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Ambiguity, Repetition, Anxiety. The Phantasma of Foundational Violence in Cortázar's "El otro cielo"

"El otro cielo" is one of several texts where Cortázar deals with the displacement between Argentina and France, between Buenos Aires and Paris. As, for instance, in his novel *Rayuela* or in his short story "Cartas de Mamá", also in "El otro cielo" Cortázar draws on the topic of the double; the confrontation with a more or less uncanny second self with peculiar wishes or behavior. As has been stated several times, in "El otro cielo" we have a multiple splitting of the self on several levels, one of them being the (biographical) relationship between Cortázar, his narrator, and the Comte de Lautréamont. The otherness alluded to by Lautréamont and the figures of the story who in part already wear *l'autre* in their names, is, however, an otherness which can in my view only fully be explored if the parallelism of French otherness is taken into account as well. The fundamental phantasma the text is built on, I will argue, is the phantasma of transnational and transhistorical foundational violence: a garland of flowers, as the text will suggest, that consists of the transatlantic phenomena of coup d'états, *caudillismo*, revolution, and foundational violence in the sense of Benjamin and Derrida. Other than simply hiding from a dull engagement, a demanding mother and a threatening political future, I argue that the narrator needs to enter the labyrinth of the passages in order to recognize the hybridity of his own political anxiety and of a heritage that goes far ahead of Juan Domingo Perón.

"Je est un autre". Language, reality, and lo neofantástico

Julio Cortázars short story "El otro cielo" appeared in 1966 in the volume *Todos los fuegos el fuego*. Narrated in first-person, it tells the story of a stockjobber, who lives with his mother in 1940s Buenos Aires. He is engaged to Irma, "la más buena y generosa de las mujeres" (Cortázar 1966/2020: 158[1]), but he uses to escape her, his mother and, to a lesser extent, his job at the bourse, via a gap in time and space. Many times, when he roams the streets of the city center, the district of the arcades (*pasajes*) and galleries – and the bourse –, it so happens that he encounters effortlessly, "empujando apenas con el hombre cualquier rincón del aire" (ebd.: 155) another world: the world of late 1860s Paris, respectively the neighborhood of the Parisienne bourse and its nearby galleries, especially the Galérie Vivienne.

The galleries, as well in Buenos Aires as in Paris, are the bearers of the eponymous 'other sky'- a ceiling of stucco and plaster and dirty skylights; a sky that ignores either sun or rain, daytime or nighttime. In the Galérie Vivienne, the narrator uses to meet with his lover, the prostitute Josiane, and her friends Kiki, Albert, and La Rousse; he wanders the galleries and frequents the cafés of the neighborhood. However, the 19th century Parisienne world is not a mere world of leisure, faineance, and happiness but also a world of work – now and again, the narrator works in the French bourse right around the corner just as he does in Buenos Aires. But most importantly, it is a world of terror. The 'second sky' is haunted right from the start by a ripper, the so-called 'Laurent', who has already strangled seven women, mainly prostitutes. This violence seems to be the pre-condition that enables the narrator to cross from one time and space to the other: when he came to the Parisian galleries for the first time, the murderer was already up to his mischief and he met Josiane only because she was hiding from Laurent in the galleries. Conversely, when Laurent is finally caught, the gap will close and the narrator will henceforth be unable to enter his alternative world. Laurent is, however, not the

[1] Im Folgenden zitiert unter der Sigle EC.

only problem that disturbs the alleged idyll. There is also the impending war against the Prussians and then that mysterious *sudamericano*: a handsome and taciturn, somewhat uncanny young man who frequents the same cafés as the narrator, has used the love services of Josiane's colleague La Rousse, and with whom the narrator feels a certain affinity. However, he never manages to speak to him, although he undertakes to do so several times.

