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Capitalist Thresholds: *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and the Mapmaking of Modern Mexico

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I argue that Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) delineates a theory of Mexico's long transition to capitalism. I demonstrate that Fuentes' novel makes sense of the world as it continually separates the external from the internal, the realm of the social from the realm of the individual, and popular from bourgeois interests. While literary scholarship has often interpreted Artemio Cruz as an emblem of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, I propose to approach the novel's main character as a personification of capital, a representative of a definite social class, whose life provides a narrative enclosure of Mexico's peripheral modernization. Throughout the essay, I focus on separation as a spatial code that accounts for the emergence of a new class formation in Mexico in the 1940s and 50s. I argue that in its spatial integrations, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* formalizes the obstacles presented by economic dependency to the expansion of a national bourgeois order.

KEYWORDS

Carlos Fuentes; *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*; transition; Mexico; modernization; dependent capitalism

"um bom romance é de fato um acontecimento para a teoria."

Roberto Schwarz, "Pressupostos, salvo engano, de 'Dialética da malandragem'"

In an early scene in Carlos Fuentes' 1962 landmark novel, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*MAC*), we find the eponymous main character, the bastard-cum-capitalist whose life runs parallel to the rise of industrial capitalism in Mexico, negotiating a concession to exploit some sulfur deposits hidden in the Mexican southern forest with a group of US investors. A dispassionate Cruz listens while two businessmen, an engineer, and a geologist, patronizingly explain to him the Frasch process for mining deep-lying sulfur. Spread across Cruz's desk is a map, showing a "mancha verde punteada de triángulos que indicaban los hallazgos del geólogo" (24).[1] To persuade the Mexican mogul to intercede in their favor, the investors offer to let Cruz enjoy the profits derived from the adjacent logging of cedar and mahogany forests. The most striking aspect of the back-and-forth, however, is Cruz's conscious resistance to being overrun by his US counterparts. After a member of the negotiating team discloses that "la zona era tan rica que podía explotarse al máximo hasta bien entrado el siglo XXI" (24), Cruz zealously replies: "podían explotar el azufre hasta bien entrado el siglo XXI,

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pero que no lo iban a explotar a él ni un solo minuto del siglo XX" (25). Cruz's obduracy forces the investors to acquiesce to his every provision. The negotiation ends with Cruz leveraging his position as a front man into a two-million-dollar broker fee.

The scene, set in 1941, is informing for several reasons. First, the extractivist rationale behind the joint venture is faithful to the export-oriented commodity boom of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that assigned Latin America its primary role as a supplier of raw materials and foodstuffs in the international division of labor. However, a substantive change has taken place: the spatial perspective of the novel has shifted away from the production enclave and toward the metropolitan city. From an office building in downtown Mexico City the boundaries of the tropical rainforest are being redrawn according to the spatial logic of commodity production and modern private property. While earlier Latin American novels linked "the overweening and oppressive force of nature … to a world outside the jungle that can be grasped only by way of the ghostly stirrings of monetary exchange" (Beckman, *Capital* 167), in *MAC* this relation has become mediated by the city and a new dominant class: the national bourgeoisie. The emergence of a national bourgeois order forces the spatial focus of the novel away from the production enclave—the jungle, as in José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924); the pampa, as in Ricardo Güiraldes' *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926); and the llano, as in Rómulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929)—to the city. The *agrimensores* (surveyors) that by the end of Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949) descended into the plain are hereby summoned to the city by the rising song of the national bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, the event that elicits the happy reunion between the bourgeois king, monopoly capital, and technological savvy in the corridors of the Mexican metropolis is still the incorporation of soil into capital and the separation of an increasing number of people from direct access to their means of subsistence. This historical process will remain the backdrop to Artemio Cruz's social ascent and, as such, will continue to manifest at every definitive instance in his life, leading to his apotheosis. Cruz's life emblematically collates the "deferral" of the revolutionary promise of land redistribution (70), the extermination of indigenous populations and the violent suppression of organized labor (81), the systematic theft of communal lands (190), the spoliation of the church's property (43), the usurpation of arable lands (54), the enforcement of modern private property and the separation of domestic from productive spaces (115), the confiscation of empty lots (138), and so on. Together, these processes fulfilled the necessary conditions for capitalist relations of production to take hold of the Mexican economy, they, in Marx's words, "incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians" (*Capital vol. 1* 895). Thus, Cruz's negotiation with the group of US investors becomes an instance where the temporalities of originary accumulation, bourgeois development, and structural dependency are brought together in a way that specifies the peripheral character of Mexico's capitalist modernization.

