law, but felt there, even in failure, in its absence? For narration could not give an account of this and is therefore destined to read our text as only one kind of failure, the

failure to cohere as *patria* coheres, in space and time: a coherence that narration obtains in likening itself to history, borrowing from the sanctioned record of history and the symbolic and material solvency of its concepts. Poetics would instead experiment—experience, however failingly—the invention of its own concepts of freedom, sovereignty, and truth. It would attempt to free itself from that history by feeling for a moment prior to its concretion: the poetic moment where flesh meets first sensation, and the world can be named as if anew.

Ultimately reading for these poetics would then lead us back into the body of Bayoán, the house of the pilgrim consciousness, and judge its failure differently OK. Because I don't mean to suggest that reading for a poetics would then nullify failure. What follows is an account of failure, but a failure producing a different kind of knowledge. Even if we agree that the failure of the Marién-Bayoán union is explained by the inescapability of the colonial condition, which makes any writing from this locus an already *insolvent logos* (an insolvency which Johnson argues can be read in Marién's sick body and which signals, *a priori*, the failure of their union; an insolvency which, I believe, Bayoán's attempts to rectify via a recourse to the enfleshed word of divine *Logos,* a realm beyond solvency); or if we also agree that this union would circumscribe the text within an insularist logic all too narrow for its author's political aim, the problem of desire and the body would not be entirely accounted for or attended to. The body would stand as an unruly remainder of flesh hovering over the diary before us.

I believe that the flesh, as the pilgrim's medium for experience (as perception and as creation) marks the alpha and omega of Hostosean poetics in *La peregrinación de Bayoán*. His confessions regarding the nature of the body, the earthly vessel for the *alma*, casts the problem of freedom as a problem trackable in the *carne*. The text's sudden, oftentimes erratic (Johnson describes them as "schizophrenic") forays into desire, touch, and pain reveal a general anxiety about the body that isn't totally explained by the nation-narration-foundation allegorical schema. Rather, I believe that reading for the language of sovereignty—the same language that articulates nation—might give us a clearer sense of the logic that underpins Hostos's project as a project for a world to come. It would furthermore give a clearer sense how the black body, specifically, is the ultimate impasse to this world project. And it is so because a world founded on spectral luminous inscription is shattered by the fact of black pain in the world, a sensory experience that in this text meets powerlessly with muteness, blindness, and anesthesia in relation to this particular pain. The metaphorical recourse to slavery and liberty reveal in *La peregrinación de Bayoán* mark the unpayable debt accrued by the Hostosian spirit to the black body, the absent center of his world. The desired "rayo de luz," the Logos he believes would reveal the truth of Puerto Rico and America to the reading Spain, is "chained" to the very experience of the world that produces it, an experience that collapses the integrity of his projected sense-world. A crisis that is at once ontological and epistemic ensues here, one that precedes its relationship to *patria* and which threatens to, and ultimately dissolves, Hostos's own poetic world system.

III. *The Natural-History of the Body: Marién as Allegory*

In *La peregrinación de Bayoán,* there is always a wish to defer whatever the body is, and no relationship reveals this more vividly than the one between Bayoán and Marién. She is consistently characterized as a source of both desire and anxiety. More than halfway into the text, he finally admits, with ambiguous awe, that she in fact has a body: "Primera vez que salía de mis labios la alabanza de su *belleza material*: ella se sonrojó. (197, my emphasis). This recognition, which in Marién triggers sensation in the form of blushing skin, is one of few inter-corporal scenes between the couple. Bayoán, likewise affected by the perception of Marién's reddening flesh, frames this scene as a loss of power: "Era vergüenza por mi pequeñez, que admiraba la carne y no el espíritu?" To

recognize the effect of the body of the other in his own body triggers the possibility of his "pequeñez." At once, Bayoán reveals to be punctured by desire while at the same time becomes an object of pleasure for Marién. This red trace of blood on the face he would rather imagine faceless becomes the undeniable stain, the flesh revealing itself without room for doubt before him. Bayoán is powerless, confronted with having to see it and think about it. Later, again when the fact of Marién's sickness makes her body once more a problem for Bayoán, he attempts to submit to reason this pleasure which threatens to render him minuscule: "¿No es el placer del organismo *chispa eléctrica* que, partiendo del cerebro, va desarrollando, animando, *conmoviendo* los anillos del sistema nervioso, produciendo un *choque simultáneo*, cuyo fin es su principio, una *violenta convulsión*… ? No *afectan dolorosamente* al cuerpo enfermo, todo *choque*, *toda convulsión*?" (277, my emphasis).

Pleasure invariably shares a porous edge with pain. What is rousing in life lets death into the house in this account of Marién's sensorium, a schematization of the body's experience that borrows from a romantic imagination where illness over-stimulates the nerves to the point of haptic torture and fragmentation. Furthermore, there is a call to science here that locates this act of narrative observation within an etiological discourse. It is a celebration of the illustrated eye as a source of power for the observer in which ocularity allows for a mechanistic explanation of the mystery of the body and the trappings of desire. Bayoán becomes the spiritual doctor to his beloved's *mal de siglo*, a harbinger of the power to identify and cure the mystery that lies beyond her degenerating flesh.

Bayoán thus partakes in vital power in direct proportion to the lover's pain, a pain he absorbs and claims for himself. Sacrifice, then, mediates their relationship. In what Jossianna Arroyo Martinez names as the ethics of the "spirit that matters," a necropoetics that in her analysis unites the efforts of Hispanic Caribbean intellectuals thinking sovereignty, independence, and citizenship in the latter half of the 19th century (like Cuban José Martí and Puerto Rican Ramón Emeterio Betances before him), the preponderance of the *alma* in relation to the *cuerpo* attains its paradoxical integrity through a gendered ritual, a willed alchemy of the flesh, a logocentric *despojo* or divestiture. This highly coded poetic gesture, Arroyo notes, thus anticipates the origin of the aesthetico-political concerns to be taken up in a *modernismo* that would congeal at the turn of the century. Hostos and Betances prefigure this aesthetic, articulating it however from a place of *necessity*, as a *techné* (following Arroyo) through which the colonial subject negotiates the condition of non-citizenship, of foundational homelessness and matterlessness with regard to the political and historical milieu (Arroyo 112). Expanding on Arcadio Díaz Quiñones' model, she asserts that "this ethic redivides body (sexuality, the feminine) and spirit (transcendence) to inscribe a virile subjectivity in a discourse of sacrificial surrender. The seeming antinomies of that discourse respond to a tendency in philosophical culture to assign this "matrix" or materiality to the feminine as the very principle of what remains outside the spirit" (Arroyo 110). Within the knowledge of his own body, within the will of his own sacrificial poetic experience of the corporal, pain is for Bayoán the precondition to thought and life: "cuando sufro, pienso; cuando pienso, vivo: me siento con fuerzas en la mente, en el corazón, *hasta en los nervios*: lucho, y me animo: sufro, y sonrío: tengo la conciencia de mi infelicidad, y mi infelicidad me enorgullece" (94, my emphasis). It is important to make a distinction here between the modalities of pain circulating here. Bayoán demonstrates a capacity to sublate or rise above bare physical pathology, By transmuting his pain into a physical phenomenon, he activates a key gendered separation between the de-corporealized psychic turmoil of "sufrimiento" and the base facts of corporeal "dolor." For Bayoán, pain presents an opportunity to reveal the *alma*'s triumph over the *materia* by way of melancholic aestheticization, and this triumph defines the horizon of Hostosian joy, an occasion for masculine alchemy: "yo creo, y lo creo hasta el extremo de no poder desarraigar esa creencia, que solo el dolor hace feliz" (162).

But Marién, as the sacrificial skin, must then be shown to be unable to enact such masculine alchemy. She is not a *spirit that matters*, but ultimately must, as a function of the constellation of ritual,

remain a *matter for spirit*. In what can be called a scene of sensorial paternalism, Bayoán anesthetizes Marién presumably protecting her from an experience only he, poet and pilgrim, can tackle for himself. It is his mark of power, which cannot be diffused and shared with her, lest it be neutralized of its invigorating yield for Bayoán. Marién is the particular sacrifice, and thus her body is the offering that will allow Bayoán to reside entirely in universal spirit. Marién's body, deep in physical pain and deeply embodied by both desire and illness, is barred here from the alchemical experience of this pain as theorized by Bayoán. And this is not insignificant, since power for the pilgrim entails the power to transmute the data, the raw "chispa eléctrica" of the world into "rayos de luz." He withholds from her the possibility of having this pain engender something more than merely a bodily sensation: a confirmation of Bayoán's unique position with regards to life and death. Admitting to Marién's entanglement with a body would be tantamount to accepting the loss of power within his own poetics, which would have to account for her experience, for her body. Marién's pain cannot be known by Bayoán, so he resorts to folding her experience of corporal pain into his own poetic reimagining of sensation, rendering her a function of his will to sublate the flesh, spiriting but not really spiriting away her body. This scene genders sensation by enacting a split between two divergent and seemingly irreconcilable experiences of pain: a deep alchemical pain that confirms the pilgrim's power of transubstantiation, and another that can be described as shallow, static pain, which relieves him of the burden of truly thinking the pain of a feminized other. Or *others*, since through this "matrix" of the feminine enter, too, the concomitant concepts of the *página* that receives the will of his *pluma* and the *patria* that must be sacrificed before the altar of Universal Spirit.

Marién's pain ultimately discloses the bare fact of her body. But her body nevertheless and in spite of the pilgrim, articulates another limit: Bayoán's own flesh. She haunts his spirit with her material being, the accursed remainder of his ritual. Despite this urge to administer Marién's pain, Bayoán is still perturbed by his encounters with the inescapable truth of her body: "Soy un mar sin fondo, me decía yo anoche, cansado de sondear, de ver dentro de mí. Si el espíritu es un mar ¿*qué es ese maravilloso pedazo de barro que lo envuelve*? *No he cesado de preguntármelo durante las largas horas que, cerca de Marién he pasado* (277, my emphasis). We have observed before this depiction of the ocean as the undefined, chaotic marrow of Bayoán's origin, the elusive "fondo" where will, desire, and agency dwell, undifferentiated. Deep and inexhaustible, this opaque center of Hostosian spirit stands in stark contrast to the body, the "maravilloso pedazo de barro." Remarkable here is the fact that despite the glorious fatigue expressed by Bayoán's spiritual navel-gazing, this "sondear" of the soul is never characterized as impossible or even mysterious. This scene rather confirms his capacity—an ability that is only his—to plunge confidently into the void of pure spirit, this confirming his coextension with it. This substance is known because it *is* him. It is the body that cannot be known. The question is echoed once more in the same passage, when Bayoán demonstrates his failure to read Marién's sick body, the meaning of her jolts, what lies behind her smile or the color of her skin. The power of his eyes fails to find first causes now, and this failure is tantamount to the incapacity to *interpret*: "creer que no se engañan nuestros ojos cuando toma por síntomas de vida los síntomas de muerte." The passage anxiously repeats the word "engaño," marking this moment with suspicion, unknowability, and powerlessness. The clay vessel threatens to tarnish the waters of spirit with its remainder, leaving our pilgrim in a radical state of anguish. Marién's body re-enters here as a perturbing supplement, as a crisis of interpretation, as an epistemological problem.

Standing next to Marién's earth-bound vessel, Bayoán succumbs to what I like to call a morphic anxiety, a fear of final particularity specifically tethered to the truth of the body's decay and death, the same decay and death that seemed, in the ritual of feminine sacrifice, to confirm Bayoán's unity with Spirit. Besides being the field of experience, the actual house of the pilgrim, the body introduces in our discussion the problem of finality and limitation: of *terminus*. Thus, we are

ultimately concerned here with history, as the felt fact of the flesh perforce introduces in this process of subject formation the experiential problem of time. Marién's supplement—what remains of her ew is the remainder of concrete history eroding the core of a "spirit that matters." The morphic imprint of experience embodied in her nerves, the fact of the body as a form in the world articulated by experience and which makes sensation a matter of thought, destabilizes the will to render experience borderless and timeless—universal, truthful, total, mythic. So, in the crisis between the bodies of Bayoán and Marién, we bear witness to a collision between what is represented as whole and natural and what is depicted as historical.

In "The Idea of Natural-History," Theodor Adorno offers a critical vantage point to this problem by mediating the dialectical opposition of both nature and history to arrive at the immanent critique each term provides for the other. Adorno wishes to dissolve a definition of nature as the "mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been," what is opposed to the "historical," that which "surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new" (266). Thus, the natural, upon first analysis, is untouchable and distant, alienated as what was "already there" before us. Our purview, on the other hand, is the fallen condition of history and its impenetrable events which seem to foreclose all mythical possibility, all harmony with the natural. Contending in his essay with the neo-ontological (Heidiggerian) escape of this problem—a substantial equivalence of being and history hypostatized unto universality—Adorno's final analysis reveals that it is transience, history and nature's shared lot in the passing away of things, in death, which mediates both terms:

> Nature itself is transitory. Thus it includes the element of history. Whenever a historical element appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it. Likewise the reverse: whenever "second nature" appears, when the world of convention approaches, it can be deciphered in that its meaning is shown to be precisely its transience" (Adorno 264).

A whole history of rotted things, markings on the rock of the earth, petroglyphs etched by the gradual graze of bodies that have been, that have been barred from the graphic alchemy of spirit (*rayos de luz*), are astir in the seeming stillness of myth and nature. In their being dead, nature and history show their bare face**.** And if that death were to haunt the present, the mythic present which Bayoán wants to substantially equate to the Universal and therefore extirpate from concrete history, from death as the generative center (what lies in the *fondo del mar*) of colonial being, the whole of his histories—of the body and of America– would be radically destabilized.

In Bayoán's account, then, the body must do precisely that, lest it perish and transform, as the material substance of history does in fact. As we have come to see, Bayoán attempts this extirpation by claiming substantial unity—through the Logos—with nature, with a dreamed mythical wholeness. To fall into form here would be to fall into a knowledge of the foundational aspect of material death in America. This account necessarily includes bodies beholden to their transformations in time, flesh unsounded by the narrative of progressive clarification—the orthodox Hegelianism resuscitated in Hostos as theology. As discussed before, Hostos articulates a mythic time expressed in the will and power to reveal the archaic American, to reinvent its birth through messianic prowess. No longer on the side of the "mar" of spirit, Bayoán would have to concede to the fate of clay: the fate of erosion, the truth of the shifting shorelines gnawed at and articulated by the ocean. His is a rejection of natural-history, of the memory of suffering that constitutes it. This memory—layered and inscribed in the particular bodies (here the body of Marién as metonymy for the degenerative process that defines form), the particular place of nation (Spain, the insular Caribbean, the discrete American nation-states) or the particularity of the temporal impositions of the colonial condition— all represent, much to Bayoán's dismay, sites of morphic concentration

that demand that they be felt and critiqued, rather than folded into *Geist*. Form, then, is at the antipodes of a will to universalize experience within an ontological model that aspires to finally free itself from the original debt to the history in which it and he, in actuality, are born.

Desire, then, is in *La peregrinación de Bayoán* the unrelenting fulcrum that mediates Bayoán's movement towards an absolute to the unavoidable presence of the particular. It is the troublesome sting, the *aguijón* that will not yield, that will not fail to bring the Hostosian subject back in relation to matter and time. In the novel's most intense portrayal of desire, a moribund Marién awakes from a fever dream to Bayoán's kiss:

> En sueños pedía un beso, y se lo di; *beso de fuego de infierno*. Se estremeció y despertó sobresaltada. Hubo una *coincidencia satánica*; ella, al despertar, vivo aún el recuerdo de su sueño, creía sueño lo que era realidad, y se pasaba la mano por los ojos: mientras tanto, *los míos, saltando de sus órbitas, buscaban el deleite en su seno descubierto*: ella sorprendió aquella mirada, se cubrió el seno, recogió su cuerpo, me miró, y espantada del *desorden que había en mí*, dio un grito lastimero, un alarido aterrador. (303, my emphasis).

It is important to remark that Bayoán's conception of Marién's body as immaterial pure substance is met by Marién herself time and again in the text with real resistance. She would like nothing more than to return to the familiar touch of her native landscape, riddled with its history and all. She would love nothing more than Bayoán as flesh, as the promise of tactility, even if that tactility is intermingled with the eventual end of things. In her desire for union lies the desire for the possession of her own flesh, a desire to offer Bayoán that which would finally be her property to relinquish with absolute devotion and through desire, happily die. And it is precisely because of this that she is barred from this expression of self-possession. Marién is most allegorical when we consider her beyond the heavy-handed intentions of the diary's *clave*. This is to say that in truly reading for her allegory, she is no longer a static placeholder for an island, but is instead the expression of a dynamic moment between history and its concretes, as allegory is. Marién is the name that mediates and opens up to critique the irreconcilable elements of a colonial condition. Her desire to be a body and to die in union would inaugurate a perspective in the text counter to Bayoán: the possibility of a death wish that recalibrates autonomy, power, and sovereignty in terms of knowing and being the dead, a feeling for it. A finality faced head-on as a rapturous drive towards that which passes on, rots, erodes, and is no longer. But that would *be*, nevertheless. It would be the ownership over death and pain as experiences that matter, satanic grounds for relation. Not expiration as escape, but perishability imagined as subjective *conditions of possibility*. In the impasse placed by Bayoán on Marién's sensuous and erotic self-expression, we will come to witness what is in excess of both colonial and imperial time, a momentary explosion of what no longer accepts sublimation: the full force of coloniality as a temporal inscription on the body, the disavowed possibility of feeling something unexpected, unaccounted for in the meager plot of time given to the colonial body by reason, by the administrators of Spirit. An ownership of one's death impossibly felt as pleasure owed to no one.

This is entirely at odds with the Hostosian myth, and in relation to Marién, he progressively appears more as a mirror of the very logic of his imperial opponent. He becomes Marién's administrator of time and sensation. Bayoán must now recover agency over the senses by making himself the one responsible for awakening Marién from the angelic condition of her sleep. She would presumably rest in this condition, if not for Bayoán's transgression of touch. Performing blame, he shatters the vulnerable purity and immateriality of her dream—and it is interesting to note that she is not only sick and angelic, but sleeping, fully in the *noche pasiva de los sentidos* that

recapitulates her position as receptive, never an agent of her pleasure. Bayoán blames himself for the perversion of his own will. He blames himself, too, for awakening Marién from the dream that defines her as an angelic substance for his patriotic endeavor. In blaming himself, he recuperates sensation for himself by becoming sensation's first cause, and rendering Marién's condition as merely an effect of his own excess, an excess to be purged in the *despojo* of the letter, in the confessional space of the diary, the privileged zone of sublimation: "he sofocado mis recuerdos, he apretado mi corazón para acallarlo, he salido, *he huído del papel, y al fin he vuelto*: necesito descargar en algo el peso que me agobia. (121, my emphasis). This reversal rescues him from the bondage that would undermine his vision for the world: tú, con la *violencia* del amor que has inspirado en mi corazón, que se tenía por seco, *a mi espíritu, que sólo de ideas creyó posible ser esclavo*, y ahora lo es… de una *muñeca*. (227). In this attempt to restore the autonomy of his omnipresent will, Bayoán produces a scene where Marién, his beloved doll and the actual reason for his undoing, did not relinquish the flesh, but rather reacted to a slip of his own willpower. A slip that, for all its slippage, still belongs to his experience, still falls under his control, under his will to submit to writing, since the blank piece of paper can hold the weight of everything put in it, swallowing the scene in its white surface for a remembering that is actually a forgetting, a willed dispossession, a *despojo*.

Despite this elaborate effort to reframe Marién's will to lovingly die, Bayoán must concede to the confusion of flesh catalyzed by his kiss. In the wake of this "coincidencia satánica," what remains is a real *carnicería*: the truth of matter, the underbelly of the luminous dream. This remainder appears before us as an assembly of disparate body parts, engorged eyes, hands, lips, breasts, fragments of a fantasy that is, for a moment, shattered by the truth of touch. These "pedazos de barro" seeped in the particularity of wanting and pain and in the history of suffering, are the *materia prima* Bayoán would rather anesthetize so as to forget: the bloody, painful, and vulnerable origin of his will to light, expressed most fully in his being a subject of the empire that includes him. He, too, is part and parcel of this butcher shop, in spite of himself. No other scene in this text rests its attention more vividly on the fact of flesh than this moment where the limit of Bayoán's body meets the limits of Marién, as body and as symbol. The limit of her body marks, in a condensed expression, the contour of his, the edges of his totality.

So much so that at this moment, Bayoán can no longer speak for himself. Hostos, interrupting the temporal and spatial dimension of this scene, must come to collect and reorganize the grafts that remain after the kiss has punctured the fragile purity of Bayoán's voice, its disembodied presence, with the aberrant explosion of skin:

> Todo cuanto el lector pueda decirse, se dijo el editor la primera vez que leyó el manuscrito. Me dije que era imposible que un hombre como Bayoán, se viera arrastrado hasta ese extremo; me dije que era increíble esta falta de fuerza en un espíritu fuerte; esta debilidad, en una razón acostumbrada a dominar; esta impetuosidad de los sentidos, en un ser dominado por el alma, y no quise creer, *y atribuí al desvarío de un momento, a su constante predisposición a exagerar sus faltas, el ansia de movimiento que buscaba ocasiones de luchar, esta repugnante aberración de sus sentidos*. (308, my emphasis)

In yet another attempt to sublimate the flesh, Bayoán disappears in order to become a distant specter alluded to: a reference, merely a person spoken of. Hostos, as editor, strives here to account for Bayoán's failure through a similar display of willpower: "no quise creer," he states simply. Hostos, as editor and therefore as medium for Bayoán's message, must finish the job that Bayoán started but could not complete—that is, the task of extirpating sensation and its concomitant excesses from a neat totality that, in disavowing experience, denies any gaps in its knowledge. In

order to do so, Bayoán must suddenly disappear, becoming a representation within a representation that seeks to submerge this "repugnante aberración de los sentidos." The fact of his abrupt intervention, however, only affirms collapse. It envelops every dimension of the text—its diegetic "inside" as well as the coeval "outside" that includes Hostos and includes us as witnessing "lectores" the world—with anxiety. Thus, Bayoán can no longer claim to be impervious to the world. The dream of an airtight system is dissolved in the very attempt to reestablish its possibility and its power. Whatever pushed the text forward suddenly halts and crumbles before us.

We return to an awareness of mediation: Hostos as medium-editor of Bayoán's voice for us, as well as to the book itself as the vessel for the pilgrim's voice. In both cases, it can no longer be said that this text is producing knowledge or conveying experience. From this point onwards, Hostos writes as if he were Bayoán, impersonating, fabricating: "estimulado por el deseo de estudiar en su fondo aquel carácter, tomaba los apuntes que ahora utilizo para *sustituir con mis propias emociones* la narración de lo que entonces vi" (318, my emphasis). Hostos, disclosing thus the synthetic nature of this willed invention of experience, unwillingly reveals the synthetic quality of Bayoán, even the Bayoán that wrote before this editorial intervention. The primal scene of this text's production comes to the fore in its most layered attempt at obfuscation. At its most willed moment of *seeming* natural, *La peregrinación de Bayoán* is riddled with the history of real anguish that produces it. It enters the transient movement of the things bound by and inscribed with time and the flesh. Fully enmeshed in the contradictions from which a colonial subject, Bayoán, speaks, the text as an aesthetic object here begins to break at the seams burst open by the very historical context that is the point of locution for *La peregrinación*, in spite of the artifices of the artwork.

Ultimately, the body in *La peregrinación de Bayoán* functions as a mediating principle for the crisis of an experience at odds with itself and, more broadly, at odds with a progressive and ever-clarifying unity of the World—in redemption, in justice, in transcendental truth. Bayoán longs for this History, seeing the luster, the apparent promise of redemption. This redemption would be expressed thus: as coextensive with Universal spirit, we would see that the colony was never a colony. Both Empire and province would stand in equivalence, and thus the logical apparatus of ontological debt, the law *qua* logos by which Spain could refute Hostos's vision for Puerto Rico and the Hispanophone Caribbean, would be canceled. All of the colonial past, then, would in a flash be resuscitated and rectified in light of this fact. Justice, divine justice, would be restored. But Bayoán already knows he is doomed, and his flesh recoils from the truth of touch, from that which signals the death of mythical totality. Desire, the touch of time, gnaws at this myth with an overabundance of sensation. Death, the janus face of desire, creeps back into the picture with its satanic tactility. And in this touch is ciphered the transience, the natural-historical, element of being. Bayoán anxiously rejects it, knowing that at any moment touch will come back to puncture his totality with pleasure, with pain, with desire, with the true content of concrete history: "¿no volverá el deseo a aguijonearme?" (217). The avoidance of the body only expresses the avoidance of the transient element of history, the death it cannot be rescued from, lest it be killed before perishing. The body, as a site expressive of the convergence of both historicity and myth, powerfully mediates this crisis and allows us to read Bayoán's anxiety as that which articulates this crisis. His aversion to sensorial excess, in himself and in Marién, is symptomatic of a broader difficulty with an idea of history where the concrete particularity of colonization and its concomitant histories of subjugation—as much a matter of history as it is a matter of pain, physical death, and corporal mutilation—impinge on the purity of the absolute and whole. These hermeneutic shards disclose a story about a place where death is an inner-historical fact, where death itself marks time and space, where the only truly historical perspective possible is one which is riddled with the ghosts unaccounted for by the "hombre nuevo".

Marién's death allegorizes—interprets the history of—the Atlantic crossing as a border zone facticity as death, coloniality as a *being with* and not in opposition to imposed death. And this is not the *symbolic* stasis of precious ritual sacrifice, which would grant Bayoán the power to prevail and catapult his subject into modernity by way of a precocious *modernismo* built on the shoulders of the feminine other, but the *allegorical* and therefore dynamic concreteness of decay as a fact already felt in the flesh of a colonial subject, who is etched with death upon arrival to being. Any modernity built by the supposed purity of the word would come to rust in this space marked by the saltpeter of a sea that surrounds all possible permanence in luminosity. Whatever may be the *patria* imagined cannot but feel the *aguijón*, the prick of colonial pain that is impossible to absolve because it *is* the history; already an ontological fact of the pilgrim's utterance. A truth of dispossession that Hostos has failed to *despojar*. And remains, lingering as supplemental grafts of trembling skin.

IV. *The Color of Spirit*

The body, now possessed with time: with transience, with resented transitivity. Transitivity in particular marks the touch of the other, of the not-I that affects me without my consent or my power to reject its being experienced: the history and the histories that precede and produce the voice that speaks in the text. Bayoán utters with dismay, asserting that

> Nada puedo: *lo que hay en mí, a pesar de mi orgullo lo confieso, es de ellos*: las ideas, los pensamientos, la verdad, son una atmósfera, producida por la vida intelectual, como lo es por la vida animal el aire que respiro: envuelto en ella, tengo *a mi pesar* que respirarla y dar *a mi pesar* a mi razón, a mi fantasía, a mi ser interior, las sombras y la luz, la confusa claridad y las tinieblas que exhala la vida intelectual *de los demás*. (142, my emphasis).

Begrudgingly admitting to susceptibility to the matter of the other, whether in reason ("intelectual") or in flesh ("animal"), Bayoán laments, defeated: "confieso mi impotencia." But what is in this atmosphere, in all this being haunted by the sedimented touch and sounds of others? Who are these accursed others that intrude? The urge to articulate an entirely new position with regards to the colonial problem means that Hostos must necessarily react anxiously to any other possibility, any other exhalation, any meaningful breath discerned (*sombras*, *luz*, *confusa claridad*, *tinieblas*) in this problem. Here, Jossianna Arroyo Martinez's analysis of the complex patchwork of internationalist responses to 19th century imperial power brings necessary insight to the anxiety we encounter above. She reminds us that for "Hostos the sacred ideal of independence has to be read beyond all human conflict" (Arroyo 87). Her work, which underscores the radical presence and consequences of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution to the articulation of the Antillean Confederation, allows us to read in Hostos's defeated and anguished breath the disavowed exhalations of a world-system in which black revolutionary praxis and logos would lie at the center, as origin. Even if Hostos (and Cuban José Martí, whom Arroyo discusses in kinship with the Hostosian model) would come to "see Haitians as allies, they do remain critical and tend to disavow the main features of Haitian constitutionality, mainly the *internal strife between military factions* and *the laws that classified all citizens as black*," Haiti, as a paradigm, appears to negate some of the salient features of the Hostosian account of American genesis (Arroyo 87, my emphasis).

As the shores of San Nicolás, Haiti emerges, a real place. Bayoán gazes once more from the vessel of his progressing ship of history:

> ¿Quién habita esta costa? Una raza que prueba que los hombres no *tienen color en el espíritu*; que hay una chispa igual en todos, que de todo los hace capaces: los negros han fundado un imperio en este sitio. ¡*Misteriosa justicia!* tú que estás en todas partes. Al infeliz Africano arrancado de sus selvas, y hecho esclavo por la fuerza, le das fuerzas: rompe con ella sus cadenas; *el hierro le da armas; las armas, un imperio*. (62, my emphasis).

How to consider the colorlessness of spirit? What kind of history do the colorless (and, by negation, the possibility of a colored ghost, black *Geist*) spirits partake in, and what does it render possible? Impossible? What blackened present would emerge from the blackened ghost of real revolution, in the kingdom of this world, awakened for a moment here? This account reads like a salve for Bayoán's own spirit, a recapitulation of the logic by which the purity of a reasonable movement of "espíritu" —spirit always being a way to mean history—is finally free from the base matter that produces it, most importantly the stubborn gnaw of black possibility, black embodiment, implied here by way of negation. Freedom, as glimpsed from the ship, authorizes Bayoán's *Aufheben*, a picking up and canceling of black particularity. Free black bodies picked up by the wind, as part and parcel of the forward-moving gust (elsewhere, he writes, "yo, *empujado por un viento* que aún no se si lleva a puerto," though we know what storm these gusts of progress do betray) that propels his ship. Blackness canceled in being equalized, in being made coextensive with and already included in the concept of freedom elaborated here. Colorlessness of spirit achieved in the metaphorical yet no less material *limpieza de sangre* that Bayoán performs on behalf of historical movement. Freedom free from the need to reckon with the bone and blood of Haiti that inaugurates and expresses, as *Ursprung*, freedom's fundamental conditions of possibility.

Bayoán as messiah, melancholy angel of new history, an Angelus Novus for a New America, powerlessness here before Universal Spirit. As it goes, "the angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 257). But what could it mean to awaken these dead, the black dead of Haiti, letting these particular dead speak and in that speaking smash the presumed wholeness of what was never whole to begin with? A logic immanent to that history precludes action, and so Bayoán stands impotent before the piling of wreckage, freedom fought for with hands and heads and chains and iron, hurling before his feet. Is not this depiction of the Hostosian messiah but a moment of coded sacrificial offering, where masculine powerlessness, the admission of the impossibility of action in the midst of a hurricane of history that will not yield, guarantees the future vigor of a subject through which all souls will rise, colorless? That subject, however, is actually history hypostatized as objective truth, the particular dissolved by the flame of Spirit, engulfed in supposed and inevitable unity. Hostos thus folds blackness into this scene, but only as the melancholy account that depicts, at the same time, the loss of the black body but the gains for the reasonable unfolding of world spirit. Personal power is surrendered here for the future, and the melancholy movement of the ship of his new history justifies the dismissal of a present disavowed, a real practice of freedom inaugurated in those shores of San Nicolás. A freedom tarnished with the colors, chains, and weapons—the "internal strife" that threatens to shred his universal spirit to pieces. The Haitian fact becomes another shore in a constellation of shores picked up by the eyes of America's messiah, of a Bayoán striving for unity, hoping to banish thus "internal strife."

Arroyo again alerts us to the fact that Hostos tethers the impossibility of black revolutionary praxis to the facticity of the black body, so as to imply that whatever poetics of freedom could arise from the wretched grounds of Haitian struggle is *a priori* limited, tarnished by the experience of forced bondage which would warp of any idea of liberty stemming from it (Arroyo 85). It is freedom

presumed to be unfree because it stems from the experience of physical enslavement, a poetry borne of the reaction to a pain unaccounted for by historical spirit. Bayoán considers slavery to be a problem, yes, but it is a problem existing purely as a matter of the law, a condition that guarantees its harmonious rectification in the progressive "tribunal" of *Weltgeist*, in history. To him this means that it could eventually be forgotten, unfelt by the slave, dissolved without remainder: no clank of chains or metallic reverberations of those heavy "hierros" that would, in Hostos's view, ultimately produce a leaden empire of anger and resentment, like Haiti. Commenting on Guarionex's hacienda, Bayoán marvels at the harmonizing power of benevolent bondage: "Su hacienda es su retrato: allí hay tranquilidad, hay armonía, hay orden: es *justo*, y *sus esclavos olvidan su esclavitud*: en todas sus cosas hay moderación, hay dignidad (163, my emphasis). Justice, harmony, order: these are the sacred tenets of Hostos's faith in the word's fundamental unity with God, or truth.