Despite the adversities, the narrator spends much time in the other world, feeling a mixture of happiness and worry, lightness and dejection, hope and pride – for Josiane's boss, her nameless *amo*, apparently trusts him so much that he indirectly seems to recommend Josiane to his protection. Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires, the narrator tries to appease his mother, who is suspicious of his repeated absences, with small gifts. For the love of his fiancée, he also goes on a recreational vacation to the summer home of Irma's parents – however, he doesn't linger there for long and soon flees back to the city and the French galleries. Here, the subliminal atmosphere of violence and revenge finally reaches its peak with the detailed narration of the execution of a poisoner who serves, in a way, as a substitute for Laurent, who is still at loose. After the execution, the narrator manages only one more time to trespass the border between the two worlds: after a long absence, he finally meets Josiane again and learns that Laurent - his real name is Paul – has eventually been caught and that the mysterious *sudamericano* has died in his hotel room around the same time. The narrator, however, cannot benefit from all this. On the contrary: he soon finds the gap, or, rather, the garland, as he calls it,[2] closed and can thus no longer seem to find a way to reach the world beyond the arcades of Buenos Aires. He hence has no choice but to finally marry Irma and resign himself to the "normalidad burocrática" (ebd.: 177) and to the troubled social and political atmosphere of the Buenos Aires of 1945. The story closes as follows:

> Y entre una cosa y otra me quedo en casa tomando mate, escuchando a Irma que espera para diciembre, y me pregunto sin demasiado entusiasmo si cuando lleguen las elecciones votaré por Perón o Tamborini, si votaré en blanco o sencillamente me quedaré en casa tomando mate y mirando a Irma y a las plantas del patio. (Ebd.: 183)

According to Jaime Alazraki, the so-called fantastic narratives of Borges, Kafka, and Cortázar, are, in contrast to the traditional fantastic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, characterized above all by the fact that they make a second reality visible (cf. Alazraki 1990: 28–29). Cortázar himself put this into the field when he sought to define the character of the marvelous that distinguishes his stories from those of the aforementioned era:

> Maravillosa en el sentido de que la realidad cotidiana enmascara una segunda realidad que no es ni misteriosa, ni transcendente, ni teológica, sino que es profundamente humana, pero que por una serie de equivocaciones ha quedado como enmascarada detrás de una realidad prefabricada con muchos años de cultura, una cultura en la que hay maravillas, pero también profundas aberraciones, profundas tergiversaciones. (Cortázar/García Flores 1967, quoted in Alazraki 1990: 28)

In contrast to the, as it were, 'classic' stories of the fantastic, the *sujets* of what Alazraki goes on to call "lo neofantástico" (ibid. as well as Alazraki 1983) do not provoke anxiety but, rather, certain unrest and the impression of having caught a peak of that masked second reality, which works as the bearer of a metaphorical meaning (cf. Alazraki 1990: 29). This metaphorical meaning, as Alazraki argues, provides, then, a "lenguaje segundo" (ibid.) as the "única manera de aludir a una

[2] I will get to the role of the *guirnalda*, offered to the narrator by *figuras alegóricas*, during the next chapter.

realidad segunda que se resiste a ser nombrada por el lenguaje de la comunicación." (ibid.) The importance of a 'second language' for literature in general and fantastic narratives in particular, was, however, already remarked briefly by Tzvetan Todorov, who, in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* states:

> Or la littérature existe par les mots; mais sa vocation dialectique est de dire plus que le langage ne dit, de dépasser les divisions verbales. Elle est, à l'intérieur du langage, ce que détruit la métaphysique inherente à tout langage. Le propre du discours littéraire est d'aller au-delà." (Todorov 1970: 175–76)

The function of language in (phantastic) literature and maybe even more so in the stories of the *neofantástico* would therefore bring to the surface and render visible what cannot be articulated within 'common' language or discourse. The failure of articulation is, in this case, not necessarily due to political censorship but to the very nature of language. While it always already presents itself within a certain ideology (or metaphysics), it nevertheless contains hidden layers which can be uncovered either in psychoanalysis or, as Todorov and Alazraki have argued, through phantastic literature.

When I speak of psychoanalysis in this context, it is, of course, not by accident. What Cortázar and Alazraki have somewhat loosely called 'second reality' can, at least in the case of "El otro cielo", be described in far greater detail with the help of Jacques Lacan's categories of the imaginary and the symbolic as these categories allude both to language and 'second language' as to surface structures and second meanings. For Lacan, the realm of the imaginary is where the formation of the ego takes place. In the mirror stage, the subject identifies with their specular image. The specular image seems perfect and whole in contrast to the actual body of the child, who, as a toddler, experiences the former as a deficient, 'fragmented body' (*corps morcelé*). As their *corps morcelé* cannot keep up with the wholeness of the specular image – which Lacan calls *l'autre*, the little other –, the constitution of the ego goes hand in hand with an alienation:

> C'est cela le vrai sens du terme corps morcelé, et la première synthèse de l'ego est essentiellement alter, elle est *alter ego*, elle est aliénée. Le centre de constitution de sujet humain désirant comme tel, c'est l'autre en tant qu'il lui donne son unité […] (Lacan 1955: 68, emphasis in the original.)