The synchronicity at play illuminates, from a Mexican perspective, debates in Latin American social theory of the 1960s and 70 s around the capitalist or pre-capitalist (feudal or otherwise) character of the region (see Stavenhagen, Vitale, Frank, and Laclau). These debates ultimately led to the formulation of a full-fledged political

economy of dependency in the 1970s. As will soon become apparent, Fuentes himself championed a specific periodization of Mexico's transition to capitalism, but perhaps most significant for the purposes of this essay is the way in which the historical depth of *MAC* contributes to clarify for the Mexican case another key concern of Latin American social theory of the 60 s, namely the process of differentiation of social classes and the economic prospects tied to the historical consolidation of a national bourgeoisie. The contradictory development of the Mexican bourgeois class, from its commercial footings to its national replenishment to, finally, its structural terminations, is the process that Artemio Cruz's life pulls together in figuratively unprecedented ways.

I argue that, in its spatial integrations, *MAC* illuminates a particular conjuncture in Mexican history determined by three converging milestones: the culmination of Mexico's long transition to capitalism, the epochal transformation of Mexico's national bourgeois class from a progressive into a reactionary force, and the exhaustion of Mexico's project of autonomous industrialization. Artemio Cruz, whose last name is highly charged with sundry resonances, exists as a figure that inhabits these multiple crossings. Through a continued process of transgression, disavowal, and recomposition of boundaries (social, historical, geographical), Artemio Cruz's life plots Mexico's capitalist development throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Cruz's ability to both demarcate limits and move across thresholds carries the historical dynamic of Mexico's peripheral modernization into the order of form.

Theorizing transition

Considered the pinnacle of Fuentes' first period as a writer, *MAC* has been commonly read as a literary indictment of the Mexican state as seen from the vantage point of the revolutionary triumph in Cuba.[2] The novel has garnered critical attention for its "translation of a modernist aesthetic to a Mexican context" (van Delden 51). Its well-known triadic structure—a recurring string of segments narrated in the first, second, and third person, and in the present, future, and past tense respectively—has produced a large collection of literary scholarship interested in specifying the relation between Fuentes' modernist enthusiasm and Mexico's serpentine political development in the postrevolutionary period. At the center of many debates inspired by *MAC* lies one of the novel's best-known features, the formal and thematic tension between unity and fragmentation. While the outcome of this tension varies in different readings of the novel, it has been well established that the opposition serves as a marker for the struggle over the concept of the nation, Artemio Cruz himself "an agonizing revolutionary who stands as a symbol of both the revolution and the Mexican nation reborn in its aftermath" (García-Caro 87). Therefore, *MAC* has often been presented as a portraiture of national dissolution, a cautionary tale of interruption, caesura, and abrogation. Maarten van Delden observes that "The hero's psychological disintegration … and his physical dismemberment … point to the disintegration and mutilation of the nation as a whole" (153). In a different context, Carol Clark D'Lugo suggests that, in *MAC*, "the emphasis is on fragmentation at almost every conceivable

level: among characters, among social classes, in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, in the city, in the nation, and within the text's discourse" (105). Pedro García-Caro elevates fragmentation to a literary end in itself when he argues that "[t]he novel itself is not just a collection of fragments, but a novel *about* fragmentation" (97). Regardless of where the interpretive stress is put, the novel is upheld as the literary equivalent of national attrition, and its main character as the emblem of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution.

But the valence of such interpretation does not becloud the fact that *MAC* too functions as a form of mapmaking (Tally Jr. 43). The novel's cartographic fortitude continually encumbers its reading as an archive of termination. In his delirious agony Artemio Cruz adjures: "Seleccionas, construyes, haces, preservas, continúas: nada más" (165). The aphorism speaks to one of the novel's formal foundations: it diagrams the variance between the old and the new, charts social integration through a vast repertoire of spatial associations. From this standpoint, the symbolic outcome of the novel is less a parable of mortality than a model of history, a metaphor of continuation, a theory of transition. In *MAC*, as in Goethe's *Faust*, "the subject and object of transformation is not merely the hero, but the whole world" (Berman 39). Ryan F. Long has argued that, from the 1960s onward, the Mexican novel discloses "the violent foundations of the integrative operations that grounded the authority of both state and novel" (2). The observation condenses the generalized discomfort with integration, order, composition, abstraction, and hierarchization that has modeled *MAC* into an illustration of the untold inconveniencies of political structuration. While this reading has persuasively specified many of the insufficiencies of Mexican developmentalism,[3] it has largely obscured the formal conjugations offered by the novel to think through the question of transition in a context of national dependency. It is my contention that, in its portrayal of "the ideological decay of the bourgeoisie" (Lukács 114), *MAC* magnifies the generative articulations of form to display the end of the class alliance that cemented Mexico's import substitution industrialization throughout the 1940s and 50 s. Against the "habitual political equation of freedom with formlessness" (Kornbluh 81), I argue that *MAC*'s political originality lies, for better or worse, in its affirmation of limits. Defining the boundaries between individual contingency and historical necessity the novel sets forth a powerful reflection on the contradictory character of Mexico's dependent capitalism.

