

“Special Period”-izing Cuba: Limits of the Past Perfect

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To speak of the present involves a certain inevitable untimeliness, since what passes for “now” is in fact the recent past. Cuba’s historical present can be defined or delimited by a pair of events that are felt to have structured it: the crisis of the 1990s; and the (now realized) event of Fidel Castro’s passing, itself a symbolic index of the island’s subsumption into the faltering cadences of global capitalism. In truth, Cuba was never entirely outside these capitalist temporalities, yet its persistence in a state-developmental framework has allowed it to be perceived as anachronistic. In Cuba, the contemporary is felt to be defined by the so-called Special Period, officially promoted as a hiatus in an otherwise unbroken trajectory towards socialism or, increasingly, seen as a post-socialist transitional interval which in any case has also outlived its moment. The Cuban present is marked, like all presents, by traces of the past, but also by an untimeliness caused by the persistence of processes thought to have run their course long ago.

After the Second World War, the primary competing growth models (Keynesian Fordism and socialist command economies) were based on expanding industrial production. These models began to decline by the

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1970s and had expired definitively by 1989. Formerly socialist countries in Eastern Europe went through a transitional period of extreme volatility in the 1990s but soon settled into more familiar (capitalist) patterns of alternating crises and bonanzas. Having completed the transition to capitalism, wistful memories of socialism began to coalesce into the broad cultural phenomenon of *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East). In Cuba, still nominally communist, such nostalgia is present as “largely parodic reflections” (Loss 2009), but is not a dominant note. Reina María Rodríguez’s essay “Nostalgia” (2012), for example, is less about longing for a (Soviet) past than a “structure of feeling ... dramatized around the destruction of psychic space” (50) and a present in which “nothing ever takes place in the present” (52). Contemporary Cuban literary production is characterized by varied attempts to escape from temporality, both to shake off the vestiges of a state teleology and to avoid immersion in the abstract homogeneity of contemporary capitalist time.

Cuba, as a result of its economic dependency on the Soviet Union, experienced its crisis of modernization as an abrupt and shocking material and ideological collapse. Before 1991, Cuba’s socialist future seemed achievable. Even if the island’s material culture lagged behind the glossy standards of the capitalist West, it had continued to improve incrementally, and living standards rose during the 1980s. Despite the island’s reliance on its Soviet partners and the internal ideological battle the government was already waging against the capitalist-like behavior of some of its state-run enterprises, Cubans’ lived experience was not too far out of step with the refrain, “*Cuba va, Cuba vencerá*” (Cuba is moving forward, Cuba will win). This relative prosperity made the cataclysm of the 1990s seem like a sudden apocalypse. The veil had been torn away and, as Rodríguez put it elsewhere, “the dome had fallen” (2000).

Cubans responded to this crisis in many ways. Some, during and after the 1994 *balseros* episode, chose the risky escape route of the Florida Straits. Others found innovative ways to cope with the scarcity of medicine and food. The island gritted its collective teeth and held on, and the economy eventually responded to emergency measures. Cuba emerged from the chrysalis of crisis not as a socialist butterfly, but as an economic chimera, “socialist” in its rhetoric and its command structure, but capitalist in its market-based reforms and entrepreneurial spirit.

Artists, under these changed circumstances, also became entrepreneurs, soliciting partnerships with foreign filmmakers and publishers. This resulted in a “mini-boom” of Cuban literature and film on the

international market, and sparked an acrimonious, if sporadic, debate among Cuban intellectuals, some of whom celebrated what they perceived as the innovation and effervescence permitted by the state's weakening ideological and aesthetic influence, while others decried commercially successful artists as third-rate hacks and sellouts.

Beyond this topical debate, however, the literature of the post-Soviet period is notable for its diversity and its critical stance. If the state responded to the failure of the modernizing project by performing a sleight of hand, dressing up market-based reform as socialism and portraying the crisis as a pause in the long march toward socialism, rather than its abandonment, literature has articulated a counterdiscourse that works against the state's efforts to appeal to its revolutionary history. Against this "perfect past" that legitimizes the state while sealing off revolutionary praxis in a safe, preterite space, contemporary literature reduces its horizons to Bertolt Brecht's "bad new days," while suddenly taking a postmodern and "affective" turn. This pivot towards affect represents both an aesthetic transition (which I will describe by working through Fredric Jameson's [2013] work on realism) and a political one, in which affect is similar to what Bruno Bosteels (2012) has described as "the trace of a subject through a process of fidelity to truth or to its betrayal" (97). In other words, for contemporary Cuban writers, being faithful to the revolution may sometimes involve turning one's back on it.