Consequently, Lacan adopts throughout his work the famous phrase of Arthur Rimbaud "je est un autre" (Lacan 1967, Rimbaud 1871/1972). The realm of the imaginary is thus the space of the little other, of dual relations, of the double. In contrast to the symbolic, the space of language and law, the imaginary is dominated by images and imagination, deception and lure (cf. Evans 2006: 84). It "is the order of surface appearances which are deceptive, observable phenomena which hide underlying structure" (ibid.). Although it may appear as a possible escape from the symbolic order, it is a deceptive escape, as the imaginary cannot exist without the symbolic; it is always already structured by it (cf. ibid.). In addition, it is no less structured by language as the symbolic. But language in the imaginary takes on the shape of ambiguity, of puns, and double meanings; it thereby renders formations of the unconscious visible. Language, for Lacan, is essentially unstable; it "gives rise to the inherent ambiguity of all discourse" (ibid.: 101). This echoes to some extent what Todorov wrote about (phantastic) literature threatening the metaphysics of language (cf. Todorov 1970: 175–76). With Lacan, I would argue, we can conclude that this particular kind of literature which evokes the gap between the imaginary and the symbolic, or, to put it with Cortázar, between first and second reality, is especially suitable to evoke the ambiguities of discourse and thereby to render unconscious elements visible.

Research on "El otro cielo" has, of course, been concerned with the question of the double and of the loss, respectively the generating of identity. A substantial amount of works deal, for instance, with the relationship between Cortázar and Isidore Lucien Ducasse, better known as the Comte de Lautréamont, who somewhat haunts the story on an intertextual and biographical level – he came from South American Río de la Plata to Paris just like Cortázar. Particularly noteworthy in this respect is, still, the study of Emir Rodríguez Monegal (1976) who elaborated extensively on the intertwining of Laurent, the *amo*, and Lautréamont (the first two together forming the name of the latter), of the narrator and ultimately of the author Cortázar himself. For Francisca Noguerol Jiménez, the otherness to be found in both the author Isidore Ducasse and the protagonist of his *Chants de Maldoror* are similarly central to the complex of otherness conveyed in the story. In this context, the two epigraphs from the *Chants de Maldoror* Cortázar included in his story build a bridge between Cortázar's first-person-narrator and the real-life Isidore Ducasse (1994: 240), who get, for their part, entangled with the strangler Laurent (ibid.: 242). Arenillas Cabrera (2008) in turn deals with the topics of urban topography, voyage and the Baudelairian concept of the *flaneur*, culminating in the urge to dissolve identity. Against the background of city, center, and periphery, Jorge Rodríguez Padrón sees "El otro cielo" as a paradigmatic text for simultaneous multiplication and loss of centers in the literature of the Río de la Plata. This disposition leads to an off-center, a ghostly in-between, which affects the identity constitution of the subjects and impedes profound identity relations with the other (1980: 497–499). In a similar approach, but from a different perspective, Laura Martins (2000) also draws on the question of the search for a center to fill the existential whole of the postmodernist subject. She links this to a fundamental Cortázarian critique of the Western subject and their culture and states that texts like *Rayuela*, "Carta a una señorita en París", "El otro cielo" or, moreover, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, express discomfort with and resistance to a cultural order the subject is not willing to identify with (ibid.: 411–414).