Transitions forgather in *MAC*. From revolution to modern statehood, from an agrarian to an industrial social order, from debt peonage to wage labor, Artemio Cruz's life provides a narrative enclosure of Mexico's peripheral modernization. The novel's distinctive counterpoint of historical necessity and individual life captures the generative perspective opened by the consolidation of a national bourgeois order, as well as the deterioration of the latter in the face of a new international division of labor and the exacerbation of the contradictions inherent in dependent industrialization. Fuentes' own characterization of the Mexican bourgeoisie as a progressive force is telling of the period's conflicting exceptionality. In reference to his first novel, *La región más transparente* (1958), Fuentes once commented:

> *Es necesario consagrar históricamente, acaso pese a ella misma, a la burguesía mexicana*. … una clase que carece de autonomía internacional: *se trata de la burguesía de un país*

> *semicolonial*, cuyo pleno desarrollo es frenado por la burguesía imperialista. Por esto, pese a sus ambiciones tantas veces irresponsables y aun criminales, la burguesía mexicana representa una esperanza para la mayoría de los países latinoamericanos, encerrados aún dentro del marco histórico del feudalismo. (qtd. in Carballo 620)

Fuentes' eagerness to will the national bourgeoisie into being is symptomatic of what Antonio Candido considered the consciousness of underdevelopment in Latin American literature, "the phase of catastrophic consciousness of backwardness, corresponding to the notion of 'underdeveloped country'" (121). In the case of *MAC*, a certain tendency to confound the history of the nation with the history of capitalism has favored a reading of Artemio Cruz as an emblem of the betrayal of the ideals of the Mexican Revolution rather than as the personification of a definite social class, confronted by its definite contradictions. Yet *MAC* rehearses and expands Fuentes' argument on the antinomies of the Mexican bourgeoisie; its plot and structure delineate the obstacles presented by economic dependency to the consolidation of a national bourgeois order in a manner that does not reject but rather underscores "the real relationship of the individual to the class and through this to the society as a whole" (Lukács 154), i.e. in a manner that seeks to confront the novel's main character with the objective determinations of social life.

Curtained hideouts

Born April 9, 1889, Artemio Cruz steps into this world amidst a storm propelled by the tides of modernity and the rise of industrial capitalism in Mexico. Enrique Semo has characterized this long process as "Una modernidad siempre en movimiento, llena de ambigüedades y de apariciones fugaces," a manifold transformation that, in a context of underdevelopment, "sucede en medio de un juego de espejos en el cual el hábito adquiere faz moderna y la modernidad se esconde en la tradición" (28). As an exemplary modern character, Artemio Cruz cannot help losing himself inside this game of mirrors, his self-image is continually recomposed by a set of distortions and defacements that makes it nearly impossible for him to determine whose reflection the world keeps throwing back at him. In an early scene of the novel, this logic begins to unfold as Cruz steps through a set of revolving glass doors:

> El automóvil se detuvo en la esquina de Isabel la Católica y el chofer le abrió la puerta y se quitó la gorra y él, en cambio, se colocó el fieltro, peinándose con los dedos los mechones de las sienes que le quedaron fuera del sombrero y esa corte de vendedores de billetes y limpiabotas y mujeres enrebozadas y niños con el labio superior embarrado de moco lo rodearon hasta que pasó las puertas giratorias y se ajustó la corbata frente al vidrio del vestíbulo y atrás, en el segundo vidrio, el que daba a la calle de Madero, un hombre idéntico a él, pero tan lejano se arreglaba el nudo de la corbata también, con los mismos dedos manchados de nicotina, el mismo traje cruzado, pero sin color, rodeado de los mendigos y dejaba caer la mano al mismo tiempo que él y luego le daba la espalda y caminaba hacia el centro de la calle, mientras él buscaba el ascensor, *desorientado por un instante*. (21–22; my emphasis)