Cuban postmodernity arrived, not with a bang, but with an *apagón* (blackout). Perestroika turned into privatization, and the Soviet Union stopped propping up the island's economy. The consequences were devastating for both socialism and living standards. Margarita Mateo Palmer, in a 1995 work that blurs the line between academic criticism and other, more "literary," genres and which itself bears the imprint of the postmodern (pastiche), focused a spotlight on the fact that Cuban postmodernity was something different, something belated, that existed outside "normal" aesthetic temporalities and debates about the postmodern in the rest of Latin America and, most certainly, outside of European and North American models of postmodernity. This difference and distance has to do, at least in part, with Cuban conditions.

863.54 Kaplan, Ann: *Postmodernism and its*
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Evelyne Picón Garfield e Ivan Schulma: *Las entrañas del vado.*
Ensayos sobre la modernidad hispanoamericana.

México, 1984.

No HAY LUZ

Gianni Vattimo: *El fin de la modernidad.* Barcelona Gedisa, 1986.

NO APARECE

(Mateo Palmer 20–21)

These citations and others reproduced in *Ella escribía poscrítica* indicate a sense of having come late to the game (most date from the 1980s or earlier), of scarcity (the books are missing or unreadable because of the lack of electricity), and of an intellectual culture that remains subject to official controls and sanctions (not everyone has permission to access these books).

Notwithstanding the chronological peculiarities of Cuban postmodernism, the use of the term implies continuity with the postmodern in other national contexts. The scholarly debate about Latin American postmodernity can be understood as an extension of earlier debates about modernity in which the concept of unequal modernization (Ramos 2001) figured centrally. Scholars took care to distinguish a peripheral postmodernity from “hegemonic postmodernity” (Yúdice 1991). Many intellectuals took the view that a third-world, subaltern, and/or post-colonial variety of postmodernism was “the wedge whereby the older Eurocentric paradigm is broken up, and along with it the teleological master narrative of the modern” (Jameson 1993, 421). Others expressed skepticism about its emancipatory potential (Larsen 1990). Whatever postmodernism’s political valence may be said to be, its onset in Cuba coincided with what has come to be known as the Special Period, the signal event of contemporary, post-Soviet Cuba. The Cuban postmodern should be understood in the context of the cultural logic of the periphery, characterized by various counterhegemonic projects and anti-Eurocentrisms, yet should also be situated temporally alongside other former COMECON countries. Aleš Erjavec (2003), for example, has demonstrated the “strikingly similar features” that characterized visual artists’ work in late socialism or postsocialism, similarities that “arise from specific conditions of possibility, the framework conditioned by the

disintegration of various forms of socialism" (7). In other words, the collapse of socialism in some way made possible a generalized, if belated, postmodernism in Cuba and among other former members of the Soviet bloc.

This belatedness can be understood as a consequence of the Revolution. An incipient or prefigurative postmodernism can be detected in the pre-revolutionary writers associated with *Orígenes* and *Ciclón* (Hassan 2002), yet after 1960 it is present only in flashes, as in what Espinosa (2001) identifies as Anton Arrufat's "sickly postmodernism," in iconoclasts such as Reinaldo Arenas, or in expatriates such as Severo Sarduy. As Catherine Davies (2005) writes, "It is as if the Cuban social totality switched from one master narrative to another, from capitalist to a non-capitalist version of modernity, precisely when the West shifted toward the postmodern" (103–104). Santiago Colás (1994) points to the avant-garde elements present within Cuba's revolutionary theory (*foguismo*) and to the modernism implicit in dependency theory, a modernizing project parallel to the Cuban Revolution. As long as it was possible to imagine the future success of Cuba's developmental socialism, as indeed was still possible into the 1980s, there was no need to question the country's particular *grand récit*.

