

Fictional Avant-gardes in Latin American Literature (1973-2015)

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	4
Abstract	5
Declaration	6
Copyright Statement	7
The Author	8
Introduction.....	9
Renewed Outlooks on Latin American Avant-gardes	13
The Affective Turn	18
Structure.....	22
Chapter 1: Theorising Fictional Avant-gardes.....	25
Latin American Avant-gardes in the Face of Autonomy	25
Neo Avant-gardes and Revolutionary Art	32
The Role and Political Relevance of Fiction.....	38
Affect and the Politics of Immanence.....	41
The Specificity of Fictional Avant-gardes	44
Chapter 2: Fictional Avant-gardes in the Revolution	53
Artistic and Political Avant-gardes in Cuba	53
Cuba's Call to Artists and Intellectuals.....	54
Avant-gardes in a Revolutionary Society	56
Cortázar and the Avant-garde as <i>Engagé</i> Experimentation	58
Dalton and the Avant-garde as an Anti-intellectualist Call to Action.....	61
The Dead Ends of Artistic and Political Avant-gardes	64
Cortázar at the Crossroads of Art and Politics	66
Avant-gardes and Latin American <i>Émigrés</i>	69
Happenings and Direct Action.....	74
The End of Literature.....	78
The Uncomfortable Avant-gardist Roque Dalton.....	83
The Dead Ends of Institutionalised Literature	86
Humour and Community	93
Collage and <i>Testimonio</i>	96
Chapter 3: Fictional Avant-gardes, Memory and the Revision of the Past.....	101

The Turn of the Century	101
Mourning the Demise of Revolutionary Art	103
State Terror and Memory	106
Neoliberalism and Commodified Culture	111
Bolaño's Juvenile Avant-gardism.....	115
Avant-gardes, Modernity and the State.....	118
Avant-gardists on the Road.....	122
Avant-gardes between the Market and Community.....	129
Saer's Provincial Avant-garde	132
The Anachronistic Migrant	135
An Avant-garde within the State.....	139
Companionship and the Ephemeral	142
Chapter 4: Fictional Avant-gardes through a Feminist Lens	149
Feminism and the Archive of Avant-gardes	149
Female Avant-gardists and Authorship.....	151
Avant-gardes between the Canon and Archive.....	157
An Affective Outlook on Female Avant-gardists	161
María Moreno's Apocryphal Avant-gardist.....	162
A Feminist Voice in the Democratic Transition	164
Re-mapping Female Affects	169
The Feminist Avant-garde	172
Archives Devoid of Authorship	176
Mónica Ojeda's Feminist View of the 1960s and 1970s	180
Feminist Literature and Ni una Menos	181
A Woman within the Tzántzicos.....	183
Gianella's Feminist Avant-garde	188
Montage and the Archive of Avant-gardes	192
Conclusion	198
Bibliography	203

Word Count: 79,760

List of Figures

Figure 1: “Si3n” (*Los detectives salvajes*)..... 121

Figure 2: Visual sketches (*Los detectives salvajes*)..... 131

Abstract

This thesis examines the depiction of fictional avant-gardes in Latin American novels from the 1970s onward. I focus on fictionalised groups of artists that combine, within their fictional worlds, aesthetic rupture and political radicalism to reinvent community. This approach partakes in a broader trend within Latin American Studies that is interested in reviewing the concept of the avant-garde and its impact on contemporary literature. In this sense, I draw upon affect theory to analyse how these novels rewrite the collective nature of avant-gardes as a framework that mobilises affects involving questions of friendship, family and love, among others. These fictionalised circles portray artistic and political initiatives that are constitutive of the daily experiences and personal connections of their members. Fictional avant-gardes thus highlight that efforts to reunite artistic and political radicalism can produce forms of community that stem from but also ultimately exceed the artistic domain. Therefore, I argue that fictional avant-gardes regard the use of art to create group dynamics as the specific contribution that avant-gardes make in terms of driving social change.

My corpus begins in the 1970s, in the aftermath of the ground-breaking projects that, following the Cuban Revolution, aimed to transform reality through art at a continental level. These experiences reshaped the idea of the avant-garde and left a mark on ensuing efforts to articulate aesthetic experimentation and activism. The novels I study reclaim the affective potential of former avant-gardes when partaking in the political debates that have shaped Latin America ever since. First, I examine Julio Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel* (1973) and Roque Dalton's *Pobrecito poeta que era yo...* (1976) as novels that upheld the revolutionary value of art at a time when escalating political violence closed the avant-gardist project. Then, I relate Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) and Juan José Saer's *La grande* (2005) to widespread debates on memory and revisions of revolutionary endeavours at the turn of the century. Finally, I address the feminist standpoints of María Moreno's *El Affair Skeffington* (1992) and Mónica Ojeda's *La desfiguración Silva* (2015) within two contexts of intense gender activism: the Argentine democratic transition and the feminist demonstrations that spanned Latin America during the 2010s.

Declaration

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The Author

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He has produced three journal articles using this thesis's theoretical framework to examine works beyond its corpus. The first studies novels by Diego Trelles Paz (Peru) and Alejandro Zambra (Chile) and has been published in *Romance Studies*. The second focuses on the filmmaker Glauber Rocha (Brazil) and is currently in press in *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*. The third article compares novels by César Aira and C.E. Feiling (Argentina) and is currently being reviewed in *Hispanic Review*.

His postdoctoral research project focuses on the transatlantic exchanges between literature and psychoanalysis that Argentine and Spanish authors developed during the Spanish democratic transition. He has published three journal articles related to research undertaken in preparation for this project. They have been published in *Kamchatka: Revista de análisis cultural*, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* and *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*. The Editors of *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* awarded his work on *Como si nada* (Alberto Cardín, 1981) with the 2022 James Whiston Memorial Prize.

Introduction

This thesis analyses the depiction of fictional avant-gardes in a series of Latin American novels from the 1970s onward. These fictional avant-gardes respond to the paradigmatic crisis that put an end to the most ambitious and continent-wide efforts to transform reality through art that have ever been seen in Latin America. Beginning with the Cuban Revolution (1959) and ending with civil wars and military dictatorships, the 1960s and 1970s saw the peak of artistic and political avant-gardes throughout the continent. Aesthetic and political radicalism converged to make culture a privileged means of revolutionary action, and writers and intellectuals reached unprecedented visibility and mass audiences. The prevailing status of literature and literary intellectuals during this period was indicated by the ongoing global significance of authors associated, to a greater or lesser extent, with the so-called “Boom”.¹ Fiction was intrinsic to the processes of artistic and political radicalisation that characterised this period, as imagining a revamped society –and the role art would play in it– revealed the power of fiction as world-making and fuelled the joint initiatives of artists and revolutionaries (or even artists as revolutionaries and vice-versa). And if, moving into the 1980s and 1990s, state repression and neoliberalism put an end to the goal of radical transformation, literature continued to aspire to its former influence and allowed the legacy of avant-gardist ambitions to continue operating beyond any empirical instance. In this thesis, therefore, each novel I study uses fiction to recreate avant-gardist collectives and continue to lay claim to the power of imagination to spark social change. Though they do not share the same goal of armed revolution, these fictional avant-gardes nonetheless redeem the fictional dimension that lay at the core of the projects of artistic and political rupture that dominated the 1960s and 1970s and which dared to propose a new society.

I aim to elucidate how fictional renderings of avant-garde groups allow us to rethink and reclaim the potential of experimental art to contribute to social transformation. To what extent can literature, through forms of aesthetic rupture, intervene and change social dynamics? What is the relationship between arts and politics that the avant-garde embraced from the second half of

¹ The Latin American Boom was a literary movement that gained widespread recognition during the 1960s and 1970s. It is usually associated with Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Gabriel García Márquez. The experimental nature and unprecedented notoriety of their works were tantamount to the political upheaval ignited in Latin America by the Cuban Revolution. Their success was also indebted to the rapid development of the culture industry at the time, especially the global circulation facilitated by European publishing houses such as Seix Barral.

the twentieth century in Latin America? Each novel I study portrays the daily experiences and artistic and political principles of a particular collective. I thus define fictional avant-gardes as groups of artists that, within their fictional worlds, combine aesthetic experimentation and political action to reinvent community. They imagine renewed modes of coexistence that stem from but also ultimately exceed the artistic domain. In my understanding, therefore, it takes more than depicting a group of artists for there to be a fictional avant-garde. Novels that include fictional avant-gardes must, through the artistic groups they depict, re-evaluate and reopen the quest to transform society through art to be considered as such. More specifically, I focus on how these groups undertake to reinvent community by outlining a poetics and politics of fiction that brings forth and mobilises affects. The artistic communities depicted in these novels do not make a claim to particular manifestos but rather themselves serve as a framework that elicits connections and habits, and redesigns subjectivities. They rewrite the collective nature of the avant-gardist circle as a platform for experimenting in modes of being that involve questions of friendship, family, love, and sex, among others. Fictional avant-gardes thus exceed the limited sphere of individual artworks and instead champion the ethical and affective potential of art. Their political reach lies in using art to create and circulate affects midst the social milieu. They allow us to envision new ways of living together.

These novels move away from a focus on artistic works or manifestos, the way in which many scholars have usually studied avant-gardes. Instead, they thematize the creation of group dynamics as the specific contribution that avant-gardes make in terms of driving social change. This thesis thus adopts a novel theoretical standpoint to reconsider the idea of the avant-garde through notions of affect. Traditional theories of the avant-garde usually rely on a negative view of the concept of autonomy, commonly associated with the idea of “art for art’s sake”, and characterise these groups as radicalised attempts to break out of the artistic domain. Overcoming the archetypically bourgeois dissociation of aesthetic experiences from everyday life would then be the avant-garde’s ultimate goal. However, by studying fictional renderings of avant-garde groups, I argue that these novels still uphold fiction as a specific sphere of action that is not subject to extra-artistic demands but is nonetheless vital to social transformation. Rather than through changing artistic practice, fictional avant-gardes regard art as a distinctive domain apt to intervene in the social sphere by redesigning habits and mobilising affects. In this line, I refer to the broader scholarly interest in affect theory as a means of expanding the traditional remit of the

political. Combining fiction and affect allows for a more fluid, body-centred approach to the study of the literary form, ultimately enabling us to rethink the role of aesthetic rupture in producing modes of community and coexistence.

The history of Latin American literature indicates that fictionalised groups of artists have always been concomitant with the emergence and development of empirical avant-gardes. The first half of the twentieth century featured early examples such as Arqueles Vela's *El café de nadie* (Mexico, 1926), Martín Adán's *La casa de cartón* (Peru, 1928), Jaime Torres Bodet's *La educación sentimental* (Mexico, 1929), and Leopoldo Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres* (Argentina, 1948). These earlier novels portray artistic circles aiming to transcend socio-political determinants, fictionalising avant-gardes as a means of championing and making absolute the value of art beyond its social circulation. For that reason, the point of departure of this thesis is the apogee and decline of artistic and political radicalism that marked the 1960s and 1970s. The particularly intense avant-gardist experiences of this period exhibited an unprecedented confluence of aesthetic and revolutionary experimentation. Avant-gardism permeated the everyday and pointed towards a reinvented social fabric. It redrew the boundaries of the avant-garde and art more widely, and continued to resonate in the imaginaries and approaches of later authors.

I organise my corpus into three sections. I begin with two novels published at the twilight of Latin American avant-gardes in the 1970s. Julio Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel* (1973) and Roque Dalton's *Pobrecito poeta que era yo...* (1976) fictionalised groups of artists to contest the closure of the avant-gardist programme and uphold the vital contribution of art to social transformation. In the second chapter of the thesis I examine fictional avant-gardes at the turn of the twenty-first century. Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) and Juan José Saer's *La grande* (2005) partook in widespread debates on historical memory and challenged neoliberal hegemony by reviewing and reclaiming the affective potential of former avant-gardes. Finally, I focus on two periods of intense feminist activism that echoed avant-gardist ambitions: the Argentine democratic transition of the mid- to late 1980s, and the continent-wide demonstrations that took place in the 2010s. María Moreno's *El Affair Skeffington* (1992), in the first, and Mónica Ojeda's *La desfiguración Silva* (2015), in the second, reviewed the contexts and debates of the previous novels through a feminist lens. They reimagined avant-gardes as communities enabling bonds and artistic endeavours beyond restrictive notions of identity and gender.

My corpus is thus composed of novels that rewrite the legacy of artistic and political avant-gardes that pervaded Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s. These works invoke the affective dimension behind those quests for a new society when participating in the debates that have marked the continent ever since. Since I study pivotal historical crossroads, in which the always problematic links between art and politics were heatedly discussed, I selected authors and novels that are representative of their broader contemporary public spheres. To present a convincing analysis of how fictional avant-gardes allow us to rethink such paradigmatic questions, I chose renowned and widely read authors whose works are relevant and influential not only for Latin American literary circles but for a wider public as well. In turn, with the combined angles of fiction and affect, I reassess established interpretations and advance renewed views of canonical novels such as *Libro de Manuel*, traditionally criticised as a misguided literary project in Cortázar's oeuvre, and *Los detectives salvajes*, generally regarded as an elegy for avant-gardes. Ultimately, I argue that each novel in my corpus responds to specific cultural and political debates by outlining a literary ethics –an all-embracing way of living stemming from art– that restores a political dimension to fiction through notions of affect. The fictional avant-gardes found in these novels advance revamped modes of community in the face of pressing socio-cultural issues.

With this study of fictional avant-gardes I make four interrelated contributions to the field of Latin American Studies. First, I reassess the continental specificity of Latin American avant-gardes, which have historically exhibited distinctive traits that distance them from European and US cases. Second, I show that a study of fiction exceeds traditional theories of the avant-garde that privilege programmatic and public declarations, which ultimately restrict the concept to either a formalistic interplay between tradition and innovation or the struggle for legitimation within the cultural field. Third, I examine these fictional portrayals to partake in a broader scholarly trend within Latin Americanism that is interested in reviewing and theorising the afterlife of avant-gardes. While existing studies mostly privilege literary works that replicate the experimental formal techniques of former artists and movements, I argue that fictional portrayals of avant-gardist groups are equally relevant when addressing the legacy of avant-gardes in Latin America. I explore how these novels deploy paradigmatic avant-garde forms, such as collage and non-linear narrative, when fictionalising circles that regard art as fundamental to eliciting renewed habits and connections. In this way, each novel in my corpus uses experimental

techniques to ultimately portray the creation of communities as the specific contribution of avant-gardes to social and political transformation. Fourth, I highlight how these depictions of reinvented avant-garde communities in Latin American novels published since the 1970s are built around links between affect and fiction. I thus relate my approach to the wider recent use of affect theory within Latin Americanism; I analyse these novels through affect to specify how fiction intervenes in the social by proposing modes of being and relating.

In the remainder of the introduction I will expand on the contributions to Latin American Studies listed above. First, I will highlight the relevance of fictional avant-gardes amidst recent scholarly reviews of the concept of the avant-garde and its impact on contemporary literature. Then, I will discuss in more detail the links between fictional avant-gardes, general guidelines of affect theory, and specific uses of affect within Latin Americanism. Finally, I will present a concise outline of the overall structure of the thesis and the key concepts addressed in each chapter.

Renewed Outlooks on Latin American Avant-gardes

Reconstructing the history of Latin American avant-gardes requires reviewing traditional theories of the avant-garde itself. As I will examine in Chapter 1, the development of the avant-garde in Latin America does not entirely follow from its most influential and usually Eurocentric theorisations. I will unpack the understanding of the avant-garde as set out by Matei Călinescu, Alain Badiou, Peter Bürger and Hal Foster, among other renowned thinkers, to underline the limitations of universalising the concept around Eurocentric traditions. In this way, I argue for the need of a more inclusive notion of the avant-garde, apt to contemplate cases that do not respond to the same artistic and historical crossroads as canonical examples of European and US art. Rather than generalising a definition from a particular case study, therefore, I emphasise that each concrete instance of avant-gardist art invites us to reconsider the established guidelines of the avant-garde as such. It is necessary to take into account the specific socio-historical context in which an avant-garde group emerges to fully grasp its contribution in terms of aesthetic innovation and political engagement. Thus, a focus on Latin American examples does not outrightly refute but rather complement traditional approaches to the avant-garde, allowing us to identify avant-gardist principles beyond the works and experiences of movements such as Dada and Surrealism, in the 1920s, or Minimalism and Conceptualism, in the 1960s.

This analytical angle is in line with recent scholarly studies of Latin American avant-gardes, which have deployed a continuous concern over (neo)colonialism and the problematic links between local identities and cosmopolitanism. For example, Gonzalo Aguilar notes that, in the 1920s and 1930s, Latin American avant-gardes displayed an affinity with metropolitan movements that did not entail a derivative relationship, but rather interrogated both local and global traditions: “les permitía vincular la modernidad con el territorio sin caer en una asociación automática y falsa entre lo local como territorio propio y lo universal como modernidad ajena” (2009: 17). For Aguilar, avant-gardes not only redesigned their national artistic traditions and identities from an up-to-date perspective but also challenged metropolitan and universal models of modernity. Likewise, Fernando Rosenberg defines Latin American avant-gardes as “the critique of the modern as a global project” (2006: 1). For Rosenberg, they inaugurated an artistic standpoint that questions colonialist legacies by bypassing the prototypical evolutionary and linear model of national development. While claiming to enact the ultimate modern, avant-gardes inquired how novelty is produced and valorised “within a largely ungraspable scope of shifting geopolitical hegemonies and of the differential uses and ways of circulation of cultural production that legitimise, reproduce, or contest these hegemonies” (2006: 162).

By comparing canonical definitions of the avant-garde with empirical instances, I will highlight the fact that Latin American avant-gardes have a different, oscillating relationship – shifting between greater affinities and conflictive ruptures– with the state and revolutionary organisations. I cite several cases, like Mexican Estridentismo and the Argentine art installation *Tucumán arde*, which do not fit into traditional understandings of the avant-garde as a break with tradition and art institutions, a reaction to mass culture, or an embodiment of the cult of the new. Latin American avant-gardes emerged in the 1920s in socio-cultural contexts in which the autonomy of art institutions was far from consolidated. Their aesthetic radicalism displayed a complex interweaving with state and political influences, varying from state support within nation-building projects to censorship and persecution. Such ambiguous connections between art and political action were echoed during the next stage of avant-gardist agitation. In the 1960s and 1970s, intense political turmoil blurred the boundaries between artistic experimentation and the quest for a radically new society. The landmark of the Cuban Revolution pushed avant-gardes towards revolutionary engagement, forcing them to rethink the social role and political utility of art within the struggle for socialist change. The escalation of armed struggle –leading to civil

wars and dictatorships— signalled the decline of the avant-gardist project. The subsequent domination of the neoliberal project throughout the continent frustrated the ideal of igniting radical change through art and imposed on cultural production the limits of an increasingly precarious market.

Any discussion of fictional avant-gardes should thus be situated within the broader academic interest in the notion of the avant-garde itself and its impact on contemporary Latin American literature. For instance, Matthew Bush and Luis Hernán Castañeda's *Un asombro renovado: Vanguardias contemporáneas en América Latina* (2017) compiles studies dedicated to contemporary writers, including César Aira, Mario Bellatin, Diamela Eltit and Mario Levrero, who invoke salient traits of past avant-gardes. Bush and Castañeda notice a paradoxical dialogue between past, present and future in these case studies. The principles of value and formal strategies of prior avant-gardes “resurgen en nuestros días para ser *re*-formuladas, *re*-construidas o *re*-experimentadas desde una paradójica *novedad con historia*, una intensa segunda vida que, a falta de mejor término, llamamos —otra vez— vanguardia” (2017: 10-11, emphasis in original). For Bush and Castañeda, contemporary uses of avant-gardist postulates go beyond nostalgic remembrance. Not needing to partake in a specific movement or even call themselves avant-gardists, writers can draw upon the forms and themes of past avant-gardes to intervene in present-day politico-cultural scenarios.

In her contribution to the volume, Vicky Unruh regards these contemporary examples as “una reiteración performativa” of prior instances that invokes “no solo a sus conocidas herramientas y trucos: también echa mano de sus estructuras de sentimiento [...] [y] destaca la posibilidad de reiterar, en una época posutópica, elementos del repertorio vanguardista que insinúan vías de cambio” (2017: 253). Julio Premat also employs qualifiers like “renovado” and “utópico” in *¿Qué será la vanguardia?: Utopías y nostalgias en la literatura contemporánea* (2021). When looking at Argentine literature from the 1990s onward, Premat focuses on the links between literature, rupture and tradition. For Premat, the term does not outline “una categoría literaria uniforme”; it is not necessary to define what the avant-garde exactly means but how it is quoted and the literary techniques subsequently associated with it. He claims that contemporary invocations of the avant-garde outline “una utopía anacrónica” that vindicates a bygone faith in the intrinsic potential of art for novelty and change. Facing present discouraging scenarios, in which market impositions and decreased social impact seem to announce the end of literature,

echoing avant-gardist strategies is a paradoxical way of reasserting literature's relevance: "la pregunta de la vanguardia, que pudo ser en el pasado una pregunta que buscaba negar a la literatura, hoy es una de las modalidades que prometen su perduración" (2021: 50).

Following this line of reasoning, to look back at previous avant-gardes is to uphold the relevance of literature within a context of crisis. Martín Kohan's *La vanguardia permanente* (2021) shares Unruh and Premat's anachronistic perspectives and argues that "la tradición deja de ser un antídoto de la vanguardia o la evidencia de su claudicación, para pasar a ser un instrumento más de su accionar en el campo estético" (2021: 146). Kohan characterises such interplay between past and present as redefining what constitutes novelty in the artistic domain. Paraphrasing Leon Trotsky's call for a "permanent revolution", Kohan advocates a "permanent avant-garde" capable of continuously redrawing the criteria of the value of art—even questioning, if necessary, standardised ideas about the avant-garde itself. Just as Premat regards contemporary invocations of avant-gardes as a means of enabling formal experimentation, Kohan considers that producing novelty is their ultimate goal. Novelty, then, equates to forcing readers, writers and scholars to reshape their established conceptions of literature. Novelty draws upon the avant-gardist tradition to challenge the adverse condition of art within consumer culture: "lo nuevo en el presente consistiría en hacer que no pueda saberse bien qué es lo tradicional y qué es lo que no. Porque a eso nuevo no se opone ya la tradición, sino las garantías del más de lo mismo" (2021: 203).

The renewed interest of writers in the legacy of avant-gardes is thus an opening to artistic novelty and political intervention. For scholars such as Unruh, Premat and Kohan, the guidelines of past avant-gardes offer a paradoxical tradition useful for redrawing the principles of value of present-day literature. Anachronistic uses of the avant-gardist repertoire would lead to renewed strategies and forms, reaffirming the inherently political nature of artistic experimentation. Such a repertoire could range from Surrealist automatic writing and Dadaist collage to the meta-literary tone of the Boom novelists. While my analysis of fictional avant-gardes shares this anachronistic perspective, however, I argue that there is an additional dimension that is missed by not looking at novels whose thematic—not only formalistic—concern is the portrayal of groups of artists. The novelty of the works I have chosen is not to be found exclusively in the production of new forms. These novels use techniques historically linked to the avant-garde, such as collage and montage, but these instances of formal experimentation are instrumental to

the fictionalisation of avant-gardist collectives within the novels themselves.

The overarching defining feature of the novels in my corpus, in this way, lies in deploying the power of experimentalism to imagine group dynamics and thematise the artistic circle as a reinvented community. These novels rewrite the fictional impetus behind former avant-gardes that envisioned a revamped society, regarding the inception of groups themselves as the distinctive contribution of avant-garde art to social transformation. Fictional avant-gardes explore the ethical potential of art by recreating these groups' artistic initiatives as constitutive of their daily lives. They emphasise that efforts to combine aesthetic and revolutionary rupture entail personal connections that mobilise affects stemming from but also ultimately exceeding the work of art. These novels outline the group itself as the outcome and materialisation of avant-gardist ideals, associating experimental aesthetics with community logics proper to avant-gardes. Referring to fictional avant-gardes, therefore, I stress that fiction is vital in transforming the quest for a new art into the quest for new modes of coexistence.

To date, Castañeda's *Comunidades efímeras: Grupos de vanguardia y neovanguardia en la novela hispanoamericana del siglo XX* (2015) is the only scholarly study specifically dedicated to Latin American fictional avant-gardes. Castañeda defines fictional avant-gardes as "círculos de artistas" that shape "comunidades efímeras". He looks at novels featuring such artistic circles and analyses their portrayals of "una existencia impregnada de los principios del arte, que los interpela y los consume, convirtiéndose en su única matriz de identidad personal y social, y en el sentido de sus actividades dentro del mundo ficcional" (2015: 5). While my approach to fictional avant-gardes shares his focus on community impulses and disregard for the static oeuvre, I argue that the novels I analyse present a divergent outcome to his definition of the "comunidad efímera" as an enclosed and self-contained entity. For Castañeda, fictional avant-gardes adopt the guise of selective and autonomous cultural fields, establishing a radical breach between the circle and its socio-historical framework. They constitute "pequeños campos culturales de sesgo vanguardista-marginal, [...] campos fusionados de naturaleza estético-vital o vital-estética, completos y totales en sí mismos, con sus propias formas de discursividad, institucionalidad y poder" (2015: 20). In contrast, rather than homogenous and isolated circles, I will study fictional avant-gardes that overflow the limits of the group and advocate the power of the imagination to redesign the broader social milieu.

A study of novelistic recreations of artistic circles, therefore, complements the interplay

between past and present literary forms theorised by Unruh, Premat and Kohan. However, while I share Castañeda's emphasis on the group as a reinvented community, I argue that there is a constitutive interrelation between fictional avant-gardes and their concrete historical contexts. The novels I study reclaim the fictional dimension that propelled avant-gardes to imagine a revamped society during the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America. As I will now examine, affect theory allows me to stress how these fictional avant-gardes surpass the limits of the inner circle and are actually involved in redesigning the wider social fabric. Seen through the lens of affect, they advocate the political relevance of fiction for exploring and reinventing modes of coexistence. Each novel combines fiction and affect to thematise particular group dynamics in the face of subsequent socio-political scenarios. In this sense, my case studies portray the production of artworks as inseparable from the creation of a literary ethics –an all-encompassing way of living in which the group itself is a realm that elicits affective bonds and community habits.

The Affective Turn

To address the ethical dimension of art and outline the concept of fictional avant-gardes, I draw upon the wider framework of affect theory. The affective turn refers to a significant trend in academic research, named as such by Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley's compilation *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007). Clough introduces the volume by claiming that the affective turn expresses "a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory" (2007: 2). Especially after Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold" and Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect", both published in 1995, an increasing number of scholars have looked at affect as a means of readjusting the focus of critical theory, shifting away from questions of subjectivity, identity and political representation to pre-individual and biopolitical control and resistance. Affect allows us to re-theorise the social as impacting on –and being impacted by– bodies' capacity to act; an affective standpoint explores "the changing cofunctioning of the political, the economic, and the cultural, rendering it affectively as change in the deployment of affective capacity" (2007: 3).

The affective turn is further conceptualised in Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010). They state that, rather than being inter- or multi-disciplinary, an affective perspective perpetually redesigns established boundaries between objects and fields

of study: “there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds” (2010: 3-4). Since affects are immanently located in-between assemblages of things and relations, composing bodies and worlds simultaneously, an affective perspective necessarily redraws politico-cultural frameworks of thought. It focuses on how bodies recompose themselves when transiting through social domains.

Mabel Moraña and Ignacio Sánchez Prado’s *El lenguaje de las emociones: afecto y cultura en América Latina* (2012) was the first volume to compile scholarly approaches to affect in Latin American Studies. In Moraña and Sánchez Prado’s view, the affective turn is linked to a continental geopolitical shift that renders established critical vocabularies and theories unsuitable for renewed forms of political power and domination. In them, “el elemento emocional, pasional, etc. desempeña –más que el de la razón instrumental– un papel preponderante, que se suma a los factores más tradicionalmente asociados a la formación de conciencia social y a la construcción de imaginarios colectivos” (2012: 314). An affective perspective thus accounts for socio-cultural developments that challenge canonical angles on nation-building, identity formation, and hegemonic or counter-hegemonic articulations. When describing the impact of the affective turn on Latin American Studies, Laura Podalsky identifies four interrelated lines of inquiry that “share an understanding of the sensorial as a meaningful cultural, social, and political force” (2018: 238). For Podalsky, affect theory has had the greatest influence in studies examining the psychosocial afterlife of repressive dictatorships and armed conflicts; new neoliberal/globalised economic structures and dynamics; the role of affect in the constitution and maintenance of collectives; and emotions’ involvement in colonialist social order and nation-building projects.

Fictional avant-gardes thus contribute to the study of affect in relation to pressing social issues and the reassessment of political and cultural developments in Latin America. As I will examine in detail in Chapter 1, the notion of affect allows us to reread the political contribution of fiction to projects of social change. By underlining the relations between bodies and their impact on the social fabric, affect theory enables us to stress the most immediate and corporeal dimension of the avant-gardist project. From an affective angle, the convergence of artistic and political radicalism exceeds the production of aesthetic programmes, artworks and manifestos; it leads to a quest for revamped bonds and community habits both within and beyond the group of artists. Fictional avant-gardes reclaim the legacy of their 1960s and 1970s counterparts by

restoring a poetics and politics of fiction that reimagines social relations and modes of coexistence through art. My analytical standpoint thus draws upon affect to rethink the links between fiction and avant-gardes, echoing recent scholarly approaches to Latin American culture focused on its everyday, emotional and bodily dimension. To account for the diverse approaches and recent uses of affect theory, each of my chapters deploys different theories of affect to explore the key political contexts addressed by the novels, namely revolutionary culture, memory, and feminism.

In Chapter 2, I will analyse *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* as novels that, in a context of political turmoil marked by the Cuban Revolution, drew upon affect to participate in broader discussions regarding the nature of a socialist society, the role model of the revolutionary, and the function of art. In this sense, Cortázar and Dalton dismantled the established conventions and social norms resulting from the nation-building processes examined by Ana Peluffo's *En clave emocional: cultura y afecto en América Latina* (2016). Peluffo addresses the schemes of emotion built by nineteenth-century literature as a vital aspect of nation-building, arguing that the affective dimension of culture is evidenced by its construction of codes of civility, race and gender. Likewise, Jean Franco's *Cruel Modernity* (2013) traces the extreme violence of 1970s and 1980s state terror back to the continent's colonial roots. In her view, the brutal character of military dictatorships and civil wars reanimated deep-seated affective legacies, linked to a long history of de-humanising dispossessed peoples. I will examine how Cortázar and Dalton's fictional avant-gardes respond differently to the context described by Franco, advancing an affective angle on matters such as armed struggle and military repression.

In Chapter 3, I will study fictional avant-gardes that looked back at the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the aftermath of defeated revolutionary projects and state terror. Since *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* reread the period in which Cortázar and Dalton fictionalised their own avant-gardes, I will explore the role played by fiction at a time of widespread revisions of past revolutionary struggles and debates about memory. This approach relates to uses of affect theory in relation to memory in post-dictatorial and post-civil war scenarios, such as Christian Gundermann's *Actos melancólicos: Formas de resistencia en la posdictadura argentina* (2007) and Nelly Richard's *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition* (2004), which regard affect as a privileged way of registering the unrepresentable nature of trauma. Likewise, Abril Trigo studies the role of affect in the "politico-libidinal" economy of late capitalism, which redesigns previous

modes of socialisation, labour and production/consumption through “the investment of affective, libidinal energy” in the logic of commodities (2012: 39). In this sense, Bolaño and Saer invoke past avant-gardist experiences to reclaim the relevance of literature in the face of consumer culture and free-market reforms, when projects of radical transformation were deemed finished and anachronistic.

In Chapter 4, I will study the notions of affect and gender in the fictional avant-gardes of *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva*. I will examine the feminist lens that Moreno and Ojeda use to review and rewrite not only the history of Latin American avant-gardes but the idea of the avant-garde itself. Within gender and queer studies, the connection between affect and gender has been advanced by José Esteban Muñoz (2000) and Frances Negrón-Muntaner (1996), who regard affect as a means of enhancing nondominant collectives beyond the framework of identity representation. They reread certain appeals to the sensational excess of mass culture –such as the melodrama and the *bolero*– whose affective surplus contributes to a sense of belonging among Latin American queer collectives. I also take into account Fernando Bosco’s (2006) reading of the role of affect in *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, whose “regular mobilisation of affective bonds” accounts for their “collective action and mobilisation over a long period of time” (2006: 342-343). In this line of thought, I will analyse how Moreno and Ojeda combine fiction and affect to dismantle the gendered bias displayed by both empirical and fictional avant-gardes –even by art history altogether.

An affective account of fictional avant-gardes reclaims the political capacity of fiction to provoke social change. Each of my case studies fictionalises a group of artists as a way of unveiling the crucial role of affect within the avant-gardist projects that pervaded Latin America throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Through the theoretical angles of affect and fiction, this thesis stresses the fictional drive behind the artistic and political avant-gardes that dared to imagine a radically new society and the vital position of art in it. I analyse novels that draw upon the experiences and ideals of past avant-gardes, recreating and fictionalising them to intervene in their contemporary contexts. From an affective standpoint, fictional avant-gardes not only advance aesthetic novelty in the face of a discouraging political scenario and the culture industry. On the contrary, these novels portray the convergence of artistic and political radicalism in the form of a literary ethics. The project of fictional avant-gardes is, ultimately, to produce the group itself as a collective realm for experimenting with habits and affects, challenging the status quo

by using art to elicit connections and reinvent community.

Structure

Since fictional avant-gardes review the history and notion of the avant-garde itself, Chapter 1 (“Theorising Fictional Avant-gardes”) will call its canonical theorisations into question. To go beyond definitions of the avant-garde usually generalised from European and US cases, I will go over the development of avant-gardist experiences in twentieth-century Latin America, exploring the porous boundaries between culture, society and the state that have marked them. Rather than adhering to a fixed and universalised concept, therefore, I will argue that each concrete embodiment of avant-gardist ideals redefines the idea of the avant-garde as such. Moreover, I will examine fiction as a distinct realm for rewriting the specificity and legacy of avant-gardes. In this sense, my approach to fictional avant-gardes differs from previous studies, particularly Castañeda’s *Comunidades efimeras*, that theorise them as self-contained and isolated circles split from their context. On the contrary, I analyse fictional avant-gardes as restoring a political dimension to fiction that stresses its potential to reshape the social fabric in the present. They reclaim the fictional drive that moved prior avant-gardes throughout Latin America to imagine a radically new society, regarding the creation of groups themselves as the outcome and specific contribution of avant-gardes to social change. Through affect theory, I highlight how fiction thematises group dynamics that intervene in the social by enabling connections and redesigning habits. Based on theories of fiction and affect, I will ultimately define fictional avant-gardes as collectives that use art to put forward a literary ethics and reinvent community.

In Chapter 2 (“Fictional Avant-gardes in the Revolution”), I address the period commonly seen as the apogee and final twilight of avant-gardes in Latin America. Published in 1973 and 1976, Cortázar’s *Libro de Manuel* and Dalton’s *Pobrecito poeta...* are two of the earliest examples of fictional avant-gardes that engage with the political and cultural upheaval of the period, both setting out specific traits that subsequent novels recalled and rewrote when facing later historical junctures. Cortázar and Dalton were renowned public figures and supporters of the continental revolutionary project ushered in by the Cuban Revolution. During the 1960s and 1970s, they engaged in heated public debates that aimed to clarify the role of art and culture within revolutionary endeavours. While the escalation of violence increasingly undermined the ambition of igniting radical change through art –even negating its political

relevance altogether— *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* fictionalised groups of artists that champion the revolutionary value of affect. Cortázar and Dalton turned the ascetic and self-sacrificial connotations of Ernesto Che Guevara’s idea of the *Hombre Nuevo* into a call for playfulness and humour. They imagined communities that upheld the avant-gardist ideal by using art to elicit connections and redesign habits. Their fictional avant-gardes thus reclaim the political potential of fiction to reinvent modes of coexistence, ultimately defying the closure of avant-gardist and revolutionary programmes towards the mid-1970s.

Chapter 3 (“Fictional Avant-gardes, Memory and the Revision of the Past”) addresses two later novels that rewrite the same period examined in the previous chapter. Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* and Saer’s *La grande* were published at the turn of the twenty-first century, a time of intense (re)assessments of the 1960s and 1970s. Amidst widespread discussions on memory and revisions of past revolutionary ideals, when multiple human rights movements, artists, intellectuals and politicians reflected upon political violence, Bolaño and Saer rewrote the political implications of avant-gardes through an affective prism. Rather than portraying circles of artists as fading away in the face of revolutionary struggle, civil wars and military dictatorships, I argue that their fictional avant-gardes reclaimed the revamped modes of coexistence put forward by novels such as Cortázar and Dalton’s. *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* thus both uphold the ability of fiction to redeem the legacy of avant-gardist experiences and also question the novels’ contemporary contexts, namely the hegemony of the neoliberal scenario and the commodification of culture that had come to dominate the region. When hopes of bringing together aesthetic and political radicalism seemed to have perished and become anachronistic, Bolaño and Saer’s fictional avant-gardes resumed the intertwined artistic and political quest to reinvent community.

Finally, in Chapter 4 (“Fictional Avant-gardes through a Feminist Lens”), I examine Moreno’s *El Affair Skeffington* and Ojeda’s *La desfiguración Silva* as feminist revisions of almost an entire century of gendered approaches to the avant-garde. Moreno and Ojeda advance a fictional rewriting of fictional avant-gardes themselves, inviting us to rethink the masculinist bias of the previous case studies. While the novels studied in Chapters 2 and 3 portray predominantly masculine collectives, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* combine a series of heterogeneous documents and genres to insert fictional women artists into empirical avant-gardist circles. However, they do not simply postulate an alternative and equally gendered

canon of female art. On the contrary, Moreno and Ojeda rearrange the archive of avant-gardes to confront the idea of artistic authorship and its reliance on gender. I will study their fictional avant-gardes as proposing a literary ethics that exposes the multiple affective encounters that underlie the names and titles of any individual author or artwork. Their feminist stance avoids essentialist claims, advancing a minor angle that deconstructs artistic hierarchies historically dependent on gendered identities. Ultimately, these novels advocate the political potential of fiction and affect to dismantle not only the male-inspired canon of avant-gardes but also notions of gender and the avant-garde itself.

Chapter 1: Theorising Fictional Avant-gardes

Latin American Avant-gardes in the Face of Autonomy

Defining fictional avant-gardes implies reassessing the concept and legacy of the avant-garde itself. In this thesis, I examine novels that depict artistic initiatives as enablers of personal connections and group dynamics, thematising the creation of community as the specific contribution that avant-gardes make in terms of driving social change. This chapter will set up a theoretical framework that clarifies the specificity of fictional avant-gardes through notions of fiction and affect. First, I will unpack traditional understandings of the avant-garde that universalise the concept around Eurocentric traditions and ultimately restrict it to the struggle against the autonomy of art. I will recap concrete cases to show that such universalised definitions are inadequate to address the history of Latin American avant-gardes. With examples ranging from the 1920s to the 1970s, I will argue that a study of avant-gardes in Latin America must take into account the oscillating relationship between the ideal of autonomy and the influence of the state and revolutionary politics over art. Then, I will outline the domain of fiction as apt to dismantle univocal views and redefine the notion of the avant-garde. For that purpose, I will review theorisations of fiction that emphasise its political reach and influence on the social fabric. Finally, I will draw upon affect theory to explore how fiction intervenes in the social by rewriting the group nature of avant-gardes as a literary ethics. Through fiction and affect, I will ultimately argue that the specificity of fictional avant-gardes consists in reinventing community and envisioning renewed connections and habits.

Discussing the avant-garde has been an ongoing quest since the early twentieth century, shaping a theoretical dispute that condenses broader cultural and political concerns. Scholars have repeatedly looked back at avant-gardist experiences as decisive moments when the nature of art itself was put into question. Avant-gardes have been regarded from different and contradictory angles that have aroused the most disparate judgements: they have been alternately acclaimed for their radical aesthetic experimentation and disregarded as a mere formalistic diversion, cherished as revolutionary political endeavours and criticised for conforming to capitalist consumption. The re-enactment of avant-gardist principles by later artists adds a problematic dimension. Once the inaugural project of 1920s avant-gardes was deemed concluded, mid- and late-century examples were seen as both rightful heirs and deceitful

repetitions. In any case, these theoretical approaches attempt to establish a univocal definition of the avant-garde, useful to assess concrete instances as properly avant-gardist (or not), as valid efforts to radicalise artistic and political values (or not). Throughout this chapter, I will conceptualise fictional avant-gardes as an ideal angle to analyse Latin American cases that developed in ways not contemplated by such restrictive formulations.

Canonical accounts have traditionally associated avant-gardes with aesthetic experimentation, rupture with tradition and the cult of the new. Matei Călinescu argues that avant-gardes are directly indebted to modernity, as they radicalise and transfer modernity's heroic and linear view of time to the artistic domain: they attempt to “overthrow all the binding formal traditions of art and to enjoy the exhilarating freedom of exploring completely new, previously forbidden, horizons of creativity” (1987: 112). For Rosalind Krauss, such a quest for the absolutely new corresponds to a misleading “myth of originality”. She characterises the “parable of absolute self-creation” of the avant-garde as “the way an absolute distinction can be made between a present experienced *de novo* and a tradition-laden past” (1987: 157, emphasis in original). However, for Krauss, this myth of originality conceals the interdependency between tradition and creation that defines art as such. Referring to examples of formal techniques reappearing in subsequent avant-gardes, such as collage or monochrome painting, Krauss makes the case for an inherent and necessary interplay between past and present. She denounces the discourse of originality for serving wider interests linked to the exhibition and consumption of art, as it revalues certain works for institutions like the market or museums (1987: 162).

While Călinescu and Krauss enable us to regard avant-gardes as intra-artistic questions of tradition and creation, Daniel Bell links them to broader capitalist dynamics. For Bell, initial avant-gardes translated the capitalist quest for continuous innovation and economic growth into the cultural realm, as they both shared “the ideas of liberty and liberation, whose embodiments were ‘rugged individualism’ in economic affairs and the ‘unrestrained self’ in culture” (1978: xxiii). However, these values collided due to increasing social and economic rationality and specialisation. In this sense, Bell states that avant-gardes expose the cultural contradictions of capitalism. Their radical aim for new experiences emerged from the role model of the “bourgeois entrepreneur” only to later dismantle its values: “Its appeal stemmed from the idea that life itself should be a work of art, and that art could only express itself against the conventions of society, particularly bourgeois society” (1978: 19-20). Likewise, Renato Poggioli associates avant-gardes

with the tensions of modern society, claiming that their anti-bourgeois stance can only flourish in capitalist-democratic frameworks. He shares Bell's view that avant-gardes express "the evolutionary and progressive principle of that social order in the very act of abandoning itself to the opposite chimeras of involution and revolution" (1968: 106). For Poggioli, avant-gardes depend on capitalism's increasing technologisation and division of labour, as reacting to alienation and mass culture constitutes their *raison d'être*: "Faithful to qualitative values, the artist facing the quantitative values of modern civilisation feels himself left out and rebellious" (1968: 108).

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, Alain Badiou relates avant-gardes to twentieth-century revolutionary politics, as they participated in the heroic and voluntaristic project of erecting a "new man" for a new society: "the project of the new man is a project of rupture and foundation that sustains –within the domain of history and the state– the same subjective tonality as the scientific, artistic ruptures" (2007: 8). Avant-gardes, therefore, aimed to finish art as it had been traditionally known and reinvent it from its foundations. They shared common goals and methods with revolutionary organisations, as they both devised their artistic and political projects as an utter break with the past and commencement of the radically new. For Badiou, the true and paradoxical nature of avant-gardes lies in hosting, within art, the end of art itself. He finally defines avant-gardes as "poetico-political groups" with a vocation for de-differentiating artistic and political praxis: "they embody the identity between a school of artistic creation and an organisation which practices and maintains the intellectual conditions of a political break" (2007: 149).

Affinities between artistic and political avant-gardes –and their limits– are exemplified by cases such as Suprematism and Futurism within the Russian Revolution. In 1923, Trotsky dedicated a series of articles to exploring the links between art and the post-revolutionary society. He claimed that Futurism originated from "the revolt of Bohemia" in an "eddy of bourgeois art", replicating the prototypical interplay between tradition and novelty highlighted by Krauss. At the same time, "The workers' Revolution in Russia broke loose before Futurism had time to free itself from its childish habits, [...] and before it could be officially recognised, that is, made into a politically harmless artistic school whose style is acceptable" (2005: 115). For Trotsky, the revolt of Futurism "against the old aesthetics [...] and smelly life which produced that aesthetics" marked its organic rapprochement with the Revolution; he particularly

valued the work of Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose “struggle against the old vocabulary and syntax of poetry, regardless of all its Bohemian extravagances, was a progressive revolt against a vocabulary that was cramped” (2005: 124). Nonetheless, Trotsky upheld the need for “a little historic vision”, arguing that the absolute break with the past envisioned by Futurism could only be a long-term goal. In his view, the Revolution did not entail simultaneousness or symmetry between ideological and socio-economic processes: “the ‘lathelike’ art will remain for many years more, and will be the instrument of the artistic and social development of the masses and their aesthetic enjoyment” (2005: 121). Trotsky thus rejected “the deduction that Futurism is the art of the proletariat. [...] In our opinion they are the necessary links in the forming of a new and great literature. But they will prove to be only a significant episode in its evolution” (2005: 137).

These ambiguous connections between Futurism and the Revolution challenge definitions of the European avant-garde, such as Bell and Poggioli’s, that restrict it to a quest for autonomy from the market. Initially, artists associated with Futurism and other Russian movements partook in cultural projects linked to the state, regarding experimental art as a contribution to a working-class aesthetic and the development of socialism. This alliance came to an end when the Party imposed stricter controls over culture, for example, by declaring Socialist Realism the Soviet Union’s official artistic style in 1932. In this sense, Susan Buck-Morss distinguishes the artistic avant-garde from the political vanguard. For Buck-Morss, their initial convergence was facilitated by a shared perception of “history-as-progress” that soon led to a clash between artistic and political values: “when the October Revolution brought to history its scenario of proletarian class rule, the logic of what constituted ‘progressive’ art became intellectually confused and politically controversial” (2002: 216). In her view, the definitive split between the artistic avant-garde and political vanguard was inevitable, as it was already announced by their foundational and contrasting approaches to historical progress. As exemplified by Trotsky’s arguments and the Party’s imposition of aesthetic guidelines, the role ascribed to art within the advancement of socialism contradicted the avant-gardist quest for the absolute new. Buck-Morss notes that avant-gardes like Futurism were condemned to a preliminary and still-bourgeois stage, to a specific and outdated moment within the historical continuum of art (2002: 216).

Compared to such contradictory conceptualisations, Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974) presents the most accepted and canonical definition of the term. Bürger outlines the avant-garde as a reaction against aestheticism and the status of art within bourgeois society,

referring to the concept of autonomy to claim that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, social and economic specialisation completely detached art from daily life. Reduced by society and work to an alienating lifestyle, people rediscover themselves as fulfilled “human beings” through art, as long as the artistic domain remains separated from their vacuous routine (1984: 49). Such a split gave rise to the illusory idea of the independence of art, reaffirming the lack of social function of aestheticism. For Bürger, the institution of art encompasses production and distribution, as much as a given period’s common-sense ideas about culture and its modes of reception. Therefore, avant-gardes constitute the self-criticism of art in bourgeois society: “What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men, [...] the way art functions in society” (1984: 49). Avant-gardes refute the institution of art as a whole, aiming not to eradicate art but to overcome the typically bourgeois detachment between art and life. Their actions, manifestos and works are radical objections to autonomy, striving to organise a new life praxis from a basis in art: “The avant-gardiste protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate arts into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences” (1984: 22).

While such an autonomous institution of art may apply to 1920s European avant-gardes (Bürger privileges Dadaism over any other), the Latin American scenario demands a different approach. Autonomy does not reflect the status of art in early twentieth-century Latin America. Beatriz Sarlo and Carlos Altamirano argue that the idea of an autonomous cultural field only accounts for “sociedades altamente secularizadas y donde se han consolidado las instituciones de la democracia liberal sobre la base de una economía capitalista” (1983: 85). In contrast, the unstable liberal-democratic frameworks in which Latin American avant-gardes emerged distanced them both from Soviet-like dirigisme and “formas de autonomización relativa que las preserven de la coerción abierta por parte de las autoridades del sistema político” (1983: 86). Likewise, Julio Ramos describes Latin American cultural fields as *loci* of uneven modernisation, marked by a limited consumer market and porous boundaries between art and the state. This lack of institutional bases aroused a paradoxical desire for autonomy. On the one hand, it fostered “la exploración de la literatura como un discurso que intenta autonomizarse, es decir, precisar su campo de autoridad social”; on the other, it led to “el análisis de las condiciones de imposibilidad de su institucionalización” (2003: 12). In early twentieth-century Latin America, the autonomy of the cultural field was undermined from two different but interrelated flanks: while artists

could not clearly demarcate their sphere of action from political and state influences, they could not find the material conditions of autonomy in a non-modernised market either.

Exemplifying these dilemmas, Mexican Estridentismo was founded in 1921, right after the end of the Revolution's armed conflict. Their development as a group was concomitant with the state project of stabilising a post-revolutionary government, impeding the possibility of future civil conflicts, and outlining a national cultural identity. Formed as a multidisciplinary collective by poets like Manuel Maples Arce and Germán List Arzubide, fiction writers like Xavier Icaza and Arqueles Vela, and visual artists like Ramón Alva de la Canal, Estridentismo conceived its artistic project as an extension of the post-revolutionary politico-cultural programme. In 1925, Estridentismo's leaders moved to Xalapa (renamed in their works as Estridentópolis), where they became state officials and partook in cultural and educational policy-making. As List Arzubide declares, Estridentismo aimed to embody "la imagen más honda, más completa, más íntegra de México y su Revolución" (1987: 117). The titles of Icaza's novel *Gente mexicana* (1924) and Maples Arce's poem *Urbe: super-poema bolchevique en 5 cantos* (1924) display the artistic crossover that characterised the movement, blending Mexican autochthonous traditions, cosmopolitan avant-gardist currents, and leftist and internationalist political affinities.

In a similar vein, Nicaraguan Anti-academia was formed around 1931 by a group of young poets including Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Joaquín Pasos, Octavio Rocha, and José Coronel Urtecho. Their emergence was contemporary to Augusto Sandino's anti-interventionist war, which marked Nicaragua's political history in the struggle for national emancipation and opposition to the United States' occupation (which spanned from 1912 to 1933). Sharing Sandino's nationalist standpoint, Anti-academia sought to match political struggle with the quest for linguistic and cultural autonomy. As their first public declaration states, they aspired to renovate and consolidate the Nicaraguan cultural field: "Hay que aprovechar la presencia en esta ciudad de algunos elementos jóvenes de afición literaria para formar un núcleo de vanguardia que trabaje por abrir la perspectiva de una literatura nacional y construir una especie de capital literaria que sea como el meridiano intelectual de la nación" (in Solís, 2001: 57). Anti-academia disseminated global avant-gardist trends while compiling Nicaraguan folklore, linking their experimental project to the development of national art forms. Despite their contrasting stances towards state institutions, both Estridentismo and Anti-academia aimed to contribute to nation-

building through artistic autochthony. While Estridentismo's proposals unfolded within the post-revolutionary Mexican state, Anti-academia strived for cultural autonomy in opposition to a Nicaraguan state perceived to have succumbed to US intervention.

Early twentieth-century avant-gardes thus emerged in socio-historical circumstances not reducible to art's autonomy and detachment from daily life. Unruh highlights decisive contextual traits such as economic expansion; rapid growth grounded in region-specific dependence on one or two major exports; incorporation into world-scale capitalist markets; demographic change that stimulated the growth of major cities like Bogotá, Lima, Mexico City, Santiago de Chile, São Paulo and Buenos Aires; the growth of a more politically aware and active middle class and the development of significant workers' movements (1994: 4). Unruh reinstates a political dimension to the quest for merging art and life, defining Latin American avant-gardes as an "aesthetic activism" that responded to a series of pressing issues: "what art should be like and how artists should be spending their time in rapidly changing modern milieus, how to make forceful contact of consequence with readers and spectators, [...] and about the pertinence of radical artistic experimentation to long-standing cultural and linguistic identity problems" (1994: 28-29). As Estridentismo and Anti-academia exemplify, Latin American avant-gardes arose at a time of socio-political turmoil, aiming to reformulate the social role of art in relation to the political and cultural power of the state.

These examples reveal the limits of universalised notions of the avant-garde when looking back at Latin American cases. Bürger outlines an autonomous and well-established institution of art as the condition of possibility of avant-gardes, given that reintegrating art into the praxis of life would be their ultimate goal. However, the Latin American scenario exhibited a limited market and unstable boundaries between the domains of art and the state. Contrary to a response against autonomy, 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes actually sought to establish an autonomous sphere of action, reaffirming the specificity of art as a means of contributing to broader debates regarding social modernisation, state redesign and national identity. Groups like Estridentismo and Anti-academia displayed features beyond universalised and univocal definitions of the avant-garde: not limiting themselves to an intra-artistic quest for rupture, these groups aimed to develop a reading public for a renewed literary tradition, to intervene in debates around autochthonous identities, and to engage in state cultural policies. As I will now explore, such an inherent porosity between Latin American art and politics was radicalised during the

1960s and 1970s, when avant-gardes joined revolutionary organisations to provoke radical social change.

Neo Avant-gardes and Revolutionary Art

For Bürger, the avant-gardist project was closed after movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism faded away: “the means by which the avant-gardistes hoped to bring about the sublation of art have attained the status of works of art. [...] To formulate more pointedly: the neo-avant-garde institutionalises the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions” (1987: 58, emphasis in original). Bürger condemns mid-century neo avant-gardes as inauthentic attempts to repeat the protests of historical avant-gardes. They were ultimately absorbed by the culture industry, since museums and the market could incorporate and exploit seemingly subversive works without any conflict of interests. Such an apologetic account reflects what Hans Magnus Enzensberger calls “the aporias of the avant-garde”. Enzensberger claims that avant-gardes’ initial premises actually announced their eventual failure, as continuously producing “new” forms mirrors market dynamics: “The historic contest for future recognition becomes a competition for present purchase. [...] The anticipatory moment of art is cut down to a mere speculation; its future is charted like that of stocks and shares” (1966: 81-82).

Eric Hobsbawm shares this sceptical view and identifies an “air of particular desperation” in the history of avant-gardes: “They were constantly torn between the conviction that there could be no future for the art of the past [...] and the conviction that what they were doing in the old social role of ‘artists’ and ‘geniuses’ was important, and rooted in the great tradition of the past” (1998: 25). Avant-gardist ideals thus inevitably led to a blind alley. The revolutionary and prototypically modern ambition of “expressing the times” could not be achieved through artistic means, experimental as they might be, but “by the combined logic of technology and the mass market, that is to say, the democratization of aesthetic consumption” (1998: 30). For Hobsbawm, it was not the established language of art which became obsolete after the social and technological transformations that marked the twentieth century, but the social status and influence of art and artists themselves. Similarly, Andreas Huyssen argues that the depoliticisation and conformism of postwar culture neutralised avant-gardes’ radical ambitions. Rather than obliterating the avant-garde, mass culture incorporated it. The use of montage and shock in commercial films and advertising is then a symptom of avant-gardes’ obsolescence:

“Ironically, technology helped initiate the avant-garde artwork and its radical break with tradition, but then deprived the avant-garde of its necessary living space in everyday life. It was the culture industry, not the avant-garde, which succeeded in transforming everyday life in the 20th century” (1986: 15).