While this passage has been regularly used to emphasize the motif of the double[4] and the role fragmentation plays in the novel, *MAC* resists the all-too-easy equivalence

between the exaltation of a subjective viewpoint and the refusal of structural determinations. Ericka Beckman notes that in this scene the aesthetic strategy of estrangement and doubling is given a "specifically peripheral inflection […] the mirrored images throw into relief, simultaneously, the contrast between gleaming opulence and poverty, *and* the unavoidable presence of the poor even in the most opulent barricades" ("Latin American Literature" 184). The *ineluctability* of such presence is what gives place to an ominous intuition: the mirror image of Cruz is not the one that glares in the reflection of the second glass panel, but, in fact, it is the lottery-ticket vendors, shoeshine boys, women in *rebozos*, and children who swarm outside the walls of the modern office building. Behind the appearance of a fragmented self, modernity's revolving door, lies the social relation that produces both Cruz *and* the immiserated masses: the separation of countless people from direct access to their means of subsistence. This form of separation is the concrete social process that allows Artemio Cruz to carve out a place for himself in the history of the nation, the process that generates the class-specific interests that will, by the end of his life, chain him to his bed, crushing him under the full weight of his historical circumstances.

Separation orders Cruz's life from birth to death, the *navaja* (pocketknife) that severs his umbilical cord upon his birth emblematically reappears in the form of the *bisturí* (scalpel) that slices open his stomach at the time of his death. Separation too emerges as the force that propels Cruz into the whirlwind of history, most notably in the closing segment that narrates his expulsion from Cocuya, the come-down-to-ruin hacienda where he grew up in the care of Lunero, his beloved uncle. This third-person segment, ripe with symbolism, discloses Cruz's origin story as a product of rape, the illegitimate offspring of Isabel Cruz and Atanasio Menchaca. Born in a *choza de negros* ("Negro shack") on the same day his father is murdered by an old brother-in-arms, Cruz ties together the racial, political, and economic violence at the base of Mexican modern history. Cocuya became a part of the Menchaca estate when Santa Anna gifted the land to his aide-de-camp, Ireneo Menchaca—father of Atanasio and Pedro Menchaca, husband to Ludivinia, and the quintessential figure of the pre-Porfirian hacendado. Cocuya comprises "las miles de hectáreas obsequiadas por el tirano gallero y rengo; apropiadas sin pedir permiso a los campesinos indígenas que debieron permanecer como peones o retirarse al pie de la montaña; cultivadas por el nuevo trabajo negro, barato, de las islas del Caribe; acrecentadas con el cobro de las hipotecas impuestas a todos los pequeños propietarios de la región" (292). Cocuya is the product of the usurpation of arable lands, debt peonage, slavery, and financial speculation. These are the building blocks of the crumbling paradise Cruz is expelled from after an *enganchador* (agent) threatens to remove Lunero from his shack.

Two aspects of this otherwise very significant passage are worth exploring in some detail. The first is the way that, in Cocuya, "habit acquires a modern façade and modernity becomes ensconced within tradition" (Semo 28). By 1903 the spatial order of Cocuya has been reduced to its most basic form: a windowless house and a shack. In this secluded microcosm the relations of production that dominated nineteenth-century Mexico subsist in a condensed form:

> Ahora, todo andaba cerca y en la hacienda angostada por los agiotistas y los enemigos políticos del antiguo amo muerto, sólo quedaban la casa sin vidrios y la choza de Lunero;

> y en aquella sólo suspiraba el recuerdo de los criados, mantenido por la flaca Baracoa que seguía cuidando a la abuela encerrada en el cuarto azul del fondo; en ésta sólo vivían Lunero y el niño y ellos eran los únicos trabajadores. (281)

The hacienda's deterioration runs parallel to the rise of liberalism in Mexico, Cocuya was set on fire "cuando pasaron por allí los liberales en la campaña final contra el Imperio, muerto ya Maximiliano, y encontraron a la familia que había prestado sus alcobas al mariscal jefe de las fuerzas francesas y sus bodegas a la tropa conservadora" (288). Thus, Cocuya's deterioration indexes the consolidation of capitalism as a dominant mode of production, even when, as Agustín Cueva has argued, "parece claro que en el desarrollo de nuestro capitalismo agrario existe una especie de unidad en la diversidad dada por el hecho de que este desarrollo ocurre—salvo en contados puntos de excepción—de acuerdo con una modalidad que lejos de abolir el latifundio tradicional lo conserva como eje de toda la evolución" (80). The incorporation of a set of social relations based on the latifundio into the modern configuration of Mexican capitalism is intimated in Cocuya in the same way that Cruz's origin is insinuated in the color of his eyes. The bastard son of Atanasio Menchaca smuggles the social order of the latifundio into the twentieth century; through Cruz's gaze the social relations of the hacienda will penetrate the most bulwarked corners of the Mexican bourgeoisie.