While I agree with the diagnoses of fragile, doubled, or tripled identity and a profound discomfort with the symbolic order, I think what these works fail to take into account is the far more concrete political background "El otro cielo" presents to the reader in both metaphorical and metonymical form. Also, Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz' interesting analysis of "El otro cielo" as family allegory which, according to her, expresses Cortázars repudiation of erotic patriotism (2004: 116) and his rejection of bourgeois values arising with the industrialization of the 1940s, does not really pay attention to the fundamental political violence lurking in the narration. In her opinion, the principle of violence in the narration has a fundamental Freudian character, being incarnated in the desire to kill the prostitute as a representative of the devouring mother – a desire that, in her reading, shifts from the narrator to his double, Laurent the ripper (ibid.: 120). She links this allegorically to national identity as "[t]he narrator sees himself as a misfit in both identities" – rejecting the bourgeois values of the one world, and being driven out of the bohemian paradise of the other due to his murderous pleasures (ibid.) While I agree that the fundamental texture of the story consists in an (in part) psychoanalytically decipherable excess of entangled individual and political *jouissance*, I would be hesitant to characterize the protagonist and his relationship to Laurent in this rather brute, as it were, 'Norman-Bates-like' manner. As I will show below, I think we have reason to believe that Josiane herself is in fact another imaginary reflection of the narrator and therefore part of a structure of a

metonymical shifting of signifiers.[3] These shifting signifiers ought to show the narrator what he is not yet able to accept: that the violence he experiences in Paris has a foundational and hence political character, which points to the history of revolutions of both countries and still has a firm, yet ambiguous influence on the Argentina of the 1940s.

The allusions the narrator makes by the end of the story to the second World War, the nuclear bomb, and, of course, to Juan Domingo Perón, are therefore, in my view, merely hints of the deeper phenomenon of political violence that haunts the text and also the narrator himself who cannot escape it.[4] "El otro cielo", I will argue, is a text where the fundamental trauma of *violence fondatrice* comes to the surface on behalf of a second reality, where language exists merely as a poetic, metaphorical message, as wordplay, and bearer of violent sensuality.[5] The, as it were, distorted language of the imaginary realm is to a large extent an upside-down communication which renders those elements of the "realidad cotidiana" visible that cannot be articulated from within. My hypothesis is therefore, that the fictional characters of Josiane, Laurent, el *sudamericano*, and *el amo*, into which the narrator splits himself or projects himself onto, and the historical characters of Perón and Napoleon III (the latter is only present implicitly as we know the story takes place at the end of the Second Empire) all form part of the same *guirnalda*. This *guirnalda* links the French as well as the Argentinean State to the *violence fondatrice* of *caudillaje*, hybrid republicanism resp. monarchism, violence against the masses, and, conversely, violence of the masses. The space of the galleries and arcades, which provides protection from the vicissitudes and threats of politics, is right from the start invaded by the very violence it meant to exclude. Far from being just an escape room for a somewhat oedipal narrator, the galleries are an enabling space for the political anxiety of a bourgeois (symbolic layer), yet bohemian (imaginary layer) narrator who takes an ambivalent stance towards the upcoming first presidency of the *caudillo* and working-class hero Perón. Before we finally enter the world of the galleries, let's take a closer look at the first two pages of the story, where the narrator – retrospectively – remembers the time when gliding over from the Pasaje Güemes to the Galérie Vivienne was the easiest thing one could imagine.

Remembering the galleries: the sound of desire

The first page of Cortázar's story is worthwhile to be analyzed in depth. Both on the semantic and phonetic level, it contains the elements which form the basis for

[3] In his reading of "El otro cielo", Matei Chihaia (2010) argues convincingly that 'shifting' is a crucial feature of the story in several ways: in the dislocation and the metaleptic structure of the story, in the narrator's search for identity, which constitutes a rite de passage to the world of adult citizens (cf.: 163) producing, in turn, an aesthetic shifting: "un efecto de distanciamiento duradero frente a las formas literarias tradicionales" (ibid.) This way, "sudamericanidad sería un asunto de editorial, de literatura" (ibid.)

[4] That's why I believe Reichardt (1986), Schmidt-Cruz (2004) or Noguerol Jiménez (1994) hit only part of the problem when they identify the political problem of the story merely in the present fascism, in imminent Peronism, in a rising bourgeois social class, or in the parallelism of military occupation by the own army with culmination in Perón's presidency in Argentina and the threat of Prussian invasion in 1870 France, without identifying the repeating threat of foundational violence with different political backgrounds.