His laudatory contemplation echoes Francisco Arango y Parreño's "Representación hecha a Su Majestad con motivo de la sublevación de esclavos en los dominios franceses de la isla de Santo Domingo" (1791). There, the Cuban planter writes to the Spanish crown, well enmeshed in the waves of panic that undulated from the epicenter of the Haitian event, a panic manifest in the "representación" as a need to understand, with presumably expert precision, the unimaginable repercussions of what has happened but which the crown can't see: "el examen de este suceso, después de excitar la compasión del Gobierno por la desgracia del vecino, ha de fijarse en descubrir la trascendencia y relaciones que pueda tener con nuestras islas" (Arango y Parreño 48). He becomes the empire's eyes in order to *make see* ("a la *mira* de todo," "que oportunamente *haga ver* a V.M."), to fabricate an optics of scientific accuracy regarding the lived lives of slaves in the Hispanic colonies. In this representation, legal and passing for experience, Arango y Parreño argues that His Majesty need not worry about any copycat uprisings for various reasons, listing as his third and most robust justification the fact that the Spanish are gentler slave owners than the French:

> Y la 3ra y principal, está en el modo de tratar a los esclavos. *Los franceses los han mirado como bestias y los españoles como hombres*. El principio de aquellos amos y aún de su legislación negrera, ha sido siempre el excesivo rigor, infundir a sus esclavos todo el temor que se pueda, creídos de que de este solo modo, era capaz un blanco de gobernar cien negros en el centro de los bosques y en medio de unas tareas tan fuertes y tan contínuas. (49, my emphasis).

In other words, this distinction inaugurates a scale, a spectrum of possible degrees of violence that in turn produces a curious idea of the human, a category of humanity in which the slaveowner's atrocity does not bar the black body from being folded into some kind of personhood: a freedom that means a supposed freedom from the kind of torture and death that sparked the revolution in Saint Domingue. For what else could "hombre" mean here vis-à-vis "bestia"? How do the limits of one produce the other? Arango y Parreño's inscriptive *parto*, the birth of his black human in the "representacíon," offers a humanity emerging from and administered by the supposedly gentler crack of the Spanish master's whip on the slave's arched human back. It sucks ontological substance out of this haphazardly differentiated whip crack to produce meaning for the Spanish slaveholding enterprise. It makes solvent truth—produces a theory of representation, produces the law, and therefore produces a truthful *logos* that inaugurates a slippery ontological category to be exploited by those who willfully forget the primordial crack of the whip on skin that produces meaning for a grammar of good-willed punishment, benevolent control, and paternalistic need for the administration of life.

Intimately entangled in both Arango's "representación" and in Hostos's pilgrim is the concept of a harmonious and easily forgettable slavery; forgettable because it is somehow protected,

captured by the representative solvency of a language that mirrors the harmony of nature and which presumes, by guaranteeing this representativity, to cancel the facticity of the slave's material being. A language of representation that refers back to the *hacendado* family as the social counterpart to the symbiosis, the harmony, of primary nature. It depicts the slave's body as a pleasant element in an ecology of filiation guaranteed by nature's self-evident and unitary truth. These slaves forget their slavery as they pass without apparent remainder into the naturalized affective economy of the *Gran familia puertorriqueña.* Puerto Rican historian Luis Manuel Diaz Soler freezes a frame in this moment of passage from abject to the intimately familiar. Feel for it:

> Don Eugenio María de Hostos incluía al "esclavo Adolfo y tres negras, la cocinera, la lavandera y Mercedes la niñera", cuando se refería a los miembros constituyentes del hogar paterno. Recordaba a Adolfo, entre humilde y altanero, alto, delgado, de facciones regulares y a la lavandera Josefa, "por cuyos brazos tenía predilección, pues más de una vez tuvo la *bárbara complacencia* de hincar en ellos un alfiler". A Mercedes la recordaba como una "negrilla de color claro, carinosísima compañera de sus terrores nocturnos". (Diaz Soler 151, my emphasis)

How could her sharing in the politics of tenderness—in the always private violence of the home, the open secret of pain as filiation—make Josefa forget the prick of the pin on the laboring black flesh of her arms that are not even hers but are the private property of the father, entirely available the son's "barbarous indulgence"? In the symbolic transaction through which the slave's body loses self-possession and yet simultaneously enters the traumatic center of the remembered childhood home, the house of the father through which she is recognized and engulfed, where does the memory of sensation go? The undisclosed experience of corporal punishment (in sinister but real adjacency to amusement here) lingers undissolved by this provision made for the black body in the nucleus of the naturalized social reproductive order. Mutilated skin, drowned and disembodied in representation, holds the image of this memory together as its *punctum.* And this experience, the glue or medium that makes it possible and then dissolves without apparent remainder, will come to be reproduced aberrantly as a diffusion of that "aguijón" (prick, sting, the same haunting *aguijón* of desire) that returns over and again, threatening to puncture the false unity, the ontological "armonía" of the Hostosian *logos.*

In the theory of representation articulated by Arango y Parreño, who assuages personal and imperial fear by reminding the Crown and himself that the Spanish have written moderation into their laws, we find a point of departure that expresses itself fully in Hostos's own semiotic practice. Parreño argues that slaves in the Spanish colonies need not struggle for a that which has already been given: a form of personhood within the very logos that enslaves them. Claiming the observance of these laws in Cuba and all Spanish colonial territories, Parreño seeks to secure a right––the right to their own colonial purchase, an individual's right to their very own instantiation of the enfleshed colonial primal scene, the slave—that had been granted a mere two years before to these territories through the Real Cédula de Gracia of 1789. Ultimately, the culprit is the French anarchist chaos itself, whose revolutionary language engendered the ill fate of its colony: "los amos han enseñado a sus siervos, y por su propia mano se han fabricado su ruina." The French have revealed themselves to be unsuitable masters of black life, and the road for Parreño is gloriously paved for Spanish success in the lucrative commerce of slaves.

Implicit here, too, is the paternalistic administration of benevolent bondage, itself predicated on the ontological impossibility of black self-possession, a modality of self-possession that would dangerously unhinge the given experiential and epistemological paradigms of life that Arango y Parreño refers to; because to possess oneself would finally be to possess one's pain, the meaning-

making pain, the only place from which a full and dense concept of freedom could arise: the skin comes, cracks the whip back, the sound is heard, the sound of the suffering unallowed by the language he has articulated and the grammar from which his "representación" is made. Blackness—as particular and irreducible and remaining materiality impinging on the semiotic system inaugurated in Arango y Parreño but fully expressed in Hostosian harmony—short circuits the representative power of the word. The possession of black self would produce some other kind of grammar for experience whose very possibility would plunge the pilgrim's into chaos.

Perhaps we can finally feel the full scope of that chaos, the constitutive chaos of Bayoán's "conciencia," quoted earlier in our analysis: "*¿La conciencia*…? Es el fondo del abismo donde van a parar tus deseos, tus pasiones, tus propósitos, tu vida; *el caos de donde has de ser*". It speaks of a moment prior to the pilgrim's will. It is the forgotten abyss which gave rise to the utterance of the pilgrim *I*, what Judith Butler, riffing on the toll of Nietzche's awakening bell of self-reflection, describes when she asks if it is "possible to try to give a narrative sequence for that process of being affected, *a threshold of susceptibility and transfer* and I that might reflect upon and relay, a life that did not yet exist and that, in part, accounts for the emergence of that I" (Butler 3, my emphasis). Here, a bell does not toll but a whip does crack and cannot but be heard in some space beyond representation and narrative possibility. The answer to Butler's question would be an ample *yes* full of black skin and all those heavy metals, the disavowed but undissolved *hierros*, the chain and the revolutionary sword, that would require another past and future of that I and of America. If pilgrimage means for Bayoán the possibility of some other kind of belonging beyond Empire—the legitimating movement, the performed possibility of relation and interconnection—, then that very same ocean also promises the absolute erosion of his poetic "yo." Because to navigate that Atlantic crossing will always bear the salty sediments of that water blackened with unsounded pain and death, sediments that demand their sound and that, in part, account for the emergence of the Hostosian subject despite their being abject by the letter that founds this subjectivity.

The very utterance of a "Haitian constitutionality" presupposes certain conditions of experience—enfleshed and bloody collision, touch, earth-bound struggle—at odds with the Hostosian pilgrimage, which wants a being "beyond human conflict." This unified being, however, can only be obtained by extricating Bayoán's breath from the breath of material truth. Hostos's world-system, being predicated on the universality of the word at the expense of the flesh, frames the Antillean Confederation as justified because of its logical—linguistic—unity with the imperial logos, with the Spanish word that would forcibly cast Haiti out of this breathing together, this breathing that signifies, that speaks and affects. For "in the laws that classify all citizens as black" not even the *logos* would escape its reference to a particular color, a particular black flesh and concomitant black uttering from which the word—and all the interanimatory potential implied in the word's being breath breathed together—springs out to inscribe embodied blackness into the articulation of that *atmósfera*, the common wind, to follow Julius Scott, that this passage responds to and wishes, failingy, to suppress.

If that past were to feel for Haiti, the weight of its Bayoán's ship would necessarily swirl in chaos. The pilgrim would not progress but rather linger, remain, reckon in spirals, reckon with the disavowed prick of matter—of material history, of what has happened there—on the skin of time. It is a material history that diffuses outwards towards a future where it demands to be felt. But to get there one would not move forward toward the inevitable gust of history, but be stuck, *quedado*. Remaining with the remainder, with what Spirit has not picked up. Arroyo again alerts us to the fact that Hostos tethers the impossibility of black revolutionary praxis to the facticity of the black body's memory of bondage, so as to imply that whatever poetics of freedom could arise from the wretched grounds of Haitian struggle is *a priori* limited, tarnished by the experience of forced bondage which would warp of any idea of liberty stemming from it (Arroyo 85). It is freedom presumed to be

unfree because it stems from the experience of physical enslavement, a poetry borne of the reaction to a pain unaccounted for by historical spirit. As if the feeling of freedom were negated by being a necessity of experience, a fundamentally new sense for freedom. The disavowal expressed in Bayoán's representation of the Haitian liberatory energy as merely a colorless aspect of Spirit is ultimately in continuity with a general disavowal of the senses as articulators of a history—history as a practice—of freedom.

Thus we bear witness to a fork in the road, two poetics proposed: on the one hand an all-engulfing Spirit that for Hostos marks the overcoming of human conflict under *Logos*, the surpassing of material particularity—black skin and its concomitant knowledge and practices—by way of the word, and then another, the possibility of a Black Universality which would fundamentally break from the substance that makes the Universal: black practice as the substance of the common, that unavoidable breathing of black breath expressed in "la vida intelectual de los demás." "Los demás" here remains nameless, but this *demasía*, this othered excess inspired, finds its feeling in the birth pains of black liberatory practice rooted in Haiti as the epicenter of the practical and philosophical problem of freedom, implying thus that to utter freedom is to breathe with blackness, always, at every moment. Nameless, all here is destabilized by the possibility that whatever Hostos utters is always already participating in the materiality of black breath, partaking of its body and its utterance. Bayoán is powerless before this air which he cannot help but take in.

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The pilgrim holds his breath. Bayoán can only claim to be partially fulfilled in his desire to live beyond the fact of the flesh when he is no longer present as a sensing body breathing words into the dénouement of his own quest. A transformation takes place as the pilgrim of the diary becomes another ghost in it: a ghost channeled by Hostos, who feels for Bayoán, feeling for himself. He must hastily finish the text by feeling like Bayoán. In the preface to the 1863 edition, Eugenio María de Hostos begins by denying original authorship: "Estas palabras me las dictó Bayoán." In other words, Hostos is but a transcriber, a *medium escribiente* or medium in possession of the *facultad* or ability to write the words of the mattering spirits, spirits that matter by their speaking. Bayoán needs a mouth and a hand to end the pilgrimage for him, so he can claim victory over the flesh.

But Hostos must write what he sees; he sees Bayoán receding in the horizon: "Me dirigí a la playa, y cuando el buque se confundió con el horizonte, bajé entristecido la cabeza y pensé que el horizonte de la vida es mucho más oscuro que el del mar" (319). Once more the ocular poetics of the seafarer appear, and yet Bayoán no longer looks but is resoundingly looked at: made object, made body. Hostos enters the semblance space of his own book and strips his pilgrim of the very immaterial and ghostly—*Geist*-like—quality that thematizes the transformation of the flesh into word. The anxiously-guarded categorical distinctions between the presence of the body and its spectral demarcation as *Logos*, between the particular pilgrim and historical Spirit he claimed to be the recipient of, are undone by this splitting of the writing self.

In the end all ghosts need a mouth through which to speak, and this means too that material spirit requires a point—a particular place (though not necessarily placed), a nerve struck, a sound sounded—from which feeling can be taken possession of, from which one could possess and be possessed by the fact of experience, "to receive the spirit of the postcolonial" as Fred Moten tells us. But he also tells us that in order to receive this spirit, one has to be, "not in between," an ontological and and aesthetic departure "that is not anti-foundationalist but improvisatory of foundations; that is a turn toward a specific exteriority; that is not only an insistent previousness in evasion of each and every natal occasion but the trace and forecast of a future in the present and in the past here and there, old-new, the revolutionary noise left and brought and met, not in between" (13). Ghosting

himself while speaking for a ghost in need of a word, Bayoán-Hostos—hyphenated thus to mark this not quite presence and absence, authorship and readership, mind and body, history and its subject—enacts a felt need for some kind of being not in between.

When Hostos begins to speak for Bayoán, Bayoán can be said to have entered the realm of the speaking dead in need of a *medium*, as a loaned voice in which to matter. He is writing, in his diary, the anguished pursuit, the pilgrimage that he knows has no end, which was known from the start which was not the start:

> América es mi patria; está sufriendo, y tal vez su dolor calme los míos… Si puedo encontrar ahí lo que en vano he buscado en Europa; si en una de esas repúblicas hay un lugar para un hombre que ama el bien, después de recorrerlas todas, después de estudiar sus necesidades presentes, y evocar su porvenir, me fijaré en la que más reposo me prometa… Si en ninguna lo encuentro, seguiré peregrinando…(319).

Hostos attempts to arrive at a position which in fact is not available to his own history. He is barred from the "reposo," the stable "lugar" from which to construct a position. Instead, he is forced to endlessly content once more with ocean water and its scattered sediments, its intimations of times which return to haunt the disembodied project of the Hombre Nuevo. Here, the novel surprisingly grapples with the ocean for a possible Caribbean geopoetics predicated on forever pilgrimage, on the forever deferral of the stable place of "reposo." However, *La peregrinación* has disavowed the very sea that foregrounds pilgrim-knowledge, and what we read here thematizes an inability to feel for this "not in between." It is framed in the diary as a melancholic poetics of loss. He cannot but supply us with an expression of a historical subject still enmeshed in the colonial logic: in the given order of non-experience conceded to when faith resides fully in the representative power of the Word. Thus, his eponymous pilgrim, as a mediation of reformist *logos*, fails.

A plunge into failure sounds out a truth: that in the given order of History's totalization, there are no senses for the subject he seeks. However, a possibility emerges in the crisis, a possibility close to what Marx suggests in the moment where the senses finally become *theoreticians* of themselves in the immanent expression of their being, in *practice*, not independent of its materials. By "theoretician" here I mean the opposite of abstraction: not the sacrifice of the body before the altar of singular Spirit, but rather the opening up of the senses and their capacity for invention, the freedom felt in their being practiced, the fact that an occasion within history that calls for sensation to emerge newly. The voices of the many spirits speaking in the water through that practice beyond representation, "consent not to be a single being." Could sensation be the fulcrum of Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach, the finding, the emergence of a feeling that marks the passage from the interpretation of the world to the world's changing? What kind of justice would read from a language inscribed with that unwritable (water refuses writing, as it refuses any and all form) sensorial substance which Bayoán so effortlessly denies but also needs in order to move? *La peregrinación de Bayoán* has no answer for this, of course, but the ripples discernable in the ocean in wake of his errant ship cannot but reverberate the sonorous silence—the felt anesthesia—of what would potentially implode the given concepts of sentience, history, and even pilgrimage: in other words, ocean water as that which would problematize the sensing subject of that landed history yearning for "lugar" by disclosing a limit to what it can feel and therefore a sense for what it fact can change.

The encounter between form and its other becomes apparent in Hostos's narrative work as it comes formally undone and thematically centered on death and the decay of the body. The novel performs the impossibility of its completion to suggests a fundamental crisis in closure and coherence, a crisis which the narrator confronts by fearfully gazing upon the sea that shores up

histories of colonial subjugation and Black suffering that refute the organizing capacity of *Logos*—the law of Empire, the spiritual key of *Weltgeist*, and the written word of the literary text. Hostos offers a possible subject of history from which to feel for that desired change, but he can only approach the fullness of that history from the limits of a faith in the representative capacity of *logos* and whatever concomitant futures it can produce. And yet, *La peregrinación de Bayoán* alerts us to the possibility of the pilgrim's path, where we can be free to approach history as a field of new sensations, a being in the matter of experience, a poetry and a practice of being in and knowing the Caribbean in the fullness of its opacity, in whatever new figurations of place, voice, and history emerge from there.

A Maritime Sensorium: Three Key Episodes from Puerto Rican Ocean Poetry

0. *Prelude*

Eugenio María de Hostos's failed pursuit of a spiritual foundation for a sovereign nation and a concomitant citizen to come in the 19th century—the Hombre Nuevo—forced *La Peregrinación de Bayoán* into a crisis of experience, a crisis thematized in my analysis as an impasse to narrative representability that is mediated by Hostos's encounter with the "oscuridad" of a sea that drags irreducible sediments: histories and corporalities unaccounted for in the pursuit of an American *Logos* and which haunt the text's titular pilgrim as he crosses the expanse of water between two worlds. At play there was a wish to anesthetize his lover Marién, and metonymically, to sublate without remainder the troublesome particulars of the place and time of Puerto Rico and the Americas, a place and a time that erode, with enfleshed particularity, the foundations of a place elaborated within the symbolic matrix of empire. Hostos sought pure Spirit, dispossessed of the trappings of the *carne* which so stubbornly locates itself and which discloses decay, transience, and lust.

What he sought to discard in the ocean returns to him as history unresolved. His seeking gave way to a longing for a self-evident and transhistorical subject of history which, paradoxically, rejected the very sensing bodies—female, ill, black, Caribbean bodies—that would comprise the flesh of said history. In the depths of the abyssal Atlantic he crosses twice, Bayoán anxiously gazes at the water and reluctantly surmises a limit to his messianic paradigm: the archive of uncounted *dolor* Bayoán apprehends in his encounter with that ocean cannot be subsumed under the imperial letter, and the dead will not simply rise to become aspects of an "hombre nuevo". A trace lingers in the sea as an abyss: water as aporetic surplus to the yearning for continental expanse.

Marién's *grito*, which signals the breaking point at the novel's climax, also ruptures the totalizing dream of Hostosian *Geist* through its insistence on a sound that cannot be subsumed. Unable to mute the both the chattering of lapping waves or the piercing shriek of his lover's fearsome scream, Bayoán contends with a sound he cannot mute or account for, a sound in excess of the *Logos* which he desired as *evidence* of an objective truth. In the wake of Hostos's hermeneutic shards, these soundwaves offer a vector into an alternative literary and aesthetic genealogy emerging in slantwise relationship to this failed foundation; a genealogy that articulates a body receptive to the sound of the abyss, there where Hostos feared the accumulated death and transience that marked the equinoctial latitudes he sought to systematize.

I linger now on three key episodes in the development of 20th century poetry in Puerto Rico to insist on water as both an aesthetic concern and a critical paradigm for assembling a toolkit for a Puerto Rican erosive sensibility. I will highlight the way through which a tropological attention to the maritime grants us a critical vocabulary for studying this sensibility, a mode of hearing for and sensitizing an archive of transience that departs from the will to fix. The sea emerges in Puerto Rican poetry as a counterpoint to Hostosian narrativity. It affords us a new point of departure for an account of the Puerto Rican subject beyond the overdetermination of land as the unit. This tropological shift from the yearnings of continentality to the itinerance of the maritime foregrounds erosion as a fundamental concern for Puerto Rican literature as it relates to itself as conditions for emergence for a political subject: a subject attending to its movement and dissolution in time beyond a subservience to the formation of the State. In what follows, I turn sound now as a critical path through which poetry makes available—or *echolocates*—a Puerto Rican common "we" beyond the notions of evidence and legibility on which Hostos's spiritual grammar hinges. I linger now on the border zone between sound and silence as it becomes articulated by Puerto Rican poets of the sea, in order to follow an arc of what Julia de Burgos, the first poet under study in this chapter, calls

"silencios transarinos" or *transmarine silences*, a sonorous silence where a Puerto Rican "we" is articulated in the 20th century.

I. *Poetry, an Ear for Abyssal Voices*

Screams, muted. Unheard, and yet screaming. Like the way some can hear the dead, there and not there, a formal contradiction for a moment abolished. From one possible point of hearing, the history of revolutionary dissent in Puerto Rico is in fact a history of screams: the *Grito de Lares* of 1868, when, with the support from José Emeterio Betances and other leading figures of revolutionary sentiment, those who organized around such a thing as feeling Puerto Rican cried a unified cry of liberty against the colonial master, Spain. Or the *Grito de Jayuya*, of 1950, when again there was screaming, now against the backdrop of the ever-encroaching grip of the United States over the social, political, and economic life of the Puerto Rican archipelago. In the backdrop of that second *grito*, the *Ley de Mordaza*, or Gag Law of 1948, a sonorous figure all too perfect for a set of murderous repressions aiming at any possible screaming, speaking or signifying the Puerto Rican autonomous: flags, slogans, anthems, songs, conversations, all silenced under penalty of the jail cell or the bullet's blast. By 1952 the *Estado Libre Asociado*, or Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, living half-dead to this day, made this gag a thing of legal truth. Under its constitution, Puerto Rico was granted citizenship by its colonial master and yet remained, from the optic of the empire's law, unspeaking and unhearable: devoid of any representation within the terms of its democracy. Suddenly, this swerve in the scream's trajectory reframes the question of being Puerto Rican. It forces a question of entirely nefarious intent—a modality of ontological warfare waged in sound waves: on what grounds could the Puerto Rican be spoken when what speaks through the Puerto Rican is, at its core, a semi-signifying, rather stillborn identification, discursively inseparable from the conceptual yield of the United States? What better way to silence the scream than to bring into question the substance of its vibration?

But, from another possible point of hearing, a hearing for the waves, could this sound—its supposed absence, framed epistemically and experientially as aporetic silence—be perceived? What would this mean, and what would be the consequence of hearing it? In other words, in stipulating the possibility of the truth and density of the Puerto Rican *grito* in spite of the multiplied gags of its history, I am tasked with considering what this proposition changes about the given properties of sound as well as what appears to be sound's other, silence. Guided by the preponderance of the *grito* in the Puerto Rican revolutionary history sketched above, I turn to poetry, where we can find a momentary kinship between sound and silence, a relative lack of hierarchy between them: there, silence can gnaw at the world at least as much as sound—its self-evident density, its mattering—does. I proceed here, then, with the belief that the poem is, among other things, a meaningful articulation of silence in which the substance that sounds there—vowels, consonants, rhythms, sculpted breath—enlist the aid of a void whose muteness is already meaning. This is to say that the poem allows a recalibration of our thoughts regarding the sonic dyad of the heard and the unheard that surpasses the logic of deferrals in a poststructuralist procedure, where the word points towards the absence, the absence being the truth. I am, of course, indebted to the field opened by *différance* and its valorization of the ghosts that speak through our words. However, what I am trying to touch on here is more akin to what Fred Moten calls "phonic substance," that which is irreducible to both meaning and language and therefore persists relentlessly, gnawing at the multiplied gags of the Puerto Rican twentieth century.[10]

[10] See "Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester's Scream" in Fred Moten's *In the Break:* The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.

Taking the poem as a sonar for the Puerto Rican phonic substance, I want to argue that in order to sense the substance of this *grito*, we must proceed by interrogating the matter of sound as it becomes audible through a tropological recurrence of the sea in the development of Puerto Rican poetry in the 20th century Sound attains density in this poetry through the medium of ocean water: entering poetry as a substance heard, as the voice of the unredeemed dead, as the interruption to the continuity of silencing. The sea submerges and drags centuries as a medium for the remainder, it accounts for what remains. The sea also withholds control: it cannot belong to or be possessed by a single body: as I seek to demonstrate in my readings, the ocean trope also mediates a divestment from individual subjectivity and an elaboration of a multiple body untethered to one history: a tidalectic body shaped by submarine unities across times and locations. A Puerto Rican phonic substance is coextensive with a maritime silence. These sensorial inscrutables are the "stuff" of poetry and, in suggesting poetry as the technology for critical intervention, I am attempting to think through a method with which to interrogate a Puerto Rican commons without assuming *a priori* what it sounds like or even who makes the sound to be heard.

Perhaps "silence" is that which the conceptual yields of progressive and teleological history cannot hear. Is poetry here, then, an ear for sensing that boundless and unrelenting *grito* which our given notions of historical unfolding categorize as muteness? The poets under study in this chapter orient their devotion to this silence which is actually an uncontainable phonic substance. In order to sound out the common *transmarine silence*—a silence which acts in the world as a spacious and unbordered *now* in which dissent from dominant history is collective and ongoing, untethered from that history's requirement for intelligibility—I will turn to three twentieth century Puerto Rican poet of the ocean: Julia de Burgos (1914-1953), Francisco Matos Paoli (1915-2000), and Angela María Dávila (1944-2003). By way of maritime figures tethered to meditations on sound and silence, these poets apprehend the enumeration of deaths, dismemberments, erasures, and drownings that mark the Puerto Rican 20th century revolutionary effort and find a common experience in the capacity to sense an indomitable yet inhabitable sound emerging from the cracks of that history's death sentence.

These poets approach such a history of violence obliquely, however: the voices at work in their poems do not seek to repair, mend, or offer a facile index for that material history of suffering. They offer an alternative to a poetics of singular, ever-clarifying historical actualization commonly identified in the lyrical form. Lyric poetry, in its Romantic, late-Romantic, and even modernist stages, casts the speaking subject as a the indispensable *medium* capable of organizing the unruly experience of the world and transforming it to address, rendering it a circulable and comprehensible—one might even say useful—concrete historical truth in the world. This world, mediated through the *logos*, becomes sensible as a voice distanced from History, as critique, yet intimately of History, as its sedimented expression. This aesthetic mode in which the self-reflection of the subject implicates a voicing of its historical becoming, then, makes poetry available to all sorts of subjectivations: liberatory and oppressive, redemptive as well as totalitarian. As Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins remind us, Romantic lyrical making dressed itself in the Hegelian mist when this poetic form became the privileged means through which *Weltgeist* lives for itself and in itself, as indexable concreteness: "that attainment of subjective wholeness would in turn represent both perfect expression and the dialectical accomplishment of historical progress, *for in its expression the poet moves us all forward toward enlightenment*" (Jackson and Prins 2014: 3, my emphasis). As a conduit for a total expression of historical self-consciousness, the Romantic lyrical mode establishes a subject tethered to the requirements of its history—its senses of place and time—all while ensuring a historical concreteness to which this subject must invariably refer to. Even in its critical modalities, this definition of lyric once more orients a progressive time of unfolding and an eventual maturity of spirit that takes for granted the dual tethers of a secure subject and of a legible history.

While Burgos, Matos Paoli, and Dávila still operate within structures and materials that indeed overlap with conventions of the lyric tradition—they are, after all, writing language on the page—they nevertheless probe the conceptual limits and assumed yields of lyrical *poiesis*, especially those regarding central tenets of voice and clarity—poetry's hierarchization of sound—where lyrical voice should be singular and give order to a chaos of sounds and give evidence for such an order. I argue that this experimentation with lyric form emerges as a need felt; in order to apprehend new senses of collectivity, revolt, and experience in excess of the available logics, they must pursue a poetry at a point anterior to ideas of order.

To do this, they write from the point of contact between sound and silence. They turn to the sea and the waves. All three poets explore the oceanic abyss frontally, as one would a collaborator, a God, or a lover. Theirs is not an optimistic reframing of the sea as Hostos's pilgrim saw it: as a vast and thanatological antagonist to the human will. The key difference here is that while Hostos's pilgrim Bayoán conceptually and literally rejects the abyssal, the "fondo inarticulable" that poses a limit to a watertight and transcendental "hombre nuevo"of his political system, Burgos, Matos Paoli, and Dávila return, in diverging but kindred ways, to that same abyssal scene and cull from it a condition of possibility, a quantity of truth more aligned with the Puerto Rican experience of decay, death, and opacity. Ocean water, that nameless and boundless expanse that is both the amniotic beginning and erosive end of all structures of this world, becomes a point of departure that opens up a critique of the Hostosian notion of evidence as concrete, unmoving, and "landed" fact we observed in the previous chapter. These poets of the transmarine silence dissent through a celebration of unnaming (for there is no stable place to *logos* to name or to arrive at as a precondition for the collective) and dissolution (for there is no rejection of *thanatos,* but rather a will to erode and a divestment from notions of futurity). They rethink the notion of evidence for a "we" of Puerto Rican poetry and for a common political subjectivity by insisting on the sea's sound as that which cannot be touched with the hand but rather contacted by way of hearing in common in the silence of the now.

Julia de Burgos's litanies in the posthumous volume *El mar y tú* (1954) sing of the sea to defy the notion of a "national poet" through a death wish at the shore. She bridges the anxious transits of the Hostosian pilgrim with her own dérives decidedly at odds with ideas of the "usefulness" of her voice for a future-oriented political project. Thus, her book becomes for this study a necessary prelude, an alternative foundational scene at the antipodes of Hostos, where the body's pain and dismemberment do not heroically yield a nation but rather willingly elude restitution, closure, and containment. Her poems also question the relationship between possessing or being in ownership of a voice, and being possessed by voices, of being spoken through. Francisco Matos Paoli's *Canto de la locura (*1962) continues to think about the sensing and susceptible body as an instrument for ecstatic possession and collective song, pushing Burgos's possession by maritime voices to the territory of literal mystic union. His is a mysticism that does not seek to transcend the flesh but rather hear the unison vibration in all the bloody things of the world in the wake of revolution's carnage. Finally, Ángela María Dávila's maritime voices in the landmark avant-garde poem *Homenaje al ombligo* (1966), inscribe themselves as a response to Matos Paoli by way of a recuperation of Burgos's feminine poetics of the sea, pushing his yields further, where ocean water becomes both cosmic and amniotic fluid. Her poems explore the image of the navel as a point of contact for "we" in excess of historical time and single location, a common *omphalos, hymen,* and *throat*, a membrane where the collective is birthed time and again at every utterance, endlessly, queerly. In all three, a transmarine unity is actualized by hearing for a silence that carves a common place for a common sound.

They provide perhaps the clearest definition of the guiding figure of this project, *waves in time*: meaning both the material erosion of the ocean wave that counts the death-time in Puerto Rico through its slow but certain chipping away at us, and the concomitant soundwave that this friction

makes, which interrupts the logic of total erasure through the sound of its repeated and rhythmic encounters, through crashes that reverberate in spite of the limits of the objective world. These three voices of 20th century Puerto Rican poetic history are taken by this wave and leave their poetry as records in the research, in the archaeology of silence, where in each we find diverse but intimately interpenetrated field maps of our sonorous possibility of freedom. Through this poetic constellation, I argue for coeval present in which a people subjugated by multilateral violence impossible to repair have already sounded out ways of making and hearing and feeling Puerto Rican, like the way some can hear the dead, there and not there, a formal contradiction for a moment abolished.

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II. Voices in Revolt: Julia de Burgos Singing with the Void

A figure whose poetic and political practice—a feminist, an internationalist, and resolutely pro-independence member of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party—was intermingled with a life of persecution, solitude, and exile, and forgetting, Julia de Burgos's voice is itself an enactment of a speaking silence, a living-dead voice whose line of inquiry engages refusal, the unheard, and the unseen as a field of otherwise possibility for being free and being Puerto Rican. Her suffering—the cold-to-the-bone exile in New York City, the alcohol, the myth-spawning death in the empty streets of Spanish Harlem—has served to preserve her memory as an uncanny martyr and an unlikely mother-icon of *la patria.* And yet these biographical approaches have themselves eclipsed the rigor of an aesthetic and affective project tethered to a private and unnamable suffering that touches on an ineffable but constitutive aspect of Puerto Rican being: a pain, a solitude, and a pleasure without place and time in History's unfolding in colonial past or postcolonial longing. Through a disavowal of any idea of liberation predicated on becoming visible, audible, enduring, or whole, Burgos points towards a maritime politics, a practice of being in radical surrendered to an incurable solitude, possessed by a pain without words: a modality of being at the antipodes of a masculinist impetus to translate or transform pain into glory, or to yield from sacrifice a useful, future-oriented reproductive telos.[11]

This otherwise politics exists, besides and beyond the kind of independence and autonomy that requires recognition—the face and the name—to buttress a subject and a set place for the *patria.* In her poetic oeuvre, scattered across two volumes published in life and one volume—titled *El mar y tú*—of posthumous publication, as well as a great number of newly-available previously lost poems in her archive, we find the building blocks for an orthography of the sea, for the maritime metonymy, for a grammar of a radically refusing anguish, solitude, and surrender in the vast expanse of sound that will later reverberate in both *Canto de la locura* and in *Homenaje al ombligo.*[12] And yet the movement of this arc is by no means exhausted by the pointing out of mere literary genealogy. We

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[11] Pedro Albizu Campos (1891-1965), president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party from 1930 onwards and practically a patron saint and metonymy for the Puerto Rican 20th century nationalist discourse, popularized the phrase "La patria es valor y sacrificio" (The *patria* is valor and sacrifice), a slogan that condensed the masculine poetics of effort, courage, and labor as tantamount to the building blocks of the independent nation to come.