Opposing these elegiac judgments, Hal Foster vindicates 1960s neo avant-gardes as authentic realisations of avant-gardes’ foundational programme. For Foster, neo avant-gardes were not just innocuous repetitions of the readymade, collage or monochrome painting. On the contrary, they actualised the avant-gardes’ legacy within a later state of affairs: “rather than invert the prewar critique of the institution of art, the neo-avant-garde has worked to extend it. [...] [It] has produced new aesthetic experiences, cognitive connections, and political interventions, and that these openings may make up another criterion by which art can claim to be advanced today” (1996: 14). Previous failures in obliterating the institution of art actually allowed neo avant-gardes to challenge the artistic conventions, modes of production and exhibition circuits of their own time. Happenings, Pop Art and Minimalism, among others, “develop the critique of the conventions of the traditional mediums, as performed by dada, constructivism, and other historical avant-gardes, into an investigation of the institution of art, its perceptual and cognitive, structural and discursive parameters” (1996: 20). While Foster revalues 1960s movements and overcomes Bürger’s fatalistic determinism, he nonetheless constrains their effects to the institution of art. In his theorisation, historical and neo avant-gardes are limited to a no less historicist and formalistic interplay within the artistic domain.

A quick glance at the Latin American 1960s and 1970s highlights the limitations of this interplay between Bürger’s historical and Foster’s neo avant-gardes. As Andrea Giunta notes, mid-century Latin American avant-gardes displayed a tension between artistic internationalism and revolutionary politics (2015: 20). On the one hand, art institutions such as the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires and the Bienal de São Paulo aimed to establish these cities as world-renowned art centers, repositioning Latin American art *vis-à-vis* the most experimental international currents (King, 2007: 5). This internationalist goal was part of broader developmentalist projects that aimed to modernise Latin American societies through economic development. Meant to counteract the Cuban Revolution’s continental appeal, the US Alliance for Progress actively fostered events, awards and exchanges between Latin American and US art. Institutional support was granted to highly experimental forms, such as happenings, Pop Art and

Op Art. For example, the 1970 exhibition *Information*, at the New York's Museum of Modern Art, reunited Latin American artists such as Luis Camnitzer, Marta Minujín and Hélio Oiticica with US Americans such as Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol.

Towards the end of the 1960s, a period of political instability led many avant-gardists to condemn this internationalist programme as a deceitful imperialist stratagem. Artists previously linked to institutions like the Instituto Di Tella revolted against their own promoters and sought different avenues, reaffirming the potential of art to participate in a continental revolutionary context. In this line, Sarlo notes that outlining the domain of art as a specific sphere of action became a means of political intervention: “quieren presentarse como revolucionarias en arte y, *por eso*, ser reconocidas como revolucionarias en política. [...] El arte se comunicaba, al parecer definitivamente, no con la ‘vida’ sino con esa forma, más despótica que la ‘vida’, que era la política” (2007: 189-192, emphasis in original). Distinguishing between historical and neo avant-gardes, therefore, does not apply to the Latin American context. These avant-gardes went beyond opposing the alleged autonomy of art institutions, which they regarded as accomplices of military dictatorships, illegitimate democracies and capitalism. Paradoxically, it was by reaffirming the ideal of art as a specific and relatively autonomous praxis how aesthetic experimentation and political activism converged, finding in experimental art a force apt to mobilise an imminent revolution. As Giunta notes, these politically engaged avant-gardes “se propusieron pensar las acciones estéticas como una energía capaz de colaborar en la transformación del orden social. [...] El arte no tenía que esperar a la revolución para adquirir un sentido político, sino que podía aspirar a integrar incluso las fuerzas capaces de provocarla” (2015: 284). As I will explore in Chapter 2, the Cuban Revolution played a decisive role in igniting a revolutionary impetus in artists and intellectuals who re-theorised their avant-gardist status in sometimes conflicting terms.

The Argentine installation *Tucumán arde* was devised in 1968 by a group of visual artists who quit the artistic circuit and produced an artistic-political event with the leftist trade union Confederación General del Trabajo de los Argentinos (CGTA). Originally linked to the experimental arts scene, artists such as Graciela Carnevale, León Ferrari, Roberto Jacoby and Juan Pablo Renzi adopted a revolutionary standpoint that converged with the most radical political currents. Displayed in the Union headquarters and making use of ambient sound, audiovisual reels, news collages and wall paintings, *Tucumán arde* presented itself as a

“counterinformation” report on economic crisis and political persecution in the province of Tucumán. As one of the biggest sugar-producing regions in the country, the shutdown of Tucumán’s sugar refineries caused severe socio-economic distress, which the government tried to disguise through propaganda. This blending of art and politics into a unified intervention is clearly expressed by Tucumán arde’s manifesto: “La violencia es, ahora, una acción creadora de nuevos contenidos: destruye el sistema de la cultura oficial, oponiéndole una cultura subversiva que integra el proceso modificador, creando un arte verdaderamente revolucionario” (in Giunta, 2015: 261). Undertaken during Juan Carlos Onganía’s dictatorship (1966-1970), Tucumán arde was a highly disruptive event rapidly censored and closed by political and police pressures.

The Chilean Brigadas muralistas offer a fruitful counter-example of leftist art exhibiting an opposed stance towards the state. Instead of using art to confront a military dictatorship, the Brigadas united artistic and political activism in support of Salvador Allende. The Brigadas were formed by activists –mostly but not necessarily artists– who drew upon political avant-gardes’ ideals to rethink the role of art within an unprecedented socialist ambience. Initiated in 1968 by members of Santiago de Chile’s Juventudes Comunistas, the Brigadas actively contributed to the 1970 presidential campaign. They painted collective murals at different Chilean cities, supporting Allende and contesting the mass media’s hegemonic discourse. After Allende’s election, the state officially supported the Brigadas and commissioned a series of murals. For example, in 1971 they joined the renowned painter Roberto Matta for *El primer gol del pueblo chileno*, painted in a public swimming pool to commemorate the government’s first anniversary. Intervening in the public space and adopting a collective signature, their murals gave rise to a communal and indistinguishably artistic and political praxis. They moved art to the streets, mingled with a politically engaged population and actively promoted “La vía chilena al socialismo”. As Matta recalls, the goal of the Brigadas was “que el artista salga a la calle. Que salga a la calle en forma simple. Porque no somos nosotros los que vamos a hacer aparecer esta ideología nueva: va a venir desde abajo” (in Aguirre y Chamorro, 2008: 90).

Examples such as Tucumán arde and the Brigadas show that the importance of avant-garde initiatives was based on the social networks of affect they promoted as much as the installations, paintings and manifestos they produced. In this sense, the novels I study fictionalise avant-gardist groups to underline an aspect that, despite being constitutive of the aesthetic and political ideals of former endeavours, has generally been sidelined in canonical approaches to the

history and legacy of avant-gardes. Just as *Tucumán arde* sought to trigger an affective response to social inequity and the Brigadas aimed to turn art into a communal event, each work in my corpus portrays artistic projects that result in renewed forms of coexistence. In this way, fiction becomes a means of rethinking and reclaiming the affective power of former avant-gardes when intervening in a later historical context. Throughout this thesis, I will analyse novels whose fictional avant-gardes pursue artistic experimentation only insofar it leads to a literary ethics, ultimately presenting the creation of community as a privileged way in which art can contribute to social transformation.

On the other hand, the Uruguayan guerrilla organisation Tupamaros presents an inverse relationship between art and politics, since they put an aesthetic stamp in their political actions that resembled concept art. Founded in 1965, Tupamaros was a leftist urban guerrilla that faced the increasingly unconstitutional and repressive governments of Jorge Pacheco Areco (1967-1972) and Juan María Bordaberry (1972-1976). While *Tucumán arde* and the Brigadas adopted strategies of political activism to rethink the specificity of art, Tupamaros drew upon aesthetics to enhance clandestine actions and shock the Uruguayan population. In 1969, they undertook the Toma de Pando using theatrical means, executing “una acción de propaganda armada para mostrar que teníamos capacidad de tomar una ciudad, aunque sea unos minutos, su comisaría, su cuartel de bomberos, algunos bancos” (in Longoni, 2009: 10). Tupamaros staged a fake funeral procession travelling from Montevideo to the nearby Pando, where disguised guerrillas –dressed as a priest, the deceased’s relatives and passers-by– assaulted the city’s main public buildings. While such an example risks romanticising a bloody event –it resulted in the death of one military official, one civilian and three guerrilla fighters– it also highlights the twofold aesthetic and political character displayed by Latin American activism during the 1960s and 1970s.

In a convoluted political scenario, *Tucumán arde*, Brigadas muralistas and the Tupamaros were three significant examples that blurred boundaries between artistic and political radicalism. While *Tucumán arde* and Brigada muralistas put art at the service of revolutionary projects, Tupamaros drew upon aesthetics to execute direct actions. However, armed struggle and military dictatorships ended with artistic radicalism. While *Tucumán arde* was rapidly closed down by the military state, the Brigadas’ mural *El primer gol del pueblo chileno* was coated with successive layers of paint in 1973, after Augusto Pinochet took control of the Chilean government. Political persecution led many of these avant-gardists to abandon art in favour of political activism and

even armed struggle. Most of Tucumán arde's participants ultimately went into exile or were involved in clandestine initiatives during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. Tupamaros was eventually disbanded in 1973, when the coup d'état condemned most of its leaders to death, exile or imprisonment. Moreover, the Uruguayan state "erased" Tupamaros' 1971 daring escape from Punta Carretas prison from history, turning the building into a shopping mall in 1994. My corpus of novels starts at this specific historical juncture. *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* were published in 1973 and 1976, respectively, when the goal of radical transformation was drastically curtailed by political pressures and state persecution. As I will argue in Chapter 2, Cortázar and Dalton used fiction to contest the closure of the avant-gardist project and to advocate for its still-relevant potential to provoke social change.

These Latin American examples challenge universalised concepts of the avant-garde. Rather than Bürger's reaction to autonomy or Foster's self-conscious repetition of experimental forms, Latin Americanist scholars have recently adopted a versatile definition of avant-gardes. For Luciana del Gizzo, the concept encompasses a series of different and even contradictory attributes, which each specific avant-garde movement selectively invokes: "un conjunto de enunciados que conforman una formación discursiva, entre los que se encuentran la ruptura y la novedad, la modernización y la capacidad de intervención social del arte" (2017: xv). This approach invites us to analyse each concrete case as rethinking the scope and attributes of the avant-garde in relation to a specific context. Every reoccurrence of the avant-garde thus redefines the concept itself. In the same vein, Ricardo Piglia pinpoints three key aspects of avant-gardes: first, they present public and artistic responses to a given socio-political scenario; then, such responses redesign the social position of artists; finally, avant-gardes turn their artistic stance into the proposal of an alternative society: "La vanguardia no hace sino pensar aquellos espacios desde los cuales es posible construir la ilusión de una contrasociedad. La utopía no tiene otro sentido que el de la crítica al presente" (2015, Chapter 11). Piglia's definition offers a suitable angle to reread avant-gardes through an affective prism, regarding them as community projects rather than formalistic responses to art institutions.

While Latin Americanist scholars have rethought avant-gardes from a new perspective, however, depictions of avant-gardist circles within fictional worlds have not received equal attention. The novels I analyse in this thesis thematise the creation of group dynamics as the distinctive contribution of avant-gardes to projects of socio-political transformation. In this

sense, I will now examine fiction as a specific realm apt to reassess the impact of avant-gardes in Latin America and redefine the concept of the avant-garde itself. I will explore the political potential of fiction to reinvent community, later conceptualising fictional avant-gardes as frameworks that transform aesthetic radicalism into redesigned habits and affects. Moreover, studying fictional avant-gardes will underline the relevance of avant-gardist ideals even after their alleged historical closure. These novels re-examine the history of avant-gardes to restore a political dimension to fiction, rewriting their legacy as a means of responding to pressing issues in their own contexts.

The Role and Political Relevance of Fiction

Theoretical reflections on fiction allow us to explore the interweaving of literature and society. Jacques Rancière argues that the links between literature and politics are related to neither the ideological standpoint of authors nor the depiction of political events or social issues. He uses the expression “politics of literature” to state that “literature ‘does’ politics as literature –that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing” (2004: 10). For Rancière, the relation between the poetics and politics of fiction must be addressed beyond the question of representation, which would locate “fiction on the side of an imaginary to which it contrasts the solid realities of action, and notably of political action” (2017: xxxi). Rather than constituting “the more or less deformed expression of social processes”, Rancière claims that fiction “is first a structure of rationality: a mode of presentation that renders things, situations or events perceptible and intelligible” (2017: xxxi). He resituates the concept of fiction beyond literature itself, understanding it as a pervasive logic of world-making that constructs “through sentences the perceptible and thinkable forms of a shared world by determining situations and their actors, by identifying events, [...] and by giving to these links the modality of the possible, the real or the necessary” (2020: 8). Fiction permeates the social fabric; it is necessarily implied in every social discourse that assigns positions and relations to subjects within a given context. Experimenting with fiction, thus, entails an intrinsic political dimension; it reshapes the nature and social circulation of discourse, establishing “new relations between words and things, perceptions and acts, repetitions of the past and projections of the future, the sense of the real and the possible, of the necessary and the verisimilar, from which forms of social experience and political subjectivation are woven” (2017: xxxiv).

In a similar vein, Nicolas Bourriaud has coined the concept of “relational aesthetics” when studying art practices from the 1990s onward. In a mode of social organisation structured according to the division of labour and hyper-specialisation, as Bourriaud argues, in which the social bond has been severely commodified, artistic praxis has become “a rich loam for social experiments, like a space partly protected from the uniformity of behavioural patterns” (2009: 9). Art thus strives to achieve connections and enable human relationships. Bourriaud traces the origins of such practices back to twentieth-century avant-gardes, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, which exacerbated the modern project of emancipating humankind and building a new society. However, once Utopian and teleological understandings of history were deemed closed, contemporary artists would not merely repeat archetypal avant-gardist forms, nor assign to art the same functions as their precursors: “the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist” (2009: 13). The substrate of what Bourriaud calls “relational art”, in this way, is formed by intersubjectivity, and its central themes are being-together and the collective elaboration of meaning. Art produces a specific sociability and conviviality that takes the form of a social interstice: “it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the ‘communication zones’ that are imposed upon us” (2009: 16). While the present-day social context restricts the possibilities of inter-human relations, therefore, art is a state of encounter that *models*, rather than *represents*, values that can be transposed into society.

Bourriaud’s notion of relational art thus echoes Rancière’s definition of fiction as a “structure of rationality” and “mode of presentation”, whose specificity lies in using language, as I quoted above, to construct “the perceptible and thinkable forms of a shared world”. Far from adhering to apocalyptic declarations of the “end of art”, Bourriaud argues that the idea of the art form itself has changed in the contemporary scenario. The artwork’s form only exists as such in the encounter, when spreading out from its material dimension to become a linking element and introducing human interactions: “Each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth. [...] Producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange” (2009: 22-23).

Rancière and Bourriaud’s understandings of fiction and relational aesthetics, in this way, allow us to illuminate the connection between fictional avant-gardes, affect, and the social repercussions of the novels studied in this thesis. Fictional avant-gardes display a paradoxical relationship with the concept of autonomy that was so relevant for scholarly studies of their empirical counterparts. Rather than outrightly refuting autonomy and striving to de-differentiate art and life praxis, as Bürger’s canonical view of the avant-garde dictates, these novels still pursue the ideal of literary form as a specific sphere of action. It is precisely through their adherence to the specificity of fiction how they reclaim and continue the avant-gardist project. Through the lens of fictional avant-gardes, autonomy cannot be reduced to the simplistic notion of “art for art’s sake”, but rather points towards fiction as a distinctive domain apt to envision affective connections and new ways of living and coexisting. Fictional avant-gardes thus resemble relational art forms, in Bourriaud’s terms, when modelling the group of artists as a possible world. A fictional avant-garde does not merely outline an interstice of conviviality in a post-Utopian scenario, but presents us with modes of community that can be transposed into the broader social milieu, ultimately revealing the ethical potential of experimental art.

Fictional avant-gardes thus exhibit an intense political engagement, in the sense given to the political by Jean-Luc Nancy: “the political is the place where community as such is brought into play. [...] [I]n other words, the place of a specific existence, the existence of being-in-common, which gives rise to the existence of being-self” (1991: xxxvii). Nancy argues that community is not a uniform essence shared by certain individuals but the mode of existence of a self that depends on exposing itself to others. He defines the “inoperative community” as “a matter of [...] existence inasmuch as it is in common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance” (1991: xxxviii). Rather than projecting a unified and transcendental identity, which could be imposed onto the group, the inoperative community exhibits an open-ended nature. Fragility and indeterminacy are its ultimate assets, as its perpetuation relies on hosting continuously reinvented relationships.

My definition of fictional avant-gardes echoes this vision and the notion of politics as the domain in which common existence is constantly reinvented. I examine novels that regard avant-gardes beyond the goal of either solidifying or dismantling the autonomy of art. On the contrary, they thematise group dynamics as fictions, stressing the role of the imagination in redesigning the social fabric. Seen through conceptualisations of fiction and community –such as those by

Rancière, Bourriaud and Nancy– the avant-gardist bias towards experimentalism exceeds the aesthetic domain. I will now draw upon affect theory to explore how fictional avant-gardes convert aesthetic and political radicalism into the reinvention of community. I will address fictional avant-gardes as collectives for whom creating art entails producing the group itself as an ephemeral framework that elicits affects and habits. Beyond the state and even revolutionary groups, fictional avant-gardes ultimately reveal the political potential of art when artworks become instrumental in renewing ethical proposals and modes of coexistence.

Affect and the Politics of Immanence

The concept of affect refers to resonances and intensities circulating in-between bodies. As Bruno Latour argues, “to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning ‘effectuated’, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or nonhumans” (2004: 205). From the point of view of affect theory, the social is made of bodily encounters underlying and surpassing the subjective and emotional realms, shaping the at once most intimate and impersonal capacity of a body to affect and be affected by other bodies. Following Baruch Spinoza, affect signals the belonging of bodies to a world of encounters that increase or decrease their power to act: “No one has yet determined what the body can do” (1996: 87). Affect is thus inherent to the perpetual becoming of a body as otherwise than what it already is. Through affects, bodies are as much outside themselves as in themselves, given that strict distinctions between interior and exterior, the self and the world, cease to apply.

Moving from a conceptual definition of affect to its pertinence as a theoretical framework for the humanities and social sciences, Massumi remarks that critical theory has conventionally focused on the ideological and discursive positioning of identities: “Ideological accounts of subject formation emphasise systemic structuring: [...] male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. [...] The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid” (2002: 2). Privileging discourse and positionality subtracts bodily movements from the picture, as it contemplates displacements between beginning and endpoints but not the qualitative transformations that those passages ignite. In contrast, Massumi argues that movement is ontologically prior and conditions positionality, since it generates the immanent field wherein positions ultimately emerge. Social order is then a retroactive discrimination of identifiable individuals and groupings out of an undifferentiated field of continuities: “Passage precedes

construction. But construction does effectively back-form its reality. So social and cultural determinations feed back into the process from which they arose” (2002: 8). Opposed to subjectivity and identity, affect corresponds to the “unqualified” unfolding of bodies perpetually becoming something other than themselves.

Drawing on affect theory to analyse fictional avant-gardes, in this vein, contributes to current debates within Latin Americanism that aim to conceptualise the role of culture in mobilising political action. Jon Beasley-Murray’s notion of posthegemony advances a political theory of affect that opposes affective resonances to “the illusion of transcendence, the fiction of hegemony, the presupposition of the state, and the presumption of a social pact” (2010: xi). For Beasley-Murray, the state captures and confines affective flows, turning immanent bodily interactions into transcendental identities within a homogenised narrative: “singular collectives become identifiable individuals, and the state arises, imposing its order upon culture” (2010: 131). Posthegemony contests the prevailing influence of Gramscianism in Latin America, which, from the 1980s onward, has been reread by prominent intellectuals to redesign the Left’s paradigms of thought, shifting from revolutionary radicalism to revaluing democracy (Aricó, 2005). For Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is the bedrock of social order, as it constitutes “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant social group” (1971: 12). Social consent is thus the primary means of political power, while coercion is only employed in moments of crisis.

In this line, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s account of hegemony is a landmark of post-Marxism in Latin America. The concept of hegemony allows them to disregard economic-class determinism in favour of renewed political identities and subjects. The struggle for a “radical democracy” constitutes the ever-expanding horizon of politics, as a hegemonic project unfolds by increasingly articulating the interests and demands of diverse social groups. Hegemony thus results from a contingent articulation of heterogeneous and equivalential discursive elements, unified and represented by an “empty signifier” that transcends and embodies “the moment of universality in the chain of equivalences which unified the popular camp” (Laclau, 1996: 55). A hegemonic formation is the construction of a historical bloc whose unity is not pre-given but results from articulating its elements’ mutual antagonism toward some other element. This opposition between the “people” and the “power bloc” makes hegemony equate to politics altogether: “The political operation par excellence is always going to be the

construction of a ‘people’” (Laclau, 2005: 153).

During the past decades, Latin American Cultural Studies have generally adopted a Gramscian orientation that echoes Laclau and Mouffe’s approach to hegemony. The interplay between hegemony and counter-hegemony has permeated several theoretical trends including postcolonialism, globalisation, popular genres, the *testimonio*, new political subjects and social movements, among others (Del Sarto, Ríos and Trigo, 2004). Posthegemony contradicts Laclau and Mouffe’s view of hegemony as a discursive articulation, advancing instead a political paradigm that questions political representation. According to Beasley-Murray, political power is never really exerted or disputed through consensus; on the contrary, it operates in biopolitical terms: “Social order is secured through habit and affect: through folding the constituent power of the multitude back on itself to produce the illusion of transcendence and sovereignty” (2010: ix). For Beasley-Murray, a hegemonic approach never questions state power, as it rests upon a previous and implicit agreement. It is necessary to give consensus to consensus, that is, to accept consensus as the ultimate goal of political struggle: “At its limit, the logic of hegemony simply identifies with the state by taking it for granted” (2010: xv). Hegemony thus overlooks state structures that secure social order, precisely, by limiting politics to representative mediation while having an immediate impact on bodies and daily life.

However, affects and habits are not only regulated by state structures; they also constitute bodily resonances capable of challenging and transforming them. My view of fictional avant-gardes as circles experimenting with art and affect concurrently, in this vein, draws upon posthegemony to rethink the links between culture and politics from their most material ground. Hegemony and posthegemony are thus opposed ways of conceiving community and coexistence, and affect offers a political alternative to state hierarchy. While the state subjects and categorises bodies according to fixed identities, shaping model citizens capable of negotiating consensus, affect, as Beasley-Murray notes, “gathers up singularities and partial objects, bodies of all shapes and sizes, and redistributes and recomposes them in new, experimental couplings and collectivities” (2010: 132). Affect unfolds “through resonance and repeated encounters on the plane of immanence, offering the prospect of forms of community that might do without transcendence, that is, without either the state or sovereignty” (2010: xvii). Encounters between bodies give rise to affective de-subjectivation, blurring identities and reinventing ways of coexistence. The political potential of affect opens up a line of flight from individual and state-

caught subjectivity to impersonal and collective being.

Posthegemony thus regards affect as a means of enabling a bodily politics opposed to discourse and representation. Likewise, my approach to fictional avant-gardes outlines the group of artists as a reinvented community exceeding the state framework, in which artistic initiatives produce a literary ethics. As defined by Spinoza, ethics rests upon everyday pragmatics of how to maximise good encounters –which increase bodies’ power of acting– and minimise the bad: “It is especially useful to men that they harness their habits together, to draw themselves close by those bonds most apt to make one individual of them” (1996: 156). An ethics grounded on affect shapes a politics of immanence not aiming to construct any counter-hegemonic discourse; on the contrary, it fosters encounters between bodies resulting in renewed ways of life and relationships beyond the state. Each novel I study, in this sense, regards avant-gardes through fiction and affect, exposing that experimental art can be involved in subverting social order. These novels reread former avant-gardist experiences to redefine the notion of the avant-garde but also to question their contemporary context. Looking back at the history of Latin American art, fictional avant-gardes ultimately explore the power of experimentalism to enhance coexistence through reinvented habits and affects.

The Specificity of Fictional Avant-gardes

Combining fiction and affect theory, I adopt an analytical angle that differs from traditional approaches to manifestos as the privileged object for studying avant-gardes. Numerous works have compiled Latin American manifestos, such as Hugo Verani’s *Las vanguardias literarias en Hispanoamérica: Manifiestos proclamas y otros escritos* (1986), Nelson Osorio’s *Manifiestos, proclamas y polémicas de la vanguardia literaria hispanoamericana* (1988), and Jorge Schwart’s *Las vanguardias latinoamericanas: Textos programáticos y críticos* (1991). In her study of 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes, Unruh declares that manifestos were among their most significant and innovative productions, since they “constituted a primary outlet for vanguardist critical and creative expression” (1994: 10). Looking at a more extensive chronology, ranging from the 1920s to the twenty-first century, Patrick Frank also argues that, due to their polemical and assertive nature, manifestos are the most convenient form for reviewing “the question of the function of art in society” (2017: xiv). Conceptualising the manifesto will thus allow me to outline fictional avant-gardes as an alternative object of study, ultimately highlighting their

specific contribution to debates on avant-gardes.

Martin Puchner argues that manifestos are a specific literary form independently of their content. Performativity and theatricality are their pivotal formal traits, as they configure futuristic, self-authorising and openly agonistic speech-acts: “a genre that writes from the position of weakness and that has to construct the agency that will usurp authority. [...] The manifesto projects a scenario for which it must then seek to be the first realisation” (2005: 29). Through manifestos, avant-gardes authorise themselves as the uniquely valid artistic current, outscoring predecessors and competitors by redefining the values of art. Puchner concludes that the manifesto “turned out to be an ideal tool for creating and then ensuring the collective identity and discipline of avant-garde movements” (2005: 78). Del Gizzo also states that the collective identity of an avant-garde is the condition of possibility of its radical ambitions, since it “validaba prácticas y concepciones artísticas que no eran consideradas por los canales tradicionales de legitimación” (2017: 19). Forming a group thus allows avant-gardes to question the social status of art. Since individual innovation would face a greater resistance, the group safeguards artists and hosts experimentation within its boundaries. However, the manifesto not only names the group and shapes a self-authorising meeting space. It also homogenises individual endeavours according to common aesthetic guidelines: “cada vez que el acuerdo tácito de una vanguardia se ponía por escrito en manifiestos y dogmas únicos, se cercenaba la autonomía estética de cada artista” (2017: 21).

While Badiou also claims that groups are indispensable for enabling avant-gardist radicalism, he argues that manifestos are not directly tantamount to their aesthetic materialisations. For Badiou, the avant-gardes’ specificity lies in their commitment to artistic creation as an experience of absolute commencement: “The tendency of twentieth-century art is to revolve around the act rather than the work, because the act, as the intense power of beginning, can only be thought in the present” (2007: 136). The manifesto, though important, is actually the secondary moment of avant-gardes, a “rhetorical envelope” that casts into the future a radical rupture for which the present lacks words: “the Manifesto is the reconstruction, in an indeterminate future, of that which, being of the order of the act, of a vanishing flash, does not let itself be named in the present” (2007: 138).

Compared to manifestos, fictional avant-gardes offer an alternative discursive form that also accounts for experiences that disregard the static oeuvre and focus on the fleeting act

instead. Rather than advancing a certain posture in the face of tradition or competing movements, fictional avant-gardes regard artistic experimentation as a means of mobilising affect and reinventing community. Contrary to the performative and belligerent tone of manifestos, I study novels whose fictional avant-gardes draw upon affect to question monolithic collective identities. Fictionalising an avant-gardist group, instead of writing a manifesto, allows these novels to explore affective angles that dismantle the manifesto's authority and surpass its programmatic homogenisation. In other words, these novels turn the manifesto into a fiction that emphasises a different aspect of the aesthetic and political ideals of avant-gardes. Their artistic circles frame affective encounters aiming to redesign the social fabric, invoking avant-gardist experiences that resonate beyond the closure of its empirical counterparts towards the mid-1970s.

As I explore in Chapter 2, Cortázar and Dalton's fictional avant-gardes add a supplementary dimension to their public political commitment and programmatic declarations. At a moment of revolutionary turmoil, when artistic avant-gardes faced increasing pressures to reassert their social utility, their novels advocated the potential of fiction and formal experimentation to ignite change. In Chapter 3, I stress the break of fictional avant-gardes from the manifesto's interplay between past, present and future. While manifestos announce the legitimate artistic currents to come –defying tradition as obsolete and the present as stalled– Bolaño and Saer championed the relevance of fiction by locating a certain future in the past. Rewriting past experiences and juxtaposing them to the present enables renewed literary and political openings, as their fictional avant-gardes look back at the 1960s and 1970s to intervene in contemporary discussions on memory and the revision of revolutionary projects. Finally, in Chapter 4, I address Moreno and Ojeda's fictional avant-gardes as advancing a gender perspective absent from both canonical manifestos and the novels studied before. Their feminist rereading of past avant-gardes not only vindicates overlooked avant-gardist women. It also translates their legacy into a redefinition of the avant-garde as such, questioning the gendered bias underlying established paradigms of art and political action.

In this way, I rethink avant-gardes from the standpoint of fiction. Rather than taking manifestos or universalised definitions of the avant-garde as my point of departure, I undertake close reading of novels to stress how fiction can engage in theoretical reflection. For this reason, while I outline thorough accounts of each novel's historical scenario, a specific analysis of questions of reception and circulation falls beyond the scope of the thesis. I contextualise the

works in my corpus not to examine their influence in terms of readership or social impact. Instead, I focus on their standpoints towards broader socio-cultural debates as a means of understanding how they re-theorise the political dimension of experimental art through notions of affect. This thesis privileges the close reading of novels rather than other art forms, therefore, to advance a cohesive and homogeneous argument for the potential of literary fiction to redefine the concept of the avant-garde.

Moreover, as I exemplified in the Introduction, Latin American fictional avant-gardes have always accompanied their empirical counterparts. Unruh characterises such a proliferation as “obsessive self-reflexive portrayals”, which supplement manifestos and public declarations when exploring “the substance and viability of the contemporary artistic persona and explore just what there might be for artists to do in a changing Latin American world” (1994: 72-73). Piglia also highlights the recurrence of fictionalised artistic circles throughout the twentieth century, identifying them as challenges to the social role of art. In his view, they exemplify “el modo en que un escritor ficcionaliza en sus relatos ciertos rasgos del mundo literario y en los que es posible leer posiciones de combate respecto de problemas como la crítica, el mercado, otro tipo de tradiciones” (2016, Chapter 1).

Fictional avant-gardes thus continue the long tradition of writers and groups of artists within fictional worlds that Premat terms “ficciones de autor”. While the autofiction genre, as defined by Serge Doubrovsky (1993), unites autobiography and fiction to explore the discursive construction of the self, “ficciones de autor” shape the literary author as a discursive construct itself. Premat defines them as self-reflexive portrayals linked to the conventions and norms of literature within a given historical paradigm. Imagining a certain figure of the writer is intrinsic not only to its social status but also to the conditions of circulation and legibility of literature as a whole: “el autor no es un concepto unívoco, una función estable ni, por supuesto, un individuo en el sentido biográfico, sino un espacio conceptual, desde el cual es posible pensar la práctica literaria [...] en un momento dado de la evolución de una cultura” (2008: 21). Writers advance “ficciones de autor” to delimit a sphere of action. They feature writers as protagonists of fictions that portray, among other situations, the stages of writing and publishing, aesthetic and political discussions with other cultural actors, and appearances in the public sphere. These fictional counterparts, in turn, redesign the established role model of the writer. Within the fictional world, they legitimise the aesthetic and political programme of its author and delegitimise others:

“Esas ficciones serían entonces espacios para resolver conflictos ante la tradición, ante los imperativos de originalidad, ante las expectativas y presiones sociales, pero también un espacio para lidiar con el yo ideal” (2008: 28).

In the same vein, Jérôme Meizoz defines the self-fashioning of a writer as a “literary posture”. For Meizoz, literary postures articulate the necessarily twofold –individual and collective– nature of the author, as personal choices and ambitions are mutually dependent on “the position that the author occupies or aims to occupy in the literary field, which outlines a certain range of artistic possibilities” (2007: 31). Outlining a literary posture is a task in which multiple dimensions of literary praxis converge: formal techniques and styles, thematisations of writing within the fictional world, and public appearances in the media. A literary posture is both intrinsic to the creation of an individual poetics and determined by the rules and expectations of the cultural field. It relates aesthetic preferences to broader questions such as the positions of writers in the literary field, their stances towards tradition, and the forms of recognition they seek. Meizoz thus stresses the influence of socially available options on the self-images that writers envision for themselves: “the posture is necessarily responds to a repertoire linked to the history of literary practices. [...] An author’s posture is deployed, generally, in relation with or against other postures stemming from previous works themselves” (2007: 25-26).

“Ficciones de autor” and “literary postures” are thus constitutive of the social status of the writer and production of literary texts. They oscillate between conforming to and challenging the politico-cultural framework that determines modes of production and circulation of literature. In this sense, Premat argues that the role model of the author is both cause and effect of his or her fictional works: “el autor es una figura inventada por la sociedad y por el sujeto, tanto como es un efecto textual. [...] Al autor se lo construye: construcción social en la medida en que el campo literario fija parámetros y expectativas, construcción imaginaria en tanto personaje funcional” (2008: 26). As authorial initiatives must somehow relate to socially available models, there is an inherent tension between empirical and fictional avant-gardes, that is, between collective endeavours and individual reflections on a state of affairs. Precisely, fictional avant-gardes exploit such an ambiguous condition by dissolving the artist’s personality into the collective. The novels that I examine do not portray the creation of individualised oeuvres but turn the guidelines of the avant-gardist group into a fiction.

To date, Castañeda’s *Comunidades efímeras* is the only scholarly work focused

specifically on Latin American fictional avant-gardes. Castañeda studies a corpus of novels spanning almost the entire twentieth century: Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* (1929) and *Los lanzallamas* (1931), Leopoldo Marechal's *Adán Buenosayres* (1948), Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963), Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* (1965), Fernando del Paso's *Palinuro de México* (1977) and Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes*. He defines his object of study as "círculos de artistas" configuring "comunidades efímeras" that entail "la construcción conjunta de un espacio social estetizado, de una dinámica colectiva que puede ser considerada una 'vida artística', y de un campo cultural alternativo, extraoficial, tal vez secreto" (2015: 2). He regards these fictionalised circles as small collective entities that shape an avant-gardist ethos, describing them as self-contained, selective and de-hierarchised groups whose ambitions lie less on producing works than carrying forward an artistic way of life: "Los círculos borran los límites del arte y abren las fronteras de la vida para combinar arte y vida en un campo estético-vital que rivaliza con las instituciones del poder" (2015: 14). Castañeda notes that ephemeral communities do not produce concrete and individualised artworks but group experiences. They redesign their members' subjectivities according to a poetic view of life, which consists of being together during intense and fleeting moments of community: "La única obra de estas comunidades radica en construirse ellas mismas como matrices colectivas de experimentos estético-sociales, o dicho de otra manera, como plataformas comunales de generación incesante de eventos análogos al happening" (2015: 207).

My analytical angle shares Castañeda's focus on community impulses and disregard for the static oeuvre. The novels I examine portray analogous moments of community as the pinnacle of the collective creation of their avant-gardes. However, I argue that the analysis of fictional avant-gardes must take into account their connections to a broader socio-political context beyond the limits of the group. Castañeda outlines ephemeral communities as endogamic and autotelic circles configuring "una utopía privada" and "un simulacro interior". Their artistic ways of life are limited to a selected few who trace a radical breach between the group and its context: "El microcosmos [...] es lo suficientemente autónomo como para ser analizado por separado, como una realidad independiente y, quizá, antagónica a la realidad social, política e histórica" (2015: 214). For Castañeda, these ephemeral communities do not seek, "de un modo explícitamente político, transformar las condiciones objetivas de la realidad social"; on the contrary, they represent "un retorno involuntario a la lógica de la autonomía, según la cual la

producción y la circulación de los productos culturales –en este caso, de la vida artística– ocurren dentro de una élite de expertos y conocedores” (2015: 9). Restricting the poetic experiencing of community to an enclosed circle connotes a nostalgic dimension, not considering fiction a way to reclaim the political potential of prior avant-gardes. Instead, fiction gives rise to illusory repetitions of bygone ideals: “En el corazón del círculo de artistas reside un proyecto utópico auténtico que [...] es finalmente endogámico y se realiza como una ficción de grupo. Las ambiciones progresistas del pasado subsisten como fantasmas del recuerdo” (2015: 215).

While Castañeda regards fictional avant-gardes as selective and autonomous circles, isolated, by definition, from the broader social milieu, I define them as community proposals that overcome the established boundaries of art and politics. They question state paradigms as much as the cultural field, and intervene in the pressing socio-political debates marking their respective historical contexts. This comparison reveals significant differences between Castañeda’s way of reading fictional avant-gardes and mine. I argue that his approach overlooks an element of political involvement that is constitutive of avant-gardes in Latin America, and which enables these fictionalised groups to transform artistic initiatives into reinvented communities. Looking back at the 1960s and 1970s, he studies Cortázar’s *Rayuela* and regards its fictional avant-garde as an aestheticising community whose “miembros son pocos, una élite intelectual, sentimental y ética que se diferencia tajantemente del cuerpo social mayor” (2015: 101). Likewise, he argues that the avant-garde portrayed in *Tres tristes tigres* advances an anti-Castroist celebration and aestheticisation of pre-revolutionary nightlife in Havana, ultimately performing “una crítica implícita y anticipatoria al programa cultural de la Revolución Cubana” (2015: 123). In contrast, I analyse *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* to stress that fictional avant-gardes must seek to bridge the gap between artistic experimentation and social change to be defined as such. Examining the same turbulent period of the 1960s and 1970s as Castañeda, I will show that Cortázar and Dalton’s fictional avant-gardes upheld the value of art by emphasising its potential to mobilise affect and, thus, contribute to revolutionary endeavours.

When studying *Palinuro de México*, Castañeda interprets its openness to activism, in the aftermath of the Tlatelolco massacre, as an act that contradicts the ideal of autonomy and, therefore, depicts the collapse of fictional avant-gardes. As soon as its members join the mass protests taking place in Mexico City, for Castañeda, the idea of a fictional avant-garde ceases to apply: “la articulación entre este y la nación es una bisagra problemática, que no tiende al

intercambio y la comunicación, que más bien refuerza la desconexión. Una desconexión que puede llevar a una desaparición total, física y simbólica, de la forma comunitaria en cuestión” (2015: 215). Such an elegiac account of fictional avant-gardes mirrors Castañeda’s reading of the only novel we both examine. In his view, in *Los detectives salvajes*, “el círculo no sobrevive como organismo, sino como recuerdo generacional y destino individual” (2015: 30). On the contrary, I argue that Bolaño’s fictional avant-garde actually reopens the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, reclaiming the power of fiction to advance renewed modes of coexistence within a discouraging neoliberal scenario. Finally, Castañeda restricts ephemeral communities to exclusionary boundaries based on gender, claiming that they inherently embody homosocial and sexist values: “un mundo de hombres que fundan su poder simbólico, su capacidad de formar grupos y experimentar vivencias comunitarias, sobre la base de la exclusión y el control de los personajes femeninos” (2015: 17). My analysis of *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva*, in contrast, opens fictional avant-gardes to a feminist perspective that redesigns not only the canon of avant-gardes but the idea of gender itself.

In the end, Castañeda’s study follows Bürger’s theorisation of avant-gardes as dependent on a well-established, bourgeois and autonomous art institution to which they react. However, my previous recap showed that examining the Latin American scenario demands a different approach to the notion of autonomy. A historical account of Latin American examples revealed the inadequacy of adhering to fixed and generally Eurocentric definitions of the avant-garde. Examples such as Estridentismo and Anti-academia highlighted the fact that 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes were strongly linked to state policies and nation-building. In Latin America, avant-gardes did not emerge as a response to bourgeois artistic autonomy but as political projects *vis-à-vis* state initiatives. The 1960s and 1970s were another moment of avant-gardist effervescence, when aesthetic radicalism met political activism and acquired a revolutionary character. Cases such as Tucumán arde, Brigadas muralistas and the Tupamaros faced state power in different ways, all seeking social change through guerrilla and socialist channels. These examples reveal inherent affinities and tensions between the realms of culture and politics in Latin America. Rather than applying a universally valid concept, therefore, studying avant-gardes demands a flexible approach. Each concrete reoccurrence redefines the concept itself, as artists invoke avant-gardist ideals differently to question what art is and how it relates to society.

Drawing upon concepts such as “ficciones de autor” and “literary postures”, I define

fictional avant-gardes as fictionalised groups of artists combining aesthetic and political radicalism to reinvent community. Fiction thus allows the legacy of avant-gardes to keep operating far beyond empirical instances. As I will explore throughout this thesis, these novels intervene in the pressing debates that mark their historical contexts –involving questions such as revolutionary activism, memory and feminism– by reviewing prior avant-gardist postulates and reclaiming the power of fiction to drive social change. Rather than mirroring isolated and self-contained cultural fields, I argue that these fictional avant-gardes aim to reshape the social by mobilising affects and redesigning habits. In this way, combined with the lens of affect theory, fiction reveals its capacity to devise a renewed sense of community, revamping modes of coexistence beyond the frameworks of citizenship and the state. Ultimately, the literary ethics put forward by fictional avant-gardes redraws not only established paradigms of art but of politics and society altogether.

In the remaining chapters, I will structure the study of each novel according to three aspects that jointly shape the notion of fictional avant-gardes. First, I will explore their portrayals of collectives that frame affects and habits and transform a shared worldview into a revamped community. I will look at the personal connections, particularly in terms of friendship, love and family, with which their avant-gardists enhance the political dimension of affect. Second, I will examine how such a defiance of mores and state-imposed sociality gives rise to artistic and political projects such as happenings, art exhibits, poetry and even mere gatherings within the novels. In this way, I will outline the literary ethics through which each group merges art, affects and activism in response to pressing social concerns. Finally, I will focus on the formal composition of the novels themselves, highlighting how their experimental techniques replicate their fictional avant-gardes' fusion of art and politics. I will stress that, while portraying their fictional collectives, on a meta-literary level each novel reflects on its own socio-cultural positioning as a means of championing the political relevance and transformative potential of fiction.

Chapter 2: Fictional Avant-gardes in the Revolution

Artistic and Political Avant-gardes in Cuba

The Cuban Revolution was a turning point for Latin American artists and intellectuals involved in heated debates about the socio-political dimension of culture. Amidst a turbulent geopolitical context, framed by the Cold War and Third World decolonisation, Cuba “se convertía en imagen simbólica de una nueva realidad política con repercusiones en el campo cultural” (Pogolotti, 2007: 2). As I explored in Chapter 1, in the early twentieth century, Latin American avant-gardes had been involved in state policies, nation-building projects, and the quest to consolidate an autonomous and modernised cultural field. After 1959, the Cuban Revolution motivated avant-garde artists to seek an alliance with revolutionary politics and be part of an unprecedented continent-wide socialist programme.

Numerous intellectuals drew upon the notion of the avant-garde to rethink the role of art in the Revolution. As Ambrosio Fornet² recalls: “empezaba a consolidarse una alianza entre las vanguardias políticas y artísticas. La Revolución [...] se nos aparecía como la expresión política de las aspiraciones artísticas de la vanguardia” (2007: 5). For roughly a decade (1959-1971) there was a close relationship between artists and the Cuban state, though cracks started to appear particularly towards the end of this period. The Revolution first promoted a series of institutions and publications that gathered cultural actors from across Latin America. The ambitions of the artistic avant-garde were channelled through state initiatives like Casa de las Américas and the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (1959), the Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización (1961), and the Congreso Cultural de La Habana (1968). In parallel, a series of episodes aroused mistrust on both sides and pressured artists to follow state directives, such as the censorship of the film *PM* and Castro’s “Palabras a los Intelectuales” (1961), Che Guevara’s assassination (1967), and the Padilla affair (1971). As I will shortly examine, these events aroused a sense of political urgency among state leaders and activists, leading them to question the relevance of culture for revolutionary struggles. In this way, two opposed regimes of value coexisted within the Revolution, envisioning artists’ contribution to social change in either aesthetic or political terms. Towards the end of the period, immediate political utility was

² Fornet was a Cuban writer, filmmaker and scholar who, since the 1960s, presided over the Instituto Cubano del Libro and the editorial committee of the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba.

demanded from culture in detriment of specifically artistic endeavours.

Since the Cuban Revolution framed the greatest affinities and final breakup between artistic and political avant-gardes in Latin America, my initial case studies focus on two authors particularly prominent at these crossroads. Cortázar and Dalton partook in public debates and outlined the key questions that marked the history of Latin American avant-gardes from the 1960s onward. Each voiced polarised standpoints on the role of literature within a revolutionary process: while Cortázar emphatically advocated literature as a specific sphere of action, Dalton favoured extra-literary activism and armed struggle. This dichotomy condensed the dilemmas faced by ensuing attempts to combine aesthetic and political radicalism in Latin America. The rest of the novels in this thesis look back at this historical juncture to re-examine the legacy of avant-gardes, seeking to reopen their ambitions of igniting social change through art. Therefore, examining Cortázar and Dalton's novels will establish the guidelines of fictional avant-gardes, which the novels studied in the following chapters invoke and rethink.

Cortázar and Dalton upheld the relevance of avant-gardist ideals at a time when escalating armed struggle and political violence jeopardised the social status of art. Their fictional avant-gardes underlined the importance of formal experimentation and literary production that is not subject to the political avant-garde but is nonetheless vital to it. Throughout this chapter, I will explore how these novels reclaim the potential of fiction to reinvent community. *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* fictionalise collectives that advocate the revolutionary value of affect, invoking Che Guevara's idea of the Hombre Nuevo and turning its self-sacrificial connotations into a call for playfulness and humour. These fictional avant-gardes devise the group of artists as a framework that elicits connections and redesigns habits, ultimately defying the closure of avant-gardist and revolutionary programmes towards the mid-1970s.

Cuba's Call to Artists and Intellectuals

The Cuban Revolution reshaped the Latin American scenario and impacted the whole of Western intelligentsia. The Revolution initially succeeded in “mobilising writers across national borders, publishing younger writers, and gaining the support and admiration of intellectuals ranging from [Jean-Paul] Sartre to [Susan] Sontag” (Franco, 2002: 38). The post-Stalinist New Left sympathised with Cuba, as the state conferred a significant role and visibility to artists and

intellectuals. In Latin America, paradigms of thought were radicalised by “el aura inconmensurable de una revolución ahora realizada en tierras latinoamericanas”, which turned politics into “la práctica dadora de sentido de todo ejercicio intelectual” (Terán, 1991: 154). Renowned artists who had previously developed a political consciousness were attracted to Cuba’s unorthodox approach to revolutionary politics, its focus on culture and unprecedented continental scope. For example, García Márquez declared that “the definition of a Latin American *intelectual de izquierda* became the unconditional defense of Cuba” (in Castañeda, 1993: 184).

The cultural institution and magazine Casa de las Américas acted as a “mirror of revolutionary culture as it is being formulated by Cuba and the Latin American vanguard” (Weiss, 1977: 14). Through its publications and awards, Casa de las Américas quickly centralised a series of authors and works, among them those constituting the core of the Boom including Vargas Llosa, Fuentes, García Márquez and Cortázar. Moreover, the journal established a network of shared articles and ideas with publications such as *Marcha* (Uruguay) and *Siempre!* (Mexico). Havana became both a geographical and symbolic capital for Latin American intellectuals: the Cuban Revolution fostered and oriented culture on a continental basis, aiming to legitimise not only specific authors but a politicised role model of the intellectual (Quintero Herencia, 2002: 30).

In this sense, Casa de las Américas was Cuba’s response to the United States’ Alliance for Progress and the cultural institutions it promoted. It acted as “the convener of meetings and forums to make sure that the unity that had to some extent failed in the OAS [Organisation of American States] on political grounds would materialise in the cultural arena with Cuba at its center” (Lie, 1996: 68). The Revolution succeeded in institutionalising the Latin American leftist intelligentsia and numerous intellectuals lived and worked in Cuba: García Márquez, Mario Benedetti, Rodolfo Walsh and Dalton himself, among others. The “viaje a La Habana” reached an almost pilgrimage status, given the number of international conferences periodically reuniting artists, intellectuals and politicians. In addition to the yearly Casa de las Américas awards, Cuba hosted events such as the Conferencia Tricontinental (1966), Organización Latinoamericana de Solidaridad (1967) and Congreso Cultural de La Habana (1968).

As a political leader and traveller not born in Cuba, Che Guevara personified the Revolution’s continental scope and Latin Americanist discourses. Likewise, the cultural project

of Casa de las Américas had its political counterpart in Cuba's material and ideological support of revolutionary endeavours in Latin America and the Third World at large (Artaraz, 2009: 24). Internationalism was inextricably linked to the Cuban project, largely thanks to Che Guevara's theory of the guerrilla *foco*³ and involvement in warfare in distant territories. Simultaneously, the French intellectual Régis Debray acted as an international ambassador and theorist of Latin American struggle, especially after publishing the iconic book *¿Revolución en la Revolución?* (1967) and being imprisoned in Bolivia after a clandestine visit to Che Guevara.⁴

The concept of the avant-garde was repeatedly quoted and redefined during this period, as artists and intellectuals attempted to elucidate the links between revolutionary art and politics in the face of political upheaval. However, the avant-garde was not a fixed and univocal idea but acquired ambiguous and shifting connotations. Throughout the first decade of the Revolution, different conceptualisations aimed to answer a series of pressing questions. What are the concrete traits of revolutionary art? What is its role within a socialist society? How can artists and intellectuals relate to political and state directives?

Avant-gardes in a Revolutionary Society

Che Guevara's most renowned text, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965), summarises the guidelines that alternately fostered and hindered the confluence of artistic and political avant-gardes. For Guevara, subjective conditions are crucial to constructing socialism. Developing the *Hombre Nuevo* embodies "the radical change that the Cuban regime was invested in promoting, [...] a model that quickly became influential in the politics, culture, and identity struggles of Cuba and Latin America" (Serra, 2007: 2). In Che Guevara's view, guerrilla combatants are prime examples of the *Hombre Nuevo*, responsible for imbuing revolutionary consciousness and self-sacrifice in the masses. In his own words: "El revolucionario [...] se consume en esa actividad ininterrumpida que no tiene más fin que la muerte, a menos que la construcción se logre en escala mundial" (2011: 21). Heroism, voluntarism and selflessness were thus the

³ The *foco* theory was set out in Che Guevara's book *La guerra de guerrillas* (1960), which narrated his experience of guerrilla warfare in Cuba.

⁴ The Argentine *Ciro Bustos* was captured alongside Debray. Bustos was Che Guevara's principal contact man in Argentina, responsible for liaising with local political groups and organising supporting cadres. In his autobiography, published in 2007, Bustos recalls learning about Che's assassination during the trial he and Debray faced in Bolivia: "One Tuesday morning, however, excitement turned to jubilation. The judges were in a pow-wow with the prosecutor on the podium, when he suddenly turned round and declared he was in a position to confirm that the famous Che Guevara had been captured and had died from his wounds in La Higuera" (2013: 374).

privileged values of the Hombre Nuevo, conveying a sense of physical sacrifice and asceticism (Kumaraswami, 2016: 82). As I will shortly explore, the notion of the Hombre Nuevo entailed a sexist idea of revolutionary action that relegated women to secondary roles and that filtered through into the fictional avant-gardes of Cortázar and Dalton. In the following chapters, I will explore the continuation of such a gendered view of avant-gardes by Bolaño and Saer, and its dismantling in the works of Moreno and Ojeda.

Che Guevara argues that pedagogy is the Revolution's most pressing cultural task, needed to motivate participation in the daily and collective task of building socialism. In this vein, Cuban cultural policies have been seen as a "Marxist-humanist attitude to culture, [...] [with] an understanding that the Cuban people needed to develop their spiritual lives, via access to culture, enabling them not only to play a productive part in society but also to escape alienation" (Gordon-Nesbitt, 2015, Chapter 3). The Revolution's commitment to culture rapidly led to the creation of institutions such as Casa de las Américas and the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, alongside initiatives such as the Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización and Movimiento de Artistas Aficionados (1963). Democratising access to culture necessarily redesigned inherited conceptions of art, now focused on developing a revolutionary consciousness.

El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba openly contests dogmatic views of culture, condemning Socialist Realism as inadequate for the Cuban context. Che Guevara advocates "la auténtica investigación artística" and attacks "la simplificación, lo que entiende todo el mundo, que es lo que entienden los funcionarios, [...] las formas congeladas del realismo socialista" (2011: 16). He seemingly fosters unorthodox and alternative ways to political dirigisme, which artists could interpret as validating formal experimentation: "no se pretenda condenar a todas las formas de arte posteriores a la primera mitad del siglo XIX [...] pues se caería en un error proudhoniano de retorno al pasado, poniéndole camisa de fuerza a la expresión artística del hombre que nace y se construye hoy" (2011: 17). However, he clarifies that future artistic forms—appropriate for the forthcoming Hombre Nuevo—can only stem from a new generation of artists and intellectuals born and raised in socialism, not from established and pre-revolutionary personalities. He warns that "la culpabilidad de muchos de nuestros intelectuales y artistas reside en su pecado original; no son auténticamente revolucionarios. [...] Ya vendrán los revolucionarios que entonen el canto del hombre nuevo" (2011: 18).

Che Guevara advanced a perspective that could be interpreted two ways, on the one hand encouraging artistic experimentation and, on the other, discrediting the relevance of intellectuals when forging the *Hombre Nuevo*. He finally defined political utility as the parameter legitimising the role of intellectuals and art in a revolutionary society. New artistic forms would be eventually developed alongside the *Hombre Nuevo*; therefore, “transitional” intellectuals had to accept their contradictory and ultimately transient status. The Revolution thus forced intellectuals to revise their specific areas and instruments of intervention. Debates on aesthetic forms were linked to broader discussions regarding the social value of literature and art, in which subsequent and contradictory redefinitions of the notion of the avant-garde attempted to elucidate the political status of artists and intellectuals. The initial confluence and final breakup between artistic and political avant-gardes in Cuba followed oscillatory state policies regarding culture, which had an impact on the different avenues that artists undertook to reinvent art alongside the *Hombre Nuevo* and socialist society to come.

Cortázar and the Avant-garde as *Engagé* Experimentation

The ideal of shaping a new literature for a new world motivated Latin American intellectuals to look for renewed aesthetic proposals. As an early promoter of the Boom, Emir Rodríguez Monegal championed modernised aesthetics detached from any folkloric legacy. For instance, he celebrated a novel published a decade earlier, Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955), as a precursor that “aprovecha la gran tradición mexicana de la tierra pero que la metamorfosea, la destruye y la recrea por medio de una hondísima asimilación de las técnicas de Faulkner” (1969: 25). The novel form was broadly valorised as the proper domain to renovate Latin American literature; it achieved global recognition due to an interdependent phenomenon of political upheaval and market development. The Boom’s success in both the culture industry and specialised circles was as significant as the Cuban Revolution for creating the label of “nueva narrativa latinoamericana”, and Spanish publishing houses played a decisive role in forging a global readership.⁵ Market dynamics not only guaranteed the professionalisation of writers but also put them in the spotlight of public opinion and granted them an unprecedented massive readership (Rama, 1984: 105). The public recognition and willingness of intellectuals to contribute to social

⁵ During the 1960s, numerous Latin American writers linked to the Boom were awarded the Seix Barral’s Premio Biblioteca Breve de Novela. For example, Vargas Llosa’s *La ciudad y los perros* (1962), Cabrera Infante’s *Vista del amanecer en el trópico* (1964) and Fuentes’ *Cambio de piel* (1967).

change was thus facilitated by a context that demanded new discourses and prompted them to enact a leading voice.

