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“THE SOLE OBJECT OF ALL MY EFFORTS IS TO DO YOU GOOD”: Robert Owen, Simón Rodríguez, and the Saint-Simonist Avant-Garde

Ronald Briggs

THE SOLE OBJECT OF ALL MY EFFORTS IS TO DO YOU GOOD—TO RELIEVE YOU FROM THE MOST WRETCHED MENTAL AND BODILY SLAVERY AND MISERY; and the time is fast approaching when you can no longer doubt these sayings.
--Robert Owen, “Address Dated September 19th, 1817; On Measures for the Immediate Relief of the Poor”

no es sueño ni delirio, sino filosofía. . . ; ni el lugar donde esto se haga será imaginario, como el que se figuró el Canciller Tomas Morus: su Utopia será, en realidad, la América.
--Simón Rodríguez, “Luces y Virtudes Sociales” (1840)

In his *Recuerdos literarios*, Chilean intellectual José Victorino Lastarria recounts meeting the elderly Simón Rodríguez (1769-1856) in the company of his own elderly mentor, Andrés Bello. The elders were both from Caracas, and each had weathered the Wars of Independence in exile abroad, but on this occasion their discussion of politics was more local than global, as Rodríguez told how he once served a formal banquet to Mariscal Sucre (then President of Bolivia) on bedpans. The normally stern Bello cried with laughter, Lastarria noted, adding that Rodríguez told the story with “el énfasis i aquellas intonaciones elegantes” that he attempted to reproduce graphically in his writings (48-49). When it came to philosophy, Lastarria continues, Rodríguez remained something of an enigma, a reformer who sought to improve the lot of the poor through practical vocational education, but whose real or imagined originality was such that he denied knowing anything about Saint-Simon or Fourier, despite having spent two decades in France. The real answer, Lastarria suggests, is Robert Owen, the English factory manager/owner whose *Co-operative Magazine* introduced *socialism* into print in English and whose experiments in the textile town of New Lanark combined industrial production with a similar belief in the power of vocationally-minded education (Lastarria 45-46; Donnachie 135).

Writing several decades after Rodríguez's death, Lastarria took up a critical thread that would remain unexplored until the second half of the twentieth century. As Lastarria himself pointed out, his contemporaries tended to ignore Rodríguez, put off by the very appearance of the writing—its use of bold type, italics, all-capitals, and unorthodox layout—with the result being that “su claridad, que era la cualidad mas apreciada por el autor, casi desaparecia bajo las formas plásticas de su lenguaje i de su escritura, que chocaba por su estrañeza” (46). Another nineteenth-century observer, Arístedes Rojas, counted himself firmly among those who found the writings jarring (and merely jarring), describing Rodríguez as “utopista, soñador, monomaniaco” and proposing that “Don Simón quiso reformar la sociedad moderna con los delirios de una imaginación exaltada” (242; 244). Twentieth-century critics such as Germán Arciniegas and Ángel Rama would be kinder, the former evaluating Rodríguez's educational plan as “one of the most curious and intelligent works ever written on its subject in America” and the latter calling the writing itself “a rigorous, rational transcription for the mechanism of thought” (Arciniegas 310; Rama 47). For Venezuelan critic Susana Rotker, Rodríguez's strange essays represented nothing less than a mimetic reflection of “the marginalization and the social unrest experienced by South America,” and thus a straightforward attempt to depict realities that might elude a more traditional style of writing.

When Rodríguez's first important essay was published in Arequipa, Peru, in 1828, Owen had already spent more than a decade leading social reform movements as the manager of the factory town of New Lanark and the founder of a colony in New Harmony, Indiana. He had been hailed in his native England and the United States—his subscribers at New Lanark included Jeremy Bentham, he spoke twice before the United States Congress in 1825 between interviews with Thomas Jefferson and President James Monroe, and his newspaper essays and letters had created an international following.¹ Arguing from the central supposition that human character is the product of circumstances rather than will, Owen proposed a social perspective that focused on the pursuit of happiness at the community rather than individual level and a system of education designed to teach each child, both on the playground and in the formal curriculum, “that ‘he is never to injure his playfellows; but that, on the contrary, he is to contribute all in his power to make them happy’” (*A New View* 39). This philosophy harmonizes nicely with Rodríguez's call for shared faculties:

NO HAI *facultades* INDEPENDIENTES
siendo así
 no hay facultad propia
que pueda ejercerse sin el concurso
 de facultades ajenas
 (2: 116)

It remained the basis for Owen's religious and economic orientation, from his opposition to sectarianism to his suggestion that activities such as cooking and eating be communalized. If Rodríguez is remembered as the interesting essayist who failed as a practical reformer, then Owen is just the reverse—in *A History of British Socialism*, Max Beer credits him as “the first British socialist who did not turn to the past for inspiration” while noting that he was “distinguished neither by original philosophic speculations nor

outstanding literary achievements, but by strength of character and untiring reform activities” (162; 160).

In 1828, both writers stepped out onto an American stage with expository projects for saving the embattled republics of the former Spanish America—Rodríguez proclaiming a new epistemological model in *Sociedades Americanas en 1828* and Owen writing the government of Mexico with a proposal to found a utopian community in largely uninhabited lands in Coahuila and Texas. Rodríguez’s new episteme depends upon a correlation between popular will and government he defines as parallel to that between written language and the spoken word: “Ortografía *Ortolójica*, es decir, fundada en la *boca*” and “Gobierno *Etolójico*, esto es fundado en las *costumbres*” (1: 269). Given the evident failure of warfare as a means for building stable political structures—Rodríguez writes from the newly independent Peru described by Flora Tristán as a country “desangrado por veinte años de guerras” (14)—he suggests that a social education designed to produce good citizens is the only way to assure that these citizens will come to demand proper representation in government. His grass-roots approach posits a moral principle of community as its central social obligation: “*vivir de una industria que no le perjudique, ni perjudique á otro, directa ni indirectamente*” (1: 283).