Fredric Jameson, in *Antinomies of Realism* (2013), begins to displace or modify his previous account of postmodernism, locating the disintegration of grand narratives as a latent tendency of realism itself, present since its origins. He maps the dissolution of the realist novel, which he describes as a symbiosis of narrative and scenic impulses (11). This tenuous alliance of the *récit* (storytelling) and scenic elaboration reaches its terminal crisis with the coetaneous emergence of modernism and mass-market fiction. This trajectory, which Jameson describes dramatically as "the end of realism" (19), modifies his earlier periodization of the postmodern. This "affective turn," which Jameson assimilates to his previous theorization of the "end of temporality" (2003), is characterized by the substitution of bodily states for emotions (*Antinomies* 32).

Jameson's account of realism's reorientation—away from the "story" (*récit*) and towards an affect or presentism—seems particularly compelling as a description of the general tenor of post-Soviet Cuban literature, much of which represents life as a perpetual post-apocalypse, in which the best that can be hoped for is survival. Given Cuba's continuities with other post-Soviet states' postmodern moments, this is as good a framework as any for describing the contours of contemporary

Cuban literature, yet some limitations must be acknowledged and some modifications made.

One important caveat with regard to Jameson's account of the "end of realism" is that, while he describes the displacement of the *récit*, or narrative impulse, by an "eternal present," he cannot avoid representing this displacement in narrative form, as a story with a beginning and an end. The danger for the reader (and perhaps for Jameson as well) is falling into an erroneous understanding of this trajectory as being wholly internal, as a teleological impulse somehow immanent to "realism" *qua* subject, rather than as realism's response to the evolution of *its* subject, namely "bourgeois" society (i.e. capitalism). Neither should we treat the impact of capitalist society on realism as uniform, any more than capitalist development is uniform. In fact, contemporary Cuban literature is a site in which a breach in the narrative may be glimpsed, and the apparent slide into "atemporality" or "presentism" may be seen, not as a capitulation, but as a contested process in which alter-temporalities are posited.

Likewise, Jameson's description of mass-market fiction as a kind of "commercial realism after realism" may not shed much light on Cuban literature. While Esther Whitfield (2008) has documented the impact of foreign markets and the "dollarization" of Cuba's economy on the form and content of the island's literary production, the effects she describes cannot be reduced to "commercialization" in the sense of works written *for* the market, in whatever way they are ultimately marketed. As Kaptcia and Kumaraswami write (2010), "economic matters, decisions and motives do come into play, but these simply are not prioritized as the cause and goal of sociocultural activities" (182; my translation). Indeed, if we posit the "social realist" novels of the late 1970s and 1980s as a statist version of mass-market or genre fiction, one could claim that the contemporary moment constitutes a momentary reversal, or break, in the trend towards "commercial realism." Likewise, there is still an insular quality to Cuba's literary establishment, and many works, despite their ostensible "universalism" or external orientation, contain insider references to local figures and polemics that are largely undetectable by a foreign reading public. None of this means that market logic plays no part in Cuban literary production, yet it is important to distinguish between a notional "market" as the putative motivation for creative work and the kind of market that exists as a structural reality in Cuba and indeed, historically, in Latin America more broadly.

Many parts of the world do not have (or, in the period identified with Modernism, did not yet have) developed literary markets. Post-crisis Cuba, with its limited publishing capability, still does not have a truly "mass" market of its own. Authors find foreign (mostly Spanish) publishers that have greater printing, distribution and promotional capacities than Cuban presses. This creates a geographically displaced market, one that depends on (and sometimes addresses itself to) an international public, and has given impetus to the idea of a postnational literature. This external mass market functions as an economic and cultural supplement, much as the diaspora community has always done by providing an outlet (for commodities, for dissent). Like the diaspora, the external literary market is an important interface for the inflow of money and ideas. Neither Cuba, nor Cuban literature, is entirely separable from this extra-territorial supplement. Both "nation" and "national culture" are characterized by a two-way dependency between the island and its diaspora. It may sound poststructural and passé to speak of exile and external markets as "supplements," but it describes what is in the first instance an economic dependency, not an ontological relation. This dependency on foreign publishers takes a classic form (packaged for a non-specialist audience in Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*) of an "underdeveloped" periphery which provides raw materials for markets located in the "developed" core.