Writers and critics aimed to redefine the idea of aesthetic rupture in line with their sought-after contribution to revolutionary transformation. Such a preeminence of intellectuals in the public sphere broadly followed the role model of Sartre. The figure of the *engagé* intellectual enabled Latin American writers to embrace political engagement without demanding concrete party affiliation or abandoning the specific field of literature (Terán, 1991: 154). As Sartre says in *What is literature?*: “The ‘engaged’ writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change” (1949: 23). Distanced from the notion of “art for art’s sake”, artistic praxis was seen as a tool for social change because formal experimentation mirrored and complemented revolutionary action. As Vargas Llosa declared when receiving the 1967 Premio Internacional de Novela Rómulo Gallegos: “La literatura es una forma de insurrección permanente. [...] Su función es estimular sin tregua la voluntad de cambio y de mejora” (1986: 135).

Cortázar embodied the paradigm of the *engagé* intellectual. In a 1962 conference in Havana, he declared that “escribir revolucionariamente” was not to adopt the Revolution as subject matter but to experiment in the face of revolutionary politics: “Si el escritor, responsable y lúcido, decide escribir literatura fantástica o psicológica, o vuelta hacia el pasado, su acto es un acto de libertad dentro de la revolución, y por eso es también un acto revolucionario” (1977: 274). Cortázar stood for the inherently critical nature of literature and invited writers to become “los Che Guevara del lenguaje, los revolucionarios de la literatura más que los literatos de la revolución” (1970: 76). His article “Literatura en la Revolución y Revolución en la Literatura” (1969) also argued that revolutionary literature must use formal experimentation to advance a radically new vision of society. He defined the ambitions of revolutionary writers as “revolucionar la novela misma, la forma novela, y para ello utilizar todas las armas, [...] la conjetura, la trama pluridimensional, la fractura del lenguaje” (1970: 73). For Cortázar, literary works and activism were equally significant means of revolutionary action: “Pocos dudarán de mi convicción de que Fidel Castro o Che Guevara han dado las pautas de nuestro auténtico destino latinoamericano; pero de ninguna manera estoy dispuesto a admitir que los *Poemas luminosos* o *Cien años de soledad* sean respuestas inferiores, en el plano cultural, a esas respuestas políticas” (1970: 44).

Such a defence of the transformational force of literature devised it as a politicised but still specific sphere of action. The concept of the avant-garde was seen as an impulse towards formal experimentation –broadly linked to the technical repertoire of modern art– where aesthetic rupture entailed political effects. In *Casa de las Américas*, Roberto Fernández Retamar⁶ reaffirmed the potential of avant-gardes for producing a radically new art within an equally unprecedented society: “La vanguardia nace en Europa de la crisis del mundo capitalista. [...] ¿Vamos por eso a prescindir de lo que ha conquistado la vanguardia? ¿Vamos a recluirnos en expresiones agrestes y deplorablemente folklóricas?” (1967: 15). Likewise, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez⁷ claimed that the social relevance of art rested upon its potential for rupture: “lo verdaderamente revolucionario es ruptura, negación. [...] Hay que asimilar lo que las tendencias estéticas más diversas –desde el impresionismo al arte abstracto– han aportado” (1964: 12-13). These two influential theorists of revolutionary culture thus celebrated the avant-garde for using every precedent formal innovation to advance renewed visions of society.

In 1968, Cortázar had a virulent quarrel with José María Arguedas. First, Cortázar justified his apparently contradictory stance as a Latin American intellectual residing in France: “era necesario situarse en la perspectiva más universal del viejo mundo [...] para ir descubriendo poco a poco las verdaderas raíces de lo latinoamericano” (2006: 171). He associated cosmopolitanism with formal experimentation and opposed folklore: “esa ‘vuelta a los orígenes’ que ilustra precisamente una importante corriente de la literatura latinoamericana [...] me es profundamente ajeno por estrecho, parroquial y hasta diría aldeano” (2006: 171). As a Peruvian writer who “stayed” in Peru and whose works blend Spanish and Quechua, Arguedas took Cortázar’s comments personally. He accusingly linked Cortázar’s cosmopolitan poetics to his market success: “A usted, don Julio, en esas fotos de *Life* se le ve muy en su sitio. [...] Por eso está tan engreído por la glorificación, tan folkloreador de los que trabajamos ‘in situ’ y nos gusta llamarnos, muy a disgusto suyo, provincianos” (2006: 199). Invectives like Arguedas’ translated debates between cosmopolitan and folkloric forms into refuting the social status and economic privileges of Boom writers.

Cortázar thus personified the standpoint of the *engagé* intellectual, whose specifically

⁶ Fernández Retamar was a central figure in Cuba since the 1960s until his death in 2019. He was a poet, essayist and literary critic who directed *Casa de las Américas* and served on the Council of State of Cuba.

⁷ Sánchez Vázquez was a Spanish-born Mexican philosopher who specialised on Marxist aesthetics. He travelled to Cuba numerous times during the 1960s, where he partook in cultural events and published articles in influential journals like *Casa de las Américas* and *Unión*.

literary works would represent a major contribution to an all-embracing revolutionary programme. As Claudia Gilman explains: “Los defensores de la tradición de la ruptura afirmaban la paridad jerárquica de la serie estética y la serie política; planteaban como su tarea la de hacer ‘avanzar’ el arte del mismo modo que la vanguardia política hacía ‘avanzar’ las condiciones de la revolución” (2003: 144). According to this regime of value, political commitment demanded aesthetic modernisation and experimentation, and the notion of the avant-garde granted equal revolutionary importance to art and politics. The new art of the new world was meant to use the most “advanced” and rupturist forms, useful for renovating ways of social and political change.

Dalton and the Avant-garde as an Anti-intellectualist Call to Action

The ideal of the *engagé* intellectual was eventually jeopardised by events both internal and external to Latin American culture. Cuba’s political situation was weakened by economic deprivation and Castro’s support for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He also proclaimed the 1968 Ofensiva Revolucionaria that nationalised every private trade and service, mobilised the entire workforce for agricultural labour, and reshaped cultural policy according to tighter disciplinary guidelines (Clayfield, 2019: 71). The late 1960s and early 1970s are usually regarded as “a period of intense and systematic institutionalisation, which saw a level of hitherto un-thought of bureaucracy applied to the Revolutionary process” (Clayfield, Kirk and Story, 2018: 1). As Benedetti noted at the time: “La revolución asume conscientemente un estado de ánimo frente al cual la cultura humanística pasa a ser un rubro secundario. [...] No sería ilógico esperar un aumento de la presión social sobre los intelectuales en Cuba” (1968: 30). This statement marks a turning point in the relationships between aesthetic and political regimes of value that could no longer coexist within the Revolution.

This state of affairs affected the position of intellectuals. Previous ambitions of enacting an independent and critical voice were discredited, and adherence to state guidelines was demanded to guarantee “the mobilisation of culture in the defense of the nation and therefore the role of the artist as a combatant (but also educator)” (Story, 2018: 183). Artists could no longer follow Cortázar in pursuing a “revolución en la revolución”, and immediate political utility was privileged when defining the revolutionary intellectual as such. Gilman names this ideological radicalisation as “anti-intellectualism”, as it favoured subordination to political directives over artistic specialisation: “Surge dentro del mismo campo intelectual para abjurar de sí mismo

enfrentando a sus miembros con otros paradigmas de valor. [...] Implica la problematización de la relación de la labor intelectual y la acción, entendida en términos de una intervención eficaz en el terreno político” (2003: 166). Che Guevara’s assassination in 1967 was a decisive moment when the status of the intellectual was measured against the man of action who divested himself of his middle-class origins. The anti-intellectualist faction finally favoured armed struggle as the defining trait of the revolutionary intellectual, as expressed in the “Declaración General del Congreso Cultural de La Habana”: “El Congreso saluda en el Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara el ejemplo supremo del intelectual revolucionario contemporáneo que, abandonando cargos y honores, va a combatir en cualquier pueblo oprimido de la tierra” (1968: 28).

While Cortázar embodied the paradigm of the *engagé* intellectual, Dalton epitomised the revolutionary intellectual privileging direct action over artistic specificity. In the late 1950s, parallel to publishing his first poetry collections, Dalton joined El Salvador’s Communist Party. After a series of imprisonments and exiles (in Mexico, the Soviet Union and Cuba), Dalton quit the Party and joined the Salvadoran Guevarist guerrilla Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP). Thereafter, Dalton was actively involved in the early stages of the Salvadoran civil war. The ERP would later join other likeminded political organisations under the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), leading the armed conflict against the Salvadoran army until the 1992 peace treaty. Even though Dalton never stopped writing, he did stop publishing: while alive, he published his last book –*Taberna y otros lugares* (1969)– just before definitively embarking on armed struggle. Neglecting his own public image as a writer thus reinforced his orthodox standpoint on the urgency of direct action.

In several interventions in *Casa de las Américas*, Dalton questioned the cultural capital of the intellectual. He argued that it implied an unacceptable privilege founded on social inequality: “De un análisis serio de mi propia obra poética [...] puedo decir que aún priva sobre el punto de vista comunista que ahora soy, la actitud del burgués que antes fui” (1963: 13). Dalton’s stance entailed self-examination and demanded intellectuals to join the hardships of revolutionary struggle: “la situación moral del intelectual latinoamericano que ha llegado a la comprensión de las necesidades reales de la Revolución solo podrá ser resuelta en la práctica revolucionaria, en la militancia revolucionaria” (1969: 7). Dalton did not necessarily dismiss artistic endeavours; however, he established a hierarchical distinction between action and culture: “Yo creo que todo lo que he dicho no pone en duda la especificidad de la tarea literaria. Examinó simplemente las

tareas históricas que se ofrecen ante la intelectualidad cubana y latinoamericana en el seno de sus sociedades y me inclino por una jerarquización de las tareas” (1969: 32).

While Cortázar and Arguedas discussed poetic choices, Dalton bypassed debates on literary form. Instead, he opposed aesthetic values to the circumstances of armed struggle, finally asking intellectuals to follow political leaders and adopt the selfless mandate of the *Hombre Nuevo*: “¿debo darle más importancia al trabajo de terminar mi importantísima novela o debo aceptar esta tarea peligrosa que me plantea el Partido, la guerrilla, el Frente, y en ejecución de la cual puedo perder, no mi precioso tiempo de dos meses sino todo el tiempo que se supone me quedaba?” (1969: 8). Dalton associated the critical standpoint of the *engagé* intellectual with a self-deceptive belief in artistic autonomy. In his view, autonomy was nothing more than market complacency: “El escritor que ejerce ilimitadamente el oficio de fiscal de la vida pública suele ser un tonto. [...] Siguen pensando en su autonomía (que nunca existió, pero que les fue cuidadosamente inventada), convencidos de que siempre fueron por sí mismos una fuente de poder independiente” (1977: 124). In contrast, he declared that the revolutionary status of intellectuals depended on recreating themselves as *Hombres Nuevos*: “En la praxis revolucionaria, el intelectual, como categoría histórica incompleta [...] se realiza como hombre nuevo, como hombre integral: unidad de teoría y de práctica revolucionarias” (1969: 7).

At this point, the mere possibility of an artistic avant-garde contradicted the Revolution’s roadmap, as declared during the Congreso Cultural de La Habana: “Los antiguos conceptos de vanguardia cultural adquieren un sentido aún más definido. Convertirse en vanguardia cultural dentro del marco de la revolución supone la participación militante en la vida revolucionaria” (1968: 26). Fernández Retamar withdrew his previous claims regarding the usefulness of artistic avant-gardes: “Hoy tengo menos confianza en la univocidad, en la claridad de una expresión como ‘vanguardia estética’, que arrastra tantas confusiones. [...] Quizás convenga comenzar por prescindir de una nomenclatura que se ha revelado ineficaz” (in Benedetti, 1971: 12). Sánchez Vázquez also shifted his outlook on the subversive potential of art and advanced a more orthodox view: “un arte más útil, en ese momento, a la revolución: el arte de un contenido ideológico directo, aunque se halle vinculado a formas y medios de expresión más tradicionales” (1972: 19). For Fernández Retamar and Sánchez Vázquez, renouncing the idea of the artistic avant-garde entailed abandoning experimental aesthetics, which were no longer pursuant to the political project they supported. The social value of art could not rest upon formal rupture

anymore; it was exclusively linked to immediate socio-political utility.

Antagonism between the *engagé* and revolutionary intellectual led to refuting previously celebrated authors and forms, particularly the Boom. Cosmopolitanism and formal experimentation were condemned for being detached from concrete political struggles, as artists and institutions looked for renewed forms to rethink the links between art and revolutionary politics. Opposed to the novel's superfluous elitism, "the new revolutionary environment especially affected more public genres and cultural forms [...] with a potential to be seen by the political vanguard as important instruments of social and political change" (Kapcia, 2005: 141). For example, documentary cinema witnessed a period of climax with Santiago Álvarez's newsreels (Chanan, 2004: 211), and icons of the protest song and Nueva Trova, such as Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez, were officially recognised and promoted as continental "spokespersons of the revolutionary experience" (Moore, 2006: 153).

Regarding literature, Casa de las Américas included the *testimonio* as a new category in its 1969 awards. The first winner was *La guerrilla tupamara* (1970), by María Esther Gilio, which narrates the guerrilla experience of Tupamaros in Uruguay in their own voices: "[el premio] establecía una relación de continuidad entre la forma textual del testimonio y la idea de la práctica guerrillera que había socavado la legitimidad de la vanguardia estética a finales de los sesenta" (Peris Blanes, 2005-2006: 158). As a non-mediated textual form, the apogee of the *testimonio* mirrored the anti-elitist disregard of the novel. Just as the anti-intellectualist current favoured direct action, the *testimonio* strived to denounce social injustice through orality and direct transcript: "it already incorporates the abandonment of the literary, [...] where the literary breaks off into something else, which is not so much the real as it is its unguarded possibility" (Moreiras, 1996: 195). Celebrated as a properly revolutionary form, the *testimonio* shaped a poetics paradoxically legitimated by non-aesthetic criteria. It depicted an allegedly truthful Latin American reality, deeming the perspective of the intellectual unnecessary and inherently bourgeois. In Chapter 3, Bolaño and Saer's novels will allow me to address the still-relevant dichotomy between artistic and political radicalisation at the turn of the century. I will analyse their fictionalisations of avant-gardes amidst a new surge of autobiographical texts and *testimonios* that reviewed the 1960s and 1970s revolutionary projects.

The Dead Ends of Artistic and Political Avant-gardes

The Cuban Revolution, therefore, framed a series of encounters and conflicts between artistic and political avant-gardes, in which the quest for a new art was alternately pursued through aesthetic or political means. The Padilla affair caused the definitive breakup between the Latin American intelligentsia and the Cuban state. It was the endpoint of an oscillatory relationship that had already endured sensitive episodes such as the abovementioned “Palabras a los Intelectuales”. The Padilla affair caused a polarised division between intellectuals unquestioningly supporting the Revolution and those still subscribing to the *engagé* model. Cortázar was one of the few figures attempting to bypass such a polarisation, ambiguously defending and criticising the Cuban state at the same time.

The poet Heberto Padilla was arrested and accused of counter-revolutionary activities in 1971. He then published a public self-accusation following typical anti-intellectualist guidelines: “si hay –salvo excepción– un sector políticamente a la zaga de la revolución, es el sector de la cultura y el arte. [...] Sin embargo, para exigir, para chismear, para protestar, para criticar, los primeros somos la mayoría de los escritores” (1971: 109). Following his imprisonment and repentance, Latin American and European intellectuals who had previously supported the Revolution published an open letter in *Le Monde*. It was signed by de Beauvoir, Fuentes, Juan Goytisolo, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Sartre and Vargas Llosa, among others. They claimed that Padilla’s self-critique was a “texto lastimoso” recalling “los momentos más sórdidos de la época del stalinismo” (in Croce, 2006: 257). In response, Fidel Castro declared Cuba’s final breakup with these intellectuals, whom he called “basuras” and “agentillos del colonialismo cultural”. He accused them of benefitting from “la fama que ganaron cuando en una primera fase fueron capaces de expresar algo de los problemas latinoamericanos” (in Croce, 2006: 245).

This clash indicates the dead ends of a long decade of encounters and mismatches between art and politics. As previously quoted from *Casa de las Américas* and the Congreso Cultural de La Habana, literary magazines, public speeches and institutional declarations provided discursive platforms where the avant-garde was subsequently re-theorised, appraised and dismissed. Such recurrent redefinitions of the concept mirrored the fluctuating links between artistic forms and direct action, as much as between intellectuals and state directives. The aesthetic and political regimes of value could no longer coexist after a series of events escalating from Che Guevara’s assassination in 1967 to the Padilla affair in 1971. Anti-intellectualist perspectives demanded immediate utility from art and the idea of an artistic avant-garde was

deemed inadequate for forging the Hombre Nuevo. In the end, the term avant-garde could only be applied to political leaders.

However, fiction was also used to redefine the scope and validity of the avant-garde. Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel* and Dalton's *Pobrecito poeta...* reread the links between art and politics through fictionalised avant-gardist circles. While Cortázar was perhaps the most renowned figure to champion the *engagé* ideal and specific domain of literature, Dalton advocated revolutionary duties beyond cultural specialisation and was involved in armed struggle. In the remainder of this chapter, I compare both novels to present a fictional counterpart to Cortázar and Dalton's public self-images. I will analyse how *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* used fiction to re-examine the role of avant-gardes in revolutionary projects and to highlight the potential of artistic experimentation to reinvent community. Their fictional avant-gardes exceed the artistic domain to explore issues like friendship and violence, ultimately depicting the creation of group dynamics as the specific contribution that avant-gardes make in terms of driving socio-political change.

Cortázar at the Crossroads of Art and Politics

Libro de Manuel was Cortázar's greatest attempt to combine literary experimentation and political commitment. During a 1980 seminar at the University of Berkeley, Cortázar went over his career and mentioned that he wrote this novel to assume “una responsabilidad cuando se es un ser pensante y [...] se tiene un contacto e incluso una influencia con lectores, oyentes o espectadores” (2013: 235). The Cuban Revolution encouraged Cortázar to reconsider his status as an intellectual and he decided to put his literary recognition at the service of Latin American revolutionary projects. In his own words, *Libro de Manuel* aimed to give literary form to such a public engagement, pursuing “una especie de deseo de escribir no un libro específicamente político [...] pero sí intentar un libro que, siendo literario, transmitiera al mismo tiempo por lo menos un poco de mi propia experiencia en la materia y que tuviera también alguna utilidad frente a sus eventuales lectores” (2013: 236). Cortázar envisioned it as a book capable of overcoming the reaction of Che Guevara after reading his short story “Reunión”. During a flight from Argelia to Cuba, Fernández Retamar invited Che to read Cortázar's fictionalisation of his chronicles on guerrilla warfare. As recalled by Cortázar: “Lo leyó, se lo devolvió y dijo: ‘Está muy bien pero no me interesa’” (2013: 35).

When writing *Libro de Manuel*, thus, Cortázar adopted stylistic features that aimed to bypass the dead ends of artistic and political avant-gardes. The novel was meant to reflect on political urgencies through the experimental lens of his previous works, such as *Rayuela* (1963) or *62: Modelo para armar* (1969). To uphold the relevance of combining artistic and political radicalism, Cortázar exacerbated his previous attempts to grant readers an active role and engage them in the task of composing, rather than merely interpreting, the text. In this vein, *Libro de Manuel* mirrors *Rayuela*'s kaleidoscopic structure, juxtaposing chapters that resemble standalone units and could be potentially read in a non-sequential order. Likewise, *Libro de Manuel* replicates the narrative strategies of *62: Modelo para armar*. Both novels shift back and forth not only between different locations and chronological planes, but also between multiple points of view and first- and third-person narrators. Moreover, just as *Rayuela* included chapters written as different literary genres, such as autobiographical accounts or philosophical digressions, *Libro de Manuel* inserts newspaper clippings that constantly interrupt the narrative. As I will shortly examine, this use of non-fictional materials is the primary means by which Cortázar aimed to stress the political extent of literary experimentation.

In the novel's preface, Cortázar promised to donate the book's royalties to political activists, anticipating anti-intellectualist objections to his work and reaffirming its revolutionary relevance: "los propugnadores de la realidad en la literatura lo van a encontrar más bien fantástico mientras que los encaramados en la literatura de ficción deplorarán su deliberado contubernio con la historia de nuestros días. Personalmente no lamento esta heterogeneidad que por suerte ha dejado de parecerme tal" (1995: 11). Nevertheless, the publication of *Libro de Manuel* quickly aroused discussions in the media and specialised magazines. For example, the Argentine journal *Crisis* dedicated its first issue to compiling opinions on the book. In it, the trade union leader Raimundo Ongaro⁸ disregarded the effective reach of Cortázar's ambitions: "Lógicamente que nos parece bien que un intelectual se solidarice con las luchas populares (Cuba, Vietnam o Argentina) pero a cada cosa su lugar: para esas luchas nos importa el que arriesga la vida" (1973: 17). Likewise, the Priest for the Third World Carlos Mugica⁹ refused to even read the novel because of its elitist poetics: "1) porque como escritor Cortázar me parece

⁸ Ongaro was the Secretary General of the leftist Confederación General del Trabajo de los Argentinos (CGTA). The aforementioned Tucumán arde took place at the CGTA's headquarters.

⁹ Mugica was a catholic priest and leftist political activist, especially active within the Movement of Priests for the Third World. He was assassinated in 1974 by the parapolice force Alianza Anticomunista Argentina.

obstruso; 2) porque no tengo tiempo para leer ficciones y 3) porque considero que su literatura va dirigida a los exquisitos y no al pueblo” (1973: 17).

While Ongaro and Mugica echoed the anti-intellectualist favouring of armed struggle over art, renowned literary critics also questioned the literary techniques of *Libro de Manuel*. For Jorge Rivera, Cortázar personified an elitist standpoint conceiving political liberation in merely formalistic terms: “como si la alienación y la reificación del ‘hombre viejo’ fuesen sólo una ‘desventura del espíritu’ necesitada de ciertos exorcismos, y no una consecuencia objetiva de las relaciones que se verifican en la sociedad” (1973: 35). In the same vein, Sarlo condemned Cortázar’s combination of formal experimentation and political action as an inconsequential “exageración rocambolesca, en cuyo interior lo político puede ser manejado como residuo de folletín, como espacio de manías y fantasías individuales” (1974: 33). Likewise, Hernán Vidal refuted Cortázar’s redefinition of the avant-garde and noted its discordance with Marxist-Leninist guidelines: “En sus tratos, contactos, comunicaciones y transacciones se aprecia un estilo ajeno al de una organización de experiencia subversiva, más cercano al espontaneísmo anarquizante” (1979: 59).

These highly publicised indictments mirror the novel’s polarised context, when a literary rereading of revolutionary politics could be attacked from an anti-intellectualist and Manichean standpoint. When intervening in the Padilla affair, Cortázar aimed to sustain –and not resolve– the tension between artistic autonomy and political adherence to Cuba. While most of his literary peers publicly condemned the Cuban state, Cortázar did not sign the open letter and published the poem/essay “Policrítica a la hora de los chacales” (1971). Instead of dichotomously defending either Padilla or Fidel Castro, “Policrítica...” confronted the third party of the “chacales”: “De qué vale que exponga razones y argumentos / Si los chacales velan, / [...] Si al otro día los periódicos, los consejeros, las agencias, / [...] fabricarán una vez más la mentira que corre, la duda que se / instala” (1971: 33). By attacking the “chacales”, Cortázar reminded the reader who the “real” enemy was: neither Padilla nor Castro but the propagandistic apparatus of imperialism that benefitted from the conflict.

“Policrítica...” ambiguously supported both the writer and politician. While the relevance of literature was undermined by Castro and the anti-intellectualist faction, the poetic form allowed Cortázar to reverse the terms of the debate. He claimed that writing this poem was his way of contributing to the Revolution: “No excuso este lenguaje, / [...] Es ahora que ejerzo mi

derecho a elegir, a estar una vez más y / Más que nunca / Con tu Revolución, mi Cuba, a mi manera. Y mi manera torpe, / a manotazos, es esta” (1971: 33-34). Cortázar reaffirmed his commitment to the Revolution and refused to condemn the Cuban authorities. However, he did so without abandoning the artistic sphere of action. As the last verses state: “Déjame defenderte / cuando asome el chacal de turno, déjame estar ahí. Y si no lo / quieres, / oye, compadre, olvida tanta crisis barata. Empecemos de nuevo, / di lo tuyo, aquí estoy, aquí te espero; toma, fuma conmigo” (1971: 36).

Expressions such as “a mi manera” and “fuma conmigo” anticipate *Libro de Manuel*’s approach to the social role of art, aiming to reunite artistic and political avant-gardes by combining formal experimentation and affect. In contrast to the novel’s contemporary reception, I will examine its fictional avant-garde to revalorise its unorthodox approximation of art and politics. Fiction will thus offer a renewed angle on the anti-intellectualist debates quoted above, as *Libro de Manuel* aimed to reshape the forthcoming Hombre Nuevo through playfulness and affect.

Avant-gardes and Latin American *Émigrés*

Cortázar had previously explored the concept of the avant-garde in his 1947 article “Teoría del túnel”, which regards historical avant-gardes as radicalised projects transforming formal experimentation into renewed life experiences. Cortázar argued that, in groups such as Dadaism and Surrealism, “la noción de géneros, de toda estructura genérica, se le da con la perspectiva visual de barrotes, cárcel, sujeción” (2005: 59). He associated these formal ruptures with the need for overcoming “la angustia general del hombre de nuestros días: la duda de que acaso las posibilidades expresivas estén imponiendo límites a lo expresable” (2005: 72). In this vein, Vidal argues that Cortázar’s affinity with revolutionary currents, such as the Cuban or Sandinista Revolutions, reveals “un acto de fe en el potencial liberador de las fuerzas instintivas –el principio de placer–, fuerzas imposibles de ser totalmente sublimadas y utilizadas por el poder burgués” (1979: 50). For Cortázar, the avant-garde opposes capitalist alienation by transforming the subjectivities of both artists and spectators, as aesthetic rupture impacts consciousness and allows us to envision liberated ways of living.

Cortázar’s ideal of provoking political effects through experimentalism finds its fictional counterpart in the avant-gardist circle of La Joda. *Libro de Manuel* introduces a group of Latin

American *émigrés* living in Paris and forming an extreme left political faction. Far from adhering to ascetic anti-intellectualist guidelines, *La Joda* frames behaviours and relationships permeated by playfulness and eroticism. In an interview given at the time the novel was published, Cortázar claimed to oppose the “burócratas” and “comisarios” who neglected the political dimension of liberated ways of life: “En América Latina, libro dos grandes batallas, una por la liberación humorística, otra por la liberación erótica, por un humorismo y erotismo integrales que nos liberen de todos los tabúes” (in Gundermann, 2001: 30). Cortázar thus invoked Guevara’s *Hombre Nuevo* and reread it against itself, redefining the concept to refute anti-intellectualist disregards of art. His fictional avant-garde portrays reinvented subjectivities and lifestyles, ultimately reaffirming the contribution of art and affect to revolutionary change.

Cortázar’s vitalist rereading of the *Hombre Nuevo* is mirrored by *La Joda*’s daily gatherings and routines. Their condition of *émigrés* echoes but finally redesigns a lengthy tradition of Latin American “men of letters” who looked up to Paris as the “capitale littéraire de l’Amérique latine” (Villegas, 2007). While *Rayuela* previously depicted Paris through street wanderings, *Libro de Manuel* narrates clandestine and life-risking political endeavours within enclosed spaces. Cortázar himself had reflected on *Rayuela*’s idealised exploration of Parisian streets before: “Mi mito de París actuó en mi favor. Me hizo escribir un libro, *Rayuela*, que es un poco la puesta en acción de una ciudad vista de una manera mítica” (in Herráez, 2014: 22). *Rayuela* follows its protagonist as he explores Parisian landmarks while voicing existentialist and love reflections. For instance: “Tantas veces me había bastado asomarme, viniendo por la rue de Seine, al arco que da al Quai de Conti, y apenas la luz de ceniza y oliva que flotaba sobre el río me dejaba distinguir las formas, ya su silueta delgada se inscribía en el Pont des Arts” (2008: 7).

In contrast, *Libro de Manuel* depicts Paris through fleeting glimpses of urban decadence. A seemingly omniscient third-person narrator describes a panoramic view of Paris, maintaining the critical distance necessary to judge and condemn capitalist social dynamics: “anohecía y estaba tibio y gente, los grupos de argelinos derivando hacia Pigalle o la Place Blanche, la noche en su rutina de neón, papas fritas, putas en cada portal y cada café, tiempo de los alienados en la ciudad más personal y más anclada en sí misma del mundo” (1995: 224). *Rayuela*’s idealised landmarks are displaced by impoverished neighbourhoods, where social outcasts roam amidst an ambience of alcohol and prostitution. In this scenario, *La Joda*’s acquaintance Andrés says to his French girlfriend Francine: “esto se sitúa exactamente a veinte cuadras de tu casa, de tus

catálogos razonados y tu suscripción a *Les Temps Modernes*” (1995: 246). *Libro de Manuel* reveals the reverse of a city traditionally fetishised as the ultimate expression of distinction and high culture. Instead of the role model that Latin American elites admired, Cortázar’s avant-gardists only see misery and violence in Paris. This anti-imperialist challenge to Parisian symbols translates urban materiality –like the “putas en cada portal” and “noche de neón”– into an oppressive state of affairs that must be changed. Andrés continues: “Para tu mundo y el mío esas cosas son siempre inevitables, claro, pero estamos equivocados” (1995: 254). In Chapter 4, I will examine another fictional avant-garde that questions and rewrites the iconic milieu of Paris. *El Affair Skeffington* situates its feminist community in an ebullient interwar Paris where expatriates and avant-gardist initiatives proliferate.

The plot unfolds within private apartments, where La Joda’s members develop intimate connections inseparable from political actions: “El mimeógrafo ronroneaba en el fondo de cuarto, insonorizado lo mejor posible por un biombo reforzado con cobijas y un disco de Aníbal Troilo, Pichuco” (1995: 112). Printing clandestine leaflets blends with the expatriate nostalgia of listening to Tango and sharing homemade food and wine. Moreover, constant shifts of narrative focus and juxtaposed dialogues connote an intimate and sheltered environment in which characters relate to each other comfortably and familiarly: “–Llamalo a Marcos –le dijo Gómez a Patricio–, los buñuelos están listos y calentitos. Dame un trago de vino, Monique, la tinta me invade el alma” (1995: 114). As I noted regarding Dalton, the anti-intellectualist faction shamefully acknowledged and abjured its privileged middle-class origins. In contrast, *Libro de Manuel* revalorises the petty-bourgeois ambiences and habits of middle-class intellectuals. Cosy apartments provide a suitable stage for La Joda’s members to politicise their peers and incite them to partake in group initiatives. The narrator lists how different characters behave in this apartment, concatenating rather than progressing from one scene to the next, thus conveying a sense of simultaneous and shared feelings: “Oscar semiacostado entre Gladis que roncaba un poquitito nomás, [...] los comentarios sobre el operativo del ERP escuchados como cada vez de más lejos, virando lentamente a otro ángulo, juegos del sueño y la penumbra y el vino, otra cosa en esa modorra donde una luna muy alta” (1995: 168-169). Group dynamics reunite the personal and the political, privileging subjective over violent transformation. Reports of guerrilla actions fade away in the background while individuality is dissolved into dreamlike and shared intimacy. Revolutionary action is thus inseparable from the affective potential of friendship and love,

revealing the political value of redesigning habits and routines.

Intimate spaces also mirror Cortázar's goal of forging the *Hombre Nuevo* through liberated eroticism. The novel compares two contrasting views of the political dimension of sex. First, Andrés is introduced as an acquaintance of La Joda who “Escucha una barbaridad de música aleatoria y lee todavía más, anda metido en líos de mujeres, y a lo mejor espera la hora” (1995: 31). Andrés is a *dilettante*, reluctant to political action, whose main concerns are art and love. He initiates a *ménage à trois* with La Joda's member Ludmilla and the French youngster Francine, composing a love triangle that replicates the Manichean choice between politics and art. While Ludmilla represents La Joda's revolutionary politics, Francine –whom he calls “francesita libresca y cartesiana”– symbolises elitist aestheticism. Andrés strives to transcend this dichotomy through erotic liberation. As he reflects while in bed with Francine, he regards sex as a defiance of mores that opens an alternative reality: “cómo decirle alguna vez que sólo en el amor accedía a la libertad, decidía o acataba las imaginaciones más vertiginosas del deseo sin esas tijeras de la vigilia con que antes y después recortaría las formas del presente” (1995: 131). For Andrés, the political potential of sex lies in turning routine and norms upside down. This contrasts with Che Guevara's view of the role of women within revolutionary fight. *La guerra de guerrillas* claims that “la mujer es una compañera que aporta las cualidades propias de su sexo”, such as housekeeping and improving literacy (2004: 56). He also indicates the distractions that meeting women entails for guerrilla fighters; if a combatant “hace contactos con mujeres, contrae amistades no permitidas, debe separarsele inmediatamente [...] por violación de la disciplina revolucionaria” (2004: 71). Opposed to Che Guevara's asceticism, the novel gives literary form to Andrés' ambitions through sumptuous and tactile descriptions of sex that merge eroticism and politics. Sex between Andrés and Ludmilla is described using metaphors that resignify bodily parts and their functions, just as eroticism enables an alternative outlook on daily life: “la succión de los labios que se pegan al anillo de fuego y musgo, [...] arrancándolo a su servidumbre cotidiana y secreta, llamándolo a una ceremonia que arrase con las rutinas de esa mano distraída que de tanto en tanto baja a limpiar y a lavar, de esa casi inexistencia” (1995: 139).

However, Andrés adopts a sexist angle that turns Ludmilla and Francine into feminine objects of desire. Teresa Brennan states that the idea of a self-contained identity depends on a “foundational fantasy”. Instead of accepting bodies' interdependency on the transmission of affects, individuality is imagined and reaffirmed by projecting unwanted affects outside

ourselves. Brennan argues that such a disposition of affects is oriented towards “feminine beings, by which I mean those who carry the negative affects for the other. [...] By disposition, I mean the direction of negative affects such as aggression” (2004: 15). Brennan’s negative affects are comparable with Spinoza’s “bad encounters” and “sad passions”, that is, “an affect by which the body’s power of acting is diminished or restrained” (1996: 138). Andrés’ oscillations between Ludmilla and Francine, between politics and art, configure a masculine fantasy of subjective fulfillment. Andrés’ sexual liberation finally falls short of transcending conventions and dichotomies; instead, he directs negative affects towards Francine and rapes her: “sentí a la vez su quejido y el calor de su piel en mi sexo, la resistencia resbalosa y precaria de ese culito en el que nadie me impediría entrar, aparté las piernas para sujetarla mejor, [...] poseyéndola más y más mientras la oía decir que la lastimaba, que la violaba” (1995: 285). Compared to the previous sumptuous metaphors of sex, this rape scene displays a lineal narration and one-dimensional word choice. Its narrative focuses exclusively on Andrés and reduces Francine to a passive victim of violence. Instead of increasing bodies’ power of acting, in the end, sex only reaffirms Andrés’ dominant and gendered position.

On the other hand, La Joda’s leader Marcos also initiates an affective relationship with Ludmilla. Andrés’ *ménage à trois* is therefore reversed by the double intrusion of another man and political action. As Marcos explains when inviting Ludmilla to join La Joda: “Te imaginás que si te hablo de eso es porque a lo mejor un día querés estar con nosotros, pero tiene que ser algo como tener ganas de acostarse o de jugar o de ir al cine, algo que te sale como un golpe de tos” (1995: 135). Choosing between La Joda’s political project and Andrés’ dilettantism grants agency to the female vertex of the triangle. Moreover, sex between Ludmilla and Marcos is portrayed as a blending and enhancement of bodies exceeding linguistic conventions. The narrator uses metaphors that do not stress the sumptuousness of eroticism, but rather point towards semantic fields more commonly associated with laughter and playfulness: “Hundiendo las manos en el pelo de Marcos lo llamó hacia lo alto, se abrió como un arco [...] donde cualquier cosa empezaba desde otros límites, donde todo podía ser almanaques y barriletes y chivitos y teatros, donde alguna vez la Joda podía tener todos esos nombres, todas esas estrellas” (1995: 240). While Andrés reasserted his masculinity and individuality through violent sexism, Ludmilla and Marcos’ sexual climax opens a line of flight towards reinvented subjectivities. Political awareness and affect reinforce each other when Ludmilla joins La Joda and develops a

love relationship with Marcos. This convergence of eroticism and revolution is mirrored by La Joda's avant-gardist programme, which combines art and politics through playful terms like the "barriletes" and "estrellas" evoked by Ludmilla.

Happenings and Direct Action

Alongside friendship and love, La Joda's public interventions complement Cortázar's unorthodox view of politics, as their playful approach to political action undermines any severe blueprint. During the seminar in Berkeley, Cortázar recalled meeting Latin American guerrillas in Cuba who expressed their gratitude for his most playful book, *Historias de cronopios y de famas* (1962): "Esos muchachos me dijeron: 'Mira, te queríamos ver y hablar un momento contigo para decirte que en los intervalos de algo que estamos haciendo [...] nos encanta leer tus historias de cronopios. Siempre hay alguno de nosotros que las tiene en el bolsillo'" (2013: 197). "Cronopios" are quasi-human beings whose ingenuity and tenderness playfully disrupt routine. With this anecdote, Cortázar proved that his ludic texts were not a depoliticised escape from revolutionary duties but actually fulfilled the guerrillas' need for laughter in-between fighting. Cortázar thus rewrote the ideal of the *Hombre Nuevo* and reversed its sacrificial ethos from an experimental and playful angle. The quest for the *Hombre Nuevo* would be necessarily incomplete if political "seriousness" left no room for a renewal of habits and affects.

Libro de Manuel portrays happenings that disrupt daily capitalist life. La Joda advances an aesthetic and political programme that aims to shock Parisian routine through spontaneous and playful events. For example, they interrupt film screenings at climactic moments: "justo cuando la Brigitte comienza a convertir la pantalla en uno de los momentos estelares de la humanidad, o más bien en dos, [...] Patricio se levanta y produce un espantoso alarido que dura y dura y dura y qué pasa, luces, hay un loco, llamen a la policía" (1995: 59). By interrupting Brigitte Bardot's nude scene, La Joda disrupts the habits of the society of the spectacle and the passive consumption of entertainment. They also act in high-class restaurants, where they order expensive courses, eat them without taking a seat and arouse scandal: "A todo esto la circunstancia orteguiana se manifiesta plenty, señoras chuchuchuchuchu en las orejas de otras señoras, revoleo de ojos, es un escándalo, aquí se viene a estar sentado y a departir, váyanse a comer a una fonda" (1995: 65). Using terms like "plenty" and "chuchuchuchuchu" to characterise La Joda's interventions, the narrator underlines their unorthodox and playful nature.

Their unexpected happening takes place in the restaurant, as they attract diners' attention and proclaim an outspoken political statement: “–Si yo como de pie es porque vivo de pie desde el mes de mayo. [...] Lo hago por mi prójimo y espero que mi prójimo aprenda a vivir de pie” (1995: 65). La Joda's members understand “vivir de pie” as a challenge to consumer society. Just as eroticism previously turned mores upside down, playfulness now subverts the alienation of capitalist routine and hints at a liberated existence.

La Joda's happenings can be linked to contemporary endeavours within the visual arts. In 1968, the Argentine Julio Le Parc published a manifesto defining art as “una especie de guerrilla cultural contra el estado actual de cosas” (1968). For Le Parc, artists had to “fundar una acción práctica para transgredir los valores y romper los esquemas; desencadenar una toma de conciencia colectiva y preparar, con claridad, empresas que pondrán en evidencia el potencial de acción que la gente lleva en sí” (1968). Such a metaphorical comparison between guerrillas and artists commands them to shock their spectators' consciousness and ignite revolutionary subjectivities, just as Che Guevara advocated in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*. In this sense, Ana Longoni notes that artists combined aesthetic choices and political action: “la violencia política se vuelve material estético (no solo como metáfora o invocación, sino incluso apropiándose de recursos, modalidades y procedimientos propios del ámbito de la política, o, mejor, de las organizaciones de izquierda radicalizadas o guerrilleras)” (2014: 46). To achieve socio-political change, they transformed the guerrilla's modus operandi into aesthetic experimentalism, devising happenings that drew upon the methods of activism to launch ephemeral and shocking artistic interventions. Among them, Longoni lists “las prácticas, recursos y procedimientos ‘militantes’ (el volanteo, las pintadas, el acto-relámpago, el sabotaje, el secuestro, la acción clandestina)” (2014: 47).

The notion of “guerrilla cultural” entails merging aesthetic forms and direct action. For instance, in 1968, the Argentine Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia put forward a flashing action identical to *Libro de Manuel's* events. They “invaded” a downtown gallery with helium balloons, which placed next to each other formed a political slogan along the ceiling: “Llega la revolución”. Moreover, La Joda's sabotage to consumer society and capitalist goods is comparable with the Brazilian Cildo Meireles' “Interções em Circuitos Ideológicos: Projeto Coca-Cola” (1970). Just as Cortázar's avant-gardists raised havoc in stores and restaurants, Meireles took Coca-Cola bottles out of market circulation and intervened in them. He added

political statements –like “Yankees Go Home”– and instructions for turning the bottle into a Molotov cocktail. Likewise, the Argentine Grupo Cine Liberación aimed to turn cinema into “un arma político-cultural”. They presented their film *La hora de los hornos* (1968) as “Un acto para la liberación. Una obra inconclusa, abierta para incorporar el diálogo y para el encuentro de voluntades revolucionarias” (in Mestman, 2009: 123). The group organised grassroots screenings promoting a revolutionary impetus. At one point, the film displays a black frame with the label “Espacio abierto al diálogo”. Screenings were then interrupted, and a voice-over narrator stated: “Importa sobre todo la acción que pueda nacer de estas conclusiones. [...] Por eso el film aquí se detiene, se abre hacia ustedes para que ustedes lo continúen” (in Mestman, 2009: 130).

These examples indicate different ways in which avant-garde artists used guerrilla methods to radicalise and redefine art as a means of revolutionary action. In *Libro de Manuel*, La Joda continues its happenings by kidnapping a Latin American diplomat linked to military governments. In exchange, they expect the liberation of political prisoners. They call this unnamed diplomat El Vip and spy on his meetings with fellow militaries, exposing the influence of imperialism on political repression: “había sido entrenado en Panamá por los yanquis, background que había dado ya cinco muertos por mano propia, participación activa en la represión a base de técnicas de la escuela, y un cuartel general clandestino [...] en alguna parte del distrito siete de París” (1995: 227). Cortázar’s fictional avant-garde thus mirrors his public views about the convergence of artistic specificity and revolutionary action. However, while La Joda’s project aestheticises guerrilla methods, it also questions how artists envisioned the “guerrilla cultural”. Cortázar does not invoke the severity of direct action as a way out of aesthetics; in his view, political utility does not entail abandoning ludic and experimental art.

In this sense, La Joda combines violent assaults and the playful spontaneity of happenings. The happening/kidnapping begins by transferring counterfeit money from Argentina to France, hidden inside the cage of a turquoise penguin. Disguised as the caretaker of this fake exotic donation to the Parisian zoo, an Argentine revolutionary clandestinely enters France to aid La Joda. The penguin’s arrival in Paris is then staged as a happening, when disguised guerrillas engage in a farcical dialogue with airport authorities: “No solamente los aduaneros se quedaron encantados con los animales sino que la que parecía la jefa [...] se enamoró del pingüino turquesa y prometió visitarlo periódicamente en Vincennes, noticia registrada con gran seriedad por los representantes del zoo y particular emoción patriótica del veterinario entregante” (1995:

123). The penguin is finally left free and roaming along Parisian streets, provoking a car crash and initiating an involuntary happening that replicates La Joda's earlier playful interventions: "ya en torno del pingüino había un grupo de noctámbulos absolutamente estupefactos y se oía el pito del vigilante que venía corriendo. [...] En el centro del corro el pingüino gozaba de su hora inmortal, agitando las aletas dejaba oír una especie de discurso quejumbroso" (1995: 175).

La Joda's plan continues with the actual kidnapping. La Joda takes special care of the prisoner's wellbeing when locking him up: "la pieza limpita en el primer piso del chalet, Marcos dándole un cigarrillo al Vip, traele un vaso de coñac, [...] ustedes no me pueden hacer esto, y Patricio bajando la pistola y mirándolo despacio como en una de Raymond Chandler y diciéndole hijo de puta, por suerte para vos no nos parecemos" (1995: 269). Cortázar thus establishes a substantial difference between oppressive and liberating violence. While El Vip is involved in torture and political persecution, La Joda upholds a code of conduct still defending human life as an utmost value. Correspondingly, their routine within the kidnapping bunker is portrayed through community habits and affects. Concurrently to the excitement of life-risking political actions, they share food and coffee and reaffirm their friendship and love: "El reparto de nuevos sándwiches y nescafé hirviendo los juntó en un rincón del piso, [...] esa tendencia de las parejas a acercarse, Monique apoyándose en Gómez, Oscar con una mano perdida en el pelo de Gladis, pájaros de última hora en los cedros" (1995: 277).

At midnight, La Joda's bunker is raided by parapolice forces. Nonetheless, they insist on releasing El Vip in good form: "La palabra está dada, dijo Heredia, pase lo que pase tenemos que soltarlo en buen estado de conservación, [...] nadie puede decir que no cumplimos. Sí, dijo Marcos, pero andá a saber ahora si les interesa recibir el paquete intacto o más bien decir que llegó con todos los hilos rotos" (1995: 326). At a time when violence was widely considered a valid course of action –not only by guerrilla leaders but by artists and intellectuals too– Cortázar depicted a kidnapping operation whose success depends on the prisoner's wellbeing. Cortázar's novelistic kidnapping can be opposed to the kidnapping of Pedro Eugenio Aramburu.¹⁰ As Sarlo recalls, Aramburu's execution by the guerrilla group Montoneros was "vivido por miles como un acto de justicia y reparación [...] [que] estaba bien por razones históricas y políticas" (2003: 134). Under the firm belief in an imminent revolutionary victory, violence offered an authentic

¹⁰ Aramburu was an Argentine Army general and leader of the Revolución Libertadora, the 1955 military coup against Juan Domingo Perón. He became dictator of Argentina until 1958. He was kidnapped by Montoneros in 1970 and murdered in retaliation for the execution of Peronist activists.

and grassroots form of historical redemption. Execution was seen as a legitimate compensation for Aramburu's dictatorial abuses: "La muerte de Aramburu no obligaba a resolver ningún dilema moral, sobre todo porque la idea misma de un problema moral parecía inadecuada para entender cualquier acto político" (2003: 134).

In contrast, La Joda's blurring of intimate bonds and revolutionary action shapes an ethics opposed to killing. Cortázar deposits the exertion of violence exclusively on the side of illegitimate military forces: "Pensar que querían matarlo ellos mismos, dijo Gómez divertido, ahí sí que nos fregaban. La imagen exterior, dijo Heredia, andá a explicar en Guatemala o en la Argentina que no éramos nosotros, que habíamos cumplido la palabra" (1995: 333). The conclusion of the happening/kidnapping reaffirms their quest for a redesigned Hombre Nuevo through shared affects and laughter. Opposed to favouring ascetic and selfless armed struggle, these avant-gardists finally celebrate their unorthodox approach and having given their prisoner back uninjured. This outcome distances them from both the dogmatism of revolutionary organisations and dictatorships' disproportionate repression. Once the group is disbanded, two of them recall the itinerary beginning with their playful happenings and leading to their comrades' liberation: "Heredia le pasaba su cigarrillo a Gómez que chupaba con ganas y se lo devolvía, tendidos boca arriba, [...] al final se la dimos por el caño'e la verdura, dijo Gómez entre dos pitadas, [...] claro que se la dimos, fue la gran Joda, viejo" (1995: 333).

The End of Literature

The "gran Joda" combines playful experimentation and direct action, resulting in an outlandish happening/kidnapping with concrete political consequences. La Joda embraces the potential of happenings for disturbing routine, striving to mimic guerrillas' operations through unorthodox means of revolutionary change. Jaume Peris Blanes remarks that *Libro de Manuel* draws upon happenings to challenge any established separation between culture, politics and daily life. He argues that the novel's formal techniques echo the way happenings involve their participants, aiming to "modificar la percepción de la realidad del lector a través de un shock en su experiencia de lectura que le hiciera tomar conciencia de sus automatismos perceptivos y, de ese modo, le abriera nuevas vías de comprensión del mundo" (2012: 253). Cortázar's poetics thus aims to arouse renewed links between readers and a revolutionary context. La Joda's happenings and the novel's formal composition mirror each other, deploying analogous formal strategies to

reshape how readers regard the confluence of literature and politics.

Libro de Manuel deconstructs its novelistic status by constantly foregrounding its unconventional structure. It introduces its plot through the standpoint of “el que te dije”, who not only participates in La Joda’s gatherings and operations but also registers the events in fragmentary and spontaneous notes: “era como si el que te dije hubiera tenido la intención de narrar algunas cosas, puesto que había guardado una considerable cantidad de fichas y papelitos, [...] que permitieran meterse desde ángulos variados en la breve pero tumultuosa historia de la Joda” (1995: 15). The narrator’s “notas” and “papelitos” give the novel a haphazard tone and order: “empieza a darse cuenta de que se le ha ido la mano en la espontaneidad, y [...] sucede que algunas cosas que en su momento le habían parecido significativas se le adelgazan feo, mientras que por ahí cuatro tonterías [...] le llenan la sopera y la memoria” (1995: 211). Just as La Joda de-hierarchises political orthodoxy through playfulness and affect, “el que te dije” infringes narrative conventions through constant shifts of focus, disjointed juxtapositions and arbitrary judgments. These unreliable narrator and unstable plot put readers in charge of reconstructing and making sense of La Joda’s storyline.

Political revolution and formal experimentation complement and replicate each other, as “el que te dije” states when pondering how to subvert literary conventions: “una cosa es describir estéticamente aunque no se falte en nada a la verdad, y otra esto, quiero decir extraer el erotismo y demás concomitancias de la estética porque si lo dejás ahí seguís en la literatura, [...] sos una vez más el libertino letrado o el panegirista de la izquierda” (1995: 212). The forthcoming *Hombre Nuevo* would ultimately trade literature for an unprecedented “esto”. A revolutionary change in politics maintaining “old” aesthetic forms would carry along a dogmatic worldview incapable of real liberation. The narrator thus presents *Libro de Manuel* as a text that deconstructs its own novelistic status and questions the definition of literature as such. In this way, instead of becoming a “panegirista de la izquierda”, “el que te dije” escapes literary authorship and genres, aiming to radicalise both political and artistic values. He declares to pursue “la no distanciaci3n o mediaci3n como dicen ahora, poner la Joda como los cubistas ponían el tema del cuadro, todo liso en un mismo plano sin volúmenes ni sombras ni preferencias valorativas o morales, [...] es casi imposible en español, comprendé que se me cae la birrome de la mano” (1995: 212).

Such an impossibility of narrating La Joda through traditional forms leads “el que te dije”

to include extra-literary materials in his notes. Newspaper clippings constantly interrupt the novel, reproduced in facsimile copies from Latin American and French media. More importantly, La Joda's members comment on these articles, signalling the "invasion" of fiction by pressing political events. For example, they learn from *Le Monde* that a Brazilian guerrilla leader has been killed: "–No puede ser, me cago en la reputa madre –dijo Heredia arrebatándole el diario a Susana y devolviéndoselo casi en seguida–. Seguí leyendo, no puede ser pero seguí" (1995: 272). As Cortázar explains in the preface, he read those newspapers while writing *Libro de Manuel*: "coincidencias y analogías estimulantes me llevaron desde el principio a aceptar una regla del juego harto simple, la de hacer participar a los personajes en esa lectura cotidiana de diarios latinoamericanos y franceses" (1995: 11). *Rayuela*'s open-ended structure had previously asked readers to partake in "la experiencia por la que pasa el novelista, en el mismo momento y en la misma forma" (2008: 316). *Libro de Manuel* now places them in the same context as its author and characters, all of them reading and reflecting on the same news. Readers must measure and resolve this juxtaposition of fiction and news. By shocking their reading habits, Cortázar asks them to live up to the renewed subjectivity of the Hombre Nuevo, forcing them to adapt their frames of thought to such a blurring of literature and politics. Including news is a means of reshaping common expectations on how fiction relates to its context: it is meant to raise awareness and move readers to political involvement.

Sylvia Saítta argues that "el principal elemento político de *Libro de Manuel* reside en su dimensión periodística ya que su procedimiento más efectivo es el de incorporar la lucha revolucionaria y la violencia represiva en América Latina" (2015: 287). For Óscar Martín, the proliferation of newspaper clippings indicates a lack of control on the narrator's end. An agitated historical current overflows the established domain of literature: "Es la propia historia quien invita a elegir los recortes y a contarse a sí misma. [...] De esta manera es cómo el lector elabora una reconstrucción de la obra literaria en el proceso de lectura y realiza la historia" (2011). In this vein, *Libro de Manuel* incorporates a mise en abyme that fictionalises and duplicates its formal structure: La Joda's members compile their own "libro de Manuel". Meant for the baby Manuel who roams among them, they collect those same facsimile clippings that Cortázar intercalated in the novel. As "el que te dije" recalls, Manuel's mother spends her time putting together "el libro de lectura destinado a una alfabetización todavía remota y que consistía en pegar noticias en distintos idiomas. [...] [H]abía previsto que a los nueve años ya estaría en

condiciones de entrar en la historia contemporánea por vía de cosas como: ‘Córdoba: torturaron a cuatro extremistas’” (1995: 112-113).

“el que te dije” envisions Manuel as the forthcoming Hombre Nuevo, as he will develop his subjectivity after La Joda’s imminent revolution: “Capaz que tipos como Marcos y Oscar [...] estaban en la Joda por Manuel, quiero decir que lo hacían por él, por tanto Manuel en tanto rincón del mundo, queriendo ayudarlo a que algún día entrara en un ciclo diferente y a la vez salvándole algunos restos del naufragio total” (1995: 166). He imagines Manuel’s education as reading those clippings and gaining knowledge of previous historical events. In a post-revolutionary society, La Joda’s “libro de Manuel” would replace traditionally bourgeois children’s literature: “Susana va consiguiendo recortes que pega pedagógicamente, es decir alternando lo útil y lo agradable, de manera que cuando llegue el día Manuel lea el álbum con el mismo interés con que Patricio y ella leían en su tiempo *El tesoro de la juventud* o el *Billiken*” (1995: 241). Moreover, “el que te dije” deposits in Manuel his hopes of constructing a new society equally facilitating social justice and playful liberation. The book includes fun clippings meant to teach Manuel “la superfluidad de ciertas hermosuras, [...] de lo que podía dar todo su sentido a cualquier proyecto de futuro” (1995: 167). Mirroring Cortázar’s authorial choices, La Joda’s own “libro de Manuel” juxtaposes political and cheerful news without any hierarchy: “pasando de la lección al juego sin demasiado traumatismo, aparte de que vaya a saber cuál es la lección y cuál el juego y cómo será el mundo de Manuel y qué carajo, dice Patricio, hacés bien, vieja, vos pegoteale nuestro propio presente y también otras cosas” (1995: 241).