Beginning where both writers coincide, in their meticulous planning for an educational philosophy designed to propagate a definition of community very much at odds with that of the industrialized age they inhabit, I want to explore how each defines that philosophy in writing and how each sees writing itself as a potentially revolutionary act. I will argue that Owen’s and Rodríguez’s essays occupy an unexplored branch of avant-gardism often overshadowed by the more autonomous but less politically engaged visions of the avant-gardists that followed (and that continue to dominate our understanding of the term). Before analyzing Owen’s and Rodríguez’s writings and careers, I want to define the slippery space between political and artistic avant-gardism in which I will be working.

Against the context of the same industrialized Europe from which Owen plans his utopian communities and from which Rodríguez will depart for the newly independent Americas, Henri de Saint-Simon formulates the first extra-military use of the term *avant-garde* in his dialogue between an artist, scientist, and industrialist who discuss their roles in bringing about the revolution that will produce a rational society. The artist describes his own role as that of the avant-garde:

We—the artists—will be your vanguard. The power of the arts is in effect the most immediate and most rapid of all powers. We have all kinds of weapons. When we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or canvas; we popularize them in poetry and song; we use, in turn, the lyre or the tabor, the ode or the ballad, the story or the novel; the drama is open to us, and through it, above all, we are able to exercise an electric and victorious influence. We address ourselves to man’s imagination and sentiments; consequently we are always bound to have the sharpest and most decisive effect. (*Selected Writings* 281)

Saint-Simon, a veteran and survivor of both the American and French revolutions, posits here, as he does throughout his career, a plan for reorganizing industrial society. His system, which Emile Durkheim has identified as socialist rather than communist or utopian, envisions a new society in which economic interests themselves control the government. In this order a network of “commercial tribunals” finally becomes the effective government as “men of industry have as their judges only peers and colleagues, while the role of legal socialists is reduced to a minimum” (Durkheim 126). Saint-Simon puts three super groups of exceptional citizens—and here one’s status as exceptional depends upon merit rather than birth—in the role of directorship, and he calls these groups the industrials, the scholars, and the artists. Frank Manuel has argued that these three classes correspond to classifications identified by French physiologist Marie François Xavier Bichat—“psychophysiological types, so to speak, in each of which one quality predominated, the motor, the rational, or the emotive” (Manuel 121-122)—and that “as a rule, under the new division of labor the emotive or moralist branch tended to initiate projects, the scientific to criticize and evaluate them, and the administrators to execute them” (Manuel 122). Manuel concludes that if “the spirit rather than the letter of Saint-Simon’s last writings is considered” the moral function, which would be filled by the artist, assumes a role more important than that of the scientist. Durkheim, on the other hand, finds the artist’s position to be the least secure of the three and Jack Himelblau has noted “Saint-Simon’s continual wavering and not trusting society to the artist” (Durkheim 137; Himelblau 75).

Himelblau and Manuel do agree, however, on the final importance the artist obtains in Saint-Simon’s last writings, in which the artist literally becomes the conscience of the social body. Here artists play the role of propagandists—“les artistes, les hommes à imagination ouvriront la marche; ils proclameront l’avenir de l’espèce humaine” (*Le nouveau christianisme* 134) (the artists, the men of imagination will begin the march; they will proclaim the future of the human species)—but they are expected to do more than merely make change popular. If the new order is to endure, they must also serve as spiritual guides for the public—“à passionner la société pour son bien-être général” (to make society fascinated with its own well-being) (*Le nouveau christianisme* 134). To Himelblau, though, the elevation of the artist comes with a price. By bestowing “sacerdotal characteristics,” Saint-Simon has in effect made the artist “a social servant, depriving him of his artistic freedom and hampering necessarily artistic creation” since his idea of art derives its new powers not from intrinsic aesthetic value, but from the salutary effects that value exerts on the general public (76). Here, too, as Saint-Simon himself points out, the line between autonomy and propaganda remains anything but a clean division, as art had a long history of promoting, among other things, “la croyance des peuples aux idées superstitieuses sur lesquelles les papes avaient fondé leur omnipotence (the people’s belief in the superstitious ideas on which the popes had founded their omnipotence) (*Le nouveau christianisme* 129). In the new Saint-Simonist order, too, the artist will enjoy something less than complete autonomy, yoked as he or she will be to a social body that also includes its rational and industrial elements. But art’s importance remains elemental—that same aesthetic beauty that served kings and popes remains a non-negotiable component not only of the Saint-Simonist system, but also of the education of each individual citizen.

Himmelblau's argument makes real traction, however, when we compare it to contemporary notions of artistic integrity rather than an older system of noble patronage. Clearly some sort of shift has occurred between the thoroughly responsible presence of the artist in Saint-Simon's vision and the now more familiar figure of the avant-gardist as an artist who sees himself or herself as anything but the first wave of a planned revolution. When a more, to contemporary ears, familiar avant-gardist such as Mallarmé claims that the unorthodox textual design of *Un coup de dés* invokes a simultaneity impossible for traditionally laid-out verse, or when Apollinaire describes his own *Calligrammes* as a last gasp for the printed word—"à l'époque où la typographie termine brillamment sa carrière" (778) (in the era when typography brilliantly ends its career)—before the eventual and inevitable domination of sound and movie recording, both are giving art itself a far more central role than that outlined by Saint-Simon's artist.² Indeed, by the reckoning of Saint-Simon's artist, the poets have it backwards, since the Saint-Simonist avant-garde seeks to employ art as a tool for making the general public more receptive to industrial progress and structural reforms. Art, in this view, seeks to aid the industrialists and philosophers in their mission to impose a new economic order and not to adapt in response to an economic order that changes of its own accord. Mallarmé and Apollinaire suggest that particularly expressive effects rather than political change might be the central goal of a new artistic project.