The matter of "underdevelopment," once central to intellectual debates in the 1960s, reemerges in the post-Soviet Cuban context with new forms of dependency such as those that concern us here—namely, the increased economic importance of the diaspora and the "displaced" market for literature. In this context, the novelty of the postnational may be doubted and, indeed, understood as part of a recurring dynamic of dependency which at certain moments causes extraterritorial markets and cultural influences to rise to prominence. In fact, I prefer to bracket the postnational (and related concepts such as "globalization") as a not-particularly-useful category for understanding the present. A more rigorous understanding of the relationship of the national to the extranational is found in Étienne Balibar's "The Nation Form" (1991), an account of the nation-state as a necessary component or complement to the international system of hierarchical and competing sovereign nations. Here, too, the core-periphery binary plays an important role in determining the relationship among national identity formations. Broadly, national communities in "core" countries tend to exoticize and/or ethnicize

peripheral regions; it can be argued that an author such as Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, whose novels—most famously *Trilogía sucia de La Habana* (1998)—respond pointedly and specifically to the crisis conditions prevalent in 1990s Cuba, was marketed to a foreign audience by emphasizing the “tropical” sexual content of his novels, which were packaged as “dirty realism” by publishers in Spain, where *realismo sucio*, or dirty realism, was already a recognizable aesthetic trend. A similar argument can be made about the prevalence of ruins or slums as thematic elements in contemporary literature.

So, even as I attenuate or modify Jameson’s claims about mass-market fiction as one of two *teloi* for realism, I do wish to insist on the substance of his argument in *Antinomies of Realism*, namely that there has been a significant shift, in realism (the novel), from a narrative impulse to an affective one.

Attempts to periodize post-Soviet literature have focused on its generational aspects, positing a breach between *desencantados* (Fornet 2001), an older generation whose socialist ideals were tested or even destroyed by the Special Period, and a younger group of writers, the *novísimos* (Redonet 1993), who came of age in the crisis years and never knew the golden age of socialism. In the work of Leonardo Padura, the most well-known *desencantado*, there is a strong nostalgia for the early years of the Revolution, when it was still possible for the present generation to believe that they would be the ones to usher in the socialist future. Now that this future has been foreclosed, some of these writers choose to revisit the past.

Yet the writers of *desencanto* refuse to indulge the nostalgic impulse in a pro-Soviet or even a generically utopian mode. Jesús Díaz, in a semi-autobiographical work (*Las palabras perdidas* 1992), locates repressive, censorial tendencies among the very writers who believed themselves to be the aesthetic vanguard of the Revolution. Likewise, Padura (*Pasado perfecto* 1991) encounters corruption and graft behind the image of perfection presented by the best of the revolutionary youth, the ones who were to have become perfectly selfless “new men” of socialism in the image of Che Guevara. Abilio Estévez (*Tuyo es el reino* 1997) turns towards pre-revolutionary moments and a pastoral setting, but even here there is no solace, no Eden.

Among other authors, especially among the *novísimos*, there is no such nostalgic impulse, no desire to return to a past that is seen as contiguous with the bleak present. If affect is “the body’s present,” as Jameson

(2013) asserts in a chapter title (*Antinomies* 27), the literature of the crisis years betrayed a new concern for the body, its immediate needs, and its functions. The visceral and scatological "dirty realism" of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez focalizes not so much the consciousness of its characters, as their bodies. Eating, drinking, defecating, washing, and having sex occupy the whole of their quotidian existence. Gutiérrez takes the struggle to realize these basic physical activities amid penury and precarity, and sharpens it into hyperbole. Other authors (Lourdes de Armas 2007; Karla 1999) describe a physical economy in which the body's energy must be carefully monitored and exertion avoided.

Nanne Timmer (2006) notes that the *novísimos* share "an interest in the marginal, the eschatological, and the body" (191) and highlights *their* thematization of subjectivity. Yet theirs is a curious subjectivity, one notable for its apparent solipsism (what Timmer describes as a "shift from the collective to the personal") or even its self-negation. In this regard, Ena Lucía's novel *El pájaro: pincel y tinta china* (1998) is an interesting case study. In this work, the putative narrator (or structuring subject) is an absent character, group identities (especially literary and academic cliques) are actively rejected and, in a pattern followed throughout the novel, subjective interiority is deflected by references to other works. "Dispersos por la sala, observaban fascinados, tal vez a la manera de los increíbles lectores de *Finnegan's Wake*" (Scattered about the room, they watched, fascinated, perhaps like the incredible readers of *Finnigan's Wake*) (29). This shift away from emotion and monadic subjectivity accords with the pattern described by Jameson, yet is also suggestive in another sense. The characters' inner lives, as imagined by a male narrator, are displaced by allusions to an extratextual, *readerly* subjectivity, which, elsewhere in the novel, is interpellated as female. This reorientation, away from male authorship/authority and toward an active, female, meaning-making subjectivity, aligns with other contemporary developments.