[12] I want to bring attention to the category of the posthumous text, —where the sound of the dead still touches on and transits, without interruption, on the realm of the living—especially in the context of a reading that insists on the facticity of an anterior acoustic space where this distinction ceases to account for the dynamic expanse of sound I track in *Homenaje al ombligo.* By engaging in such a reading, I cannot dismiss the fact that the most striking echoes of Julia de Burgos in the poetry of Ángela María Dávila can be found in Burgos's posthumous *El mar y tú* (1952). Moreover, as discussed in the case of Hostos in the first chapter and in what will become a fundamental paradigm for understanding the queer poetics of Manuel Ramos Otero in the chapter that follows, the voices of the dead have a privileged place in the practice of being Puerto Rican. Thus, we must tether this movement of the wave in time to the recurrent and coeval emergence of a Puerto Rican thanatography. It is in the domain of sound that the living and the dead come to share this capacity to touch, affect, and receive.

must revisit the conversation taking place here between sounds of the living and the dead and grapple with these echoes, these *surcos* (or grooves, a word favored by both Burgos and Dávila), paths that lead to a shared horizon beyond the logos of representation, restitution, and redemption, in direct refusal of *patria*-inflected practices indebted to a revolutionary, vigorous masculine time that does not operate in either Burgos or Dávila.

In Julia de Burgos's "Letanía del mar," the marine metaphor constellates solitude, dispossession, and namelessness to offer a refusal of Sapphic lyrical restitution. In other words, the promise of poetry as that which mends the broken tongue of a shattered lyrical voice into a poetic whole is from the outset disavowed. The voice wants to fall deep into the anonymity of a sea in what appears to be a scene of drowning:

> Mar mío
> mar profundo que comienzas en mí,
> mar subterráneo y solo
> de mi suelo de espadas apretadas.
>
> Mar mío,
> mar sin nombre,
> desfiladero turbio de mi canción despedazada,
> *roto y desconcertado silencio transmarino*,
> azul desesperado,
> mar lecho
> mar sepulcro…

The poem opens with the designation of some ontic condition in which death and birth are one and the same, where destruction and creation cannot be understood temporally as a sequence, but as a dual emergence in the present. In this litany we find the sea as the anterior space in which voice is but a moment, an articulation of this open and all-engulfing anteriority. This is not a litany *to* the sea, but *of* it. As such, the sea and not the self ushers the sound that registers the violent dispersions and ruptures of a body that pursues a suicidal oceanic anonymity, a body that finds in namelessness the fullness of a solitude that is, like the sea, substance itself and not an aspect of substance available to co-option or instrumentality.

Here, too, we come to know the sea against the grain of its romanticized inflection as a utopian space of connectivity, vitality, expansion, and sublime paradisiac wanderlust. Burgos's sea (a "mar" that is at once part and parcel of the voice and yet also the source of the voice's desired undoing, alpha and omega conjoined) is first and foremost the absolute limit to life and language, even while indeed harboring the dual trace of the amniotic and the primordial as a promise of new life to come. The mother who ends the suffering of her children by allowing them to rest the eternal commons of the dead, the sea saves as it swallows. It is thus a point zero for being, the before of place and time. The sea is that which contains, and nothing in this planet can be said to contain it. Far from the facile *jouissance* with which the sea can be mined for metaphors of generative multiplicity and dispersion, the sea is the substance of nothingness, the abyssal, and the necrotic, a rejection of the terms of life on land. To assume the maritime orientation, then, as the poem does, is to posit an impossible speaking that clashes with the boundaries that allow for accumulation, for a representative voice, for words, for subjects, or for states. To speak of the sea is to speak of an eternally anonymous mass with no beginning or end, with no condition to supersede or anticipate what it already is. One either comes from the sea or moves towards it. There is nothing to come

after it, and in these poems, we must proceed with a recognition of a pact with death disclosed through this staging of semblance with ocean water.

The ocean in Burgos marks the death of the name. Namelessness emerges here, too, as a refusal of reconstitution or repair, a disavowal of repair's possibility within the terms of this world, a world willingly rejected, a sea which is the only viable witness of the poem's address. Because it is a condition, as Derek Walcott would have it, "all subtle and submarine," untethered to a dialectic of recognition while nevertheless being animated, vibrating with salts and sediments, beyond the position of the historical and its name-granting capacity, beyond its pursuit of a coherent archaeological method with which to valorize, to make matter, its scattered things that nevertheless make sounds, sounds resonating in the poem: "roto y desconcertado silencio submarino," we read, in a redoubling of visual and sonic opacity that revels in the indecipherable and unlocatable source and end of suffering.

The conditions are given, then, for poetry to untie itself from an imperative to redeem or repair what is absent, lost, or lacking. The penetrative urge that would seek to pry open the first cause of pain, its conditions of emergence, is elided through a proposition in which the poem is more akin to the sonar device that registers, through echolocation in the ocean's dizzying recombination of surface and depth, a full topography of animation amidst death (a "mar lecho" that is also a "mar sepulcro, " an entity that can, at one and the same time, destroy as well as create) ascertained by sympathetic vibration and resonance, a *being with* the sea that will wash body and land away. There is nothing to penetrate or uncover, there is no beyond it through which to organize futurity. It simply is, and the poem tracks this simultaneous experience of being (sound) and becoming (voice) as an oscillation with no beginning or endpoint, just as there is no true solvent distinction here between the voice that addresses the sea and the sea that receives the address. It is litany that marks a rhythm to this death beyond a desire for repair, a pulsation that discloses a joy in suffering beyond the single lyric voice's capacity for possession, a sea of pain in which even the poem—voice as spaced sound in time—gets in the way, practically resented, speaking despite itself:

> Azul,
> lívido azul,
> para mis capullos ensangrentados,
> *para la ausencia de mi risa*,
> *para la voz que oculta mi muerte con poemas*.

There is no wish to circumvent death because death is where the poem already *is*, the source of the sea's sound in this litany. It is a death wish in which freedom is the freedom from the need to articulate pain as if it were a thing separate from the substance of sound, which belongs to no one. It is through this erosion—the surrender to decay—effectuated by the ocean's wave crashing against the single voice and the single body that the poem thematizes its refusal of any horizon other than the passage of the single into the communion of sounds. There, we find that there is no longer a need for sound to be measured as a voice to speak it, for the sound described here utters from a position where both the spatial and the temporal, as boundaries for the sequential and as markers to trace the event, are interrupted.

In another poem from *El mar y tú*, "¡Oh mar, no esperes más!" this dynamic constellation among death, voice, and time is formulated as an inflamed plea directed at the sea for time's succession to end once and for all, for a break from the inutility of the temporal, for time has no space for this living death:

> Amapolas de luz, mis manos fueron fértiles tentaciones de incendio

Hoy, cenizas me tumban para el nido distante.

¡Oh mar, no esperes más!
Casi voy por la vida como gruta de escombros.
Ya ni el mismo silencio se detiene en mi nombre.
Inútilmente estiro mi camino sin luces.
Como muertos sin sitio se sublevan mis voces.

Through her poetic practice, a rhythmic spiral of repeated encounters with the sea, Julia de Burgos inaugurates a *surco* and a *ruta* to be filled by the voices of her many dead.[13] It is in home or the "nido" amassed from the combustion of the laboring hand that the uproar of a multitudinous voice rests. It is worth noting that here, formulations of the plural ("cenizas," "mis voces") have death as their precondition. Only in the beyond of this life's exhausted conditions of possibility can the voice that speaks in the poem yield the sound of uproar in "mis voces," our voices. We are these "muertos sin sitio" whose mere stirring resonantly with and in death already describes what is happening, what is being done, what is already being undone, the no-place that has been carved out by and for the sound of the dead. Thus, Burgos frames *poiesis* as the nest of the already dead and speaking, a repository for something that is not quite space or time, outside the progressively clarifying movement of History's material dialectic, where crisis releases orgasmically into its sublated other.

This sonic realm of the dead thematizes not only a freedom from the temporal and spatial requirements that give bounds to life, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the refusal of progressive time itself as a framework capable of accounting for the repeated stillbirths that mark the Puerto Rican "we" as articulated in Julia de Burgos's poetics. They are stillbirths because, in *El mar y tú*, poetry surmises the death sedimented in every present utterance. These are sounds from beyond the sea's sepulcher which the poem allows us to hear; the poem the medium through which, for its duration, the multitudinous uprising of vocalizations is rendered audible. Where the past has not passed without remainder and where the future, too, as a redemption of the dead, as vast as the sea is ineffable, is not only impossible, but also undesired by the speaker.

To presume that the poem's speaker can effectuate such a repair would place the speaker in temporal and spatial conditions separate from or transcending the dead "voces." Thus, the audibility made available in the poem does not entail a "speaking for," a phallic-heroic sounding of the bare rocks of time, like Pablo Neruda's speaker in Canto II of the *Canto General* (1950): "Yo vengo a hablar por vuestra boca muerta." The speaker in "Letanía del mar" recognizes itself as one other dead mouth because it is in that silence of the sea's thanatological space that the poems locate a sense of a common sound. To presume a voice that would subsume this suffering would betray the *pacto* of this communion in pain, rendering it messianic at the expense of Burgos's subtle thanatological "we". To repair and *re-member* this brokenness by virtue of a unifying face or voice would neutralize the critical valences of a speaker that longs for the boundlessness of death. "Letanía del mar" articulates a position which has disavowed the representability on life's terms, and death emerges there as an ontological alternative from which its speaker can voice a commons beyond the requirements of the name, the singular voice, or the will to live a life available to the organizing concepts of temporal progression and political subjectivity. To join the dead here is to

[13] I am alluding here to one of Burgos's most celebrated poems, "Yo misma fui mi propia ruta," a formulation that once more enacts this endless self-generative and self-destructive practice of being that lies at the core of both Burgos's and Dávila's poetics. Both "surco" and "ruta" also speak to the poets' theories of the language as a transitive gnawing and marking of experience into sedimented language, a "sea of salts" (following Dávila) that always beckons for an echo, an infinite conversation, a wave.

become manifold in slippery relation to subjectivity's interpellations. In another poem, "¡Oh, lentitud del mar,!" this idea is framed as a condemnation of the other's need for "poemas" that would render this living-dead condition legible:

> ¡Y aún me piden canciones por palabras,
> no conciben mi pulso sin poemas,
> en mi andar buscan, trémulos, los astros,
> como si yo no fuese por la tierra

The speaker identifies, as part of its refusal, an ethical crisis immanent to the material conditions of poetic making by identifying in the public, in those that beckon a redemptive song, a nefarious wish to substitute the poem for a life, to make the poem a supplement or stand-in for a living "pulso." Once more, Burgos's speaker presses on the ethics and the possibility of representation in order to think through an alternative to this easy equivalence. Here and in "Letanía del mar," all paths lead to the founding of a kind of silence that explodes the possibility of possessing or arresting one lyric persona for the purpose of clarity or redemption.

Out of phase with time and out of phase with historical presence, the echoing pulses of the sea's wave in the final stanza of "Letanía de mar" complete an alchemy that effectuates the transformation of the singular into the cosmic totality through a refusal of the name and its redemptive capacity to found and find a space and a time for the pain of the poem. Then and only then does it become something like a common place, a condition shared, a *mar* at once for the poem's voice that reaches out towards the tú, towards the universe:

> Mar mío,
> mar lecho,
> *mar sin nombre,*
> *mar a deshoras*,
> mar en la espuma del sueño,
> mar en la soledad desposando crepúsculos,
> mar viento descalzando mis últimos revuelos,
> mar tú,
> mar universo.

In remaining with the repercussions of a sonorous silence, the sound of the living dead untracked by History's archaeology of sounds, we are following another experiential impossible of the Puerto Rican poetic arc. In Burgos we encounter regions of a paradoxically cacophonous silence, a sound that is also a space of misrecognition that thwarts the logic of perception, representation, and memory. The contours of this particular silence seem to exceed the conscripts of the aporetic historical silences so importantly theorized by Michel Rolf-Trouillot. In Trouillot's formulation, silence renders palpable the machinations of power implicit in the making and suppression of history, between what he calls "historicity 1" as a material sociohistorical process, and "historicity 2," the dynamic and contentious space of historical narrative. Unlike Walcott's maritime historical, Trouillot's history is a history that sets out to touch hard surfaces:

> The bigger the material mass, the more easily it entraps us: mass graves and pyramids bring history closer while they make us feel small. A castle, a fort, a battlefield, a church, all these things bigger than we are that we infuse with the reality of past lives, seem to speak of an immensity of which we know little except that we are part of it. Too solid to be unmarked, too conspicuous to be candid, they embody the

> ambiguities of history. They give us the power to touch it, but not to hold it firmly in our hands—hence the mystery of their battered walls. We suspect that their concreteness hides secrets so deep that no revelation may fully dissipate their silences. We imagine the lives under the mortar, *but how do we recognize the end of a bottomless silence*? (30. my emphasis).

Trouillot's aim here is not necessarily the anxious unearthing of "our" pyramids and monuments. He underscores the deceptive aspect of such solidities which at once disclose and obfuscate history's truth content. Nevertheless, his reliance on tactility is surprising given a passage and a project that hinges on a sonorous metaphor, namely the supposed endpoint of a "bottomless silence" that is yet to be recognized by some extension of the touching hand. So he asks, quite earnestly, "how do we touch silence?," meaning a way of touching presumably analogous to how we can so readily touch the undeniable monumentality of the objects of the past with our hands, hands that deem something as concrete fact beyond representation. In touching the evidence, it seems, representation and narration collapses to make way for contact, of an intimate being with and in history. In historical discourse, this might look like a sense of facticity beyond doubt: *here are our things, things that have happened. Touch and find out*. Of course, Trouillot argues that this process is never devoid of mediation, power, and negotiation. Quite the contrary, they are constitutive of the historical. Even these touched things–-remnants, rocks, bodies, sediments—are beholden to a scale of valorization. As he points out, "facts are not created equal: the production of traces is always the creation of silences" (Trouillot 29). But it seems that at least one aim of his proposition regarding silence involves the capacity to touch said silence and therein find an equally analogous kind of recognition: like touching rocks that speak in their being touched, when this silence is touched, we would have a silence no longer.

But I hear other things, echoes and vibrations, in Trouillot's question. What I hear departs at least partially from *Silencing the Past* in that there, we still encounter a need or a disposition—a position, messianic—through which the past's silence is rendered sonic again, in which it comes to matter like pyramids matter, ambiguity and all. This line of reasoning, however, still depends on the will to arrest things "firmly in our hands," giving them a due place in time, making them available for "historicity 2," however opaque the latter truly is, as shown by Trouillot. In Julia de Burgos's *El mar y tú* we find an invitation to relinquish touching with hands and this excavation that collects for posterity. An invitation to touch with our ears, like the poem is able to "touch on" the silences of a sea of "voices sublevadas." It is to consider sound as already affecting, touching back, performing its own kind of contact which does not seek to hold or arrest and which does not seek to arrest the object held as a kind of evidence or confirmation, as reproducibility or representation. Burgos points towards the poem's capacity for tracking the contours of silence, allowing us to think of silence as a position of refusal and suggesting a method of touching the bottomless silence that Trouillot intuits.

This touching in between materiality and its other—between history and its other, which is not an absence—seeks not to bring silence to a halt, however. It presents an alternative disposition: *a capacity to be touched* by that inscrutable silence that discloses another social life already vibrating in the space marked by it. Here, I find Jamaica Kincaid's meditation on silence as a *need* to be more akin to what I am working towards:

> The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account, of themselves. The people in a small place cannot give an exact account, a complete account of events (small though they may be) ... The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness, for that would demand a careful weighing, careful consideration, careful judging, careful questioning. It would

> demand *the invention of a silence*, inside of which these things could be done. It would demand a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way they understand the existence of Time. *To the people in a small place, the division of Time into the Past, the Present, and the Future does not exist*. (53-54).

Kincaid's constellation, which traces a relationship among silence, time, and narration, stands in contrast to Trouillot's articulation of silence in that for the former, silence is permission: a permission granted to consider narration, the account of oneself, outside the paradigm of succession, "the division of Time into the Past, the Present, and the Future." She is of course referencing the enduring and ongoing consequence—the echoes—of colonial violence in the now, which negates the possibility of narrating the fullness of the "event" from within the historicist toolkit. Furthermore, Kincaid's is not a *silencing,* which presumes agents and dynamics that enact quietude with respect to the historical archive, but rather silence as a fact and a foundation: an *invention*, a finding out of what is actually there, an already mattering thing in the domain of sound that is not put to the service of either the production of concrete indexes or their coevally produced historical silences. If Trouillot discloses the deceiving senses of touching magnitude and monument, Kincaid's poetics of the silent ask about the textures particular to a smallness edging on imperception, senses that disrupt the adequacy of historical probing and historical inquiry.

If we can't touch this silence with certainty and a sense of possession or knowledge of its unrelenting bottomlessness, holding it "firmly in our hands" as Trouillot writes of a solid mass, can we hear it for what it is and practice this contact otherwise? At odds with the division of time into the past, present, and future, what we hear in the poetics of this sonorous silence is the full and real perennial *meanwhile* ("entretanto la ola," following Burgos) in which small places linger. The poem culls from the multitudinous silences of our history into a crashing wave to break the chain of time's reign over the account of Puerto Rican being.

Julia de Burgos enacts a new point of departure for our study by making available a reading and hearing practice at odds with the ossification of literary voice in the service of political futurity. Her various scenes of corporal and vocal undoing offer a stark contrast to the place in Puerto Rican literary history she has been often offered, as mother or icon of an exilic and martyred *puertorriqueñidad*. The poems in *El mar y tú*, perhaps Burgos's most profound contribution to the development of Puerto Rican poetics, in fact offer a corpus, poetic as well as enfleshed, where there is no will to possess or attain, where time stands still and the voices of the unsounded whole, there in the sea, pass through the poem a they pass through a throat that merely sounds but does not—cannot—contain or fully represent. The possibility of a speaking dispossession, a cry of uprising dead voices, becomes the point of departure for new kind of relationship between voice and silence that both Francisco Matos Paoli and Ángela María Dávila will push further, one towards the dispossessions of mystic unity and the other towards the relationship between the throat and the incalculable cosmos.

III. *Sonorous Seafoam*: Francisco Matos Paoli's *Canto de la Locura*

Francisco Matos Paoli's *Canto de la locura* (1962) was a book of death and silence borne. A decade prior to its publication, on November 2, 1950, insular police stormed his Río Piedras apartment, hungry for incriminating pro-independence miscellanea. They found a Puerto Rican flag alongside some speeches written on behalf of the archipelago's freedom. The Gag Law of 1948 allowed for this to be sufficient evidence for his arrest. Expelled from his professorship at the University of Puerto Rico, the poet, mystic, *medium*, and Secretary General of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party was sentenced to a twenty-year confinement that compromised his mental health,

triggering a breakdown. It was then he continued his sentence at a psychiatric hospital, haunted and guided by the hallucinated voices and images that, in the silence of the mind's edging on the brink of death, results in one of the cornerstone poetic works of Puerto Rican literary history.

And yet the prison and the psychosis, their dual dictums of silence, do not explain *Canto de la locura*. The poem itself tarries with silence, is silence and death turned upon itself to the point of becoming sound and life. This book, whose title already thematizes a dispossession of lyrical voice—for it is *locura,* madness itself speaking through and not being spoken of—embraces quietude and death as thresholds much like the paths, or mystical *vias*, of San Juan de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de Ávila before him. *Canto de la locura* is a poem endowed with all the formal and semiotic conventions of the long mystical tradition. It stages the quest of the soul in the darkness, or *amada,* in erotic and frenzied pursuit of the luminous *Amado*, the *increado* from which all comes to be. It furthermore expresses this transport of the soul in oscillating stages of anguish, pain, resistance, and finally pleasure, surrender, and death onto new life. These conventions, however, do not exhaust the poem. For it is also a poem about the stages of freedom's particular pursuit in Puerto Rico in the twentieth century. It is about the Nationalist Party, about the *gritos* of 1868 and 1950, about Pedro Albizu Campos, spearhead of the Party and Paoli's cellmate, whose ulcers from torturous exposure to radiation from the Empire's experiments he would tend to. It is a poetry of place, a song of and by his hometown of Lares, cradle of the first *Grito*. It is about his mother as guiding spirit, the poet's Virgil through the arduous exigencies of the path towards divine union and indepence: a formulation of the poetics of revolution fundamentally at odds with even God's masculinity, with His principle of destruction. Because, ultimately, a spiritual and metaphysical dilemma is tethered here to a question well within the realm of experience: what to do with all this sound, with the lovely vibration of the world that lingers and insists? *Canto de la locura* is about the combative, miraculous persistence of sound even in the face of silence, even in the face of the divine inarticulability commanded by the presence of the One. *Canto de la locura* suggests that we are, before everything, our boundless *Grito*.

The poem is punctuated by American birds and birdsong. They comprise the first staging of the war waged by sound on what seems to be its voidal other. The calls of birds on the brink of death by God's hand beckon the challenge, the question:

> Y por qué la calandria,
> la mimosa de astros extendidos,
> pugna por no morir
> cuando Dios la conculca con su asalto?
>
> Ebrias guedejas de mar,
> espumas sonoras que militan
> en contra del abismo.

The stanza-length question is the poem's echo of the bird's *pugnar*, the affront to a God that appears for the first time in the fifth stanza of the first *canto* of the poem as the murderer of sounds. The prevailing question of *Canto de la locura* is here: what to make of this primordial sonic disobedience to the Creator by the measly toil of the created, the derived, the likeness? Questioning implies a call and response dynamic staging the possibility of a sound existing in the world—immanent to it—capable of retorting God. Divine time, or rather the atemporal sphere of the transcendent, is thus perturbed by the stubbornness of the creature's rhythm, the meter of the small *Mimus saturninus* ("la mimosa de astros extendidos," a play on the calandria's scientific name). The chalk-browed mockingbird, South American bird of mimicry under Saturn, the planet of periodicity and bounds, orients the pursuit of

the opening stanzas of the poem towards a meditation on the substance of poetry—sound in time—as well as the mediating relationship between poetry and Creation.

Addressed here is a corollary of the bird's presence: what does poetry *do* to the world? What it does, the first *canto* suggests, is establish measures, a field of resonances that simultaneously produce and structure experience in this world. In other words, the poem *makes* the world by sounding out the void. This, of course, is a problem for a poem in conversation with the world's Source, with the holy and inscrutable and necessary absence of everything so that the mystical poem may "work" as such. This is precisely the dilemma framed as the vociferous "tendrils of seafoam" that "militate" against the abyss. The "amada" wants nothing more than to find the void full of nothing, but therein lies the song of equinoctial birds and the sound of the sea eroding the idea of a total ontic muteness:

> Pero yo no quiero el sol
> que fructifica en los saludos:
> quiero la serena oquedad,
> el silencio vacío que tumba
> el ala de los ruiseñores.

Thus, we can say that the poem operates mystically in two interlocking registers. On the one hand, it is expressive of the point of contact between being and becoming, the particular and the general: the limits of human intellect and a God beyond symbolic intelligibility. In this way it is a classic mystic poem that stages the problem of articulating an experience that can only be addressed through the disavowal of experience's vessel, by surrendering to the "silencio vacío que tumba / el ala de los ruiseñores," by hollowing out ("serena oquedad") the word, the self-same song of nightingales. But the motor of the poem is precisely the crisis engendered by the attempt to experience the void. What is found there is that the void and the sound are the same. So part and parcel of the poem's mysticism is also a meditation on the soundwave that suggests that phonic substance is the consubstantial element that links matter to the eternal wave of creation. Song, birdsong, derivative mimicry, the likeness, is touching on the secret of the void. It seems to be equivalent to it. It, too, is an event. Soundwaves articulate, give a sense of, this *nada* that lies beyond the concept. Thus, *Canto de la locura* is the mystic poem of and for sound, a semblance space where sound turns upon itself. To insist on the speaking of the calandria and all the other birds (quetzals, golondrinas, ruiseñores) is to shatter God's authority to mute the sound things make. The void is sound, unmaimed, the hollow before the words. The silence of God is sonorous, and the prayer for silence is unanswered:

> Tal vez Dios me liberte
> del arcoirisado tedio,
> de las nubes que pasan henchidas de armonía

In the beginning, it was always sound. Sound is the *increado*.

It is significant that the song is heard at the hour of the bird's trampling, moments before its death. The mockingbird faces its extermination with a song. A primordial cruelty at the threshold of perishing is likened to the *pugnar* and thus designates the sonic event as the triumph over even God's command to die. The song is the unbounded sound of struggle. There is something there in the acousmatic voicing of the bird—for here we must concede to the fact of the bird ultimately perishes ("Dios lo *conculca*", in the present) —that upends the very logic of death, its equivalence with total silence. This density that remains is the bird's *grito*, unstructured and unbounded by the particulars of

form: bird, sea, human body or word, all are vessels for sound, but they are emphatically not the end or beginning of it. As the substance of the song, forms and shapes are sound articulated, modified. There is no silence. Is there, then, no God? At a spiritual level, the poem's crisis of faith, the *Canto*'s dark night of the soul, lies in its grappling with the repercussions of this fact. The prayer raised at the end of the first *canto* quoted above begs for a silence that would rescue the *amada* from the facticity of sound. The pursuit of the void, the longing for the *nada*, yields a sonorous abundance that now the *amada* must contend with, if it is to continue to believe that in the beginning there was silence and not the sound that cuts across the "serena oquedad."

Sound is the unruly remainder, and the particulars of creation articulate, for a moment, an antecedent sphere of sound in surplus, exceeding the limits of form and agency. But to what effect does the poem wage this war? What does the remainder express? Here, we might also ask, again following Walcott's paradigm, his nautical archaeology, "where are your monuments?," the organized direction, record, and result of the struggle. So, we turn to the saltwater, unifying substance of the poetics of the wave. In the case of Matos Paoli, ocean water provides a sensuous material through which to articulate his sonic mysticism. Figurations of this formlessness, or more broadly, of the tensions between container and the contained—time and what is outside of time, what is alive and what is dead—rely on the maritime metaphor, on the ocean wave:

> El extraño es el mar:
> este escenario móvil de corales,
> esta muriente pesantez de algas.
>
> Pero el Solo me obliga a declinar.
> Yo busco en la perla muda que no tiene salmos
> el último rumor de los ahogados.
>
> Y no sé lo que es la coexistencia
> más allá del límite que ignora,
> porque el Solo reduce la aureola,
> me deja sin aliento, sin medida,
> me estrella contra el mar agazapado de nostalgia.

The sea here, as the other of the triangulation God-poet-sea, as the *extraño*, brings to mind Julia de Burgos's thanatological inflection by indexing a threshold that must be crossed. In her poetic system, the sea is the possibility of making sound even from within the condition of death. The sea thematizes the condition of speaking death, and her songs turn to the sea—and thus towards death––as a collaborator, as their *medium*. The sea is that which speaks through a voice surrendered. The poem, in avowing its being possessed by the sea and its sediments on the dead, renders audible the voices of the dead.

Here, too, muteness indicates the condition that opens up the sounds, the lingering "rumor" of the departed. The sea, its rhythmic demarcation of time, like stanzas in a poem, is the rushing sediment of all that has happened, all that cannot but make a sound, even while being "the perla muda," the silent yields of the conch. Silence is, once, more, implicated with density. This "muriente pesadez de algas" recapitulates Burgos's oceanic poetics by insisting on the density of the dead, suggesting the coexistence of the formed and the formless, of those whose sound we register in the now but whose sound is also there unheard, in fundamental "coexistencia" that ignores the "límite" or the threshold that locates voice exclusively within life and therefore renders death mute. But here, as was the case in Burgos's poetics, in order for this poem's militation to proceed, the dead must rise

by speaking through this "mar agazapado de nostalgia." The Solo, or *causa prima*, launches the yearning speaker to the vociferous sea of things past. This is the echo of the "calandria" stanza. Now it is not the bird but the bard at death's threshold. Every utterance at this brink, thus, is the "aliento" and the "medida" (time and meter again intermingled with this primordial nothingness) that emerges at the sites of the speaker's muteness and shortness of breath, from the torturous silence of the prison cell to the prison cell of reified forms of historical subjectivity.

Matos Paoli expands on Burgos, however, by giving us a puzzling version of the sea without center, without referent:

> Unidad increada,
> fervor de contratiempo,
> porque el diálogo gime en los acantilados rotos,
> ya sólo me recuerda
> la primera soledad de la ola sin mar.

Whereas Burgos oriented our attention towards the interaction of the body and the water—the erotic and thanatological rhythms of songs to Puerto Rican death—Matos Paoli here pushes the image further towards abstraction, opting to center the undoing of the body by subsuming it under the unity of "la ola sin mar," the wave unmarked by notions of containment. It is pure movement and chaos, time's substance acting on the world before the idea "mar," yet undefined by the geological reference point. A key aspect of Matos Paoli's poetics emerges here, one tethered to the layer of the poem that tracks a mystical pursuit—the annihilation of the singular and the embodied so as to become the general, the whole "unidad increada." Although this gesture is partially explained as geopoetical iteration of *ecstasis* that marks a mysticism of the tropics, we are left to wonder about the preponderance of the wave within this system, especially a wave without shore. Such a formulation emphasizes the swerve in the elaboration of Puerto Rican poetics oriented towards what lies beyond the representability of struggle within the terms of bounded, particular versions of the grito: its cause, its chronological dates, or its effects on the course of history:

> ¿Pero de qué me vale la corrección,
> ordenar, ordenar,
> sonreír,
> si de pronto el fiat de la Historia se subleva
> para que no haya historia?

A critical opening is made here to interrogate the relationship between the poem and its mobilized materials, between this speaking that emerges from history and the voice *made to make sense* of history. A wager is placed here on truth content emerging precisely in the fact of the *pugnar* itself. This struggle is the shifting soundwaves of the *grito* not merely as a particular moment in both the mystical pursuit or the liberatory progress of Puerto Rican history, but as the substance of the event, its precondition, what allows for its expression. *Canto de la locura* rests *as* that condition. It opts for giving a sense of the first *Grito*, the general condition of emergence, a sort of origin explored in the poem as an *élan* whose expression is tracked in the poem's cantos. What we are left with, what remains, is the whimper of the "díalogo," voices of the living and the dead, boundless, pushing against every possible shore as a unitary wave, recapitulating every time the holy—because inutterable, *inapalabrable*—fire of freedom's pursuit in every present. A new proposition in the pursuit of a liberatory poetics is expressed through a will to upend the requirement that sound be shaped, hinged to cause or resolution, in order to matter. In light of this, silence or whatever

perceived muteness due to history's imposition can be understood as actant, as sound, when considered as the radical act—truly a yearning for a root—of not putting words to things but making space, as silence, for things to make their sounds.

Not putting words to things allows for these scattered things, the "escenario *móvil* de corales" dancing in the water, an apt image for the disturbances and ruptures of history, to disclose their immanent sonority, their "unidad increada." This silence is but space made for them. It is the silence beating on the "acantilados rotos," the sound of the cliffs chipped at by the water. This stanza, then, also stages a pursuit of knowledge: to feel for (by hearing) and then to know what has happened, what is happening, at the origin of the wave.

Matos Paoli's formulation resonates with Aimé Césaire when the latter, in "Poésie et connaissance," yearns for a juncture "où l'étude du verbe conditionnera l'étude de la nature" (164, my emphasis), in other words, *mediating* the interweaving of nature (everything there is, pure *being*) and history (meaning, time, movement, *becoming*). The "verbe" deployed as a haptic technology, or the poem understood as a sensing membrane in transitive—mediated—relationship to the world of perceptible things, inflects this world so as to reveal the truly dynamic, shifting, waving aspect of nature as well as the transhistorical aspect of something that cuts across it. For Césaire, this something is the matter of sound, "le dessin rupestre de la matière sonore" (164). Like a message written on the rocks from time immemorial, as if before time itself or perhaps *as* time's beginning, the murmurings of matter would finally be rendered sonorous. The synesthesia here is rather clarifying—an image revealed through touch and sound, or sound mattering itself into the density of what is visible, in semblance of the cave painting. In this way it can be linked to the process by which the inscrutable experiences of mystical transport must be communicated. But the mysticism here would no longer be the experience and therefore the knowledge of perfect union with the transcendent, but a sort of mystical immanence, an experience and a knowledge of a stillness amidst the movement of everything sensed and in time. And this stillness is a sound, and the poem its ear.