The second aspect worth noting is the simultaneous differentiation and combination of spaces at work in the hacienda. Lunero's shack is hidden behind "la nube pesada del convólvulo que Lunero plantó hace años para disimular los adobes pardos de las paredes y enredar la choza en esa fragancia nocturna de flores tubulares" (281). There is a striking parallelism between Lunero's effort to enshroud his shack, to secure its preservation as a *curtained* hideout, and Ludivinia's self-confinement behind closed doors: "encerrada en ese cuarto azul *con cortinas de encaje y candiles que tintineaban en la tormenta* y que jamás se enteraría del crecimiento del muchacho a unos cuantos metros de su locura sellada" (285; my emphasis). The tinkling of the chandeliers resonates with Lunero's candle-making as the lace curtains do with the convolvulus that swathes the shack's adobe walls. The spatial gap between the big house and the hut is bridged by the *india* or *flaca* Baracoa, who each week sells the candles made by Lunero to secure the means of subsistence for Ludivinia and her son, Pedro. Despite not having stepped inside the house in more than thirteen years Lunero's candle-making provides the material sustenance for Ludivinia's madness.

Life's fragile equilibrium depends on a double form of isolation, first, on Cocuya's isolation from the energies of capitalism, second, on the isolation between Lunero's shack and the *casa grande*, a spatial gap that upholds the landowner's fantasy of a self-sustaining world order—an order already belied by Lunero's commercial dealings. This spatial arrangement is preserved until the moment Ludivinia commits the sin of transgressing the boundaries of her confinement: "Dejó que saliera Baracoa y entonces *violó todas las reglas, apartó las cortinas* y frunció el rostro para avizorar lo que sucedía allá afuera" (291; my emphasis). The act of parting the curtains sets in motion a sequence that will end in Cocuya's final dissolution. The destabilization of the spatial order of the hacienda leads to the death of Pedro at the hands of Cruz, the humiliation of Ludivinia at the hands of the *enganchador*, and Cruz's final expulsion from his idyllic ménage. As he is forced to leave Cocuya Cruz becomes overwhelmed by

fury: "ira porque ahora sabía que la vida tenía enemigos y ya no era ese fluir ininterrumpido del río y el trabajo; ira *porque ahora descubría la separación*" (305; my emphasis). Torn apart from his mother at birth, Cruz once again falls prey to separation as he is forcefully removed from the land of his childhood. The ripple effect of this originary act of violence will come to define Cruz's life in its entirety; his rage will continue to gain momentum as every crossroads in his future will push him farther away from the wholeness evoked by the uninterrupted flow of both river *and* labor. Through this recursive act of separation Cruz will unwittingly carve out a place for himself within the Mexican social order. Alienating himself from the peasantry, the landowning class, the indigenous peoples, the church, the bureaucracy, etc. (the string of "betrayals" in his life), Cruz will eventually find himself standing in front of all other social classes and groups. The specific role Cruz will come to play—a role he will no longer be able to renounce—is that of the national bourgeois.

The prodigal use of space

Considering the spatial dynamic revealed in Cocuya, the sequences that, throughout the novel, enact separation can be reread as a spatial genealogy of the formation of a national bourgeois order. Separation is recast as the master code that defines the novel's spatial logic. In Henri Lefebvre's classic formulation, "a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and producing it" (47–48). Throughout the novel, separation diagrams the boundaries of Cruz's world, it creates spatial patterns that bespeak the motions of sociality. *MAC* produces the world anew as it continually separates the external from the internal, the realm of the social from the realm of the individual, and popular from class-specific interests. The spatial dyad of inside and outside produces an order to which there is no excess, no possible affirmation of social relations beyond its limits, thus separation intimates totality in a way specific to the development of modern private property.