Once their happenings and the kidnapping are over, La Joda’s last and posthumous avant-gardist project is nothing less than their collective “libro de Manuel”. While awaiting the kidnapping’s outcome, they have fun cutting newspapers and choosing which articles to include. Instead of expecting a violent exchange, the novel draws upon the wording of political conflict to portray them manufacturing the collage: “de golpe les da un ataque de solidaridad y hay batallas campales por el único par de tijeras o el tubo de goma, [...] todo el mundo dispuesto a ser coautor del libro” (1995: 287). During the assault that dismantles La Joda, “el que te dije” is killed and hence his narrative work is left unfinished. The novel finishes by introducing two newspapers clippings that he “guardaba en el bolsillo del saco”. The last two clippings in the “libro de Manuel” are a Latin American article focused on “testimonios de presos políticos [que] denuncian casos de torturas” and, next to it, an article reporting on “ex-soldados norteamericanos

que dejaron constancia de las crueldades que propiciaron en Vietnam” (1995: 338). Towards the end, both instances of the “libro de Manuel” –Cortázar’s own novel and La Joda’s fictional compilation– come together and wrap up their avant-gardist stakes.

For Peris Blanes, the narrator’s death and final inclusion of *testimonios* indicate the novel’s passage from the literary domain to “la enunciación testimonial, en un espacio tan violentado que parecía negar la posibilidad misma de la literatura de ficción” (2012: 111). Cortázar would then comply with widespread rebuttals of fiction and the novel, echoing anti-intellectualist inclinations towards the *testimonio*. However, this experimental shift between fiction and news actually constitutes an unorthodox intervention in such debates. Rather than relegating experimentation in favour of more “immediate” and “serious” forms, the death of “el que te dije” leaves readers the task of bridging the gap between one and the other. La Joda ultimately fades away to foster renewed links between fiction and urgent issues like imperialism and dictatorships. To engage readers in meaning-making is to reshape their reading habits, so they can regard their broader context from a renewed angle. The novel’s conclusion thus foregrounds the need for aesthetic rupture within a revolutionary project, reaffirming the capacity of fiction to mobilise subjectivities towards political involvement. Moreover, the *testimonios* included offer a strong contrast between military torture and La Joda’s ethics of valuing their prisoner’s wellbeing. Brought together, *testimonios* and fiction illustrate Cortázar’s unorthodox view of revolutionary transformation, opposed to more dogmatic outlooks usually resulting in making absolute the value of violence.

First, I explored how La Joda invokes playfulness as a means of aesthetic and political activism, and the ways their gatherings and routines elicit renewed community habits. Then, I argued that the book’s formal composition mirrors such a merging of the artistic, personal and political domains, as Cortázar envisions a reader indistinctively processing fiction, news, anecdotes and *testimonios*. The novel thus measures its political effects in terms of reshaping subjectivities: readers are asked to live up to the ideal of the Hombre Nuevo by blurring distinctions and hierarchies between political action, aesthetic rupture, intimate bonds and playful events. The novel’s conclusion reinforces Cortázar’s public stance and reflects on the links between fiction and the *testimonio*. Including allegedly more “truthful” forms actually allows *Libro de Manuel* to radicalise its experimentalism and reinvigorate the quest for a “revolución en la literatura”.

Now, I will examine *Pobrecito poeta...* as complementing Cortázar's standpoint through a reverse pathway. While Dalton adopted the role model of the revolutionary intellectual, publicly favouring direct action and armed struggle over art, his fictional avant-garde foregrounds the relevance of affect and formal experimentation for socio-political change. Moreover, the novel also merges fiction, news and the *testimonio* to redefine the limits of literature and demand active engagement from its readers. However, rather than embedding facsimile or truthful documents, it introduces fictionalised and counterfeit pieces of non-fiction. Albeit adopting alternative strategies, in the end, both Cortázar and Dalton use experimental techniques, such as collage and montage, to uphold the value of literature when pursuing revolutionary ideals.

The Uncomfortable Avant-gardist Roque Dalton

After Dalton's assassination in 1975, Cortázar published an elegiac article in the newspaper *El Sol de México* declaring: "entre lo mucho que me ha dado Cuba, el conocimiento y la amistad de Roque Dalton se contará siempre entre lo más precioso" (1975: 2). While his own guerrilla comrades accused Dalton of being a petit-bourgeois intellectual and CIA undercover agent, eventually killing him,¹¹ Cortázar associated such an unfounded judgment with Dalton's unorthodox approach to art and politics: "el verdadero heroísmo de un revolucionario como Roque Dalton [es ser] capaz de mantener vivos los reflejos dialécticos que dan al ser humano su dimensión más valedora" (1975: 4). Cortázar's portrayal begins by recalling Dalton's dedication to armed struggle and political action. It narrates a midnight encounter between intellectuals and Fidel Castro in Casa de las Américas, when Dalton and Castro engaged in a friendly discussion about the proper usage of a certain weapon: "cada uno trataba de convencer al otro mediante demostraciones con una metralleta invisible que esgrimía de una u otra manera, abundando en consideraciones que a mí se me escapaban por completo" (1975: 3).

¹¹ As reconstructed by Barbara Harlow, Dalton's assassination "came at the height of a debate within the ERP concerning the relative priorities of military struggle versus popular organisation. Dalton supported the imperative of grassroots work among the masses against the emphasis on the part of others in the group on the primacy of armed vanguards" (1996: 82). Likewise, Ben Ehrenreich recaps the ERP's "official version" of Dalton's assassination, which dictates that internal divisions were linked to "Dalton's lack of discipline, contending that he drank, disregarded orders and was unwilling to conform to the rigid hierarchies and rules designed to protect the militants from infiltration" (2010). In contrast, Ehrenreich argues that the conflict started after Dalton contested the short-term and militaristic view of revolutionary struggle adopted by the ERP's leaders: "Dalton became the spokesman for the dissident view that the ERP's priority should be a long-term effort to build a mass movement: they would gain power as a result of a complete social transformation" (2010).

Cortázar then opposed Dalton's poetics to "la chabacanería y el populismo suicida que tanto mal hace a mucha poesía revolucionaria" (1975: 2). After acknowledging his friend's commitment to armed struggle, Cortázar adopted an intimate tone and claimed that Dalton's habit of constantly laughing "era uno de sus mensajes más directos y más hermosos, se reía como un niño, echándose hacia atrás" (1975: 2). In this way, Cortázar turned Dalton into an example of his own unorthodox and vitalist revision of the *Hombre Nuevo*. Cortázar's view of Dalton mirrors his playful approach to the avant-garde, pinpointing in his poetics "la vitalidad, el sentido del juego, la búsqueda del amor en todos los planos, la duda antes que el dogma, la crítica previa al acatamiento" (1975: 3). He quoted a letter Dalton sent him from Hanoi in 1973, just before his fatal return to El Salvador. After declaring his willingness to read the recently published *Libro de Manuel*, Dalton said:

Tu país va a necesitar mucho de todos los que saben o sienten que el talento que no tiene su corazoncito no sirve para un carajo. ¿Tú sabes que he releído *Rayuela* precisamente aquí en Hanoi? Me metí en un lío con el guía-intérprete vietnamita porque una madrugada con síntomas de inminente tifón lo desperté con mi ataque de risa. [...] Pero explicárselo al vietnamita fue de bala, pues él no alcanzaba a entender por qué un "utopista loco" me daba tanta risa... (1975: 3).

Cortázar quoted this letter to dismantle unilateral views of Dalton. He depicted Dalton as an all-encompassing revolutionary intellectual whose guerrilla vocation did not leave playfulness and formal experimentation behind. He even contradicted Dalton's own anti-intellectualist stance, arguing instead that Dalton "encontraba en mí la misma definición y la misma esperanza frente al socialismo que los monolitos de las revoluciones pretenden destruir en nombre de una aquiescencia dogmática" (1975: 4). Cortázar linked Dalton to the role model of the *engagé* intellectual to intervene in the controversies between literary specificity and direct action. He opposed the "fabricantes de estatuas" who would surely aspire to canonise Dalton as an inflexible and sober combatant. Having read a few chapters of Dalton's at the time unpublished *Pobrecito poeta...*, Cortázar regarded the novel as an attempt to overcome the dead ends of artistic and political avant-gardes, which draws upon affect and experimentalism to reveal "lo que los asesinos de hombres como él no quieren comprender, que el camino de un verdadero revolucionario no pasa por la seguridad, la convicción, el esquema simplificante y maniqueo, sino [...] [por] una penosa maraña de vacilaciones, de dudas, de puntos muertos" (1975: 4).

Pobrecito poeta... was posthumously published in 1976 and included Cortázar's article as an afterword. The novel portrays a fictional avant-garde loosely inspired on Dalton's youth group, the Salvadoran Generación Comprometida. As Dalton's manuscripts indicate, he wrote a first version of the novel in 1964 and continued rewriting it nearly until his death. While his public interventions adhered to a prototypical anti-intellectualist standpoint, such a persistent dedication to writing seemingly contradicts his favouring of armed struggle over literature. Moreover, the novel presents a highly experimental structure that dismisses linear narrative. It is composed as a patchwork of different points of view and discursive genres, which offer multiple angles on El Salvador's politics and culture in the mid-sixties. Three chapters focus on writers reflecting on their literary and political endeavours, as narrated by either first- or third-person narrators. These chapters portray a single day in the lives of these writers in a realistic style, narrating their routines and inner thoughts. Two other chapters radicalise the novel's defiance of narrative linearity, depicting collective and anonymous discussions on the question of how to provoke political change through art. As I will shortly examine, these are the most experimental portions of the novel. In them, Dalton gives an unorthodox response to the debates regarding revolutionary commitment in which he vehemently participated. The remaining two chapters incorporate extra-literary texts such as newspaper clippings, *testimonios* and academic essays. This use of collage resembles the inclusion of non-fictional materials in *Libro de Manuel*, inviting readers to participate in the process of meaning-making and, on a meta-literary plane, to reflect on the political extent of fiction and its aptness to produce social change.

The novel's title quotes a 1936 poem by the Salvadoran Geoffroy Rivas, which foregrounds the guilty conscience of middle-class intellectuals aspiring to represent the working class.¹² The title thus mirrors Dalton's polarisation between intellectual and guerrilla engagement, which has led scholars to draw opposing conclusions from *Pobrecito poeta...* Patricia Alvarenga Ventuolo claims that "encontramos dos escrituras contrapuestas en Dalton que expresan dos funciones autoriales, sin posibilidad de síntesis" (2012: 209). Likewise, Rafael Lemus argues that guns and letters –politics and art– ultimately constitute two irreconcilable sides: "el poeta guerrillero, que subordina la escritura a la militancia, y el poeta a secas, que afirma una y otra vez la autonomía de la práctica literaria" (2014: 8). *Pobrecito poeta...* would

¹² The poem belongs to *Vida, pasión y muerte del anti-hombre* (1936) and the verse quoted by Dalton reads: "Pobrecito poeta que era yo, burgués y bueno".

then mirror the impasse of a writer aiming for political utility but incapable of transcending the literary domain. First, Dalton's thematisation of Salvadoran intellectuals would subscribe to "ese discurso antiintelectualista que [...] plantea, esquemáticamente, que la literatura no es sino superestructura y que, para incidir en el mundo, debe incorporarse al aparato estatal o la lucha partidista" (2014: 9). On the other hand, the novel's experimental structure would adhere to "el discurso vanguardista que sostenía, por el contrario, que la literatura podía hacer en el papel, y por sus medios, lo que la vanguardia política hacía en el terreno" (2014: 9). In contrast, Luis Alvarenga states that Dalton actually overcomes the split between artistic and political avant-gardes. For Alvarenga, rather than reflecting the inevitably split consciousness of the *engagé* intellectual, Dalton puts forward an all-embracing aesthetic and political project: "desde una crítica inicial a la 'autonomía absoluta' del arte hacia una superación de ésta para desembocar en una concepción integral de revolución, en la que se buscaría la superación de la fragmentación del sujeto y de los ámbitos de la vida humana" (2011: 45).

The rest of this chapter will explore how the novel overcomes the dichotomy between experimental writing and revolutionary activism. Just as Cortázar's *Libro de Manuel, Pobrecito poeta...* redesigns the ideal of the Hombre Nuevo as an irreverent and all-encompassing quest to revolutionise political means, aesthetic choices and daily life. By turning group dynamics into a fictional avant-garde, the novel stresses the vital role of artistic experimentation when envisaging new modes of coexistence. As Dalton expressed in his letter to Cortázar, using terms like "corazoncito" and "ataque de risa", *Pobrecito poeta...* invites us to reconsider the dead ends of artistic and political avant-gardes through affects and playfulness.

The Dead Ends of Institutionalised Literature

During the 1950s, Dalton formed part of the Salvadoran Generación Comprometida and the avant-gardist group Círculo Literario Salvadoreño. Writers such as Álvaro Menéndez Leal, Manlio Argueta, Roberto Armijo and José Roberto Cea participated in an artistic cohort "unida a través de dos compromisos: el ético –basado en la solidaridad social– y el estético, oponiéndose a toda influencia de la tradición literaria salvadoreña, buscando nuevos medios de expresión" (Hernández, 2009: 135). Political commitment and aesthetic ideals converged in the Círculo Literario's manifesto, written by Dalton himself: "ENFÁTICAMENTE MANIFESTAMOS QUE NO NEGAMOS LOS VALORES ANTERIORES SINO LOS QUE HAYAN VUELTO

FRÍAMENTE LAS ESPALDAS AL PUEBLO...” (in Alvarenga, 2011: 28). Rather than absolute rupture with tradition, their avant-gardist project sought to reread former artistic endeavours and combine them with political activism: “Venimos a revalorizar lo que pretendidas ‘generaciones inmaduras’ quisieron sepultar o ‘descuartizar’ [...] y entonces buscaron la evasión, la fuga, la justificación, el oportunismo” (in Alvarenga, 2011: 28).

Dalton then published a series of articles in newspapers such as *Tribuna libre*, where he aimed to overcome the conflict between art and activism. Dalton devised the ideal of the Hombre Nuevo as an ethics involving every aspect of life: “No es que confundamos la Poesía con la Política, exigimos su correspondencia, su equilibrio, su conformidad, su respaldo mutuo, porque es así cómo, únicamente, pueden ser partes integrantes de un hombre total, de un poeta” (in Alvarenga, 2011: 72). For Rafael Lara Martínez, Dalton’s revolutionary commitment takes the form of a dialectical encounter between art and politics, seeking to subvert both a given social order and the subjectivities of writers and readers (2007: 8). Just as Che Guevara confronted Socialist Realism, Dalton dismissed dogmatic guidelines and argued that political commitment and formal experimentation must converge to develop renewed sensibilities:

Hay que desterrar esa concepción falsa, mecánica y dañina según la cual el poeta comprometido [...] se pasa la vida diciendo, sin más ni más, que la burguesía es asquerosa, que lo más bello es una asamblea sindical y que el socialismo es un jardín de rosas bajo un sol especialmente tierno. La vida no es tan simple y la sensibilidad que necesita un marxista para ser verdaderamente tal, lo debe captar perfectamente. Es deber del poeta luchar contra el esquematismo mecanicista (1963: 16).

Dalton later recalled the avant-gardist years of the Círculo Literario through an affective lens, granting equal importance to artistic initiatives, political projects and community: “polemizaron sobre diversos temas, protestaron y, marginalmente, hicieron una vida entre marginal y bohemia: de la reunión de Partido se iba a la cervecería y en ocasiones al revés, surgieron los grandes amores efímeros, las trágicas pasiones” (1975: 17). Just as Cortázar claimed that political liberation demanded eroticism and playfulness, Dalton’s outlook combines the Party and the bar, revolutionary and love passions, politically engaged and bohemian lifestyles.

Pobrecito poeta... presents a fictional counterpart to this circle and portrays writers who, at first sight, would match the members of the Generación Comprometida. Going by their first names, the cosmopolitan poet Álvaro would be Álvaro Menéndez Leal and the communist

Roberto would be Roberto Armijo. At the same time, the *poète maudit* Mario would be Armando López Muñoz, whose chapter is a rewriting of López Muñoz's personal diary. Such a comparison would be confirmed by the title Dalton gave to the novel's first draft: *Los poetas*. However, the final title shifts from the plural to the singular. Instead of writing a chronicle of this generation of poets, *Pobrecito poeta...* fictionalises them and interrogates the different ways a poet can position him or herself in a revolutionary scenario.

Pobrecito poeta...'s five writers share traits such as friendship, youth, leftist ideals, middle-class origins and gender. Each aims to bridge the gap between politics and art from a different aesthetic standpoint. Ileana Rodríguez notes that the novel outlines a repertoire of possible role models, each chapter depicting the literary project of its correspondent poet: "El romanticismo, el modernismo, el vanguardismo, el criollismo, quedan a la vez negados e incorporados al texto" (1986: 380). Arturo Arias points out that neither of these archetypes can actually fit the revolutionary artist: "El proceso fallido de todos los poetas es el de encontrar el auténtico 'hombre nuevo' de corte guevarista, que no se reconoce en ninguna de las prácticas estético/militantes de la época" (1999: 146). *Pobrecito poeta...* juxtaposes each chapter/poet in an experimental and open-ended structure. Separate chapters are dedicated to depicting the lives and works of these poets, each adopting a different narrative angle and literary style. By including an omniscient third-person narration, an interior monologue and a personal diary, among other genres and forms, the novel invites its readers to draw comparisons between the poets and gauge their avant-gardist choices in the face of subsequent political episodes and socio-cultural debates. Rather than establishing a universal model of the Hombre Nuevo, therefore, Dalton adopts a pluralist perspective and introduces multiple artistic and political standpoints devoid of narrative homogeneity or resolution.

The first chapter is a third-person narration of a single day in the lives of Álvaro and Arturo. During its twenty-four-hour plot, indigenous traditions and cosmopolitanism converge and finally drift apart. First, Álvaro is portrayed as a noteworthy cultural actor, who hosts a prime-time show and was awarded the Premio Nacional for a short story anthology. Then, he receives Tata Higinio, an elder "brujo con cara de santo" who used to sell medicinal herbs to his relatives in El Salvador's rural region. Álvaro recalls his childhood discovery of literature when listening to Tata Higinio's indigenous and mythological tales. For Álvaro, Tata Higinio's visit is an opportunity to collect folk material for his writing. However, his intentions flounder when

Tata Higinio's looks and habits clash with his cosmopolitan and highbrow studio. As Álvaro inwardly says: "Pasá, entrá a mi mundo, Tata: aquí no hay trampas de ishcanal, envenenamientos de reptil-escorpión: aquí lo peor que puede pasar es que te ahogúes en las humosas tempestades de la fiebre de Dostoeievski" (2007: 58).

Tata Higinio declines Álvaro's attempts to revive childhood memories and tells him: "Quizás ya no sos el mismo de antes, el de la gran casona. [...] Hoy sería cuando para venir yo a pegártela de brujo. Pero vos ya tas grande" (2007: 71-72). The actual reason behind Tata Higinio's visit stresses the insurmountable gap between his marginality and Álvaro's privileges. He is seriously ill and needs Álvaro's influences to be admitted in a public hospital. While Álvaro aims to exploit Tata Higinio's folk background in his avant-gardist writings, the elder exposes the hardships endured by El Salvador's indigenous and impoverished population. This contradiction is later exposed during Álvaro's last activity of the day, when he poses for a portrait painting: "en el cual el rostro de Álvaro, sin barba, con unas mejillas purísimas que no eran las suyas, [...] se confundía con San Salvador" (2007: 104). In contrast to Tata Higinio's urgent need for hospitalisation, Álvaro's portrait ridicules his farcical enactment of the national poet archetype. Tata Higinio embodies El Salvador's social injustices, denouncing the futility of artists who aspire to represent a transcendental national identity.

For his part, Arturo is a young writer who introduces himself as "el más interesante entre los novísimos narradores salvadoreños" (2007: 50). He is also a lawyer and activist in charge of filing a habeas corpus petition in the name of Cayetano Carpio, a union leader and political prisoner.¹³ Arturo has published an award-winning book but has not written anything since. He links his lack of creativity to the scarcely inspiring context: "El problema para un cuentista en El Salvador es la falta de temas. [...] Cuando pasa, una vez al año, se trata generalmente de algo tan de mal gusto que es imposible literaturizarlo" (2007: 97). Just as Álvaro's fetishized cosmopolitanism failed to acknowledge the hardships of El Salvador, Arturo's pretentiousness prevents him from noticing the urgency of political violence. He is equally dissatisfied with the literary ambience as with the hardships of revolutionary activism; with a farcical tone, he emphasises the clash between his bourgeois habits and class struggle: "todo está muy bien pero si no te desayunas te duele la cabeza durante todo el año y terminas por morirte aunque seas el

¹³ Dalton fictionalises Carpio, who was the leader of the Communist Party of El Salvador in the 1960s. He later quit the party to start the revolutionary organisation Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí.

héroe marxista-leninista más rándaco de la época, el Superman de las clases menesterosas” (2007: 73). By the end of the day, his writer’s block matches his political disdain and impotence. He goes to bed and suddenly realises he missed the deadline to file Carpio’s habeas corpus.

The second chapter introduces Roberto, a poet linked to the Communist Party returning from a visit to Cuba. It consists of an interior monologue unfolding during a roundtable in the Feria del Libro Centroamericano. His first thoughts contradict his public image as a renowned intellectual and political activist: “Felizmente a alguien se le ocurrió que había que pagar las entrevistas y felizmente no hubo mayor problema para lograr que me invitaran a mí, en calidad de posible gloria nacional futura” (2007: 142). While awaiting his turn to speak, Roberto ruminates over his love affairs in Havana. His inner account of Cuba thus contradicts common-sense expectations from a politically engaged poet: “¡Con lo que me hubiera gustado quedarme a escribir para el cine! [...] O de tus amores, mi adorada putita. No me quedará más remedio que escribir para mis colegas, los grandes idiotas Salvadoreños” (2007: 149). His interior monologue unfolds by interlacing sex and humour, offering an erotic and playful response to aesthetic and political dogmatism.

However, the term “putita” echoes the sexist angle I noted in *Libro de Manuel*, as Roberto’s Cuban lovers mirror the objectified position of Ludmilla and Francine within *La Joda*. Just as Andrés before, Roberto conceives love and sex as unidirectional means of masculine fulfillment. Rather than active members, these fictional avant-gardes only include women as objects of desire meant to sublimate and overcome the political impotence of men. The presence of these idealised and commodified women actually reaffirms the group’s homosocial nature, as I will examine again in Chapter 3 regarding *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande*. As Sedgwick argues when studying representations of relationships between men in English literature: “we are in the presence of male heterosexual desire, in the form of a desire to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females” (2015: 38). In the case of Roberto, sexual satisfaction metaphorically compensates for his lack of an effective combination of art and politics, placing on women the duty of “completing” a masculine subjectivity torn between writing and action. In Chapter 4, I will oppose such a restrictive view of the role of women to novels that fictionalise avant-gardes from a feminist angle. *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* depict female avant-gardists who contest the gendered structures underlying not only the notion of the avant-garde but art altogether. I will analyse their fictional avant-

gardes as an alternative to the homosocial dynamics of groups like Cortázar and Dalton's, since they are formed by feminist artists whose projects and affective connections dismantle inherited ideas of gender.

While Roberto inwardly treasures an artistic vocation, his declarations during the roundtable advance a typical anti-intellectualist perspective. Graphic contrast between italics and regular typography shows Roberto's thoughts sabotaging his discourse: "*Pues como creo que les iba diciendo* (Claro, ahora vas a hablar más babosadas por media hora o más, como si lo mejor no fuera cerrar la trompita) [...] *de lo que se trata según mi punto de vista es de lograr que la poesía que nuestra poesía intervenga a cada día más en la labor que se plantea el hombre*" (2007: 156-157, emphasis in original). Roberto's inner invectives mock his public self-image, undermining the earnest presentation his audience expects. The end of the conference reaffirms this contradiction between Roberto's public standpoint and his interior monologue. In need of money, Roberto admits his imposture of personifying a flawless "gloria nacional futura" and calls himself a hypocrite. Moreover, he quotes a poem by Charles Baudelaire, a figure whose enduring influence will also be relevant for Bolaño's fictionalised poets:¹⁴ "¿APLAUSOS? Inclinación de la cara sonriente. Aplausos. [...] Mírate en el espejo, ah tú, hermano escritor, mi semejante hipócrita. Y esto, gracias a Dios al parecer, se acabó" (2007: 166-167).

While these three writers expose ideological contradictions between public stances and inner desires, Mario embraces his literary vocation within the realm of the personal diary. Throughout the entries, Mario adopts the tone of the *poète maudit* and attacks social norms and expectations: "los que criticamos un determinado sistema social [...] o la totalidad de la existencia, seremos los que más abonaremos la esperanza hacia eso que la generalización estupefaciente ha llamado un futuro" (2007: 366). At the same time, he opposes the asceticism and self-sacrifice of party politics: "¿Qué es pues lo que me piden? Renunciamientos y más renunciamentos" (2007: 368). Rather than relinquishing his vocation, he aims to contribute to revolutionary change precisely by living through a literary lens. While writing a diary means that he does not make any compromise to get published, thus reaffirming his radical individualism, it also enables the genre to become a means of ethical transformation. Devoting himself to a literary ideal is how Mario envisions becoming an Hombre Nuevo: "Si me dicen que este criterio

¹⁴ For instance, Bolaño's *2666* (2004) begins with an epigraph from Baudelaire's "Le voyage": "Un oasis de horror en medio de un desierto de aburrimiento".

moral mío [...] debe ser combatido y anulado, yo digo, con fiereza si es necesario, que por él vivo y que, inclusive, yo iría a las filas de la Revolución para defenderlo” (2007: 368).

The intimate form of the diary allows Mario’s chapter to resemble the critical conscience of this avant-gardist circle. By not publishing or posing as a public intellectual, he is the only poet pursuing the links between literature and life to the very end, and is therefore morally authorised to criticise his peers. Mario registers conversations with his friends and mocks them for posing as either cosmopolitan or revolutionary intellectuals. Regarding Álvaro, he writes: “tiene un talento muy especial, pero ha caído en la frivolidad. Claro, ganando tanto dinero con su programa de televisión” (2007: 294). He also confronts Roberto, who tried to recruit him for the Party: “no acaba de aconsejarme: hay que estudiar marxismo, hay que estudiar marxismo. La verdad es que yo podría ponerme temporalmente hipócrita y dedicarme a cultivar una buena cara de seminarista rojo. ¡Qué va!” (2007: 269). Such a radicalised individuality soon leads Mario to a quixotic impasse: “No sé cómo se lucha desde la situación en que me encuentro. Estoy loco, estoy loco. El alcohol solamente me bestializa más. [...] Estoy solo, eso es. Estoy solo” (2007: 371). Alcoholism and solitude permeate his last entries. When political urgency invades the diary’s intimate domain, Mario’s radicalism only offers self-destruction. After the 1961 coup d’état and massacre of workers and students, Mario concludes his diary by reflecting on his discord with political currents. Gaps and ellipses punctuate his last sentence and suggest an uncertain and fearful state of mind: “José está oculto, reclamado por los Tribunales Militares por ‘sedicioso’. Roberto [...] ha sido arrestado y no se sabe si... Prácticamente todos mis amigos están desaparecidos: presos, perseguidos o... ¿Y yo? ¿Por qué...?” (2007: 378). State terror not only threatens his friends; it also closes Mario’s literary and ethical project, which now demands continuation beyond the written word.

Each role model ultimately fails to reshape the writer’s position in a revolutionary scenario. Álvaro, Arturo and Roberto’s contradictions between public stances and inner desires expose the dead ends of institutionalised literature, revealing publishing and authorship as inherently thwarted ideals. Dalton’s fictional avant-garde thus echoes La Joda’s guerrilla happenings as a way out of established artistic and political channels. In both novels, the convergence of artistic and political avant-gardes only occurs when defying institutionalised avenues and blurring distinctions between art and daily life. Compared to Alvaro’s submission to market dynamics and Arturo and Roberto’s two-faced commitment to party politics, truly

revolutionary art demands an ethics of “living” –rather than publishing or consuming– literature. However, Mario’s self-destructive path also reveals the dead ends of the *poète maudit* model. Restricted to the intimacy of the diary, the only possible outcome of Mario’s radical individualism is the aestheticisation of alcoholism and death. As I will now explore, *Pobrecito poeta...* enables a contrasting alternative through a community approach to literature.

Humour and Community

These poets expose the failure of avant-gardist initiatives when undertaken through institutionalised and individualised means. In contrast, the novel’s core chapter, “Todos: El Party”, displays a very long hundred-page proliferation of anonymous dialogue lines. This chapter juxtaposes unrelated conversations between unidentified poets during a soirée inspired on Clementina Suárez’s “El Rancho del Artista”.¹⁵ Linguistic ambiguity combines feast and politics in a single title: El Party configures a social ambience where humour and playfulness advance an unorthodox perspective on artistic and political avant-gardes. Instead of the previous and failed authorial models, shared laughter and drinks transform literature into an affective experience. Opposed to publishing and the public image of the writer, El Party’s non-individualised voices shape an irreverent literary ethics beyond any singular figure or movement.

Just as Cortázar designed a haphazard narrator to portray La Joda, Dalton’s montage of disjointed voices transposes its characters’ playfulness and spontaneity into the printed text. Devoid of a narrator’s organising view, it is impossible to link these dialogue lines to any individual poet. The chapter’s experimental form replicates these avant-gardists’ irreverent lifestyle, as it disorderly mixes different conversations and moments of the night. The absence of narrative linearity conveys a shared ambience of people and dialogues playfully and absurdly relating to each other. El Party is depicted as a sophisticated gathering where artists find themselves next to the Salvadoran high society. Its organiser introduces the group to the gathering as “la esperanza para la literatura salvadoreña y quizás centroamericana. Ellos son los integrantes de la Generación Comprometida, así llamada por su compromiso con las causas nobles de la belleza, el arte y la humanidad” (2007: 221). While such a highbrow presentation

¹⁵ Suárez was a promoter of Salvadoran art during the 1950s. Her “Rancho del Artista” was “uno de los centros culturales más importantes de la época. Allí Roque Dalton se relacionó con poetas, escritores, pintores y músicos, además de numerosos miembros de los cuerpos diplomáticos que también acudían a las tertulias, conciertos y recitales” (Hernández, 2009: 139).

depoliticises and accommodates the avant-garde into purely aesthetic regimes of value and social recognition, the poets irreverently make fun of the atmosphere and even themselves: “–Fuera de nosotros, este party es la corrupción pura, gedionda y náhuatl. –Claro que en Quetzaltenango no hay casas así y por eso podés creer que ya partiste la piñata y arribaste a la alta sociedad. – Sírvanle un trago, al hombre, que no es alcohólico anónimo” (2007: 187).

Arias notes that Dalton questions national identity and cultural tradition by incorporating the rhythm and vocabulary of orality: “reconstruye las fuerzas elementales populares de los dichos, proverbios, clichés, y otras expresiones idiomáticas del habla popular [...] para forjar una nueva identidad que conlleve una nueva serie de principios éticos de comportamiento” (1999: 138). The poets’ juxtaposed interjections translate drinking and conversing into an ironic dismantling of socio-cultural norms: “–Te digo que ya la canteás: un poco más de cultura, chimado, que por algo aceptamos venir a codearnos con la crema de la intelectualidad. –No, papaíto, si yo a lo único que vengo es a ver si levanto” (2007: 172). Their conversations challenge the institutionalisation –and thus neutralisation– of art. Rather than adopting the public image of the intellectual, their informal vocabulary and way of speaking deny their presumed lettered status and promote a sense of belonging through humour and puns: “–Es necesario acabárselo, el guaro no se hizo para lavar la ropa. Su producción es una actividad económica importante para el país, [...] consumirlo es hacer patria. Con el permiso de ustedes, salú. –Por ellas: las hembras y las botellas” (2007: 220). Moreover, they repeatedly quote popular and folkloric verses, singing and reciting to defy the cultivated ambience: “–Vino que del cielo vino / qué caramba / tú me tumbas tú me matas / qué caramba / pero yo siempre te empino. / Tú eras la que me decías / que nunca me olvidarías / vaaa-mos-nos a emborracharnos” (2007: 220).

The poets’ irreverent stance dismantles the role models depicted in the previous chapters, as their conversations revolve around the Salvadoran and Latin American literary tradition. They say: “–La poesía es también resultado de una tradición nacional dada. Y la poesía patriótica es todavía peor entre nosotros. [...] –Claro que eso es culpa de la tradición latinoamericana, tan superficializantes, que nos llega por la vena de Darío y sigue imponiéndose por las arterias de Neruda” (2007: 202). After posing the topic, subsequent interjections dismantle the solemnity of tradition, using humour and popular songs to undermine El Salvador’s cultural canon. Instead, they build community through irony and laughter:

–Si yo empezara una letanía con la siguiente frase: “El Salvador: país donde nadie se muere de hambre, ni de sed, ni de frío, ni de calor”, ¿con qué telas si no hay arañas me ibas a contestar? –Eso es chiche: “Siete de junio, noche fatal, bailando el tango en la capital” [...] –“El Salvador: país de lagos y volcanes”. Frase del Ministerio de Información y Turismo, de España (2007: 186).

In this way, El Party dismantles national identity and mocks the interest of 1920s avant-gardes in cultural autochthony. Instead of reasserting an authentic national tradition, Dalton’s avant-gardists proffer an ironic jumble of quotes. Moreover, this assault on established values redirects its attacks towards the poets themselves. Their humorous tone tackles the pressing matter of intellectuals’ role within revolutionary projects. One of them proposes quitting writing and joining the Communist Party: “–Nos arrogamos unos derechos de parto que ni las preñadas en el Seguro Social de Rusia. Y afuera, en la calle, todo seguirá igualito [...] Hay que pro-le-ta-ri-zar-se” (2007: 197). They give self-mocking and taunting responses to such an anti-intellectualist call: “–Pero claro, doctor, licenciado, general e ingeniero, monseñor, pero claro que sí, de eso se ocupan nuestros desvelos. –Y nuestras gomas” (2007: 197). Shared drinks and laughter, once again, open an unorthodox and blasphemous way out of the dead ends of artistic and political avant-gardes. The poets do not give any resolution to their debates, reaffirming their collective belonging by means of an absurd and playful synthesis instead: “–Muchá, aquí hay una proposición: que participemos conjuntamente en los juegos florales de Zacatecoluca. Hacemos un poema en vaca, ganamos y nos chupamos los mil pesos del premio (2007: 211).

In El Party, the poets’ anonymous voices begin by challenging the Salvadoran petty-bourgeois and lettered circles to later defy their own social role as intellectuals. Both Cortázar’s *La Joda* and El Party, in the end, regard art as a means of eliciting affects and redesigning community. *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* deconstruct the alleged seriousness of revolutionary action and rewrite the *Hombre Nuevo* as a playful ideal. Compared to the previously failed role models of Álvaro, Arturo, Roberto and Mario, El Party devises non-institutionalised and non-individualised ways of “living” literature. Paradoxically, such a stance can only persist by constantly questioning and redesigning its own prerogatives. Rather than publishing their works or adopting the self-image of the intellectual, these poets put forward a collective and endless dismantling of authorship. Facing transcendence and homogenisation, *Pobrecito poeta...* does not provide any fixed politico-aesthetic programme. Instead, the novel depicts ephemeral moments of community in which drinks and laughter advance a blasphemous

view of art and politics.

Collage and *Testimonio*

In the preface to his also posthumous *Un libro rojo para Lenin* (1986), Dalton explained his goal of writing a poem “en correspondencia con la revolución latinoamericana, [...] al cual se incorporen muchas voces, más autorizadas que la mía” (2009: 18). In his own words, collage allowed Dalton to integrate literary forms and Latin America’s political turmoil: “la inconclusión perenne del poema lo dejaría siempre abierto, susceptible de nuevas incorporaciones o de nuevos tratamientos al material ya incluido, de acuerdo a los dictados de la vida misma” (2009: 18). Just as *Libro de Manuel* included news and *testimonios* to merge the planes of the novel, author and reader, *Pobrecito poeta...*’s last two chapters juxtapose extra-literary documents and texts. Both novels thus demand active participation and invite readers to interpret these documents through La Joda and El Party’s avant-gardist guidelines. While the poets dismantle the Salvadoran literary tradition and their self-images as intellectuals, *Pobrecito poeta...*’s readers can mirror their irreverence when making sense of the novel’s collage.

Dalton’s previous poem-collage *Las historias prohibidas del Pulgarcito* (1974) provided an open-ended and fragmentary account of El Salvador’s history, juxtaposing heterogeneous and contradictory materials. Dalton concluded *Las historias...* with a note subverting its historical truthfulness: “Fuera de los textos y poemas originales, tres textos han sido modificados para lograr los efectos perseguidos por el autor y dos textos aparentemente extraídos de otras publicaciones son apócrifos, escritos también originalmente por el autor. Corresponde a los lectores descubrirlos” (1979: 232). Rather than presenting a homogeneous narration, Dalton locates the political potential of literature in granting readers the active role of interpreting a montage of contradictory texts. Such a lack of distinction between truthful and fake documents contrasts with *Libro de Manuel*’s collage. While Cortázar included facsimile clippings to signal the “invasion” of literature by political urgencies, Dalton fictionalises and forges apparently truthful documents. Following inverse pathways, they both use collage as a means of erasing distinctions between fiction and reality, triggering a dialogue between the novel and *testimonio* that upholds the revolutionary value of artistic avant-gardes. Techniques such as patchwork and collage will be replicated by every novel studied in Chapters 3 and 4. While Bolaño and Saer depict their avant-gardes through juxtaposed recollections and points of view, Moreno and Ojeda

devise their own by merging fiction and counterfeit sources. As I will argue throughout the thesis, therefore, my entire corpus deploys the power of experimentalism to imagine group dynamics and mobilise affects.

Pobrecito poeta... includes a whole section of documents and counterfeit sources. It is titled “Intermezzo Apendicular: Documentos, opiniones, comentarios (en OFF)” and juxtaposes nine different documents without narrative commentary or framework. However, each text is related to the previous chapters’ events and discussions. To begin with, a monograph celebrates the Salvadoran poet, statesman and author of the national anthem, Juan José Cañas: “ya se vea en él al poeta decano de la juventud salvadoreña, ya al noble y culto caballero, de ameno y fino trato, [...] o ya al ciudadano leal y adorador de su patria” (2007: 380). Afterwards, Dalton includes an extract of the 1961 book *Las Constituciones de El Salvador*. While the text initially celebrates the Ley para la Defensa de la Democracia, it then includes two appendixes narrating the 1960 and 1961 coups d’état. It thus highlights the plot of corruption and violence underlying shifting political regimes. Hereafter, a self-evident fake census derides the solemn tone of such traditionalist views of national culture and history: “El último censo general de la población de El Salvador señala que en nuestro país existen 367 entrenadores de futbol, 16 embalsamadores titulados, [...] 10 corredores de valores para la Bolsa, 96 mil 543 personas sin ocupación definida y 4 poetas” (2007: 407).

The novel’s final chapter is “La luz del túnel”, an apparent *testimonio* by the theatre director José narrating his imprisonment, torture and escape. In fact, the chapter’s core events were previously narrated by Dalton in two articles published in the Cuban media: “Roque Dalton cuenta su evasión de la cárcel” (1965) and “Una experiencia personal” (1967). In them, Dalton detailed the time he spent at the paralegal prison of Cojutepeque between September 1964 and May 1965, when an earthquake demolished his cell and he escaped. However, changing the narrator’s name undermines the *testimonio*’s truthfulness. Dalton also converts two short articles into a hundred-page chapter, exhibiting extensive and self-reflexive rewriting. For Lara Martínez, Dalton develops a “poética de la prisión” that dismantles the *testimonio* through intertextual references to literary works. *Pobrecito poeta...*’s fictionalised *testimonio* transforms a past and lived event into a poeticised experience, which “cerniría la declamación de un texto anterior el cual mediatiza la narración de la vivencia presente” (2010: 5).

José’s account thus establishes an intrinsic relationship between living, reading and

writing. He begins by denouncing state terror and torture: “En la pileta lo meten a uno de cabeza, atado de pies y menos. [...] Con los reflectores le cuecen a uno el cerebro” (2007: 422-425). Immediately after, he rethinks these events by quoting a poem by Humberto Díaz-Casanueva:¹⁶ “Como dijo el poeta: ‘El espantoso mundo dejé con pies mortales / aquí entre mis alas un canto es la suerte más pura / más la luz para espiga aún no basta’” (2007: 425). Moreover, José acknowledges the literary nature of his narration and reminds the reader that it involved intense rewriting: “sé que entonces tomé nota velozmente de ese dato pensando en su utilización posterior. Y luego hay quien piensa que se trata de una pose el que afirmemos ser capaces de vivir los momentos más intensos de nuestra vida para (con vistas a) la literatura” (2007: 443). Not only poetry permeates his ambiguous *testimonio*. After questioning the distinction between life and literature, he also challenges any division between high and low culture. Distancing his narration from the severity of political violence, he regards his torturer through stereotypes of the culture industry: “un galán maduro, a punto de ser aniquilado por la papada y la panza, un Broderick Crawford bonitillo, si cabe la simbiosis. Es que ni la propia CIA ha podido escapar de los estereotipos del cine negro norteamericano” (2007: 444).

José’s literary prism exceeds the mere rewriting and offers a means of survival amidst a life-threatening situation. He reflects on this interlacement of life and literature when pondering how to give readable form to the extreme experience of torture:

Si yo fuera un adepto de la más conocida de las desviaciones del realismo socialista, aquí diría que en aquellos momentos me vi iluminado por la luz de Lenin [...] y al tiempo que me surgía un halo ciclamen en derredor de la cabeza, me dispuse simplemente a morir. Felizmente mi tradición literaria pasa también por Malraux, Hemingway, Kafka, Salarrué, Brecht y Henry Miller (2007: 455).

José presents a text that apparently follows the *testimonio*’s guidelines only to boycott them from the inside. He draws upon the genre’s truthfulness to abandon it and opt for the most experimental forms of modern art. José self-referentially comments on his writing and quotes an avant-gardist piece by Bertolt Brecht: “‘el mundo como es / el mundo como deviene / lo que debe ser el hombre / lo que tiene que ser el hombre’. Sí, compañero Bertoldt, pero allí mismo métame otro párrafo sobre la autonomía del drama individual y [...] la dialéctica de mis

¹⁶ Díaz-Casanueva was a Chilean poet linked to the 1920s avant-garde. He was also a union activist and, in 1970, he was appointed by President Salvador Allende as Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations.

momentos y tus momentos” (2007: 456). By merging formal experimentation and survival, José’s *testimonio* reveals its own dissolution as a genre. Instead of exposing the truthful voice of the subject, it offers a continuous concatenation of quotes and literary mediations. Just as La Joda’s guerrilla happenings exceeded art, José’s fictionalised *testimonio* presents a way of living through a non-institutionalised literary prism.

José then refers to his fellow poets and prompts us to re-evaluate the previous chapters. First, he describes Roberto’s final inability to resolve his inner contradictions: “según me dicen, está separado del Partido por indisciplina, no se le ve por ninguna parte, dejó de escribir poesía y su cabeza parece haberse extraviado para siempre bajo las faldas, entre las piernas de no sé quién” (2007: 467). Then, he recalls Mario’s tragic death and honours his devotion to a literary ideal: “Fue el más deformado de todos nosotros, tal vez, pero de seguro el más profundo, el único verdaderamente trágico” (2007: 487). Moreover, he remembers his reaction to Mario’s death, remaining loyal to El Party’s habits of drinking and laughing, and defying revolutionary asceticism: “Cuando supe de su muerte absurda, no pude hacer otra cosa que lo que él hubiera hecho al saber la mía: me fui a un bar de La Habana [...] y me emborraché hasta terminar preso” (2007: 488).

Finally, José turns this non-conformity upon himself. He narrates his escape from prison and later arrival in the Soviet Union, where he resumed his artistic and political activities: “Represento al Partido en lo que va quedando de la Kominform. He engordado quince libras, [...] viajó regularmente a Austria, Francia, Cuba, Suecia. Tengo una amiga estable y algunas aventurillas de vez en cuando” (2007: 506). The novel’s last paragraph exposes the imposture of such a comfortable lifestyle, when José admits not living up to his revolutionary beliefs: “Sin embargo, no he podido escribir un triste diálogo desde hace meses. En ocasiones siento que regresé [...] simplemente a conseguirme una coartada presentable para quedarme fuera del juego” (2007: 506). This conclusion reveals that no definitive resolution can be given to the quest for social change through art. *Pobrecito poeta...* portrays different poets not to condemn them as failed role models but to rethink the premises of avant-garde art, whose revolutionary status depends on continuously reinventing its own conditions of possibility.

In sum, El Party’s approach to the avant-garde boycotts every attempt to homogenise the identity and agenda of the revolutionary artist. It represents an unorthodox intervention in a context of political upheaval that pushed artists and intellectuals to rethink their social role. As I

recapped above, the Cuban Revolution framed the most intense but finally frustrated attempts to reunite artistic and political avant-gardes ever seen in Latin America. *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito Poeta...* fictionalised avant-gardes to advocate for the political relevance of experimental art at a time when immediate utility was demanded from culture. Amidst the escalation of political violence, they translated the ideal of the Hombre Nuevo into an ethics of “living” literature through playfulness and companionship. In this way, Cortázar and Dalton portrayed the reinvention of community as the specific way in which avant-gardes drive social change. For *La Joda* and *El Party*, creating art entails producing the group itself as a framework that elicits connections and shared habits. These novels thus depicted group dynamics as a fiction that brings forward affects and envisions renewed modes of coexistence. Moreover, they combined fiction with allegedly more truthful and revolutionary forms such as journalism and the *testimonio*. Cortázar and Dalton used archetypal avant-garde techniques, such as collage and non-linear narrative, to shock reading habits and foster political involvement in their readers. They merged the fictional and empirical to show that both could be revolutionised through an experimental impetus. In this way, their radicalised poetics matched the radicalised communities formed by their fictional avant-gardes, ultimately championing aesthetic rupture as intrinsic to the quest for a revamped society.

Chapter 3: Fictional Avant-gardes, Memory and the Revision of the Past

The Turn of the Century

In the previous chapter, I examined *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* in relation to the Cuban Revolution, a radicalised scenario framing the most intense attempts to reunite artistic and political avant-gardes in Latin America. I will now explore *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* as novels reviewing the legacy of those avant-gardist projects in a later context. Bolaño and Saer's fictional avant-gardes echo the unorthodox approach to art and politics seen in those created by Cortázar and Dalton, creating a chronological interplay between the 1960s and 1970s and the turn of the century. *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* looked back at past avant-gardes amidst broader discussions regarding the aftermath of authoritarianism and civil wars, the outcome of democratic transitions, and the hegemony of neoliberalism.

Fiction allowed Cortázar and Dalton to stress avant-gardist aspects like playfulness and companionship, usually overlooked during the debates on revolutionary art that proliferated in the 1960s and 1970s. Mirroring *La Joda* and *El Party*, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* also portray groups of poets and friends who turn literature into an affective experiencing of community. However, for Cortázar and Dalton, the promise of revolution was one of feasible fulfillment and their fictional avant-gardes looked forward to a drastically new society. Bolaño and Saer reassessed such a radicalisation of art within a later scenario devoid of grandiose prospects for change. Furthermore, Cortázar and Dalton's interventions related to Latin America at large and participated in a continental project. In contrast, Bolaño and Saer faced a context that restricted political and cultural initiatives mainly within the nation. While Bolaño aimed to bypass Latin American borders and outline a global poetic ethos, Saer focused on a hyperlocal provincial domain. They sought avenues out of the twilight of Latin Americanism either by exceeding the continent or falling short of the nation.

Cortázar and Dalton's novels partook in a wider climate of ideas seeking to blur boundaries between art and political action. In the aftermath of civil wars and state terror, Bolaño and Saer rewrote the affective side of avant-gardes in opposition to both utilitarian views of violence and outright condemnations of revolutionary projects. As I will shortly explore, their novels portray communities that contest the impact of political violence and state coercion on the social fabric. *Los detectives salvajes* explores the prolongation of juvenile radicalism beyond its

original time and place, as its poets continuously reconnect art, friendship and love during a journey from Mexico in the 1970s to the world at large in the 1990s. On the other hand, *La grande*'s middle-aged protagonists refound their former sense of camaraderie after dictatorial violence and exile halted their friendship and gatherings for more than 30 years.

These fictional avant-gardes thus shape a literary ethics experimenting with modes of coexistence in the margins of the state. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that Bolaño and Saer reread the legacy of avant-gardes to uphold the political relevance of literature within the seemingly bleak scenario of the 1990s and early 2000s. In this sense, my analysis of *Los detectives salvajes* will question usual interpretations that regard it as an elegiac account of the avant-gardist project. I will refer to canonical studies of the novel to show that its fictional avant-garde aims to reopen rather than lament bygone ambitions. When writing no longer seemed a privileged means of intervention, and culture was increasingly absorbed by free-market dynamics, Bolaño and Saer still championed the specificity of literary form. Their novels use temporal disjunctions as a formal technique apt to interrogate the repercussions of prior avant-gardes. They depict avant-gardist communities that persist over time, highlighting affect as the key attribute to relaunch the ethico-political ambitions of art.

I will now contextualise these novels in relation to three concepts repeatedly used in scholarly accounts of Latin American culture at the turn of the century: mourning, memory and market. Mourning refers to artistic responses to the effects of political violence on society. On the one hand, it expresses a certain melancholic lament, as the revolutionary potential of art was outrightly rejected and artists had to rethink their role models and self-perceptions. On the other, mourning links art to memory. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, testimonies of torture and violence were vital to denounce state terror and human rights violations. Especially in the Southern Cone, artists contributed to impose issues like *desaparecidos* and juridical reparation in the political agenda and public opinion. Moreover, artistic revisions of the past took place in a disparaging context signalled by social urgencies, economic crises, and the pervasive commodification of culture. Amidst neoliberal reform policies implemented by both authoritarian and democratic states, the submission of culture to free-market dynamics forced writers to revise their conditions of production and circulation. In this vein, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* relate to the so-called "end of history". While prior avant-gardists saw their projects as intrinsically involved in revolutionary transformation, Bolaño and Saer

interrogated the status of avant-gardes and art altogether at a time when artistic and political radicalism seemed not only incompatible but even unthinkable.

Mourning the Demise of Revolutionary Art

Sigmund Freud defines mourning as the arduous, gradual and painful work of overcoming the loss of a loved object, be it either a loved person “or some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (1964: 243). In this vein, mourning was a recurrent keyword when reconsidering the conditions of culture and politics in Latin America in the aftermath of the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s, both authoritarian and democratic regimes had undertaken neoliberal policies and free-market reforms, usually facilitated by violent means like state terror and financial pressure from the international establishment. Alignment with the Washington Consensus and the restructuring of the state were implemented by dictatorships in the Southern Cone, especially during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and long-lasting democracies in countries such as Mexico and Costa Rica since the mid-1980s. In El Salvador and Guatemala, such reforms were consolidated during the democratic transitions that followed prolonged civil wars in the early 1990s. The adoption of neoliberalism in almost every corner of Latin America closed down projects of national and regional developmentalism. The goal of an integrative and continental Latin American liberation was thwarted and receded into local limits. Political action and cultural production were not only deprived of radical aims but also restricted to national boundaries. As Idelber Avelar states regarding the Southern Cone, “the dictatorships, by submitting unconditionally to *international* capital, turned the *nation* into the crucial battlefield for all political action” (1999: 36, emphasis in original). By limiting political disputes to internal affairs –even while receiving support from foreign entities– governments paved the way for economic openness to global capital in detriment of regional sovereignty.

Mourning thus implied rethinking precedent paradigms of thought. In the work performed by mourning, as Freud remarks, “Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object” (1964: 244). When applied to literary works, mourning encompassed two interrelated dimensions: the trauma of extreme violence and political defeat was inseparable from the loss of literature’s social status. Brett Levinson argues that the “end of literature”

mirrored the “end of the state”. On the one hand, the “demise of the sovereign state” forced it to “compete with other domains, such as the global market”; on the other, literature, “which once occupied a privileged position within the institutions of civil society, and therefore within the state itself, must now battle for that rank and legitimacy with other forms of creation, above all, mass and popular culture” (2001: 1-2). While Levinson displays a rather elitist and Manichean bias towards high culture over popular forms, his verdict underlines the increasing commodification of literature. As for Avelar, he invokes the concept of mourning to link memory and trauma to neoliberalism, claiming that literature “confronts not only the need to come to terms with the past but also to define its position in the new present ushered in by the military regimes: a global market in which every corner of social life has been commodified” (1999: 1).

The apogee of neoliberalism frustrated the avant-gardist ideal of provoking change through art. Franco notes that authoritarian violence and market dominance “ended the utopian dreams of writers and projects of literature and art as agents of ‘salvation and redemption’” (2002: 12). As exemplified by the Boom, the continental scope of the Cuban Revolution and the modernisation of the culture industry had previously given intellectuals unprecedented visibility. They were prompt to enact a leading voice regarding social issues and envisioned a new art for a radically new society. However, events such as the Padilla affair hindered the alliance between *engagé* intellectuals and the revolutionary state. Later, authoritarianism and integration into global capital undermined the political reach of art altogether and “the magisterial and regulative force assigned to literature by the boom was bound to meet its historical limit” (Avelar, 1999: 13). As hopes of revolutionary change faded away, activism was no longer intrinsic to formal experimentation: “when aesthetic innovation, revolt, disturbance, and difference represent entrances into the market, [...] literature ceases both to sustain and disrupt the social dichotomies upon which the globe banks and thus concludes its modern function” (Levinson, 2001: 28).

When analysing the clash between artistic and political avant-gardes in Cuba, I noted that political urgency condemned aesthetic rupture as superfluous elitism and opted for supposedly more immediate forms. Later, state terror and democratic transitions favoured a new peak of *testimonios*, such as Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), Hernán Valdés’ *Tejas verdes* (1974), or Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos’ *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983). While *testimonios* were crucial for bearing witness to torture and

human rights violations, politically engaged scholars theorised the form as an alternative to the privileged status of the “letrado” and commercial canonisation of the novel. They regarded it as a platform for extra-literary and popular voices apt to give truthful accounts of oppression. George Yúdice condemned literature as a “gatekeeper, permitting certain classes of individuals to establish standards of taste within the public sphere” and advocated *testimonio* for expressing a “liberated consciousness free of such elitism” (1991: 26). The *testimonio* once again challenged the social function of literature and the intellectual. It was meant to express new political subjects and social movements, leading to intersectional alliances in reconstructed civil societies. For John Beverley, it questioned the role that artistic avant-gardes had played in defeated projects: “it was also a way of testing the contradictions and limits of revolutionary and reformist projects still structured in part around elite assumptions about the role of cultural vanguards” (1996: 281).

Saer and Bolaño’s public interventions, however, stood for the specific domain of fiction while also acknowledging the need to redefine established role models of the writer. In 1980, after the death of Sartre, Saer published an article reappraising Sartre in opposition to previous and archetypal views of *engagement*. Saer attacked *engagement* when simplified as ideological alignment in the public sphere. In contrast, he cherished Sartre’s commitment to literary specificity and regarded him as “un narrador” whose “compromiso está inscripto en la esencia misma de su trabajo, que el trabajo de un artista consiste en universalizar su singularidad [...] [y] reunir los pedazos de una totalidad humana desgarrada” (1980: 13). While Saer began his literary career contemporarily to the Boom, Bolaño only gained public recognition in the 1990s and advanced a bolder view of his predecessors, even claiming that “la herencia del boom da miedo” (in Braithwaite, 2006: 99). Nonetheless, he reaffirmed his dedication to literature in a typically avant-gardist tone: “Como escritores hemos llegado literalmente a un precipicio. No se ve forma de cruzar pero hay que cruzarlo y ese es nuestro trabajo, [...] hay que inventar, hay que ser audaces” (in Braithwaite, 2006: 99).