Césaire's formulation regarding the nature of the knowledge ascertained by and expressed through poetry and Matos Paoli's image in *Canto de la locura* quoted earlier mobilize almost exactly the same elements, rocks and waves: "la musique poétique qui ne peut être que *le battement de la vague mentale contre le rocher du monde*" (169, my emphasis).[14] This "vague mentale," for all its apparent immateriality as *mind*, is nevertheless expressed through the music of the poem, which we should not take to designate poetry in any particular prosodic style. The music, as what is there before and *as* poetry, is the "matière sonore," the matter of sound which is music only in its *relation* to the matter of the world. The equivalence is very apropos, given that Matos Paoli, too, struggles to resolve the

[14] The resonances between Matos Paoli and Césaire are numerous. Césaire's *Cáhier d'un retour au pays natal* (1945) can and should be read alongside *Canto de la locura* as kindred projects towards a language of freedom and revolution in the twentieth century that is first and foremost explored through phonic substance. The result of such a comparison would highlight, for both, the preponderance of the soundwave in the pursuit of what Césaire calls an "immobile verrition," a veering, grazing, a scanning sound emerging in the pursuit of freedom, a radical swerve (as in the verb to *veer*) immanent to the now, to the "grand trou noir," Césaire's formulation of the voidal fullness in which we are. Both poems opt for a sounding out in a poetics of presence that refuses the future as the horizon of struggle. Neither, however, look towards the past as a place of redemption or rescue. In both Césaire and Matos Paoli's long poems, return is impossible. The search for the origin, the "Pensamiento Cero," in *Canto de la locura* ends where it begins, and we find that "en el pleamar se anulan / los orígenes más hermosos," just as the voice in the *Cáhier* cannot return to the native land. It resolves "pour que j'invente mes poumons," proposing the poem as the respiratory system towards a new voice. The Cáhier is a song to and of the radical and miraculous facticity of voice in spite of colonial history. A comparative optic reveals in the *Cáhier* an iteration of what I have called here an "immanent mysticism" towards a dynamic, always uncontainable and opaque *négritude* experienced in this taking of voice, and for Matos Paoli, an account of creation, of self-determination and freedom, written in the key that is, among many things, objectively political, at once resisting identity and seeking affective networks, feelings for the sound of Puerto Rican freedom.

chiasmic encounter of the shaped and the unshaped, what is dense and what appears to have no density ("la ola sin mar"). Whatever this "connaissance" comes to be is not *a priori* determined, it is constituted in encounter, in an infinite back and forth between the boundless wave and its destination. But, as poetry of the wave, what it seeks is not the survey of what is there already, but rather an account of the experience of that sound—its anger, its erotic energy, is exhaustion, its insistence, all as *facts*—independent of organization, purpose, or direction as slogan, struggle, as *lucha*. These concepts, the shaping of that sound in the speech act, the representation of "connaissance:" are secondary and beholden to the act that sets inquiry in motion: the uncontainable dimensions of the wave, the sound, the *grito*. Poetic knowing, if we translate it as a gerund to designate what I believe is an infinite and restless recapitulation, is like the movement of waves, folding and unfolding through the practice of sounding out, a sort of echolocation. Sound, then, is at one and the same time what reaches out to experience the world as well as what is received as the word. The transitivity is also reminiscent of the mystical experience, for it presupposes a surrender, a becoming-surface on which the divine—or the opacity of the world—acts, a silence carved out for an anterior sound.

But the requirements of such a music—surrender, silence, receptivity—push the poem itself into a crisis staged in the *Canto* as what appears to be a refusal of the poet-as-actor in the world, an accusation directed at the folly of poetry. If poetry is to receive and channel the wave, how could it then strive in spite of its materials and push towards the echolocation of the root, the unheard suffering of the people, of the self, of the universe? This point of pressure is explored in another *canto*:

> Porque soy el poeta,
> befa mayor de la palabra,
> debo tener el cielo dispuesto al mundo vano.
>
> Y cuando chocan los seres,
> qué impasible evasión, qué pabilo de lumbre
> enterrada,
> que decisión baldía
> hacer que todo poema se levante del ruido
> y pueda representar la idea,
> el fantasma infinito de los vuelos,
> la eucaristía que se reconoce
> en el modo de partir el pan.

In recapitulating the relationship between the poet and the universe, the voice here establishes a cosmological comparison in which the lyrical voice belittles the bard's task: namely, the profanation or putting into earthly circulation of that which belongs to the realm above. In this superior celestial vault is the *Logos*, flesh of the *Idea*, and the poet stands before it as its "befo," the embodiment of the word's mockery. This spatialization transforms, however, when the same voice questions the need to sublate the world of noise below. There, in the unruly noise of what *is*, we find the eucharist of poetry, tangible and experienced as the "modo de partir el pan." Touch is itself the consecration, the transubstantiation; now a profanation, repudiated earlier in the stanza for putting into circulation the mundane "ruido" of this earth, is precisely the labor of the poem.

This swerve, a paradigmatic shift in the role of the poet as creator, seems to offer a pathway that is, to a certain extent, at odds with the singularity of the lyrical speaker who must decant the disorderly noise below into measures of celestial harmony above to render it valuable or meaningful.

At the center of this last stanza we find the act of hands splitting bread, the labor of dividing singularity into a plenitude that feeds the many. And the voice, furthermore, calls this a recognition, a perception remembered as the *materia prima* of poetic making. It is no longer about making, at least not creation understood as constructive principle, making something out of a primordial nothing. The *ars poetica* offered here, in comparison, strikes us as horizontal, less about the poetic-divine *fiat* that speaks the world into being and much more about what happens in a relation, a waxing and waning that presents itself here as a meal shared in common, in the music recognized in a quotidian solidarity that eludes the conscripts of the word. Not the music of the spheres, but the noises made by people, better received in silence:

> Sé que el vecino hace un esfuerzo
> grande
> por se hombre,
> sé que debo hablar con armonía,
> apaciguar el león que se come el crepúsculo
>
> De momento me enternezco,
> me suelto en la corriente noble,
> apabullo los astros con la mano y digo:
> es mejor el silencio cuando se está tan muerto
> y no podemos mejorar el día
> común
> prendido a nuestra lágrima
>
> Pero tengo que luchar y luchar

The recursive and repeated encounter with the silence, a surrender to "la corriente noble," meets the struggle, "luchar y luchar," to give words to any of this. The *pugnar* of the first canto—the lucha, the struggle amidst death—is now a struggle against the harmonies of the "astros," a refusal of transcendence as the ruling principle of liberation. Should there be any words at all, are they necessary? Heere again is the tension between the poetic event taking shape and the exigencies of this being "tan muerto," the promise of the "día / común" consecrated by the poem's address. At this point there is also little faith on the intelligibility of suffering expressed as tears, the "lágrima," wich, earlier in this canto the poem links to memory and forgetting: crying is "ese tatuaje del olvido / que aún queda al encarnado." In this darkest threshold of the poem's night, tears, the flesh of suffering, salty sediments of our history, no longer holds. They no longer suffice. Is poetry condemned, then, to merely remember, both as an act of recall and as a re-memberment, a piecing together?

The poem is asking this because, in its stubborn desire to "luchar y luchar," it strives for that "día / común" amidst the great human debris, among its cacophony. So, to arrive at this day, it calls for silence; it must undermine itself so as to touch on the quantity of truth that cuts across everything that is already here. This is the same crisis that César Vallejo takes on in "Un hombre pasa con un pan al hombro," from the posthumous collection *Poemas humanos*, when he too wonders in dismay at our daily bread of the unspeakable.

> Un hombre pasa con un pan al hombro
> ¿Voy a escribir, después, sobre mi doble?

Structured through harshly simple two-line stanzas that offer various iterations of the everyday silence of the poem in the face of anonymous common suffering, "Un hombre pasa…" is, like *Canto de la locura*, not calling for the end of poetry, even while it puts crushing pressure on the event of the poem as the poem itself *happens* in front of us. What is miraculous is not the bread offered by the word as the nourishing balm for the world, but rather the facticity of all this persistence, the concrete concatenation of moments which the poem must constantly face: the nullifying silence it meets at every utterance of the word that is also part of the poem. In the *Canto*'s language, we read it as "tengo que luchar y luchar." It is what we also find expressed as a eucharist "recognized" in a moment of silence, a correspondence that jumps out at the point of the word's necessary inutility. Silence is a cypher of the poem's surrender to the facts that cut across it. Only then can we say there is any *doing* by the poem. What it *does* is sound out the very *día común* it pursues.

So this is vehemently not silence as the anathema of poetry. It is telling that at the end of Vallejo's poem we bear witness to a sound that is not a word:

> Alguien pasa contando con sus dedos
> ¿Cómo hablar del no-yo sin dar un grito?

Grito: unworded sound at the point of contact and rupture between the body's concreteness (the abrasions of the throat) and the sonic sphere shared with what is not the self (the "no-yo"). It is the artwork's inner contemplation of a freedom from the aesthetic delusion inherent in the belief that any single utterance could once and for all find the word or the place or the name to this that we experience in the silence of the day, so private and common, that the poem could ever be more than the receptive membrane with which to sound out suffering as the *reparto*, the birth and re-distribution, that consecrates the common day before words do. The voice in *Canto de la locura* utters:

> Para qué deseo el tieso
> símbolo de los grandes congelados de la historia?

To claim a final "símbolo" is to be frozen, wrested from the actual motion that characterizes the poetics of the wave, which is also a poetics of time: both the sonorous meditation on decay and erosion as well as the inquiry into the origin and endpoint of freedom, of what elsewhere in the poem, Matos Paoli writes as "una evolución del deseo primero" that leads to "su misma sombra redimida / en un Treinta de Octubre." In the *Canto*'s theory of time and *poiesis*, this concrete, particular event of our revolutionary history, that of the *Grito de Jayuya* and all the *gritos* across the archipelago raised that day in 1950, is not a frozen fragment of time past, but rather active and affecting of every present in which the collective voice finds a vessel for the *grito*. Thus, what the poem seeks here is a reconceptualization of the relationship between voice and time. Although Francisco Matos Paoli is undoubtedly, in word and mangled body and mind, a poet of the revolution deeply entrenched in the evolution of freedom—the "deseo primero" as it unfolds in the middle of the twentieth century—the poem's labor, its cause and expression of movement, is not the pursuit of the name or the symbol. It is not the production of indexes and timelines whereby the poet comes to play the voice of the historian of the people. What we find is the point of convergence between this "deseo primero" and the eradication of the need for a point of origin, what in the Canto is expressed as the tide ("pleamar") that obliterates "los orígenes más hermosos." The origin is every time: past and future, the dead and the people to come, eroding the conscripts of the now. Each utterance and picking up of the *grito*'s wave is the liquid "pleamar" that submerges referents so as to allow the *grito* to be the nameless, faceless, and placeless—free and fugitive—substance that makes and unmakes history. The grito is the coming into contact with the vibration that acts

through both silence of the poet and in the imposed silence of the people, the root of the world's vast and formless amounts of *dolor*, which no act, material or poetic, could apprehend:

> Tal vez nos queda, amigos,
> el río siempre nuevo que nos juega
>
> y el mar enroquecido
> de tanto grito inútil
> que viola sus fronteras hoy y hoy.

The poem offers its silence as a sonorous refusal of time while in time, the fullness of silence in which contemplation and action find a point of contact beyond the obligation of speech, which we found articulated earlier in Julia de Burgos's refusal of the song in "¡Oh, lentitud del mar". Here, as there, what is at stake is not a wavering of poetic or political commitment. Quite the contrary, what emerges in both is a subtle and complicated invocation of freedom predicated on the event of the poem understood as a sonorous space of failures-to-name the cause and the effect, which keeps sounding out the field of the countless deaths and omissions of history past and future. Rest from history's fatiguing claims, from the exhaustion of counting and recounting time. In both (Julia de Burgos calls this the "pulso sin poemas" inaudible to the clamoring audience of her lyric event seeking identification), there is a faith in the capacity of an uninterrupted and unutterable wave of rage and pain to chew on the substance of this world because it is, one with it—its navel, its placeless and timeless origin, where the rage was born. Words betray this rage as for Matos Paoli's mystical experience, they would betray god:

> ¿Y cuándo, Dios del aire,
> ennegrecido de Ti mismo de tanto pensar,
> dejaré de ser la marioneta
> expuesta a toda acción insuficiente
> y cogida del brazo con viles garfios de hierro,
> obligada a cantar
> cuando se está mejor en el silencio?

In both, the birth of a voice through which history indeed passes but which also contains a space carved out, a silence made that breaks from a version of history that invests *Logos* with a power to appease or justify, to be transcendental, redemptive, clarifying, or vindicating. It does not bring back the dead, but the dead live in and through it, as sound. The future is in it, too, not as hope for redemption, but as a pure presence that contains it; an *aleph*, where it all fits, made and unmade. The utopian yearning of the poem is a prayer for all the future to fit in this vast silence, as the air compressed in birdsong:

> Si pudiéramos clamar
> para que el cielo se hiciese añicos
> en la boca chiquita de un pájaro.

The poem's inner meditation—its generative silence— regarding its proper place amidst the rumble of the archipelago's history, the neverending strife for its release from this very history, is tethered to a parallel opposition that can be summarized as the deep chasm between action and inaction, the point zero of every revolutionary history as well as its point of convergence with the

spiritual journey detailed in the poem: between the presumed silence and solitude of the *via contemplativa* and the outward eathly action of a *via activa*. On the one hand, the poem's sounds must struggle with flesh and blood spilled, with arms raised in battle. What has happened and continues to happen cannot be undone. The bloody and jagged noises of strife pose a limit to the poem's will to be silent. These are the demands of the world and of the community rushing into the poem:

> ¿Por qué me acuerdo yo del livor de la sangre,
> del ensueño decapitado,
> si ahora el sol no luce
> sino como fragancia alucinada.

The memory of blood spilled, the account of all that has passed, comes to penetrate even the concrete solitude and silence of the prison cell. Here, the spatialization of the contemplative stance is put into contact with the personal biography, the Francisco who serves the prison sentence in solitary confinement. However, the solitude is transgressed by the experience of struggle that, as memory, inevitably tethers the silence and anaesthesia of imprisonment to the great struggle outside: both the struggle of the martyred revolutionaries of October 30 and the broader, and the struggle of the spirit between separation and unity. Outside, the *not-I* (the Vallejoan "no-yo" met with screams) is precisely what constitutes the speaking voice in the poem, marking a turning point which will come to wither the chasm between solitude and multitude, between silence and speaking. The Amado appears, and ecstasy, private and incommunicable, happens in spite of the irreducible remainder of blood which the poem cannot sublate. Sublation is not a requisite.

> Y se precisa la vecindad del otro
> para llamarme alguna vez Francisco
>
> Yo sé que Dios al fin me reconoce,
> y me lleva al Origen imperturbablemente,
> a pesar de la mano levantada en un
> rito de sangre,
> a pesar de los que murieron
> atados al ludibrio de la tierra

Ecstasy is by definition a movement away from the body from within the body. Given this paradox, ecstasy seems, upon first inspection, a deeply antisocial phenomenon. There, lyric speech crumbles given that the position is, above all, not *I*. How can the poem proceed amidst conditions which at once intensify and obliterate communicable experience? Despite this limit, speaking happens in the *Canto*. Speaking carries on, carrying with it the silence of the poem's ecstatic communion with the many martyred, the many nameless and placeless that inhabit the poem. The stanza directly after the one quoted above recapitulates the pursuit of an appropriate namelessness, an "acento innominado" that describes not the particular words uttered, but a supplemental sonic grain or texture to this speaking that renews the ubiquitous language of Galatians 2:20, redefining the conditions of possibility for speaking, hearing, solitude, and the common to make space for the sound of an experience that thwarts the orderly progression and resolution of revolutionary time's messianic drive. This experience makes no audible sound and yet is present, vibrating, inflecting with its "acento" the speaking of the poet, like silent words murmuring in conjunction with the words that are actually spoken:

Puedo decir, puedo decir con acento innominado:
"Cristo vive en mi"
como el pétalo de sol
que sirve de plétora
en esta noche de final blancura

In the biblical verse, the surrender of the life that speaks ("I have been crucified with Christ") denotes a figural dispossession of an individual will expressed through the invocation of Christ's most enfleshed moment, the threshold of death. In devotion, one metaphorically dies Christ's pious death at every second. In other words, Christ's death is a trusty chronometric image, not merely alluding to messianic futurity, but also to a continued presence of this death in every moment, a death that endows life with meaning. This dispossession marks the passage towards a new life promised. In the New Testament, it reads like a mnemonic device: surrender begets redemption, a futurity that will, in another place, endow this joyful sacrifice of the self with an exuberance of meaning, a flesh everlasting beyond the martyred flesh, the luminous flesh that is one with God, or *Logos*.

In the poem, however, the "acento" with which the speaker recites the biblical passage is "innominado" because, unlike the excess of meaning afforded by the Crucifixion, the Puerto Rican "rito de sangre" is placeless and nameless, seen and heard only through the poem's own mediation from within the void, the still eye of the whirling storm of our history's catastrophe. Nevertheless, the poem insists on its "puedo decir," punctuating sanctioned scripture with the sonic surfeit of speech of the dead and silenced, suggesting that these unlocatable and unindexed facts of experience already find their way in any word, in any word's temporal puncturing of that void, in the sound of the people, which bears with it the mark of *la nada*. It is so even in the words of the bible, or in the splitting of bread, or in the singing of the birds, as we have seen. In the daily bread of the common word, in the noise made in the talking of the people, lies the *potens* of the poem's truth content—the unity of the common sound—and the already enacted community avowed.This stanza closes off a section of the *Canto* replete with a speech in semblance of scriptural *fiat*, a modality of speaking in which the word is consubstantial with truth beyond earthly resemblance, beyond symbolic necessity: "Yo digo que es verdad el mundo," "Yo digo que es verdad el pan," "Yo digo que es verdad / la Estrella Solitaria." These *fiats*, truth unsounded, must be heard from within the words already existing in the world. The lapsarian language at first rejected in the poem in pursuit of the holy Logos finds itself scattered in the fallen parts, in the fractures of the quiet motion and vibrations of a "cruz cargada a cuestas" every day, at every hour, in an ample and sonorous now.

The poet, then, proceeds as one who reaches for a language—sound ordered and structured in time—to apprehend the ecstasy of union with a God who has no time and no space, but which nevertheless substantiates both time and space. In the poem, Matos Paoli's pursuit is a pursuit for the language of that "annulled origin" that birthed this pained condition into being, a pursuit that leads the poet back into his own body and through this body, into the navel of all the unsounded and unworded suffering that binds the human use of language. The dead live in the body of the poet who has also partaken in the "rito de sangre," and his unnamable sounding is at once deeply entrenched in the history of his own body, marked by time and its real wounds, while also implicated in every other body who has passed and will invariably pass through this "rito" to some degree or other, whether through the individual bulletwound or the collective excision from messianic time. Here, it is the experience lived and living, endlessly renewed in every possible contact between material struggle and its sounds collected in words, which affords the truth content to the *fiat* of *Canto de la locura*. The speaking from the vantage point of the very silences of History, the place from which the poet speaks, must grow silent, contemplative, receiving, vulnerable to

everything that is not I. Thus, to liken the pursuit of a Puerto Rican sound to the stages of a mystical union is to mine the mystic language's conditions of emergence: exit from self within the self, receptive surrender, and finally, the movement towards a reconciliation with the fact that, though not intelligible in the orderly progression of History's *fiat*, this sonorous material marks every word that passes through the sentient body, as a membrane through which time is known. It describes the infinite pursuit of a method to find words to this being, at once, in and out of time. The poetic act, its quiet splitting and distributing of the bread of the unnamable violence and joy of the everyday, is precisely the instrument of this pursuit.

The necessity of this paradoxical still point recapitulates the role of reception, surrender, and passivity in the elaboration of the poem's lyric theory. Drawing a clear line of filiation between itself and the poetry of Santa Teresa de Ávila, "la del muero porque no muero," the speaker doubles down on a path that, while radically different from the praxis of material struggle, is nevertheless not at odds with it. The poem suggests that it is this impetus, accessed in the silent night of contemplation, which ushers forth and makes possible the practices of dissidence. The speaker in contemplation, decidedly at odds with the social totality, still bears the common cross:

> Por eso yo camino con la cruz a cuestas
> la razón loca que me habla del sentido,
> porque supe de la unidad lilial
> entre la acción y la contemplación.

If the poem signals the consecration of a community, this community is not oriented or defined by a temporal or spatial axis of identification, even if time and space enter it as aspects, as sensation and language entering the poem. Community is tethered to a set of experiential possibilities, to ways of feeling out and sounding out the materials of an objective history—its textures ascertained through the sonar of the poem, recapitulating the practice auditory touch embedded in the poetics of *Canto de la locura*. Much like the mystical experience Paoli undergoes in the prison cell's sentence of silence and stillness, the irreducibly objective conditions of history's prison cell describe a set of conditions from which to practice what exceeds these very material conditions. The image of the "cruz a cuestas" denotes such a practice of the commons. It points not towards the event of a crucifixion in which nails fix the martyred body as referent for the future, but rather towards a relay, a constant practice of feeling the commons, a trans-temporal pilgrimage through the disaster of material violences. It is not the single sacrifice of the crucifixion that explains community as a debt paid by remembering, but the endless shouldering of a weight dispersed in time and space, a density that traverses every individual body and every experience of the Puerto Rican body in time. No need to remember or restitute what, in the now, is already membered, conjoined, acting. This is the past within each present however still or silent, which inevitably haunts the poet's speaking with ghosts of the past and ghosts of future death, all members of the same common thanatology.

Action and contemplation, solitude and community, speaking and silence, are all linked by the "cruz a cuestas" that crystallizes, with haptic precision, the "sentido" of this unspeakable quantity of facts: murder, blood, exile, death, gags, torture. A *reaching towards*, in the solitary body, a speaking ("puedo decir, puedo decir") even in death and thus outside what temporally progresses, what abides to reason's conceptual requirements. In other words, in the solitude of history's silence, which is a modality of death within the terms of the world's time, the poem articulates sounds, whether heard or unheard, whether what is heard there are clear words or tongues raptured by the spirit of that which underlies history and time. This is the poem's final resolve,

> Lo mismo el corazón encerrado

que el corazón abierto.

Lo mismo el verso claro
que la tupida antorcha en los labios quemados
por el pasar de tanto cruel poniente.

Lo mismo el gran silencio convecino
que la criatura alegre que nos sigue
golpeando la espalda.

echoed in the next to last canto as a recapitulation of the will to surrender to the smallness of the now, what appears, in the scales of history's thresholds of the event and the uneventful, as a nonevent:

Estoy pronto a todo,
a ser el inerme nacarado
que pasa y no pasa,

A ser la criatura clausurada
que nadie saluda en la calle.

A ser el imperfecto
que cada día derrama
el cubo de la basura.

Pero no podrán quitarme el desvariado sentir
que me imanta en las dalias caídas,
no me podrán quitar
esta sangre inocente que milita
en una isla avergonzada.

Where the great silence of time mutes, the poem carves out a space for ecstasy, movement in stillness, speaking in silence, a vital fluid that cuts across history's events, unperturbed by this history's means for apprehending, organizing, and analyzing experience. And contrary to the messianic time of the Galatian utterance, this silent speaking and blood flowing is embedded in a present tense that looks neither towards the future nor the past for permission. It cannot find it there. Past experience is a "rito de sangre" that is not past but present cross to bear, the sedimented touch of time. The future, as progression and clarification, holds no promise save the promise of dissolution, the eventual erosion of the body and of the "isla avergonzada." Thus, the *Canto* must go about pursuing its "acento innominado" —a silence and a stillness that nevertheless speaks and gyrates—in which the "razón loca" of the cacophony of the world, of God and History's *conculcar*, is not neutralized with the promise of harmony to come. The "acento" punctures the continuity of Historical progression to carve out a moment of hearing. The "razón loca," despite being the sonic nonsense radiating from the facticity of death, decay, destruction, and obliteration, is also the voice, the fiery tongue, that possesses the poem ("la tupida antorcha en los labios quemados," where we find the gnawing and silent emanation at once a part of and apart from its conditions of historical emergence. A movement away from history while in history's irreducible bind, at the still point between being and becoming in time.

And this still point is the *isla,* and the *isla* is the poem: between life and death, silence and speaking, creation and oblivion, both the island as a figure and the poem as a membrane for sounding out the world articulate a time and place in a flux—that is, time and place as a practice. *Canto de la locura* ends unambiguously in praise of the sound of the raw materials, in exaltation of the very profaned objects of the world and their irreducible music, which it rejected so vehemently at the beginning of the poem. It expresses, once more, an immanent mysticism, a touch of everything that is here on earth as a practice of encountering the sound of that elsewhere, as opposed to the necessity of the vertical and transcendental ascent or progression from here to another place in space or time. It stresses the idea of practice and inquiry by way of a question. The whole stanza is a single question regarding time, and it ends the poem as if the entire path of *cantos* that came before it were preparations for the event of the question, and for this question to be asked infinitely. Here, we are no longer questioning the veracity of the still point, but rather are invited to linger, to wait, to wonder about the still point's relationship to the materials of the world. However, the inquiry no longer regards the what, but the when, and this focus on the temporal vector recapitulates the imbrication of practice and time, repetition and sensation:

> ¿Cuándo vendrá la florecita
> de Francisco de Asís,
> el de la fina humillación en las cosas,
> a retener la isla jubilosa
> en que no moría mamá,
> alta, alta,
> abrazada al luminar del día,
> fuerte como los
> amados
> elementos?

The presence of the organic metaphor in the "florecita" indicates a temporality of growth, maturation, and decay we encountered elsewhere in the poem's reliance on the native flora and fauna of the Americas. The poem insists on its mediating position, on its capacity to render audible the mutual imbrication of organic time and historical unfolding: the part of our struggle and strife silently speaking in the rocks and the water and the rotting plants which we encountered elsewhere in the motions of the tides, the rising and setting of the sun, and the life and death of birds and their birdsong. Thus, the apparent silence and stillness of these "amados / elementos" in fact encapsulates the sound and movement of a force—a wave—inapprehensible from any position outside the "cosas." Such is the case also with the "isla," retained in its jubilation by way of a resting surrender. The presence of St. Francis of Assisi—patron saint of vows of poverty ("fina humillación en las cosas") and, notably, of the divine presence in nonhuman life—echoes this surrender to the surrounding ecological whole as a radical practice of time and space otherwise. Humbled, receiving, silent, the voice here likens the path of the canto, which is, as we've seen, the path of an elaborated polyphony of being Puerto Rican—to an everyday hagiography. There is, it seems, a holy momentum in the silent stillness of the poem's—and the people's—breaking of the bread.

The arrival of the force that will "retain" the "isla jubilosa" is thus likened to the inevitable progression of flowerings and rottings that, registered in the poem, disclose an equanimity of what *is* and what *becomes*, what *emerges* and *dies*, unrecorded, silently sounding: the actual sound of our strife written without the given keys of historical intervals of bondage or liberation.

As a disavowal of progression and permanence, temporality is warped over the course of the question, multiplied by the interaction of its various time markers. On the one hand, we read

"retener la isla jubilosa," meaning to hold that which has already bloomed, what already made manifest in the present. But there is also the "moría" of "donde no moría mamá," which denotes a past continuous. Death, then, is articulated in the imperfect. It is neither an endpoint, time's final say on the movement and sound of the force, nor is it one and only one death, since the conjugation implies a condition of dying that floods over the borders of the singular event. Even if the question seeks the place where this death is not present ("donde *no* moría mama), it nevertheless avows to a timeline in which this death is a continued condition extending in time, a life-death: this is, as we have seen elsewhere, an aspect of the Puerto Rican condition expressed in the poetics of the wave, where life is practiced from the vantage point of decay and perishing. In both cases—the already present of "retener" and the past death imperfect of "moría" —the final stanza discloses the confluence of times immanent to this account of *poiesis* by implying a waxing and waning movement, endless, between pure presence and a recurrence of endings. Likewise, manifestation and obliteration oscillate in the final moments of the poem as varying answers to the question posed, contained within the very utterance of the question. There is nothing but this making and unmaking: a retreat from the "cosas," the shards and fragments of a bloody strife in the mystical experience (as the poem began), and then the approach, waxing into the shore of these materials, the "amados elementos" encountered over and over again and each time capturing, briefly and impermanently, the totality of the conditions of being in this time (the poem's ending, its embrace of what is and was always there). The delicate humbled and scattered things, in the end, are one and the same with the classic *Amado* of the mystic pilgrim's amatory pursuit. These small things reveal the multiplied presence of the *Amado* awaiting to be constellated in the shards, the strength of the numerous *amados* always on the shore, awaiting the question that constellates them anew each time.

And finally, the mother, Virgil of the poet-pilgrim's arduous process in the silence of the *noche oscura*, appears one last time to conclude the mystic poem. In its final yearning for the endurance of "mamá" —an idiomatic choice which modulates the poem's sonic register with a humble, familiar tenderness that counterpoints the linguistically dense, latinate, and archaic lyrical keys of the entire *Canto*—the poem highlights an arc that can be said to begin in the poem's dedication. In it, we read "A Lolita Lebrón, nuestra Juana de Arco." The entire poem is dedicated to one of the martyr-architects of the 1954 revolutionary event on the United States Capitol, where Lebrón, along with Rafael Cancel Miranda, Andrés Figueroa Cordero, and Irvin Flores Rodriguez, stormed Congress in session to unfurl the revolutionary flag (silenced and prohibited under Gag Law) and shoot at the Law's authors, 30 times. For this, Lebrón was imprisoned for 25 years.

The poet's dead mother, with whom this poem is in implicit and explicit mediumistic communication, bookends an arc that centers a femininity where both poetry and revolution have valorized masculine principles. Masculinity is inherent in God's will to kill the songbird. It is present in the marginalization of the poet's voice as useless and alone in contrast to the valor of the bloody praxis of the "rito de sangre," in the inability to sense community as a miraculous but anonymous (nameless and placeless, unbound and unbordered) splitting of the bread which the poet of the Canto vehemently strives to make audible. Its bold refutation is that voice and poetry must become mother, become Juana de Arco, that the mystic path or the plight of the people living under history's silence hinges on a capacity to receive, to become, as the poet has become, the *amadas* of the fractured world. Elementally, this practice of becoming mother lies in the preponderance of water over the course of the poem, in the boundless interstice between primordial life and the promise of death, erosion, and drowning. Sensorially, it is encoded in the pure, generative and placeless receptivity of the ear, which picks up the vibration of the world indiscriminately. Unlike the hand which yearns to prove itself by reaching out in touch or labor, the ear cannot retain what appears and disappears in space and time—it stands equanimously in relationship to perception and the gradual loss of the perceived. So, too, the poem conjectures, must the practice of the Puerto

Rican be: a receiving of the broken and sonorous elements which knows itself to be a doing, infinitely regenerative in its willed disavowal of action for action's sake. If there is a rhythm to time and space unfolding in Puerto Rico, the poem insists that it is like the *madre*, like Lolita, like Juana de Arco, like the ocean, like the ear.

The meditation on gender in Matos Paoli's poem—the celebration of various versions and correspondances of the feminine—signals a fundamental shift in the account of an aesthetico-political arc in the lyrical development of Puerto Rico, and consequently, in the available practices of the Puerto Rican voice, of being Puerto Rican, consubstantial and coevolving with these poetics. Responding to a century in which converges the aftermath of two consecutive colonial invasions, in which the question is, "where and when and who and how is our history if all we have is gags and silence?," the poem opts for subverting the expected answers required by a History of succession and clarification and loudness and heroic gestures of action, requirements imposed by the epistemic and ontological supremacy of the very force that seeks to silence. Through lyric's negative capacity, in its praise of these silenced women of our general and particular histories, the poem identifies a masculine tendency in these calls for responding to the epistemic and material violences of our history with more reactionary masculine epistemes which attempt to close in and define, permanently, illusorily outside of time's gnaw, the voice and the place and the time of the practices of being Puerto Rican. Something of that ample and sonorous answer to "who we are" is identified by the poem in the persistent tenderness of the dead mother for the suffering son, in the quiet blooming of the "florecita" which we can only bear witness to in an open waiting, and the ocean waves to which we can respond with nothing other than surrender, if we are to exist within the truth of the ever-decaying, eroding, and changing "amados / elementos." But an interruption must take place, a shift, a recalibration of the senses—of the scales with which experience is understood and received and, importantly, shared in the act of speaking, of giving account, all this being anterior to History—in order to inhabit and be picked up by the wave, to go on, to carry on, if indeed "il faut continuer."

Canto de la locura is a contemplative exercise that underscores the ways in which experience erodes the terms of history as it erodes, simultaneously, the sedimented layers of language that transmit and translate the passage of time in the elaboration of a lyric subjectivity. Through its attention to the elemental force of water as a conduit between being and becoming, the poem thematizes the pursuit of a sensorium of the sea with which to weigh and consider the revolts of the island. The island—metonymically the singularity of the body as a form, or the mortal coil as flesh at the mercy of the world, of the isolated events of a history—becomes undone in the motion of the sea waves, waves which in turn expresses a language of mystical transport articulated through the language of elemental. In other words, the sea is positioned in this poem as the ecstatic location of the island undone and reconstituted, eroded to be reshaped by the sound of the waves. *Canto de la locura* mines the underlying promise of the mystic path: that an experience outside of time is communicable in time, that desire and ecstasy's abandon is participatory in the unfolding of freedom, and that it can in fact shape the contents and contours of time and that all this is available to the gradual shaping of a voice apart from and part of time's unfurling. Here, then, the definition of lyric which highlights its role as a clarifying vessel for History's voice is reimagined to make space for lyric as membrane, a chiasmic space of both voicing but also, importantly, producing novel conditions for voicing and receiving: itself a repository of practices with its own opacity, precarious, uncertainty, rife with their own quantity of the unexpected, of newness emerging from the passing of of the world through it. The poem is the vessel, the medium, of this unnamable and unspeakable sounding, in between the living and the dead, sound and silence, above and below, saying and feeling, a chiasmic truth borne of the *vía activa* and *vía contemplativa,* individual sound and common polyphony. The oceanic mysticism of Puerto Rican revolt inaugurated by Francisco Matos Paoli,

whose writing cements the ocean as the foundation for a liberatory poetics counter to the overdetermined gridlock of land, foregrounds a turn in Puerto Rican poetry from the romance of land to the unsounded and only partially-knowable substance of the sea, always partial and open to another shape, always affecting and being affected by the sediments it weathers, always vesseling the remains for the next island.

IV. *Nameless Navels*: Ángela María Dávila in *Homenaje al ombligo*

Homenaje al ombligo (1966) is a book that from its outset attempts to break with some of the salient formal conditions associated with lyrical singular subjectivity. It is a co-authored work by Angela María Dávila and then-partner and fellow Puerto Rican radical leftist avant-garde poet José María Lima, and yet in the body of the text there are no distinctions that would allow a reader to tell who is writing at any given moment. One can of course refer to the table of contents, which includes the poets' initials next to each poem to denote authorship, but the additive, continuous flow of the poems themselves, which have no title and seem to merge into each other if not for the blank spaces on the page that mark a new "moment", appears to reject this need to distinguish among them.