As he grows older, Cruz will gradually lose the ability to move at will across the threshold that separates enclosed from open spaces. In Cocuya, the heavy cloud of the convolvulus that enveloped Lunero's shack served as a thin veil that Cruz could traverse at will. Thus, the evocation of the convolvulus, a meaningful leitmotif of the narrative, serves not only as a marker of Cruz's nostalgia for his lost childhood, but, notably, for the loss of his ability to move freely between interior and exterior, a continuum that mirrors the uninterrupted flow of the river where he and Lunero used to bathe. In Cocuya the smooth transition from inside to outside is barely disturbed by the presence of the convolvulus. Such smoothness will rapidly deteriorate as Cruz continues to consolidate his place atop the Mexican social order. By the time he finds himself lying on his deathbed, Cruz will no longer be able to even part the curtain to glance at the world he leaves behind him, let alone move beyond the limits of his confinement.

Forever gone are the early days of the Revolution, associated in Cruz's memory with the figure of Regina. In the opening lines of the segment dated December 4, 1913, Regina is evoked as being "desnuda, de pie, joven y dura en su inmovilidad,

pero ondulante y suave en cuanto caminaba: a lavarse en secreto, *correr las cortinas*, abanicar el brasero" (64; my emphasis). Regina herself is a figure that mediates the spatial relation between inside and outside. Her undulating and soft movements link her to the endless flow of Cocuya's river. In the act of parting the curtains she allows the outside world to penetrate the couple's room, a gesture that will be repeatedly negated to Cruz during his final agony. In the most primitive ways, Regina's body is associated with nature: "ese cuerpo joven abrazado al suyo: pensó que la vida entera no bastaría para recorrerlo y descubrirlo, para explorar esa geografía suave, ondulante, de accidentes negros y rosados" (64). Despite the raffishness of the metaphor, it remains relevant that Regina is so profusely described in terms of landscape. Her body becomes a repository where nature and the ideals of the Revolution collapse onto each other. Thus, Regina's death not only operates as a marker of the defilement of the ideals of the revolutionary movement—an interpretation already available in the fact that Regina's relation with Cruz is a product of rape—but the subordination of nature to the logic of private property (Marx's incorporation of soil into capital). Cruz, who sees nothing but landscapes in Regina's body, will defile Regina's body by becoming a landowner: "Tierra. Tierra que puede traducirse en dinero" (140).

Moreover, Cruz's estrangement from the outside world mirrors Mexico's rapid reconfiguration during the 1940s and 50s, a period when the Mexican state "swapped revolutionary zeal for efficiency and pragmatism, and gave favor to industry, commerce, and foreign investment at the expense of ongoing social reform aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the nation's poor" (Alexander 5). The presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946–52) represents a threshold in Mexican history, it marks the transition toward an accelerated industrialization and urbanization that deeply altered Mexico's social landscape. In his *Viaje al centro de México* (1975), Fernando Benítez recalls: "hasta 1940 la ciudad mantuvo sus límites. Diez años después la creciente industrialización atrajo a millares de inmigrantes y el valle cubrió su rostro agrícola, surcado de canales, con una máscara industrial de humos y de esmog" (23). Mexico's deepening industrialization irreversibly moved the national landscape away from the spatial and temporal imaginaries of the Mexican Revolution. In reference to the construction of University City (1949–52), Carlos Monsiváis argued: "Si en el Centro el uso del tiempo (la tradición como amuleto) es concluyente, en Ciudad Universitaria, *a partir del uso pródigo del espacio*, se manifiesta otro diálogo entre la arquitectura y la ciudad" (417; my emphasis). The prodigal use of space that Monsiváis understands to be one of the key aspects of Mexican architecture during this period, evinces a new urban language that tends to displace the spatial vocabulary provided by the Novel of the Revolution.[5]

A dialectics of enclosure and openness

So far, two tendencies have confronted each other over the interpretive rights to Artemio Cruz's life. The first tendency has favored a reading of Cruz as the literary least common multiple of fortune, fate, and freedom, a "product of a series of chance events and personal choices, of historical circumstances and acts of his own volition, of successes and errors whose consequences he can no longer control" (Oviedo 872). A second interpretive perspective has tended to foreground the way the novel's

structure gives every episode in Cruz's life its rightful place as part of a whole. As Lanin A. Gyurko notes: "The formal design of the narrative, its rigid triadic progression, constitutes an attempt to impose narrative form upon the disorder of consciousness" ("Structure" 31). The process of subjecting the main character's past to a rigid, uniform structure, helps dissolve the fantasy of an elected individual path. Indeed, from this standpoint, a different outcome for any of the episodes in Cruz's life seems less than impossible, every act, every decision, a piece in what the novel constructs as a perfect puzzle.[6] The overarching structure that binds together Cruz's life inevitably conflicts with the novel's presentation of his individual choices. In both readings Artemio Cruz is made to stand in lieu of the nation, his life a literary resolution to the saga inaugurated by the Mexican Revolution. The critical, often generative apertures afforded by these readings notwithstanding, it seems plausible to assert that the novel's form instantiates a rather more fundamental question, one that is less national in its character than *systemic*, i.e. a question of "specific 'logics' of determination and relationality" (WReC 8). I argue that *MAC* formalizes such a fundamental question by engaging in a dialectics of enclosure and openness.[7]