Of course these expressive effects come intrinsically tied to technological advances outside the arts, and neither artist feels himself capable of winning a battle against technology—their innovations rather serve as analogies to technological advances. In the realm of artistic expression they claim to produce the same sort of leaps their readers have already seen and been influenced by in a larger, commercial sphere. Where these avant-gardists differ from those of Saint-Simon is in their reasons why Mallarmé and Apollinaire posit expression itself as an end rather than a pedagogical tool. To Donald Drew Egbert this shift in perspective is an inevitable result of the untenable position in which Saint-Simon places the individual artist, giving him or her a mystical ability to sway public opinion but little role in making decisions about what this ability will accomplish. At once a servant of the idea-makers and the propaganda engine that makes the popularization of those ideas possible, the Saint-Simonist artist soon finds this sense of revolutionary power impossible to contain. Thus the artists remained "enchanted" with the power Saint-Simon granted them, but "rejected his belief that art should be devoted to achieving social goals, and therefore should be functional, utilitarian, didactic, and easily understandable" (122). So the faithful first wave of Saint-Simon's military metaphor holds on to its literal leading role while ceasing to accommodate the main body of troops that comes behind it.

There is also something delightfully prelapsarian about a golden age before the barrier between art and life became an essential concept for twentieth-century avant-gardism. Renato Poggioli places the division in late nineteenth-century France, arguing that *La Revue indépendante* "was perhaps the last organ to gather fraternally, under the same banner, the rebels of politics and the rebels of art," before concluding that such unity became impossible at the end of the nineteenth century when "what might be called the divorce of the two avant-gardes took place" (11). Avant-gardism, in Poggioli's theory, comes to be defined by "the dialectic of a movement," a dialectic that inevitably ends in failure as the

artistic movement shifts from “activism” to “antagonism” to “nihilism,” before finally reaching a self-destructive “*agonistic* moment” when it manages to rejoice in its own destruction “as an obscure or unknown sacrifice to the success of future movements” (25-26). Thus the avant-gardist sees himself or herself not as the harbinger of inevitable human progress, but as a dissident voice that will at best inspire the unborn dissidents of the future.

Here it is worth looking at two other constructions of the historical avant-garde, Peter Bürger’s vision of avant-gardism as an attack on the institution of art and Andreas Huyssen’s insistence on the avant-garde’s need “to remain dialectically related to that for which it serves as the vanguard” (4-5). For Bürger the bounds of avant-gardism are those of art itself. That is, the avant-gardist begins as an artist who wishes to destroy the conventions of art in order to create a new, institution-free art, “integrated into the praxis of life” (53-54). Approaching the process as a great historical failure, Bürger focuses on the inherent contradictions in the avant-gardist’s position, given that this “integration into the praxis of life” represents anything but liberation. Noting that the utopian visions of the avant-garde depend upon “an element of the noncommittal and an absence of any consequences,” Bürger points out that much is lost when art becomes “wholly absorbed” (50) in life. The artist, then, faces two contradictory forces, since the very power of art that he or she wishes to use to change life is literally a function of the distance between them. Furthermore, the creation of utopian alternatives to life as it exists will not necessarily spark societal change, given that the “better order” created by art “relieves the existing society of those forces that make for change” (50). Bringing about a better social order through art, be it written, visual, or musical, thus remains an elusive goal, and the artist’s attempt to achieve it faces the Scylla of an art that disappears into life and the Charybdis of an autonomous creation that becomes a simulacrum of the desired social change.

Huyssen’s characterization of the avant-garde as an artistic institution goes back to Henri de Saint-Simon’s description of the role of art itself in the dreamed-of revolution: a wing of the revolutionary party charged with using the attractiveness of artistic genres to make the public more amenable to its message. Like Poggioli, Huyssen sees a divorce between this historical mission and the more clearly aesthetic one invoked by the term today, though he puts that divorce in the 1930s rather than the end of the nineteenth century, while noting that “as early as the 1890’s the avant-garde’s insistence on cultural revolt clashed with the bourgeoisie’s need for cultural legitimation” which is to say that the reality of material progress and the artistic techniques designed to propagandize that progress failed to stick together (5). In both Huyssen’s and Bürger’s conceptions of the term, artistic aspirations and political ones remain fundamentally contradictory. An artist is only a useful technician for revolution in a social context in which his or her techniques are important.

Huyssen, however, offers mass culture as a consolation for this failure, a place where “the utopian hopes of the historical avantgard are preserved, even though in a distorted form” and it is mass culture that finally links reformist projects like those of Rodríguez, Owen, and Saint-Simon to avant-garde movements like futurism and dada (15). If the commercialization of mass culture indeed allows the artist/advertiser to serve as a first wave of *something* so long as that something remain subordinate to the larger social order

the artist/advertiser and his or her mission/employer inhabit, the twentieth-century vision of the failed avant-garde loops backwards towards an earlier failure—the final inefficacy of reformist visions to find, in the lecture hall and newspaper, the means of radically changing the economic and social conditions that made those instruments possible in the first place.

The inadequacy of all of these theories before a thorough mixture of political and artistic avant-gardism such as that we see suggested in Owen's essays and embodied in those of Rodríguez is painfully clear. Each depends on a meaningful demarcation between life and art, and without a sense of this demarcation as an unavoidable reality all its own, even the nostalgic wish for a prelapsarian unification of art and politics loses its tragic tension. Nor do we lack for compelling arguments to this effect. Guido A. Podestá notes how clearly useless Bürger's concept of the avant-garde becomes when placed before American examples of avant-gardism, given the fact the "institution of art" might be the last thing these movements seek to attack.³ Despite, and in fact because of this particular disconnection between avant-gardism as practiced by Simón Rodríguez and Robert Owen (and each undoubtedly sees himself as a part of a vanguard portending widespread political change), it is important to analyze what threads do connect their utopianism and the particular artistic movements theorized by the twentieth century as avant-gardist. While never self-consciously regarding themselves as artists, both thinkers see the presentation of their ideas as something more than a mere communicative exercise—namely, as a means of exemplifying the new epistemes they wish to propose.