[5] In her reading of "El otro cielo", Marcy Schwartz also focuses on language, stating for example that Irma as an earthy, two-syllable name contrasts with the soft Josiane, functioning thus as a distinctive marker to distinguish between the blurring zones of the two worlds. She concludes somewhat superficially that the several names of French, respectively Castilian origin together with the figure of Lautréamont help Cortázar establish the story's multicultural themes and the idea of bicultural identification (cf. 1996).

the several layers of meaning that the text will unfold in the following. I will therefore quote them at length:

> Me ocurría a veces que todo se dejaba andar, se ablandaba y cedía terreno, aceptando sin resistencia que se pudiera ir así de una cosa a otra. Digo que me ocurría, aunque una estúpida esperanza quisiera creer que acaso ha de ocurrirme todavía. Y por eso, si echarse a caminar una y otra vez por la ciudad parece un escándalo cuando se tiene una familia y un trabajo, hay ratos en que vuelvo a decirme que ya sería tiempo de retornar a mi barrio preferido, olvidarme de mis ocupaciones (soy corredor de bolsa) y con un poco de suerte encontrar a Josiane y quedarme con ella hasta la mañana siguiente. (EC: 155)

The first paragraph reads almost like a *poème en prose*.[6] What we have here is an alternating sequence of flow and rupture. The impression of a smooth flow results from a high number of synaloephes: Me ocurría_a veces / dejaba_andar / se ablandaba_y cedía / se pudiera_ir_así / de_una cosa_a_otra. The way the words effortlessly flow into one another is mirrored semantically by the words "sin resistencia" in the second line, which refer also to the easiness with which the narrator used to cruise between the two worlds. Immediately after, there is a break, both semantically and phonetically: "Digo que me ocurría" doesn't contain any synaloephes, but an accumulation of rather hard consonants: first 'g', then 'qu', then 'c'. However, this break or rupture is cancelled right afterwards, when we dive again into a sequence of synaloephes which soften the hard 'c' sounds: aunque_una_estúpida_esperanza quisiera creer que_acaso_ha de ocurrirme todavía. As before, the flow, albeit now in an almost hasty manner, is semantically mirrored by an element of the sentence, the stupid hope of returning ("estúpida_esperanza"). Additionally, the dominating sound here is a rather light and hopeful 'a', creating a number of similar sounds. The flow in these sentences is further emphasized by the threefold use of "ocurrir": "Me ocurría a veces", "[d]igo que me ocurría, "acaso ha de ocurrirme todavía". The use of the *pretérito imperfecto* signals that the event (the 'trespassing') has repeatedly, habitually occurred in the past. However, as shown by the acceleration brought into play through the synaloephes, time has gone by fast. This indicates a sense of loss and nostalgia emphasized by the subsequent dominance of a rather gloomy 'o': "mi barrio preferido", "olvidarme de mis ocupaciones", "soy corredor de bolsa", until the mentioning of Josiane – a name as gentle as the girl who wears it – helps to return to the flow and to a more hopeful 'a': "y con un poco de suerte encontrar_a_Josiane_y quedarme con_ella_hasta la mañana siguiente". With this, the first paragraph closes. The next one starts like this:

> Quién sabe cuánto hace que me repito todo esto, y es penoso porque hubo una época en que las cosas me sucedían cuando menos pensaba en ellas, *empujando* apenas con el hombro cualquier rincón del aire. En todo caso bastaba ingresar en la deriva placentera del ciudadano que se deja llevar por sus preferencias callejeras, y casi siempre mi paseo terminaba en el barrio de las galerías cubiertas, quizá porque los pasajes y las galerías han sido mi patria secreta desde siempre. Aquí, por ejemplo, el Pasaje Güemes, territorio *ambiguo* donde ya hace tanto tiempo fui a quitarme la infancia como un traje usado. Hacia el año veintiocho, el Pasaje Güemes era la caverna del tesoro en que deliciosamente *se mezclaban* la entrevisión del pecado y las pastillas de menta, donde se voceaban las ediciones vespertinas con crímenes a toda página y ardían las luces de la sala del subsuelo donde pasaban inalcanzables películas *realistas. Las Josiane* de aquellos días debían mirarme con un gesto entre maternal y

[6] *Les chants de Maldoror* by Isidor Ducasse is also a *poème en prose*. Cortázar alludes to this text via the two epigraphs at the beginning and in the middle of his story which are direct quotes from *Les chants de Maldoror*. His dialogue with Ducasse is therefore extended to a complex aesthetic level.