The scene depicting the 1955 New Year's party, the sumptuous denouement to Cruz's rise, is the capstone of the historical transformation mapped by *MAC*. The Coyoacán mansion is the setting for the appearance of a definite national bourgeois consciousness.[8] In Coyoacán, the extravagant display of objects contrasts with the earthlike quality of the walls: "estos viejos muros, con sus dos siglos de cantera y tezontle" (253). The latter stand symbolically closer to the adobe walls of Lunero's shack than to the ornamental features that adorn the mansion's interiors. The spatial arrangement of the scene is relevant when incorporated into the novel's dialectic of enclosure and openness. In the immediately preceding segment, in a passage that emphasizes the life paths Cruz decided not to follow, the second-person narrative that voices Cruz's unconscious offers a synthesis of the novel's spatial logic: "tú quedarás fuera, con los que quedaron fuera" (247). The separation of the internal from the external is now expressed as the separation of insiders—the select few who have been invited to the New Year's party—from those who will forever remain outsiders, the myriad creatures that, bereft of everything to allow for the rise of the Mexican bourgeois class, have been banned from the lavish interiors of the Coyoacán mansion.

In her book-length study of *MAC* María Stoopen brightly emphasizes the unique contrast between the possession of objects and the main character's interactions with nature—all of Artemio Cruz's intimate encounters occurring in open spaces (56). The comparison is key to understand the spatial logic behind Cruz's gradual confinement. In their sensuous character the objects that decorate the interiors of the Coyoacán mansion—evocative of *modernismo*'s import catalogues (Beckman, *Capital* 42–79)—are a constant reminder that these are not objects alone, but commodities that have been removed from the sphere of circulation. By taking possession of these objects, Cruz succumbs to "the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities," namely that the commodity-form "is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx, *Capital vol. 1* 165). As the commodity-form subsumes all social relations under its guise, Cruz will continue to

grow apart from the world of nature, from the open spaces where he cultivated his most intimate memories (his personal interactions with Lunero, Regina, Gonzalo, etc.). Cruz's estrangement from the outside world is a *conditio sine qua non* for his consecration as a capitalist, for his final transformation into "capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will" (Marx, *Capital vol. 1* 254). This spatial sequence transforms the natural world of Cruz's childhood and the open landscapes of the revolutionary war into the closed spaces of his private, domestic life, leading to his final agony in a hospital bed.

Cruz's anxious stream of consciousness is a long ode to the world he has been estranged from:

> Yo y no sólo yo, otros hombres, podríamos buscar en la brisa el perfume de otra tierra, el aroma arrancado por el aire a otros mediodías: huelo, huelo: lejos de mí, lejos de este sudor frío, lejos de estos gases inflamados: *las obligué a abrir la ventana*: puedo respirar lo que guste, entretenerme escogiendo los olores que el viento trae: sí bosques otoñales, sí hojas quemadas, ah, sí, ciruelos maduros, sí sí trópicos podridos, sí salinas duras, piñas abiertas con un tajo de machete, tabaco tendido a la sombra, humo de locomotoras, olas del mar abierto, pinos cubiertos de nieve, ah metal y guano, cuántos sabores trae y lleva ese movimiento eterno: *no, no, no me dejarán vivir*: se sientan de nuevo, se levantan y caminan y vuelven a sentarse juntas, como si fueran una sola sombra, como si no pudieran pensar o actuar por separado, *se sientan de nuevo, al mismo tiempo, de espaldas a la ventana, para cerrarme el paso del aire, para sofocarme, para obligarme a cerrar los ojos y recordar cosas ya que no me dejan ver cosas, tocar cosas, oler cosas*. (59; my emphasis)