Robert Owen's writing career begins with a series of four essays written between 1813 and 1816 and published together in various editions under the title *A New View of Society, or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character, and the Application of the Principle to Practice*. Published some thirteen years after his initial arrival in New Lanark, these essays cite the practical success of his reforms as proof of the essential truth of his message, a truth he expresses in economic terms as "improvements of the living machinery" that "are now producing a return exceeding fifty per cent, and will shortly create profits equal to cent per cent on the original capital expended in them" (5). In short, his argument goes, the series of humanitarian reforms by which he improved the hygiene, morale, and overall well-being of the workers at New Lanark should be viewed as anything but charity. Rather, the law of the market itself supports the logic of such reforms, or, as Owen puts it, "If, then, due care as to the state of your inanimate machines can produce such beneficial results, what may not be expected if you devote equal attention to your vital machines, which are far more wonderfully constructed?" (5).

Owen's interest in improving the human "machinery" naturally leads him to focus on education; what W. H. G. Armytage has called "the invariable concomitant of Utopist endeavor" thus forms a core of Owen's plan (36). Declaring reading and writing to be "merely instruments by which knowledge either true or false may be imparted" (*A new View of Society* 75), Owen emphasizes the ethical principle of shared happiness as the foundation that must underlie whatever skills are developed—the "manner" of education, he argues, matters less than the "matter" to be taught (*A new View of Society* 75). Part of

Owen's method is the requirement that the principle of shared happiness be treated not as an abstract concept for memorization and discussion, but as the practical rule governing every aspect of playground and classroom life. Having already posited the school as a refuge from the influence of "untrained parents" (*A new View of Society* 39), he further suggests that it function as a universe in which this moral principle holds sway just as Copernican physics might be said to govern the real universe. Thus, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, Owen comfortably makes scientific progress a metaphor for social progress and suggests that though humankind seems "to have remained as ignorant of himself as he was of the solar system prior to the days of Copernicus and Galileo" (*A New View* 42), his schools will strive to embed the principle of shared happiness so seamlessly into everyday life that the students "will receive the same conviction of its truth, that those familiar with mathematics now entertain of the demonstrations of Euclid" (*A New View* 48).

By the time Owen comes to write his missive to the Mexican government he has already participated in the founding of two utopian communities, the successful venture at New Lanark and the failure at New Harmony, Indiana. Beginning with a nod towards the difficulties inherent in founding a new republic—"obstáculos formidables que retardarán, ya que no impedirán, la realización de vuestros deseos"—he offers to provide "algunos medios que os proporcionarán el modo de hacer desaparecer las dificultades de que estáis rodeados" ("Petición" 183). After making the claim we might expect—that his own experience and research had allowed him to master two sciences necessary for creating "un carácter superior en los niños" and of educating each student "de manera que goce de la más completa seguridad desde su nacimiento hasta su muerte"—Owen goes on to suggest that America, and Mexico in particular, offers the only ideal space in which to realize his experiment ("Petición" 184).

Here he argues, with remarkable tone deafness towards the Mexican government, that his experiment needs the legal equivalent of empty space—"una nueva comarca en que no existen las leyes, instituciones y preocupaciones conocidas"—and that Texas and Coahuila provide such space in abundance ("Petición" 184). He promises to cobble together an international enlightened community "de individuos de cualquier nacionalidad cuyo ánimo sea tan ilustrado que se haga superior a las preocupaciones de la localidad," and to deliver, with this community, a solution to every division that separates humankind: "será una sociedad que prepara los medios de poner fin a las guerras, a las animosidades religiosas y a las rivalidades mercantiles entre las naciones, y a las disensiones entre los individuos" ("Petición" 185). Owen thus posits a prototype of the larger harmony he hopes to inspire. He will eliminate national, economic, and religious boundaries by offering a community whose united emphasis on shared happiness and education will transcend such banal divisions.

Owen concludes with a gloss of the relationship between scientific progress and social reform, finally putting his own proposal in perspective not as a brave venture into uncharted waters, but as a logical reaction:

El aumento de los conocimientos humanos, el progreso de las ciencias y, más que todo, los prodigios de las invenciones mecánicas y de los

descubrimientos químicos, que evitan la necesidad de mucho trabajo manual, exigen hoy en cambio, en el gobierno del mundo, una revolución moral que mejore la condición de los *productores* y les impida destruir, por medio de una revolución física, a los *no productores*. (“Petición” 186)

Here the mission of social change is to provide a nonviolent outlet for the *ajuste de cuentas* that modernity has rendered necessary: “Es de desear para todo el mundo que no haya revoluciones, y que las mejoras que aumentan en la época en que vivimos se hagan sin violencia por los Gobiernos establecidos” (“Petición” 186-87). In keeping with what Bestor defines as the communitarian’s middle way of “demanding reforms as far-reaching, as drastic and rapid as those that appeared in any revolutionary program” while at the same time objecting to “the method of revolution,” Owen is proposing an alternative reality in which persuasion rather than violence causes governmental change and in which governments listen to reason rather than the threat of violent dissolution (9). In this sense Owen shows a certain respect for established government, positing his community not as the nucleus of a sweeping revolution, but as a social laboratory whose results will convince those “Gobiernos establecidos” to take on the necessary reforms themselves.

The Rodríguez who published *Sociedades Americanas en 1828* had also shown a certain respect for established government. His career as a writer began with his 1794 proposal for the professionalization of the Caracas school system, a process modeled on the Bourbon reforms then taking place in Madrid. Later, as the first education minister of independent Bolivia, he saw his own proposals for a secular public school system fall victim to the traditionalism of the public and his own disagreements with Sucre. By the time he takes up his pen to make an essay-length microcosm for an enlightened American future, his views have organized themselves around a similar epistemological principle—the same experiential focus found in Rousseau and Pestalozzi. Furthermore, since he writes from an American continent recently liberated after decades of revolutionary violence, Rodríguez need not search for an open space in which to put his radical reforms into practice. He can make, for the American continent, the same claim Owen does for Texas and Coahuila, arguing that, as far as “GOBIERNO VERDADERAMENTE REPUBLICANO” is concerned, “La América es (en el día) el único lugar donde sea permitido establecerlo” (1: 262).