> divertido, yo con unos miserables centavos en el *bolsillo* pero andando como un hombre, el chambergo requintado y las manos en los *bolsillos* […] y ya entonces era sensible a ese falso cielo de estucos y claraboyas sucias, a esa noche artificial que ignoraba la estupidez del día y del sol ahí afuera. Me asomaba con falsa indiferencia a las puertas del pasaje donde empezaba el último misterio, […] y los departamentos tendrían el mismo perfume que salía de las tiendas que yo creía elegantes y que chisporroteaban sobre la penumbra del pasaje un bazar inalcanzable de frascos y cajas de cristal y cisnes rosa y polvos rachel y cepillos con mangos transparentes. (Ibid.: 155–56, my emphasis)

In the first sentence, it is again the 'o' that dominates and creates together with, once again, hard consonants, another series of similar, repeating sounds and alliterations: "me repi*to to*do es*to*_y_es *p*enoso *p*orque hubo una época". The 't' and 'p' sounds push here like knocks or kicks and thus reflect "empujando". Had it, in earlier times, been easy for the narrator to slide over from the *barrio* of the Pasaje Güemes to the Parisian galleries, "empujando apenas con el hombro cualquier rincón del aire", it has now become impossible – he can push as much as he likes, nothing happens. Due to the synaloephes, we once more have the impression of fleeting time that slips away from the narrator. Hence his remark at the beginning of the paragraph "[q]uién sabe cuanto hace" – he cannot tell how much time has actually passed. Moreover, the uncertainty in the face of the passing of time underlines the uncertainty of the semantic relationship between the two timelines we deal with in the story: The Buenos Aires of the late 1920s and then the mid-1940s and the Paris of roughly 1869 and 1870.

From the second sentence onwards, when the narrator talks about the arcades and the galleries for the first time, another sound slowly begins to dominate the narration: a sensual, sibilant 's' sound. "[c]asi siempre", "paseo", "las galerías cubiertas", "quizá", "pasajes", "secreta", "desde siempre". We are now entering the sphere of desire (*de**s**eo*): mental desire as well as physical longing. The 's' sounds are therefore later joined by likewise sensual 'u' sounds: "luces", "subsuelo", "películas realistas". These films are, moreover, "inalcanzables", just like the realization of the desire.[7] Therefore, "inalcanzable" appears twice in this section, the second time accompanied by another series of 's' sounds, which also conclude the paragraph: "un bazar inalcanzable de frascos y cajas de cristal y cisnes rosa y polvos rachel y cepillos con mangos transparentes." Already before, the 's' of *deseo* is multiplied too in the description of the *otro cielo*: "ese falso cielo de estuco y claraboyas sucias". What is remarkable, however, is that the narrator 'forgets' the 's' in the name of Josiane, for all things: in the transition between the sentence that ends with "películas realistas" and the next sentence that begins with "Las Josiane", the plural 's' (Josiane**s**) is lacking. This could be due to the verbal omittance of the plural 's' in the French pronunciation, however, considering the meticulous construction of the previous sets, I think the missing 's' should be taken seriously. The realistic films, apparently a euphemism for porn, are a brute realization of imminent sexual desire, whereas Josiane, just like the late 19th century Paris she

[7] In this section, the narrator refers to his adolescence, when, as a young boy, he came to love the Pasaje Güemes and its prostitutes, who, however, rejected him due to his youth and his lack of money. At this time, we are still in Buenos Aires; the visits to the galleries start only some time after that; apparently when the narrator had already settled down with a job and a fiancée. Interestingly, the period of the narrator's adolescence coincides with the beginning of the *década infame* (cf. also Rodríguez Monegal 1976: 637). The arcades and galleries are thus always already contaminated by political anxiety; in the late 1920s as well as in the mid-1940s.