Questioning or simply rejecting the Guevarian concept of the "new man" is a common theme in contemporary literature, and there is a parallel critique of the "new woman," who stands for official feminism in Cuba, which has long been placed under the umbrella of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC). With its close relationship to the state (its founder and president was Vilma Espín Castro, the late spouse of current president Raúl Castro), the FMC provided little autonomous space for women to organize and it promoted a labor-centric version of feminism.

This tight bond between the FMC and the patriarchal state has had political implications. The FMC's status as a feminist organization was never entirely clear. Even though the organization's stated goals were to contribute to equal rights and opportunities for women, its relationship to feminism was somewhat strained because of the political framework of the revolution. Catherine Davies (2000) indicates that "socialists considered feminism a white, middle-class phenomenon which had no role to play in Cuba" (119). In other words, women's issues tended to recede before problems such as class conflict, national underdevelopment and imperialism. As Maria Mies (1986) notes in her landmark study of patriarchy and capitalism, "an anti-patriarchal struggle ... was prevented by the Marxist-Leninist parties which led the liberation wars, because all contradictions among the people, including the man-woman contradiction, were subordinated to the main contradiction between the nation and the imperialist power" (198).

The Revolution more than doubled women's access to waged work, but still only succeeded in employing about a third of women by 1990 (Safa, cited in Pearson 1997, 677). The Family Code of 1975 required men to do their share of household labor and child care, and guaranteed participation in the workforce and education as being fundamental women's rights. These advances were important, but not universal, and remaining inequalities worsened during the crisis years.

Ruth Pearson notes that a decline in living standards, such as the one that accompanied Cuba's Special Period, usually means an expansion of unwaged reproductive labor (1997, 673). This means that the burden of subsistence—"solving" and "inventing" (*resolver* and *inventar* in Cuba's crisis lexicon)—fell largely upon women, who have had to redouble their labors both inside and outside the home. This increased workload has led to a decrease in participation in popular organizations such as CDRs (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution) and the FMC (700).

Conversely and paradoxically, the reinforcement of this gendered division of labor has given women greater autonomy. As the status of legal marriage declines and women have been forced to assume more responsibility for both the economic survival and maintenance of the household, the percentage of female-headed households has increased significantly (Safa 2005, 332–333). Matrifocality is traditionally associated with Afro-Cuban households, but the post-Soviet period has seen a reduction of racial differences in family structure (Pertierra 2008; Safa 2005).

This shift to female-led households is illustrated by Lourdes de Armas' *Marx y mis maridos* (2010), in which the protagonist narrates her own biography as a series of heterosexual partnerships with men of diverse ideological stripes. As the crisis of the 1990s intensifies, she becomes increasingly independent of these men until meeting her last partner, who, unlike the others, exercises little or no social or economic power over her. The novel contains epigraphs by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, which together highlight the possibility of an end to patriarchal and proprietary family relations, a prerequisite for the equal status of women. That these predictions are being realized, not as a consequence of industrialization and socialism, but rather in a period of deindustrialization and the dismantling of the welfare state, is one of present-day Cuba's historical ironies, as is the remarkable increase in published women novelists.

In 1984, Luisa Campuzano gave her landmark "Ponencia sobre una carencia" (Talk about a Lack) (Campuzano 1988) in which she denounced the scandalous, near-total absence of women in Cuba's narrative fiction, especially the novel. Yet by 1993, numerous women were emerging as the island's most important literary voices. Elzbieta Sklodowska (2013) offers the most compelling explanation for this turnabout: as women shouldered a greater *material* burden, they also took on more responsibility for Cubans' *spiritual* well-being (101). As employed by Sklodowska, "spiritual" refers to cultural and intellectual work; women's literary production can thus be considered a form of affective labor in so far as it attempts to make sense of the shared experience of material and ideological exhaustion that pervades the post-Soviet era, thereby rebuilding "communities and collective subjectivities" (Hardt 1999, 89).