Thus, *Homenaje al ombligo*'s first formal disturbance is of consequence to our study. Although I will focus on the poems penned by Dávila (as clarified in the book's index) in order to track the development of her poetic system, it is important to note that at every point, *Homenaje al ombligo*'s radicality in the context of both Puerto Rican letters in specific and in modern poetic form in general, lies in its disavowal of a clear single voice as the royal road to the clarification of spirit. There is a sediment of Dávlia in Lima's poems and vice versa. There is always more than one, a tidalectic dyad in pursuit of a moreness-than-one. Moreover, the critical work of this book, Dávila's first published work, lies precisely in its submerging of referents: navels, origins, points of departure and of culmination reside elliptically. The who, the what, and the where perennially flee. As such, the poems disturb enlightenment, lyric's prominent promise. And yet this book is in fact a robust rethinking of the Puerto Rican question. By leading us astray and vantageless with regards to these poems's place in history or even its aim towards some history yet to come, *Homenaje al ombligo* aims for its anterior and imperative *we* in spite and because of history.

Its first poem, "camaradas del sueño, os reconozco," whose title already signals a concern for the promise or desire for a collective and the role of lyric in the production of a dialectic of recognition, opens the collection by revisiting the Baudelarian *au lecteur*. It is a poem about address, about a face-to-face. We read:

> camaradas del sueño, os reconozco.
> los de la luna repartida en el rostro,
> los del rostro sin comienzo,
> pero con un final rotundo y envolvente.
> los de las llagas sonrientes en el cuerpo,
> los que endulzan espinas
> y clavan esperanzas.
> los de rabo del ojo doloroso y tierno
> como hoja que cae,
> como estrella fugaz,
> como lamento que llega antes que el dolor
> o después, siempre a destiempo
> y justamente cuando se necesita.

Although attributed to José María Lima, the poem arranges an inventory of both poets' key terms. Chief among them here is the preponderance of the lunar metonymy, which we will track in Dávila's poetry hereafter. The lunar in *Homenaje al ombligo* operates as a glyph for transience and the opacity of ludic dreamspace. Change, progression, and decay, the behavior of the lunar phases, stands in contrast to the solar sameness, what can be said to be the constancy of the sun as it appears in the sky. There is also the relationship between the moon and ocean water in the movement of the tides. Water, specifically the salty vital water of oceans, is the principal elemental force that cuts across this book and arguably all of Dávila's poetics. Animated by lunar movement, ocean water draws near and retreats along the shore in a dance of erosion, submersion, and resurfacing that will also be central to the rest of the poems.

But for now, lunar light is in focus. A reflection or luminous echo of solar power's clarity shines on the faces of the comrades whose countenances "sin comienzo" already suggest misrecognition, for where could this recognition fall on, if the face towards which it moves does not begin? What is the possibility of address here, and who are the "camaradas" if the poem itself can't find their face, this most absolute index of personhood? Lunar light shining on faces without origin establishes a tension between what the poem is supposed to be doing (recognizing its referent-we, its collective or "camaradas," its call to action) and what it actually does. It actually obfuscates the boundaries of those being addressed, those whose faces have no beginning and therefore cannot be determined, bounded or circumscribed, called on or mobilized towards some aim. Camaraderie, so enmeshed in the discourse of militancy and orthodoxy, of solar *puissance*, softens up under moonlight to make possible a different process of coming into being together and of striving towards something. The poem, then, is itself the coming into being of these comrades of the dream. This *we* that is both recognized and called on, exists in the duration of a faceless address.

These faces, though boundless, are known through their participation in a lament anterior to pain ("los del rabo del ojo doloroso y tierno," "como lamento que llega antes que el dolor"). In this way, the poem makes pain—unbracketed pain, with no beginning or end—the beginningless face of the beginningless "camaradas." It is a pain defined and given shape by its duration, its persistence in time, and not by its local point of origin. *Lament*, pain as sound vibrating as the syntax of the poem before us, must always arrive before this pain because it is through lament's sonority that suddenly pain accrues flesh, word-flesh. And it is this flesh which constitutes this body ("los de las llagas sonrientes en el cuerpo"), this submerged addressee of the poem. The voice of the poem simply calls for a moment in which this pain will be vesselled by those comrades who will feel it.

The pain is personless, but it is not, however, disembodied. As it progresses, "camaradas del sueño" attempts to sing a body into being, a body that is actually the suffering conferred a point of access through which it will come to be apprehended, an event that will, finally, instantiate the common ownership, the shared body, of pain. In other words, a birth, an origin among all the other infinite origins of the pain of the world for which there could be no possible single face, no single vessel for recognition. The moon, we read, is "repartida," re-parted, scattered again and again across the countenance of a pain immemorial. The "rostro sin comienzo" owes its lack of beginning to this, that it *is* through its condition of continuing to be, as that which cuts across or is intermingled with all of time because of its condition of being absolutely singular, as origin, and yet necessarily plural, without which we could not speak of what comes to be created. The *us* emerges as the only possible condition for the origin of this *dolor*. And as such, every time, every second, can be said to be the moment of its birth. It is *continuing to be,* constantly surfacing in a time that is actually untimely ("siempre a destiempo") because it is spaced, meaning that it operates not in the domain of succession, but as spontaneous space created by the *necessary* ("justamente cuando se necesita") *contact* between that sonorous lament with no beginning or end and the community that births it forth in the form of "camaradas" in and with this pain. This can be perhaps more succinctly

articulated in the following way: this faceless and nameless pain finds its point of access (of creation, of origin) at the very origin of the poem's *us*, and, conversely, this being that the "camaradas" are is the access, a point of contact, an origin of suffering's sound. It is the point at which it matters.

We must stop, then, at necessity. What exactly constitutes this condition? It seems to call for a kind of community that cannot proceed from the ends-oriented practice of justice, reparation, or re*dress*, since none of these seem sufficiently robust in the field opened up by the poem because they presuppose a discernible, singular point where the pain begins (as recognition) and another, entirely separate and equally singular point where it comes to end as justice served, as pain pacified or quelled. Redress, as the attempt to represent the final nonbeing of the suffering that births forth the "camaradas," presumes that this pain is not co-originating with the potential agents of its remediation. But in order to access this "dolor," it must first be exactly that which creates the commons. They are inseparable. The *we* regarding the pain, the *we* that also constitutes the hearers of the poem's voice, must take "dolor" in, or better yet, arrive at it as shared substance. Thus, it is not a matter of ameliorating what needs to end once and for all, but of recognizing that at this point of necessary contact, the being of we *and* the being of this pain, emerge concretely. Here, they are no longer in the field of representation, to which justice and redress belong as faces for the pain. They emerge as presence, as what necessarily *continues to be*, enduring in the lament that once more puts us face-to-face with pain until this pain itself comprises the face of an *us* that begins nowhere because it begins anew each time, all the time.

The voice that opens *Homenaje al ombligo*, the writing of this plural birth, is trying to get at the fact that there is no redress, just this repetition of the ad*dress*, this feeling for the voice that makes pain into lament and thus into being. Flesh that comes into being *as* lament is precisely the event that gives rise to the possibility of speaking the pain that cuts across personhood and place. Its referent-*we* is born into it and it is this same *we* in turn that ushers pain's birth into the world: continuously, every time a singular yet consubstantial contact—a plural touching of that which contains that world's beginnings and its ends, all in the same place. Finally, the insistence on recognition ("os reconozco", and note the sacramental address, the liturgical "os" that likens the "repartir" of this lunar light to the body of Christ transformed and partaken of in the eucharist) can be understood as an avowal of the pact with this necessary repetition: a practice of cognizing again and again (re-) in which the song, the "lamento" that marks the community's passing into voice and thus into substance, into what *matters,* transpires.

What do we do, then, with this sound that now matters? The poem ends in a salute, another moment of recognition:

> voluntarios de la risa,
> multiplicadores de atmósferas,
> inventores del juego
> que ganan sin ganar
> y aún perdiendo,
> hermanos en la carne,
> compañeros en el diente feroz
> que deja huella.
> conocedores del ombligo
> y su música, os saludo.

As we've seen, the poem does not invent a face for this suffering, opting rather to emphatically locate a common "carne." Flesh is the pain before the person, that which exists before pain is given a finality by way of representation and representation's political binds and identifications.

Representation, or personhood as a having of a face, detracts from the capacity to address the "dolor" that the poem takes as substance for its creation of the *we*. The ethics that exists hand in hand with ontology contests the need for a face, because this is the pain that exceeds the face, exceeds one life**.** The poem seeks to suspend this moment between impersonality and personhood, locating therein the possibility of recalibrating the address of suffering, the terms of its point of access and the conditions of its thinking.

That point, that condition, is the navel (the "ombligo") and this book, as its *homenaje*, expresses the insistence of sound as the enfleshing of pain that exceeds representation. It furthermore locates in the poem the flesh of pain's address, its possibility expressed as a shared wound. Sound shaped as a poem marks the place of the navel, which is at once the first wound and the dull memory of emergence, imprinted as scar ("que deja huella"). The navel here suggests a crossing and enmeshment of interiority and exteriority: a point at which the interior and the exterior of the skin meet and become the other—absolute singularity closing in and absolute otherness opening out towards the world—by virtue of their impossible proximity. Fusing the point of closure and the point of opening, this crossing of the singular and the general suggests a coevalness of individual pain and the history of the pain of that which is *not-I*. This chiasmic condition instantiates the book's rethinking of the ethics of the commons as the *ombligo* we all share: we are done as the other is undone, we become part of the other in and through the embodied memory of the pain that constitutes us, as the other's wound becomes visible to us through us. A partition of the wound that inscribes my becoming in your being, borne and unborn in a mutual pact that thematizes the rebirthing of the community.

And thinking anew the coming into being of the commons is for Dávila tantamount to a new approach to a history of suffering, the history of Puerto Rico as being in and with this suffering. It is about making space for pain, and it is also about showing pain as a constitutive element of these "camaradas del sueño," whose consubstantiality with pain does not reject the life that vibrates there. Thus, navels replace the preponderance of the face as the vector through which we can think of the common cause politically amidst a discourse that has been so riddled with the question of being represented or accounted for. There is a shift here because the poem is no longer speaking for these faces who suffer, paternally apart and on their behalf before the history of the world's sung sufferings, validated or made solvent by a single voice, a single name, or a single face. The poem goes about this shift by enacting, in words, a membrane, an ombligo, between flesh and sound. These "conocedores del ombligo" approach knowledge and possession of this pain simply by being the sound, the shared lament, that makes the poem. Knowledge, in turn, is no longer about enclosing pain as if that were ever truly possible. Here, it is also not knowledge as the power to be separate from the known. It is a grazing of a region that reveals a being intermingled with it, a touch that articulates a space known because it is heard and felt. It is where hearing and feeling happens. These words that mark the poem are themselves navels, incisions that articulate ("que deja huella") the sonic space of the world which harbors all pain known and unknown. Once more we encounter the figure of this impersonal intimacy, this point of contact between anonymity and deep involvement. It suggests that lyric individuation, in which the order of sound makes a face to be faced in reading, encounters a limit in its desire to be for another. "Camaradas del sueño" pursues this modality of singing where lyric can no longer be separate from being, their point of contact, their navel.

The navel is known through its music. Sonority casts the *we* of the poem as a thing made of consonance and sympathetic vibration rather than by identification with a represented face. As the augmentation, the making persistent and enduring, of the *ombligo*, the poem offers sound as a truer shape of pain, faceless and yet enduring, placed yet also stirring, fleeing. As air is made to matter in the vibration of the word, sound becomes the substance of lyric. But lyric, of course, is but one face

given to sound, one momentary enclosing of sound's plural domain. The poems in the collection gesture towards a practice of being *with* sound, curious about what might be left out, potential and possible, in the pain which the island of lyric cannot fully encompass because this suffering is not for containing.

We can now take up the modalities of this sound, the interplay of flesh and sound as well as its avowal of community as *consonance*, as a *sounding with,* which the plural voice of *Homenaje al ombligo* is concerned with. In other words, we can register the manifold shapes taken by this voicing. The unifying thread in Angela María Dávila's inaugural poetic work is the spatial and temporal dispersal of voicing, a voicing which does not belong to one but which the body (the bodies) render sensible as song shared.

"¡si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar!" elaborates this approach to voice by picking up the same lunar and oceanic figures in "camaradas." It erupts with a "what if" statement that posits an inversion of the conditions of stability and impermanence, of emptiness and plenitude, singularity and plurality:

> ¡si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar!
> la invasión,
> la terrible super-multinvación de golpe y marejada
> no sería de mientras ante un futuro asalto.

Rather than positing water as that which threatens to dissolve the bounded stability of land, the poem makes space for the thought of the world as edging inevitably towards water. What if the world moved towards water instead of against it? This poem is also a poem about the place of this voice in time: between the stability of ground presumed to be the beginning of life, and the hyperbolically plural and total approach of the "terrible super-multinvación de golpe y marejada" that will come to happen suddenly, as a deluge in the future that will swallow the world completely. As such it is also a poem about beginnings and endings of the world, about *terminus*, *alphas* and *omegas*. This geospatial disorientation of the first stanza serves to ground a series of oppositions which the poem's voice seeks to inhabit this future as a known and already acting thing. It is therefore not concerned with the preservation of the boundary that separates land from the ocean, but in the voice that speaks from the navel of eternal oceanic catastrophe, the caveat being that this invasion is something other than catastrophic, something other than some outside force impinging threateningly on the voice. The voice is this chaos. It brings this chaos into focus to suggest that sound is made, a sound that is of the world even (perhaps especially at) the point of contact between formation and disintegration.

Dávila's voice in this poem posits the ontology of the voice of shared suffering inaugurated in "camaradas del sueño" as something oceanic, of both life and the death operating at every moment of that which is living. For the ocean in all of *Homenaje al ombligo* exceeds the metonymy of amniotic, primordial essence. As discussed earlier, the navel and the womb as oceanic territory index sites of creation and birth. And yet the tides and violent confrontations between water and the world invite us to expand the domain of water to arrive at a fuller sense. Water, ocean water, is the substance of the dead: the salt of pained tears, the floods that in this poem gnaw at the enclosed and the singular. Water indicates erosion as the promise of the ocean's intermingling with the land which will certainly complete its engulfing of the world. Hear it:

> ¿y qué si a fuerza de ver túneles
> el vacío de soledad hinchada
> se infectara de mundo?

Erosion comes into play here as the force of water digging tunnels, porosities in the surface of the world. *Infection* recalls the airy and watery media through which the body is known always as a porous thing susceptible to the outside, where separateness from these uncontainable substances reveals itself as mere appearance. And this inside-outside spatialization, too, is appearance. To be "infected with the world" designates an a priori pact with a vulnerability to erosion that rethinks solitude, the "swollen solitude" of the lamenting voice that speaks in this book, as being space for the world, interpenetrated with it. Mutually implicated in this space from the start, the voice reminds us that there is no way to keep this pain outside. Its stake in the world is inevitable. As such, we are once more drawn to the question of the consubstantial and constitutive *dolor* which can never be placed outside as a matter to be addressed or spoken about.

This solitary pain is actually spoken through the world and speaks the world into being, burrowing into every crevice of experience, weaved into it as an infection that has suffused through every possible solitude outside the word's domain. Impersonal, intimate, and present:

> cualquier penosa ruta contendría el reflejo
> de algún mar olvidado.
> ¡ay! si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar
> *no serían tan míos estos versos*

The reprise of the speculative "what if" that opens the poem wonders what to do with all these forgotten seas of pooled saltwater, the nameless sediment of suffering. Forgetting—the aporias of historical memory, the unsounded containers of time's uncounted suffering—exists alongside solitude as markers of history and language's anesthesia. The poem's concern, then, is the challenge posed to language and poetic voice when faced with the "mar olvidado:" the multiple and repeated instantiations of language's failure to account for every other place that has been washed away, eroded, transformed into the confluence of mineral and liquid that is saltwater. It is repeated because every movement towards this sediment, every "penosa ruta" towards the ocean, becomes the reprise—the origin again and again—of every *pena* since the beginning. These are the routes carved by pena, etchings on *logos* that endure as what remains of them in the meaning-granting capacity of language. Every encounter with this sea in which the world in this poem ends—for what else could this route towards the sea entail if not one end of the world—is actually the beginning: the beginning of the sound of all the world's pain. Puerto Rico's solitude amidst the named and known atrocities of the world harbors, then, all of the silent and forgotten oceans of tears in the world. Puerto Rico, a solitude infected with the world, infects this world with its quantities of previously forgotten and unfelt saltwater.

"¡Ay!," an interjection at the point of contact between pure sonority and communicable meaning which ambiguously marks pleasure as well as pain, pierces the space between the "mar olvidado" and the poem's yearning in its last two stanzas, which simultaneously lament and celebrate the insufficiency of lyrical technology: "no serían tan míos estos versos." Now we must think with this desired partial dispossession, this potential post-diluvian condition in which the poem's point of origin, its own *ombligo*, would no longer be traced exclusively to the voice that speaks. Furthermore, we must think through the conditional relationship between this world that verges towards the sea ("si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar"), effectively the end of the world, and this peculiar disavowal of singular lyric vocalization.

The pursuit of a word in which all the world's enduring suffering would explode outwards thus making the world anew by virtue of a shared possession of *logos* recalls the world-making yearning of canonical *vanguardia* poetics: simply put, a new world needs new words because it is in

those words that the substrate of the experience of the tension between what felt and what is yet to be felt finds its point of contact. This is to say that such a poetics locates in the word a navel, both an opening in the given order of experience (in all that came before, in history) and an opening for new experience, new births who find in this new word a history beginning. The experiments of the early to mid-twentieth century Latin American avant-gardes, of course, mined this possibility in search of a new domain of experience that would, in a utopian flash, destroy and create the world from the order of sound outwards. Take, for example, the frenzied final canto in Chilean ultraist Vicente Huidobro's *Altazor,* where we do not know if the staccato of vowels announce the miraculous birth of the world and its nascent sounds or the steep and final fall into death and oblivion. This is Altazor's navel, death and birth touching:

> Lalalí
> Io ia
> i i i o
> Ai a i ai a i i i i o i

Dávila's poem, too, pursues the *ombligo* of words, the event in which words are birthed as necessity, as transitive membrane of experience that which confirms experience by rendering it circulable and communicable while also carving an occasion of convergence, a community, for this experience in the world, thus making it both opaquely intimate but importantly "no tan míos," impersonal, unequivocally of history's dense repository of pain, yet clawing at the edges of historical possibility and historical clarification (its names for this pain) , exceeding historical indexicality.

I believe that we would be led astray if we attempted to chalk these poems up exclusively to utopian longing, even when they indeed pick up this longing in the elaboration of their contents, comrades and all. Avant-garde utopianism suggests a world to come that is by definition not here, never possibly here, forever in a temporal condition of being out of phase with the now. The utopian impetus in avant-garde poetics has often enlisted the phallic bravado and lyrical masculinity of the messiah, the single lyrical and ontogenetic *yo*, the proverbial mouth from which the past explodes into the future and is redeemed through it in a new linguistic and experiential pact. This poem and the arc of poems that I will proceed to discuss suggest a different account of the relationship among times, yearnings and origins of the collective. With regards to time, they suggest a world to come to the present condition of suffering, a condition where even the ossifications of history (the dried up and forgotten pools of saltwater) already contain a newness that if sung, would change the world from the navel of words outwards, because perhaps all the words we would need already lay calcified in its dry shores. It is not a matter of locating ontological primacy once and for all (what comes first for this world to come? new worlds or new words?). It is about the poem's capacity to be a space of inquiry as well as invention, where we come to hear what it speaks *through* when a word (or "estos versos") is uttered. This signals a dynamic of voice and possession where the one who speaks is not the sole birth of the word or the world. Rather, it is about a remainder in the act of utterance that sounds out a condition anterior to both the historical past and the future yearned for. It is the substance of pain which cannot be birthed or possessed by any one voice, for it exists as a fact of the shared pool from which language drinks.

Returning to the poem, the sound of "ay" interrupts the progression of the final stanzas in order to disclose a point where sound can be affecting yet somehow devoid of a single origin. How could one ever begin to trace the origin of the meaningful vibration of the throat at play in the sound of *ay*? Pain is the common word of the world: its birth, present and future all at once. To imagine the pursuit of the navel of words is to yearn to imagine communication informed by this fact of language. The voice in "si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar" insists on disclosing the part of

the unnamed and unmarked (un-worded) "mar olvidado" in every utterance of pain, which is in turn operating at every utterance of the world's logos. And pain, we recall, binds and births the faceless collective to which *Homenaje al ombligo* is addressed, referring always to the particular form of forgetting, silencing, and submersion that informs Puerto Rico's pained ombligo while also insisting that whatever is found there, in the poem and in the world, reveals the painful navel of the world. Behind and beyond the single give name, beyond property and beyond being in possession, are the quivers of pain that birth language into being and birth the world in pained and pleasured sound.

We are again faced with the paradox of this namelessness that births a common word which in turn designates the place of a people in the history of pain, or, to phrase the issue differently, of a poem that I am mobilizing towards the question of Puerto Rican being that consistently submerges the points of origin and closure that would identify and organize around Puerto Rico. If these new words are to be to be found, it seems we must first accept, celebrate, even, the plunge of the world into the oceanic chaos that surrounds meaning at every corner. This is not to say that the poem yeans for the loss of meaning in a celebration of the arbitrary. We must carry on with this sustained effort, the book's requirement, that we hold personhood and absolute impersonality—absolute intimacy and deep anonymity—hand in hand. There, it seems, we would find that language which bears the mark of all the nameless and forgotten *mares*. The consequence of such a finding would place Puerto Rico, the undisclosed, at the center of the very meaning of our given words for the experience of pain, dispossession, and forgetting. This would be the meaning of a verse with more than one voice.

"Para mi nombre quiero" and "acabo de morir" take up the name and the place as their objects. The first of the two begins with an avowal of erosion that picks up the content of "si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar." Here, however, the world is summed up in a voice that longs to be a voice and nothing more:

> para mi nombre quiero
> sepultureros grises y tajantes.
> es más:
> no quiero nombre,
> que me lo lleve el mar lavándolo
> en mi arena,
> que me lo arrastre el mar,
> y que yo sienta
> que estoy allí la intacta,
> la sin nombre.
> que estoy allí, con vibración del golpe
> de la ola

From the outset we are faced with thinking death in relation to the name. The ocean appears here as the foamy gravediggers ("sepultureros grises") whose motion of chipping away at the substance of the self—metonymically the "arena" that articulates the substance of the body as matter progressively and definitively dissolved by the movement of the waters—fulfill the voice's desire for death. This death transpires at the very moment of the name's irruption into the poetic space, a fact that brings to mind the sapphic scene of lyrical genesis, in which the dismemberment of the feminized body gives rise to the scattered but meaningful fragments of song. Here, however, it is not the impossibility of attaining the lover over there, outside of me, which dismembers me in bouts of bittersweet *eros* so that the pieces that remain become transformed into the medium for the poem. In this case the speaker is, after all, "allí la intacta / la sin nombre," in a condition of unshaken

presence, however nameless. The question, then, that this shift in lyrical erotics begs us to consider is: how does this revisiting of the birth of song, figured here as a death wish via the loss of the name, where *eros* comes not from the outside to take hold of the speaker and instantiate its destruction, but instead where eros is one and the same with death, with the waves that wash away the name and the place, offer alternative pathways to our understanding of the poem's theory of mediation, its propositions concerning the nature of addressing, naming, and inaugurating the collective?

We can begin to approach an answer by considering, in the case of the sapphic lyrical tradition, the need to be remembered: that is, both the requirement to recall and remind, in the moment of the poem's uttering, a known history of lovelorn pain from which lyric is birthed as words scattered in the poem, and also the re-membering, the process of putting together those very pieces so as to restitute their legibility, their passing over without remainder into the tradition that begins and ends in clarified lyrical voicing as history's forward-marching *Weltgeist*. In "para mi nombre quiero" the relinquishing of the name thematizes the unhinging of the voice from a need to refer to or be referred to by any known history of pain through which the song could be explained or remembered. For the name already encodes the possibility of address and identification, the being for another's call and for another's desire which undoes the name as it shakes its stability for a moment in ecstasy. The name harbors the promise that I will be rescued from this violent scattering in giving myself over to the power of the address that recognizes what is eternal in me, what will in time reintegrate me from this undoing as soon as my name is uttered. *I* is whole again by virtue of the power of the name, and it is in the transparency of the name, the word which represents me as law, that the poem encodes justice. Justice here means recuperation and representation. Thus, with the washing away of the name comes the erosion of not only the word imbued with the power to rescue and reclaim and re-mend, but also the desire to "live on" at all. In other words, we are dealing here with a relief from the debt at stake in the name. It expresses the voice's release from the dyad of self and other that binds lyrical voice to arrest, clarification, and resolution.

The poem postulates the possibility that this death wish itself is the place where voice engenders something other than the recuperation of the name, a practice that seeks no endurance in History's record, but which nevertheless affirms a thing in common, a thing which cannot be ascertained by any name because it exceeds what can be touched by a name's address. The consubstantial emergence of *eros* and *thanatos* in this poem suggests an elision of the lyric triangulation whereby voice is recognized and affected from the outside, an outside that initiates, names, and confirms the anguished condition of the speaking subject. Sapphic lyric's temporal requirements—a catalysis, a lament of collapse, and mended restitution and valoration of the pieces by way of the alchemy of song (the re-membering) to this scene of vocal and corporal crisis—is itself a small-scale iteration of a progressively clarified historical unfolding. If I accept the name as my rescuer, I accept the source of my pain as being fully known, reparable, able to be redeemed. But the voice here rejects this because, once more, we are looking at the conditions of lyric under the pressure of a pain and joy without a name and with a voice that wishes to deem this nameless pain its substance. Names are of history and this pain is not vesseled by history, nor is it to be rescued by an admission into history's spirit. And so this voice persists as the wave and the particle indistinct from the agent of its undoing ("allí / con vibración del golpe / de la ola"), in possession of its own death. Of the wave, indivisible from the wave that undoes. To be "intacta / la sin nombre" is to articulate this standing besides self (*ekstasis*) as immanence. "Intacta" acknowledges this wholeness-in-death amidst erosion and disintegration. But it also signals a shift in the nature of touch by proposing touch as a possibility even in rejecting the kind of touch that arrests and names. Untouched by that curative touch that preserves while being affected by another touch which seems comes in closer contact with the substance of this song. To be untouched by the annihilating power of the names of history all while being still susceptible, willingly washed away by this wave that is at

the same time consubstantial with the voice—a being of the crash of the wave ("con vibración del golpe / de la ola").

Once more, it is the touch of sound which emerges here as the substance which most closely tracks this refusal of the name, sound as a touching possible at once in the singular and in the plural, phonic substance picked up in the present voicing of the song, a body made not into words but into the continuity–the community—of soundwaves:

> a solas con mi piel y con mis valles,
> con mis ojos adentro con mis cuencas,
> con mis playas ardientes,
> recorrida en bandadas de murmullos:
> desnombrada.

This property of sound bridges the apparent gap between the "a solas" and its orbit of particular sensations detailed in a geography of the single body ("mi piel," "mis valles," "mis ojos," "mis cuencas") and the surpassing of the lyric singular enclosure expressed in the losing of the name. Between these we witness a personal geography transform into a flock of murmurations where the loss of the name is consummated ("bandada de murmullos"). We can now also approach the ocean wave through another texture of meaning, for in the crash of the wave one finds a metonymy for the properties of sound that Angel María Dávila's voice seeks to augment in the pursuit of the navel. Sound, too, is a wave entirely capable of erosion, entirely capable of touch as dispersion of air, extending outwards to involve itself with the outside. Sound, as the wave that articulates the expanse of air from the throat outwards into the world, is the substance of the word before the word's necessary halt. This is why Angela María Dávilas's poetics emphatically returns to the soundwave as a privileged site of inquiry into the navel of the pain and the pleasure of the world, from which all sound is birthed. Every new sound made is but an articulation of the body of sound that is nameless and without sole proprietor. The "bandada de murmullos" picks up the sound of everything that came before, every particular geography of skin, every basin ("cuenca") of experience, and signals its communion with the murmuring of the world, all that is heard and unheard. This is not lyric's closed temporal circuit staging the voice that mends the world into a postlapsarian coherence, but a wide anterior time, wide and ample as death is in relation to the bounds of a life, of which the word represents but a moment, a parenthetical. Thus, at every corner of a poem's closure is the open and boundless and nameless vibration of the navel, where sound comes to vibrate into meaning. The world repeatedly begins again with every soundwave, that which is implicated in every other soundwave, involved in the totality of the world's vibration.

These anonymous whispers, a diffusion of voices without a determined orientation, replace the solitude of the physical geography and complete the alchemy—for this is the transformation of matter—that transmutes particular and uncounted sensation into sonic matter that does not need place. It is there that the name ceases to be and is multiplied, able to share an equal stake in both the personal, expressed in the body's eroding geography, and the impersonal, the chaotic and gnawing *ola*. And it is through an insistence on the possibility of a sonic *corpus*, here and scattered throughout all of *Homenaje al ombligo*, that Angela María Dávila apprehends the pain and the pleasure, the *eros* and the *thanatos*, that congeals a common *us* irrespective of location, body, and name, traversed by pain's invisible but timelessly audible contact with pleasure. It is through the properties of mattering sound—through wails, sobs, screams, and shouts—that we can hope to enter into communion with the unnamable and forgotten salts of the world. "para mi nombre quiero" is an origin story by way of a world's end, the coeval death-birth of a voice heralding the world being made sound, where the death of the name is the birth of the wave figured as a body of sound. This surf drifts everywhere,

making this nameless salt the substance that sediments into the world, where pain and pleasure are known for themselves and where the practice of being pain and pleasure—being joined at the navel to it by way of sound—congregates the commons.

To consider further the centrality of death, dissolution, and nothingness to Angelamaría Dávila's line of poetic inquiry in *Homenaje al ombligo*, let us consider "acabo de morir," where death makes possible another sonic origin, another turn of the navel, now centering the throat as the site of this birth:

> acabo de morir
> y que mi muerte
> sirva de grito hondo a mi garganta,
> y que me arda la sal de tanto tiempo
> prendida y afuegada.

Death marks the passage into sound spatialized, a scream endowed with extension, with a depth that recapitulates the oceanic abyss elaborated in the previous cycle of poems. Deep screaming designates sound as substance implicated in being: a depth of sound that, like the ocean floor, contains things. Depth is the zone of the inapprehensible, where light loses its capacity to bring anything to clarity. Metonymically moving us towards opacity, the dizzying relationship established here between surface and depth disorients the grasp of experience over the image in the poem, for how can we feel or gauge the depth of sound or ever hope to touch what is found there? We do not know and must proceed blindly in the domain of sound. Dávila's metaphorical and metonymic gestures thus thematize an annihilation of the image as the guiding clarifying end of *poesis*. If, as "camaradas del sueño" foretold, we are to know the navel through its music, then we must be willing to proceed blindly, to gouge the eyes and let sight die and make possible a deep sound, a touching of and through sound.

The poem's refusal of vision is ultimately the refusal of the eye's abstractive potential, itself predicated on the distance to the poetic image, which is but an elaboration of the distance implied in representation. Much like the elision of the face in "camaradas del sueño," the recoil from representation gestures towards the pursuit of a condition prior to the claim to knowledge and identification. Representation forecloses transitivity by encoding the "end" of the object represented: an end or limit to the what, when, and how of its expression. The image marks power over the substance as it neutralizes its otherwise opaque components for the sake of its participation in a discursive economy. Representation in lyric, then, performs a role not untethered to the hypostatized faith required the political subject before a History that sees and thus grants their return—their re-membering—to this economy, rescuing them from the symbolic poverty of their body and the crude insufficiency of their sense-data in order to secure a place in the everlasting and enduring domain of the sanctioned abstracted image-object, or the Word. This is not to say that Angela María Dávilas's poetry in *Homenaje al ombligo* abolishes or even wishes to abolish the word. Not only is it obviously a thing written, absolutely participating in the domain of the letter, but furthermore it directs an effort to finding something that can be accessed in and through the experience granted by and sedimented in words. It is something akin to a "minor" *logos* that wouldn't need to account for remembering or enduring as object, whose remembrance is already guaranteed not in the domain of truth or representation, but in the fact of the word as the intersection of sound, image, and experience, in the "salt of years" that in this poem births the word into being in a time and place entirely unknowable. In "acabo de morir," the insistence on the sonic domain invites us to think the body in a zone organized by that which vision cannot accommodate: proximity, envelopment, and touching. For not even the word can claim to totally arrest the vast ocean of sound from which it culls its meaning. An ethical disclosure emerges in Angela María Dávila's

poetics insofar as it posits the necessity of being involved and implicated in sonic making. The transitivity of sound—in the vibration of a "grito hondo" that affects the ear of the hearer and the throat from which sound originates—binds all matter and all voices here.