Saer and Bolaño advanced similar standpoints on literary specificity and contested a mournful scenario marked by political defeat, trauma, and the decline of literature’s social status. Their words echoed other uses of avant-gardist forms, as exemplified by artists responding to state terror and participating in democratic transitions. For instance, the Chilean Escena de Avanzada gathered visual artists, writers, and philosophers such as Carlos Altamirano, Raúl Zurita, Lotty Rosenfeld, Diamela Eltit, and Nelly Richard. The Avanzada assimilated prior

avant-gardist experiences to oppose the extreme violence and censorship of the Pinochet regime (Richard, 2007: 14). Mirroring the guerrilla vocabulary I noted in Chapter 2, they undertook “acciones de arte”: urban interventions challenging the military control of social spaces and daily life. In “Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento” (1979), Rosenfeld adhered stripes of white tape to the street, perpendicular to the lines indicating the direction of traffic. She disrupted the conventional signs that organise urban displacements, triggering a symbolic link between crosses and death. Then, several members of the Avanzada participated in “¡Ay Sudamérica!” (1981). Six airplanes, flying over Santiago, dropped 400,000 flyers voicing Chileans’ right to a decent standard of living, also inviting them to reinvent art and approach “la vida como un acto creativo”. This action referenced the bombardment of La Moneda and rewrote political trauma as active contestation.

Avant-gardist forms were also used to reconstruct continental ties through art. The group Solidarte –Solidaridad Internacional por Arte-Correo– was founded in 1982 by the Mexican artists César Espinosa, Aarón Flores, Manuel Marín, Mauricio Guerrero and Jesús Romeo Galdámez. As stated in their manifesto, Solidarte drew upon the globally recognised form of mail art –employed in the 1960s by avant-gardes like the North American Fluxus– to oppose “toda forma de imposición e intervención cultural, política y militar” (in Lopera, 2020: 77). Through protest postcards and informational leaflets, they turned such an experimental aesthetics into a collective means of raising awareness and coordinating artistic efforts throughout Latin America. In 1984, Solidarte contributed to the Primera Bienal de La Habana with an “acción postal colectiva” titled “Desaparecidos Políticos de Nuestra América”. Forty-nine artists from ten countries replied to “una hoja membretada con los datos del colectivo, el nombre de la obra y un gran recuadro vacío que invitaba a ser intervenido” (Navarrete Tudela, 2021: 102). The objective was to gather like-minded artists and bring to light more than 90,000 political disappearances imputed to dictatorships in the Southern Cone, civil wars such as El Salvador and Guatemala’s, and democracies like Mexico.

State Terror and Memory

While mourning alluded to the decline of literature’s status, examples such as the Avanzada and Solidarte prove that avant-gardist strategies were still fruitful for denouncing state terror and human rights violations. Likewise, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* were published at a

time of widespread discussions on memory. Their fictionalisations of the legacy of avant-gardes took place within a context in which revisions of the 1960s and 1970s proliferated. Since the early 1980s, memory has provided “the very basis for thinking creatively about political change in transitioning societies” (Lazzara, 2018: 26). Addressing the effects of political violence exposed conflicts of interests and differing views of the past. Throughout Latin America, memory was intrinsic to the democracies that followed dictatorships, state terror and civil wars. Not limited to remembrance, memory connotes agency and plurality: it implies an active reconstruction in contraposition to others. Since the past is open to reinterpretations in shifting ideological contexts and political struggles, Elizabeth Jelin refers to “los trabajos de la memoria” done by “los seres humanos activos en los procesos de transformación simbólica y de elaboración de sentidos del pasado” (2012: 48). Memory exceeds the individual domain. It is intertwined with the shared values and representations of the past of a certain society at specific historical coordinates.

Memory initially arose out of activism. During the 1980s and 1990s, the term was linked to victims of state terror and civil wars and their testimonies of torture and exile. It was associated with demands of human rights movements and the figures of the victim and family: “el paradigma de los derechos humanos se fue consolidando como el parámetro legítimo para interpretar jurídica y socialmente las atrocidades cometidas por los regímenes dictatoriales y autoritarios” (Jelin, 2012: 14). Memory displayed different itineraries in each country. In Argentina, it was a state policy aimed at condemning human rights violations and legitimising democratic institutions. It featured prominently in public opinion and the media, as shown by the extensive edition of *Nunca más* (1984) and ample repercussions of the “Juicio a las Juntas” (Vezzetti, 2007: 3). However, military pressures and socio-economic instability finally led the government to not pursue trials and pass the Ley de Punto Final (1986) and Ley de Obediencia Debida (1987). Still in the Southern Cone, Chile’s “transición negociada” and Uruguay’s Ley de Caducidad (1985) established “reconciliation”, “silence” and “peaceful coexistence” as social guidelines right after the end of dictatorships (Stern, 2016: 126).

In countries that experienced prolonged civil wars, memory exhibited a diverging chronology but faced analogous obstacles. In El Salvador, the Acuerdos de Paz (1992) initially gave rise to the Comisión de la Verdad, meant to clarify human rights violations and prompt juridical reparations. However, the institutionalisation of the warring opponents as democratic

political parties –Arena and FMLN– relegated issues of memory in favour of a negotiated transition that resulted in the Ley de Amnistía General (1993). In Mexico, the democratic Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) led a low-intensity dirty war between the 1960s and 1980s, aimed at armed organisations and political opponents in a broad sense. Memory was mostly linked to clarifying material and political responsibilities for the emblematic Tlatelolco massacre (1968). As the PRI only left power in 2000, the Mexican state repeatedly neglected access to official records and curtailed memory efforts like the Comité del 68 (1993) by former student leaders.¹⁷

A complementary approach to the concept of memory expanded its chronological and thematic focus. Beyond human rights violations, numerous discussions dealt with pre-dictatorial militancy, armed struggle, and self-criticism on behalf of the Left. Former revolutionaries and intellectuals embarked on heated debates about past revolutionary projects. The former member of the Mexican Communist Party Jorge Castañeda presented one of the earliest and most renowned examples with *Utopia Unarmed* (1993). Castañeda warned against leftist sectarianism and militarism, reaffirming the need to work within the institutions of parliamentary democracy. Almost a decade before becoming Secretary of Foreign Affairs of centre-right president Vicente Fox, he argued that the Latin American Left had to “achieve the combination of economic and social equity” through “a social market economy that reduces inequalities” (1993: 451). The Venezuelan Elizabeth Burgos displayed an even bolder ideological shift. Once actively involved in the Cuban Revolution and married to Debray, Burgos increasingly became an anti-socialist spokesperson. After editing Menchú’s *testimonio*, she worked with the guerrilla combatant Daniel Alarcón Ramírez on *Memorias de un soldado cubano* (1997), a highly critical account of his lifetime dedication to the Cuban Revolution. In her prologue, Burgos drew upon memory as an instrument to review and condemn her former allegiance to revolutionary projects. She claimed

¹⁷ By the mid-1990s, the goals of social reconstruction and juridical reparation through memory seemed to have been diluted, increasingly replaced by a state of disillusionment and stalemate throughout the continent. Nonetheless, particularly in the Southern Cone, the 2000s signalled renewed energy for memory as a result of political regime change, the arrest of Augusto Pinochet, and the juridical universalisation and non-applicability of crimes against humanity (Collins, Hite and Joignant, 2013: 12). The abovementioned laws were repealed and trials were resumed. For example, the Uruguayan dictators Gregorio Conrado Álvarez and Juan María Bordaberry were sentenced to 25 and 30 years in prison, in 2009 and 2010, and the Argentine dictator Jorge Rafael Videla was sentenced to life in a civilian prison in 2010. While legal proceedings did not feature as predominantly in other regions of Latin America, pedagogical and cultural projects were undertaken by both the state and civil society. In Mexico, the Tlatelolco massacre came to be regarded as a symbol in the struggle against authoritarianism and towards democratisation. The museum Memorial del 68 was inaugurated in 2007, and, in 2011, 2 October was officially declared the “Aniversario de los caídos en la lucha por la democracia”.

that Alarcón Ramírez's *testimonio* revealed “la cara oculta de la historia” and “la voluntad de Fidel Castro de irrumpir e imponerse en el escenario político mundial, [...] por la que ha hecho pagar a todo cubano un alto precio en dolor y sufrimiento” (1997: 4).

Fiercely opposing these criticisms of armed struggle and socialism, Beverley equated them to a “coming-of-age narrative”. In Beverley’s view, they were part of the “neoconservative turn” of an intellectualised middle class accommodating itself to moderate politics: “According to this narrative, the illusion of the revolutionary transformation of society that was the inspiration for armed struggle was our Romantic adolescence” (2011: 99). Reviewing revolutionary activism has been a contentious debate since the 1980s. As late as 2019, the intellectual Horacio González –director of the Argentine National Library between 2005 and 2015– argued that “hay que reescribir la historia argentina” as an “historia dura y dramática, que incorpore una valoración positiva de la guerrilla de los años 70 y que escape un poco de los estudios sociales que hoy la ven como una elección desviada, peligrosa e inaceptable” (in Palacio, 2019). Castañeda and Burgos, on the one hand, and Beverley and González, on the other, summarise the ample ideological arch adopted by the Latin American Left to reformulate its political strategies. Opposed to the abandonment of prior ideals, Beverley strived to recover what could have been a “Latin American form of socialism”. An early supporter of the Sandinista Revolution and Pink Tide governments, he claimed that the legacy of revolutionary endeavours reinvigorated the “new social movements” of the 1990s and 2000s, as “the promise of the armed struggle pointed to the possibility of a more egalitarian and joyful future” (2011: 108).

In his essay on Argentine culture *El río sin orillas* (1991), Saer expressed his disapproval of armed struggle and the groups that promoted it. When reviewing the 1970s, Saer dedicated a few paragraphs to criticising the leaders of Montoneros, whom he despised because “su modo de resolver los diferendos teóricos era el asesinato político, su método para procurarse fondos el secuestro, [...] [mientras] depositaban en cuentas bancarias en el extranjero millones de dólares obtenidos por medio de pactos secretos con sus enemigos, de asaltos y de extorsiones” (2003: 185-186). I previously noted that *Libro de Manuel* addressed the issue of violence by depicting a non-violent kidnapping distanced from military brutality. Likewise, Saer condemned Montoneros’ “inexplicables arbitrariedades” and “crímenes inútiles” such as “la ejecución a sangre fría del general Aramburu” (2003: 184). In his view, this *modus operandi* “echó

displicentemente por la borda toda reflexión genuina sobre la violencia y sus límites, sobre la justicia y los métodos válidos para instaurarla” (2003: 185). Next to this harsh judgment, he outlined a contrasting portrayal of his fellow writer Francisco Urondo, who joined Montoneros and was killed by the military in 1976. Saer recalled Urondo as “uno de mis más viejos amigos” and evoked “la época en que, tomando un vino jovial, discutíamos sobre Char, sobre Juan L. Ortiz, Apollinaire o Drummond de Andrade, en las orillas del río Paraná” (2003: 186). In this way, Saer associated Urondo with a series of poets and disregarded his links with political figures. Moreover, he anticipated the motifs to be explored in *La grande*: its fictional avant-garde consists of a group of friends and poets whose approach to literature and politics is inseparable from sharing readings, recitations, food and drinks.

In different public appearances at the time of publishing *Los detectives salvajes*, Bolaño advanced an analogous review of revolutionary politics. When receiving the 1998 Premio Internacional de Novela Rómulo Gallegos, he recalled his juvenile Trotskyist militancy and subsequent disillusionment: “Luchamos por partidos que de haber vencido nos habrían enviado a un campo de trabajos forzados, luchamos y pusimos toda nuestra generosidad en un ideal que hacía más de cincuenta años que estaba muerto” (2004: 37). He also recalled his return to Chile in 1973 to support Allende, claiming that “en el fondo iba a la aventura y me gustaba la aventura en sí misma” (1998: 8). Opposing vitalist idealism to party leaders allowed Bolaño to contest the links between artists and the Cuban Revolution, which he characterised as “una salvedad bastante infantil con Cuba porque es una enfermedad de los latinoamericanos. [...] Ahí la cagó Cortázar y la gran mayoría, y la cagaron de una manera bestial” (1998: 8). Just as Saer differentiated Urondo’s poetry and friendship from armed struggle, Bolaño opposed Dalton’s personality to the outcome of revolutionary projects. He remembered meeting Dalton’s comrades in El Salvador, stressing that “de los diez comandantes principales cuatro eran escritores. [...] Por ejemplo, Cienfuegos, que es uno de los que dieron la orden de matar a Roque Dalton, yo me pregunto si, incluso, no hay allí una enemistad literaria” (1998: 9). Bolaño turned Dalton’s killing into an episode of poetic animosity, raising the incompatibility of artistic and political avant-gardes. He contrasted the avant-gardist poet with the exertion of gratuitous violence: “Como si fuera una banda de gánsters. Y dijeron, matémoslo ahora que está durmiendo, porque es poeta, para que no sufra. Palabras literales” (1998: 9). Bolaño’s revision of the past also introduced the topics later developed in *Los detectives salvajes*: his fictional avant-garde looks

back at the encounters and mismatches between art and revolutionary politics in the 1970s, outlining a literary ethics through affects and aiming for “la aventura”.

Neoliberalism and Commodified Culture

Bolaño and Saer’s review of prior avant-gardes resituated their postulates in the context of the late 1990s and 2000s. To reclaim an avant-gardist legacy in relation to memory connoted a certain view of the impact of market dynamics on culture. When addressing art in times of neoliberalism, Francine Masiello locates its political potential in revealing conflicts between past and present, opposing the “celebration of free-marketeering” and “apparent neutrality on social contradiction” (2001: 3). In turn, Moreiras defined “la experiencia literaria como una experiencia de duelo”. Literature incorporated and thematised mourning; the loss of literature’s status was processed through literary forms and elicited more literature: “hacen del lugar de la pérdida el lugar de una cierta recuperación, siempre precaria e inestable, pues siempre constituida sobre un abismo” (1999: 25). In this vein, I will shortly explore how Bolaño and Saer’s fictional avant-gardes reclaimed the relevance of literature amidst the pervasive commodification of culture.

Mourning and market signalled the uncertain status of art and intellectuals within transitional societies and the ensuing dominance of neoliberalism. Democratisation and the redefinition of Latin America’s position in global capitalism demanded rethinking the “long history of activism among vanguard intellectuals” (Masiello, 2001: 24). Writers could no longer aspire to enact a leading voice when the pervasive culture industry questioned the value of literature itself. As Gustavo Guerrero reflected: “el escenario de los noventa y los dos mil es el de una gran crisis del valor literario que vuelve más perentoria que nunca una discusión sobre sus modos de fabricación, de acumulación y de transmisión” (2018: 89). Literature had to compete and maximise profits in a marketplace constantly demanding novelty and featuring multimedia forms of entertainment. Following cultural retaliation and economic crises, the Latin American publishing industry was severely damaged and absorbed by transnational corporations. During the 1980s, Spanish conglomerates acquired most of the publishing houses responsible for the cultural fervour of previous decades.¹⁸ Literature was incorporated into networks of global circulation but whose operating models exploited cultural commodities within local domains

¹⁸ After its admission into the European Union in 1985, Spain saw a boom in transnational investments. For example, Latin American publishing houses like Joaquín Mortiz and Emecé were bought by Planeta, while Plaza y Janés acquired Sudamericana.

(García Canclini and Moneta, 1999: 8). Spanish publishing houses discouraged the project of a pan-regional Latin American literature and positioned their authors within literary fields defined mainly by national borders. The concentration of capital thus accentuated the balkanization of national literatures and there was limited transit between countries: “el recurso a la edición y a la exportación desde la Península acaban siendo el único medio para internacionalizar la difusión de una novela o un libro” (Guerrero, 2018: 108). Authors must achieve recognition in Spain before circulating in Latin American countries other than theirs. Winning Spanish awards such as the Premio Alfaguara, Premio Planeta or Premio Herralde de Novela is normally a prerequisite for accessing the international market.

Literature thus mirrored a broader shift in Latin American societies. Global markets forced writers to readjust their relationship with the nation-state, as Nicola Miller argues: “The idea that national identity could be debated in primarily cultural terms also came under increasing scrutiny in the face of challenges to state sovereignty” (1999: 257). Gareth Williams detects an “uneven, incomplete, and ongoing passage from national to postnational cultural and political paradigms” (2002: 1). Postnational did not mean the final demise of the nation: it implied redefining “inherited conceptual and representational systems” within a historical transition “away from the national revolutionary period and into the passage toward global accumulation” (2002: 1). Looking at an unprecedented dialectics between the local and global, Martín-Barbero argues that “la nación se ve exigida a redefinir su propia función y sus modos de relación con un adentro fragmentado y un afuera que deja de serlo, pues la atraviesa replanteando radicalmente el sentido de fronteras” (2001: 32). These scholars exemplify how the nation-state was reconceptualised during the peak and collapse of neoliberalism. The nation did not seem to provide a reference for politico-economic emancipation anymore; it could no longer sustain the developmentalist principles that ignited revolutionary projects during the 1960s and 1970s. For Franco, Latin American literature of the last quarter of the century worked with the remnants of such a perished and collective project. It revealed “the absence of any signified that could correspond to the nation” and approached the national as “a contested term or [...] a mere reminder of a vanished body” (1989: 204). In this sense, literature exposed a bold contradiction between its conditions of production and circulation. On the one hand, the nation was no longer a viable ideological framework, many novels thematised its decline, and Spanish publishing houses dominated the market. On the other, those transnational corporations mostly distributed

books within local limits.

Guadalupe Gerardi regards Bolaño and Saer's works as narratives of travel that redesign "conceptions of literature as influenced by the nation, reformulating the relationship between the two, which has bound Latin American literature since the nineteenth century" (2019: 2). Bolaño personified the transnational nature conferred to literature in times of global capitalism. As he introduced himself: "Aunque vivo desde hace más de veinte años en Europa, mi única nacionalidad es la chilena, lo que no es ningún obstáculo para que me sienta profundamente español y latinoamericano" (2004: 20). Bolaño moved from Chile to Mexico as a teenager, wrote most of his oeuvre in Spain and gained Latin and North American recognition after receiving the Premio Rómulo Gallegos and Premio Herralde. In addition to his novels' de-territorialised plots, his nomadic life "has come to represent the entirety of contemporary Latin American literature" (Hoyos, 2015: 5). Bolaño embraced such a public image, as he stated in several interviews: "Mi única patria son mis dos hijos. [...] Y tal vez, pero en segundo plano, algunos instantes, algunas calles, algunos rostros o escenas o libros que están dentro de mí y que algún día olvidaré, que es lo mejor que uno puede hacer con la patria" (in Braithwaite, 2006: 62). Bolaño rejected the idea of nationhood and opted for affects. Rather than a transcendental identity, he saw the nation as a sum of significant readings, loved ones and daily reminiscences. As I will shortly address, *Los detectives salvajes* gives fictional form to Bolaño's stance. Its avant-gardists advance a literary ethics that traverses the world, shaping modes of community not restricted to national borders.

While Saer had published his first books in the early 1960s, he acquired wider recognition after moving to Paris in 1968. In the preface to a short story collection, he anticipated Bolaño's rebuttal of transcendental ideas of the nation: "la patria, en tanto que abstracción, es el último refugio del sinvergüenza. [...] La patria pertenece a la esfera privada" (1986: 2-3). However, his works do not portray a nomadic lifestyle but mostly focus on his hometown in the rural area of the province of Santa Fe. His affective rewriting of the nation therefore revolves around coming-of-age experiences and intimacy with local scenarios: "Y sin embargo, estamos constituidos en gran parte por el lugar donde nacemos. [...] Lengua, sensación, afecto, emociones, pulsiones, sexualidad: de eso está hecha la patria de los hombres, a la que quieren volver continuamente y a la que llevan consigo donde quiera que vayan" (1986: 3). Rather than departing from Latin America to the world at large, *La grande* rewrites the links between avant-gardes and the nation as a narrative of homecoming. After more than thirty years in Europe, an

ex-poet returns to Santa Fe and gathers his friends in a weekend reunion. Compared to Bolaño's transnational stance, Saer's provincial angle bypasses both internationalist and national approaches to art. I will later highlight the relevance of focusing on Santa Fe, compared with the centrality of Buenos Aires within the Argentine cultural field.

As much as redesigning national boundaries, the end of the century was also theorised as impacting the links between culture and time. Authoritarian violence and neoliberalism signalled a rupture between past, present and future. As Octavio Paz said when receiving the 1990 Nobel Prize: "Me parece que comienza a ocurrir lo mismo con la idea de progreso, y en consecuencia, con nuestra visión del tiempo, la historia y nosotros mismos. Asistimos al crepúsculo del futuro" (1991: 17). Devoid of both a retrievable past and future liberation, only the absolute present remained as the realm where market dynamics and the mass media ruled: "catalizando la sensación de estar de vuelta de las grandes utopías, los medios se han constituido en un dispositivo fundamental de nuestra instalación en un presente continuo, [...] una sucesión de sucesos en la que cada hecho borra al anterior; y sin un mínimo horizonte de futuro no hay posibilidad de pensar cambios" (Martín-Barbero, 2000: 4). I previously noted that memory offered a way of disrupting such an absolutisation of the present and its pretended social harmony, reinstating unresolved conflicts from the past. Regarding art, Avelar argues that anachronism offered a powerful formal technique: "In the very market that submits the past to the immediacy of the present, mournful literature will search for those fragments and ruins that can trigger the untimely eruption of the past" (1999: 3). Looking back at "forgotten" experiences triggers a radical discord with the present, suggesting an open-ended future and renewed artistic and political horizons: "Instead of 'adjusting to the new times' and [...] a self-satisfied corner in today's division of labour, I would rather insist on the reflection on the conditions of possibility of literature's very untimeliness in the current marketplace" (1999: 231).

Los detectives salvajes and *La grande* gave literary form to Bolaño and Saer's standpoints on revolutionary projects and authoritarianism. They intervened in widespread debates on memory through temporal disjunctions: both novels structure their plots as narrative interplays between past, present and future. Opposing the commodification and homogenisation of culture, chronological disruptions elicit renewed outlooks on the past. Formal experimentation thus becomes a means of rereading the legacy of avant-gardes and reclaiming their contemporary relevance. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will explore how fictionalising avant-gardes

reveals affect as intrinsic to the quest to combine art and social change. Affects enable the avant-gardists in *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* to experiment with modes of coexistence beyond the frameworks of the state and political organisations. In this way, Bolaño and Saer provided an unconventional account of artistic avant-gardes and their relations with politics. Amidst a socio-cultural context demanding memory and the re-evaluation of political violence, these two fictional avant-gardes recovered a literary ethics apt to reinvent community.

Bolaño's Juvenile Avant-gardism

Los detectives salvajes broadly rewrites Bolaño's juvenile experiences in Mexico in the 1970s. The novel depicts an avant-gardist circle, Realismo Visceral, fictionalising Bolaño's group Infrarrealismo. Its leaders, Ulises Lima and Arturo Belano, mirror Mario Santiago Papasquiaro and Bolaño himself. Infrarrealismo contested two salient aspects of its contemporary cultural field. On the one hand, it responded to the promotion of art undertaken by the state to regain support from the youth after the Tlatelolco massacre. On the other, it questioned established authors such as Paz and Carlos Monsiváis through the daring tone and strategies of twentieth-century avant-gardes. For Infrarrealismo, these canonical writers imposed unacceptable and conformist poetic criteria. In contrast, they stood for Efraín Huerta, an exponent of popular culture in whom they recognised the paradigm of Mexican literature. Carmen Boullosa, a poet close to the Infrarrealistas, argued that such a dichotomy between Paz and Huerta structured Mexico City's poetic scene at the time. It was imperious to align oneself either with "los exquisitos" or "los callejeros": "Los del bando de Paz llamaban a los efrainitas estalinistas. Los efrainitas llamaban a los octavianos reaccionarios" (2008: 419).

The Infrarrealistas vocationally embraced marginality and boycotted the public appearances of those whom they called "poetas estatales". By eliciting public scandals, they assumed the role of juvenile avant-gardists challenging "official" writers and the institutions supporting them. For instance, Boullosa recalls a book launch of a work by Paz around 1975: "Con mis propios ojos vi cómo unos Infrarrealistas (los saboteadores) arrojaron una copa a Paz (que iba guapísimo, con un elegante blazer) y cómo el poeta se sacudía la corbata y luego seguía la plática como si no hubiera pasado nada, sonriendo" (2008: 422). Infrarrealismo's belligerence and Paz's indifference, as depicted by Boullosa, exemplify the sidelined position of the group. They adopted marginality as a guideline for writing and living, as materialised in the

precariousness and dispersion of their production: ephemeral magazines of limited print and poetry collections published by minor, usually self-funded publishers.

Bolaño wrote the manifesto of Infrarrealismo, titled “Déjenlo todo, nuevamente: Primer manifiesto infrarrealista”. Replicating Dalton’s earlier manifesto for the Círculo Literario, Bolaño called for a new ethics combining daily life, poetry and politics: “Nuestra ética es la Revolución, nuestra estética la Vida: una-sola-cosa” (1977: 8). However, Bolaño incorporated Dalton’s fatal outcome to his manifesto and proposed a revolutionary ethics oscillating between vitalism and tragedy: “nos acercamos a 200 kph. al cagadero o a la revolución” (1977: 6). Infrarrealismo thus reflected on the revolutionary crossroads of the 1970s. They claimed that avant-gardists must distance themselves from established personalities and forms; instead, their radical poetics must mirror political struggle:

Desplazamiento del acto de escribir por zonas nada propicias para el acto de escribir. [...] NO ESTÁN en el Bolshoi sino en el dolor y la belleza insoportables de las calles. / Un arcoíris que principia en un cine de mala muerte y que termina en una fábrica en huelga. [...] Subvertir la cotidianeidad. / O. K. / DÉJENLO TODO, NUEVAMENTE / LÁNCENSE A LOS CAMINOS (1977: 11).

Even after events like the Padilla affair and Dalton’s assassination, the manifesto still sought the convergence between artistic and political avant-gardes. The verses “DÉJENLO TODO” and “LÁNCENSE A LOS CAMINOS” echo André Breton’s text “Leave Everything” and the beatnik poetics of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Bolaño thus regarded revolutionary politics through a literary lens recalling some of the most experimental twentieth-century authors. However, the manifesto’s last verses state: “Soñábamos con utopía y nos despertamos gritando” (1977: 11). In 1977, therefore, Bolaño had already invoked the notion of mourning to address the effects of political violence on avant-gardist ambitions, and anticipated the lament of his 1998 “Discurso de Caracas”: “todo lo que he escrito es una carta de amor o de despedida a mi propia generación, los que nacimos en la década del cincuenta y los que escogimos en un momento dado el ejercicio de la milicia. [...] Toda Latinoamérica está sembrada con los huesos de estos jóvenes olvidados” (2004: 37-38).

In the same vein, *Los detectives salvajes* looks back at the affinities and final breakup between artistic and political avant-gardes in the 1970s. Its fictional avant-garde not only rewrote Bolaño’s juvenile endeavours but also intervened in widespread debates on memory and political

violence. Bolaño's "carta de amor o de despedida" addressed the two angles I outlined before in relation to mourning and trauma. First, fiction was a means of reviewing the aftermath of revolutionary projects, as those utopian dreams "despertaron gritando" when persecuted by state terror. Then, it provided a novelistic counterpart to the self-critical reviews of former activists who judged armed struggle and the dogmatism of the Left.

The novel is structured in three parts. The first corresponds to the personal diary of Juan García Madero, the youngest member of Realismo Visceral. The diary is circumscribed to the landscapes of Mexico City and the desert of Sonora, and to the time span between November 1975 and February 1976. In the first person and adopting an intimate tone, García Madero narrates his participation in the group led by Lima and Belano and their journey to Sonora looking for the lost poet Césarea Tinajero. In the 1920s, Cesárea founded the original –also fictional– avant-garde group Realismo Visceral. Then, she quit poetry and disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The novel's second part spans the next twenty years in the lives of Lima and Belano. It is structured as a series of third-party vignettes about their adventures throughout Latin America, the United States, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. After finding Cesárea, who dies in a climactic scene, Lima and Belano leave Realismo Visceral behind and embark, each on their own, on erratic itineraries rendering their lives as enigmas. Resembling a transcript of interviews and research fieldwork, this kaleidoscopic second part includes multiple testimonies recalling their encounters with the poets and guided by two key questions: What happened to Lima and Belano after leaving Mexico in 1976? How were their links to Realismo Visceral and poetry reshaped afterwards? The third and final part reintroduces García Madero's diary and provides a conjectural answer to these enigmas, as it narrates the outcome of the Real Visceralistas' trip to the desert and their final encounter with Cesárea. By shifting back and forth between different chronological planes and narrative perspectives, *Los detectives salvajes* uses temporal disjunctions to highlight an often overlooked dimension of artistic avant-gardes. Looking back at the 1970s from the point of view of the 1990s, the novel reclaims the avant-gardist quest to merge aesthetic radicalism and community.

I will now explore Bolaño's use of fiction to redefine the avant-garde and resituate it in a new context. In this way, my reading will contradict usual scholarly interpretations of the novel as a portrait of political defeat and avant-gardes' lost hopes. On the contrary, Realismo Visceral reclaims their legacy and faces the 1990s post-utopian scenario by revalorising literature beyond

publishing –even beyond the written word. The novel does not present any written piece by the Real Visceralistas. Their avant-gardism does not produce concrete works but a literary ethics merging reading, writing and daily habits. During their subsequent journeys, this ethical angle revises the frustrated involvement of artistic avant-gardes in revolutionary projects, reclaiming the value of poetry, instead, as an enabler of affects and modes of coexistence.

Avant-gardes, Modernity and the State

The reconstruction of Lima and Belano's adventures juxtaposes testimonies by people whose lives were somehow moved after meeting them. These vignettes are presented in chronological order from 1976 to 1996. However, one of them is split in several parts and interwoven between the rest. Amadeo Salvatierra's account of his one-day encounter with the Real Visceralistas stays fixed in 1976, and both inaugurates and concludes this second part of the novel. Salvatierra is an ex-Estridentista and friend of Cesárea who meets Lima and Belano right at the beginning of their journey. His memories of the original 1920s Realismo Visceral and Cesárea are the point of departure of the novel's fictional avant-garde. The constant return to Salvatierra's vignette amidst a sequence that keeps advancing in chronological order gives narrative form to the anachronistic: every step in Lima and Belano's journey implicitly invokes this past reference.

Salvatierra asks Lima and Belano the reason behind their interest in Césarea. They reply that they came across her name by chance when researching Estridentismo and the lack of published texts by Cesárea propelled their inquisitiveness. Salvatierra locates an old folder on his bookshelves and declares: "Aquí está, dije, mi vida y de paso lo único que queda de la vida de Cesárea Tinajero" (2003: 210). Salvatierra assesses his life only insofar as it is materialised in written text: living and writing are condensed in a pile of old papers from fifty years ago. He shows Lima and Belano the only existing number of *Caborca*, the magazine of Realismo Visceral directed by Cesárea in the 1920s. The tactile quality of the magazine arouses melancholic daydreaming in Salvatierra, whose remembrances of Cesárea mirror the search initiated by the new Real Visceralistas: "qué visión, una mujer de veintitantos años en la década de los veinte atravesando el Zócalo con tanta prisa. [...] [V]eo el pasado de México y veo la espalda de esta mujer que se aleja en mi sueño, y le digo ¿adónde vas, Cesárea?" (2003: 254). Lima and Belano's journey thus becomes an affective wandering into the past, the past of Mexico and the past of Cesárea, interlinked by the fictional avant-garde Realismo Visceral.

Salvatierra remembers Cesárea's job as the secretary of General Diego Carvajal in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. He presents Carvajal as the patron of the arts of his time, and his portrayal cherishes the links between the Mexican Revolution and artistic avant-gardes, speaking highly of those "que entraron desnudos en el torbellino de la historia y que salieron vestidos con los más brillantes y más atroces harapos, como mi general Diego Carvajal, que entró analfabeto y salió convencido de que Picasso y Marinetti eran los profetas de algo" (2003: 374). Salvatierra remembers Manuel Maples Arce, the founder of Estridentismo, who received state patronage and envisioned the city of Estridentópolis. Mirroring Cortázar's depiction of Paris as an avant-gardist scenario, Maples Arce and Carvajal share a fascination for this stereotypically cosmopolitan metropolis. Although neither has visited France, they both reaffirm its traditional role as a model for the Latin American lettered circles. However, while both Cortázar and his fictional avant-garde lived in Paris, Bolaño regards it as an illusory ideal. Inspired by Paris, Maples Arce and Carvajal come up with the idea of founding an avant-gardist city in Mexico. The project is unreachable by definition, absurdly imaginary as it strives for the ultimate modern "en sus museos y en sus bares, en sus teatros al aire libre y en sus periódicos, en sus escuelas y en sus dormitorios para los poetas transeúntes, en esos dormitorios donde dormirían Borges y Tristán Tzara, Huidobro y André Breton" (2003: 378).

Salvatierra finally recapitulates his last encounter with Cesárea right before she left for Sonora. He worriedly asked her about the future of *Caborca* and Realismo Visceral: "¿No te das cuenta que si te marchas ahora vas a tirar por la borda tu carrera literaria? [...] [E]l estridentismo y el realismo visceral son sólo dos máscaras para llegar a donde de verdad queremos llegar. [...] A la modernidad, Cesárea, a la pinche modernidad" (2003: 486). Cesárea's response questions Salvatierra's enthusiasm regarding the links between avant-gardes and the state. While Salvatierra celebrates the project of Estridentópolis and Carvajal's role as the patron of the arts, Cesárea silently smiled "como si le estuviera contando un chiste muy bueno pero que ya conocía" (2003: 486). Instead of linking aesthetic experimentation and the state as a grandiose path to modernity, Cesárea says she goes to Sonora looking for "el porvenir común de todos los mortales, buscar un lugar donde vivir y un lugar donde trabajar" (2003: 487).

Andrea Cobas Carral and Verónica Garibotto argue that Cesárea's vanishing contests "el modo en que la revolución, al institucionalizarse y coincidir con el programa estatal, deja de ser eficaz, y la manera en que la literatura es uno de los agentes de ese pasaje, perdiendo así su

posible carácter subversivo” (2008: 185). However, Lima and Belano also recognise an alternative avant-gardist paradigm in Cesárea. As Salvatierra recalls, she was in charge of writing Carvajal’s speeches: “Unos discursos estupendos, muchachos, les dije, unos discursos que dieron la vuelta a México y que fueron reproducidos en periódicos de muchas partes” (2003: 314). A portion of Cesárea’s unknown oeuvre thus circulates “hidden” in Carvajal’s words. However, she did not aim for the transcendence of grandiloquent political parades. She exhibited a lighthearted and ludic detachment, writing those speeches while smoking and chatting with her peers: “Y Cesárea los preparaba allí y de esa manera peculiar: mientras fumaba y hablaba con los guardaespaldas del general o mientras hablaba con Manuel o conmigo” (2003: 314). By placing Cesárea amidst empirical avant-gardists like Maples Arce and List Arzubide, Bolaño rewrites Estridentismo’s role in the Revolution. Cesárea’s derision subverts the assimilation of aesthetic and state guidelines, originally meant to produce cultural autochthony and modernisation. Bolaño’s 1970s Realismo Visceral thus echoes Dalton’s ironic revision of 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes, as I noted before when the poets of El Party mocked the development of experimental art in Latin America.

Contrary to any alliance between avant-gardes and the state, the only poem Cesárea ever published, titled “Sión”, is a playful response to Estridentismo’s transcendental ambitions:

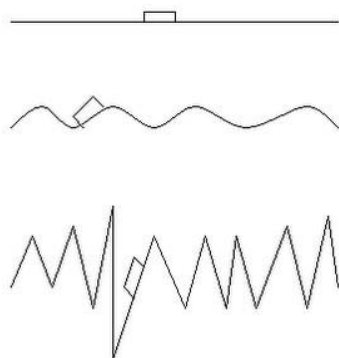


Figure 1: “Sión” (Bolaño, 2003: 397)

Lima and Belano look at it and conclude that “no hay misterio” and “el poema es una broma” (2003: 422). In Cesárea’s drawings, they recognise “un barco en un mar en calma, un barco en un mar movido y un barco en una tormenta” (2003: 423). They understand that art cannot aspire to transform reality in alliance with the state. On the contrary, remembering Cesárea while

drinking and reading her poem elicits a moment of camaraderie and humour between Salvatierra, Lima and Belano: “llené mi copa otra vez y llené la de ellos y les dije que brindáramos por Cesárea y vi sus ojos, qué contentos estaban los pinches muchachos, y los tres brindamos mientras nuestro barquito era zarandeado por la galerna” (2003: 423). At sunrise they part ways, and Lima and Belano declare: “no se me preocupe, Amadeo, nosotros le vamos a encontrar a Cesárea. [...] [N]o lo hacemos por ti, Amadeo, lo hacemos por México, por Latinoamérica, por el Tercer Mundo, por nuestras novias, porque tenemos ganas de hacerlo” (2003: 584). Meeting Salvatierra allows them to reread 1920s Realismo Visceral as an avant-garde not aspiring to grandiose modernity but shaping a literary ethics out of shared readings and habits. Mirroring Cortázar and Dalton’s avant-gardists, humour and playfulness are vital in their gatherings. Their incessant references to literature are always permeated by lighthearted taunts and ironic self-mockery. They approach Cesárea’s legacy as a call for a reinvented sense of community, inherently open-ended and demanding to be re-enacted –and thus redesigned– by future collectives.

Real Visceralistas introduce themselves as a “pandilla” aiming to “cambiar la poesía latinoamericana” (2003: 10). Belligerence and marginality outline their avant-gardist character, as one of them denounces: “A los real visceralistas nadie les da NADA. Ni becas ni espacios en sus revistas ni siquiera invitaciones para ir a presentaciones de libros o recitales” (2003: 119). Alan Pauls regards this fictional avant-garde as a group of poets without an oeuvre that embodies an avant-gardist vitalism: “la Vida Artística es un principio de inmanencia, una especie de campo informe, anti jerárquico, sin más allá, que lo procesa todo –política, sexualidad, socialidad, territorio– y se define menos por lo que son las cosas que por lo que pueden” (2008: 329). This poetic ethos turns the group into a realm for experimenting with affects. Their radicalism lies in pursuing an intense and collective way of living, rather than in adhering to any specific aesthetic programme. The novel does not include any written piece by a Real Visceralista. They sporadically allude to the sparse poems they write but only as a means of eliciting more conversations and camaraderie. As a newcomer to the circle recalls: “Hemos caminado, hemos tomado el metro, camiones, un pesero, hemos vuelto a caminar y durante todo el rato no hemos dejado de hablar. [...] Durante el trayecto les leí los últimos poemas que he escrito, unos once o doce, y creo que les gustaron” (2003: 27). Literature is constitutive of their nomadic transit through the social fabric. Sharing readings, drinks and friendship makes them a community of

writers without works, for whom literature is more a matter of living than publishing.

Finding Cesárea and her works is the group's *raison d'être* and ultimately symbolises the redemption of poetry. However, this position objectifies Cesárea as the sought-after substance of Realismo Visceral. Male poets project their aesthetic and political ideals onto her mysterious figure to consolidate a homosocial pact. Their fascination with Cesárea's enigma reaffirms the gendered nature of the circle. Just as Cortázar's *La Joda* and Dalton's *El Party* relegated women to secondary roles, Real Visceralistas disdain their female counterparts. While they sublimate and look up to Cesárea's spectral figure, the role of actual women in their circle repeats Cesárea's subordination within Estridentismo and the Mexican state. As they tell each other when referring to female poets: "–¿Hay muchas poetisas? [...] –Como nunca antes en la historia de México. [...] Levantas una piedra y encuentras a una chava escribiendo de sus cositas" (2003: 25). In Chapter 4, I will analyse *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* as novels that rewrite the lost poet motif from a feminist angle. Moreno and Ojeda portray the quest for "forgotten" artists as a means of dismantling the notions of artistic authorship and gender themselves. I will argue that, rather than guaranteeing the continuation of a homosocial circle, looking for female avant-gardists enables a de-hierarchised sense of community beyond gendered habits and affects.

Avant-gardists on the Road

Scholars have generally interpreted the vanishing of Cesárea, first, and Lima and Belano, then, as voicing the swan song of avant-gardist ideals. In this line, *Los detectives salvajes* would fictionalise the generational closure of hopes for radical change. For instance, Emilio Sauri argues that Lima and Belano's departure represents an artistic impossibility in the face of political violence: "[it is] the story of an entire generation of Latin Americans devastated by the rise of military dictatorships and the dismantling of political utopias alike" (2010: 421). In the same line, Bush and Castañeda regard the Real Visceralistas as daydreamers expressing nostalgia for an irretrievable past: "los real visceralistas mexicanos de los años setenta [son los] últimos exponentes de una Vanguardia con mayúscula que, hacia los estertores del siglo, se ve degradada por efecto de la mercantilización de la literatura" (2017: 22). Likewise, for Franco, politics is almost completely absent in Bolaño's fiction, which would outline a post-political world inhabited by a "generation for whom the grand narratives are no longer possible, for whom

random conversations, reflections, gossip compose daily life, for whom, indeed, daily life is the only kind of life and in which the only certainties are death and evil” (2009: 210). For Cobas Carral and Garibotto, Bolaño does not offer avenues out of the dead ends of 1960s and 1970s revolutionary projects, only giving an autopsy-like answer to the question of “¿Qué hay detrás de la ventana?” that concludes the novel: “detrás de la ventana se encuentra la historia del fracaso del Realismo Visceral [...] [y] clausura el proyecto de los 70” (2008: 187).

These scholars stress the decadence of avant-gardes in a post-utopian cultural field that did not favour either aesthetic or political radicalism. However, reread as an avant-gardist reinvention of affects and community, Realismo Visceral cannot be judged according to the effective “success” or “failure” of a certain programme. As David Kurnick argues, opposing these sceptic interpretations of the novel: “the novel honors youth’s fantasy of endlessness less by preserving it in the amber of nostalgia than by insisting that the comedy of youth never really leaves us” (2022: 33). Bolaño’s belonging to Infrarrealismo, therefore, is not immediately translated into *Los detectives salvajes*’ fictional avant-garde. On the contrary, fiction allows Bolaño to redefine what configures an avant-garde group as such, opening further poetic and political explorations. Just as Lima and Belano cherish Cesárea’s irreverence and playfulness, opposing the state’s co-opting of Estridentismo, Bolaño does not merely portray the failure of 1970s ideals. The novel does not close down a revolutionary project but aims to reopen it, rewriting the legacy of avant-gardes to reclaim its affective dimension. Temporal disjunctions enable a dialogue between the 1920s, 1970s and 1990s whose disruptive potential lies in shaping a literary ethics: as Lima and Belano traverse the world during the next twenty years, their fictional avant-garde casts a new light on different historical junctures.

Los detectives salvajes depicts a nomadic lifestyle in search of literary and political openings after the frustrated outcome of revolutionary projects. The avant-gardist principles of Realismo Visceral consist of experiencing life and travel through a literary lens. For them, as Gerardi argues, the journey encapsulates “a particular way of seeing texts, it becomes an optic through which to examine not only space, but also reading, and how to treat literature” (2019: 42). During their gatherings, they share stories of travelling and build a wandering myth around themselves: “hablaban de Lima, de sus viajes por el estado de Guerrero y por el Chile de Pinochet consiguiendo marihuana que luego revendía a novelistas y pintores del DF” (2003: 59). An acquaintance of Belano equally links his personality to the experience of traversing Latin

America: “él se marchó por tierra, un viaje largo, larguísimo, plagado de peligros, el viaje iniciático de todos los pobres muchachos latinoamericanos, recorrer este continente absurdo” (2003: 205). However, their self-images as drifters exceed the Latin American realm. As Belano tells his girlfriend, Real Visceralistas envision a way of life aiming for the world at large: “nombró países como Libia, Etiopía, Zaire, y ciudades como Barcelona, Florencia, Avignon, y entonces yo no pude sino preguntarle qué tenían que ver esos países con esas ciudades, y él dijo: todo, tienen que ver en todo. [...] Y él entonces dijo: no pienso *verlos*, pienso *vivir* en ellos” (2003: 221, emphasis in original). Belano’s emphasis on living –rather than seeing– amounts to the group’s avant-gardist ideals: they avoid written productions to design a literary ethics, embodying a vitalist notion of poetry in their daily lives.

Opposing interpretations of *Los detectives salvajes* as the elegy of avant-gardes, Castañeda states that Realismo Visceral survives by pursuing its postulates beyond the restricted scope of the group. Its paradoxical continuity relies on consummating its own dissolution: “la ética de la huida, del viaje sin destino que solo engendra otros viajes, decide el espíritu juvenil del movimiento y define a sus herederos” (2015: 182). Castañeda argues that the afterlife of Realismo Visceral must be traced in the individual itinerary of Belano. His tragic and romantic destiny as a wanderer in Africa would offer a role model to future poets seeking a poetic way of life: “Lo que empieza como la aventura grupal y adolescente del segundo Realismo Visceral, [...] quizá, ya no pueda realizarse en grupo. Ahora, probablemente, sea el turno del individuo solitario, tal vez el único agente capaz de mantener vivo el fuego del impulso utópico” (2015: 204). However, while the group’s fusion of art and politics truly exceeds its inner boundaries, their effects are not limited to the individual wanderer. On the contrary, they blend literature, friendship and love and experiment with modes of coexistence. As I will now examine, their literary ethics prolongs their juvenile avant-gardism by generating new connections across continental borders, ultimately outlining a post-Latin American stance.

While travelling, Lima and Belano meet different avant-gardists aiming to combine aesthetic radicalism and political activism. They find themselves involved in the same debates on revolutionary art as Cortázar and Dalton. After visiting Europe and the Middle East, Lima returns to Mexico in 1980. A fellow poet, Hugo Montero, invites him to join the Mexican delegation attending a conference of intellectuals in Sandinista Nicaragua: “me habían dicho que Lima estaba muy mal y yo pensé que un viajecito a la Revolución le recompone los ánimos a

cualquiera” (2003: 349). The delegation encapsulates the role model of the *engagé* intellectual; it is formed by “lo más granado de la literatura mexicana y latinoamericana (iban varios escritores exiliados en México, tres argentinos, un chileno, un guatemalteco, dos uruguayos)” (2003: 351). Before arriving in Managua, they sign a “Declaración de los Escritores Mexicanos, un panfleto que había pergeñado Álamo y los poetas campesinos en solidaridad con el pueblo hermano de Nicaragua” (2003: 350). However, Lima does not attend any of the roundtables or events. Their companions only notice Lima’s absence when “uno de los pinches ahijados de Cardenal” asks to meet “el padre del realismo visceral” (2003: 352). This missed encounter between Ernesto Cardenal’s acolyte and Lima reveals two opposed stances on the links between avant-gardes and the state. Cardenal is Nicaragua’s most renowned poet and founder of the art community in Solentiname Islands. Just as Cortázar and Dalton actively participated in the Cuban Revolution, Cardenal was Minister of Culture of the Sandinista government. Moreover, just as with *Libro de Manuel* before, Cortázar wrote the short story “Apocalipsis de Solentiname” (1976) and several articles in the print press supporting the Sandinistas, to whom he donated the authorship rights of his book *Nicaragua tan violentamente dulce* (1983). In contrast, Lima is a self-published poet pursuing his vitalist ideals to the very end, silently abandoning a state-orchestrated conference that mirrors the countless events taking place in the 1970s.

Montero shares his concern for Lima’s absence with the Guatemalan writer Don Pancracio Montesol. In response, Montesol narrates a riddle about a poet who gets lost “en una ciudad al borde del colapso”, devoid of money or friends whom to call for help: “Ya ni siquiera escribe. O escribe con la mente, es decir delira. Todo hace indicar que su muerte es inminente. Su desaparición, radical, la prefigura. Y sin embargo el susodicho poeta no muere. ¿Cómo se salva?” (2003: 359). When Montero asks for the answer, Montesol replies: “ya no me acuerdo, pero pierda cuidado, el poeta no muere, se hunde, pero no muere” (2003: 360). For the lost poet, literature is a metaphor for survival: he may descend into the abyss but, because of his literary ethics, the poet never dies. Once the conference ends and the delegation returns to Mexico, Lima’s friend and former Real Visceralista Jacinto Requena tries to meet him at the airport. He asks a fellow poet for Lima’s whereabouts: “Me miró horrorizado. En su mirada también había desaprobación. [...] El otro argentino dijo: hay que ser un poco más responsable, [...] te juro que si llevo a estar yo al frente le rompo las pelotas” (2003: 361).

Lima suddenly reappears in Mexico and tells Requena “que recorrió un río que une a

México con Centroamérica. Que yo sepa, ese río no existe. [...] Un flujo constante de gente sin trabajo, de pobres y muertos de hambre, de droga y de dolor” (2003: 386). Opposed to the “proper” contribution a writer should make to the Sandinista Revolution, Lima gets lost and traverses an inexistent river metaphorically encompassing the whole of Latin America. He embarks on nomadic adventures and claims to have visited two portentous islands:

La isla del pasado, dijo, en donde sólo existía el tiempo pasado y en la cual sus moradores se aburrían y eran razonablemente felices, pero en donde el peso de lo ilusorio era tal que la isla se iba hundiendo cada día un poco más en el río. Y la isla del futuro, en donde el único tiempo que existía era el futuro, y cuyos habitantes eran soñadores y agresivos, tan agresivos, dijo Ulises, que probablemente acabarían comiéndose los unos a los otros (2003: 387).

While attendees to the conference sign a typical Declaration and follow a state-modelled agenda, Lima lives poetry as a tactile experience enabling a lucid angle on the future of revolutionary politics. Past and future clash in his metaphorical islands, anticipating the disaster of forthcoming dictatorships and civil wars. In Lima’s tale, Latin American politics faces a blind alley: reclaiming a peaceful past is a nostalgic illusion, while accelerating the future can only lead to a violent nightmare. Real Visceralistas contest the convergence of artistic and political avant-gardes, when understood as posing as *engagé* intellectuals and becoming part of the state. For them, social transformation is not a matter of transcendental struggles for state power. Lima’s allegorical river shows that pursuing a literary ethics entails experiencing and sharing marginality. As I will now explore regarding Belano’s adventures, affective engagement with a desolate scenario dissolves individuality and elicits renewed means of community.

Another Real Visceralista, Felipe Müller, recalls meeting Belano right before his final departure to Africa in the mid-1990s. At the airport, Belano tells him a tale about two unnamed writers. Both were of the same age as Belano and he characterises their destinies as “ejemplificantes”. They both believed in the Revolution and had promising careers: “Pero entonces ocurrió lo que suele ocurrirles a los mejores escritores de Latinoamérica o a los mejores escritores nacidos en la década del cincuenta: se les reveló, como una epifanía, la trinidad formada por la juventud, el amor y la muerte” (2003: 525). First, Belano introduces a Peruvian Marxist who wrote “páginas horribles y panfletarias” alongside playful poems: “Para ser maoísta, aquello no era muy serio. [...] Como poeta, en cambio, seguía siendo bueno, en

ocasiones incluso muy bueno, arriesgado, innovador” (2003: 526). Expatriate in Paris, the Peruvian returned to Peru in the aftermath of Sendero Luminoso’s uprising. Due to his eclectic works and ideological alignment, he found himself in an untenable position: “los que no lo despreciaban por su poesía lo odiaban a muerte por revisionista o perro traidor y en donde, a los ojos de la policía, había sido, a su manera, es cierto, uno de los ideólogos de la guerrilla milenarista” (2003: 526). Attacked by both the Left and Right, sidelined from the cultural field, the Peruvian bordered insanity. He shifted from Maoism to Theosophy and Catholicism, and his wife and friends abandoned him. In this extreme condition, he frantically wrote “libros enormes e irregulares en donde a veces se percibía un humor tembloroso y brillante. [...] Sin embargo, de vez en cuando, escribía poemas muy hermosos” (2003: 527).

Then, Belano introduces a Cuban “Narrador Feliz” who never read anything other than fiction and poetry, and whose works were “felices y radicales” (2003: 527). His homosexuality led to state persecution and frustrated his career: “no tardó en verse arrastrado por la mierda y por la locura que se hacía llamar revolución. [...] Perdió el trabajo, dejaron de publicarlo, [...] finalmente lo metieron preso” (2003: 527). According to Belano, the revolutionary state aimed to “cure” him of his homosexuality and turn his literature into a contribution to his homeland. However, “el cubano aguantó. Como buen (o mal) latinoamericano, no le daba miedo la policía ni la pobreza ni dejar de publicar” (2003: 527). Facing state coercion, the Cuban reaffirmed his ideals and embraced writing beyond publishing and public recognition. Literature amounts to resisting, as shown by his exile in New York, where he died of AIDS and dedicated his last days to “acabar de escribir un libro y apenas tenía fuerza para ponerse a teclear. [...] Sus últimos días fueron de soledad y de dolor y de rabia por todo lo irremediadamente perdido. No quiso agonizar en un hospital. Cuando acabó el último libro se suicidó” (2003: 528). The Cuban’s fate unveils the ethical potential of writing. First, his “felices y radicales” works channel a life opposing state persecution; then, his determination to finish the book and commit suicide reclaims domain over death.

Right before Müller and Belano’s farewell, Müller thinks about these writers and says: “El sueño de la Revolución, una pesadilla caliente. Tú y yo somos chilenos, le dije, y no tenemos culpa de nada” (2003: 528). In response, Belano “Me miró y no contestó. Luego se rió. Me dio un beso en cada mejilla y se fue” (2003: 528). Belano’s departure mirrors Cesárea’s abandonment of Mexico City and poetry. Belano’s silence and smile imply that there is a

reminder in his tales of artistic and political avant-gardes that cannot be so rapidly dismissed. His Rimbaudian parting to Africa associates these stories with his own destiny. Just as the rumours and stories circulating about Lima in Nicaragua, Belano reconstructs the lives and works of other writers as a means of sharing values and experiences with his interlocutors. These scenes showcase how the Real Visceralistas embrace a poetic ideal built upon the ephemeral and affective moment of having a conversation. Broadly inspired by Enrique Verástegui and Reinaldo Arenas, the Peruvian and Cuban not only exemplify the abyss faced by writers caught between revolutionary hopes and political violence. They also shape an ethical stance that insists on writing as a means of resisting state repression and dogmatism. The Peruvian's "temblorosos y brillantes" texts, as well as the Cuban's intimate connection between life, writing and death, outline a literary ethics to be traced in Belano's journey.

Belano reverses this "trinidad formada por la juventud, el amor y la muerte" faced by Latin American writers in the aftermath of revolutionary projects. As portrayed by Belano's partner in Barcelona in the 1990s, Real Visceralistas seek alternative avenues to merge literature and affect: "Por las noches solíamos escribir. Él estaba escribiendo una novela y yo mi diario y poesía y un guión de cine. Escribíamos frente a frente. [...] No escribíamos para publicar sino para conocernos a nosotros mismos o para ver hasta dónde éramos capaces de llegar" (2003: 434). For them, writing is a vitalist act withdrawn from the public sphere. Instead, it allows them to explore the links between friendship, companionship and politics, ultimately challenging and redrawing their subjectivities: "Y hablábamos sin parar, de su vida y de mi vida, sobre todo de la mía, aunque a veces Arturo me contaba historias de amigos que habían muerto en las guerrillas de Latinoamérica. [...] Y seguíamos haciendo el amor" (2003: 434). Moving between writing face to face, recollecting past experiences and sex, they interweave literature and politics through an immanent lens. Although transcendental political projects were frustrated after a long decade of revolutionary hopes, Belano and his partner evoke the affective investment of those involved in them, channelling it towards a further exploration of love.