Several of these contemporary writers themselves take up the question of women's autonomy. Portela, in *Cien botellas en una pared* (2002), adopts and parodies the "dirty realist" aesthetic to bring the physical spaces of Havana into a much sharper focus than in her first novel (*El pájaro*), published in 1998. We see Jameson's scenic impulse at work here in *Cien botellas*, which revolves around the relationship of a woman (known only as 'Z' or Zeta) with an abusive, controlling man. Zeta regains her independence when the man falls (or is pushed) out of a window and dies. She constantly downplays her own intelligence, preferring to present herself as a highly sexualized individual. A friend makes frequent references to Zeta's inferior intellect. Yet we know from

her biography that Zeta grew up among intellectuals and artists. She attended the *Pre* (pre-university school), which placed her among the top students in her age cohort (less qualified students in Cuba receive technical or vocational training), and she graduated from university. We know she is a writer, though she barely mentions this fact. She betrays herself in the footnotes, the “noticas de Zeta”, which contain glosses of Latin phrases employed throughout the novel. Zeta’s erasure of her own erudition is in line with the post-Soviet period’s devaluation of professional careers, which simply are not remunerative enough to keep up with commodity price inflation. She survives, not by using her university degree, which she describes as useless, but by repairing automobiles.

Women gain a degree of autonomy just as there is no longer any “productive” labor for them to underwrite with their “reproductive” or domestic labor. This new autonomy affords them little benefit, however, because, like Zeta, economic conditions prevent them from self-actualizing. Instead, they are underutilized.

In this scenario, women can gain a room of their own, but it is simply a room, there being no wider public space in which they can intervene. There are several works exemplary in this regard. This pessimism is reflected in Karla Suárez’s *Silencios* (1999), set in the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. The 1980s were no utopia for the protagonist, who lives within a dysfunctional family. Her independent streak makes her a pariah in school. She succeeds in establishing a certain autonomy—from her family, from men and, almost unthinkably in post-crisis Havana, in her living arrangements, yet she does not feel liberated, precisely because her independence is no different than isolation. She withdraws into her room as the crisis takes hold.

The “cuarto propio” as isolation chamber or prison reappears in Yohamna Depestre’s “Abikú” (2004). A woman, desperate for some personal living space, kills her family. She wins few more centimeters of space as a result, but preserves it only in the form of a prison cell after her eventual conviction for murder. This feeling of claustrophobia, capable of producing violent reactions, turns inward in Leonardo Padura’s *Herejes* (2013), in which Judith, one of three characters whose lives the novel explores, concludes that authentic liberation consists in suicide or the destruction of her body, which she understands as a limit or prison. Such examples point to a sense of unfreedom associated with social life in general, and to the paradox of turning inward or withdrawing only to find oneself in a narrower prison: the body.

Withdrawal, seen also in the various forms of abandonment catalogued in Wendy Guerra's *Todos se van* (2006), is emblematic of the absence of a future horizon. In contemporary fiction there is no future, and the past exists only as an accumulation of ruins. This also describes, perhaps, Antonio José Ponte's work, or at least the fascination with ruins that has characterized a good deal of post-Soviet literature (and criticism).

Jameson (2013) identifies affect with Alexander Kluge's "insurrection of the present against other temporalities" (10). In the Cuban present, this insurrection is staged against all utopian possibilities, against the past perfect, the nostalgia of innocence or of the early revolutionary years, and against the future perfect evoked by Fidel Castro in his famous speeches in which, according to a hackneyed joke, he only conjugated verbs in the future.

Contemporary writing attempts to absorb and contain other temporalities in the present, giving rise to a heterotopic or palimpsestic phenomenon noted by critics. José Quiroga, in *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005), writes about the "juxtapositions" and "weird temporality" (11) that characterized Cuban literature in the 1990s. James Buckwalter-Arias (2010) has documented the "reinscription" of the avant-garde as both sensibility and reference point during the same period. This odd mix of epochs has only intensified in the intervening period, as Cuba navigates the troubled waters of twenty-first-century capitalism, on which its dated third-worldism and sclerotic command structure confront the overdeveloped behemoths of digital and market "freedom."