To complicate the image further, the third stanza then inverts the relationship of the body to this space of sound by locating this "grito" —the sound made upon this dying—in a zone both temporally and spatially *anterior* to the organ of its diffusion, or "garganta". Here, sound is the condition that gives rise to the body, the throat, and the word. It marks the interstice or threshold between being and its other. These are the things contained in sound's ontic extension, in the "grito hondo." The speaker's own willingness to die and become sound—for this is the annunciation of its own coming to die, its own having been done ("acabo") dying, so perfectly proximate to the "acabar" of an orgasm—allows for the throat to be medium for the scream, an arc of transformation that recalls the death wish of the previous poems, but which importantly takes place within the microcosm of a single organ. This being in possession of one's own death—to be able make the impossible speech act of "acabo de morir" — while also being possessed by the very scream that calls for the speaker's own throat thematizes the loop or spiral of generation and destruction, the convergence of alphas and omegas from which this voice speaks the body into creation. The throat, then, becomes a navel of the world, a site where we can also track both the poetics of erosion encountered in "si el mundo fuera ruta para el mar" and the theory of sound at play in "para mi nombre quiero" as they articulate the poetic body's capacity to make and unmake itself, to speak one's death and also be born again through the sound that precedes words. In every guttural opening and closing is the birth and death of the world experienced as sound, a point of contact and access into the substance of the sonic.

Returning to the scream itself as the precondition to being, I am thinking of this augmented sound event as pure sonic and the corporal convergence to the point of near rupture. The scream is the *desborde*—the simultaneous encounter and negation of the boundary—of voicing, voice at its limits insofar as voice in lyric is said to mark the passage from the chaos of the world to the domestication of sound implicit in intersubjective recognition and legitimated personhood. A scream—of horror, of delight, of passionate conviction—is sound clawing at the throat from which it emanates, in refusal of the body's capacity to vessel its relentless sound. It recapitulates a central tension operating in our discussion: the insufficiency of single vessels, whether they be bodies or words or landmasses, as they are made to grapple with the impossibility of communicating a sonic whole that is inapprehensible. In screaming, the vocal cords' ability to shape and splice air around it in order to make intelligible words of and in the world comes to a halt. We learn from this friction with the grain of both the body and the sound that a scream articulates with clarity what we mean by possession in a transitive sense: I make this sound that is itself unmaking and making me, and in this back and forth dance is disclosed the fact that all sound is repetition and return to the navels, the throats that touch and track, as knowledge, sound's passage into experience. The poem is one such throat and navel. This transitivity in possession means also that experience is not separable from whatever sediment is uncounted by the word uttered. Because sound calls for the throat to receive it even as the throat is that which touches the shared totality of sound and allows it to interact with the body as an intimate sensation: "y que me arda la sal de tantos años." Salt, of tears and of the wide fathomless ocean that cuts through the poems in this volume, comes to be felt at this limit of both the body and the word, at this point at which they receive their death.

Intimacy and the personal are not cast aside by the poem in its movement towards touching the boundless body of sound. An abundance of syntactical formulations of the personal in the latter stanzas of "acabo de morir" compels us to grapple with the intimacy of the particular, the experience of death, and ultimately, with solitude and silence:

la muerte me llegó, así, de golpe
revolcándome pieles ya gastadas,
naciéndome en las ansias de anuevarme.
pobre en mí, por mis surcos
me levanta una aurora tambaleante;
por mis pasos perdidos,
por mi huella ingastable,
se me encauza la muerte a garrotazos
volcándome la vida.
¡vida yo!
con la aurora latiéndome en los pasos.

In other words, the poem is not excluding this most private and solitary—practically anti-social insofar as it is ostensibly singular—experience of ecstatic and untranslatable birth-death from its participation in the general. In another poem, "y después, mirar todo," we encounter a resonant formulation of this condition:

y sentir que sujeto entre mis manos
canciones de universo,
que no merecen labio,
ni garganta, ni nada,
merecen ser cantadas solo por mi universo

Recapitulating the synaesthetic relationship between touch and sound, the voice of this poem furthermore describes the chiasmic quality of an irreducibly universal song—a *canción de universo* that is still operating, spaced and timed, irrespective of any failure or success by the sonic organs ("labio," "garganta") to vessel this sound. In other words, the same voice that structures sound in the poem is at one and the same time gesturing towards its *unsoundness*, towards sound's death and sound's silence, almost in a willed elision of its own locution. Appearing here as a paradox of the acousmatic possessive ("merecen ser cantadas por *mi* universo"), this sound-image suggests that we must recalibrate any naturalized relationship among body, sound, and space. Here, there is no desire to amplify or vouch for the body of sound to be recognized or valorised or even voiced. Voice, then, is to be understood in *Homenaje al ombligo* in the context of a universe of soundwaves. This is how we can come to understand these acousmatic gestures, these repeated unhingings of the voice from a singular source of locution. The poem marks the navel—once more the point of pure contact—through which the expanse of sound comes to be, for a moment, a matter of voice. But, in the end, there is only this knowing of the space which already contains sound beyond recognition, a song that simply is.

Likewise, this voice also finds in the quietude of death a form of life—of presence, consequence, and creation—that comes to exceed life's own worn out pool of possibility ("pieles ya gastadas," "volcándome la vida"). In other words, this body is a channel for marking and being marked by death, as both the imprint ("huella") and the steps, the feet of meter in the poem ("mis pasos") ultimately redouble and confirm this condition of living-death which, in this book of poems, denotes the foundation of a swerve in the constitution of an erosive Puerto Rican subjectivity.

Death marks yet another refusal that we must contend with. This refusal, too, is tethered to the problem of representation. To desire the annihilation of what would otherwise be deemed living is to dislodge the ontological primacy of life as it is acknowledged or demarcated by whatever metric endows being as alive from the outside. Death is not simply the suicidal escape from the cruel hand

of History, a death wish understood as an absolute end to the experience of history, a last reprieve of the ontologically damned. It denotes a radical shift in the concept of the living altogether. To be considered alive is to be granted vitality, and this voice grants vitality to itself in the now, in what the outside would deem silence, stillness, nonbeing. Death here is dynamic, not only engendering new dawns ("auroras") of experience, but affirmatively in combat to the ontological boundaries of life itself, combatively life-death screamed: "¡vida yo!" Thus, we are no longer in the dialectic where life and death exclude each other so as to constitute one another, but in a space where silence speaks, invisibility engenders vision, and solitude—a solitude incurable by any desire or provision granted to be represented or amended—does not exclude a plurality, a common sound, a being *with* beyond subjectivation. These sensorial impossibles suggest language's longing for a word with which a song, our song, can be sung. And as such, this longing, always recognizing a distance forever multiplying, puts pressure on language's capacity to touch on the sonic whole where the wails, screams, and moans of this song simply rest and linger.

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In my analysis of Hostos, the trope of the sea as death marked the wall of an aporetic condition. Water was consubstantial with the death of a vision of a world sublimated fully to the movement of a Spirit–a coherent and individuated subject of world history—which corresponded to the clarification of a transcendent being. As I have sought to highlight in the 20th century archive of maritime poetics, death now moves beyond the rhetorical and epistemic closure of the impasse or the aporia vis-à-vis totality and instead becomes an opening towards the elaboration of a new ear for hearing history's silence and a new body for sensing Puerto Rican time and place in spite of history. It is an opening inscribed into the legacies of unsounded pain and not as an escape from its painful condition, immanent and wrought from its own materials rearticulated in a sea that spans the entire past and all future becoming. A timely sea sounding and a wave of poets pursuing its rhythms which do not progress but rather linger.

To die the death considered by the poets in the archive I've constellated here is to loosen the closed and hermetic forms of singular lyrical subjectivation in order to become part of a sea that links struggles across times and bodies silenced under the progressive thrust of colonial history's epistemic gridlock. Water returns in the 20th century as a substance of temporality and as the matter of silence passing into voices. And yet the genealogy of poets assembled here collaborates with the erosive, obfuscating, conjoining, and recombinant motions of the sea in order to give a shape to—find a language for—the remainders of a history of subjugation. The sea, as the uncontainable excess, holds the phonic substance which is irreducible to history and yet becomes itself the sound anterior to historical discourse. It is the sound behind speech, and the rumor in its wake: what remains unformed. As figural and material *alpha* and *omega*, the ocean in Puerto Rico's twentieth century is the site of articulation for a subject that seeks to dissolve the thickened sediment of layered and muted revolts in order to pursue a sound: a sound of a new time beginning. Thus, death here designates the dissolution of a shape into the sediments of the manifold, sediments which await congealment into new, multiplied voices in becoming. This gesture, beyond its significance in the history of poetic forms in Puerto Rico, suggests an ethics of relationality with the dead—with the past, with the fallen, with the muted *gritos*—which sidesteps the melancholy of redemption in Hostos's historical vision and opts for the oscillating movement, infinite, between sedimentation and erosion as tidalectical poles: through this restless movement, in resonance with the ocean waves that give a shape to these geopoetic approaches to time, the poets of the wave in time avow to the always partial, always incomplete sounding which requires a commons and not a messiah for its instantiation. Altogether, Burgos, Matos Paoli, and Dávila perform such a method of cross-historical

collaboration in language that grants us a vocabulary in the present, an epistemic and sensorial toolkit, with which to revisit a historical condition foreclosed by a silencing. The senses of a Puerto Rican subject made available for the past and for the next swerve in the telling of its time and the location of our place.

Cruising for Location*:* Manuel Ramos Otero's "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar"

I. Introduction: Dying in and for a Forbidden Place

In 1990, poet, storyteller, novelist, playwright, essayist, and cultural worker Manuel Ramos Otero (1948-1990) returned to Puerto Rico to die. Succumbing to the last stages of AIDS-related complications in the peak of an epidemic, the writer makes this final movement of a life in transit between two poles of the Puerto Rican cartography—between the isle of Manhattan and the native archipelago—knowing well it would be his last. Despite the irreducible set of circumstances--personal, political, and aleatory--that motivated this last displacement across the geographies that inform his literary output, it becomes irresistible to read this coda to an errant life in light of that very oeuvre. Manuel Ramos Otero's writing, regardless of genre, holds together as a robust poetics that insists, with sustained rigor and pleasure, on imagining Puerto Rico as a place of and for and in death.

My concern in this chapter is not, however, to neatly tether the biography of Puerto Rico's first fiercely and militantly homosexual writer to his literary output in order to explain or justify it.[15] Manuel Ramos Otero was a writer of death well before being a writer of the AIDS plague. It is my argument here that this is so precisely because Manuel Ramos Otero is a writer, first and foremost, of the Puerto Rican experience, and that his writing, particularly his short stories and two volumes of poetry, relate this experience—an endless migratory circuit without destination—to a textual and philosophical thanatology. It is a thanatology, however, that moves erotically through and in death. In Ramos Otero, migration and exile are linked to a practice of *cruising location*, a surrender to the suspension of time and space for which scenes of death and disintegration serve as an index, a way of describing something irreducible about a perennially migratory consciousness. In perhaps the most frontal attack to the disembodied textual and political aspirations cultivated by Eugenio María de Hostos in *La peregrinación de Bayoán*, Ramos Otero chooses to sing and write obsessively of the abject *eros* in Hostos's dreaded erosion. In other words, the texts under study in this chapter focus on the enunciation possible within an avowed condition of displacement, decay, transience, figures that describe a body and an archipelago washing away in time, in water, through illness and longing. The hermeneutic shards of the Hostosian pilgrim, who realizes before the imperial Law that the Puerto Rican is a forever migrant, become for Ramos Otero a map towards an "orgasmo infinito" ––a poetics and an ontology of displacement in excess of the logic of place and of return.[16]

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[15]I use "homosexual" here and in other moments of this text in acknowledgement of the Manuel Ramos Otero's documented insistence on the disruptive valences of the term vis-a-vis the disciplining the sexuality within a colonial history, the climate of sanitization amidst the AIDS epidemic, and the marked whiteness and class homogeneity of urban gay culture. In a 1986 interview with Gregory Kolovakos, Ramos Otero states that he has "never been satisfied with the term 'gay.' To [him], it has always been a commodity: it describes a certain reality, but it is not as broad a term as 'homosexual.' I thought, and still think, that to be gay has more to do with the homosexual experience as an economic group, the middle class, in an urban setting in New York and sometimes in San Francisco. It is this experience and attitude that has been copied in other parts of the world. 'Homosexual' is a more politically conscious terminology, precisely because the word itself acknowledges consciously what being gay is all about. The term 'gay' is inoffensive, particularly for those who use it for themselves." (Ramos Otero 42).

[16] "Orgasmo infinito" is the chiasmic formulation—at once suggesting relational eros and an individual deferral of the erotic—Ramos Otero deploys in the queered Caribbean cartography of the first poem of his posthumous collection, *Invitación al polvo* (1991). Staged as a homoerotic rewriting of Lola Rodriguez de Tió's ubiquitous poem "Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro las dos alas" that mines the source poem's signs for a queer poetics grounded in the geopolitical yearnings of a century prior, the poem rearticulates Caribbean body-space relations by positioning eternally-deferred desire and vagrancy—and not geographic or linguistic coordinates—as the grounds for a future shape for the Caribbean.

I seek to track these figures and the language generated by this line of inquiry as a way of describing the Puerto Rican experience otherwise—as a way of naming the Puerto Rican as a people free to die outside the discourses that seek to preserve, close off, or ossify this experience in an attempt to make it legible, as Hostos sought to do. Here, the fact of Ramos Otero's life at the juncture of various precarities within the larger precarity of the Puerto Rican condition—as a sick, dissident, and lustful homosexual pilgrim of the Puerto Rican exile in New York City—indeed informs the method of this inquiry. I am tracking a literary voice sensitized to the interstitial and the edge, to that which is always already near death.

As we observed in Eugenio María de Hostos's literary project, we bear witness here precisely to an attempt to name and know *who we are*, to sound out the cross-historical question I've been tracking in this project beginning with *La peregrinación de Bayoán*. What sets the work of Manuel Ramos Otero apart, not only from Hostos, but from generations of *letrados* well into the 20th century concerned with this question, is his commitment to disavowing the need for an answer in order to propose questioning and inquiry as precisely the mobile and restlessly-rearticulated "place" in which the Puerto Rican subject practices *being*: "Yo no creo que es que no sabemos lo que somos, como repiten tantas veces los escritores cuarentistas a manera de letanía religiosa, sino que no nos atrevemos a ser" (MRO 11).[17] This tongue-in-cheek claim is nevertheless clarifying when read in the context of the pursuit of location that structures this chapter. The turn to ontology in Ramos Otero's remark seeks to dethrone the narrative and philosophical tendency towards a *telos* structures around lack and around the paternalistic or pathologizing rhetoric that organizes the Puerto Rican canon regarding place, character, and national sensibility. In Manuel Ramos Otero's own words, Puerto Rico is a forbidden country ("un pueblo prohibido"). To simply *be* in the demonic grounds of the forbidden place entails a cross-generational affront to the symbolic order of a long history of founding fathers-qua-pathologists. Ramos Otero suggests that our location emerges through the abject space of that which is forbidden, what is construed by the fathers of the land as aporetic to their discourse.

II. Desirous Shipwreck: Ramos Otero Between the Trentistas and Cuarentistas

Manuel Ramos Otero's repudiation of the *cuarentistas*—the Generation of 1940—in his remarks cues us into the cross-generational conversation with a long Puerto Rican aesthetico-political genealogy that the author activates and critiques throughout his literary project. Although his statement identifies the *cuarentistas* with the "litany" of the question of identity, the autopsy of the Puerto Rican canon on land and identity that emerges in his literary project forces us to contend with both the Generation of 1940 he singles out in the interview quoted earlier, as well as with the legacy of the Generation of 1930, specifically Antonio S. Pedreira's landmark text, *Insularismo* (1933), a text which lays the aesthetic and political groundwork for the concerns of the generations that follow it, who will either align with or depart from the theory of place and time articulated by Pedreira. Here, I will reactivate the conversation between Ramos Otero and Pedreira in order to highlight how the former subverts the political aims of the latter by assimilating the signs and sensibilities abject to the chief premises at play in *Insularismo*.

Before engaging closely with Pedreira's text, it is useful to foreground my analysis in a survey of the discourse on place both generations elaborated, as well as the changes in material

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I discuss these erotics and poetics of dispersal and recombination for a Caribbean to come at length in "*Escrito entre cuerpos*: poesía, erotismo y esparcimiento en el Caribe de Invitación al polvo de Manuel Ramos Otero."

[17] "I don't think the problem is that we don't know who we are, as many 'cuarentistas' repeat like a religious litany, but rather that we have not dared to be" (this and all subsequent translations are my own).

conditions of production they responded to. The Generación del 30, for whom Antonio S. Pedreira functions as a symbolic Father and a metonymy for the generation, voices a lament for the loss of a Puerto Rican cultural and political nexus organized around a racist, paternalistic, and heterosexual account of a docile people in dire need of instruction, tutelage, discipline, and oversight by the white, landowning *criollo* class.[18] All this because Puerto Ricans are a people cursed by being insular, migrants adrift in the open sea of historical unfolding. Activating the ethnographic specters of geographical determinism, degeneration theory, and theories of hygiene and racialization that date back to 18th century, Pedreira argues in his text for a nostalgic return to a pre-U.S. invasion condition in an argument buttressed by the racist and pathologizing logics of the plantation economy.

The Generación del 40, in turn, spearheaded by essayist and playwright René Marqués (1919-1979), shorthands a set of philosophical and stylistic tendencies that emerge in light of the definitive presence of the United States in Puerto Rico by the mid-20th century: the shift in the economy from agriculture and the *hacienda*, or plantation system, to manufacturing amidst exponential industrialization, increased military drafts, and mass migrations of labor force from rural towns to the capital of San Juan, which engendered the the *barriada* (slum), and from the Puerto Rican metropolis to New York City. It is therefore a generation defined by anxiety for the *patria*, nostalgia for an agrarian mythos, and a craving for heavy doses of cultural didacticism structured around a social realist aesthetic seeking to recuperate the dwindling tropes of a national identity. As such, its primary aim was a literature in the service of *finding a place*: the autonomous and definitive place of a Puerto Rican subject physically and psychically fragmented by US hegemony, as well as the pursuit of a literal location, a soil for Puerto Rican culture. This is why an identification with tellurian aesthetics emerges as a reaction to the threat of industrial-metropolitan machinery that destabilized the solvency of "land" —and the promise of landedness, an unproblematic and durable place of the island—as the self-evident locus of Puerto Rico.

Location anxiety recurs as a line of continuity, a common obsession for both the Generation of 1930 as well as that of 1940. The concerns of the "cuarentistas" mark a loose endpoint in an arc that maps out the question of place in Puerto Rico beginning with Hostos and reformism in the 19th century and which is is resuscitated by the Generación del 30 after the United States invasion in 1898. Despite a difference in the "treintistas" with regard to the object of nostalgia and desire—the *treintistas* respond by yearning for Puerto Rico in its former colonial condition under Spanish rule and within the plantation life-world—they nevertheless provide the philosophical groundwork for the narrative concerns of the *cuarentistas*. Antonio S. Pedreira voices a lament for the loss of a Puerto Rican cultural and political nexus organized around a racist, paternalistic, and heterosexual account of a docile people in dire need of instruction, tutelage, discipline, and oversight by the white, landowning *criollo* class.[19] All this because Puerto Ricans are a people cursed by being insular, migrants adrift in the open sea of historical unfolding.

In Pedreira's *Insularismo* (1933), a paradigmatic text in the Puerto Rican essayistic tradition, we encounter one of the most passionate syntheses of this genealogy of thought. Pedreira reactivates the specters of natural history, geographical determinism, and racial degeneration theory, discursive technologies deployed to justify the need to identify, investigate, and correct—to interpret and freeze—a national subject, to cure the confusion of a people. It is an aspirational and muscular

[18] The paradigm of paternalism in Puerto Rican national identity has been studied most thoroughly by Juan G. Gelpí's *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico*.

[19] The paradigm of paternalism as an organizing principle for an account of Puerto Rican national identity has been studied most thoroughly by Juan G. Gelpí's *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico*.

dream of continental modernity whose impasse is a smallness that affects the national subject's senses of touch and sight, its capacity for action and contemplation:

> No somos continentales, ni siquiera antillanos: somos simplemente insulares que es como decir insulados en casa estrecha. Encogidos por tierra, tiene nuestro gesto ante el mundo las mismas dimensiones que nuestra geografía. Ni desiertos ni planicies, ni amplios valles nos ayudan a estirar la visión y estamos acostumbrados a tropezar con un paisaje inmediato que casi tocamos por cuatro puntos.[20]

Pedreira arrives at a key metaphor to describe this malaise of sensorial and imaginative poverty, calling the archipelago a "nave al garete," an errant ship navigating the ocean waters precariously, without direction, without telos. The proposed solution, of course, is to relinquish power to this very lettered class and pursue modernity by way of labor and literacy, an illumination of the masses as the royal road to the cure, in a ship steered by the lettered white criollo. Ocean water is at odds with this dream of continentality, and the return to the abyssal depth feared by Hostos's *peregrino* and reanimated in *Insularismo*'s scene of foundational shipwreck points towards a shared anxiety that, for this study, becomes the index for an abject surplus that shapes a counter-genealogy. This countercurrent enacts a praise for that ocean's erosive motion and recuperates the critical power of that which cannot be fixed, of that which is defined by its fugitive relation to being placed.

Manuel Ramos Otero produces a body of work predicated on defiantly remaining with this epistemic shipwreck disavowed in Pedreira, with its redundant errantry and perilous shipwreck with abandon, assuming it completely without any etiological agenda, thus enacting what Puerto Rican queer theorist Rubén Ríos Ávila describes when he urges us to relinquish the idea of a traumatic loss of identity and instead track narrative *desire* in storytelling ("relato") for the sake of itself, dethroning trauma from "su lugar en la Historia, donde figura como un metarelato, como un dispositivo para autorizar a los *'médicos'* o hermeneutas de turno" and instead "devolvérselo al relato, al *cuento* a través del cual el sujeto intenta sitiar *el fondo inarticulable the sus obsesiones*" (Ríos Ávila 2002: 20, my emphasis).[21] Ramos Otero writes the Puerto Rican subject as a pilgrim of the archipelago's obsessions, who dives into this inarticulable depth so as to find a sense of that which, as he says, *we* are not allowed to *be*. While Pedreira looks out into the ocean as an impasse on administered life, Manuel Ramos Otero reads the wave chewing on the shore as a rhythm for a life in erosion. This will to "vivir del cuento" —the colloquial Puerto Rican phrase that names the Scheherazadian desire to live in and through fabulation with abandon—is shown by Ramos Otero to be one and the same with the practice of being Puerto Rican.

According to Manuel Ramos Otero, what lies on the other side of this historical paternalistic taboo, this not being allowed to be, is that Puerto Rico describes an edgewise *ontos*, an ode to decay and erosion voiced by the embodied living-dead. I argue that Ramos Otero's poetry and prose takes seriously the proposition that vagrancy, death, desire, and illness mark and identify an already-existing freedom, an already practiced way of being in common structured by the temporality and spatiality of death. His poetics gestures towards an "us" found in scenes of abandon and excess: in the throes of heroin addiction, the lustful temporalities of cruising the Christopher Street piers, in

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[20] Pedreira 2014: 62: "We are not continental, or even Antillean: we are simply insular which is like saying insulated in a narrow house. Shrunken by land, our way in the world has the same dimensions as our geography. No deserts or flatlands, no ample valleys to help us stretch our vision, and we are accustomed to trip on an immediate landscape whose four corners we can almost touch."

[21] "its place in History, where it functions as a metadiscourse, as a dispositif with which to authorize the 'doctors' or hermeneutics in season." "return to the narrative, to the story through which the subject attempts to probe the unutterable depths of its obsessions."

the fractured and meandering polyvocal stories uttered from the mouths of social outcasts, in the patience of one who waits defiantly in a room for death to arrive. There, Puerto Rico appears provisionally, devoid of monuments or continental permanence, its subject unheroic, precarious, and perishing. It is, and here I call our attention once again to a term from Julia de Burgos and Angela María Dávila, a *namelessness*, a surrendering of that which the name organizes and guarantees in favor of a more mobile, itinerant truth that eludes nomenclature.

Epistemologically, this is deeply unsettling. It is so not only within the context of the Puerto Rican intellectual pursuit of the autochthonous subject beginning in the 18th century natural history discourses and its subsequent articulations in the 19th and 20th century, but also from a radical or postcolonial formulation of the problem. That which lies on the other side of this barrier to "permission," following Ramos Otero's language, threatens the foundations of a false dream: that the questioning will be over, that some degree of permanence and legibility will, as Hosotos believes in *La peregrinación de Bayoán*, messianically rectify the catastrophes of a history and steward the Puerto Rican national subject to an objective transcendental place within the forward motion of *Weltgeist*, watertight and impervious and beyond the dislocations of an eternal migration that the facts of that history inevitably point to. In light of this history of healthy and vigorous absolving messiahs, Manuel Ramos Otero volunteers as our languishing and loving angel of death

My reading practice—tracking a liberatory vocabulary and a grammar for Puerto Rico within the temporal and spatial practices marked by disintegration and undoing—focuses on one of Ramos Otero's narrative works, but, as it will become apparent in what follows, narrativity is refracted by poetry and poets in the text. Following this dual engagement within the text itself, I choose to read from both genres, activating paths of analysis that foreground a shared aesthetic and political orientation: aspects of an aforementioned thanatological (eros)ion. The poetry of Julia de Burgos is a key element of this story. Ramos Otero himself, even when voicing a predilection for the ritual and form of storytelling, is adamant about his disavowal of distinctions between the poetic and the narrative.[22] As I seek to argue however, this idiosyncratic theory of the story, of the "relato," should not be taken as a transcendental *fact* of narrative closures, but rather as a reflection of the author's particular way of engaging narrative desire and narrative form: as anti-teleological meanderings, as desire for its own sake, not unlike his own idea of Puerto Rican common life and history for a people constrained to the eroding island as well as for those who are forced to leave. His is a narrative infected by poetry's capacity to conjoin temporalities and perform a linguistic alchemy of spaces and objects, materials and histories, without a need for sequence or plot.

The sea is liquid thanatos, a substance for passage between realms. At an edge with land and therefore both its limit and condition of emergence, the sea troubles arrival as much as it upsets place as the location of common Puerto Rican life. Ramos Otero's is a telling between poetry and tale.

III. Adrift in A Sea of Tall Tales: Telling Time and Place

"El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" is the eponymous final story of Manuel Ramos Otero's 1979 collection, published by Ediciones Huracán in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. In it, we encounter an

[22] In an interview by Zoraida Santiago for "En Rojo," the cultural supplement for Puerto Rican leftist periodical *Claridad*, Ramos Otero states: "He seguido escribiendo cuentos porque verdaderamente de todos los géneros—a pesar de que yo no quiero establecer una dicotomía absoluta en la literatura y encasillarla en géneros literarios—es el cuento el que más me satisface. El cuento como forma." ("I have kept on writing stories because truly out of all the genres—despite me not wanting to suggest an absolute dichotomy in literature or reduce it to discrete genres—it's the story which most satisfies me. The story as a form.") (12)

Edgar Allan Poe epigraph that shorthands some of the story's central concerns while establishing a line of filiation between the story's voice and Poe's own predilection for the gothic ethics and aesthetics of decay. It is a poem of a woman and the sea:

> It was many and many a year ago,
> In a kingdom by the sea…
> In the sepulcher there by the sea,
> In her tomb by the sounding sea.

The epigraph constellates an economy of reference that underscores the imbrication of storytelling, time, and space. It specifies as a prerequisite a long duration, the "many and many a year ago" that gives rise to the occasion of the storyteller, the "once upon a time," or the "había una vez" that frames storytelling as a means for telling and feeling—invoking the specter of—time. Noteworthy, too, is the stanza's insistence, the sea thrice repeated, any yet also refracted: as kingdom, as sepulcher, and as tomb. This progression, these versions of the sea, suggest a movement from the illusion of monumentality and enclosure—the kingdom's walls metonymically recalling the dream of permanence, of imperviousness to the ocean waves—to the sepulcher, enclosure of the dead, and finally the tomb, the solitary resting place of the dead, which defers the eventual fusion of soil (or salt) with the flesh.

Whatever is there "by the sea" is at once bound up with its undoing. What we are about to read, then, is one such *passage* between land and sea. And the sea is "sounding," signaling the sonorous substance, the voice, emanating from this passage. It is also the sea that sounds, an ocean that probes the depths, a thing that measures that abyssal condition that defines the sea as a territory of the dead. A sea for probing something eternally receding, an instrument of knowledge.

"El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" will ultimately frustrate the aims of this probing to indicate the nonexistence of the "end" to such a sounding, thereby replacing this urge for finality with the pleasure of sounding for its own sake, a return to the pleasure of obsession, to recall the Ríos Ávila quoted earlier. Ramos Otero underscores this aim in the footnote to the epigraph, which specifies not only the poem's name, "Anabelle Lee," but more curiously the fact that this is the poem's "principio y final." As alpha and omega points of the poem, and, transitively, of the story, this infinitely recursive movement towards the ocean grave is precisely the point. In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," Manuel Ramos Otero will employ the Scheherazade figure in order to think through the impossibility of narrating Puerto Rico. Scheherazadian seduction foregrounds a theory of Puerto Rican time and space. The desire kindled between the lover-storyteller and the beloved-listener foreground a broader inquiry—the expansion of a Puerto Rican time and territory which, in the end, is an eternal beginning at edge with ending, which in this case is found by cruising the abandoned piers by the Hudson River on Manhattan's western shore.

In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," a narrator shares the autobiographical account of his life as a gay exile from Puerto Rico who also tells the story of the eponymous "Mujer del Mar" to Ángelo, his beloved, a closeted exile of Italian descent by way of Bayonne, New Jersey. The story of this woman of the sea, however, is impossible to tell: she is, from the outset, a multiple entity: not only is she the protagonist of the narrator's biography of Puerto Rican exiled *poéte maudite* Palmira Parés (a mythologized quasi-hagiography of Julia de Burgos that edges on mythic autobiography of Ramos Otero himself), but she is also Vicenza Vitale, "la donna del mare," a story Ángelo's father recounts and which Ángelo obsessively retells to the narrator.

The feminine trope of the "mujer del mar" also moves beyond the individual embodiment of one woman in the tale to suggest a poetics of storytelling organized by way of feminine generativity, a gesture which, in the discursive context of patria, place, and founding fathers, already

critically displaces the grounds of narration. The recurrence and multiplication of maternal archetypes in the story foregrounds a symbolic gesture in which the inscrutability of the place of origin is always at stake, yet endlessly deferred by the various offspring dispersed throughout the text who continue to weave more textuality into the sprawling tale. The mediating archetype of Scheherezade, as mother of stories, also inflects "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" through a mutual implication between telling a tale and the vital function, a "vivir para contar" which suggests the character's self-birthing by way of narrativity: they become virgin-tellers untethered from the penetrative incision of the Father who demands the story structure the télos of clarification. Instead, we navigate an oceanic *matrix* of virgins, poets, witches, and grandmothers in itinerant recombinations that trouble the segmenting gestures of filiation, generation, time, and place by elaborating a coeval field of voices, threads, and histories of movement that defer the possibility of ascertaining origin and frustrate the question: who births whom? This feminine figuration of the storytelling act is also echoed in the preponderance of the sea as a double symbol of beginnings and endings. As a woman of the sea, the titular figure, refracted in the story's various women, draws into the symbolic field of the story a maritime sensibility informed by syncretic spiritual practices. Read within the field of the story's implicit predilection for ocean mothers such as Afro-diasporic *orisha* of the Yoruba pantheon Yemayá—at once a sea-mother who gives and nurtures life as well as she who carries the dead to the underwater world of the afterlife—this turn to motherhood draws from culturally and spiritually-specific Caribbean and Mediterranean syncretic registers to offer a theory of the story at the antipodes of the binarizations of father and child, origin and diaspora, life and death, beginning and end.

The tale we read is told intermittently within this oceanic matrix deferring of starting point. It is interrupted by the facts of the lovers' lives, but also by meandering lyrical bouts of free indirect discourse that detract from the promise of the story's progressive clarification by branching out into dizzying and at times dislocated details surrounding the transits of both Palmira Parés's migrations within Puerto Rico and to New York, Vitale's movement from the water-bound cities of Naples to Casablanca to the Azores to Puerto Rico, as well as meta-reflections on the impossibility of telling the story being told by the narrator telling it. The story constantly begins anew, endlessly derailed by sex, travel, and drug use. As the story spirals towards its ending, the lover murders Ángelo, and we learn the story was being told retrospectively, with Ángelo having been killed by the narrator, and the story being at once a confession, a deferral, and a fabulation on the unavoidable facts.

The story here is also a thing that contains. It holds a place in refusal of fixed place. It vessels or gives a location to the exilic condition. Exile in turn becomes a shape-giving force. A kaleidoscope of places confounds easy demarcations between what is "inside" and "outside" the story being told. Its locations come to envelop the lived geographies and transits of the characters involved in it as well as those of the people enacting its telling. We travel through the Christopher Street piers, the city of San Juan, the coastal town of Manatí, (Ramos Otero's birthplace as well as that of fictional poet Palmira Parés), a room at Hotel Christopher where the lovers meet, and another, Room 1001, at Hotel Central in Manatí, the old haunts of the mythic poet Palmira Parés.

Exile, then, is a condition that produces doubles, and which refracts the image of the presumed purity of facts. The exilic describes a movement in space and time which not only shapes those who traverse, but which also multiplies and layers the places linked by these physical and psychic acts of migration. "Uno es tanta gente a la vez," the narrator laments, "Yo sólo puedo contar el cuento de Mujer del Mar (la historia nunca antes contada de la poeta manatieña Palmira Parés) y Ángelo sólo pudo contar 'the story of the woman of the sea'" (92).[23] However, the stories

[23] "One is so many people at the same time. I can only tell el cuento del la Mujer del Mar (the never-before-told history of Palmira Parés, poet from Manatí) and Ángelo could only tell 'the story of the woman of the sea"

told immediately refute the singularity and autonomy of any one story, something in them requiring a weaving of story *ad infinitum*. Locations, lives, and actions at once diverge and become each other, one fact simultaneously discernible and made opaque by the trace of another: San Juan through New York, Palmira through Vitale, the lover through beloved, the facts by way of the story.