When he begins to argue the nuts and bolts of his beliefs about education and society, Rodríguez echoes Owen on several fronts. For example, he, too, sees the school as a special microcosm for freeing the younger generation from the prejudices of its elders—“Mas es el daño que hace, á la sociedad, un viejo ignorante, conversando con un nietecito, que el bien que promueven mil filósofos *escribiendo . . . volúmenes*” (2: 112)—and, like Owen, he downplays the significance of literacy itself: “IDEAS! . . . IDEAS! , primero que LETRAS” (2: 130-31). Finally, and most importantly, Rodríguez, too, defines a guiding moral principle as his core educational value, and his principle, like Owen’s, is clearly, to use Bestor’s term, communitarian.⁴ Just as Owen sought to inculcate a concept of shared happiness to bind individual interests, so Rodríguez invokes empathy as his core social value, and he bases this empathy on knowledge of one’s fellow citizens: “entre los conocimientos que el hombre puede adquirir, hay uno que le es de estricta

obligacion el de SUS SEMEJANTES” (2: 115). This principle of social knowledge leads him to another core truth about social behavior—the implicit limits that a community places on individual freedom—and this focus on the social dimension of human behavior leads him to the concept of shared faculties mentioned above (2: 116).

Rodríguez goes on to make a series of arguments for government involvement in education, suggesting that the government take over the role of “PADRE COMUN en la educación” (2: 120) likening the necessity of universal education to that of the vaccine against smallpox, which had been famously instituted in colonial Venezuela (2: 124). In true communitarian fashion, and in echo of Owen, he argues that the progressive Enlightenment of the Spanish American public will prevent at least a certain kind of revolution in which the public rebels against its leader “como se rebelan los humores contra el individuo” (2: 126). While the revolution of a long-repressed and ignorant public holds no attraction whatsoever for Rodríguez, he does not advocate education as a road towards public docility. What concerns him is rather the false docility brought on by ignorance. Rodríguez is always careful to distinguish between the violent wars called revolutions and the deep epistemological shift from authority to reason that the term should imply. A skeptic of Jefferson’s belief in the energizing powers of periodic revolutionary upheavals, he sees the education of a new public as the first step towards establishing a government organically connected to it (1: 273).

And just as Owen casts broad societal change as the inevitable future—“THE WORLD APPROVES—AND NONE CAN RESIST” (*A New View* 225) this despite a number of practical setbacks—Rodríguez invokes the inevitability of scientific discovery as a metaphor for the progress he is calling for—“no hay verdad que pueda ocultarse desde el instante en que la naturaleza la descubre” (2: 167). With this note, both writers invoke the precariousness of their own position. On the one hand, each is a prophet proclaiming an unpopular truth to a skeptical public whose imagination will not brook this inevitable future. On the other hand, each sees himself as a propagandist whose job it is to communicate this message to an audience that may presumably be swayed by what it reads.

Owen’s successful effort to launch his own career through a propaganda blitz has been well documented. Bestor and Armytage cite Owen’s own account of an 1817 effort to send newspaper versions of his essays, sometimes in the form of letters, to among others, “each of the leading persons in all classes” at a total cost of £ 4,000 (Bestor 71), while Armytage notes, again echoing Owen, that the volume of his mailings was such that “On one occasion his newspapers caused the mail coaches a delay of twenty minutes” (81).⁵ Noting that Owen’s status as well-known voice of reform dated from this burst of publicity, Bestor characterizes the four thousand pounds as “money well spent” (71).

For Rodríguez, whose writings reveal similar ambitions, the intricacies of newspaper publishing and publicity proved less friendly in the absence of a fortune sufficient to send tens of thousands of copies of his essays to the movers and shakers of Spanish American society. Lastarria’s commentary on the disgust that his unorthodox style produced in

much of the reading public has already been pointed out, and Rodríguez himself spends a great deal of ink preparing defenses of his style, even including, at the beginning of the 1834 edition of *Luces y Virtudes Sociales*, a laudatory quote from the editor of *El Mercurio Peruano*. First, the editor characterizes Rodríguez as “un genio meditador,” who has managed “la singular innovacion de pintar, á los ojos, los pensamientos, por medio del tamaño y forma de las letras, de la colocacion artificiosa de las palabras, y del aislamiento de las frases” (2: 99). And rather than let the editor’s words stand alone, Rodríguez adds his own commentary, insisting that readers take note that *this* particular intellectual authority has found the eccentricity of his text’s presentation altogether suited to its message: “dice que el modo de escribir es una *singular innovación*, no dice (como el profesor de varias ciencias) que es un *arbitrio para vender papel*: dice que la produccion es *singular* y que tiene *mérito*—no dice que es *coleccion de consejos y cuentecitos*, ni *cajon de sastré*” (2: 100). Clearly Rodríguez’s encounters with critics have already provided a laundry list of condemnations for his typographical lay-outs. The editor of *Mercurio Peruano*, who serves as something closer to an ideal reader, thus becomes an example for Rodríguez to brandish before potential readers in an attempt to preempt any knee-jerk reactions to his style. Along with demonstrating Rodríguez’s faith in this particular newspaper’s intellectual capital, this preface also provides an inescapable catalogue of his own frustration—the plea of an innovative writer suffering the indifference and/or misreadings of his contemporaries.