Heterotopoi, or multitemporal spaces, are common in contemporary Cuban works. Daína Chaviano's *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* (1998) maps various historical layers on to present-day Old Havana. As temporal confusion ensues, the historical city can seem more present, more real, than the contemporary one. The novel evinces a primary concern with the spatial dimension, with mapping, that overrides any historiographical impulse or temporal presentation as such. The spaces of the city are overlaid; history is compressed into the present; time is converted to space. This is analogous with what David Harvey (1990) identified as a hallmark of postmodern capitalism: time-space compression resulting from the drive to reduce production (transportation) costs and overall turnover time while eliminating spatial barriers to the mobility of commodities and capital. In terms of Jameson's affective turn, such a collapse of temporality into the present could be "characterized as a 'reduction to the

body,' inasmuch as the body is all that remains in any tendential reduction of experience to the present as such" (2013, 28).

The heuristic value of Harvey's conception of postmodern capitalism is acknowledged by Moishe Postone (2010), who nevertheless takes exception to Harvey's emphasis on subjective experience as a form of mediation between social form (postmodern capitalism) and cultural forms (21) in what remains a classical base-superstructure model. Here it is perhaps fruitful to consider that "affect," in Jameson's framework, can be thought to deactivate the Cartesian subject as such, along with its narrative ordering of experience, in favor of an alternative model of being-in-the-world akin to Heidegger's *Stimmung*, which conceptualizes the human as always already a subject-object (2013, 38). This recognition—that affect is always situated "in the world" and is not merely a retreat from the world—can serve as an addendum to Postone's observation that Harvey's focus on the experiential eliminates the possibility of identifying the emancipatory possibilities of postmodernism, which Postone describes as "a sort of premature post-capitalism, one that points to possibilities generated, but unrealized, in capitalism" (2010, 22).

An orientation toward the possibility of liberation is of utmost importance in contemporary Cuba, situated as it is between an ossified state capitalism and an incipient, globally hegemonic regime whose crisis of profitability makes it increasingly dependent on financial instruments (fictitious capital) and the dispersal of risk to the margins. In such a context, in which marginal persons are more than ever subject to the abstract domination of "the economy," it is crucial to note certain fault lines or emancipatory possibilities visible in a literature that can otherwise seem very bleak.

There is something like an emancipatory drive in many of these works, as paradoxical and as ineffective as withdrawal and "retreat to the body" may appear in some of the texts discussed, there is no doubt that it represents an attempt to break out of the heteronomous frame of the social and to disrupt the temporalities of both capital and state, of future value and future socialism.

In Antonio José Ponte's novel *Contrabando de sombras* (2002), the characters subsist in a parasitical, salvage economy. Despite visible and rapid deterioration, buildings that should collapse remain standing, in apparent stasis. There is no urban renewal or change against which to measure the passage of time. Everything seems static. Yet the novel

insists on life amid the ruins. People live and copulate in the liminal spaces of the thanatological frontier of Havana's necropolis. In one memorable scene, set in a cinema, the same film reel plays over and over, in endless repetition. While the world around them seems frozen, two lovers unite in the ambiguous space behind the screen, forging a human bond and asserting their vitality against the backdrop of repeating images.

In addition to registering this feeling of stasis and this obsession with entropy and decay, the "insurrection of the present" also militates against the temporality of abstraction, of the wage, and of the circulation of commodities. Many authors describe a refusal of ambition, self-improvement, entrepreneurial spirit, and even work itself (Estévez and Gutiérrez are particularly salient examples). In other words, if contemporary Cuban literature demonstrates a tendency (analogous to capitalism's own tendency) to reduce time to space, it also shows that, within what Adorno (1977) called "the mass of merely existing reality" (133), there is an oppositional will.

Jameson paraphrases Paul Heyse in order to describe the essence of the *récit* (storytelling), which, at its best, could "concentrate the temporality of narrative into something the mind could uniquely appropriate and hold to itself, time made space, in other words, the event materialized" (2013, 23). In the contemporary period, the Cuban government has increased its efforts to materialize (and monetize) the narrative of the Revolution, in a phenomenon Rachel Weiss (2011) has dubbed "museification" (172–173). Abilio Estévez's work, in particular *Inventario secreto de La Habana* (2004), constitutes a sharp critique of this phenomenon, in which a once-revolutionary social process increasingly exists only as bureaucracy, bronze, and stone.