Manuel Ramos Otero makes this spatio-temporal refraction what the story is "about" to implicitly suggest that the exilic story, necessarily refractive because of the movements of its errant storytellers, touches on the heart of all forms of narration, most poignantly for this study *the narration of nation*. For Ramos Otero, the heart of the matter is a "vivir del cuento," a "living off the story," or believing one's own tall tale, which always implies a sense of speciousness to the story told. This return to "vivir" once more recalls the vital function of the ocean-mother-matix that structures Ramos Otero's version of the narration of place as an alternative to the land-father-telos. This modality of narration is paradigmatic for Ramos Otero, who later names a story "Vivir del cuento," in the collection *Página en blanco y staccato* (1987).[24] There, invisibilized histories of Puerto Rican labor migration to Los Angeles and Hawai'i in the early 20th century become entangled with the transits of Puerto Rican writers in New York seeking to write the voice of a placeless migrant into a story and into history. The story—protracted, invented, and seemingly without boundary—becomes the only place shared, a place to rest for a migratory community that compels its people to *become Scheherazades*. In other words, telling the tall tale is part and parcel of living another day.

"El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," approaches Puerto Rico's un-narratability by privileging excessive storytelling in an act of augmentation where tall tales are spun beyond the "possible" and a common space and time are produced in and through fabulation. Puerto Rico becomes a place founded and practiced by way of a Scheherazadian set of stories told on the heels of each other to the point of obfuscating any clarifying télos or point of destination. Storytelling, as ritual, becomes the queer time and place in which a "we," a sense of the common, comes to happen.

In this protracted story about stories, the narration and the location of community mirror the geographical irreducibles of the Caribbean and Atlantic waters:

> El orden de sus vidas ha ido diluyéndose en las palabras memoriosas de los cuentos. Era la permanencia fugaz de la llovizna del tiempo. No hay que imponer los laberintos ineludibles de la trama, nadie sabrá jamás la verdadera historia de la Mujer del Mar, estamos coincidiendo débilmente en el triángulo muerto del cuento interminable, en el mar de chiringas de sargazos. Todos sabemos que esto es algo feofíceo, de falsos tallos y falsas hojas que flotan en los mares cálidos y cubren una gran superficie del Atlántico, que Puerto Rico, después de todo es un volcán del sargazos de piedra, la ruina verde de un pueblo en el olvido, quen [sic] medio del Mar de los Sargazos está, inevitablemente, el islote (la isla, tempo andante) de San Juan Bautista frente al mar (93).[25]

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[24] Joe Chadwick's English translation of this story's title for Volume 6 (No. 1) of Kurt Hollander's poetry and art journal *The Portable Lower East Side*, is "The Scheherazade Complex."

[25] "The order of their lives has been diluted in the memorious words of stories. It was the fugitive permanence in the rains of time. It is not necessary to impose the ineludible labyrinths of the plot, nobody will ever know the true story of the Mujer del Mar, we are loosely coinciding in the dead triangle of the unending story, in the sea of sargasso kites. We all know that this is a fictitious thing, of false stems and false leaves that float in the warm seas and which cover a vast surface of the Atlantic, that Puerto Rico, after all, is a volcano of sargassos of stone, the green ruins of a place in forgetfulness, that in the middle of the Sargasso Sea we find, inevitably, the islet (the island, *tempo andante*) of San Juan Baustista facing the sea."

A note on the location of Puerto Rico rests on the heels of a theory regarding the deglutition of facts by the monstrous mouth of a story's words. Both are linked by the image of the Sargasso Sea, the oft-mythologized region of the Atlantic in which four currents converge to form a sea unlike any other sea given its being unbounded by land and identifiable solely through the ever-shifting swatches of brown-green sargasso that grant it its name. As a signature trope in literature of and about the Caribbean, the Sargasso Sea is a glyph that concretizes discourses of the region as a place of troublesome origins, opaque and murky demarcations, and vagrant or "stuck" trajectories—much like the algae that float at the mercy of currents, tidal flows, and the wakes of ships that navigate the surrounding waters. As such, the metaphor of the Sargasso Sea gives a shape to a series of related tropes that mark the Caribbean as a point of no return, as a world of shipwreck and endlessly recursive remaining in place. Its indeterminate gnarl of marine flora, which thwarts attempts to untangle, separate, and demarcate sites of origin and endpoints, has likewise made the Sargasso Sea a useful metaphor for the discourse on race and ethnicity in the Caribbean. The most salient example of this projection onto the Sargasso Sea can be found in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). There, the Sargasso Sea becomes a figure expressive of Antoniette's state of illegible limbo between racial and geographical boundaries, between a life-world structured around the plantation economy and its decay in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery.

The multiple and layered Sargasso Sea marks a fluid space in which the abject signifiers of modernity circulate freely and take on a new life at the antipodes of a structured and clearly-discernible world. As Ramón E. Soto Crespo notes in his cultural history of this sea, the zone recombines the refuse of a multiplicity of shores, recapitulating notions of Caribbean space and time as predicated on crossings, hybrids, and mutations (of genders, of race, of modes of production, of navigational currents, of temporalities, of histories local and global): "as a living garbage heap, the Sargasso Sea gathers rejected pieces from multiple shores to create an unattached living arrangement." (Soto-Crespo).[26] The Sargasso Sea becomes another figure expressive of the endless interplay between sedimented and eroded forms whose mutations in time give rise to unforeseen openings into the ossified histories of origins and teleology.

In Ramos Otero's treatment of the Sargasso Sea trope, this organizing metaphor recapitulates the non-progressive movement of the story we are reading, a sort of "key" that underscores that its facts are caught in a whirl of migrations, fantasy, and hallucination, at a standstill yet also in motion. The spectral evocation of the past, the tracking of the present time in the act of storytelling, and the production of narrative desire regarding the future exist in a state of borderlessness. "Es terrible la persistencia del pasado," the narrator laments (96).[27] As a form intimately related to the ritualization and embodiment of time, storytelling becomes a conduit through which "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar " refuses both time's linear progression as well as its cohesiveness or continuity. It sketches out a story of a Puerto Rico told through a series of events untethered to historical cohesion: they are minor and marginal episodes in the life of two drugged out gay exiles and the life and death via overdose of a poet relegated to forgetfulness. People and places are on their way to becoming other: "Es posible que las montañas vuelvan a ser islas como en otro tiempo. Es probable quen [sic] algún lugar del tiempo, yo fuera la Mujer del Mar" (98).[28]

As one of the character's instruments for shaping and being shaped by temporality, stories here enact a queering and a querying of time. They queer time by multiplying, variegating, and

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[26] Soto-Crespo, Ramón. "Archipelagic Trash: Discarded Forms in the Cultural History of the Americas." in Archipelagic American Studies. 2017. Duke University Press.

[27] "The persistence of the past is a terrible thing"

[28] "It's possible that the mountains will be islands as in another time. It's probable that in another place in time, I was the Mujer del Mar."

deferring the narrative conclusions of their own arcs: characters marked with death from the outset live lives in the stories of others and timelines become entangled in others by being conjoined in the mélange of a borrowed or fabricated tall tale. In their ritualized scenes of enfleshed storytelling, as the characters become mediums for the sedimented lived trajectories of exile that pass through their throats, they query time by interrogating the presumed pastness of the past, the consistency and self-sameness of a storyteller's subject-position in time and space, and the notion that death puts an irrefutable end to a story. Here, we witness at once the refusal and the erotic edging play with time as the substance of a story, with ocean water as the substance of a liquid time, a scene of water-possessed voicing: "y mi amor por él es la venganza por saberme condenado a la vida. El pobre se ha metido en mí como ese mar cautivo de mi pueblo (esa playa desolada de Palmira Parés) que atraviesa La Boca entre dos brazos de rocas negras… Sabiendo quel [sic] muerto volverá del mar como el río, como un puñal que regresa a la casa del amado (106).[29]

Threads of narrative and their concomitant facts come together and drift apart, making the temporal and spatial autonomy of any one "relato" within "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" provisional and temporary at best, thereby rendering the isolation of any singular master narrative (any "metarrelato" as Ríos Ávila notes) impossible, the one caught in the tangle of algae of another: "Y así, dejamos uno al otro tantas veces, creyendo que se acababa el cuento, la maldición de amor entre dos emigrados, yo buscándome en los versos viejos de Palmira Parés y la visión fantasma del pueblo costero, él regresando por la misma ruta de Vicenza Vitale a la playa frente al volcán, a la Napoli polvorienta de los cuentos frente al fuego en un sótano de Bayonne" (100).[30]

We can further consider the Sargasso Sea metaphor in its relation to the specificity of the Puerto Rican archipelago, rendered by this image as a place edging on placelessness. It is a paradoxical site of "sargazos de piedra," (sargassos of stone) solid and presumably locatable yet describing a geography that is not altogether found there, a place that confounds the idea of placing. To locate the green ruins "de un pueblo en el olvido" is to take part in a story about a place of origin whose edges digress infinitely. Puerto Rico, a porous and eroding location crisscrossed by multiple times: both the temporality invoked by the name "San Juan Bautista," the first name given to the Puerto Rican archipelago during conquest, itself suggestive of the long durée of coloniality and its concomitant craving for static space, as well as the time of the exiles who live out the range between the myth of origin and the impasse on origin given by displacement. If Puerto Rico is to be the *place in common*, the point zero of the story's characters, it is not actually a set x on a map of the Atlantic, but a fluctuating conglomerate of fictions about place that sediment and erode to yield a sense of location that can only refer ambiguously. Puerto Rico, a ruin of times and places in the memory of transiting storytellers and their cast of characters, appears and disappears, congeals and erodes, becoming perceptible and imperceptible in the "permanencia fugaz" of a story that gives shape to various times within time, congealing as it is being told, "en tempo andante."

IV. Amphibian Geographies of Desire: The Piers as Caribbean Space

[29] "and my love for him is a revenge for knowing myself condemned to life. The poor guy has taken over me like that captive sea of my hometown (that desolate beach known to Palmira Parés) that crosses La Boca between two arms of black stones… knowing that the dead one will return to the sea like the river, like a dagger that returns to the house of the lover"

[30] "And just like that, we left the other so many times, believing that the story was over, the curse of love between two migrants, with me seeking myself in Palmira Parés's old verses and in the ghostly vision of a coastal town, with him returning, following Vicenza Vitale's same footsteps to the beach by the volcano, to the dusty Napoli, by the fire in a basement in Bayonne"

In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," the *cuentero* and his lover meet at the interstitial times of dawn and dusk to encounter each other in passing, cruising for love in the shadow of the abandoned piers. This fugacity of time is a fundamental aspect of the practice of cruising. The time of cruising is a queer time, a temporal framework described by Jack Halberstam as "those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (Halberstam 6). I am interested in this as a modality of reading and critique in semblance of these fabulated desiring exiles of the story because I recognize in their own irreducibly sexual cruising something synonymous with the exilic, something which suggests that exile is the perpetual cruising of and for location, a queer time and place for the displaced subject seeking orientation, albeit provisionally and against the grain of longevity, as is always the case in the ephemerality of the cruised encounter. By the time that this narration takes place, when the piers become that queer ecosystem, the Hudson River piers are merely phantasmagorical relics of a once-vital maritime economy. They were at some point, as artist and art historian Jonathan Weinberg notes, a location sedimented with transit: "the shipping terminals from above the Battery to 14th Street were not meant for lingering; rather, they were built to facilitate the movement of people and things in and out of Manhattan. *Passage*, the French word for arcade, more aptly describes the porous nature of the pier buildings" (Weinberg 9).[31] The piers then, are a non-place inscribed in and by migration. Ramos Otero locates Puerto Rico within a non-place bursting with other, pre-existing acts and histories of location: of capitalist commerce, of sexual exchange, of a maritime history already tethered to desire.

Given these points of resonance between the space, time, and movement of the cruising body and the repetitions of sea voyage and migration histories braided into the story, I want to suggest how the text opens up a practice akin to *cruising location*: idling and circuitously moving across space by way of thought, at once holding the desire to know what in them locates Puerto Rico in "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar"—what is the Puerto Rico to be found there, waiting—while also relinquishing the orientation and temporality of an end to pursuit.

The collapsed, gutted, and debris-filled structures of the piers formed a dilapidated geography of queer life that marked the social, sexual, literary, and artistic cultures of New York City between the 70s and the 90s. In this story, the piers mark a site of love and lust with abandon, a liminal place of pure wandering and longing suspended in a state of perpetual dusk or dawn, some time in between the day's progression and the day's waning light:

> Ángelo y yo nos amaremos siempre, aunque las enfermedades incurables, como la sífilis o el cáncer, nos separen, quedan las miles de noches del amor en busca de la muerte, volando sobre dunas amarillas con ángeles de polvo, haciendo las calles abandonadas de los muelles, ardiendo en ruinas, cogidos por la mano de la luna para no ver el sol, prendiendo y apagando las luces de Bengala, contándonos el cuento de la vida en la negra intemperie de la madrugada, candelabros de yerba quemándonos los labios, alucinando sobre peldaños orinados e iglesias clausuradas en Christopher Street, rechazando la llegada ineludible del miedo (94).[32]

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[31] Weinberg, Jonathan. Pier Groups: Art and Sex Along the New York Waterfront. Pennsylvania State University Press. 2019.

[32] "Ángelo and I will always love each other, even if the incurable diseases, like syphilis or cancer, do us part, the thousand nights of love in pursuit of death remain, flying over yellow dunes like angels of dust, making the abandoned streets of the piers, alight in ruins, holding hands with the moon so as to not see the sun, turning the flares on and off, telling each other the story of life in the black inclemency of dawn, candelabras of weeds burning our lips, hallucinating on urinated stoops and boarded up churches on Christopher Street, rejecting the ineludible arrival of fear."

The sentence strings together an ecology of elements, objects, geographies, and bodies through a syntax in semblance of the Hudson riverine flow. There's a dragging at play here which mirrors the way these characters drag the debris of their own migrations. For a moment, in the long present of that sentence, the piers retain these sediments for our attention. Illness is among them.

I want to begin by considering the place of these "enfermedades incurables" in the incredibly protracted first sentence of this passage. Syphilis brings to mind two major currents within the aesthetic and cultural history of illness. As a venereal disease, it evokes sexual deviance by underscoring a presumed proximity between nonreproductive sex and illness. Queer desire as one and the same with contagion. Although the story is set a few years prior to the historical starting date of the AIDS epidemic, the text here is already sensitized to a sense of morbidity that hinges on the lustful geography of sexual experimentation in the piers. We can say this story lays the aesthetic groundwork for what will become a key concern in the last period of Ramos Otero's life as a writer, where poetry will become the preferred form for specifically exploring AIDS as an aesthetico-political position, a thanatology of writing.

In the piers scene we're looking at, syphilis also gestures obliquely towards an aesthetics of decay proper to the 19th century, an erotics of illness experienced by a hyper-sensitized body. A key example of decadent aesthetics of *modernismo* in Colombian José Asunción Silva's De sobremesa (1925), where the position of illness goes hand in hand with an affective politics proper to the mal de siglo. That syphilis and cancer "separate" is as much a testament to the lovers' shared temporality of death as it becomes an avowed position of corporal difference. These are lovers plagued and inhabiting the crosscurrent of aesthetic and medical discourses of the century prior.

Corporal difference also establishes a subversive relation to a conceptual genealogy specific to the Puerto Rican and Caribbean historico-scientific knowledge of the body. In the emerging epistemologies of Latin America and the Caribbean by the mid-19th century, the sick body founds a canon in which degeneration, decay, and indolence become inherent qualities of a fragile body malnourished by the tropics. Daylet Dominguez describes the first official history of Puerto Rico, Fray Íñigo Abbad y Lasierra's *Historia Geográfica, Civil y Natural de la isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (1788), as a foundational text for the Puerto Rican subject which legitimizes this canon of illness as foundation for Puerto Rico.

Reading for the afterlives of Abbad y Lasierra opens the story to a dialogue with the emergence of a key Caribbean epistemic discourse regarding the body and territory Dominguez suggests. But my reading of illness in Ramos Otero's story underscores the mutation of this discourse in time. Illness in "El cuento de la mujer del mar" marks a refusal of etiology and remediation. The fact of an "enfermedad incurable" is affirmed from the outset. The historically-charged temporality of degeneration and corporal degradation identified with disease is mined for a temporality in refusal of the narrative closures of hygienic control, a canon of closures which Rubén Ríos Ávila describes as the long line of "hermeneutic doctors in succession" who authorized themselves with the administration of the national body. Orienting themselves towards illness, the lover and beloved recast the a priori Caribbean diseased body as an erotic eroding avowed. As illness marked the entrance of Puerto Rico into the narrative time of Historia, illness also marks the passage of the lovers into the rotting time of cruising's lustful and embodied meandering of the piers.

I remain interested, however, in the fact that the cuentero and his lover wait at the piers for a third presence. They wait for the mother, matrix of the tale: la Mujer del Mar. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the disavowal of the Father as the organizing sign of storyteller and subsequent exploration of mother-virgin-witch *cuenteras* in Ramos Otero's text opens up the narrative space to a disoriented and meandering poetics in which linear sequentiality, cause and effect, and origin and supplement are perennially deferred. In this iteration of the mother-matrix, the Mujer del Mar

emerges as a spectral presence as the lovers cruise the ghost who contains the story that binds and consacrates their damned union in place and time. This is the ghost of Palmira Parés, one of the many avatars of La Mujer del Mar. I want to suggest how the evocation of this ghost, in an allusion to Puerto Rican exilic poet Julia de Burgos and her 1954 posthumous poetry collection *El mar y tú*, enacts an aesthetic alliance with death. Cruising the ghost becomes a metaphor for poetry's erosive capacity vis-a-vis the "relato": an orientation towards the past that recognizes in the graveyard of Puerto Rican women poets a "voice in revolt" for the present.[33] The cuentero cruises for a ghost and through the ghost, cruises for a dislocated Puerto Rico that emerges in avowal of a common history of decay. Death comes to designate not an impasse to possibility, but a trans-temporal expansion of communication. Erosion emerges here as the disintegration of a story's progression, infected by poetic intensity and by the literal ghost of a poet. Let us re-read the end of that long piers passage: "Fue contra la noche que comenzamos a esperarla, viajera sonámbula atravesando la espesa neblina sobre las aguas negras del Hudson River, de madrugada."

Death marks a threshold spatialized in the piers. The lovers' proximity to death also places them in closer relationship to the ghost of the poet. The grounds for this proximity are thanatological. In another passage shortly after the one we've been tracking so far, the cuentero interrupts his own narration and breaks into a study of Palmira Parés's poetry collection *El mar*. As I mentioned earlier, this is yet another allusion to Julia de Burgos: to her posthumous poetry collection *El mar y tú*, published in 1954, a key text in my elaboration of the maritime Puerto Rican sensorium of the 20th century discussed in my second chapter. The narrator describes the poems in Palmira Parés's El mar as a "tiempo físico y fatal de una ola que nunca alcanza la orilla prometida. Parés encuentra en él [el mar] la poeta. Es el acto de creación el que finalmente la libera para dejarla sola con la muerte, repitiendo el encuentro con la otra, múltiple, mar, marinera de la muerte". By evoking the ocean wave as a shape for a time and space of death ("el tiempo físico y fatal"), the cuentero invites us to consider poetic making ("el acto de creación") as modality of liberation. This is a liberation located in the solitude of death ("para dejarla sola con la muerte"), free from the promise of land and life "que nunca alcanza la orilla prometida". As "múltiple, mar, marinera de la muerte" Palmira Parés folds Julia de Burgos's now-mythic death in the streets of Spanish Harlem in 1953 into the arc of her poetic making. Her death becomes a final act, perhaps her final poem.

What's at stake here is not merely a compelling biographical synchronicity, that two Puerto Rican poets, Ramos Otero and Burgos, lived in exile in New York at different times, in nearness to death. I am interested in how poetry here becomes mediumistic. As described in the passage I just quoted, poetry is a form privy to the knowledge and the freedom of death, "la voz de la muerte". Nonsequential and oriented towards affinities unencumbered by spatial and temporal unity, poetry allows the cuentero to hold together a past experience of exile registered in the words of the dead poet. It thus mines for a sensorium that discloses exile as the troubling of place and time. It is at once a legacy of colonialism's thanatological mandate, a material precarization of "homeland." And yet it also expands "homeland" by reorganizing the senses of situatedness and presence via a language culled from the exilic experience.

I want to consider this stanza from Julia de Burgos's "¡Oh mar, no esperes más!" whose presence lingers obliquely in the narrator 's commentary on the poetry of Parés: "¡Oh mar, no esperes más! / Casi voy por la vida como gruta de escombros / Ya ni el mismo silencio se detiene en

[33] The posthumous publication suggests a thread for future consideration and expansion, given the irresistible coincidence in both Julia de Burgos' and Manuel Ramos Otero's final collections as works published after death. The category of the posthumous as a concretization of the "voice of the dead" acting on the deceased author's oeuvre, as a sort of bibliographical haunting, grants more dimension to the transitive pact whereby death is a membrane or threshold for various forms of thanatological communication and communion.

mi nombre / Inútilmente estiro mi camino sin luces /Como muertos sin sitio se sublevan mis voces"

The stanza opens with a demand for that "tiempo físico y fatal" that likens the motion of the wave to a suspended thanatos. This is the "ola de mar" as the space and time desired by the speaker. A simile links life to a repository of debris that suggests a dynamic motion: towards sedimentation and towards erosion. Sediments picked up by the "voy" congeal to give rise to the voice of a desiring speaker's demand. And yet experience, as the "gruta de escombros," also surrenders to the sea in a plea to wait no more. Erosion emerges in this dynamic movement as a wish to disperse the "escombros" of a life in transit so that they may locate some place for the placeless dead to come out as a multiple revolt of unsounded voices, as "sublevación." A passage from sedimentation to transient dissolution, from one voz and one vida to a spectral chorus of voices: "como muertos sin sitio se sublevan mis voces." The poem here also theorizes its own capacity to hold form and its undoing together at the same time.

Through this spectral evocation of the poem, the cuentero wants to activate a point of suspension, an evanescent "sitio" for a multitude in revolt. A multitude that reconfigures the solitudes sedimented in the pier's geography, as metonymy for a New York exile, into a provisional place of shared momentary rest. The "ola, tiempo físico y fatal" in poetry's lingering relationship to language expands the possible sense of the place. This expansion of the present space-time is what the cuentero gestures towards as he utters that "la zona del exilio es el mismo territorio de la soledad." A zone, a territory in which to burst open singular solitude in a manifold that discloses the sediments of exilic sensibility

Poetry and poetic biography in "El cuento de la mujer del mar" recuperate the possibility of inhabiting exile and its thanatological qualities to inaugurate a Puerto Rico shaped by the alliance of two poets who live the suspended present of "the tiempo físico y fatal" of poetry. "El cuento de la mujer del mar" imagines a fugue from narrative closure to poetic porosity in an erosion of genre from within the generic restriction of the story. The Puerto Rico arising in the piers through the membrane of poetry becomes a place for the restless ghosts of endless exile.

This is a decaying Puerto Rico that only emerges through his practice of storytelling eroded by poetic intervention. A Puerto Rico which otherwise does not exist. As the narrator confesses towards the end of the story, "Palmira Parés pertenece a un Puerto Rico que no existe pero es que, en realidad, la poesía es la voz de la muerte y las palmas se pudren bajo un sol viejo y la verdad imborrable de que este cuento es el único pretexto que le queda a la magia de un cuentero." The cuentero, as diseased lustful pilgrim of the piers, finds alliance in Palmira Parés's exilic story. Palmira's heroin overdose in the streets of her New York becomes part of the cuentero's present body-space relationship. She becomes his thanatological Puerto Rico, a spectral membrane for locating the common place. Her irredeemable solitude, her abandonment with regards to homeland, to canon, and to the integrity of a national body, foreground for the cuentero a practice of alliance. Palmira becomes the guiding ghost, the prism through which the text reframes the temporal closure of death as belonging. He mines her poeticized biography for a "past that is not past," to use Christina Sharpe's formulation. Cruising, then, becomes lingering and loitering in the past as it becomes activated in the present through sensorial affinities activated as poetry and the poet haunt the story.

If there is an ur-location in "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," the piers constitute such a place: "fue contra la noche que comencé a contarle el cuento interminable de la Mujer del Mar, y fue contra la noche que comenzamos a esperarla, viajera sonámbula atravesando la espesa neblina sobre

las aguas negras del Hudson River, de madrugada." (104)[34] Even while the story's places proliferate variously, these ruins of industrial maritime commerce, at once lustful nocturnal playgrounds for sexual dissidence and a refuge for those unproductive bodies excreted by the late capitalist urban revitalization project, emerge time and again in the narration as a place from which every other place can be conceptualized, where we gather a sense of text's particular intimations regarding location and temporality.

My primary contention is that in the circuit of migration established in "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," the Hudson River piers also become an irreducibly Caribbean space, a port of call in a fabulated archipelago woven together and experienced by the *cuentero*. Carole Boyce Davies offers a definition of Caribbean Space that underscores the set of body-space relations underlying such a practice of location.

> "Caribbean Spaces" is my way of describing plural island geographies, the surrounding continental locations as well as Caribbean sociocultural and geopolitical locations in countries in North, South, and Central America. [...] These are social and cultural places (spaces) that extend the understanding of the Caribbean beyond "small space," fragmented identifications. The claiming of Caribbean Space captures ontologically ways of being in the world. It assumes movement as it makes and remakes the critical elements of Caribbean geography: landscape and seascape, sky and sun, but also music, food, and style. (1)[35]

Her formulation fleshes out key aspects of Caribbean spatiality that inform my own reading. First and foremost, the Caribbean is a practice, almost geopoetic in its collaborative creation (or *poiesis*) between consciousness and a lived and mythologized geographical setting. Fabulation mediates space and time. Her proposition about the Caribbean writes the zone as an active experiential framework. But this body-space relation described here is transitive, far from the deterministic turn of racist and eugenic models in the archive of geographical determinism found in the Caribbean knowledge produced by the natural histories of the 19th century. This is, counter to that other reductive body-space articulation, a moving knowledge, one produced by and generative of these critical elements of Caribbean location, one that does not seek to capture or arrest, poetic insofar as generative.

I would add, as one such critical element constitutive of Caribbean space, an *a priori* and fundamentally transient, mutating relationship to space and time later described by Boyce Davies as a "twilight zone," "spaces of transformation from one condition to another, one location to another, one reality to another, and sometimes newly created emotional, physical, and conceptual space that then becomes another identified location. (12). Not surprisingly, a resonance emerges between twilight theorized in *Caribbean Spaces* and the time-space of dusk in which the piers emerge, where the narration of space situates us in what Boyce Davies names a "movement into sensual darkness," a description that recapitulates the embodied, sensorial specificity at stake for us. An ambiguous place in which to trouble the practice of place.

The importance of the piers as a location for sexual and artistic dissidence in the 20th century has already been well-documented. Jack Halberstam's recent work on Alvin Baltrop's photographs of the piers' collapsing structures augments this canon, revitalizing our reading

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[34] "It was against the night that I began to tell the endless story of the woman of the sea, and it was against the night that we started to wait for her, a sleepwalking traveler crossing the thick fog over the black waters of the Hudson River, at dawn."

[35] Boyce Davies, Carole. Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zone. Illinois. University of Illinois Press, 2013.

practices of this mythical location by shifting our attention away from isolated scenes of gay cis male sexual encounter and into the wild materiality of the crumbling hangars themselves.[36] He acknowledges that his analysis is "drawn instead to the collapsing architecture that became a frame and symbol for a different kind of rebellion, *that marked an alternative set of relations between space and bodies*, and that left behind an aesthetics that merged eroticism with unstable structures." (Halberstam 2022, my emphasis).[37]

I join Halberstam in thinking about the piers beyond exclusively erotic scenes of gay male sex. But the sex is not the most irreducible or radical aspect of the ecology of place and time under study here, and the wealth of critiques from within and without queer theory remind us that any easy equivalence of gay sex with notions of the radical in our current historical juncture is näive at best. I believe that Ramos Otero's story invites us to re-read the scenes of sexual encounter as well as the architectures of the piers in a way that is not entirely encompassed by Halberstam's proposition about space, bodies, and eros. In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," the piers are but a point of departure for thinking and inhabiting the Puerto Rican exilic condition. Indeed, their dilapidation marks alternative relations between body and space, but the bodies cruising, desiring, and haunting the gutted hangars here are themselves already marked (as the story suggests, to the point of excess) by other stories, passed down stories, stories gathered in protracted arcs of forced and precarious transit. The Hudson River piers by Christopher Street are shaped—confabulated—by the actions of those who cruise it; quite literally "made" by migrant cruising ("haciendo las calles abandonadas de los muelles").

We are invited to read the piers accordingly and in relation to what, in their being folded into Ramos Otero's narration, opens us up to and also re-inscribes a rich history of Caribbean articulations about body-space relations unaccounted for in isolating the piers in themselves, or gay sex in itself. The piers in "El cuento de la mujer del mar" destabilize normative formulations of the location of a Puerto Rican nation or stable place of origin by proposing collapse, rust and erosion—both of the architectures but also of the phantasmal bodies inhabiting it—as generative locations of a Puerto Rican exilic experience. There in the piers the exilic, in turn, becomes not a hierarchically minor experience or something merely being a supplement of the place of origin, but an expansion of place outside the sanctioned logics of location for a Puerto Rican commons, a place that becomes the storehouse of storytelling, whose existence at the edge of water and in warped time allows for memory, fabulation, and longing to assemble and reassemble the islands: "la vida es un territorio de cuentos siempre contados, y la muerte sus sombras" (116).[38]

Ramos Otero's narration brings to our attention the piers as a border zone: one in which the falling structures perilously flirt with the edge of the black waters of the Hudson River that inevitably lead to the Atlantic Ocean. Earlier, my discussion on borderlessness led me to interpret the trope of the Sargasso Sea as positioning Ramos Otero's story within Caribbean aesthetic legacies of conceptualizing spaces of opacity, murkiness, and indeterminate form. Now, I want to suggest the Hudson Piers as Manuel Ramos Otero's own expansion of this archive, and focus not on borderlessness, but rather on the deferral of placing that the border zone, as a chiasmus of location and transit, codifies into our language of spatiality, To describe this location as a *border* is to acknowledge a specific form of opacity immanent to this zone of multiple crossings: not just land

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[36] Halberstam, Jack, "Unbuild the World!" published online in blogs.law.columbia.edu on February 20, 2022.

[37] Elsewhere, Halberstam reads the Piers as part and parcel of an "anarchitechture" which foregrounds a trans and feminist reconstitution of space. For this particular discussion, which closely engages with the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, see Halberstam's online article "Unbuilding Gender: Trans* Anarchitectures In and Beyond the Work of Gordon Matta-Clark" published in Places Journal in 2018.

[38] "Life is a territory of stories always told, and death their shadows"

and water, but also riverine and ocean waters, as well as where various exilic stories crisscross. The border, whether inscribed by the cartographer, "given" by the particulars of geography, or, as is the case here, a zone at the crossroads of structure and collapse, is the place that puts pressure on our relationship to *placing*. This is to say that their definition includes the fact of movement that exceeds the static or stable or designated location: one possible definition of the border is the conjunction of place and movement. Those who cross it make it the border zone. Border zones are, as C.S. Giscombe writes, "something else," a place that is "unstable—they're full of too much information, they're bursting" (ix). He further notes that "to live or to have begun in 'a border area' is a *fact of consciousness; and/or it is a strategy of reading that one carries into other situations*… The border as a fixed place or as a number of fixed places is false. It 'surfaces' at unlikely situations; it surfaces unexpectedly" (x, my emphasis).[39]

Christopher Street and the surrounding twilight zone in "El cuento de la mujer del mar" emerges in and through the shape of the border, not only because of its literal bordering relationship to water, but also, and especially because of this "fact of consciousness" the border entails that is so central to the text. The reading practice described by Giscombe allows us to hold the opaque memory of Puerto Rico woven and reworked by the *cuentero* and the cruised alleyways of the Christopher Street piers coevally. Through it, we can come to understand the piers that surface in the story—and which make other places of origin surface, burst out, as Giscombe notes—as one possible shape or structure for the condition of Caribbean exile, of Caribbeanness itself. Exile, through this figuration, *becomes* a place.

The piers share with the space of Puerto Rico that surfaces in the text—described earlier as a spectral presence in the Sargasso Sea— a sense of amphibian location, between land and water and on the edge of collapse. The bodily movement of lovers cruising dangerously on the edge of death––by drugs, by sex marked with sickness, perhaps by the impending collapse of the piers' abandoned architectures—is analogous to the desiring trajectories of exiles in wayward pursuit of the common place in a city populated by other exiles. As historically, economically, and symbolically-charged points of contact with the Atlantic routes of maritime travel, the piers gesture towards the shores of Puerto Rico, thereby suggesting two ends of a circuit of transit. The memory of a place of origin is invoked by the telling of the "cuento interminable"—a story detoured by sex, hallucination, and substance use—that keeps the lovers returning to the crumbling piers in order to feel and act out location in an infinite telling that becomes for the exiled lovers a semblance of the route of ships that once docked and departed that shoreline. In the mouth of the lovers, the piers resuscitate the specter of sea travel.