As exemplified by Lima's experience in Nicaragua, the lessons from the Peruvian and Cuban writers and Belano's remembrance of his dead friends, prior quests to combine aesthetic rupture and political action leave remnants behind. In this sense, *Los detectives salvajes* echoes broader efforts to advocate memory taking place at the turn of the century. Just as activists and artists throughout Latin America aimed to "remember" the effects and victims of political

violence, Real Visceralistas reclaim the affective dimension of avant-gardes that aimed for social change through art. Realismo Visceral thus persists beyond its formal dissolution. It outlines a perpetually resumable promise, in the form of a literary ethics that elicits renewed means of community. Subsequent avant-gardists can recommence the group as an enabler of shared habits and connections that links reading, writing, and living.

Avant-gardes between the Market and Community

Belano's last public appearance occurs in the 1994 Feria del Libro in Madrid. Regarding 1970s controversies between formal experimentation and direct action, I previously noted that Dalton portrayed different role models failing to fulfill the ideal of the revolutionary artist. Now, looking at the 1990s, Bolaño depicts a series of writers facing market constraints. Opposed to the avant-gardist quest to live literature beyond publishing, the novel introduces numerous vignettes of authors justifying their presence in the Feria. For instance, a young and successful writer stresses that obsequence is the key to a prosperous career: "visitar a los escritores en sus residencias o abordarlos en las presentaciones de libros y decirle a cada uno justo aquello que quiere oír. [...] Hay que citarlos dos o tres veces en cada conversación. ¡Hay que citarlos sin descanso!" (2003: 517-518). An equally successful literary critic acknowledges: "1) Que en época de Stalin yo no hubiera malgastado mi juventud en el Gulag ni hubiera acabado con un tiro en la nuca. 2) Que en época de McCarthy yo no hubiera perdido mi empleo ni hubiera tenido que despachar gasolina en una gasolinera. [...] Mi valor es limitado, bien cierto, mis tragaderas también" (2003: 511). Finally, a poet exposes the limits of the *poète maudit* archetype when co-opted by the industry: "aquí estoy yo, dopado, con los antidepresivos saliéndome hasta por las orejas, recorriendo esta Feria aparentemente tan simpática" (2003: 522). Located at the end of the novel's chronological arc, these vignettes reveal the absurdity of literature, when market dynamics expropriate its political dimension and writing becomes just an excuse for profits and social recognition.

After more than four hundred pages and twenty years depicting Lima and Belano's adventures, the third and final part of *Los detectives salvajes* reintroduces García Madero's diary. As Ignacio Echeverría argues: "el lector repara en que todas las voces, todas las palabras, todo el tiempo transcurrido durante el intermedio tiene el valor exacto de un instante de lucidez, de un pliegue abierto de pronto para que todos los personajes puedan ser contemplados en su común humanidad" (2006: 72). By inserting Lima and Belano's mysterious wanderings between

consecutive portions of García Madero's diary, the novel features temporal disjunctions as both subject matter and formal technique. The choral reconstruction of Lima and Belano's future was, after all, a series of flash-forward scenes pursuing a single enigma: what was Realismo Visceral? By the end of the novel, this enigma is conjugated in future past, resituating the plot in the desert of Sonora in 1976. Such interplay between past and future forces readers to compare the commodified Feria del Libro with this core episode in the lives of the Real Visceralistas.

The penultimate person to reconstruct Lima and Belano's wanderings is Ernesto García Grajales, who identifies himself, in 1996, at the University of Pachuca, as "el único estudioso de los real visceralistas que existe en México y, si me apura, en el mundo" (2003: 581). After recalling the lives of each Real Visceralista once the group split, he affirms: "¿Juan García Madero? No, ése no me suena. Seguro que nunca perteneció al grupo. Hombre, si lo digo yo que soy la máxima autoridad en la materia" (2003: 582). However, the readers of *Los detectives salvajes* possess a foundational document of Realismo Visceral that outgrows the authority of this academic: García Madero's diary. The enigma of Lima and Belano can only be deciphered by comparing García Madero's notes with the dozens of flash-forward vignettes read before. Bolaño's rewriting of avant-gardes is thus condensed in the entries of this diary.

García Madero dedicates entries to each day he shares with his girlfriend and former sex worker Lupe, Lima and Belano. He describes the route into the desert, activities and conversations held during the road trip. While Belano drives, García Madero proposes literary riddles to enliven the tedium of passing through empty roads and scattered villages. For instance, "les pregunté si sabían lo que era un pitiámbico (no lo sabían), y un mimiambo (no lo sabían), y un homeoteleuton (no lo sabían), y una paragoge (sí lo sabían)" (2003: 588). Lupe also initiates her own genre of riddles, and they all inquire each other about slang phrases like "macha chaca", "dar labiada", and "echar pira". Then, García Madero asks his companions to decode a series of drawings that mirror "Sión", the visual poem by Cesárea:

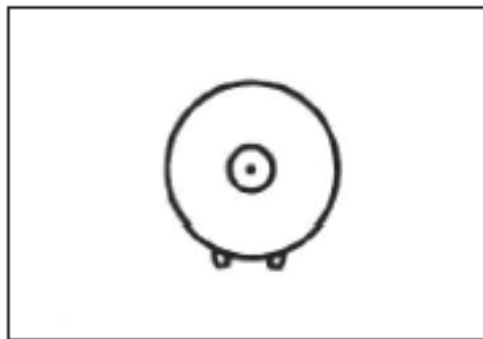


Figure 2: Visual sketches (Bolaño, 2003: 606)

García Madero takes up the role previously played by Lima and Belano, when they gave a ludic interpretation of Cesárea's poem. Lima asks: "¿Un verso elegíaco?"; García Madero answers: "Un mexicano visto desde arriba" (2003: 606). *Los detectives salvajes* never shows its poets' texts. By the end of the novel, it is not even clear that they actually wrote more than scattered pieces. Their poetic ethos neglects publishing and literary transcendence; instead, they produce community moments and shared laughs. Rather than showing poems, the novel embeds Cesárea and García Madero's sketches, whose graphical materiality embodies an ephemeral and affective exchange beyond words. Just as during Lima and Belano's previous encounter with Salvatierra, the road trip invokes humour and playfulness as key components of their literary ethics. The written word is only fruitful as a means to a collective end: to trigger the desire to share more travels, conversations, and jokes.

Once they reach Sonora, the Real Visceralistas find Cesárea but the diary does not register any literary exchange between them. Instead, a violent encounter with Lupe's pimp results in Cesárea's death. Immediately after, the group is disbanded and Lima and Belano depart on their own. García Madero and Lupe decide to stay in Sonora and live as a couple in Cesárea's empty house. There, García Madero finds Cesárea's old notebooks, the written production of a lifetime, initially meant to reveal the hidden backbone of Realismo Visceral: "He leído los cuadernos de Cesárea. Cuando los encontré pensé que tarde o temprano los remitiría por correo al DF, a casa de Lima o de Belano. Ahora sé que no lo haré. No tiene ningún sentido hacerlo" (2003: 645). *Los detectives salvajes* concludes by reinforcing the enigma structuring its plot. Only an unknown figure to those attempting to reconstruct Lima and Belano's fate, García Madero, possesses the key that would elucidate the truth of Realismo Visceral. However, he

decides to maintain Cesárea's oeuvre as a lost and mysterious object. Ultimately, García Madero's diary is the only text by a Real Visceralista we actually read. In this sense, Bolaño replicates Dalton's paradoxical advocacy of literary specificity, as their fictional avant-gardes do not publish any prose or poetry. Just as *Pobrecito poeta...* championed formal experimentation by rewriting allegedly more immediate forms like journalism and the *testimonio*, Bolaño presents as his avant-gardists' only production a fictionalised piece of non-fiction. Moreover, the private nature of the diary grants utmost political significance to writing, instead of publishing, understanding literature as a way of exploring intimacy and companionship.

The novel's resolution rewrites the notion of the avant-garde as an anachronistic ethics launched into the future. Lima and Belano's subsequent wanderings deploy this avant-gardist experience in the Mexican desert in 1976. Literature and community merge during their road trip, when talking about literature channels laughter, fear, love, and friendship. Rather than outlining an aesthetic programme, they shape a mode of coexistence later recalled when traversing the world. Although Real Visceralistas do not produce a written oeuvre, they still regard literature as vital in their affective reshaping of the avant-garde. Realismo Visceral only leads to a reinvented community when experiencing life through a literary lens. In contrast, *La grande*'s fictional avant-garde does not even produce intimate forms like García Madero's diary, nor do its members incessantly talk about literature. Rather than as a future promise or driving force, Saer locates the avant-garde in the past, as a juvenile footprint in the lives of a group of middle-aged men. *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* thus display a contrasting use of temporal dislocations. While Bolaño's fast-paced plot, flashforwards, and geographical leaps maintain avant-gardist promises as an open-ended quest, Saer ponderously describes and focuses on a single week in a very specific and provincial location. His flashbacks to former avant-gardist experiences re-examine a bygone historical juncture rather than recommence it. However, such a revision of the past motivates collective storytelling, among other shared habits, eventually founding a renewed sense of companionship. In the end, both novels reassert affect and community as the ways in which fictional avant-gardes reveal their ethico-political potential.

Saer's Provincial Avant-garde

During the 1960s, in the province of Santa Fe, Saer was part of a cohort formed by writers, filmmakers and visual artists such as Hugo Gola, Raúl Beceyro, Juan Pablo Renzi and Paco

Urondo. Although they were reluctant to adopt a collective identity, their friendship was tantamount to their shared artistic preferences. María Teresa Gramuglio defines those values as “el trabajo cuidadoso sobre el lenguaje y la forma, la crítica del naturalismo y del populismo, la colocación privilegiada de la poesía, el rechazo de la cultura masiva y de las modas literarias” (2017: 50). Paulo Ricci equates Saer’s “grupo de amigos” to an emergent “vanguardia provincial”, as this nameless and peripheral avant-garde distanced itself both from Santa Fe’s previous generations and Buenos Aires’ dominance over the Argentine cultural field (2006: 18). Towards the 1970s, some of them attempted to combine artistic and political avant-gardes. For instance, Renzi was part of the aforementioned Grupo de Vanguardia and contributed to *Tucumán arde*, while Urondo partook in armed struggle. While Saer did not share such a political radicalism, a few years before he had led a series of controversies that would set the avant-gardist tone later fictionalised in *La grande*.

In 1959, Gola took charge of the literary supplement of the local newspaper *El litoral*. Under his direction, contributions by Saer’s circle displaced the previous payroll of local writers. Changes in the editorial staff shifted the view of literature set out in the supplement. They aimed to modernise what they considered the folklorist trademark of Santa Fe’s culture. This project ended when the newspaper’s directors censored Saer’s short story “Solás” for alluding to homosexuality and sex workers, after which the group resigned and the supplement resumed its previous course. Nonetheless, this ephemeral and scandalous experience was the starting point of their ensuing careers. Saer published four short stories in the supplement, later collected in his first book *En la vuelta* (1960). Moreover, this collective enterprise assembled their shared views of art and literature for the first time.

In 1964, the Sociedad Argentina de Escritores (SADE) organised the Quinto Congreso Argentino de Escritores, gathering Argentina’s most renowned authors such as Silvina Bullrich, Marta Lynch, and Manuel Mujica Láinez. Little known outside Santa Fe, Saer initiated public controversies against these canonical writers. The national newspaper *La razón* titled its chronicle of the conference “Escándalo en el Congreso de Escritores”, highlighting the leading role played by Saer in some heated debates: “En la pugna por la notoriedad [...] ha asumido el papel de ‘enfant terrible’ un autor prácticamente desconocido: Juan José Saer. Al desencadenar la ‘rebelión de Paraná’, se erigió en líder de los ‘jóvenes’ que arremeten contra los ‘monstruos sagrados’” (in Ricci, 2006: 50). Words like “enfant terrible”, “rebelión” and “monstruos

sagrados” characterise Saer’s uninvited and polemic interventions as prototypical avant-gardist events.

Controversy aroused when the presence of Juanele Ortiz¹⁹ in the auditorium was mocked by the panelists. After labelling Juanele as “un singular vate de 70 años”, the chronicle narrates:

Velmiro J. Gauna lanzó la piedra de la discordia en instante inoportuno. Preguntó dirigiéndose a la juventud qué opinaba acerca de ciertos modismos y términos que parecen agrandar peculiarmente a Ortiz. Citó concretamente a “vergel” y “alada armonía”. Y aquí pudo arder Troya. Juan José Saer, en apasionada respuesta, rechazó toda sombra de sospecha y exigió una nueva valoración de escritores y poetas nacionales, ya que –a su juicio– existen sectores que se encargan de monopolizar las expresiones estéticas y condenan a la categoría de “hombres oscuros” a talentosos hombres y mujeres (in Ricci, 2006: 41).

Born in the province of Entre Ríos, Juanele Ortiz epitomised the vocationally marginal poet. In life, Juanele always edited his poetry himself, which gave him the freedom to pursue a poetics detached from institutional and market guidelines. As Saer recalled in the preface to his *Obra completa*: “Nosotros, sus amigos de Santa Fe, tuvimos la suerte de verlo a menudo. [...] [N]os juntábamos en algún lado, en lo de Hugo Gola, en el motel de Mario Medina, o en mi propia casa de Colastiné, alrededor de un asado y de un poco de vino, quedándonos a conversar el día entero, la noche entera, la madrugada” (1996: 14). The chronicle’s final remark exemplifies the ascendancy of Juanele over Saer’s group of friends, as well as the sense of camaraderie around him: “Junto a Ortiz tomaron ubicación algunos versificadores jóvenes, coincidentes en su admiración incondicional hacia quien consideraron ‘uno de los poetas más importantes de habla castellana’” (in Ricci, 2006: 40).

Saer’s tirades against Bullrich and Mujica Láinez were the most scandalous moment of the Congreso. Saer interrupted a panel on the Argentine novel and questioned the speakers’ privileged positions in the literary field. As transcribed by *La razón*:

Saer: Su novela, señora, es un “best seller” y nada más. No podemos valorar la calidad de un escritor con esa medida. [...] El hombre argentino busca desesperadamente al escritor que lo interprete. Ustedes no lo hacen, no pueden hacerlo, Mujica Láinez no puede merecer ningún premio. Es un autor ubicado en 1860 o 1760.
Bullrich: Soy amiga de Mujica Láinez. Creo en la libertad de crítica. Pero somos intelectuales, gente mayor, y no tolero este ambiente de jaleo. [...] Así no podemos

¹⁹ “Juanele” is a nickname for Juan Laurentino Ortiz.

continuar. Por eso, me retiro (in Ricci, 2006: 51).

Saer's interventions exhibited three avant-gardist traits: a polemic and agonistic view on literature; the camaraderie of a group of friends for whom writing and shared habits are inseparable; and a radical opposition to the aesthetics celebrated by the most renowned cultural institutions. Significantly, Saer's statements on literature revolved around the notion of the "hombre argentino". As I will shortly examine, this exclusively masculine angle will be mirrored by the secondary role assigned to women in *La grande*'s fictional avant-garde.

Just as Bolaño acknowledged that his juvenile avant-gardism fuelled his later works, Saer's interventions shaped a literary ethics later explored in his fiction. Ricci argues that Saer's experiences during the 1960s anticipated the episodes and characters depicted in his entire oeuvre: "son los años en los que se conocen como camaradas con preocupaciones intelectuales afines y en los que se originan las polémicas, discusiones y reuniones que se reconstruyen en el resto de su obra" (2006: 60). However, Saer's characters are never introduced as explicit portrayals of his former friends. Neither his fictional reconstructions are limited to that specific historical context. On the contrary, Saer revises the 1960s to locate certain artistic and political concerns still impacting subsequent periods of Argentine history.

With *La grande*, Saer intervened in contemporary discussions on memory and the submission of art to market dynamics. As I will now examine, the novel depicts a group of friends replicating the literary ethics seen in *Libro de Manuel*, *Pobrecito poeta...* and *Los detectives salvajes*. However, while Realismo Visceral still championed the promise of the avant-garde as eminently poetic, Saer's characters do not see themselves as poets nor dedicate much time to talking about literature. It is a weekend reunion which allows them to transform prior experiences and affinities into a renewed sense of community.

The Anachronistic Migrant

Published posthumously in 2005, *La grande* is divided into seven chapters, each corresponding to a day in a week that begins on Tuesday and concludes next Monday. Unfinished at the time of Saer's death, the last chapter only includes a single sentence: "Con la lluvia, llegó el otoño, y con el otoño, el tiempo del vino" (2005: 435). As the last sentence in Saer's vast oeuvre, it condenses his entire poetics as an inherently un-closeable project. Most of his novels relate to the fictional world portrayed in the previous ones, opening new avenues out of a common ground. Gramuglio

regards Saer's intertextual dialogues as a combination of repetition and variation: "Saer desplegó en su obra un juego riguroso entre lo variable y lo invariable, [...] que transcurre entre la renovación constante de la composición en cada una de sus narraciones y el incesante retorno de unos lugares, de unos personajes, de una sintaxis, de unos ritmos" (2017: 78-79). Likewise, Premat recognises "una regla de funcionamiento del corpus saeriano: todo lo que se escribirá parte siempre de algo escrito, en algún punto los libros futuros se instalarán en una historia ya empezada y en un lugar preexistente" (2011: 32). Just as its last sentence signals the periodicity of nature –"otoño"– and culture –"vino"– *La grande*'s unfinished status can only reaffirm the cyclical and open-ended condition of Saer's poetics.

Situated in the mid-1990s, *La grande* depicts Guillermo Gutiérrez's return to his hometown after more than thirty years living in Europe. The protagonist thus displays a particular relationship with the "Zona" where Saer locates his fiction. As explained by Aníbal Jarkowski, Saer's Zona "alude a un espacio propio y con un referente nítido, la ciudad de Santa Fe y sus alrededores. [...] [Pero] decir 'zona' es algo vago, impreciso, como una borradura de la toponimia" (2018: 28). Throughout his career, Saer designed a Zona that equally is and is not the province of Santa Fe. It names an autonomous and self-contained fictional realm as much as a geographical site. For Sarlo, the Zona encompasses una "sociedad de personajes" as well, whose lives progress intermingled with Argentine history: "Le da un sentido de continuidad a un mundo que es frágil, que está amenazado siempre por la muerte, con la corrupción de las sustancias, lo irrisorio de los deseos y el fracaso de la voluntad" (2016: 84). These characters reappear and relate to each other from book to book. Moreover, the "sociedad de personajes" frames the recurring presence of writers in Saer's fiction, as affective relationships between characters lead to self-conscious reflections on literature. By portraying their views over an extended period of time, Saer's entire oeuvre explores the status of literature in relation to different socio-cultural contexts.

In *La grande*, the time Gutiérrez spent in Europe amounts to the chronological extension of Saer's fictional world. Gutiérrez was initially portrayed in "Tango del viudo", a short story in his first book. He is depicted as a young poet who departs from the Zona in the 1960s after a painful breakup. However, compared to Saer's recurring set of characters, Gutiérrez is never recalled again until the posthumous *La grande*. Given his sudden departure and absolute lack of communication with his former friends, Gutiérrez's return is as mysterious as his vanishing.

Pichón Garay is the first of Saer's recurring figures to get in touch with Gutiérrez, meeting him by chance: "*Antes de sentarse se presentó: Willi Gutiérrez ¿me acordaba de él? Me costó un ratito ubicarlo, pero él se acordaba de todo lo que había pasado treinta años antes*" (2005: 21, emphasis in original). The time lapse between Gutiérrez's departure and return establishes two contrasting chronological relationships between characters and the Zona. His crystal-clear memory of past events motivates the rest to recollect the past too. Each day and chapter focuses on a separate character who speculates on Gutiérrez's past and present intentions. In this way, mediated by the enigma of Gutiérrez, the "sociedad de personajes" rethinks how their biographies unfolded during three decades in the Zona.

Just as *Los detectives salvajes* was narrated as a mosaic of recollections about the Real Visceralistas, Gutiérrez's life is the enigma structuring the novel. Doubts and rumours circulate throughout the week in the words of those living in the Zona, and multiple points of view converge when outlining the figure of Gutiérrez: "También el conocimiento que los de la ciudad tienen de Gutiérrez es fragmentario. Todos saben algo que no coincide necesariamente con lo que saben los demás" (2005: 20). He personifies an anachronistic incursion into the Zona, disrupting its chronological progression by reliving events that stayed fixed in the 1960s. As Carlos Tomatis, Saer's most iconic character, recalls: "*a mi juicio, vive en varios mundos a la vez. [...] Había llevado una vida secreta antes de irse, una vida que ni sus íntimos conocían, y ahora volvió para reanudarla, pero esta vez a la luz del día*" (2005: 21-22, emphasis in original). Gerardi argues that migration and return are repeated motifs in Saer's fiction, transposing the contrast between recognition and unfamiliarity into a formal estrangement between the narrator's point of view and the scenes it narrates: "this distancing effect formally reproduces the process of *estrangement* experienced by the main character in his 'changes of self' through travel and the unaccountability of his past" (2019: 142, emphasis in original). *La grande* adopts Gutiérrez's migrant and anachronistic condition as both subject matter and formal technique: narrating his return provokes an effect of estrangement on the depiction of the Zona. When walking through the city and eating in old-fashioned restaurants, Gutiérrez juxtaposes two temporal dimensions. As a local merchant who follows him during his strolls declares: "*Me parecía que caminábamos por la misma calle, en el mismo espacio, pero en tiempos diferentes*" (2005: 25, emphasis in original).

This estrangement is reinforced by generational turnover. Marcelo Soldi and Gabriela

Barco are two young friends of Gutiérrez researching the history of avant-gardes in the province of Santa Fe. Among them, the story of Precisionismo “estaba ocupando demasiado tiempo, demasiado volumen e incluso demasiadas energías, porque su historia había terminado mezclándose con sus propias vidas” (2005: 165). Reconstructing the fictional avant-garde of Precisionismo implies re-examining their personal connections to Saer’s fictional world. While Soldi was previously portrayed in *La pesquisista* (1994) as Tomatis’ friend, Gabriela is the daughter of the also emblematic character Horacio Barco. Two characters younger than the Zona’s “usual suspects”, therefore, research a fictional avant-garde and subsequently reread Saer’s previous works. They conduct interviews, consult archives, and compile forgotten publications. As Gutiérrez “se acuerda de todo” and “sabe de memoria textos enteros que ni los propios autores recuerdan haber escrito”, his testimony is a vital source for Soldi and Gabriela: “Es evidente que le resulta agradable evocar ese período de su vida: [...] se trata de su juventud, y como debió de evocarla a menudo desde la distancia terminó confundiendo su propia vida con el lugar donde la vivió” (2005: 187). Moreover, Tomatis recalls Gutiérrez’s youth and his links to Precisionismo, as he worked in a law firm “*que tenía como socio al doctor Mario Brando, poeta y jefe del movimiento precisionista, a mi modo de ver el impostor más canallesco que ha dado la vida literaria de esta puta ciudad*” (2005: 27, emphasis in original).

Echoing Tomatis’ resentment, Soldi and Gabriela reckon that the literary and personal disputes aroused by Precisionismo resulted in lifetime enmities: “Soldi piensa en las consecuencias extraliterarias que pueden tener para las personas involucradas como dicen, todos esos conflictos, rupturas, traiciones, enemistades, odios, agresiones verbales e incluso físicas [...] y todo eso por querellas de léxico, de formas, de tópicos literarios, de espacios periodísticos” (2005: 179-180). The novel thus presents two inseparable investigations. Just as *Los detectives salvajes* included multiple interviews and offered a choral account of Realismo Visceral, *La grande* introduces different perspectives on Gutiérrez and Precisionismo. In Chapter 2, I argued that *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* demanded an active role from the reader, in charge of comparing and interpreting multiple fictional angles and extra-literary materials. Although *La grande* does not incorporate non-novelistic documents, its readers and characters participate in a common inquiry. They share the same sources to elucidate the enigma embodied by Gutiérrez, simultaneously reconstructing the trajectory of Precisionismo. Moreover, Saer replicates Bolaño’s strategy when depicting his fictional avant-garde. Rather than showing written

productions, both novels rest upon orality and intimate writings to explore the ways of life pursued by these groups of friends and poets.

Nonetheless, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* exhibit contrasting uses of temporal and spatial dislocation. Real Viceristas resituated the past in the future: while they looked back at the 1920s to design their avant-gardist ideals, their experiences in the Mexican desert in 1976 offered the key to decipher Lima and Belano's enigmatic flight during the next twenty years. Lima and Belano expansively carried their literary ethics through the world at large. In contrast, Gutiérrez reverses their path and returns to the innermost Zona. In this sense, Bolaño and Saer make contrasting uses of provincial spaces that become narrative frameworks. While Bolaño's desert is the starting line of an adventure, Saer's Zona is the point of arrival of a homeward journey. Rather than opening their destinies to the unknown, the Zona frames intimate connections between characters knowing each other for decades. In chronological terms, Gutiérrez materialises the 1960s in the 1990s, forcing his friends to reassess the past as a means of coexisting in the present. Such a divergence on temporality and geography reflects Bolaño and Saer's different approaches to the avant-garde. *Los detectives salvajes* outlined Realismo Visceral as a future promise, intrinsically open-ended and resumable by ensuing avant-gardists. As I will now examine, *La grande* invokes a former avant-garde as a bygone experience. It is precisely this closed condition which propels Gutiérrez's circle to revise the past, leading to a reinvented community in which literature does not hold a privileged status anymore.

An Avant-garde within the State

Although *La grande* devotes extensive passages to Soldi and Gabriela's research of Precisionismo, most scholarly studies on the novel pay sparse attention to this fictional avant-garde. Sandra Contreras argues that such an exhaustive account of Precisionismo betrays Saer's lifetime dedication to deconstructing the novel form, adopting a style apt to satisfy the expectations of a wide readership: "Por lo demás, este inusitado realismo, ¿no resulta, finalmente, en una resignación ante la novela –ante la novela como formato– para la que el novelista Saer siempre propuso la abstención?" (2011: 11). In turn, Rafael Arce states that *La grande*'s unprecedented length and realism actually transform Saer's trademark poetics into fictional matter: "*La grande* sería lo novelesco 'puro' de la propia saga: [...] la historia de la historia de la saga (contando la novela de la propia obra), interrogando su falta total de

necesidad, postulando un mundo casual pero real” (2012: 6). The past of Gutiérrez and Precisionismo thus reviews the entirety of Saer’s saga and the “sociedad de personajes” that populated the Zona during three decades of fiction.

Soldi and Gabriela declare that Precisionismo was an archetypal avant-gardist rupture with the cultural tradition of the Zona: “Fue un despertar brusco y desagradable: Brando y los suyos, con la estética radical y excluyente que reivindicaban, venían a demostrar su inexistencia” (2005: 178). Among their sources, they possess a written anonymous account by a former member of Precisionismo that recalls the movement’s aesthetic guidelines and objectives: “*la función social del precisionismo era depurar el lenguaje de las masas, actualizarlo y hacerlo coincidir con la terminología científica*”; thereafter, he quotes Brando himself: “Es muy sencillo: se trata de hablar con precisión. [...] De ese modo, todo malentendido desaparece del intercambio social de conceptos y sentimientos” (2005: 324-325, emphasis in original). To technify and refine daily discourse is the movement’s utmost goal. Brando’s avant-gardism associates the transformation of language with an overarching transformation of the social fabric, grandiosely aspiring to “*ocupar el campo social en su totalidad, valiéndose ‘de todas sus instancias’, para transformarlo*” (2005: 325, emphasis in original). However, the account tones down Precisionismo’s ambitions. It narrates the literary disputes between their magazine *Nexos* and two other publications, the Neoclásicos’ *Espiga* and the Regionalistas’ *Copas y bastos*, only to translate them into a playful competition between banquets and gatherings. Rather than manifestos or texts, different menus and social ambiances embody their opposed views of literature: “*era de buen tono darse de tanto en tanto una vuelta por los pucheros precisionistas de los jueves. [...] Los regionalistas, que se reunían los viernes en la parrilla San Lorenzo, asistían, a título individual, y de vez en cuando, a los pucheros, y recibían en sus asados algunas veces a algún que otro precisionista*” (2005: 321-322, emphasis in original).

Every fictional avant-garde studied before used art to channel political objections to the state. While El Party and Realismo Visceral escaped cultural and state institutions, La Joda’s happenings and kidnapping were an open challenge to the monopoly on violence. In contrast, Precisionismo seeks an alliance with the state: art and public office are analogous instruments to provoke the changes they pursue. Moreover, their hygienist approach to linguistic and social purification resembles the shady sympathy of certain historical avant-gardes for fascist rulers. As Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote in the *Futurist Manifesto*: “We will glorify war –the world’s

only hygiene– militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” (1973: 21). Precisionismo’s ambitions to “ocupar el campo social en su totalidad” actually reflect Brando’s path towards social recognition. He married the daughter of a prominent General and held public office in subsequent periods of Argentine history. He was a diplomat in Europe during Peronismo, Secretary of Public Works after the Revolución Libertadora, and put his reputation as *homme de lettres* at the service of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional: “En el 76, su cuñado, el general Ponce, [...] trató de conseguirle un ministerio, pero Brando se echó atrás y se limitó a escribir algunos artículos justificando el golpe de Estado” (2005: 172). Brando presents his avant-gardist project as a valuable resource for state power. As he tells his father-in-law: “Mi general, [...] si la tropa entiende sus órdenes, es gracias al trabajo de los poetas, que depuran el lenguaje” (2005: 330).

Next to Gutiérrez’s recollections and the anonymous testimony, Tomatis gives a scornful portrayal of Brando, denouncing him as an impostor who “tenía aterrorizados a sus discípulos” and “se decía vanguardista pero era un burgués desembozado” (2005: 229). He recalls Brando’s relationship with military repressors. His brother-in-law was a General who “había frecuentado a los instructores norteamericanos en Panamá, en Washington, en la Escuela de las Américas” (2005: 230). Sarlo notes that, in Saer’s fiction, politics is more than a contextual background: “La política hace la trama, no por la difusa razón de que ‘todo es político’, sino por la razón específica de que pertenecen a la esfera de la política (de la violencia política) las fuerzas que operan sobre los personajes” (2016: 64). In this sense, *La grande*’s revision of Precisionismo is intermingled with the political violence of the 1960s and 1970s. It reflects on the different ethical and artistic postures that Saer’s characters adopted during the period. For instance, the kidnapping of Gato Garay and Elisa was only suggestively depicted in *Nadie nada nunca* (1980). Two decades later, *La grande* allows Tomatis to rethink the episode. Looking for information about his friends, Tomatis visits Brando, whose links to members of the military conducting clandestine arrests were an open secret in the Zona. Equally known was the animosity between Tomatis and Brando: “tenían lectores diferentes, comportamientos diferentes con las instituciones, los amigos o los enemigos, literarios o políticos; [...] frecuentaban medios diferentes y su manera de concebir y ejercer el trabajo literario eran opuestas” (2005: 236).

The kidnapping of Gato and Elisa thus outlines an opposition between two dichotomous stances on art that mirror a political confrontation. Brando receives Tomatis in his home office

while looking at the stars through a telescope. While Tomatis desperately tells him about his friends' disappearance, Brando remains silent, "afable y expectante", and finally says: "¿Quiere mirar la luna por el telescopio? Está muy hermosa esta noche" (2005: 240). Tomatis glimpses a "mirada extraña, severa y fugacísima" in Brando's eyes, declines his offer and leaves. When retelling this meeting to Soldi and Gabriela, Tomatis translates Brando's gaze into a "mensaje solapado y violento" still resonating in his memory:

Te atreviste a venir a verme para hacerme creer que tus amigos desaparecidos son inocentes, pero como yo te conozco y conozco a todos los de tu banda, sé que son subversivos desde siempre. [...] Yo tengo una obra, he dirigido revistas, he sido diplomático y ministro, [...] y ustedes, lo sé muy bien, ignoran mi poesía y se burlan de ella, estoy seguro, cuando están reunidos, emborrachándose. [...] El verso libre les sirve de pretexto, a ustedes, para esconder que son incapaces de medir un endecasílabo y de utilizar correctamente una rima. Si a tus amigos se los llevaron, por algo será (2005: 241, emphasis in original).

Tomatis experiences this exchange as a conflict between two opposed views of the Zona. Brando's silence reminds him of the episodes narrated in *Nadie nada nunca*, which suggestively linked Gato Garay to the assassination of a police superintendent and, therefore, was not as innocent as Tomatis claims. Moreover, as decoded by Tomatis, Brando's gaze associates literature with politics. Echoing Bolaño's revision of Dalton's assassination, aesthetic postulates lead to antagonistic ethical stances. "Medir un endecasílabo" and "utilizar correctamente una rima" account for the gap between subversion and a successful career in public office. In this way, *La grande* portrays two polarised ways of "living" literature. On the one hand, Brando despises the group of friends who get drunk and mock his poetry, and ultimately endorses a brutal military dictatorship. On the other, as I will now explore, Gutiérrez, Tomatis and the rest of their friends outline an ethics based on affect, companionship and shared habits.

Companionship and the Ephemeral

Precisionismo associated the avant-garde with social recognition and state power. In contrast, Tomatis recalls that, in the 1960s, a young Gutiérrez "se inscribió en la Facultad de Derecho, donde conoció a Escalante, a Marcos Rosemberg y a César Rey, de los que se volvió inseparable. Los cuatro formaron una especie de vanguardia político-literaria que duró poco porque, aparte de la juventud y de la amistad, no tenían nada en común" (2005: 26-27, emphasis

in original). In “Por la vuelta” –an earlier short story included in *Palo y hueso* (1965)– those three characters remember their former and ephemeral “especie de vanguardia político-literaria”. Their recollections mirror the way Bolaño’s Realismo Visceral disregarded written texts and shaped a literary ethics out of conversations and strolls: “No debe haber habido en todo el mundo noches mejores [...] que las que hemos pasado de muchachos caminando lentamente por la ciudad, hasta el alba, charlando como locos sobre mil cosas, sobre política, sobre literatura, sobre mujeres” (2000: 30). “Por la vuelta” outlines this group of friends as a spectral avant-garde, eventually recalled by *La grande* to re-evaluate thirty years of fictional and historical progression in the Zona. Before moving to Europe, Gutiérrez “quemó todos sus papeles, cuentos, poemas, ensayos”, leaving both his literary vocation and private life behind: “Si me hice guionista de cine fue para desaparecer mejor como artista, porque el guionista no tiene existencia propia; y para desaparecer también como individuo, utilicé un seudónimo que, aparte de mi productor, nadie conoce” (2005: 188, emphasis in original). Although Real Visceralistas did not produce a fixed oeuvre, they still reclaimed artistic precursors and a name for the group and introduced themselves as poets. Furthermore, they looked for Cesárea, also a poet. On the contrary, for Gutiérrez, fading away as an author entails an abandonment of literature altogether. After returning to the Zona, he revives his juvenile avant-gardist ideals not by producing art but gathering his friends and refounding their sense of community.

Sarlo argues that shared moments are a key motif in Saer’s fiction that consolidates camaraderie between characters: “La comida y la conversación son las acciones que le dan continuidad a la sociedad de personajes. [...] La tribu literaria saeriana no está sostenida ni por el parentesco ni por la dominación sino por una ética de la amistad” (2016: 111). Gutiérrez’s organises an *asado* and invites his old friends and new acquaintances. By gathering characters from the past and present of the Zona, he puts the ideals of his 1960s “especie de vanguardia” into play in the 1990s. One of his younger friends acknowledges the temporal dislocation provoked by this refounded community: “como si después de más de treinta años de separación, algo hubiese quedado en suspenso en cada uno, para ponerse otra vez en movimiento, sin deliberación, al primer encuentro” (2005: 49). Contrary to Precisionismo’s instrumentalisation of the avant-garde to gain political power, Gutiérrez and his friends replicate the juvenile nights they spent “charlando como locos sobre mil cosas”. Just as Dalton’s El Party opposed building community to authoring texts, their literary ethics consists of the ephemeral enjoyment of food,

wine, cigars and conversations.

Piglia states that gatherings and conversations link Saer's aesthetics and ethics: "Esta sociabilidad, fundada en lo que Saer llama 'el arte de la conversación', define el modo de narrar. Está en juego un uso del lenguaje y por lo tanto una forma de vida (los asados, los encuentros en los bares, las caminatas, las visitas inesperadas)" (2015: 13). Saer's "arte de la conversación" is the cornerstone of a literary ethics deployed through non-institutionalised channels: "La amistad es una red que sostiene al que escribe por fuera de cualquier circulación pública" (2015: 10). After dessert, the friends tell each other stories: "Todos esperan de los demás algo interesante, no una revelación, sino más bien una historia, [...] llenando de brillo y de vivacidad el tiempo incoloro, grabándose en la imaginación y depositándose, como una película se borra en el fondo de un vaso de vino, en la memoria" (2005: 404). As storytelling is comparable to the "brillo y vivacidad" of emptying a glass of wine, the "arte de la conversación" generates a shared experiencing of time and sensations. Moreover, this refounded and ephemeral community leads them to remember episodes of political violence. One of them "comenta que en los años de la dictadura, durante el terror, cuando el miedo, el asco, lo arbitrario, la crueldad y el dolor ocupaban todo, en medio del escarnio y la masacre, ocurrían cosas a la vez angustiosas y cómicas, tan absurdas a veces que terminaban causando risa" (2005: 404). Each of Gutiérrez's guests narrates a personal experience related to state terror. Their stories link tragedy and comedy, trauma and nonsense, defying "official" and "serious" narratives of the period. Echoing Tomatis' meeting with Brando, Rosemberg narrates the time he requested information on a *desaparecido* from a military officer:

el coronel, dando un puñetazo en el escritorio, le dijo que en el país no había desaparecidos, que solamente había subversivos. [...] El problema era que, con la violencia del puñetazo que había dado contra el escritorio, su peluquín se había desplazado un poco en la cabeza y a su pretendida afirmación de autoridad la contradecía la incongruencia del peluquín mal pegado contra su calva (2005: 405).

Rosemberg remembers his reaction, "dividido entre el miedo y la risa", when the colonel slammed the door and shouted "¡Bolche de mierda!" behind. Humour and playfulness were vital in the literary ethics of Realismo Visceral. Joking and mocking each other reinforced their camaraderie. Now, in Gutiérrez's *asado*, laughing together becomes an affective response to the legacy of terror and reaffirms the value of memory when reconstructing society. Just as

Rosemberg could not hold his laughter when seeing the colonel's wig, the act of retelling the episode “motiva la risa general, que induce a Riera a golpear el borde de la mesa con la palma de las manos, a Nula y a Marcos Rosemberg a retorcerse en sus respectivas sillas, [...] y al resto de los presentes a regocijarse largamente con la historia” (2005: 408). For Real Visceralistas, visual poems and sketches embodied an affective exchange beyond the written word. In this case, literature gives in to storytelling. Conversing and laughing reaffirms their sense of community, recomposing the social bond threatened by Gutiérrez's emigration and the military violence responsible for Gato and Elisa's disappearance. However, the group replicates the gendered nature that I noted in Realismo Visceral. It is exclusively composed of men, and women only participate in it as their partners. The *asado* displays a typically sexist division of household labour, as women are in charge of cleaning after dinner: “Amalia se levanta y empieza a juntar la mesa y, cuando lo advierten, Violeta y Clara Rosemberg hacen lo mismo, de modo que las tres mujeres salen en fila india en dirección de la cocina y desaparecen en el interior de la casa” (2005: 400).

Alongside Manuel Puig and Rodolfo Walsh, Piglia considers Saer one of the “tres vanguardias” in recent Argentine literature, as he puts forward “una suerte de poética negativa, de rechazo a lo que podrían ser los lenguajes estereotipados que circulan en la cultura de masas” (2015: 28). Saer's avant-gardist forms oppose the specificity of literature to the pervasiveness of the culture industry. In this line, *La grande* depicts a transformation in the landscape of the Zona. Gutiérrez's anachronistic lens allows Saer to describe urban alterations after thirty years of absence, highlighting how neoliberalism changed everyday locations and habits. As Gabriela ruminates, gentrification mimics the generational turnover in Saer's fictional world: “el lugar mítico, mentado en textos y tradiciones orales, que desde su infancia frecuentaban sus padres y los amigos de sus padres, se ha vuelto un suburbio populoso de la ciudad”; moreover, the construction of a shopping mall indicates the entry of contemporary forms of consumer culture into the Zona: “en los pantanos vecinos de La Guardia, debidamente apisonados y acondicionados, han hecho florecer, de la noche a la mañana, el anacronismo chillón del súpercenter” (2005: 186).

Gutiérrez's friend and wine seller Nula enters the mall and reflects on the visual repetition of goods and ads: “deben de haber intentado sugerir, con esa variedad de colores que evocan la descomposición de la luz, que los hipermercados W abarcan, en su incalculable

diversidad, capaz de prever y satisfacer la gama infinita de los deseos humanos, la suma de lo existente” (2005: 148). The pervasiveness of market dynamics even provokes a certain ambiguity in the group of friends. The commercialisation of wine within the mall points towards contrasting modes of consumption, allegorising cultural production as a whole. Nula laments that “la moda del vino les da a los aficionados la ilusión de cultivar una individualidad exquisita y razonada, cuando él, que es el común denominador de todos ellos, sabe que han sido previamente uniformados por la propaganda” (2005: 256-257). To the standardisation of consumer culture, he opposes a reflection on drinking wine as the ephemeral, extremely singular and only metaphorically describable feeling of “los atisbos de sabor que brillan a veces en cada botella, en cada copa, y aun en cada sorbo y después se evaporan, chisporroteo empírico que suscita reminiscencias inesperadas, de frutas, de flores, de miel, de orejones, de hierba, de especias, de madera o de cuero” (2005: 257). By referring to “atisbos de sabor” that sparkle like honey or leather, among other comparisons, Gutiérrez’s description of wine resembles an interval of poetry that suspends the narrative. Such a poetic interruption forces readers to stop and reflect on the singularity of literary form themselves. Poetic techniques, such as the use of synaesthesia, produce a detachment from everyday and commodified uses of language in the same way as characters bring their routines to a halt when savouring a glass of wine.

Portraying the Feria del Libro in the metropolitan Madrid, *Los detectives salvajes* contrasted its avant-gardists’ literary ethics with models of authorship adjusted to the market. Now, in the remote Zona, *La grande*’s friends face analogous repercussions of global capital, as exemplified by the brand-new shopping mall. Confronting the commodification of culture, *La grande* translates Gutiérrez’s favouring of shared moments over published works into a formal technique. By dusk, a newcomer to the “sociedad de personajes”, Diana, takes out “un block de papel Canson y una caja de lápices de colores, [...] que podrían considerarse como sus útiles para tomar notas no escritas, sino visuales” (2005: 401). Unlike the standardised products offered at the mall, and mirroring Gutiérrez’s description of wine as a poetic interval interrupting both the novel’s narrative and characters’ routines, Diana’s “notas visuales” are apt to capture the unique and unrepeatable instant. She looks at her friends in Gutiérrez’s backyard and paints “catorce manchitas de colores puestas en un esquema oval, más una, la número quince, en la que predominaba el anaranjado, un poco separada de las otras” (2005: 409-410). The narrator describes the scene from a certain distance, adopting the painter’s standpoint, and gives a title to

the non-oeuvre they stage: *Domingo de verano en el campo: La tarde*.

Just as the Real Visceralistas' sketches materialised the moments they shared during their road trip, Saer's novel finishes with Diana's depiction of the instantaneous and elusive. *Domingo de verano en el campo: La tarde* is the mise en abyme of the aesthetic and political guidelines of Gutiérrez's "especie de vanguardia". The living picture grants tactile quality to the group's sense of belonging. Its ephemeral visuality exceeds the written word, and describing it allows the novel to mourn and contest the decline of literature's social status. In this way, Saer redefines the notion of the avant-garde as renouncing institutionalised circuits and authorship, even abandoning literature altogether. It is the fictionalised death of fictional avant-gardes, paradoxically, which relaunches a shared experiencing of time. Three decades after burning his poems in order to "desaparecer como autor", Gutiérrez reviews his juvenile avant-gardism not to revive it but to arouse affects and refound community beyond literary authorship.

In sum, the fictional avant-gardes of Realismo Visceral, Precisionismo and Gutiérrez's group of friends review significant landmarks in Latin American history. At the turn of the century, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* partook in broader debates on mourning and memory, as cultural and political actors reviewed the effects of authoritarianism and former revolutionary projects. Bolaño and Saer fictionalised avant-gardes to highlight overlooked aspects of the quest to combine artistic and political radicalism. Rather than published works, Real Visceralistas design a literary ethics that produces community moments and defies state co-opting. To dictatorships and the Cuban and Sandinista Revolutions, Lima and Belano oppose affects, shared experiences and encounters with social outcasts. In contrast, Precisionismo exemplifies an alliance between avant-gardes and the state resulting in political power and social recognition. Compared to Brando's instrumentalisation of art and complicity with state terror, Gutiérrez renounces literary authorship. Instead, his group of friends shares an *asado* and contests the legacy of terror through storytelling and laughter. Ultimately, Real Visceralistas' road trip and Gutiérrez's weekend reunion redefine the notion of the avant-garde as a platform for reinventing modes of coexistence.

However, despite shaping reinvented communities, both groups display a masculine bias that relegates women to secondary roles and reinforces a homosocial pact. Next chapter will study the feminist angle that *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* adopt towards fictional avant-gardes. Moreno and Ojeda turn the lost poet motif, as epitomised by Cesárea and

Gutiérrez, into a feminist revision of male-inspired paradigms of the avant-garde. As I will now explore, they reconstruct the lives and works of forgotten female artists not to offer a feminine counter-canon but to dismantle established notions of the avant-garde and gender themselves.

Chapter 4: Fictional Avant-gardes through a Feminist Lens

Feminism and the Archive of Avant-gardes

In the previous chapters, I studied four examples of fictional avant-gardes that advance renewed modes of community. Fiction enabled Cortázar and Dalton, first, and Bolaño and Saer, later, to redefine avant-gardes as frameworks in which artistic ideals mobilise affects and personal connections. Their fictional avant-gardes outline a literary ethics whose outcome is the creation of groups themselves, ultimately upholding the political potential of affect to intervene in specific historical contexts. In Chapter 2, I examined *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...* in relation to the Cuban Revolution. Amidst heated debates on revolutionary action and demands of political utility from art, Cortázar and Dalton advocated the relevance of formal experimentation, playfulness, and humour to shape the *Hombre Nuevo*. While, for Cortázar and Dalton, the promise of the revolution was one of unquestionable and immediate fulfilment, Bolaño and Saer fictionalised avant-gardist circles in a later and contrasting scenario. In Chapter 3, I explored the afterlife of avant-gardist projects within a neoliberal context when political and artistic radicalism was deemed concluded. *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* looked back at the 1960s and 1970s and reclaimed the affective dimension of prior avant-gardes, engaging fiction in widespread discussions about memory and revisions of state terror and revolutionary endeavours.

Despite shaping a literary ethics beyond publishing and art institutions, aiming to “live” literature through affects instead, these fictional avant-gardes displayed a gendered bias that finally put limitations on their ambitions of reinventing community. These groups relegated women to subordinate roles that reinforced a homosocial pact. Besides being problematic from a representational point of view, these male-inspired accounts mirror broader links between gender and avant-gardes in the history of Latin American art. As I will shortly explore, Latin American avant-gardes rose into the public sphere during the 1920s as dominantly masculine literary circles. Although several women formed part of movements like the Argentine *Martín Fierro* or Mexican *Estridentismo*, the paradigm of the avant-garde artist generalised the works and experiences of men. During the avant-gardist effervescence that marked the Latin American cultural field in the 1960s and 1970s, as I noted before regarding the ideal of the *Hombre Nuevo*, the revolutionary avant-garde still reflected sexist values. Gender thus structured the canonical legacy of avant-gardes within an equally gendered history of art. First, universalising a gendered

profile of the avant-garde artist in masculine terms resulted in neglecting and “forgetting” female artists. Then, it limited the avant-gardist combination of aesthetic and political radicalism –and, therefore, its potential to reinvent community– to sexist mores and relationships.

In this chapter, I will study *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* as feminist revisions of not only the concept and canon of the avant-garde but fictional avant-gardes as well. I previously argued that the lost poet motif enabled a chronological interplay between the past and present of avant-gardes. While in *Los detectives salvajes*, the Real Visceralistas looked up to Cesárea to reinforce their homosocial circle, Gutiérrez’s return to the Zona, in *La grande*, relaunched bonds within an equally masculine group of friends. *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* also structure their plots through the lost artist motif, albeit invoking forgotten women to shape modes of community beyond the archetypal homosocial circle. Moreover, these novels deploy self-reflexive formal techniques to expose the apocryphal status of their fictional avant-gardes. Echoing *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...*’s juxtaposition of fiction, *testimonios* and documents, Moreno and Ojeda thematise the inclusion of fictional artists within empirical groups. While narrating the lives and works of these allegedly lost women, they also depict the process of forging texts and inserting these apocryphal figures within the history of avant-gardes. Portraying female artists thus enables a feminist standpoint on the avant-gardist tradition and the fictional avant-gardes I studied before.

However, to redeem the historically neglected work of female artists, these novels go beyond representing women in avant-gardes. They portray fictional avant-gardes whose feminist radicalism not only questions male-inspired paradigms of art and politics but destabilises identities more broadly, in turn enabling a genderless figure of the avant-garde. In this way, Moreno and Ojeda neither expand the canon of avant-gardes nor offer an essentially feminine counter-canon. Instead, they dismantle the definitions of art and gender themselves upon which any canon of avant-gardes is built. They combine fiction and affect to devise modes of coexistence beyond gender norms alongside models of collective authorship beyond individualised artworks, ultimately outlining fictional avant-gardes that take flight from the gendered structures of art institutions and society altogether. Rewriting the figure of the avant-garde as a collective creation dismantles the intertwining of gender and authorship that allows for patriarchal readings of art. In the end, their radicalised literary ethics defies binary and essentialised concepts of womanhood as much as gendered ways of uniting art and politics.

These fictional avant-gardes mirror the broader positioning of Moreno and Ojeda in different contexts, both marked and interconnected by increasing feminist activism, namely the Argentine democratic transition in the 1980s, and the Ibero-American *Ni una menos* movement in the 2010s. Throughout this chapter, I will highlight how their novels addressed the issue of gender at historical junctures when gender oppression and the role of women in the public sphere were subject to intense debate. Before analysing their fictional avant-gardes, I will assess the secondary role traditionally assigned to women within Latin American avant-gardes. This will allow me to question the role models available to female writers, exploring the notion of authorship itself as connoting a male-inspired figure of the artist. Invoking feminist concepts such as “*huelga feminista*” and “*deserción*”, I will then regard the act of dismantling gender identity as enabling an alternative concept of the avant-garde. Finally, I will approach the idea of the archive in opposition to the artistic canon. I will show that, confronting canonical hierarchies of artists and artworks, the archive allows us to not only rediscover neglected cases but also reshape the implicit values defining the avant-garde as such. In this sense, I will explore the links between affect and gender to outline a feminist rearrangement of the archive of avant-gardes. Affect will enable a collective voice exceeding the idea of individual authorship, ultimately devising a feminist and non-individualised literary ethics opposed to gendered models of the avant-garde.

Female Avant-gardists and Authorship

When studying 1920s and 1930s avant-gardes in Latin America, Unruh highlights a conflict between their gendered nature and the unprecedented public presence of women in modernising societies. She notes that certain women were part of dominantly masculine literary circles, such as Norah Lange and Tina Modotti in the Argentine group *Martín Fierro* and the Mexican *Estridentismo* movement. However, “the women of Latin America’s historical avant-gardes, mediating their artistic identities and practices as individual figures among groups of men, sometimes stand out for their apparent radical solitude within that literary culture” (2015: 257). Their solitude within avant-gardes not only relegated their works in retrospective accounts of the period. It also curtailed bonds between women and imposed patriarchal means of sociality as a norm. Although avant-gardist fiction featured the modern woman as a relevant character at the time, like the feminist activist in Carlos Loveira’s *La última lección* (1924) or the cosmopolitan

sex worker in Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928), the female artist was not equally thematised. While novels such as the aforementioned *El café de nadie* and *La casa de cartón* fictionalised the figure of the male avant-garde artist, “notably absent from much fiction by men was the new woman writer or intellectual, notwithstanding her growing presence in actual literary culture” (Unruh, 2006: 13).

Likewise, Sylvia Molloy argues that the notion of the “woman writer” itself carries an oxymoronic condition. Compared to the archetypal image of the Latin American writer as enacting an authoritative voice, “to speak of a woman writer is in a way to postulate an antimony: a subject, traditionally perceived as being ‘private’ and devoid of authority, appears endowed with intellectual power within the public sphere” (1991: 108). Molloy studies the works of women such as Elena Garro, Clarice Lispector and Alejandra Pizarnik and argues that their “gendered self-representations” contested restrictive and male-inspired authorial models. They drew upon established stereotypes and redefined them, self-fashioning themselves as women writers both in the public sphere and literary productions: “To those lacking representation, mirror images are not only specular, they are often spectacular. A strong theatrical stance informs many self-figurations created by Latin American women: the image becomes a role, the text a performance” (1991: 112). For Molloy, texts such as Pizarnik's “Continuidad” and Lispector's “Preciosidade” display a performative nature, given that their conditions of legibility depend on outlining a distinctive notion of female authorship: “many Latin American women's texts are preoccupied with institutional inscription. Names, epitaphs, signatures, resumes, genealogies, eulogies, even wills often fantasise the boundaries of a legal and historical persona too tenuous to be fixed” (1991: 110).

As I will shortly examine, the lost avant-gardist women of *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* interrogate a universalised and male-inspired figure of the author. They contest the patriarchal history of art that neglects women when selecting the allegedly most valuable artists and works to preserve, subsequently securing implicit and gendered parameters of value conditioning the production of future art. Therefore, art institutions both mirror and reinforce sexist social structures. Within the realm of art, they replicate hierarchical divisions condemning minorities to invisibility. Aina Pérez Fontdevila and Meri Torras Francès argue that authorship has been traditionally modelled in masculine terms, as it rests upon “el conjunto de normas y relatos culturales que determinan qué es un autor y moldean aquellas representaciones

e interpretaciones” (2019: 12). Gendered social structures predetermine the figure of the author, since writing as a man or woman connotes different positions and statuses within the cultural field. Joanna Russ remarks that renowned female writers have been usually seen as exceptional characters, being thus expropriated of the capacity to initiate their own tradition. Subsequent writers cannot picture themselves as female authors when their predecessors are typically regarded as unreachable, solitary, mad or suicidal (2018: 96). Rather than just including more women in the canon, Pérez Fontdevila and Torras Francès argue that the notion of authorship itself must be dismantled and rethought: “contrarrestar la exclusión, la invisibilización o la desvalorización de la producción artística de las mujeres no puede consistir solo en la reivindicación de una inclusión, [...] sin deconstruir los discursos y las normas que han producido dicha exclusión” (2019: 45).

Michel Foucault situates the emergence of the concept of authorship in the eighteenth century. The figure of the author came into existence “when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules were established” (1977: 125). Authorship enables the individualisation and ownership of discourse, guaranteeing the classification and comparison of works. Foucault defines the author function as an entity determining the status and circulation of discourses within a given socio-cultural context. The significance and value that society assigns to certain works are necessarily linked to the author’s name that frames them. Rather than spontaneously attributing discourses to specific subjects, “these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections, in terms always more or less psychological, of our way of handling texts: in the comparisons we make, the traits we extract as pertinent, the continuities we assign, or the exclusions we practice” (1977: 127). Foucault’s author function defines literary authorship not as an individual or original creation but as the embodiment of values and relations distinctive of a specific society.