The homage both writers pay to the newspaper, either by purchasing and mailing thousands of them or by painstakingly citing an editor’s praise, recalls Benedict Anderson’s well-known formulation of the press as a space in which the “imagined community” of the nation-state takes its shape. Arguing that a nation-state’s existence stems from the collective imagination of a public that never sees itself—since most citizens never lay eyes on most of their fellows—Anderson identifies the newspaper as the prime source of this community. Here he cites Hegel’s description of the modern newspaper as a substitute for public prayer, a “mass ceremony” in which each citizen reads alone while knowing “that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (35). Of course the press’s function as an imaginary tool for the public imagination also lends itself to the manipulation of that imagination, a move Jürgen Habermas calls the loss of the public sphere’s “political character” with the result being “that the means of ‘psychological facilitation’ could become an end in itself for a commercially fostered consumer attitude” (169). In this structural critique of the public sphere, the people’s role as the authors of imagined community becomes more precarious. The same forum that creates a vibrant, politically active public can become a tool for controlling and manipulating that public. This potential for slippage renders the public’s position “ambiguous,” an ambiguity analogous to that of Kant’s formulation of a public “under tutelage, and still in need of Enlightenment,” while at the same time “claiming the maturity of people capable of enlightenment” (105). The power to emancipate implies, and indeed demands, the power to enslave.⁶

If Rodríguez’s and Owen’s chosen medium offers this ambiguity between emancipation and manipulation, the genre of their writings inhabits similarly ambiguous territory. In José Luis Gómez-Martínez’s formulation, the essay presents an egotistical but not

disagreeable narrator for whom scientific rigor provides much rhetorical but little material support: “El ensayo, pues, no pretende probar nada, y por ello no presenta resultados, sino desarrollos que se exponen en un proceso dialógico en el que el lector es una parte íntegra” (75). This statement recalls Sir Philip Sidney’s famous praise of the poet who “nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth” and in each case what is being praised is a sense of rhetorical freedom, the ability to speak unfettered and thus give voice to out-of-the-way truths (35). This rhetorical freedom presupposes a truth that exists outside of the scientific method, where the need to “affirm” one’s findings becomes the singular epistemological decider. Within literature, both critics claim, there persists an important space for the solitary human voice whose proof lies in the very ability to persuade and convince by all rhetorical means. At the height of the industrial revolution and in a medium made possible by print technology, Owen’s and Rodríguez’s very force comes from the same source as Montaigne’s—the intimacy of a believable, rational voice.

Owen’s testimonial writings, his explanation for how he came to possess the truth about how economic communities should be organized, brings with it, as Bestor has pointed out, a mystical, even religious dimension. The power for sympathy seems, in Owen’s description, to come from above, or as Bestor puts it, from “God (or the Owenite equivalent),” as though some supernatural force had ordained him the prophet of human happiness (61). In his 1816 “Address Delivered to the Inhabitants of New Lanark,” Owen explains his own activism by asking his audience how he, seeing the human suffering that surrounded him, could “remain an idle spectator” (*A New View* 122). Before this question leads any listener to wonder about his or her status as a “spectator,” Owen answers it with a resounding no, going on to point out that this empathy has been his special gift and the driving force behind his public persona:

No! The cause which fashioned me from the womb – the circumstances by which I was surrounded from my birth, and over which I had no influence whatever, formed me with far other faculties, habits, and sentiments. These gave me a mind that could not rest satisfied without trying every possible expedient to relieve my fellow men from their wretched situation, and formed it of such a texture that obstacles of the most formidable nature served but to increase my ardour, and to fix within me a settled determination, either to overcome them, or to die in the attempt. (*A New View* 122)

While this answer is clearly unsystematic, it does betray Owen’s own beliefs about the deterministic power of circumstances—albeit in a context of extra-circumstantial determination. What is peculiar about this particular passage is how meaningless that argument about circumstance becomes when placed in an atmosphere of pure determinism of the sort that Bestor finds so troubling—“The basic dilemma of any deterministic philosophy Owen never understood, for he never troubled to explain how he, alone among men, had broken the iron change of cause and consequence” (61). While Owen can call circumstance the author of his particular gift for empathy, he still cannot explain why these circumstances should affect him so differently than they do others who grew up against a backdrop of similar economic inequality—basically any English urbanite of his generation.

On the other hand, his immediate rhetorical aims are clear. Standing as a middle-class factory manager turned factory owner towards a crowd of workers whose experience has undoubtedly taught them to greet members of Owen's class with a healthy dose of skepticism, he is attempting, above all else, to prove his sincerity. While he will elsewhere make arguments about the economic viability of a humanely structured factory community, here he works hard to establish his own altruism. This movement towards sincerity, the lifeblood of the reliable essayistic voice, reaches a kind of apex in a newspaper letter published in London (and most likely shipped by Owen all over the world) in 1817. Remarking on his own appearance at a recent public meeting, Owen recounts that he had come unprepared—"I could not finish my preparations for it in time even to read over a fair copy of them"—but that the sheer force of his message had trumped any impediment his lack of preparation might have caused: "I knew then, however, as I did before, and as I know now, that the subject would carry me through; and it will continue to do so, whatever obstacles, trivial or important, may intervene" (*A New View* 187). Here he manages not only to comment on his present faith in the cause, but to cite a past success as proof that he has long possessed such faith. The biblical echo, too, is impossible to miss. The reformer, whose early religious impulses had led him to read widely before concluding, at the age of ten "that all existing theologies were erroneous" finds himself proclaiming a secularist version of Christ's advice to his own disciples in the Gospel of Matthew: when "brought before governors and kings" they are instructed to, "take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak" (Clayes vii; 10: 18-19). In Owen's formulation it is social equality that reaches the transcendent status of divine intervention.

For Owen this account of inspiration's triumph over technique represents a high-water mark for his interest in the formal presentation of his ideas. He goes to great lengths to ensure that learned and influential people see those ideas in print, but allows himself little reflection on how the act of expression and the act of thinking might overlap. Rodríguez, who also looks to newspapers as platforms that will at once transmit his ideas and legitimize them, goes further in attempting to theorize an aesthetic of the essay. In his case the overlap between a functional transmission of ideas and a reflection on how they are conceived remains a constant source of narrative tension. *Luces y Virtudes Sociales*, for example, is composed in three phases that in reality become separate rhetorical approaches to the argument that stable democracy depends on a national commitment to social education.