In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," to be located is tantamount to engaging endlessly in this circuitous and wayward crossing whether through the physical dislocations of exile or through the space opened up by fabulation, where one proceeds like the *cuentero* and weaves, spiderlike, the intersecting and diverging memories of place available to a transtemporal and transpatial constellation of exiles made to be in common by virtue of the border zone:

> Las arañas saben lo quel hombre no sabrá nunca. Por eso, el hombre no come moscas ni teje telarañas, a lo sumo teje cuentos, inventa el mundo. La araña inventa el mundo como si fuera una mantilla de soledad. Así corrimos la mantilla negra del rostro salado de la Mujer del Mar. Así, el enano napolitano atravesó el crepúsculo, los

[39] Giscombe, C.S. "A Note", *Border Towns.* Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press. 2016. ix-xi pp.

> biombos de seda de los dragones fuego, y encontró el mundo, el nuevo, llamado desde allá…, arañando los mapas frágiles de lo desconocido. (99).[40]

In the piers, the story's characters, as well as the histories they drag in their transits, can only ever scratch ("arañando" mined in the text for its semantic ambiguity) the surface of location time and again, the avowedly opaque condition, a knowledge of the fragile map that places them and puts them in relation to each other, in relation to their desire for place. Here, the practice of storytelling, becoming araña, folds this particular queer geography of New York City into a fabulated and expansive Puerto Rican archipelago, a decay of the foundational fiction and the paternalistic mandate on which such a fiction sustains itself.

By enacting a literature of migration to destabilize insular space as the source of a national literature, 'El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" opens up what Israel Reyes calls a "transient community" and a concomitant subjectivity that decidedly breaks with the paternalistic canon founded on said insularist paradigm (Reyes 74).[41] Reyes reads the story for a modernist Puerto Rican narrative in which the tactic of montage, available to this new subject's privileging of dissonant urban space as a source of creative power, sketches out a subjectivity marked by "fragmentation, the urban landscape, homosexual desire, the narrative of exile, and the space of marginality" (73). A queer modernism is at stake in the story's "prism of paradox and ambiguity" from a narrative standpoint relative to the masculinist tradition on the island through and against which Ramos Otero's narrator writes. Following Reyes's deft analysis of Ramos Otero's radical rupture from the canon, I would add that Ramos Otero's urban literature is also qualified by an irreducible texture of Caribbean dislocation that connects the space-making and time-shaping practices central to modernist aesthetics to the migratory flows, multiplicities, and migrations of Caribbean exilic experience. The practice of Caribbean space and time is where Ramos Otero locates Puerto Rican narration. The cuentero speaks not from the Bronx low-income housing developments or from Loisaida (the Puerto Rican Lower East Side), themselves paradigmatic Caribbean spaces of another symbolic and material economy under study by Reyes, but rather from within the amphibian zone of collapse, the detritus of urban expansion, and is in dialogue with a literature of the sea as much as with an emerging urban diasporic Puerto Rican literature. Thus, Reyes allows us to propose a liquid queer exilic modernism as an aesthetic framework from which to consider Manuel Ramos Otero's narration.

I insist that vis-à-vis the islands of origin, the piers are the location of at once a tangible and precarious other Caribbean, a place for vesseling and cruising exile's machinery of dislocated memories via the instrument of the desiring and slowly vanishing *cuentero* who decays into the web of his own tale, with storytelling as the technology that fleshes out the senses of that evanescent spacetime in excess of origin and destination and in which the monumentality of place is subject to the corrosive sea that borders it. That is the location of Manuel Ramos Otero's Puerto Rico. Neither

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[40] "Spiders know what humans will never know. Because of this, humans do not eat flies or weave webs, at best they weave stories, invent the world. A spider invents the world as if it were a veil of solitude. And so we lifted the black veil on the salty face of la Mujer del Mar. This way, the short Napolitan crossed dusk, the silk screens of fiery dragons, and found the world, the new world, called upon from out there…, scratching the fragile maps of the unknown."

[41] Reyes, Israel: Modernism and Migration in Manuel Ramos Otero's "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar". The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association, Spring 1996. Vol 29, No. 1 (Spring, 1996), pp. 63-75. Both Reyes's argument and my own build on Juan Gelpí's invaluable contribution to the reframing of Puerto Rican literature, *Literatura y Paternalismo*. Reyes cites Gelpí's reading of "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar", in which Gelpí reads the city as a space whose imperviousness to control yields solidarity between two marginalized subjectivities: "La fuisón o solidaridad entre las figuras marginadas por el canon—una poeta y un cuentero homosexual, ambos exiliados—sólo se puede dar en ese espacio difícil de controlar y disciplinar que es la ciudad" (Gelpí, quoted in Reyes 72).

land nor water, the border zone from which we can trouble what we know of both the eroding island and the collapsing promise of the city.

And ocean water is the threshold, a cursor for this exilic time. New York and the piers are the black mirror of that other, native island, alive only in the waterside hallucinations of the lovers, made available through the vantage point it allows: "La ciudad era entonces un cementerio de exiliados. Las madrugadas eran de fantasmas de mares."[42] The piers are a place for these ghosts of the sea, and the bodies that populate the text are marked by the saltwater threshold that tethers their stories to this critical element of Caribbean location. Upon meeting Ángelo's grandmother, Vicenza Vitale, the narrator notes that she sits "cubierta de la costra azul que nunca se le borra a los que cruzan mares" (96).[43] The poet of the sea Palmira Parés, "'a woman who has learned the knowledge of the sea,'" the fabled Mujer del Mar whose myth holds the lovers together in a storytelling bind, is the prototype of one such life. Her story, whose strings are first woven by the *cuentero* in the desolate piers, is one and the same with the sea: "De su eterno peregrinar por las playas de la infancia, la comienzan a llamar (quizá) la Mujer del Mar. En los pueblos costeros, el mar es lo mismo que la vida" (92).[44] Parés, who hails from the coastal town of Manatí, Puerto Rico (Manuel Ramos Otero's birthplace) is a poet of the sea, and her magnum opus, *El mar*, is described by the narrator as having "el *tiempo físico y fatal de una ola* que nunca alcanza la orilla prometida… Palmira Parés encuentra en él la poeta. Es el acto de creación el que finalmente la libera para dejarla sola con la muerte, repitiendo el encuentro con la otra, múltiple, mar, marinera de la muerte" (108, my emphasis).[45]

In a coda to the long Puerto Rican maritime archive intimated in Hostos and Pedreira, the sea here returns as a thanatological substance, as something at an edge with or commingled with the disintegration of the singular body, of singular time, and of singular place: "pero el mar desintegra los espejos del tiempo." (110).[46] In a fundamental break from this long archive, however, the narrative voice's recognition of the sea as *Thanatos* is mediated through the figure of Palmira Parés, whose narrative thread within the story is a fabricated biography or perverse hagiography of migrant Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos:

> Palmira Parés pertenece a un Puerto Rico que no existe pero es que, en realidad, la poesía es la voz de la muerte y las palmas se pudren bajo un sol viejo y la verdad imborrable de que este cuento es el único pretexto que le queda a la magia de un cuentero. Yo quería escribir la verdadera historia de Palmira Parés, oscura poeta de mi pueblo, sabiendo quel más nocturno de sus versos dice más del ser del mar que cualquier playa enlluviecida. Nadie comprenderá jamás que sus momentos más fantasmales fueron las madrugadas de heroína en el exilio. Abandonada. Sola. Aprendiendo a ser lejanamente en la memoria… (107)[47]

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[42] "By then, the city was a cemetery of exiles. Dawns were for the ghosts of seas"

[43] "covered in the blue crust that never fades from those who cross the seas"

[44] "Because of her eternal pilgrimage along the beaches of her childhood, they began to call her (perhaps) the Mujer del Mar."

[45] "the physical and fatal time of a wave that never reaches the promised shore… Palmira Parés finds in it the poet. It is the act of creation which finally frees her, leaving her alone with death, repeating the encounter with the other, multiple, sea, mariner of death."

[46] "But the sea disintegrates the mirrors of time"

[47] "Palmira Parés belongs to a Puerto Rico that does not exist, but the fact is that poetry is the voice of death and the palm trees rot under an old sun and the unerasable truth that this story is the only pretext left for the magic of a storyteller. I wanted to write the true story of Palmira Parés, obscure poet of my hometown, knowing that the most nocturnal of her verses says more about the sea's being than any rainy beach. Nobody will ever understand that her most phantasmal moments were the dawns of heroin in exile. Abandoned. Alone. Learning to exist distantly in memory."

Such a mediation constitutes a layered conceptual break enacted variously. On the one hand, the counter-genealogy established here is predicated on a gendered rupture with a historically and conceptually masculinist posture towards whatever is seen in the ocean, towards whatever it reflects back to the observer. At stake in the fear and abjection at play in both Hostos's pilgrim and Pedreira's continental muscularity is a rejection of whatever threatens to *move* the body from itself in ecstasy, whatever could come to oversensitize it and render it susceptible to the annihilation of a touch that mocks the individual will's self-sufficiency through a lust with abandon for the other ("el encuentro con la otra, múltiple, mar, marinera de la muerte"). In "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," the narrative voice celebrates this touching and being touched. It becomes part and parcel of an ethics of telling the tale. A dialectic of surrender corrosive to the self as well as to the other interrupts one of the story's many moments of beginning again: "No. Uno no existe. Existo cuando el otro es de uno. Se existe cuando uno es del otro y se cierran los ciclos. El otro tampoco existe. El otro es uno, pero sólo, cuando aprende a ser de uno como es uno, cuando el otro se realiza poco a poco, escapando a vientos, libremente en el amor" (102).[48] The singular, unilateral voice is under threat of collapsing here into a transitivity and a multiplicity counter to the version of the sea implied in the paternalist gaze of the *hombres de la patria*. The cuentero speaks through the knowledge of the sea by way of an ecstatic disintegration of the singular self in time that leads to a becoming-Palmira: "Es probable quen algún lugar del tiempo, yo fuera la Mujer del Mar" (98).[49] Such is the waxing and waning motion of eros, part and parcel of erosion celebrated in Parés and in the voice of the cuentero possessed by the matter and the memory of the sea. That liquid voice itself is a deadly substance known to the woman who, through the limit experience of exile, is able to speak the poetry, the knowledge of the sea.

Alongside these forms of literal and metaphorical erosion, drug use in exile is yet another texture through which time is bent and the body is able to approach an experience in proximity to death. On the heels of this erotically-charged sea is also the elaboration of a thanatological time-space inflected by Palmira's drug use, echoed in scenes of substance use in the shadow of the piers as recounted by the *cuentero*: "con las substrancias amorosas, a embalsamar la ilusión, y la ciudad volvió a ser de repente Arabia. Fumamos yerbas de polvo de ángel y leímos por la noche *Madame Bovary*: 'Las dichas futuras como las playas tropicales.'" (104).[50] Characters touch on Caribbean space here in and through the raptures of a high. Like Flaubert's Emma Rouault, whose model of consciousness and point of view is made of pure fantasy, here, too, the future is a tropic of longing: where fabulation and futurity infect each other to suggest that narrative time in exile, the shared space-time of the lovers cruising the pier, touches on a beach made more real in a state of hallucination. Exile, then, is also one such "sustancia amorosa," another way of embalming time, an "aprendiendo a ser lejanamente en la memoria" (a "learning to be distantly in memory").

Later, drugs mark an interruption, a temporal jolt, that situates this narrative within a queer temporality in excess of forward progression. It is a refusal of the arrival of the story's conclusion and of exile's final destination: "Un pase de cocaína en flor y literalmente el cuentero retrasa el momento del miedo y cuenta el cuento, solitario, d'eskinazo a largo plazo, se le va de las manos el amor, no hay salida y al espejo se le abren las heridas. La cara del cuentero en el espejo, la ve llegar,

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[48] "No. One does not exist. I exist when the other is one's own. One exists when the one is of the other and the cycles are closed. The other also does not exist. The other is the one, but only when he learns to be one's own as one is, when the other is realized little by little, fleeing without restriction, freely in love"

[49] "It is probable that in another place in time, I was the Mujer del Mar"

[50] "With the amorous substances, to embalm the illusion. And the city was once again Arabia.We smoked weeds of angel dust and at night, we read *Madame Bovary*: 'Future joys like tropical beaches'"

la voz del mar" (105).[51] In the time of drug use, destabilizing reproductive temporality, we also bear witness to a ludic mode of embodying time that touches on the fact of consciousness for exilic and migrant dislocation. This aspect of drug use that links both Palmira Parés's and the cuentero's timeline to the errant flow of oceanic time can be described more specifically by the spatio-temporal logics implied in the local concept of the "quedaera." This ambiguous idiom of Puerto Rican vernacular, commonly deployed to speak of someone literally and metaphorically "quedado" (stuck in place, vagrant in time) has been recently recuperated by a set of essays written by Puerto Rican cultural theorist Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia, who defines it as "un imaginario que insiste en un estar inalterable a pesar de los desplazamientos que son ya más que reales o metafóricos […] trafica con el oxímoron de una experiencia productiva por ser, de todo rigor, una experiencia negativa: una experiencia del no y la negación" (Quintero Herencia 88-89).[52] Negation here is directed towards a historical imperative whose demand is for a subject or a history to *arrive* somewhere on the other side of transit. The "quedaera" is a critical negative position towards displacement and diaspora that refuses the demand to sublate exiles It is a subjective negation too, because these displacements, "ya *más* que reales o metafóricos," are above all a *fact* of that consciousness, that way of being in the world, in which experience is tantamount to a lingering and a loitering, a languid resting with what remains. It also importantly negates the melancholy of ruin and exile fundamental to Hostos's messianic poetics because such a melancholy would presume a longing for or return to some other, more real or whole place and time this melancholy would be in relation to or conditioned by. *Quedaera* is a fuguitivity from that point of view in history. Whether literal or metaphorical, the joyful rapture of the high or the consummation of the cruised "polvo" (colloquial slang for orgasm) by the *cuentero* models in "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" a practice of placing and timing at the antipodes of the nation's legibility with regards to concrete historical being.

I have employed the verb *cruising* here as a way of fleshing out a disposition and a tactic towards space at the heart of "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar," and I have done so in the present participle, following Amiri Baraka's observation that "the clearest description of now is the present participle, which if the activity described continues is always correct" (Baraka 2). And the activity does, in fact must, continue, because the temporality of cruising's elongated suspension of desire, its thriving, as it does in the story, in the opaque twilight zones at the edge of productivity, logic, and of the nation-state's reproduction. The participle suggests an ongoingness thematized in the story as a demand that there always be a *looking*: not a looking for the future, not looking to return, but to remain with what remains, to *quedarse*. The West Side piers are for the cuentero—and for this liquid counter-genealogy of Puerto Rican ocean poetics—the looking glass of exile. Through their dislocated vantage point, they give rise to a possible community within an eternal migration's displacing of the body decidedly outside a commons defined by singular location and at odds with a synchronous temporality.

One might wonder, then, about the community to come. When the *cuentero* utters that "la zona del exilio es el mismo territorio de la soledad," he implicitly spatializes the very condition of non-placement in a twofold metaphor that links the exilic with a subjective state, solitude, itself also

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[51] One line of cocaine and the storyteller literally delays the arrival of fear and tells the story, solitary, edging slowly long term, love goes out of hand, there is no exit and the mirror's wounds burst open. The storyteller's face in the mirror, sees it arriving, the voice of the sea"

[52] Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia: *De la queda (era)*. Imagen, tiempo y detención Puerto Rico, La Criba Editorial, San Juan, 2022, pp. 88-89. Quoted in Jossianna Arroyo, "La queda (era) de Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia: una mirada a la crisis del Puerto Rico neoliberal" published online in *Rialta Magazine*, July 27, 2022. ("an imaginary that insists on an inalterable remaining despite the displacements that are now more than real or metaphorical [...] [the 'quedaera'] traffics in the oxymoron of an experience that is productive for being, in all rigor, a negative experience: an experience of no and of negation."

spatialized, made territory (103). In other words, the *cuentero*, the cruising producer of an ephemeral "we," lingers in and does not overcome the contradiction that might emerge here between a pilgrim consciousness and a commons to which it might belong. Approaching exile piers-wise, as the text insists, is to suggest that what makes the common is the shared interval, however brief or evanescent, in which to to sensitize through that solitude the larger, nameless and fully inhabitable solitude of being Puerto Rican with its sedimented and speaking dead, animated in the passages from place to place, from realm to haunted realm. Not looking for the cure but looking from within the trouble fugitive to a cure.

The maritime sensorium that Manuel Ramos Otero articulates in the narrative refractions that shape "El cuento de la Mujer del Mar" absorbs centuries of iterations of a Puerto Rican subjectivity: his perverse *cuentero* traces a recursive and variegated line comprised of fugues, diagnoses, meanderings, returns, and one-way voyages across histories, bodies, literary debates, poetic innovations, and geographies of both subjugation as well as dissent. The abjected position of the ship adrift in the seas of historical unfolding, Antonio S. Pedreira's organizing metaphor for the pathology of the Puerto Rican undisciplined sensing subject, returns in Ramos Otero digluted and transformed into the sign for that *pueblo prohibido* on the other side of the teleological pursuit of place. Assembling a sensing body to inhabit that prohibited place of desire and abandon, there within the rotting remains of a defunct port of call, Ramos Otero's *cuentero* looks from an island towards the waters that lead to the other islands, islands lived and imagined. In the interval afforded by this distance and by a story spun beyond the limits of the possible, Pedreira's forever *nave al garete* emerges sea-changed, like a ghostly vessel dragging Puerto Rico's historical hauntings aboard its wandering route. The *cuentero* is the spectral *nave*'s yielding medium, and through this new mouth I can hear the ship's content of truth, the adriftness that constitutes a Puerto Rican *we*, voiced from within the language of what haunts its historical being. To tell and take part in the *cuento* is to shape the accursed *nave* into an excessive *cuerpo* vesseling senses of our common place in a time beyond Fathers.

Epilogue: *"Soñé que el mar se tragaba el cemento"*

We are running out of place. A wave in time reanimates the mute and sedimented screams of a history that has hardened by its own pressure into a rock that weighs with incomprehension and stasis and uncounted death and dispossession. Water makes these solids swerve, and in the whirl, new forms of moving in and through what remains are shored up. We must remain with what remains and make sensible the possibility in the present. Bound up with our erosion. As I consider the precarious present and a seemingly unthinkable future, my framework will continue to insist on what is already animated and vibrating in the archive of a Puerto Rican experience cognizant of the fact that, though shapes and modes have indeed shifted, a robust through-line also exists. An increasingly placeless people at the mercy of waves has and continues to learn, teach, and articulate ways of inhabiting liberatory *olas* in the relentless motions of our *tiempo*. The Puerto Rican sensing archive I've assembled in this project has attempted to sound out the tutelage of such an arc. What I have sought to practice with *Waves in Time* is a method for hearing and feeling for the ways in which senses of place and time, senses sedimented in the literary and artistic forms commonly reduced to the category and demands for coherence of the national and the promise of an independent state—both disclose the discursive limits of politics and simultaneously reorient our critical relationship to land, community, and subjectivity within the context of disintegrating infrastructures both material and symbolic.

Water has functioned here as a mediator and a model for a telling of time and the rearticulation of place. In Puerto Rico, thinking the ocean and the inhabited land coevally has foregrounded the study of subjectivities that contend with inhabiting the vanishing remains of the colonial world by living out lines of flight at edge with their own wasting away. With this last stated ambition of the project, I wish to extend my community of interlocutors and collaborators in thought and practice beyond the regional and disciplined confines of literary and area study. My hope is that this paradigm, porous and resonant with histories of extraction and subjugation beyond the Caribbean, becomes useful to those thinking through the gnarl of contradictions at play at the intersection of colonial and decolonial modes of inhabiting the world. In this way, my thinking aligns itself with the interventions in Black geography, indigenous epistemologies, and queer and trans rearticulations of space as we collectively and in solidarity open up the world to ways of living beyond the logics of fixity, capture, and territorialization. We must dream as we attend to another end of the world.

I borrow the title of this epilogue from Sofía Gallisá Muriente's voiceover in her experimental film *Celaje* (2020). Audible during the contemplative final segments of the film, Gallisá Muriente's voice hovers somewhat plaintively over a playfully kinetic and oneiric Super8 montage that includes humans clearing paths through the dense enmeshment of concrete, metal, and foliage of a post-Hurricane María landscape with the help of machetes, dilapidated remains of beachfront infrastructure amidst sand and other organic material, as well as shots that linger on the motion of light over the surface of sea water (33:00-37:00, Figures A, B, C). Her concise utterance absorbs and projects a long history of disjointed and collapsed dream images, suturing these sedimented visions of place to futures oriented towards the maritime as an actant and an analytic. *Celaje* models an erosive sensorium for the present, the sea offered once more as a chronotope for Puerto Rico.

A dream rests in the ambiguous position between the past as remembered experience and the premonition of what is to come, between the hope inherent in the wish and the fear in the form of nightmarish apocalyptic vision. Which kind of dream is this? To have dreamt and to dream of the sea swallowing cement condenses in a metonymy of elementals both a dissent from the promise of infrastructural progress and the insistence on the maritime as a method for rearticulating the experiential, fabulatory, and communal possibilities of the Puerto Rican subject in the expropriated

precarity of a present. *Celaje* is a dream of disintegration eroding the old imported dream of the permanence of a forever colony. We weigh heavily with the burden of this grand colonial dream, which seeps into our private dreams of liberation from history. And so, the film diglutes the scraps of personal and collective recollection—a grandmother's death, the effects of infrastructural collapse on the material of film, the waves gnawing at what's left of the habitable land, stillborn projects of progress abandoned to rot among organic matter—in order to reanimate the remainder unsubsumed by the architects of the failed State. The film, visibly marked by its irreducible place in the tropics, susceptible to rot and rust, locates Puerto Rico within its own eroding foundations: "Aquí nada dura para siempre," she notes halfway through the film, "El trópico se devora las ruinas del progreso. Con el tiempo, se borra el rastro de las cosas." (22:55, Figure D).

Gallisá Muriente herself describes the forty-minute film as "oscillation between chronicle, dream, and document." *Oscillation* is a key term here, reminiscent of the tidalectic itinerance among histories, geographical spaces, and subjectivities I have insisted on as a practice of aesthetic making and critique over the course of this project. Materially, the film weaves together 16mm and Super8 footage—some filmed with expired and hand-developed filmstock that began to rot after Hurricane María decimated the electrical grid in Puerto Rico—with found 1/4 inch sound tapes and home movies layered densely over each other, again recapitulating the braided dance between sedimentation and erosion, what vanishes in time and what congeals and takes shape in its wake, which I have tracked in my study as a signature of the Puerto Rican sensory archive responding to its own historical, material, and epistemic condition. This descriptive triangulation among genres already foregrounds a sustained critical reflection on the erosion of the film medium's indexical capacity as a capturer of memory, truth, and evidence for posterity. It therefore urges us to consider, in the context of the wave in time—what shape can memory, memorialization, and monumentality take when and if they are to respond to subjects and forms of inhabiting the world whose conditions of emergence are bound up with their wasting away? How, then, do we tell and re-member this time?

What is visible, documented, and inscribed in *Celaje*'s various reproductive media always edges on the dream-image; technology records the hard facts of family deaths, hurricanes, earthquakes, personal and collective histories of political dissent, and the geology of the Greater Antilles, and yet what emerges through the film's poetics is hardly the fact. Rather, soft and porous blurs ("celajes," like the shifting figures transiently discernible in cloudscapes) liberate the indexicality of the image by formally thematizing the disintegration of individual objects of representation within the temporal and spatial warpings of a colonial world. The result is a densely textured moving image that negates neat schematizations of times, histories, and symbolic registers and which in turn troubles the given binarizations between emergence and collapse, organic and technological, as well as between film's materiality and its captured objects (Figure E). This release from indexicality foregrounds *Celaje*'s tactic of fabulation: fabulations and concomitant subjects emerge from a reshuffling of what's left of the colonial project—its refuse, its signs, its infrastructures both symbolic and material. This is a film about remaining with what remains, about attending to the erosion of the habitable place by inhabiting, as sensing witness, the disintegration into its next shape in time.

The matter at stake is the time of a place. How, then, do we continue to tell our time, this particular time, to recount the running out of place, the running out of people? As I have sought to argue in this project, the repertory of sensibilities articulated in my archive of Puerto Rican subjectivity is linked by an avowal of erosion as its chronotope. The erosive, as a gesture, an affect, and an epistemic model is a response and a supplement to the unbroken chain of historical unfolding and its coherent, legible subjects. The signature vagrant and transient voices, practices, and subjectivities I've tracked here exemplify a possible way of telling the time of people whose

place has been at the mercy of History's expropriating agents. In the subject of erosion, the weight of history is not simply spirited away. Rather, the sea swallows the cement in a dream of fugue from the colony's mandate of permanence and fixity. In this dream, a position emerges which refuses the chronophobia of the state to become open to an oceanic timeliness. Puerto Rican time as an oceanic time. Such a subject becomes sensible to the imprint of what Ángela María Dávila, with whom this project started as a guide, names as *lo que pasa* ("what is passing"): a descriptor for the relentless motion of events dovetailed with a form of registering and feeling the textures of a colonial experience which does not undermine the refusals and revolts because of their partial, discontinuous, and opaque relation the organizing logic of a nation that was or a nation to come. The archive of the wave in time is punctuated by a pursuit of new ways of telling *lo que pasa*, suggesting that this telling is coextensive with a practice of location: we locate ourselves and our "we" in spite of infrastructure's failure. That to tell the tale, vivir del cuento, makes lo que pasa matter, not as record or as historical stasis, but as a dynamic becoming sensible that in turn makes available a toolkit: elements of a practice of life that recognizes that to tell lo que pasa is to figure out a form, ever-shifting, of being in this place. Ocean water—its itinerance, its tidal flows, its opacity as matter and as spiritual-symbolic weight—has emerged here as a model and mediator for activating the past and for strategizing the present.

Sofía Gallisá Muriente's *Celaje* models for us such a form of telling *lo que pasa* while remaining appositional to history's mandates for the coherent record and index. Its strategic blurring of times through the materiality of Super8 film—the film stock of a grandmother's private home movies and also the film stock documenting the decimated landscape of a post-PROMESA and post-María present—as well as through the deployal of montage sequences that highlight the structural and aesthetic continuities of extraction such as those among the sugar mill, the oil refinery, and the electrical plant, activate cross-temporal and cross-spatial affinities that in turn offer a navigational toolkit for the present (Figures F, G, H). A pedagogy of water emerges as these moving images, dispatches from the oldest colony, argue for a living memory which might aid us in a new becoming. Ocean water, itself a living memory of land and bodies disintegrated and the potential of land and body to come, grants a figure to this mode of registering time and pursuing a location for a Puerto Rican sensing subject. Her cinematic tactic echoes Jamaica Kincaid's proclamation about time in the "small place" quoted earlier, in my second chapter. Thinking from neighboring Antigua, she reminds us that to tell time in a small place—a descriptor that is less an indicator of physical dimension and more a proposition for an autochthonous sensibility towards space and history—demands "a reconsideration, an adjustment, in the way [we] understand the existence of Time. To the people in a small place, the division of Time into the Past, the Present, and the Future does not exist." (Kincaid 54).

This position and this practice of telling, which does not seek to redeem the past but rather suggest the implication of our time with the time of vanishing land and the lapping waves, unsynthesizable in the endless dance between sedimentation and erosion, is perhaps a salvageable tactic for imagining—for dreaming—whatever could come when water swallows the concrete slab. In a touching sequence of formal resonance and imbrication among water, land, and body, the camera frames a body floating on the beach in the foreground, while in the background, from left to right, the open horizon transforms into the gradual slope of the jagged cliffs of coastal Puerto Rico (Figure I). A striking symmetry emerges between the outline of the floating body—suspended ambiguously in water between the motion of life and the stillness of death—and the landmass in the background. The body, segmented by the ocean, becomes the archipelago. The voiceover eulogizes the artist's late father: "Sueño que sus cenizas se convierten en islas" (36:55). Erosion, then, is recast here not as a doomed and passive attending to a terminal stasis, but as a generative recombination of matter towards new sensibilities, ashes dispersed and composted towards the potential islands,

vantages for a new, emergent practice of telling time and locating place. The disintegrating forms—embodied histories of the dead, the detritus of collapse, and even the failures of the colony's logics of arrest traceable in the gutted architecture of empire—are implicated in the new becomings as transformed units for the unrealized *islas*.

Sofía Gallisá Muriente's poetry in constellated moving images performs a new telling of our time that exemplifies erosion as a mutual implication of aesthetic inquiry and critical methodology for the transience of a disintegrating world—the decaying world of the colony as a viable place. Though her practice engages with the medium of film and not the literary forms I have attended to thus far, she participates in the expansion and continuation of the archive of erosive sensibilities emerging from the problem with foundation that begins with Hostos. Her development of erosive aesthetics within another medium—notably a medium such as film, so deeply implicated in the will to record and capture the *now* as it becomes the *past* in reproduction—demonstrates that the vocabulary of erosion moves through forms and across historical materials as a gesture, a laboratory for new subjects that depart from their interpellation as subjects of empire, subjects of the nation, or as subjects of debt. *Celaje* concretizes a sensorium for the subjectivity of the ocean wave.

I have offered *Waves in Time* with the same openness and porosity I have argued for as a critical mode: not as a manifesto for a politics of the future, but as a fleshing out of a sensibility with which other practitioners and theoreticians of the sensible may develop vectors for inhabiting what remains, in the Caribbean and beyond. The problem of place weighs heavily on the ethical and critical discourses of the present, as land relentlessly transforms, through extractivist logics of territory, into dreams of infinite extraction without remainder. A multiplicity of *we's* are running out of place, and we are running out of time. What are the seas to swallow those other cements? With this project, I have sought to show how one place and its sedimented times can reshape our fielding of possible forms of occupying space. It is an invitation to continue to think the world, the body, and the *we* from the smallness of a small place which grates against the dream of the monumental and the enduring, insisting on imagining the world from the rock at the mercy of the tidal motion. My hope is that, as these reflections continue to take on a new life in the archives and sensibilities of potential interlocutors, my reading practice may continually foreground new vocabularies that grate against fixity, a fixity which is always sustained and protected through symbolic and material infrastructures that foreclose, segment, and border. My thinking is happily partial in relation to this vision of a commons.

For now, and in a reversal of the long history of the Caribbean as a laboratory for technologies of domination, expropriation, and control, with Puerto Rico as a shifting vantage point from which to think the ongoingness of this problem in the present, I think as water makes its way inland, shifting subtly the points of contact between body and shore, and I listen for a vocabulary that might veer our thought towards emergent possibility, for a wave in time, even in the midst of unsounded agonies, "aún en medio de la agonía."



Figure A, from *Celaje* (2020): 33:00



Figure B, from *Celaje* (2020): 34:30



Figure C, from *Celaje* (2020): 35:13



Figure D, from *Celaje* (2020): 22:55

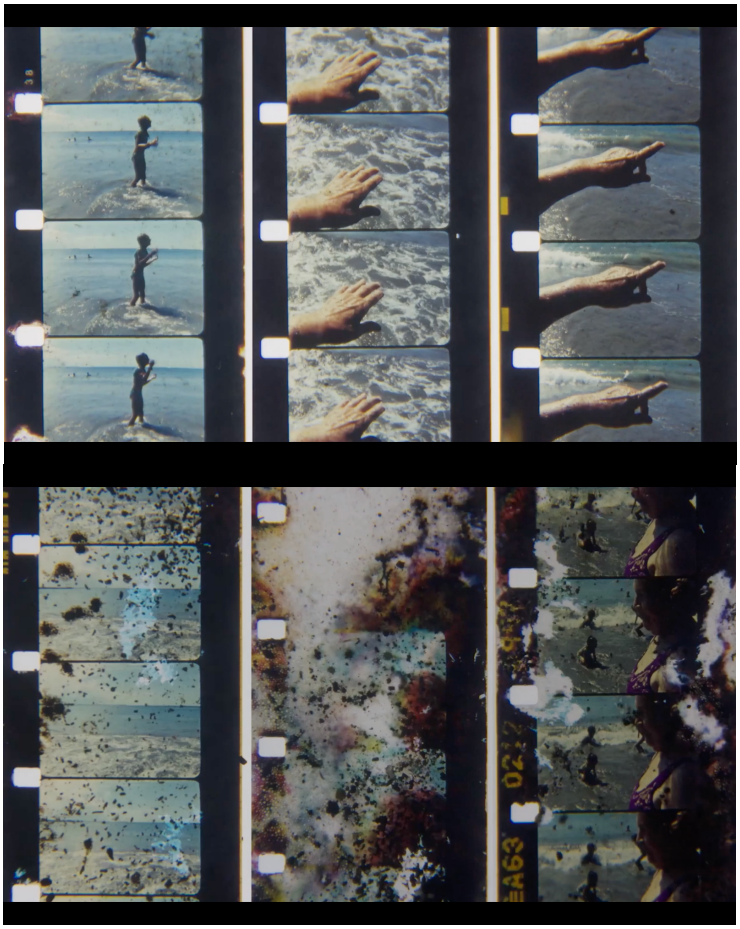


Figure E, from *Celaje* (2020): 14:17-14:28



Figure F, from *Celaje* (2020) 24:47



Figure G, from *Celaje* (2020): 25:11



Figure H, from *Celaje* (2020): 25:30



Figure I, from *Celaje* (2020): 36:46

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