Since the profile of the author is shaped by its context, it is conditioned by prior and esteemed works and figures. Pérez Fontdevila and Torras Francès argue that privileging a male paradigm of authorship impacts the position of women in the cultural field: “¿El repertorio de modelos y posturas que puebla el archivo literario prevé su encarnación *en femenino*? [...] ¿Qué les hace a las mujeres escritoras y qué les hacen las mujeres escritoras a las figuras autoriales con las que deben negociar para darse a ver y ser reconocidas?” (2019: 26, emphasis in original). In her article “¿Tiene sexo la escritura?”, Nelly Richard asks herself: “¿es lo mismo hablar de

‘literatura de mujeres’ que de ‘escrituras femeninas?’” (1994: 129). In her view, “literatura de mujeres” is the sum of works written by and portraying the experiences of women. They do not necessarily question the gendered idea of subjectivity that underlies authorship and determines literary visibility. In contrast, Richard advocates a feminist stance beyond representational ideas of literature. Opposed to analysing “imágenes de mujeres”, which would inadvertently reinforce an essentialised feminine identity, she aims to discern how “la escritura protagoniza un trabajo de desestructuración/reestructuración de los códigos narrativos que violenta la estabilidad del universo referencial y que desfigura el supuesto de verosimilitud de los mecanismos de personificación e identificación femenino-literaria” (1994: 130).

Richard’s “escritura femenina” connotes experimenting with language beyond binary norms, “abriendo la palabra a una multiplicidad de flujos contradictorios que ritman el quiebre sintáctico” (1994: 132). It leads to a “feminización de la escritura” independent of the writer’s gender or sex. Such a feminisation is always relative and takes place when literary works deviate from dominant and patriarchal frameworks of meaning: “Cualquier literatura que se practique como *disidencia de identidad* respecto al formato reglamentario de la cultura masculino-paterna [...] desplegaría el coeficiente minoritario y subversivo (contradominante) de lo ‘femenino’” (1994: 133, emphasis in original). Richard’s “feminización de la escritura” aspires to deterritorialise identities captured by masculinist regimes of power, echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of becoming-woman. For Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of becoming is not about origins, progressions and ends, but about lines and intensities: “[Becoming-woman is] not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a micro femininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman” (1987: 275). Becoming-woman is thus a non-representational process of movement not limited to being or standing in for a woman. In contrast, it opens a line of flight that passes through and destabilises the dominant hierarchies of sexual binaries –such as male/female, heterosexuality/homosexuality, masculinity/femininity– that organise and constrain our lives. To become woman implies distancing oneself from the axioms constituting a majority at any given situation: “When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc.” (1987: 291). While women quantitatively surpass men in the world, majoritarian axioms relegate them to a subordinate role.

For Richard, essentialised and gendered divisions of identities contribute to such a patriarchal social order. Therefore, to “feminizar la escritura” is to decline any fixed feminine essence, enabling instead ways of becoming-minor that “desacatan el mandato simbólico-masculino y lanzan su ofensiva contra la defensa patriarcal del sistema de identidad, desatando en su interior la revuelta espasmódica de la desidentidad, [...] dando lugar al renacer transexual de un sujeto ya ‘desmaterna y despaterna’” (1994: 139).

El Affair Skeffington and *La desfiguración Silva* invoke the lost avant-gardist woman as a means of becoming-minor, boycotting at once the notions of gender and authorship. Not only these fictional avant-gardes seek modes of art and community beyond gender binarism, but their overtly apocryphal condition undermines any kind of authority and ownership over artworks. Such a defection from the institutionalised values and circulation of literature echoes Verónica Gago’s theorisation of the “huelga feminista” as an “ejercicio de sustracción y sabotaje” that becomes a “modo de subjetivación política” (2019: 25). Efforts to conceptualise notions like the “huelga feminista” stem from concrete events and experiences of feminist activism, especially those brought about by the Ni una menos movement. In June 2015, more than 300,000 Argentine women took to the streets and launched a series of demonstrations to denounce increasing rates of violence and discrimination against women.²⁰ Inspired by the Mexican poet Susana Chávez and her poem dedicated to Ciudad Juárez’s femicides, the movement adopted the name Ni una menos and was replicated throughout Latin America and Spain. For Giunta, the unprecedented visibility of feminist demands forced art institutions to reshape their guidelines. The cultural field took notice of a transnational feminist movement that “se caracteriza por una rebelión y protesta generalizada contra la violencia cotidiana, que corta, lacera y discrimina cuerpos de mujeres; contra la violencia del lenguaje y del sistema de exclusión, que afecta el ámbito laboral en prácticamente todos los niveles” (2021: 41-42).

According to Gago, the “huelga feminista” makes a “fuera de lugar” use of the instrument of the strike. Beyond the traditional domain of the industrial working class, it highlights intersectional ways of extracting surplus value from gender division, such as unpaid caring labour and sexual exploitation. The “huelga feminista” is a process rather than an event,

²⁰ According to the CEPAL’s 2021 report on gender violence, at least 4,091 women were victims of femicide in Latin America during 2020. Honduras, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador showed the highest rates with, respectively, 4.7, 2.4, and 2.1 victims per 100,000 women. Argentina and Ecuador reported slightly lower but still alarming rates of 1.1 and 0.9 per 100,000 women.

which unfolds by interrupting taken-for-granted patterns of gender behaviour and envisioning new modes of relating: “nos permite ver, detectar y poner de relieve en términos de cómo se produce un régimen de invisibilidad específico [...] [y] deviene una herramienta práctica de investigación política y un proceso capaz de construir *transversalidad* entre cuerpos, conflictos y territorios radicalmente diferentes” (2019: 16-18, emphasis in original). The “huelga feminista” thus brings bodies and experiences together, which were previously alienated from each other for being confined to the household or not sharing the same workplace, and articulates a collective political action. For Gago, the political potential of the “huelga feminista” rests upon a dialectical shift between “visibilización y fuga” and “reconocimiento y deserción”, which both incorporates and overgrows specific gender demands: “Las integra porque no se subestiman los reclamos concretos. [...] Y las desborda también porque la puesta en común de los cuerpos en la calle permite parar para darnos tiempo a imaginar cómo queremos vivir y para afirmar que el deseo es de cambio radical” (2019: 46).

Concepts such as “fuga” and “deserción” are tantamount to Richard’s “feminización de la escritura” as a means of becoming-minor that interrupts gendered subjectivities, leaving them at a state of indeterminacy and openness potentially leading to revamped connections between “sujetos desmaternas y despaternas”. These ideas echo the intellectual and political project defined by Gabriela Méndez Cota as a “feminismo de la extinción”. Opposed to identity politics, which risk essentialising gender or limiting feminism to demands for state recognition, Méndez Cota proposes a feminism that asserts “la extinción de la vida tal y como se ha imaginado en la historia de la metafísica a través de la simbolización de la diferencia sexual” (2018: 121). Notions like “extinción”, “huelga” and “deserción” thus outline a radical feminist stance beyond the logic of identity, regarding the establishment of gender itself as the backbone of our exclusionary social structures. To desert from gender is thus to enable modes of coexistence not relying on sexual difference, which would ultimately lead to affects and habits beyond the restrictive categories of man and woman.

Just as the “huelga feminista” interrupts the bodily and symbolic dominations sustaining patriarchy, the avant-garde has traditionally represented a boycott of the principles of value supporting art institutions. As I will shortly examine, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* combine feminist and avant-gardist radicalism to transform the group of artists into a framework for creating both art and community beyond gender identity. The concepts of the

canon and archive will allow me to stress how a feminist view of avant-gardes can dismantle the restrictive symbolisation of sexual difference upon which art history is built. While the canon categorises past artworks and artists according to established values, the archive enables us to rearrange art history and rediscover traditionally disregarded instances. The canon imposes a gendered and individualised figure of the author, allowing for value judgements embodying broader social hierarchies and gender divisions. In contrast, I will argue that Moreno and Ojeda interrogate the archive through a feminist lens, devising a non-individualised approach to authorship defiant of essentialised identities. In this way, their fictional avant-gardes exceed the male-inspired models I noted in the previous novels, outlining the avant-garde artist as a collective creation that challenges gendered modes of both sociality and art.

Avant-gardes between the Canon and Archive

El Affair Skeffington and *La desfiguración Silva* review emblematic moments in the history of Latin American and even Western art as a whole. Moreno places her fictional avant-garde in interwar Paris, a typical milieu of European avant-gardes. The novel unfolds within a scenario permeated by Modernist, Dadaist and Surrealist references, advancing a feminist view of a period otherwise marked by men such as Marcel Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, and André Breton. *La desfiguración Silva* looks back at the Latin American 1960s and 1970s, that is, the context that I examined regarding *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito Poeta...* as framing debates about the Hombre Nuevo and the nature of revolutionary art. I will thus analyse the novel as a feminist rewriting of both Cortázar and Dalton's interventions and Bolaño and Saer's retrospective accounts of this period. In contrast to the male-inspired groups of artists I studied before, Moreno and Ojeda question and redraw the gendered notion of the avant-garde itself, outlining fictional avant-gardes as collective creations of art and community beyond gender identities.

Comparing the concepts of the canon and archive reveals the latter's potential to exceed patriarchal paradigms of the avant-garde. Daniel Link argues that the canon embodies the principles of value prevailing in art institutions, selecting and modelling artworks and assigning hierarchical positions. The canon is “un dispositivo que regula la práctica literaria y que tiene, por lo tanto, un poder prescriptivo, tanto para los procesos de escritura como de lectura” (2003: 273). As a pedagogical construction establishing values and role models, the canon homogenises certain texts as the institutionalised literature of a given time and place. Harold Bloom claims

that, “Originally the canon meant the choice of books in our teaching institutions, and despite the recent politics of multiculturalism, the Canon’s true question remains: What shall the individual who still desires to read attempt to read, this late in history?” (1994: 15). Bloom defends the canon from a “dangerous” multiculturalism that would jeopardise universalised and immutable aesthetic values. Such universalisation and aestheticisation of texts de-historicises and disregards the concrete context to which their formal choices responded. As Link argues: “El canon homogeneiza las diferencias entre los textos (las obras o los autores) precisamente para poder proponer modelos (que, a posteriori, se leerán como consistentes)” (2003: 274).

When addressing gender discrimination, Giunta argues that “el mundo del arte funciona como pantalla en la que estas violencias se replican bajo el formato de la exclusión, la desclasificación, los mecanismos de desautorización y de invisibilización” (2021: 41). The canon reaffirms taken-for-granted gender divisions by relegating artists institutionally classified as women.²¹ Giunta recalls her own work as a curator and the objections aroused by her exhibition *Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960-1985*. While critics complained that her exclusive selection of women blurred their role as artists, Giunta notes that these remarks missed the point of her curatorial strategy. Beyond merely rectifying absences, the exhibition aimed to dismantle the tacit means by which gender divisions are established: “Más allá de que nadie cuestiona la realización de una exposición del arte francés de posguerra o del expresionismo abstracto norteamericano, que bien podrían invalidarse como guetos nacionales o estilísticos, la pregunta que provoca tal afirmación es qué determina la condición de artista, cómo se gesta, quiénes la identifican y promueven” (2021: 37). Giunta’s words echo Foucault’s author function as determining inclusions and exclusions in art history that mirror wider social hierarchies. She shows that the notions of gender and author are tied together when institutionalising a certain idea of art within a specific context.

In contrast, the archive allows us to reread and rearrange texts in a way that re-historicises and deconstructs the canon. A renewed outlook on the archive questions the homogeneous and universalised values with which the canon selects works. As defined by Foucault, the notion of the archive both encompasses and exceeds the preservation of texts that guarantees cultural traditions and identities: “The archive is first the law of what can be said, the

²¹ For example, by April 2015, the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MoMA) only exhibited 7% of works by female artists in its permanent collection. In Argentina, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes exhibited a similar 8% (Giunta, 2021: 56).

system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass” (1972: 129). The archive is a corpus and registry that not only assigns a certain order to documents and saves memories from oblivion. It also determines the conditions and rules under which future archivable discourses can be formulated. As stated by Giorgio Agamben: “the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated” (1999: 144). In this way, the mere existence of a discourse implicitly carries within itself the conditions that made its enunciation feasible in the first place.

The coexistence of discourses at a given time and place implies an archive that frames them. As noted by Foucault, such a historical a priori does not escape historicity itself. The archive does not constitute a static and timeless structure but “is defined as the group of rules that characterise a discursive practice: but these rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together; they are caught up in the very things that they connect; [...] they modify them, and are transformed with them” (1972: 127). There is a dialectical link between past archived documents and present conditions of enunciation. The incorporation of a given discourse by the archive obeys certain rules of inclusion; these rules are reciprocally reshaped by its incorporation. Antoinette Burton notes that to interrogate an archive implies not only examining documents but also accounting for “one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there” (2005: 8). Such an understanding of the archive conspires against its own fixity, as it shows “how archive logics work, what subjects they produce, and which they silence in specific historical and cultural contexts” (2005: 9). Echoing Foucault and Burton’s theorisations, an archive of avant-gardes would first encompass every prior case of avant-gardist art. Then, it would redefine the rules determining what constitutes avant-garde art as such in a given historical scenario. To delve into the archive and unveil its silences and invisibilities, therefore, is to redesign the concept of the avant-garde itself.

For Del Gizzo, rereading the archive challenges canonical hierarchies of works. The archive preserves neglected instances and allows the reader to disrupt any fixed selection: “Leer desde el archivo puede ser un nuevo barajar de documentos, una lectura desde abajo, con las jerarquías aplanadas, que permita no solo reconstruir genealogías, formaciones y lecturas, sino fundamentalmente desarmar los sentidos fijos” (2018: 51). Likewise, Michele Soriano outlines

the concept of “contraarchivos minoritarios” as “documentos [no] inmediatamente asequibles, sino productos de reconstrucciones realizadas mediante posicionamientos situados, localizados y contextualizados” (2019: 392). A minor entry into the archive unveils objects from the past while acknowledging the biased positioning and reconstruction done in the present by the archivist. It does not create a new archive but acts within the archive itself, dismantling and reshaping its archiving rules: “en vez de completar el archivo, lo disgregan, porque cuestionan lo visible, [...] [y] suspenden las categorías que sostienen las matrices de dominación. Construyen contraarchivos porque nos inducen a coconstruirlos en el momento en que (se) exponen (en) la coconstrucción de las verdades y las violencias que las ordenan” (2019: 416). For Soriano, therefore, contesting the subordination of minoritised instances does not imply building a new or different archive. It is by rearranging the elements within an existing archive that the archivist redesigns its rules and ultimately enables alternative outlooks.

The canon and archive are two opposed ways of looking back at art history. While the canon presents an institutionalised selection of works, the archive can be endlessly reread through a non-hierarchical lens. Archival rearrangements unveil cases ignored by the canon and dismantle the implicit values that constituted the canon in the first place. The archive thus relaunches the cycle and aporias of the avant-garde: the avant-garde begins by confronting the canon to be subsequently canonised and institutionalised itself. From a feminist standpoint, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* offer a way out of this iteration between archival rediscovery and canonisation of avant-gardes. While Moreno adopts the role of the archivist and rewrites the legacy of European avant-gardes, bringing to light a “forgotten” feminist artist, Ojeda designs her novel as an archive itself, compiling diverse documents and forcing readers to become archivists and reconstruct an overlooked case. In the end, both novels use fiction to place apocryphal artists in the archive of avant-gardes, undermining the material evidence, authenticity and originality of archived instances. Their fictional avant-gardes thus infiltrate the archive to thematise and sabotage its logics of inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, their apocryphal condition blocks any attempt to retrieve a feminine counter-canon from the archive, which would ultimately reinforce essentialised identities and divisions based on gender binarism. Instead, by exposing themselves as counterfeit entities, these fictional avant-gardes dismantle the pairing of gender and authorship that governs art history.

An Affective Outlook on Female Avant-gardists

Feminist theory highlights the fact that affects carry their own historicity within themselves and cannot be split from the context in which they circulate. Linda Åhäll argues that affects are always partial and contextualised: “[it] is about how we become invested in social norms, it is about the affective investments in gender as a social norm” (2018: 41). As an instrument of categorisation, gender shapes social norms and regulates bodily behaviours, necessarily permeating affects. Social structures based on gender divisions are arbitrary and contextual but also internalised and normalised as common sense. Given their social circulation, affects are linked to gender dynamics that “go without saying”. Such arbitrary gendered norms are embodied through habits predetermining affective responses adequate to each social interaction.

Concepts such as Sara Ahmed’s “affect aliens” and Clare Hemmings’ “affective dissonance” open feminist political avenues through affect. Both are defined as feelings of discomfort, “a judgment arising from the distinction between experience and the world” (Hemmings, 2012: 157). Affective alienation and dissonance arise when bodily responses to certain situations do not match socially expected reactions. As explained by Ahmed: “If we are disappointed by something that we expected would make us happy, then we generate explanations of why that thing is disappointing” (2010: 37). From a feminist standpoint, such a dissonance between experiences and mores can trigger a desire to rectify the unjust. An affective clash between patriarchal norms and female reactions exhibits potential for transformation: it can inspire us to seek alternative politico-cultural paradigms.

The historicity of affects permeates the affective dimension of fictional avant-gardes. Since affects are inherently partial and contextualised, avant-gardist communities echo their contexts of emergence, mirroring unconsciously shared meanings and perceptions that secure gendered social structures through habits and bodily interactions. However, affect also provides an angle to reshape the archive and, with it, the idea of an avant-gardist community. Ann Cvetkovich defines “archives of feeling” as reviewing “cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (2003: 7). Archives of feeling constitute alternative modes of knowledge: stressing the affective flows embodied in archived documents, they rewrite institutionalised art history. Archived cultural artifacts can thus be reread to invoke the ways of life that produced and experienced them: “forms of affective life that have not

solidified into institutions, organisations, or identities” (2003: 9). Rearranging the archive can unveil the affects linking archived elements and life experiences, both at the past of their production and present of exploring them. Affective rereadings ultimately lead to an alternative cultural paradigm: one that highlights the affective encounters that both underlie and exceed institutionalised art.

In sum, affective rereadings of the archive can redesign established models of the author. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will examine how *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* rearrange the archive of avant-gardes and, with it, the notion of the avant-garde itself. I will focus on their use of the lost artist motif as a means of rereading art history and redefining the individual and gendered figure of the avant-garde artist. Both novels portray fictional avant-gardes that are actually an apocryphal and collaborative creation. In this way, they dismantle individuality and originality and highlight the affective flows that permeate artworks, making room for a notion of authorship devoid of a subject and, therefore, gender identity. Underlying the name of the author, in the end, connections between artworks and affects allow for collective voices to emerge. In this sense, both novels challenge the sexist perspective that I noted in the previous chapters. To a certain extent, Moreno and Ojeda fictionalise fictional avant-gardes: they offer a feminist angle from which fictional avant-gardes can be retold. *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* draw upon the affective dissonance of women artists who face gendered social structures and literary circles. They explore affective exchanges between women resulting in feminist artworks that challenge the interdependent concepts of authorship and canon. Ultimately, their apocryphal avant-gardists emerge from a reordered archive and are unascrivable to any individual subject, embodying collective voices beyond restrictive concepts of the avant-garde and gender identity themselves.

María Moreno’s Apocryphal Avant-gardist

Moreno published her first and only novel in 1992, later reissued and enlarged in 2013. *El Affair Skeffington* is structured as a *mise en abyme*: a narrator named María Moreno blurs boundaries between author and storyteller while reconstructing the life and oeuvre of the apocryphal avant-gardist Dolly Skeffington. The novel is composed of four separate parts. The first and final parts are a preface and afterword by the author/narrator Moreno reflecting on Dolly’s adventures and her quest to trace those adventures. In them, Moreno adopts a first-person narrator to describe

her writing strategies but also to contextualise the novel in relation to the Argentine public sphere of both the late 1980s and early 2010s. Preface and afterword thus reflect on the reception of the novel and outline its political standpoint regarding topics such as democratic culture and feminism. The second part includes a selection of poems allegedly written by Dolly, while the third presents comments on those poems, in the form of pieces of literary criticism, attributed once again to Moreno. The novel's composition thus mirrors the kaleidoscopic structure seen in *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...*. It grants its readers an active role in the task of reconstructing the avant-gardist poetics and life of Dolly by means of juxtaposing different narrative perspectives, literary genres and non-fictional texts. Moreover, *El Affair Skeffington* establishes a chronological link between its date of publication and the scenario where it situates its protagonist. Dated in 1992 and 2013, the preface and afterword comment on the avant-gardist and ebullient Paris of the interwar period. In this way, Dolly is portrayed as a fictional avant-gardist emerging from a retrospective rearrangement of the archive of twentieth-century avant-gardes.

The apocryphal Dolly Skeffington was first introduced by Moreno in 1984, in the magazine *alfonsina*, where she published a short article titled “La periodista borrada”. She mentioned the “dudosa existencia” of the “olvidada periodista y poeta” Dolly Skeffington, alongside a poem presumably written by Dolly and translated by the also apocryphal Rosa Montana. More importantly, Moreno announced future repetitions of this same writing strategy: “algún día contaremos íntegra su verdadera historia”. Moreno invoked Dolly again in 1991 in the magazine *Cuaderno de existencia lesbiana*. In the article “María Moreno presenta a Dolly Skeffington”, she presented a series of poems signed by Dolly and described the creative process behind this apocryphal poet:

En 1983 yo estaba gravemente enferma. El dolor era combatido con una droga [...] llamada Klosidol. Durante los insomnios era común que apareciera ese juego de palabras: Klosidol, Klosidoll, Klosidolly –a quien era inevitable llamar mi buena amiga, por último Dolly. Solía oír voces [que] sonaban como las traducciones de poetisas norteamericanas hechas por Diana Bellessi. Por distraerme escribí alguno de los versos de Dolly, pensando que ya habían sido escritos. Vi por ese entonces una película con Bette Davis: La señora Skeffington. Bautizada la criatura sólo cabía la pregunta: ¿Puede una intelectual que ha sido amiga íntima del exilio brillante –Paris 1917/30– desaparecer sin dejar huellas? (in Arnés, 2016: 27).

In this passage, Moreno set the guidelines later explored in *El Affair Skeffington*. First,

with the epithets “borrada”, “olvidada” and “dudosa”, Moreno aimed to reconstruct the “huellas” of a poet forgotten by the canon. The apocryphal Dolly is thus part of a series of “lost” avant-garde artists, including Saer’s Gutiérrez and Bolaño’s Lima, Belano and Cesárea. The enigmas and pursuits elicited by each give rise to different standpoints on avant-gardes and the links between art and politics. While *Los detectives salvajes* followed Lima and Belano’s trajectories to re-enact their radicalism, *La grande* looked back at Gutiérrez’s experiences to come to terms with the past and refound community in the aftermath of political violence. By quoting Bellessi’s²² anthology of women poets, however, Moreno places Dolly within a decidedly feminist framework. The lost poet Dolly enables a feminist angle on fictional avant-gardes, as *El Affair Skeffington* advances a feminist perspective challenging the gendered nature of both the novels I studied before and canonical definitions of the avant-garde. Moreover, Dolly’s apocryphal status exceeds the novel itself. Through mentions and quotes in magazines, Moreno gave her a public presence engaged with debates typical of post-dictatorial Argentina, such as the reconstruction of the public sphere after military repression and censorship, and the role of culture in establishing a democratic consensus.

A Feminist Voice in the Democratic Transition

Moreno played a leading role during the Argentine democratic transition in terms of combining literature and feminism. In 1983, she became editor in chief of two significant periodicals: the supplement “La Mujer” of the newspaper *Tiempo Argentino* and the feminist magazine *alfonsina*. Both aimed to renew journalism and literature from a feminist angle. While “La Mujer” is widely considered a pioneering feminist periodical in the Argentine mass media (Ulanosky, 1997), *alfonsina* defined itself, in the cover of its first issue, as the “primer periódico para mujeres”. Both periodicals outlined a feminist standpoint distanced from mainstream women’s magazines such as *Gente* or *Para Ti*. In this sense, they resumed a process of social modernisation and renovation of mores that, before being brought to a halt by military dictatorships, had been promoted by magazines such as *Primera Plana* and *Claudia* during the 1960s. For instance, *Claudia* was widely read until its discontinuation in 1973 and has been labelled as “la revista femenina de la mujer moderna de los años 60” (Cosse, 2011: 32, emphasis

²² Diana Bellessi is one of the most renowned poets in post-dictatorial Argentina. Her feminist concerns led her to found the magazine *Feminaria* (1988-2007) and compile the anthology of US female poets *Contéstame, baila mi danza* (1984).

in original). Under the direction of Moreno, “La Mujer” and *alfonsina* radicalised the format of the women’s magazine, which in *Claudia*, despite its efforts to modernise mores and habits of consumption, still reinforced certain gender divisions. For example, one issue advised housewives how to take care of their husbands: “Cuídelo amorosamente. Pero cuídelo discretamente ¡Qué bendición es una esposa que no fastidia nunca!” (in Cosse, 2011: 40).

Edited by a small independent publisher, the name of *alfonsina* evoked the iconic poet Alfonsina Storni;²³ it also echoed the surname of the recently elected president Raúl Alfonsín. The magazine represented a feminist trend stemming from the urban cultural scene that, during the 1976-1983 dictatorship, was known as “under porteño”. In the words of Moreno herself: “Creo que mi marca, de todos modos, viene más del under porteño que del feminismo académico o político” (Link, 2001). The magazine’s header, under the title “Estado Civil”, questioned heteronormative mandates, political parties, and economic enterprises seeking profits from their periodicals: “el diario que no se casa con nadie” (in de Leone, 2011: 230). Furthermore, *alfonsina* defined its readers as women who “detestan las revistas femeninas, o que simplemente no se identifican con ellas” (in de Leone, 2011: 231). This feminist focus mirrored the sections structuring each issue. For example, “Personas” included interviews with renowned women like María Elena Walsh²⁴ or Hebe de Bonafini.²⁵ “Secrétaire” echoed the most recent debates on feminism from around the globe. Finally, under “Edictos policiales”, Rosa L. de Grossman²⁶ published texts questioning police and judiciary harassment on sexual diversity.

“La Mujer” and *alfonsina* allowed Moreno to intervene in widespread debates about the role of culture when consolidating democracy. For instance, she questioned Alfonsín’s comments regarding a meeting with Margaret Thatcher in the aftermath of the Malvinas War: “con las mujeres es difícil discutir: me gustaría más encontrarme con el señor Thatcher” (in de Leone, 2011: 233). In response, Moreno “reminded” Alfonsín that a vast number of his voters were actually women, and accused him of using a “simple lugar misógino” instead of focusing on “defender los intereses del pueblo” (in de Leone, 2011: 233). Moreno also undertook a

²³ Alfonsina Storni was a pioneer of female professional writing in Latin America. Her poem collections, such as *Ocre* (1925) and *Poemas de Amor* (1926), were later reread through a feminist lens.

²⁴ Mostly known as a children’s literature author, María Elena Walsh was also a feminist activist whose poems and articles mirrored a lifelong struggle against gender inequality.

²⁵ Hebe de Bonafini is one of the founders of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a human rights organisation of Argentine mothers whose sons and daughters were kidnapped and “disappeared” during the military dictatorship.

²⁶ Rosa L. de Grossman was actually the pseudonym of the poet and sociologist Néstor Perlongher. During the 1970s, Perlongher was one of the founders of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual.

campaign in favour of legal abortion, which she consciously linked to the political events and human rights violations of the dictatorship:

Una madre que aborta sería equivalente, si no he entendido mal, a los generales del Proceso. [...] De lo que se deduce que los embriones que no han alcanzado la vida serían homologables a –la cita del general Camps y el genocidio que vivió la Argentina entre 1972 y 1980 lo sugieren– los argentinos puestos en parrilla en la Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada (in de Leone, 2011: 248).

In the post-dictatorial context, “La Mujer” and *alfonsina* were published alongside other emblematic magazines, such as *Punto de Vista*, which aimed to reconstruct a public sphere that had been damaged by political violence and censorship. Directed by renowned figures such as Sarlo, Piglia, Altamirano, and Gramuglio, *Punto de Vista* aimed to redefine the profile of the intellectual by reassessing previous ideals and advocating democratic practices (De Diego, 2003: 202). For *Punto de Vista*, democratisation demanded a pluralistic exchange of ideas beyond intransigent and radicalised ideological standpoints. The magazine endorsed Alfonsín’s candidacy, in whom they recognised an anti-authoritarian stance apt to lead an “ethical restoration of society” (Mercader, 2021: 121). *Punto de Vista* also privileged the question of memory, and attempted to redefine a national identity that had been undermined by the effects of dictatorial repression and the Malvinas War. Opposed to the “historia oficial” of the dictatorship, the magazine reviewed former generations of intellectuals and the literary tradition, repositioning authors and periodicals such as Domingo Sarmiento, *Martín Fierro*, *Contorno*, Jorge Luis Borges, and *Sur* within a revamped national lineage (Patiño, 1997: 7). It did so from a renovated theoretical angle, adopting the sociology of culture in place of the structuralist and post-structuralist theories that had dominated the cultural field in the 1970s. The magazine introduced the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams into Argentina and promoted exchanges with Latin American figures like Ángel Rama and António Cândido.

Despite *Punto de Vista*’s efforts to reconstruct the public sphere through a democratic lens, on the one hand, and renovate the theoretical toolkit of literary studies, on the other, feminism and gender theory were almost completely absent from its pages. Moreno’s interventions in the media thus advanced an alternative view of the democratic transition, championing feminist authors beyond the framework of *Punto de Vista* and its influences. Moreover, Moreno outlined a transnational legacy of women writers beyond the Argentine

tradition. Besides “La Mujer” and *alfonsina*, Moreno also wrote a regular column in the literary magazine *Babel* (1988-1991). Featuring young postmodern writers of the time –such as Martín Caparrós, Alan Pauls, Daniel Guebel and Sergio Bizzio– *Babel* was a landmark of the cultural change experienced in Argentina between the 1980s and 1990s. Following the disillusionment of intellectuals with democracy and Alfonsín, and during a soaring economic crisis, *Babel* aimed to redesign the relationship between literature and politics. The magazine performed “un olvido productivo de la tradición literaria”, allowing its writers to “posicionarse contra las escrituras bajo el signo de la memoria y el exilio que adquieren un rol hegemónico en el marco de la literatura argentina de la transición” (Klein, 2014: 12). *Babel* championed a “política de la literatura” focused on formal experimentation, distanced from both the morals of democratic commitment and “los imperativos de claridad, masividad y rentabilidad del mercado” (Rodríguez-Alfonso, 2021: 102).

In *Babel*, Moreno’s column “La mujer pública” dedicated articles to the lives and works of women such as Djuna Barnes, Marie Bashkirtseff, Luce Irigaray and Katherine Mansfield. This cosmopolitan group supplements the feminist rearrangement of the archive previously outlined in *alfonsina*. *alfonsina*’s slogan of “primer periódico para mujeres” aimed to enable an innovative feminist perspective while reclaiming the legacy of a vast number of female writers. The name *alfonsina* was used to sign every leader published in the magazine. Its first issue was opened by the question “¿Por qué?” and the name of Alfonsina launched a programmatic declaration: “porque hay nombres de mujeres que no necesitan apellidos. [...] Porque si hubo una Alfonsina que entró al mar para buscar la muerte, miles de Venus saldrán de las mismas aguas para cantar al amor y a la vida” (in de Leone, 2011: 236). The magazine adopted as its collective signature the forename of a pioneering female author, Alfonsina, strong enough to divest itself of the law of the father represented by the patronymic surname. *alfonsina* thus shaped a distinctively female but also collective voice proper to a disruptive political stance: “desde hoy vamos a implantar un alegre casamiento del horno con la máquina de escribir [...] porque deseamos luchar por el país en lugar de entregarle el cuerpo de nuestros hijos” (in de Leone, 2011: 235). This feminist standpoint designed its precursors as a group of women including the biblical and political figure of Eva,²⁷ fictional characters like Rubén Darío’s

²⁷ The name of Eva refers to both Eve, the biblical figure in the Book of Genesis, and María Eva Duarte, Evita. During her short but highly influential political career, Evita ran the Fundación Eva Perón and championed

princess,²⁸ and counterculture icons like Janis Joplin. This foundational leader exemplifies Moreno's literary and political strategy. She produced a feminist intervention in the post-dictatorial scenario that looked back at an archive of female precursors, designing, in retrospect, a collective and perpetually resumable feminist voice.

The proliferation of pseudonyms and apocryphal authors in *alfonsina* mirrors this collective enunciation. In addition to Dolly Skeffington, Rosa Montana and Rosa L. de Grossman, its editorial board included an imaginary "Mariana Imas". Easily noticeable in orality, this name is a wordplay between the syntagms "María" and "y más", suggesting that the direction of the magazine can be only attributed to an open-ended group of women. Matthew Edwards argues that these dialogues between pseudonyms and "fake" authors dismantle the patriarchal symbolic order, advancing alternative ways of authorship and a "distinctly more visible representation of sexual and gender-based marginality" (2016: 97). Moreover, "María Moreno" itself is a pseudonym masking her birth name Cristina Forero. For Lucía de Leone, rather than a pen name, "María Moreno" encompasses "operaciones de multiplicación del sujeto textual y de repliegue e inestabilidad de la firma autoral" (2011: 242). While Moreno herself has admitted adopting the surname from a former husband, it also establishes an intertextual link that feminises the national hero Mariano Moreno, an independence leader and the first Argentine journalist ever recognised as such.

Moreno's project of shaping a feminist voice during the democratic transition deconstructed the notion of authorship and public image of the intellectual. With pseudonyms and apocryphal inventions, she displaced authorial authority in favour of a collective and unstable enunciation. As exemplified by *alfonsina's* lengthy list of precursors, such a redesigned figure of the author stemmed from a rearrangement of the archive in search for former women writers. Moreover, Moreno's choice of cosmopolitan figures responded to the crisis of national identity that, as I noted before, derived from the effects of dictatorial repression and the Malvinas War. Her global selection of feminist influences exceeded the boundaries of Argentine culture and the national citizen-subject, devising its own literary tradition in defiance of the nation-state paradigm. In the same vein, I will now examine how *El Affair Skeffington* situates its fictional avant-garde in Paris. The novel fictionalises and rewrites the archive of European avant-gardes

women's suffrage.

²⁸ Rubén Darío published "Sonatina" in 1893, and the poem's first verse is one of the most famous in Latin American literature: "La princesa está triste. Qué tendrá la princesa?"

as a means of enabling a feminist stance that eludes a national collective identity in crisis. I will ultimately argue that her fictional avant-garde envisions a feminist literary ethics that challenges national and gendered dynamics, allowing for the creation of both art and community beyond the established parameters of the avant-garde and gender themselves.

Re-mapping Female Affects

El Affair Skeffington depicts the city of Paris as both a spatial-temporal frame and intertextual grid of literary references, ultimately challenging the boundaries of the nation-state in different ways to the fictional avant-gardes I studied before. While *Libro de Manuel* also situated its plot in Paris, Cortázar portrayed a Latin Americanised city marked by the presence of political exiles, artists and activists, whose European endeavours aimed to influence the Latin American scenario. On the other hand, *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* responded to the crisis of the nation-state through contrasting perspectives. While Lima and Belano hastily passed through Paris as part of their flight throughout the world, Gutiérrez reversed this itinerary and returned from Europe to the hyperlocal setting of Santa Fe. Now, *El Affair Skeffington*'s fictional avant-garde is devoid of a Latin American identity and directly conceived within a European scenario. However, the preface and afterword trigger a dialogue between post-dictatorial Argentina and Dolly's adventures in interwar Paris. Rather than portraying artists and intellectuals that traditionally looked up to Paris as the "capitale littéraire de l'Amérique latine", Moreno places an apocryphal avant-gardist in the Eurocentric circle of Paris-Lesbos.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Paris-Lesbos was formed by female writers in the Parisian left bank who expressed same-sex concerns in their poetics and lives. They shaped a community inspired by a feminist and lesbian reappropriation of Sapphic²⁹ decadence, as well as by the communitarian utopian tradition of American expatriates. The leading figures of Paris-Lesbos were Colette, Djuna Barnes, Renée Vivien, and Natalie Barney, among others. The multi-millionaire heiress Barney owned a salon that has been defined as a hub of expatriate women's modernism and a lesbian cultural intervention (Winning, 2013). Her salon was the core of the Sapphic community of Paris-Lesbos: "The fêtes and performances that she held in the garden of her villa at Neuilly in the early 1900s and her weekly Friday salon from 1909 [...]"

²⁹ Sappho was an Archaic Greek poet from the island of Lesbos. She is well known as a symbol of love and desire between women. In the nineteenth century, Sappho was co-opted by the Decadent Movement, as shown by Charles Baudelaire's "Lesbos" (1857).

recreated in modern Paris a social and artistic but also gender-fluid community of women, [...] a space in which women's same-sex desire was welcomed, normalised, and legitimated" (Longworth, 2019: 364). For instance, there was a small Doric temple in her garden, inscribed *Temple d'Amitié*, which symbolised their pagan and spiritual worship of female love. Barney also launched the *Académie des Femmes* to celebrate contemporary women writers, and poetry readings were regularly held in her Friday salon.

Feminist scholars have generally regarded the depiction of Paris in *El Affair Skeffington* as a suitable setting for developing bonds and intimacy between women. Space and affect are thus interwoven in a novel that traces a chronological bridge between Paris 1920s and post-dictatorial Argentina. Florencia Angilletta highlights a mutual concern between the Argentine transition and foundational moments of women's suffrage: "comparten el procesamiento del nuevo lugar de la mujer como la imaginación, también, de un nuevo espacio ficcional. [...] [A]unque el tiempo de la narración es a comienzos del siglo XX, opera una retórica sobre el tráfico de lecturas y de voces de mujeres en democracia" (2018: 98). Likewise, Gustavo Dessal defines *El Affair Skeffington* as "una novela que rescata el estallido de los arquetipos femeninos, corrompidos por una posguerra que acabó con los últimos restos morales del siglo XIX" (2007: 95). Moreno thus reflects on the reconstruction of the Argentine public sphere by looking back at an interwar Paris in which the social role of women was radically redefined.

El Affair Skeffington introduces its protagonist as Olivia Streethorse, a US *émigré* who arrives in Paris with her father, a rich businessman in the prosperous right bank. However, Olivia renames herself as Dolly Skeffington and undertakes an identitarian displacement matching her geographical move to the left bank: "La criaron bien, por eso ahora deseaba vivir mal. Entonces se quedó en la *rive gauche*, en el hotel *D'Anglaterra* como todo el mundo" (2013: 18, emphasis in original). Her clothing embodies this passage and places her figure in the unstable territory of gender dissidence. Dolly is shown as a pioneer of queer poses when adopting a masculine and proletarian apparel: "usaba una especie de guardapolvo gris de tela rústica, pantalones, gorra con visera en cuyo interior ocultaba el cabello y borceguíes de la Primera Guerra" (2013: 27). A new name and appearance also enable new relationships, beyond her father's wealth and heteronormative mandates. Dolly joins the circle of Paris-Lesbos and becomes the lover of Miss Barney and friend of Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes.

In this way, the novel turns the archive of female writers that Moreno had outlined in "La

Mujer” and *alfonsina* into concrete characters. Moreno’s transnational and feminist intervention in the Argentine tradition acquires fictional form in a displaced cultural scenario. Paris-Lesbos is thus an erotic and literary grid superimposed over the geographical map of Paris, where Dolly explores the affective dimension of a community made of women. As Laura Arnés argues: “implica repensar las relaciones entre los géneros literarios y sexuales como modos ineludibles en la configuración del tiempo, de los territorios, de la historia y sus narraciones. Aparecen vínculos (amistades, romances, pasiones) que se dan en un exilio asociado a la disidencia sexual y, desde esa marginalidad, ponen en cuestión las normas de sociabilidad” (2016: 33). Masiello also associates cosmopolitanism with sexual and gender dissidence. Brought together, expatriation and lesbianism elicit alternative means of community and produce “a need to speak beyond father and homeland, to announce the insufficiency of any single language” (2001: 171).

Dolly initiates a love relationship with the Dadaist artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven: “no eran amigas a la manera de París-Lesbos sino en un estilo de soldadesca soez y copas levantadas” (2013: 25). Dolly and Elsa build a female bond challenging every established norm of gender behaviour, even the model of Paris-Lesbos itself: “carecía de la decorosidad lesbiana con que los personajes de Djuna Barnes sugieren el suplicio de la *folie à deux*. [...] Podía ser la de dos hetairas pero que reciben en un burdel cubista” (2013: 29, emphasis in original). The avant-gardist nature of their art thus gives rise to disruptive female affects. Within the frame of Paris-Lesbos, but not entirely reducible to its guidelines, Moreno contrasts Barney’s salon with Dolly and Elsa’s metaphorical cubist brothel. Moreover, she portrays their bond as a “coloquio perpetuo entre los popes de dos vanguardias disidentes dentro de un movimiento tan moderno que ni siquiera puede otorgarse la concesión de existir” (2013: 30). Curiously enough, art historians Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson (2014) have recently argued that Elsa is nothing less than the original ideologue behind Duchamp’s ready-made *Fountain*. If Duchamp actually “stole” her idea, the figure of Elsa would rewrite the gendered genealogy of twentieth-century art in its entirety.

Dolly and Elsa combine aesthetic choices and life experiences. Opposed to Barney’s Sapphic and ethereal ambience, they favour an abject sense of female companionship: “Skeffington también criticaba el credo estético de Miss Barney, que rendía culto a la belleza y hacía de la virginidad un arma. [...] Las mujeres también son leche, sangre y excrementos. Los partos, el aborto espontáneo, la violación, deben ser dominados pero no por abstención” (2013:

51). Accordingly, Dolly and Elsa's relationship exceeds any aestheticisation or essentialisation of feminine identities. As a duo, they visit bars and engage in erotic and alcoholic exchanges with male workers and social outcasts. Moreno's fictional avant-garde thus echoes the ephemeral moments of community I highlighted in *Pobrecito Poeta...* and *La grande*, in which sharing drinks and humour were affective means of designing a literary ethics. However, while Dalton and Saer's characters formed masculine circles based on a homosocial pact, objectifying and relegating women to secondary roles, Dolly and Elsa turn drinking and wandering into a renewed sense of female camaraderie: "cuando una llevaba a la otra al baño y la limpiaba y vestía luego de una borrachera, o tenía que levantarla de la taza del inodoro si había perdido la conciencia, parecían madre e hija" (2013: 29).

This abject angle on female companionship results in a typically avant-gardist outbreak in Barney's salon. Just as historical avant-gardes like Dada and Surrealism embarked on a mission to *épater le bourgeois*, Dolly and Elsa show up drunk and aim to *épater* the *Académie des Femmes*. They interrupt one of Paris-Lesbos' Friday soirées and jointly sing a slanderous chorus: "Pequeños yoes, pequeños yoes / no necesitaríais tantos velos y gasas / si cada día no debierais remolcar vuestra mierda / a la estatura de besos colombinos" (2013: 52). They attack Paris-Lesbos' narcissistic "pequeños yoes" and elitist environment, seeking instead to de-subjectivise themselves in the streets next to the working class. As the narrator recalls: "Skeffington deseaba un más allá del sexo sin que eso la convirtiera en un espíritu. Al salón privado y exclusivo de las damas oponía la calle y el nomadismo de clases" (2013: 52). Echoing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of nomadism, Dolly pursues a way of being aiming to remain "in-between" spaces and identities, defined by movement and change: "The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another. [...] A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 380). Dolly's quest for a feminist community and affects, therefore, challenges the idea of a feminine essence. As I will now examine, her feminist stance produces artworks and modes of coexistence beyond fixed and gendered identities.

The Feminist Avant-garde

Dolly's initiatives overflow any fixed identity, even the feminine ideal of Paris-Lesbos. As

Dessal argues: “Ni esposa, ni madre, ni homosexual, ni bisexual, ni escritora, ni artista, ella no es nada de todo eso, y es todo eso a la vez” (2007: 96). The novel thus offers a fictional counterpart to concepts such as the “huelga” and “deserción” of gender identities that I explored before. In this vein, Dolly’s reflections on poetry echo the project of dismantling gender, as disrupting binary identities also undermines the notion of authorship and deems it inadequate for a feminist avant-garde. She teaches herself psychoanalytic theory, drawing upon Freudian ideas to outline her poetic programme. First, she blurs distinctions between imagination and reality: “Al leer en *La novela familiar del neurótico* que los padres imaginarios no eran más que los padres reales tal cual los veíamos con los ojos maravillados de la infancia, creyó imposible revelar la verdad de la propia vida. Al principio fue una desilusión, luego un alivio: la autobiografía era una quimera” (2013: 22-23). Then, she quotes the idea of self-analysis to combine writing poetry and interpreting life events: “Escribiría poemas que, aún leídos al azar, hilaran la historia de alguien desde su infancia hasta la cercanía de la muerte. [...] Guardaría los frutos en un cajón y los dejaría añejar: ‘Si el relato de la propia vida es ya una interpretación, escribirlo actuará sobre el inconsciente como la palabra del psicoanalista y, al pasar un tiempo, [...] los analizaría’” (2013: 24). Dolly devises her literature as a dialectical link between poetry and life established through constant rewriting. Since, as she understands Freud, comprehending one’s experiences is just an illusion, she writes in a way that dismantles authorial authority. She repeatedly and endlessly writes, interprets and rewrites a single lifelong poem, ultimately exposing the multiplicity that underlies not only every artistic endeavour but every account of one’s life too.

The narrator Moreno writes a piece of literary criticism on Dolly’s works. She quotes preeminent figures of feminist theory such as María Zambrano, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, and argues that “Dolly Skeffington trata de reconstruir la posición de las mujeres en la factura de una obra que la publicación bajo firma de un autor único expropiaría. [...] Llamaba ‘obra’ a la obra escrita y no a la publicada. Reescribiendo constantemente difirió el momento de someterse al juicio del otro” (2013: 56). Dolly’s poetic radicalism would then challenge both heteronormative social roles and literary institutions. Just as she escapes established mores and fixed identities, her feminist literary production renounces authorship: “En todo lo que ha experimentado puede leerse un feminismo a contrapelo –que intenta disolver el yo en lugar de afirmar su diferencia–, preguntas anticipatorias sobre el alcance de la palabra ‘autor’, y la propiedad de la producción artística, una política sexual” (2013: 56). Her constant and deferred

rewriting boycotts the idea of a published oeuvre and the individualised authorship that it implies.

Dolly's feminist dismantling of authorship challenges the canonisation of historical avant-gardes: as long as Dolly's works exceed the proper name, they escape the reach of art institutions. Her "feminismo a contrapelo" thus contests the often-denounced neutralisation and museumification of avant-gardes. Dolly overcomes the aporia of avant-gardes through a paradoxical renouncement: opposing the fixed oeuvre and authorship takes her name away from canonical accounts of interwar Paris. In her own voice, Dolly states that "un autor es una construcción ligada a la oportunidad de la historia, el éxito de la traducción, los cambios de la ciudad, el trabajo físico de los colaboradores y las distintas escuelas de interpretación" (2013: 32). Facing such a transcendental identity, Dolly's avant-gardism stays one step ahead of the institutional circulation of art. She privileges the artistic process over its final product, taking feminist art out of the salon and into the streets. As the narrator recalls, her "interés por la construcción del autor se deslizó hacia el interés del 'arte que va de nadie a nadie': [...] se trataría de un texto de azar organizado donde el lenguaje tuviera la posibilidad de hacer de las suyas" (2013: 37).

Dolly visits bars where she aims to find the "arte que va de nadie a nadie" amidst the flow of alcohol and words. While drinking at her table, Dolly listens and writes down bits of conversation heard from her neighbours: "descubrió que sin que ninguno de los responsables se diera cuenta y hablando desde distintos lugares del salón habían construido una larguísima y perfecta frase" (2013: 37). Later, she carries a five-metre roll of fabric through bars and asks local patrons to write spontaneous phrases on it. A non-individualised artistic project thus emerges from Dolly's wanderings and encounters with unnamed drinkers. Dolly's project mirrors the paradoxical avant-gardism that I noted in the previous novels. Each fictional avant-garde I studied so far disregards written works in favour of a literary ethics aiming to live literature through affects, wanderings, and reunions. In the same vein, Dolly's shift from poetry to bars combines her disruptive personal relationships and the poetic dismantling of authorship.

Dolly's literary ethics later returns to the salon to turn it upside down. Her condition as a lost poet not only goes unnoticed among canonical Surrealist and Dadaist artists but also questions the status of Paris-Lesbos itself as an essentially feminine avant-garde. Titled *La frase más larga del mundo*, Dolly showcases the roll in her first and only exhibit in Berthe Weill's

salon, which she names *Prenome*. In this way, she appears in the public sphere with a misspelled title (*prenome*, instead of *prénom*) recalling her own change of name when arriving in Paris. The ephemeral nature of the exhibit and every piece shown in it reinforces the motif of constant flight permeating her life and works. *La frase más larga del mundo* was displayed along the entire salon and revealed “un exceso de ‘rosas’, ‘nunca te olvidaré’, ‘corazón herido’ y otras expresiones que daban una idea de lo que las clases populares consideraban digno de dejar escrito” (2013: 46). *Prenome* gets no attention from the press but receives the visit of the roll’s anonymous authors: “algunos parroquianos de los bares de extramuros se animaron a entrar en Berthe Weill para constatar su participación, [...] amén de *boire un litre* a expensas del espíritu democrático de la dueña de casa” (2013: 49, emphasis in original). While Dolly’s initial project “descended” from the salon to the bar, its outcome reverses this path when the bar patrons “ascend” to the salon and share a drink within a supposedly more sophisticated ambience.

Moreover, *Prenome* exhibits two art installations that draw upon affects and community. The novel includes two ekphrastic descriptions of Dolly’s works that present readers with possible avenues for a feminist revamping of the avant-garde. First, with the title of *Joylises*, Dolly displays a series of women’s names over a giant surface replicating the cover of *Ulysses*’ first edition. Every woman involved in the production and distribution of James Joyce’s masterpiece is included: Harriet Weaver, its English editor, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, critics of *Little Review*, Myrsine Moschos, a young clerk at Shakespeare and Company, and the typists Raymonde Linossier and Cyprian Beach, among others. Just as *El Affair Skeffington* depicts an apocryphal avant-garde woman to redraw the setting of interwar Paris, Dolly adopts a feminist standpoint to reread the Parisian context in which *Ulysses* was published. The series is followed up by newspaper clippings of the legal proceedings endured by the book and its female editors. Then, Dolly stamps two graphical arrows over a copy of Sylvia Beach and Joyce’s publishing contract: “la que llegaba hasta ‘Joyce’ estaba llena de sellos con el signo pesos mientras que la que concluía en ‘Beach’ estaba trazada sobre las columnas de un libro de contabilidad [...] y un signo de interrogación” (2013: 47). In this way, Dolly gives pictorial form to her goal of deconstructing the proprietary figure of the author. As a retrospective act of feminist redemption, she gives visibility to the silenced women that participated in the process of making a literary oeuvre out of *Ulysses*.

Dolly also exhibits *Mothernisme*, which consists of a map of Paris overshadowed by the

feminine symbol. There, she added the names and addresses where expatriate women such as Isadora Duncan or Sylvia Beach live. Moreover, “*Mothernisme* contenía también direcciones de prostíbulos como *La Belle Poule* o restaurantes regenteados por mujeres como *Chez Rosalie*” (2013: 47). At the core of Paris-Lesbos, in one of Paris’ most renowned salons, Dolly’s map materialises a symbolic view of the city. While Paris-Lesbos had already reshaped the spatial coordinates of Paris as a distinctively feminine milieu, Dolly inserts popular locations like brothels and canteens. In this way, *El Affair Skeffington* not only situates its protagonist within Paris-Lesbos as a scenario in which her avant-gardist postulates could be developed. Dolly’s literary ethics and ephemeral artworks ultimately rearrange the scene and legacy of Paris-Lesbos itself, enabling modes of art and community beyond restrictive notions of gender and identity.

Archives Devoid of Authorship

The novel includes a self-reflexive preface and afterword describing the process of creating Dolly. When opening the preface, the author/narrator Moreno states: “Avergüenza empezar – ¡una vez más!– con el hallazgo de un manuscrito, no de John Shade, Emily L. o Gabrielle Sarrera sino de una total desconocida: Dolly Skeffington. [...] El manuscrito le fue entregado a John Glassco, cronista de los expatriados norteamericanos en París durante los años locos” (2013: 11). These first lines imbue the literary technique of the frame story with a twofold feminist and apocryphal perspective. First, Moreno undertakes the mission of redeeming a forgotten female writer; then, she places such an apocryphal figure amidst a series of fictional characters like John Shade³⁰ and Emily L,³¹ and the also apocryphal Gabrielle Sarrera. She also mentions the unreliable sources from which Dolly’s life and oeuvre can be reconstructed: “El único documento sobre la vida de la autora es lo que su biógrafo pudo atestiguar en Greenwich Village, y luego en París, donde los dos eran amigos” (2013: 13).

Moreno initiates her quest for Dolly as a way of contesting Glassco’s empirical account of interwar Paris. The question that introduced Dolly, as I quoted from its first appearance in *Cuaderno de existencia lesbiana*, was: “¿Puede una intelectual que ha sido amiga íntima del exilio brillante –Paris 1917/30– desaparecer sin dejar huellas?”. Accordingly, the novel mentions

³⁰ John Sade is the apocryphal poet whose writings are featured and commented in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale fire* (1962).

³¹ The protagonist of Marguerite Duras’ *Emily L.* is a female poet who ignores her literary success, whose youth poems were (unknowingly to her) published by her father.

that Glassco received Dolly's manuscripts but "desestima que la entrega, hecha en calidad de 'recuerdo por los años vividos en común y regalo personal', fuera una demanda de publicación" (2013: 11). Glassco did not include any reference to Dolly in his renowned *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970). Instead, Moreno attributes to Glassco an also apocryphal anthology of forgotten artists, *Los que no fueron*, where he allegedly included a portrait of Dolly. Moreno details that this book "no figura en los catálogos pero puede encontrarse un ejemplar traducido al castellano en la biblioteca feminista de Madrid" (2013: 12). Therefore, she reconstructs Dolly's life and works as a patchwork of testimonies and documents, juxtaposing Glassco's empirical and apocryphal books, her own conjectures, Dolly's poems, and an interview with her granddaughter. Moreno's patchwork thus turns Glassco's sexist reading of the period against itself. It interweaves canonical art history and counterfeit sources, finding in Glassco's omission the chance to resist any static and definitive version of Dolly.

For Anahí Mallol, this loose interlacing of quotes and references undermines canonical accounts of twentieth-century avant-gardes, such as Glassco's, which rest upon the name of the author to establish hierarchies and exclusions: "Como un principio de anarquía o caos, desde el delito de su escritura, permite pensar otras posiciones, otras interpretaciones, en su intento por dar voz a quien no tuvo voz, por dar cierta densidad o complejidad al objeto de catálogo" (2002: 124). The apocryphal Dolly thus allows Moreno to infiltrate and dismantle the archive of interwar avant-gardes. Gabriel Giorgi and Germán Garrido argue that *El Affair Skeffington* draws upon cosmopolitanism to reinvent modes of sexual dissidence and community from a Latin Americanist standpoint: "The displaced gaze from Latin American margins becomes an opportunity for explorations on questions of gender and forms of life that amply exceed the legacies of traditional cosmopolitanisms" (2015: 269). Placed amidst renowned Parisian figures, Dolly's apocryphal nature represents an irreverent boycott of gendered and Eurocentric accounts of historical avant-gardes.