Today's literature may seem to prioritize the representation of a static present, but it can also be viewed as an attempt to rescue the present from the burden of narratives, whether these are generated by the state, global capital, or both in tandem. Cunningham (2014), in a smart review of Jameson's *Antinomies*, asks "Why not simply call this affective revolt of the present 'modernity': la modernité – 'the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent'?" (29). Cunningham brusquely resituates post-modernism as a kind of limit point to modernity itself, a stage of pure contingency in which all "modernist" narratives, whether those of realism, teleological socialism or limitless capitalist growth, dissolve into a present in which nothing (or anything) is possible. Contingency here is understood as the opposite of *récit*, as the anti-preterite, as the entirely

open. This is not unlike the feeling of openness and uncertainty that characterizes contemporary Cuba.

Jameson himself juxtaposes contingency and affect with reference to Roland Barthes, whose critical view of the realist novel depends largely on his Francocentric understanding of the preterite as a purely ornamental tense that signifies a creative act by a writer-demiurge, lending a mythological dimension to the novel. Yet one need not accept this particular claim to rescue Barthes' insights, in *Writing Degree Zero* (2012), about the novel's relationship to time and event sequences:

Through the preterite, the verb implicity belongs with a causal chain, it partakes of a set of related and oriented functions. (30)

[F]inally the preterite is the expression of an order, and consequently of a euphoria. (31)

Contemporary fiction in Cuba rejects everything associated with the preterite, its episodic and causal nature, its implicit order and euphoria. Barthesian euphoria, explains Kristeva (2013), is that of the secure world of the bourgeoisie (208). In Cuba, though, the security being rejected is both that of capitalism's "end of history" and of the state's "march into socialism," narratives that are increasingly blended in official discourse.

However, today's literature is not unambiguously critical of either the state or the return of capitalism. Its odd temporalities reinforce the idea that Cuba is "stuck in time," which has political implications with respect to both first-world nostalgia for the Revolution and the state's efforts to buy itself more time. The post-Soviet crisis, after all, was dubbed a "Special Period" that would complicate, but not detain the struggle to perfect socialism. Likewise, the aesthetic of ruins prevalent in much contemporary literature can be seen to promote "disaster tourism" and the facile idea that communism always fails in practice. Yet these tendencies, along with the affective turn and temporal insurgency outlined in these pages, also point to a desire for another kind of temporality, neither the discredited teleology of pre-Crisis Cuba, nor the "endless everyday" of consumerism or survival (Harootunian, quoted in Liu et al. 2012). This is evidenced not only by the present's insurgency against both past and future, but also by the period's refusal of the euphoric high notes on Jameson's affective scale. Unlike in the developed world, postmodernism's arrival in Cuba was not accompanied by the "depoliticizing

sensuous theodicy of consumerist gratification" (Mazzarella 2009, 304) but by scarcity, hunger and fatigue. Under such circumstances, the absence of "high affect" is to be expected.

So whither narrative, realism and the novel in Cuba? Whither Cuba? What rough beast slouches toward Bayamo to be born? In many ways (as I hope to have shown), the dilemma of Cuban literature is that of (post)modern literature at large—the crisis of representation and the death of the subject—with important local inflections. A symptom of this may be detected in contemporary literature's relative lack of allegory. Even in works such as Jesús Díaz's *Siberiana* (2000) in which an allegorical intention is evident, the allegory is always weak or partial, never fully resolving into a symbolic parallelism or even into the twisted reflection of satire. The picture cannot be completed because the possibility of self-recognition—which Lukács (1971) identified as the end of a process whose manifestation is a novel's inner form (80)—has been foreclosed. Both the bourgeois subject and revolutionary one have met their limits in the "automatic subject," namely, capital. Since that subject has also reached its limits (varying accounts of these limits are offered by David Harvey (1990), Robert Kurz (1991), and others, it is no wonder that literary realism finds itself in limbo, unable to represent a world in the throes of disintegration, yet still incapable of glimpsing the one to come.

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