His first approach, written in a erudite but conversational style reminiscent of Montaigne for its affability and use of historical anecdotes, takes the eighteenth-century argument favoring practical, mechanical education over classical languages and turns it on its head: if living in a republic means adopting a wholly new concept of authority and citizenship, his reasoning goes, then an education in political theory becomes the most practical education a citizen could hope to give his or her children. Finding that the recently independent societies of South America are divided between two forces—"la moral en la clase distinguida, y la material en el pueblo"—Rodríguez compares this arrangement to the reproductive structure of a dioecian plant and suggests that a new arrangement is needed "á imitacion de otras plantas que en un mismo pié, tienen los dos poderes" (2:

107). Americans, Rodríguez continues, should make it their obligation to read more educational theory as a way of approaching and, if possible, closing this gap.

As the paragraphs unfold, the bursts of unconventional text design serve mainly to punctuate the conventional prose layout. Arguing that Europe’s splendor only serves to hide “el horroroso cuadro de su miseria y de sus vicios—resaltando en un fondo de ignorancia . . . ,” Rodríguez uses a variation in type to create an interruption; “**IGNORANTE** la EUROPA !!” (*interrumpirán algunos*) (2: 109).

Rodríguez responds to this interruption with a catalogue of European depravity that ranges from Russian serfdom to the continent’s widespread anti-Semitism. In conclusion, he notes the effect this catalogue should have had on the reader—“piénsese, despues, en el efecto que han producido, en todas las clases del pueblo, los rayos de luz que ha despedido, esa misma **SABIDURIA** que se admira, y se concluirá que

la INSTRUCCIÓN PUBLICA
 en el siglo 19
 pide **MUCHA FILOSOFIA**
 que
 el INTERES JENERAL
 está clamando por una **REFORMA**
 y que
 la **AMERICA** está llamada
 por las circunstancias, á emprenderla
atrevida paradoja parecerá. . . .
. . . .no importa. . . .
los acontecimientos irán probando,
 que es una verdad muy obvia
 la América no debe IMITAR servilmente
 sinó ser **ORIJINAL.**
 (2: 109-110)

On a purely visual level, the passage stands out from the rest of Rodríguez’s essay like a billboard. Essentially a block quote within the text, it permits Rodríguez to cite himself speaking in a clear, aphoristic voice that seems an external authority. Soon the voice splits again. After offering the startling argument that the philosophical process in America must save the world from Europe’s vices, an understated voice—the *real* narrator, readers are expected to assume—steps in to offer reassurance in italics that seem quiet in the midst of so much visual action. For readers who are not yet convinced, this voice says not to worry—that observation itself will eventually prove the passage’s oracular conclusion.

It is important to point out that Rodríguez’s typographical techniques themselves are not without precedent. Fellow typesetter Benjamin Franklin had complained about a newspaper edition of his “An Edict by the King of Prussia” that appeared “stripped of all the capitalling and italicizing, that intimate the allusions and mark the emphasis of written discourses, to bring them as near as possible to those spoken” (883). By seeing typographical variation as a way to introduce to the page the tonal effects normally

attributed to public oration, Franklin shows his desire to make the page a visual reconstruction of a meeting house as well as what Christopher Looby has called, citing Franklin's complaint, "the traditional valuation of the imputed presence, fullness, authenticity, and truth of speech, and the correlative devaluation of writing as a derived, supplementary, corrupt and possibly false translation of speech" (73-74). Rodríguez, of course, believes in oratorical effects just as Franklin does, but he further complicates the graphic nature of his writing by positing the visual structures of his texts as representations of the logic behind his arguments.

If the essay's roots in Montaigne and Bacon already give it a certain bias towards reading as observation in which the reader apparently "sees" the writer thinking in real time, as Michael Hall has argued, this passage initiates a process of doubling back that allows the reader access to the process by which Rodríguez's argument convinces (79). Alicia Ríos has called the effect produced by Rodríguez's rhetorical question-and-answer technique "esa falsa pretensión de participación activa del lector dentro del diálogo intertextual," since whatever plurality the discourse may contain is ultimately artifice on the narrator's part (152). Here, along with this effect of quasi-dialogue, Rodríguez produces a moment of theater in which the reader sees his ideas at work on a narrative stage. The technique of breaking the argument into aphoristic chunks allows Rodríguez to diagram the process by which it finally becomes convincing and, at the same time, to make that process appear to be something that "los acontecimientos" will inevitably prove (2:109-110). Where Owen counts on his own sincerity as narrator and the moral imperative of his message, Rodríguez explores cognition itself, and even a moment of bold theatrical presentation fails to quiet his worries about how difficult that process might really turn out to be.

Toward the conclusion of the first version part of *Luces y Virtudes Sociales*, Rodríguez makes a favorite argument on the insufficiency of functional literacy—"de qué hablará el que no tenga ideas?"—before positing the precarious condition of his own essay as an example of the feebleness of books:

¿en cuantas manos caerá que se dignen abrirlo? . . . Visto el título
¿Cuántos habrá
que quieran leer el libro? . . . emprendida la lectura ¿cuantos la
acabarán? . . .
¿Cuántos entenderán bien lo que hayan leído? . . . ¿Cuántos
partidarios habrá
ganado la *Instrucción Jeneral*? . . . cuantos la protegerán
activamente? . . . y
¿quien la pondrá en práctica?! . . .?! . . . ¿! (2: 130-31)

Against all these possible difficulties, Rodríguez offers the rationale for his tripartite structure. This detailed and intimate introduction comprises the first and will be followed by a radically condensed synopsis justified as a nod towards his learned readers:

A los sabios se debe hablar por sentencias
(*el que las entienda es sabio*)

y se les debe hablar así, porque para ellos
las *sentencias* son PALABRAS (2: 136)

The final part will employ on a wider scale the typographical techniques analyzed above in order to represent visually the logic behind his arguments, an expressive task he regards as the writer's responsibility:

de cualquier modo se propone una cuestion :
para sentarla hay reglas :
en el trabajo de resolverla caben modificaciones que,
sin alterar la Idea
pueden aclararla ú oscurecerla
(2: 138)

Here, of course, Rodríguez proposes going beyond the mere transmission of ideas and creating a discursive space in which to work through them in real time like a mathematics professor solving problems on a chalkboard. Where Owen promises new ideas in the familiar fora of the public meeting and newspaper letter, Rodríguez proposes a rethinking of the essay itself.⁷