As outlined by Foucault, archived elements and archiving rules dialectically reflect each other. Brushing the archive against the grain not only unveils repressed and silenced instances but also exposes the archivist's position within the archive. Redeeming the figure of Dolly thus rearranges the archive of avant-gardes and alters its archiving rules, ultimately deconstructing the notion of the avant-garde itself. Adrián Cangi points out that María Moreno and Dolly Skeffington are mutual sides of a single literary autobiography: "Para inventarse a sí misma

requirió de un pasado literario donde evocarse erótica y políticamente. Un mito de origen como el de la *rive gauche* para afirmar una potencia artificial creadora en la mujer” (2007: 89). Moreno designs her authorial figure as mirroring the apocryphal Dolly, reinforcing this pairing of author and protagonist in the book cover, where she juxtaposes pseudonym and birth name: “María Moreno (Cristina Forero)”. She adopts herself the duplicity that the narrator later ascribes to Dolly: “En la vida de Skeffington el dos insiste: [...] tiene dos nombres, dos objetos de orientación sexual, dos formas de expresión: la escritura –dos estilos, dos géneros– y una suerte de arte conceptual, futuro pero sin público posible” (2013: 54).

In this vein, Moreno dedicates the afterword to exploring the interweaving of Dolly’s feminist ideas and her own career: “Las teorías de Dolly Skeffington son las mías. [...] Hice viajar en la máquina del tiempo polémicas que comenzaban a desarrollarse en los corrillos del feminismo lesbiano durante la transición democrática” (2013: 165). Just as Dolly blurs her individuality to privilege the collective and affective flows underlying art, Moreno describes her book as “una autobiografía bufa, escrita en tercera persona” (2013: 165). Dolly’s fictionalised poetics mirror the novel’s use of the archive, both aiming to boycott the authority of the author. In the afterword, Moreno lists the sources used during the writing process: “ocurrencias de bar, borradores de hipótesis, sentencias sin pruebas ni indicios, [...] sin el tedio de las relecturas exhaustivas y la investigación en archivos escritos en lenguas que desconozco” (2013: 165). She also reveals the apocryphal and counterfeit condition of the characters and theories quoted in the novel: “En *El Affair*... hay atribuciones falsas y falsos testimonios, apropiación y un tipo de plagio que invertía el sentido de lo plagiado para criticarlo” (2013: 169).

Moreno notes that this writing strategy became a political stance in the democratic transition: “Estas notas estaban destinadas a encomiar y difundir una riqueza cultural que les resultara imperdonable ignorar a machos intelectuales por demás locuaces en los primeros años de la democracia y habitualmente ávidos de una importación sin barreras” (2013: 169). The 2013 afterword, therefore, reminds us of the post-dictatorial revision of national identity. She recalls her goal of voicing feminist demands in the democratic public sphere, claiming that the apocryphal Dolly disrupted a cultural field predefined in masculine terms: “El resultado fue inesperado. Algunos imaginaron que todos los nombres eran apócrifos, otros que Dolly Skeffington había existido y criticaban que la edición no incluyera el nombre del traductor de sus poemas” (2013: 169). However, this reconstruction does not reflect the actual reception of *El*

Affair Skeffington in its original context. In fact, the magazine *Diario de poesía* devoted two articles to it in 1992, written by Pablo Bari and Osvaldo Aguirre, both highlighting “el juego especular entre los nombres de la autora y los de la escritora que deja su voz en otra boca. [...] Lo propio, observamos, resulta graciosamente lo que tiene de extraño el ser” (1992: 28). Moreover, these articles stressed the political potential of such a specular authorship: “El conflicto es estético y militante. El conflicto cae sobre el género” (1992: 28). This evidence does not undermine the arguments advanced in the novel’s afterword but illustrates Moreno’s infiltration and forgery of even her own archives. Replicating Dolly’s avant-gardist dismantling of authorship, the afterword does not give a faithful portrayal of the novel’s production and reception. Instead, it intervenes and rewrites those circumstances to elicit renewed meanings.

After publishing the novel, Moreno continued sharing publications with her apocryphal counterpart Dolly. Just as in *alfonsina* and *Cuaderno de existencia lesbiana*, Moreno remembers that “con una falta total de seriedad participé de festivales de poesía, a veces sin molestarme en aclarar que los poemas, si bien eran míos, no eran míos” (2013: 168-169). One of Dolly’s artistic guidelines was the impossible correspondence between discourse and experiences. Moreno adopts this stance in the final sentence of the book: “Por el relato de esas experiencias que no me pertenecen puedo reconocirme y reunir todas mis partes, hecho que no deja de tener la influencia de las teorías de Dolly Skeffington” (2013: 170). Back and forth quotes between novel, afterword and the print media make Dolly more than a fictional character. Moreno uses Dolly as an authorial figure that acquires public visibility and contests the sexist marginalisation of women writers, paradoxically, by negating its referentiality. Outlined as a potentially endless sequence of *mise en abymes*, Dolly’s voice becomes untraceable and thus boycotts the gendered proper name that acts as a parameter of value structuring the canon.

Just as *El Affair Skeffington* revolves around the lost Dolly, Ojeda’s *La desfiguración Silva* depicts the quest for the forgotten avant-gardist Gianella Silva. Both novels explore affective dissonances between women artists and their social circles to finally shape a feminist artistic stance. While Moreno placed the apocryphal Dolly in the ebullient interwar Paris, Ojeda situates the also apocryphal Gianella in Ecuador in the 1960s within the empirical avant-gardist circle of Tzantzismo. On the one hand, bringing these two contexts together highlights the persistent invisibilisation of women in the tradition of avant-gardes; on the other, it connects transnational and subsequent forms of feminist art and activism. However, Dolly and Gianella

differ in their contrasting possibilities for establishing female bonds. Dolly's affective explorations unfolded within the framework of Paris-Lesbos and her artworks enabled modes of community beyond gender binarism. In contrast, Gianella finds herself in a sexist scenario devoid of other women and her disruptive stance condemns her to solitude. However, it is the act of creating Gianella herself which elicits a renewed sense of community. Just as in *El Affair Skeffington* before, the novel also portrays the process of creating the apocryphal Gianella but now fictionalised and mediated through a group of characters, who both design her literary ethics and put it into play in their daily lives.

Mónica Ojeda's Feminist View of the 1960s and 1970s

La desfiguración Silva was published in Cuba in 2015 and was awarded the Premio Latinoamericano de Novela ALBA. In an interview with the Ecuadorian newspaper *El telégrafo*, Ojeda argued that, as a writer, “no abordo procesos políticos –ni para criticarlos ni para ensalzarlos–. Ni siquiera hago esbozos sobre las formas de hacer política en Latinoamérica; tampoco menciono gobernantes, ni hago apologías de patria” (in Hermann, 2014). Contrary to her claims, the novel does offer a renewed angle on the history of Latin American art and politics. From a feminist standpoint, it reviews the context of political radicalisation in which Cortázar and Dalton wrote *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta....* Moreover, *La desfiguración Silva* replicates the chronological dialogues seen in *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* when juxtaposing the 1960s and 1970s and their own contexts. The lost artist motif thus allows Ojeda to look back at the moment of the greatest artistic and political radicalism in Latin America. Her fictional avant-garde explores the links between affect and art through a feminist lens that echoes Moreno's challenge to the notions of authorship and gender. While Dolly's poems and exhibits boycotted gendered identities within a community of female poets, Gianella's solitude within a sexist circle condemns her works to oblivion. However, the lack of an oeuvre finally enables a feminist avant-garde beyond gender divisions and the artwork itself. The collective and retrospective creation of Gianella as an apocryphal figure questions and rewrites the gendered bias implicit in the concept of the avant-garde.

La desfiguración Silva replicates the technique of the *mise en abyme* seen in *El Affair Skeffington*. We learn about Gianella's life and works in the 1960s through research undertaken by university students in the 2010s. The novel retells Gianella's biography while depicting the

research itself, mirroring the chronological interplay between past and present that I examined in *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande*. Compared to Moreno's self-reflexive positioning as the author/narrator of her novel, though, *La desfiguración Silva* does not feature any unifying voice. Moreno presented herself as the archivist of *El Affair Skeffington*, foregrounding in the first person how she rewrote the archive of avant-gardes and placed an apocryphal feminist artist in it. Contrastingly, Ojeda composed her novel as an archive itself, including heterogeneous sources and testimonies without an overarching first-person narrator. Each chapter in the novel corresponds to a different point of view on Gianella. Among other genres and forms, it includes a biographical account of Gianella, the script of one of her films, an interview with a scholar who studied her works, and a third-person narration about the students who "rediscovered" her. It is the reader, therefore, who must adopt the role of the archivist, in charge of inspecting and rearranging these pieces to finally make sense of Gianella's spectral figure. By exposing the apocryphal status of their avant-garde artists, Moreno and Ojeda's meta-narrative angles interrogate the gendered bias of the fictional avant-gardes I studied before. *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* use fiction and affect to outline modes of artistic authorship and community beyond gendered identities and hierarchies.

Feminist Literature and Ni una Menos

I previously studied Moreno's authorial stance during the Argentine democratic transition, examining how, in both fiction and periodicals, she advanced a feminist standpoint aiming to intervene in the reconstruction of a democratic public sphere. Three decades later, Ojeda's articles in the mass media echoed this feminist legacy. She is part of a generation of female writers who reclaim a theoretical and political tradition of prior feminist intellectuals when participating in contemporary movements such as Ni una menos. In a context of intense feminist activism and massive demonstrations, Ojeda participated in heated discussions regarding gender oppression in both art institutions and society at large. *La desfiguración Silva* thus offers a fictional counterpart to Ojeda's interventions in public debates about gender violence and discrimination.

In 2017, Ojeda was nominated to the prestigious awards Bogotá 39 for the most promising Latin American writers under the age of thirty-nine. Only thirteen were women. The award placed Ojeda in a privileged position to posit feminist demands and play a part in the

massive demonstrations that spanned Latin America during the 2010s. Just as activists took to the streets to contest gender divisions and violence, Ojeda's interventions in the media questioned the impact of gender on the cultural field. For instance, in 2019 she was involved in a public controversy regarding the Premio Bienal de Novela Mario Vargas Llosa, one of the most prestigious in the Spanish-speaking world, which awards one Latin American or Spanish novelist a prize of 100,000 dollars. Alongside one hundred women writers, Ojeda signed a public letter highlighting the disproportionate ratio between male and female authors in the Bienal's jury and candidates. The letter's opening lines state:

Las y los abajo firmantes queremos manifestar nuestro hartazgo y rechazo ante la disparidad de género que rige en la mayoría de eventos culturales y literarios en América Latina, así como la mentalidad machista subyacente. Es inadmisibles que en el siglo XXI, en plena ola de reivindicaciones por la igualdad, se organice sin perspectiva de género un evento como la Bienal de Novela Mario Vargas Llosa (“Carta contra el machismo literario”, 2019).

The letter associates its demands with those of former women who struggled for recognition within male-inspired literary circles: “Gracias a la lucha que desde hace mucho llevan a cabo las mujeres por sus derechos, por fin podemos descubrir a muchas escritoras que fueron borradas de la historia y del canon literario, denostadas, ninguneadas o silenciadas” (“Carta contra el machismo literario”, 2019). The letter then opposes this legacy of feminist demands to the gendered hierarchy still prevailing in the publishing industry. The literary value of past and rediscovered women is not reflected by the low rate of women in awards such as the Bienal. Moreover, the letter links feminist demands within art institutions to the broader socio-political context, connecting struggles for literary visibility to broader challenges to gender oppression: “Como escritoras, escritores y personas vinculadas con el quehacer editorial, no podemos guardar silencio ni frente a la invisibilización de las autoras ni frente al acoso y abuso sexual que también son parte del statu quo de las letras” (“Carta contra el machismo literario”, 2019).

In March 2019, Ojeda published an autobiographical article in the Spanish newspaper *El País* titled “Aquí hay luz”. Written as a letter to her cousin, the article depicts affects between two women experiencing gender violence: “Querida Prima: Estas Navidades me contaste que tu novio te pegó. [...] Me enfrí escuchándote, prima mía de los peluches de colores. [...] No sabía

que una semana después de conocer tu historia mi expareja volvería a buscarme para amenazarme de muerte” (2019). The letter juxtaposes the intimate language of affect with the violent indifference of patriarchal institutions: “Entonces tuve que buscar un abogado, denunciar, ir al Juzgado de Violencia sobre la Mujer... Y sin embargo, ¿sabes lo que me dijo el policía que me tomó la denuncia?: ‘Tu ex ha perdido un poco los papeles’” (2019). The article concludes reaffirming the political potential of the letter as a form apt to elicit affects and feminist awareness. The letter connects women through an intimate use of language that confronts sexist and violent discourses. Exposed to public view, Ojeda sidelines her prestige as an award-winning author in favour of a shared voice merging writing and sorority: “Quiero decirte que podemos volver a sentirnos seguras. [...] Te escribo desde mi espacio, mi territorio emocional reconquistado. Aquí hay luz, prima mía de los lazos amarillos” (2019).

In a 2015 newspaper article titled “8 de marzo”, Moreno invoked Dolly again and quoted her poetry to comment on contemporary feminist demands. In this way, Moreno associated her fictional avant-garde with her own participation in the Ni una menos movement: “Alguna vez una poeta apócrifa llamada Dolly Skeffington ordenó, como si estuviera pronunciándose contra el femicidio: ‘Si es sangre debe fluir por el interior de los cuerpos / a excepción del ciclo en la mujer / cuando aún atesora pepitas en la mariposa del ovario / para arrojar a los sembradores’” (2018: 233). *La desfiguración Silva* also gives fictional form to Ojeda’s public stance, as the quest for the lost Gianella mirrors her demands for gender equality and denouncement of violence. Ojeda’s fictional avant-garde supplements Moreno’s Dolly in terms of space and time. While *El Affair Skeffington* situated an apocryphal female poet in interwar Paris and rearranged the archive of European avant-gardes, *La desfiguración Silva* rewrites male-inspired accounts of Latin American avant-gardes from the 1960s and 1970s. Although both novels dismantle the gendered parameters of value structuring art history, each combines fiction and feminism differently. Dolly challenged both sexist oppression and feminine essentialisation within the female community of Paris-Lesbos. In contrast, as I will now examine, Gianella redesigns the role model of the avant-garde artist from a solitary position within a homosocial circle.

A Woman within the Tzántzicos

La desfiguración Silva narrates Gianella’s biography and the research undertaken to rescue her life and works from oblivion. Just as *Los detectives salvajes* and *El Affair Skeffington* before, it

presents a patchwork of interviews, testimonies and documents outlining the blurry trace of Gianella. In the words of Ojeda herself, the novel rereads the archive of avant-gardes to challenge canonical and gendered selections of authors:

Gianella Silva podría ser cualquier mujer que fue parte de algún grupo de vanguardia, que hizo arte, que no fue tomada en cuenta por ser mujer y que luego fue borrada de la historia. [...] Creo que la literatura y el arte en general tienen una tradición hipermasculina que ha creado grandísimas obras, pero que ha sido un arte de medirse el pene entre escritores hombres, blancos y heterosexuales (in Zalgade, 2017).

The novel situates Gianella in Ecuador in the 1960s and 1970s. Fiction and feminism thus allow Ojeda to revise the gendered bias displayed by usual accounts of the period, such as the sexist fictional avant-gardes of *La Joda* and *El Party*. First, the novel introduces Cecilia, Emilio and María Terán, three siblings aiming to redeem the silenced and forgotten Gianella. Then, Gianella's life and works are portrayed through documents and testimonies gathered by the Teráns. As explained by Iván Mendizábal:

La desfiguración Silva se presenta como un documento que además reúne a otros que, al modo de Jorge Luis Borges, quiere discutir una realidad “histórica”, una especie de “verdad”, alrededor de un personaje, Gianella Silva, quien formando parte de los tzántzicos ecuatorianos, aparentemente olvidada hasta hoy por dos razones: a) por la pérdida de su obra cinematográfica y b) por ser mujer, en medio de una cultura en esencia masculina (2015).

The novel depicts Gianella amidst landmarks of Ecuadorian art history, using her apocryphal figure to destabilise the canon of avant-gardes from a feminist angle. An introductory chapter, narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, reconstructs how the Teráns found out about Gianella and the way they undertook research about her. After attending a university seminar, the Teráns tell their professor Daniel about their research into Gianella. Daniel recalls a number of male Tzántzicos but “jamás había escuchado el nombre de una mujer entre ellos” (2015: 54). The Teráns say that they learnt about Gianella after reading an article in *Pucuna*, the Tzántzicos' former magazine. They interviewed the movement's leader, Ulises Estrella, who told them that Gianella had died in a car accident in 1988. However, she had apparently given up filmmaking years before, after quitting not only the Tzántzicos but art altogether. Estrella said that he had tried to recover copies of her films; however, they had been lost for a long time in the

chaotic archives of the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana.

Tzantzismo was an empirical 1960s Ecuadorian avant-garde that aimed to dismantle western cultural values imposed by (neo)colonialism: “fue un movimiento iconoclasta, de vanguardia y de negación total [...] que propuso nuevos modos de asumir la literatura, las tareas del intelectual y el ejercicio de la militancia política, en el marco de una búsqueda por una ‘auténtica cultura nacional y popular’” (Ortega Caicedo, 2017: 20). The group was founded by the abovementioned Estrella and the poet Marco Muñoz, and gathered other poets and visual artists aiming to combine art and revolutionary activism. All of them wore long beards as a symbolic tribute to Fidel Castro, and during the 1960s, they sought connections with likeminded avant-gardes proliferating in Latin America, even travelling to Havana to participate in the Conferencia Internacional de Poetas. The trajectory of the movement was thus concurrent with the initiatives and debates that I explored regarding Cortázar and Dalton in Chapter 2.

Moreover, the name Tzantzismo refers to the indigenous term “tzantza”, used by the Shuar tribe to name the practice of shrinking and conserving its enemies’ heads.³² The Teráns’ redemption of Gianella, therefore, echoes the Tzántzicos’ intellectual parricide. By revealing her silenced presence, the Teráns aim to behead the masculine icons that have signposted the Ecuadorian national culture to date, even Tzantzismo itself. In this sense, their research mirrors the retrospective reconstruction of Realismo Visceral and Precisionismo that I examined in Chapter 3, albeit from a feminist angle that contests the objectification and relegation of women exemplified by Cesárea. As an acquaintance of the Teráns recalls, Gianella’s forgotten status in the archive of avant-gardes motivates them to dismantle male-inspired hierarchies of artists and artworks:

[E]staban decididos a averiguarlo todo sobre Gianella Silva y a rescatarla del olvido de la historia. Desde el inicio, poco les importó si su obra era buena o mala –no había forma de saberlo porque no quedaba nada de su producción. Les había bastado con saber que se trataba de un fantasma, una figura desdibujada, liquidada cuyos rastros habían sido sepultados por los miembros de su propia generación (2015: 55).

Then, the novel includes a chapter resembling a biographical publication, titled “Breve biografía de Gianella Silva”, written by the Teráns to disseminate the results of their research. *El Affair Skeffington* placed Dolly in the exclusively feminine circle of Paris-Lesbos, where her

³² The Tzántzicos continued a Latin Americanist legacy that invokes indigenous traditions to challenge established cultural values. The aforementioned Brazilian Antropofagia was a landmark of such movements.

affective view of avant-gardes rewrote gendered models of sociality and art. In contrast, *La desfiguración Silva* portrays constant clashes between Gianella's feminism and sexist mores. Dolly and Gianella thus offer two contrasting but supplementary modes of affective dissonance. While Dolly disrupted feminine essentialism within a community of women, Gianella develops relationships and produces works in a circle dominated by men. Her personal connections repeatedly curtail rather than enhance the political and artistic potential of affect. For instance, this biographical account narrates her childhood as marked by her father's sexist violence: "su *hobby* oculto consistía en golpear a su mujer, Alejandra, cada vez que ella tenía un ataque de locura; su *hobby* público, en escribir canciones cristianas de alabanza" (2015: 118, emphasis in original). He is incapable of showing love for his daughter: "observaba el comportamiento afectivo de otros hombres con sus hijos e intentaba repetirlo. [...] [L]as caricias le salían como roces accidentales, las sonrisas como muecas incómodas y, cuando tocaba la mano de su hija, no podía evitar sentir asco por el sudor pegajoso" (2015: 118-119). Such a bodily desynchronisation between Gianella and her father, though, was not counterbalanced by any shared femininity. Her mother neglects maternity and even exerts physical violence on Gianella: "diagnosticada con esquizofrenia paranoide pocos meses después de haberla dado a luz, pasaba días enteros metida en los armarios de la casa cantando canciones inventadas" (2015: 120).

Devoid of friends during her childhood and adolescence, Gianella meets her first and only friend, Ulises Estrella, in university. Their friendship is mediated by art: "se sabe que su amistad nació a través de un libro de Cortázar y murió en medio de una película de Fellini. Se dice que él le pidió salir formalmente, como novios, más de una vez y que ella se negó" (2015: 127-128). The use of "se dice" throughout this biographical text underlines the scarce and uncertain information available about Gianella's life. The Teráns choose to write their biography of Gianella as a conjectural text that makes its readers participate in the quest to unveil the life and works of this forgotten artist. Moreover, by disclosing doubtful details about her intimacy, the text turns its readers into peeping Toms involved in guessing how Gianella's artistic and personal choices might feed back on each other. For instance, we learn that, in the absence of love or bodily attraction, Gianella and Ulises find common ground in voyeurism and art: "Se dice que una vez, en una reunión donde todos bebieron de más, Gianella y Ulises se besaron. Se dice que a ella le pareció repulsivo el intercambio de saliva. Se dice que imaginó el acto sexual con todas sus viscosidades y vomitó" (2015: 130). After apologising to Ulises, she explains that

she does not enjoy being touched: “‘A mí lo que me gusta es que otros se toquen, ¿entiendes?’. Y desde ese momento, Ulises la invitó a ser espectadora de cada uno de sus encuentros sexuales” (2015: 130). Gianella and Ulises thus develop an erotic relationship beyond heteronormative partnership. Given Gianella’s repulsion for physical touch, their affective connection rests upon voyeurism and blocks the possibility of romantic love. However, their friendship comes to an end when Ulises’s girlfriend notices Gianella peeping through the door of their bedroom. They never saw each other again.

The novel also associates art spectatorship with the emergence of the Tzántzicos, as Gianella and Ulises organise meetings dedicated to exploring alternatives to the Ecuadorian cultural field. According to the Teráns, it is Gianella herself who comes up with the idea of naming the group as Tzantzismo. In this sense, attributing the creation of the group to a forgotten woman rearranges the archive of avant-gardes and advances an alternative account of the Tzántzicos. Their aesthetic guidelines would be indebted to Gianella, who is in charge of scheduling screenings of films by several of the most renowned twentieth-century directors. Not only the directors in her list displayed, to a greater or lesser extent, a considerable inclination towards political commitment, but they also produced significant innovations in film form through experimental means: Pier Paolo Pasolini, Akira Kurosawa, Alain Resnais, Glauber Rocha, and Santiago Álvarez. Despite her fundamental role within the Tzántzicos, the Teráns argue that Gianella fell into oblivion due to political discrepancies with her colleagues, as she was reluctant to adopt a revolutionary standpoint: “quienes promovían la revolución cultural tzántzica eran de ideología izquierdista. [...] Del grupo, ella fue la menos involucrada y la menos preocupada por el panorama social latinoamericano. Con toda seguridad eso fue lo que la diferenció de los demás tzántzicos y lo que acabó por distanciarla de ellos” (2015: 129-130). The relegation of Gianella is foregrounded during the Tzántzicos’ poetic performance *Cinco gritos en la oscuridad*. While the performances of every male poet were properly registered in chronicles of the event, there is no report of Gianella’s participation.

After breaking up with Ulises, the Teráns explain that Gianella left the Tzántzicos and lived “tan sola como el día en el que nació. [...] [T]uvo una vida mísera y se hizo alcohólica. Durante ese período no se contactó con ningún tzántzico, no se relacionó con nadie ni volvió a filmar más cortometrajes” (2015: 134). As exemplified by her family background and problematic position within Tzantzismo, Gianella’s connections always lead her to a blind alley.

Her flight from established mores and artistic conventions is repeatedly blocked by sexist constraints such as her father's violence or her fellow artists' discrimination. She is thus unable to benefit from the community of women framing Moreno's fictional avant-garde. However, just as Dolly's legacy could be redeemed through lost poems, Gianella's ideas permeate the leftovers of her films. I will now analyse how the Teráns look at reviews and manuscripts to reshoot her films, ultimately reconstructing and vindicating Gianella's artistic and ethical ideals.

Gianella's Feminist Avant-garde

In each novel studied before, fictional avant-gardes sought avenues to combine art and politics beyond art institutions and even the state. They redefined the avant-garde as a quest for renewed modes of community, shaping a literary ethics that disregards written works and mobilises affects through art. Playfulness and shared habits allowed La Joda and El Party, in *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito poeta...*, to locate the political potential of art beyond demands of immediate political utility. While Lima and Belano, in *Los detectives salvajes*, traversed the world provoking affective encounters and reliving their juvenile avant-gardism, Gutiérrez's group of friends, in *La grande*, devised a weekend reunion as an ephemeral moment of community. *El Affair Skeffington* narrated a similar shift from written to "lived" art. Dolly quit writing poetry to take artistic creation to bars and salons. Devised as non-individualised works beyond canonical values and gender divisions, her exhibit *Prenome* embodied an affective and feminist rearrangement of the archive of avant-gardes.

La desfiguración Silva also portrays an avant-gardist defiance of the completed artwork. However, Gianella's isolation impedes her to mirror Dolly's interclass alliances and collective modes of production. Instead, she converts her solitude and marginality into a challenge to gendered art institutions. Moreover, since her films are lost due to state negligence, her ideals must be reconstructed from drafts, articles and conjectures. Unable to share her literary ethics with anyone except herself, it is the process of reconstructing Gianella which actually leads to a renewed community. As part of its patchwork of documents, the novel includes a chapter that corresponds to the script of Gianella's film *Amazona jadeando en la gran garganta oscura*. It is a rewritten version by the Teráns, based on a review in *Pucuna* that states that the film "inventa un futuro que refleja la misoginia del presente. En su cortometraje las mujeres son cadáveres expuestos en una galería de arte. ¿Cómo permanecer quietos ante imágenes futuristas que nos

acercan con tanta precisión a las problemáticas actuales?” (2015: 131). In this way, Gianella’s film portrays a misogynist form of art that echoes Bolaño’s *Estrella distante* (1996), in which the aviator and poet Alberto Ruiz-Tagle puts together photographic exhibitions of mutilated dead women.

Set in the year 2200, *Amazona jadeando...* shows a futuristic art exhibit of holographic projections of decapitated women. It begins with a long take following a spectator as he walks through corridors and the camera focuses on specific projections. More than twenty identical holograms are displayed: “muestra el cadáver desnudo de una mujer sobre el lomo de un caballo negro. Su garganta está cortada y, a pesar de que su cuerpo posee evidentes huellas de tortura, su rostro parece compungido por un orgasmo. En la parte superior del holograma [...] se lee ‘Amazona #1’” (2015: 69). Such a display of murdered women as objects of consumption is seen by an exclusively masculine public. A comparison between *Amazona jadeando...* and Dolly’s *Prenome* reveals two polarised scenarios: Moreno depicts Dolly’s exhibit within a feminine Parisian salon while Ojeda portrays a sexist art gallery. The misogynist point of view of the exhibit is replicated by its author and his friends, whose opinions on art echo the holograms’ ecstatic combination of death and orgasm. For instance, they chat and mock the oeuvre of a contemporary female artist: “es igual a todas las demás artistas de la nueva ola: simplista y poco arriesgada” (2015: 70).

In this sense, *La desfiguración Silva* contests the misogynist disdain for feminist art. The novel nests fictional planes and establishes a dialogue between them: the quest for Gianella’s lost oeuvre responds to the sexist art institutions portrayed in Gianella’s own film. The script itself allegorises such a mise en abyme and interplay between fictional planes. When rewriting the film, the Teráns add a new character, Eva, a female “visual chronicler” who breaks into the exhibit and confronts its author. She declares herself to be inspired by the Soviet avant-gardist filmmaker Dziga Vertov, who “estaba en contra de los guiones y la artificialidad en el cine” (2015: 79). Eva films her encounter with the author and streams it online, naming her live chronicle as nothing less than *Amazona jadeando en la gran garganta oscura*. Eva narrates her chronicle as an act of feminist vengeance. First, she condemns the artistic tradition of representing women as objects of male desire, as well as the gendered social structures that both originate and result from it: “Durante años el pasatiempo de los artistas fue retratar a las mujeres como monstruos. La histeria, la histeria, la histeria... Repítela cien veces y es una folia; escúpela

y es amor” (2015: 81). Then, Eva questions the depiction of decapitated women, even suggesting that models were killed during the production of the holograms. As she asks the author: “¿Por qué no nos hablas sobre los hologramas de las veinte Amazonas degolladas encima de sus caballos negros? ¿Qué querías transmitir? [...] ¿Y las modelos? ¿Viven?” (2015: 82).

Eva blurs distinctions between reality and representation to denounce the material effects of misogynist symbolisations of women. She highlights what Laura Mulvey terms phallogocentric visual pleasure: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure [...] with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (1988: 62). A binary division of social roles results in dividing men as subjects and women as objects of representation. Eva’s assault on the exhibit exposes the masculine erotic pleasure derived from the holograms’ depiction of gender violence. Moreover, the decapitated holograms exemplify Mulvey’s “paradox of phallogocentrism”, that is, that patriarchy depends on the image of the castrated woman to give order and meaning to its world. Just as the male gaze finds visual pleasure in objectifying and fragmenting female bodies, the holograms merge femicide and orgasm to connote sadistic voyeurism. The holograms condemn the Amazons to murderous silence as a means of reaffirming patriarchy, inserting their decapitated figures into “a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies [...] by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey, 1988: 58).

The visual chronicle challenges the patriarchal division between active male gaze and passive female object. Immediately after Eva confronts the author of the holograms, the camera faces him, “lo toma por los hombros y lo coloca de espaldas contra la pared” (2015: 81). Eva thus reverses the sadistic visual pleasure that confined the Amazons to be bearers of patriarchal meaning. The close-up shot frames the author as a typical museum painting, making his face a pictorial object just like his holograms. In voice over, Eva proclaims: “La transmisión ha sido interrumpida para dar paso a la ejecución del artista visual Marius Ex Machina” (2015: 84). Eva’s feminist avant-gardism contests the artistic commodification of femicide by reversing the roles of subject and object of gaze. Mirroring the holograms’ decapitated women, the author himself becomes an object of violent visual pleasure.

When concluding their biography of Gianella, the Teráns advance their own interpretation of her lost oeuvre: “nosotros, que conocemos mejor que nadie la ausencia de su

obra, especulamos que quiso convertirse en un ser irrepresentable, en un fantasma; [...] quiso que si alguien, alguna vez, sentía el impulso de dibujar el mapa de Gianella Silva tuviera que [...] trazar un marco que encuadrara la nada” (2015: 134-135). Their version of *Amazona jadeando...* does more than recover a lost script from oblivion, as it re-enacts Gianella’s avant-gardism by introducing changes to her film. They rewrite Gianella’s script as a means of erasing boundaries between fiction and reality and, in this way, replicate the act of “encuadrar la nada” that they regard as Gianella’s legacy. The Teráns aim for a nothingness framed between literature and cinema, between the screenplay’s author and its copyists, between Gianella’s biography and its filmic counterpart Eva.

Although Gianella’s script seems to fall short of Dolly’s feminist art, it still enables a way out of the film’s sexist scenario. In *El Affair Skeffington*, Dolly’s exhibit gave visual form to Moreno’s re-mapping of gender and affects in Paris-Lesbos. Such a pictorial impulse can also be seen in Gianella’s rewritten script, albeit in a meta-artistic dimension. While *Prenome* materialised Dolly’s bonds through redesigned maps and letters, *Amazona jadeando...* generates liaisons between women through co-authorship. The narrative resolution of the script overlaps the ending of Eva’s chronicle. Framed by a close-up shot, Eva explains her project and merges it with the Teráns’ research: “Uno de los cortometrajes perdidos de Gianella Silva fue *Amazona jadeando en la gran garganta oscura*. El filme se ubica en este año 2200, y cuenta la historia de una exposición con hologramas de mujeres asesinadas. [...] Hemos rodado una aproximación de lo que debió ser el filme original de Silva: el cortometraje que vieron al inicio de esta transmisión” (2015: 88). The purpose of “encuadrar la nada” finally results in a sequence of mise en abymes of artists and artworks: pursuing the forgotten figure of Gianella leads the Teráns to rewrite her script, in which a subsequent fictional avant-gardist remakes the same film.

While Gianella was unable to establish artistic and affective bonds within the Tzántzicos, reconstructing her life and works becomes a way of building community. The film’s creator is blurred among a series of authors, copyists, scripts and films, outlining a creative stance that resists any attribution of originality and ownership. Gianella and her film are devised as an open-ended collaboration between researchers, artists and even fictional characters. Moreover, the title of *Amazona jadeando...* echoes the works of the Argentine writer Alejandra Pizarnik. While Pizarnik’s short story “La condesa sangrienta” describes the grotesque assassinations and torture committed by the Hungarian countess Elizabeth Báthory, her poem “Formas” transforms a list of

metaphors of oppressed women into a collective female voice: “No sé si pájaro o jaula / Mano asesina / O joven muerta entre cirios / O amazona jadeando en la gran garganta oscura / O silenciosa / Pero tal vez oral como una fuente / Tal vez juglar / O princesa en la torre más alta”. This intertextual and open-ended list of references mirrors Gianella’s elusive status. As I will now examine, her enigmatic profile turns authorship into a non-individualised female voice emerging from a rearranged archive of avant-gardes.

Montage and the Archive of Avant-gardes

Alongside the biographical text and script, *La desfiguración Silva* includes a chapter resembling an apocryphal academic essay devoted to Gianella written by Michel Duboc, a film critic and friend of the Teráns. After they show him the outcome of their research, Duboc decides to grant academic and historical relevance to Gianella. He analyses her films as belonging to a Latin Americanist tradition of political cinema, which he terms “cine de intervención”. However, he claims that Gianella’s works went unnoticed because “no hizo cine de violencia política, pero sí de violencia, y fue, quizás, una de las más importantes cineastas de vanguardia en América Latina” (2015: 147). In this sense, Duboc reassesses *Amazona jadeando...* as a film beyond the framework of revolutionary politics that stemmed from the Cuban Revolution. According to his essay, the film does politics by denouncing the sexist perspective that finds aesthetic value in the objectification of women, subsequently reinforcing gender divisions and social hierarchies.

However, Duboc argues that Gianella found herself in the blind alley of failing to portray gender violence beyond patriarchal art institutions: “La esteticidad del horror [...] es el planteamiento por el cual Silva nos pone frente a frente con la imposibilidad de conocer algo fuera de su representación” (2015: 148). He interprets her vanishing from artistic and social spheres as related to the impossibility of escaping male-inspired modes of representation: “intentó, con su silencio, enfrentarse a la imagen y a su ausencia. [...] Un silencio largo, indefinido, [...] como un dolor ilocalizable, puede ser también el grito más desgarrador de protesta” (2015: 153). For Duboc, silence was Gianella’s reaction to the limits that patriarchal structures impose on feminist art, as she would have realised that even her project of denouncing femicide ended up satisfying a misogynist gaze: “filmarse convirtió para ella en una tarea llena de inautenticidades. G. Silva se alejó del cine porque entendió que no importaba cuánto lo intentara, sus filmes siempre serían otra cosa, una mutación extraña, una desfiguración de lo que

realmente quería mostrar” (2015: 154).

At first sight, Duboc’s attempt to rediscover Gianella is opposed to *El Affair Skeffington*’s John Glassco, who refused to publish Dolly’s poems and thus condemned her to oblivion. However, Duboc and Glassco’s judgments converge in their interpretations of female silence: they both assume that Gianella and Dolly’s abandonments of art were indebted to aesthetic impossibilities. In this vein, both women would replicate the gesture of fading away as authors of Gutiérrez, Lima and Belano. However, Gianella’s case differs from theirs due to the openly apocryphal status that she shares with Moreno’s Dolly. In the end, Duboc’s interpretation of her silence is paradoxically undermined by his own decision to write the essay. In the following chapter, the novel includes an interview by an unnamed reporter with Daniel, the Teráns’ film professor, where we learn that Gianella is in fact an invention of the Teráns. While Duboc tries to close down Gianella’s legacy and decipher her vanishing, he actually gives referential entity and academic visibility to an artist that never existed.

The Teráns discovered that Daniel’s reputation as a filmmaker and scholar rested upon a plagiarised award-winning script. Years before, he stole and submitted for competition a script actually written by his younger girlfriend, on whom he exerted gender violence. To bring into existence an apocryphal avant-gardist, the Teráns altered several issues of *Pucuna*, where they inserted reviews about Gianella’s non-existent films. Then, they wrote Gianella’s biography and showed it to Duboc and Daniel. They persuaded Daniel to sign Gianella’s unpublished script of *Amazona jadeando...* and sent it to a short films competition. They told him: “Si el guión gana podrás revelar el nombre de su verdadera autora y, con la polémica, lograr que la gente se interese por su trabajo”; according to Daniel: “Ellos querían, o al menos eso fue lo que me hicieron creer, que la mirada de todos se volcara hacia la figura fantasmal de Gianella Silva, hacer que se hiciera justicia dentro de la injusticia de la historia” (2015: 170). However, Ulises Estrella, the former friend of Gianella and jury of the competition, published a public letter denouncing Daniel for submitting a script actually stolen from him. As it turns out, the actual author of *Amazona jadeando...* is Ulises, from whom the Teráns stole the draft. The use of the interview genre, in this way, puts a perpetrator of gender violence like Daniel in the spotlight. The interviewer’s inquiries force him to give explanations for his abuse and plagiarism of his former girlfriend, subsequently leading him –and the interview’s readers– to reflect on the sexist discrimination experienced by Gianella.

Theft and forgery thus dismantle both gender and authorship. The Teráns invented a female author, to whom they attributed Ulises' draft, boycotting any distinction between male and female artists. Alongside the Teráns' biography and *Pucuna's* altered issues, the stolen script outlines Gianella as an apocryphal entity beyond the figure of the individual and original creator. Duboc interpreted Gianella's vanishing as a feminine and powerless silence in the face of patriarchal art institutions. In contrast, the Teráns devised Gianella as a counterfeit artefact giving visibility to a nonexistent avant-garde woman. Duboc's essay and Daniel's scandal are thus part of the conditions of possibility of Gianella's apocryphal emergence. As stated by Alicia Ortega Caicedo, the novel's patchwork of documents configures "un archivo apócrifo alrededor del cual se construye la novela: el entramado intertextual (cabe decir también intervisual) deviene escenario de un enigma que actualiza la pregunta por el autor y el sentido de originalidad en todo acto de creación" (2017: 21). To question the notion of authorship is to challenge the patriarchal cultural field. The Teráns devise Gianella's authorial figure as a series of feminist demands linked through nested referential and fictional planes. First, Gianella's *Amazona jadeando...* does justice to victims of gender violence, such as the decapitated Amazons, and challenges the representation of women in patriarchal art. Then, the Terán's research denounces and rectifies Gianella's forgotten status in art history. Finally, revealing that Gianella is actually an invention takes revenge on Daniel for exploiting and abusing his girlfriend. This sequence of challenges to gender violence and oppression makes Gianella an enabler of community. The task of outlining her figure brings artists, researchers and even fictional characters together, establishing bonds that question gendered social structures and art institutions.

Moreno and Ojeda shape the specters of Dolly and Gianella as patchworks of counterfeit and unstable sources. In a self-reflexive and meta-narrative way, they expose the strategies used to invent the lives and works of apocryphal artists, placing them within empirical circles to dismantle the notions of authorship and originality. These fictional and feminist avant-gardes embody an elusive line of flight defying male-inspired accounts of avant-gardes. *La desfiguración Silva* thus shifts its narrative enigma from Gianella's lost oeuvre to her authorial figure. In *Amazona jadeando...*'s script, immediately after Eva condemns the decapitated women's holograms, a print label is superimposed on the screen: "La historia no existe, solo los historiadores" (2015: 77). Likewise, exposing the creation of an apocryphal artist reveals the gendered values structuring the canon. It shows how gender impacts the notoriety or invisibility

of certain artworks depending on the masculine or feminine condition of their authors. As an apocryphal avant-garde artist, Gianella boycotts the male-based paradigm of the avant-garde that would make her posthumous renown impossible in the first place.

El Affair Skeffington still uses the pen name María Moreno to frame Dolly's adventures within a preface and afterword. The narrator anchors the proliferation of documents and assembles a well-rounded portrayal of its fictional avant-gardist. On the other hand, *La desfiguración Silva* does not present any unifying narrative voice. It only suggests the tacit presence of an archivist who puts together heterogeneous sources without establishing a definitive version. The novel itself mirrors the formal composition of *Amazona jadeando...* and blurs authorship through intertextual references. Narration gives in to a montage of documents from which the fictional avant-gardist Gianella emerges. Representing a line of flight from art institutions, a non-individualised and open-ended authorial figure is born out of the archive of avant-gardes. In charge of interpreting these multiple and sometimes contradictory sources, the reader becomes the archivist and partakes in the collective process of creating Gianella. The novel asks its readers to play an active role when repositioning female artists beyond the gendered legacy of avant-gardes.

The Teráns name their apocryphal avant-gardist after a young writer and photographer called Gianella Silva. The “original” Gianella works as a director of photography when they film *Amazona jadeando...*. As part of the novel's patchwork of texts and documents, there is a chapter that corresponds to her personal diary, in which she registers her impressions of the short film: “hacen uso de mi nombre para un personaje que crearon con la intención de extenderlo a un proyecto del que no quieren decirme nada. Han utilizado características mías, pero en general, la Gianella Silva de su guión es muy diferente a mí” (2015: 95). The diary merges fiction and fact as days pass by, and its entries end up echoing the film's script. The identities of the two Gianellas eventually converge: “A Gianella Silva (la otra Gianella Silva), la percibo como un parásito; se alimenta de mí a través de los Terán y, en el proceso, se convierte en un ser real y yo en un personaje. Poco a poco me voy transformando en su desfiguración. [...] Título: ‘La desfiguración Silva’” (2015: 102). The title of the novel thus stems from a personal diary in which artistic creation and intimacy are inseparable. In turn, this chapter mimics the intimate genre par excellence but ends up undermining the individuality of the first-person narrator, who finally adopts the identity of a fictional character. It is thus impossible to determine which of the

three Gianellas actually writes the journal. Is it the lost avant-garde artist, the figure invented by the Teráns, or the young photographer? Devoid of referentiality, the proper name “Gianella” embodies a collective and feminist voice that future projects can invoke and use as their own.

Gianella is a figure that emerges from a rearranged archive of avant-gardes. Her authorial name is not assignable to any specific subject. Beneath the name Gianella Silva, a collective voice speaks from a feminist standpoint. Once Daniel’s scandal rises to public view and causes havoc in the Ecuadorian cultural scene, the empirical Gianella must testify. She explains her links with the Teráns and the inception of a “fake” Gianella, later declaring: “Cuando nací me pusieron un nombre y, cuando aprendí a entender mi nombre, me dijeron que era única. Eso nos dicen a todos: que somos igual de únicos. [...] La verdad, la única en este desierto de repeticiones, es que mi nombre no es Gianella Silva: es Gianella Silva” (2015: 7). Gianella Silva reveals the mutually impersonal and unique nature of the proper name, as well as its affective potential when used as a means of gathering and reinventing subjectivities. The fictional avant-gardist Gianella Silva redefines authorship as a multiplicity of voices coming together and adopting a feminist standpoint beyond any fixed essence or identity.

In sum, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* intervene in the archive of avant-gardes from a feminist standpoint. First, Moreno and Ojeda situate their openly apocryphal female artists within landmarks of avant-gardes, such as the Parisian 1920s and Latin American 1960s and 1970s. In this sense, they redesign the contexts of the novels that I studied in the previous chapters. While Dolly advances a feminist angle on Cortázar’s Paris, in which La Joda failed to overcome sexist hierarchies regarding coexistence and revolutionary action, Gianella interrogates retrospective accounts of the convulsed 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, such as those of Bolaño and Saer. In these radicalised scenarios, the figures of Dolly and Gianella offer an alternative to male-inspired views of the links between artistic and political avant-gardes. They both explore the potential of affective dissonance to envision renewed modes of community within avant-gardist circles. However, they employ different angles to contest the relegation of women seen in the fictional avant-gardes of La Joda, El Party and Realismo Visceral. While Dolly boycotts the feminine essentialisation of Paris-Lesbos, Gianella disrupts the homosocial nature of the Tzántzicos, first, and then enables collaborations between those involved in creating her figure. Both novels echo the literary ethics of the fictional avant-gardes I examined before, albeit revamped through a feminist lens. They portray avant-gardist projects

that privilege process over product, giving visual form to the affective flows beneath artistic creation. Dolly's exhibit and Gianella's film embody a collective voice of silenced women beyond individualised and gendered notions of authorship and identity.

This collective approach to female authorship makes Dolly and Gianella emerge from the archive of avant-gardes. Moreno and Ojeda outline their fictional avant-gardes as elusive and openly apocryphal entities, devising their lives and works as an endless series of intertextual references. Therefore, they add a feminist dimension to the patchworks of testimonies and documents seen in *Pobrecito Poeta...* and *Los detectives salvajes*. Moreno and Ojeda use montage and counterfeit texts as a means of redeeming an invisibilised legacy of women artists while boycotting the notion of gender itself. Their archival rearrangements ultimately re-fictionalise fictional avant-gardes, as Dolly and Gianella allow us to rethink their gendered nature and envision an alternative avant-gardist community. In the end, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* do not simply present a feminist counter-canon of forgotten artists. Their self-reflexive deconstruction of the concept of the avant-garde dismantles its reliance on individual authorship and gendered identities. When artworks cannot be individualised, affect gives rise to collective and egalitarian ways of artistic creation alongside renewed modes of coexistence.

Conclusion

In his poem “Llamado por los malos poetas”, the Argentine author Rodolfo Fogwill claims that the emergence of “dos, cien, mil malos poetas” is of vital necessity: “Se necesitan malos poetas. / Buenas personas, pero poetas / malos. Dos, cien, mil malos poetas / se necesitan más para que estallen / las diez mil flores del poema. / Que en ellos viva la poesía, / la innecesaria, la fútil, la sutil / poesía imprescindible. O la in- / versa: la poesía necesaria, / la prescindible para vivir” (2016: 351). Throughout this thesis, I examined fictionalised avant-garde groups that mirror Fogwill’s call for a “poesía imprescindible” by “malos poetas”, shaping a literary ethics that turns avant-gardist experimentation into a reinvented community. The motif of fictional avant-gardes, however, is not limited to the examples I studied. Recent Latin American novels have equally thematised avant-gardist circles that regard art as a means of mobilising affect and redesigning habits. For instance, Diego Trelles Paz’s *El círculo de los escritores asesinos* (Peru, 2005) depicts a group of young poets who call themselves El Círculo and aim to replicate the poetic ethos of Bolaño’s Realismo Visceral: “Nuestra rutina no era nada extraordinaria: bebíamos, íbamos juntos al cine, nos leíamos mutuamente nuestros textos. [...] Si algo teníamos en común era la forma de concebir la literatura; en eso éramos implacables” (2005: 228). In the same vein, Alejandro Zambra’s *Poeta chileno* (Chile, 2020) portrays a US journalist who travels to Chile aiming to “descubrir a un montón de detectives salvajes” and write a chronicle about a country where “la poesía es curiosamente, irracionalmente relevante” (2020: 158). Reflecting on her research, the journalist admires such an irrational faith in literature and envisions the political implications of a poetic way of life: “[P]iensen que la poesía salvará al mundo y se creen unos héroes revolucionarios y me dan risa. Y sin embargo no me atrevo a asegurar que estén equivocados. Quizás sí, quizás sí van a cambiar el mundo” (2020: 176).

Beyond invoking the paradigmatic Realismo Visceral to devise further groups of poets, other novels have also depicted fictional avant-gardes that champion the affective potential of art as a means of political intervention. For example, Mauro Javier Cárdenas’ *Los revolucionarios lo intentan de nuevo* (Ecuador, 2016) reconsiders the oscillating connections between avant-garde art and revolutionary activism that I explored regarding the 1960s and 1970s. Cárdenas portrays a circle of young Ecuadorian artists and activists aiming to relive avant-gardist ambitions in a twenty-first century marked by poverty and the effects of neoliberalism. They start a community radio as a way of mobilising the underprivileged: “Estaba pensando que podríamos montar una

obra de teatro en el parque del barrio y dejar que el público participe. [...] Escogeremos el reparto y dirigiremos la obra pero dejaremos que sean ellos quienes decidan lo que pasará después y luego lo transmitiremos en vivo en la Radio Nuevo Día” (2016: 142). On the other hand, María Gainza’s *La luz negra* (Argentina, 2018) replicates the feminist and apocryphal angle adopted by *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* to fictionalise avant-gardes. Gainza fictionalises a circle named La Banda de Falsificadores Melancólicos that is dedicated, in the words of one of its members, to forging paintings: “¿Una buena falsificación no puede dar tanto placer como un original? ¿En un punto no es lo falso más verdadero que lo auténtico? ¿Y en el fondo no es el mercado el verdadero escándalo?” (2018: 14). Inspired by the mythic figure of Renée Cuellar, an icon of underground culture in Buenos Aires during the 1960s, the novel situates this female counterfeiter at the centre of a community of artists without an oeuvre: “Eran artistas, gente enamorada, y repantigados sobre sillones raídos la conversación les producía el mismo efecto que la música. Eran todos inteligentes, todos tenían algún talento, pero no llegarían a mucho” (2018: 25).

Changing the world through a literary ethics is the ultimate and common goal of these different groups of “malos poetas”. The corpus of novels I studied is thus part of a broader trend in Latin American literature that, during the past decades, has used fiction to rewrite and reclaim the legacy of avant-gardes. Combining fiction and affect theory, I analysed novels that transform the collective nature of avant-gardes into a platform that mobilises affects such as friendship, family and love. Aesthetic and political radicalism are constitutive of the daily lives and personal connections fostered by these fictionalised circles, which ultimately depict the creation of group dynamics as the specific contribution that avant-gardes make in terms of driving social change. My approach to fictional avant-gardes, therefore, enables an analytical angle useful to examine diverse portrayals of artistic experimentation as instrumental in devising a literary ethics and reinventing community. For this purpose, I highlighted three aspects in each novel that allowed me to articulate a comprehensive and comparative approach to fictional avant-gardes: depictions of community, recreations of artistic and political initiatives, and meta-literary reflections on formal experimentation. In this way, I outlined a concept of fictional avant-gardes that can be extrapolated to analyse other examples beyond the contexts and chronology covered in this thesis.

First, I focused on how each novel portrays a certain collective that frames affects and

habits and transforms a shared worldview into a revamped community, enhancing, in this way, the political dimension of affect. In Chapter 2, I noted that Cortázar and Dalton invoked Che Guevara's idea of the *Hombre Nuevo* when envisioning new modes of coexistence for an equally unprecedented revolutionary society. The fictional avant-gardes of La Joda and El Party rewrote the ascetic and self-sacrificial connotations of the *Hombre Nuevo* into a call for playfulness and humour. Looking at *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande*, in Chapter 3, I explored two different avenues for reclaiming the legacy of former avant-gardist communities such as Cortázar and Dalton's. Realismo Visceral pursued juvenile radicalism beyond its original context, as its poets reconnected art, friendship and love during a journey from Mexico in the 1970s to the world at large in the 1990s. In contrast, Gutiérrez's group of friends revived their youthful ideals and experiences to generate shared moments of storytelling and companionship. However, while these fictional avant-gardes shaped platforms for reinventing affects and habits, they still displayed a gendered nature that finally put limitations on their efforts to reinvent community. In Chapter 4, I examined *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva* as novels that fictionalise fictional avant-gardes through a feminist lens. While Dolly Skeffington developed connections that exceeded the feminine framework of Paris-Lesbos, Gianella Silva faced the limits of the dominantly masculine circle of Tzantzismo. Both Moreno and Ojeda, in the end, championed the power of affect to outgrow essentialised identities and enable modes of coexistence beyond gendered constraints.

In the second place, I pinpointed the ways these reinvented communities gave rise to artistic and political projects that combined aesthetic experimentation and revolutionary activism. Both La Joda and El Party, in Chapter 2, upheld the political value of art beyond institutionalised circuits. *Libro de Manuel* featured eccentric happenings that aimed to disrupt daily routine, finally leading to a kidnapping operation that, without leaving playfulness behind, provoked political effects such as the liberation of political prisoners. Every poet of El Party, on the other hand, only lived up to the ideal of the revolutionary artist when renouncing the individualised and written oeuvre in favour of a shared literary ethics. Such a literary ethics resonated in the fictional avant-gardes I studied in Chapter 3, as Bolaño and Saer portrayed avant-garde groups without works, for whom literature was a means of eliciting gatherings and conversations. In this sense, I argued that the visual sketches drawn by the Real Visceralistas when traversing the desert, as well as the act of sharing an *asado* in Gutiérrez's house, embodied

ephemeral moments of community exceeding the written word. Finally, *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva*, in Chapter 4, regarded art as an enabler of affects beyond gendered paradigms of both community and authorship. Dolly's exhibits and Gianella's films were devised as collaborations that redesigned the male-inspired figure of the avant-garde artist, outlining instead an open-ended and collective voice defiant of gender identities.

Finally, I examined the formal composition of the novels themselves, looking at their use of experimental techniques as mirroring the ideals of their fictional avant-gardes. I showed that, while depicting groups of artists, every novel deployed a meta-literary reflection on its own positioning within its contemporary cultural field. In Chapter 2, I noted that *Libro de Manuel* and *Pobrecito Poeta...* radicalised novelistic experimentation by merging fiction with allegedly more "direct" forms such as newspapers and *testimonio*, upholding the revolutionary value of literature at a time when escalating political violence demanded immediate utility from culture. In Chapter 3, I argued that *Los detectives salvajes* and *La grande* presented structures of patchworks and juxtaposed narrative points of view as a means of intervening, through fiction, in the debates that marked the turn of the century. In this way, Bolaño and Saer foregrounded the capacity of fiction, amidst a new boom of *testimonios* and self-critical autobiographies, to review questions of memory and the guidelines of former revolutionary projects. With *El Affair Skeffington* and *La desfiguración Silva*, in Chapter 4, I explored strategies for infusing a feminist perspective into such experimental techniques. Both Moreno and Ojeda thematised the insertion of apocryphal feminist artists into empirical and male-inspired avant-gardist circles, describing the process of creating Dolly and Gianella through counterfeit documents and rearrangements of the archive of avant-gardes. Ultimately, each novel in my corpus used experimental techniques, such as collage and non-linear narrative, when devising their fictional avant-gardes and championing the political relevance and transformative potential of fiction.

To conclude, this thesis explored six novels that depict fictional avant-gardes as a means of responding to pressing social concerns in specific historical junctures, such as revolutionary activism, memory and feminism. I analysed them through the joint lens of fiction and affect theory to contribute to current debates within Latin American Studies regarding the concept of the avant-garde, its impact on contemporary literature, and the affective dimension of culture. When addressing the legacy of avant-gardes in Latin America, I argued that studying fictional portrayals of groups of artists is as relevant as stressing the political dimension that is

constitutive of formal experimentation. Therefore, I examined novels that portray the daily experiences of a certain group, devising forms of community enabled by art but which also ultimately exceed the artistic domain and become a literary ethics. These fictionalised circles thus revealed that redesigning habits and mobilising affects are inherent and vital aspects of the avant-gardist effort to reunite artistic and political radicalism. With the notion of fictional avant-gardes, in sum, I highlighted that fiction has always been and continues to be instrumental in converting ambitions for a new art into the goal of a new society. Fiction reveals its power as an instrument of world-making when the quest to merge aesthetic rupture and social change leads to reinvented communities and modes of coexistence.

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