In the novel's present, the consecration of a new class, the new world order anticipated at some point in the novel by don Gamaliel, has finally beaten Cruz into immobility. Cruz's inability to change his situation, dramatized in his delirious agony, shows the actual degree in which he has become a personification of capital, a bearer of a definite social relation that now straps him to his bed with the force of a thousand suns. "Like all its forerunners," Marx established, "the capitalist production process proceeds under specific material conditions, which are however also the bearers of specific social relations which the individuals enter into in the process of reproducing their life. Those conditions, like these social relations, are on the one hand the presuppositions of the capitalist production process, on the other its results and creations; they are both produced and reproduced by it" (*Capital vol. 3* 957). Artemio Cruz is a presupposition and a result of Mexico's capitalist modernization. The limits to his every action are now determined by the same social relation that propelled him to the top of the Mexican pyramid in the first place. Only from the vantage point of the accumulation of capital does the rueful image of a dying old man that repents and reaches for the outside world gain historical significance. Cruz can no longer escape the laws of the motion of capital, and even if he could, the world he reaches out for no longer exists, behind the curtain only "fumes and smog" are to be found. Prey to the dialectics of enclosure and openness Cruz finds himself pinned down to his bed, his freedom now restricted to a backwards motion. As Gyurko explicates, "Deprived forever of a true future, Cruz must attempt to construct a future out of the mere shards of the past" (*Lifting* 49). Cruz's sentence is pronounced in one of the second-person segments: "hacia atrás, hacia atrás, en la nostalgia, podrás hacer tuyo cuanto desees:

no hacia adelante, hacia atrás" (63). The price Artemio Cruz pays to engage in nostalgia is the imminence of his own death, the cancelation of any sense of futurity.

That the contradictions of a national bourgeois class could be formalized in this way in the context of the Mexican 1960s illuminates the novel's transitional concatenations. The dissolution of the novel's tripartite structure into Cruz's stream of consciousness in the final scene of the novel vividly captures the closure of the transitional period mapped by the novel's formal integrations. The fusion of narrative voices renders Cruz's death as the rightful conclusion to Mexico's capitalist modernization: the final renouncement of the Mexican bourgeoisie of any national aspirations. By the end of the novel, class itself has become the social limit against which Artemio Cruz's life is degraded, the social relation that sets the absolute boundaries to his anamnesis. Taking up the question of Mexico's transition to capitalism *MAC* formalizes a peripheral blind alley, the cancelation of any revolutionary prospect derived from bourgeois political inclinations.

Notes

1. All quotes from Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962.
2. The novel, dedicated to Charles Wright Mills, was written, at least in part, in Cuba in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and is dated in Havana, 1960, and Mexico, 1961. See Fiddian 116; Schiller 102; García-Caro 89.
3. Following Marini (1994), I use the term developmentalism to refer to the ideology of the Latin American industrial bourgeoisie.
4. For an overview of the theme of the double see Ruisánchez, *Historias que regresan*, 2012.
5. Despite the controversies around the use of the term (see Rutherford and Olea Franco), the Novel of the Revolution remains the preeminent literary vehicle for the institutionalization of the social order that emerged from the Mexican Revolution. This corpus came to fruition at the same time Mexico was moving toward the industrial pattern of capital reproduction that undergirded the popular stance of the Mexican state in the 1930s and 40s. In this context, the uses and abuses of the Novel of the Revolution became entangled with the struggle over the centralization and corporatization of the Mexican state.
6. "Structure," notes Gyurko, "is all-important in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* … here the structure is visible on the surface, like a literary exoskeleton, at times even like a straightjacket over the narrative. Structure is not merely the vehicle for portraying Cruz's character, it is the character of the protagonist" ("Structure" 30). Gerald Martin clear-sightedly established that "[n]ever was a character more explicitly judged, and yet rarely was the evidence more obviously 'fixed'" (211-2). Jorge Volpi, analyzing Fuentes' style in reference to *Cambio de piel* (1967) notes that Fuentes "accede a una especie de totalitarismo narrativo: nada se deja al azar, el autor controla, sin tregua y hasta el final, las vidas de sus criaturas" (73).
7. I borrow the formulation of a dialectics of enclosure and openness from Hartoonian who, in a very different context, uses it to describe Mies van der Rohe's glass architecture (48).
8. In Fiddian's opinion, the scene depicting the 1955 New Year's Eve is "Fuentes's most pungent satire of the mental set of the Mexican bourgeoisie … This grotesque tableau, worthy of Hieronymus Bosch, portrays the collective greed, pettiness, vanity and mauvaise foi of those whom in another context the author deprecatingly calls 'los de arriba'" (108).

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