Along with their literal employment of the technical instruments of the nineteenth-century press—circulation and mail service for Owen and typographic innovation for Rodríguez—their reformist postures also combine the political commitment of Saint-Simonism with a general notion of technological progress that prefigures the later avant-garde's emphasis in technology as an epistemological force. Consciously linking the new political order he sees on the horizon to the technological process of the printing press, Owen notes that that this medium's productions

now show the errors of the systems of our forefathers so distinctly, that they must be, when pointed out, evident to all classes of the community, and render it absolutely necessary that new legislative measures be immediately adopted to prevent the confusion which must arise from even the most ignorant being competent to detect the absurdity and glaring injustice of many of those laws by which they are now governed. (*A New View of Society* 21-22)

Rather than positing himself as an individual agent of change within a static institution, Owen claims, like Mallarmé or Apollinaire, to have adapted his own productions to the demands of broader technological change. Such a claim also comes through in his own descriptions of the performance of utopian avant-gardism, not only as a spirit capable of carrying him through a difficult speaking engagement, but also as a rational technique for impressing upon others the economic realities of the industrial world.

Rodríguez, too, defines his mission as a response to larger developments, and counts the press among them, describing it as the “CANDELABRO” of enlightenment and arguing for its power as a means of making knowledge popular (2: 171):

Se divulga, todo lo que se difunde en el vulgo, por medio de pregones,
carteles ó gacetas; pero no se jeneraliza sino lo que se extiende con arte,
paraque llegue, en excepcion, á todos los individuos de un cuerpo. (2: 137)

Rodríguez’s appropriation of the term *arte* is particularly interesting here, as he places it not in an elevated, autonomous position, but as something akin to the role played by Saint-Simon’s propagandist. Art, for Rodríguez, is the skill necessary to render difficult ideas fit for popular consumption without diluting them in the process. He goes on to define this practice of “extender con arte” as an ethical responsibility for writers and publishers alike: “la posesion de los medios, impone la obligacion de hacer uso de ellos” (2: 137). Thus Rodríguez articulates the ethic of a vanguardia that never managed to be remembered, an ethic which defines *media* as a means of pedagogy and thus ties possession of the means of communication to a responsibility for fostering popular enlightenment. Owen, of course, practices what Rodríguez preaches, using his wealth to effectively commandeer a portion of the English press, but Rodríguez goes further by defining the “art” of publishing as in relation to an ethical duty to employ new techniques. What he calls the “painting of words” implies the writer’s task to provide visual evidence of “conexion de Ideas y conexion de pensamientos” (2: 151-52). So when Rodríguez claims early on that his text will demonstrate his ideas visually—

En las cuestiones siguientes se ve	el modo de pensar del autor lo que pretende y lo que espera (2:139)
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—the “art” he defines innovates for the sake of “generalizing” the communication of increasingly complicated ideas. For Rodríguez, as for Owen and Saint-Simon, the power of innovation lies not in its ability to destroy the institution of art, but in its coercion of artistic expression as a means of spreading transforming ideas. In Rodríguez’s case, though, this transformation is as much a process of education as exhortation. He imagines the printed page as a pedagogical space in which sentences and paragraphs might be dissected and demystified before a reading public that will in turn develop its own faculties of analysis. Of course this posture raises as many questions as it answers, since the demystifying narrator occupies a particularly strong position from which to manipulate his or her readers. Rodríguez’s continued self-conscious reflection on the process of reading and writing thus represents more a struggle with the mantle of enlightened narrator than a solution of its paradox.

Notes

- ¹ These historical details are taken from Arthur Eugene Bestor, Jr.'s study of utopian communities in the United States (106-114). For more information on Owen, see Podmore and Cole.
- ² Mallarmé proclaims the expressive goal of producing “une vision simultanée de la Page” (a simultaneous vision of the page) and describes his poems as producing, in cinematographic terms, a “mise en scène spirituelle exacte” (an exact spiritual *mise en scène*) (405-06). In Apollinaire's view his own innovations are already anachronistic, representing the influences of the cinema and phonograph, art forms which truly rule the times, on a genre that clearly belongs to an earlier age. Both explain their innovations as responses to industrial progress rather than as tools to bring about further political or economic reform.
- ³ Podestá puts it this way: “It is possible to argue against Peter Bürger's assertion that all the avant-garde movements, and surrealism in particular, tried to destroy literature as an institution. However, this goal was a complete non-sense for Harlem Renaissance and Latin American writers” (418).
- ⁴ Bestor sees in nineteenth-century communitarianism a middle ground between gradual reform and violent revolution. That is, while revolutionaries seek the overthrow of government, and reformers place a certain implicit trust in government, communitarians seek “an immediate, root-and-branch reform, and a peaceable, nonrevolutionary accomplishment thereof,” an accomplishment that could occur without violence since the communitarian believed that a small community “could undergo drastic change in complete harmony and order, and the great world outside could be relied on to imitate a successful experiment without coercion or conflict” (4).
- ⁵ Owen's claim is cited by Bestor, who also notes that Owen commissioned and paid for a printing of *New View of Society* “in three numbered broadsides” that numbered “forty thousand copies” (71).
- ⁶ Peter Howell invokes the imperfect fit between Habermas's vision of a public linked by newspapers and the reality of the post-colonial moment in North America arguing that “The story to be told is not one of a transition to a ‘genuinely critical public,’ but on the contrary, of a radical *conflict* in the assumptions and necessities that formed the locus, procedure and aims of discourse and representation in the public-political arena” (363).
- ⁷ Ángel Rama has invoked the textbook as a model for Rodríguez's vision for essayistic space—“Rodríguez removed writing from its normal patterns, purged it of rhetorical adornment, extracted its essences, and boiled them down to their most laconic expression, then distributed them textbook-style, on the page so that the reasoning process and its component concepts would be accessible to the eye” (49)—while Miguel Gomes compares his page to a chalkboard (54-55).

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