lives in, is closer to the fantasy dimension of desire than to its physical fulfillment.[8] The small pause one has to make between "realistas" and Las Josianes" in order to get one's tongue around the triple '(l)as' sound, introduces a gap between 'realism' and Josiane. Even if it is not Josiane herself who the narrator refers to here, but her *porteño* colleagues from 15 or 20 years earlier, the rupture between Josiane and reality is already established in this transition and links Josiane to the realm of the imaginary rather than the symbolic. The fact that the *deseo*-s is omitted in the plural of her name, shows, moreover, that Josiane and her world reveal a certain lack right from the beginning: at the moment when the narrator experiences the fulfillment of his desire in the world of the galleries, this world is already threatened by loss.
In these first two paragraphs of "El otro cielo", we can find three elements which are in fact constitutive for the rest of the story: 1) ambiguity, which we have in "territorio ambiguo", the narrator's description for the Pasaje Güemes,[9] 2) blending or intermingling, another part of the Güemes description, referring here to the delicious blending of the inkling of sin and innocent peppermints occupying the mind of the adolescent narrator of the late 1920s. The third element is 3) repetition, conveyed through the persistence of "ocurrir"/"me ocurría" in the first paragraph and the phonetic repetition of certain sounds and syllables, as we have seen above. This repetition, as I will argue below, mirrors the political repetition of violence which seems to have accompanied for decades the installment of many governments or regimes in post-Independence Argentina. The first element, the ambiguity, hints, in turn, at the ambiguous stance the narrator and his class (the middle-class bourgeoisie) may take towards past and imminent governments of a certain type: namely, the (in-)famous *caudillaje* type. For this reason, the second element, the intermingling, relates to the blended identities the narrator encounters for himself in the world of the French galleries. When he doubles, triples or even quadruples with the *sudamericano*, Laurent or the *amo*, the political anxiety of governing and looming violence is already there.

Yo sí: Being in the galleries

In the paragraph following the *poèmes en prose*, which, as we have seen, culminated in the sensual 's' sounds of desire, the narrator, for the first time, introduces a curious object that appears again and again in the course of the text: the garland.

> […] ese mundo que ha optado por un cielo más próximo, de vidrios sucios y estucos con figuras alegóricas que tienden las manos para ofrecer una guirnalda […]. (EC: 157)

The perhaps peculiar seeming term of "guirnalda" appears in the story a total of eleven times. For the narrator, the garland becomes a kind of open sesame: it allows him to enter the labyrinth of passages and galleries. I would argue that the *guirnalda* refers moreover to a famous intertext: namely, the tale of Theseus and Ariadne and their famous thread, with which Theseus can find his way out of the labyrinth again once he has vanquished the Minotaur: a monstrous hybrid creature of man and bull that lives in the labyrinth.[10] The myth refers to the monstrous, which is also hidden in our only superficially idyllic gallery world: it generates itself most clearly in the

[8] In fact, what seems to be Josiane's greatest attraction is, for the narrator, her room right at under the roof of the Galérie Vivienne.

[9] This ambiguity is not just a topological ambiguity but, as I will argue below, a fundamental ambiguity with regard to political ideology, the stance towards the *jouissance* of the masses etc.

[10] Cf. for example Ovid's version in the eighth book of his *Metamorphoses* (1978).

figure of the, as it were, invisible, woman killer Laurent. Like Theseus, Cortázar's protagonist also enters a labyrinth – a labyrinth of passages, at the other end of which there is a monster that seems to have superhuman powers: Laurent can effortlessly strangle his victims with just one hand. And just as the Minotaur regularly kills male and female virgins who are offered to him as sacrifices, Laurent strangles a total of nine women, primarily prostitutes. The virgin who becomes a prostitute turns Cortázar's '*ré-ecriture*' of the myth into a stage of shrinkage and depletion. This shrinkage also extends to the heroism, if you will, of the narrator, for he does enter the labyrinth yet not to defeat the monster, but to benefit from it: Only as long as the monster is alive, he will be able to enter the world of the galleries. That's why, unlike Ovid's Theseus, who uses the thread to leave the labyrinth safely, the narrator needs the carnivalesque version of the thread – the garland – to find his way back into the labyrinth again and again. At some point, however, this no longer works: the garland becomes cracked, deceptive, and in the end, it closes itself off completely to the protagonist:

> Nunca he querido admitir que la guirnalda estuviera definitivamente cerrada y que no volvería encontrarme con Josiane en los pasajes o los boulevares. (EC: 182).

He is left thrown back on himself in Buenos Aires, not because he defeated the monster – the Parisian police did that job – but because he has learned that the Parisian threat was in fact an Argentinian threat all along – an ambiguous political body, a threat of violence, but also of (working class) revolution.

The myth and its inversion by Cortázar thus indicate that we are dealing with trouble in paradise. But what, then, is the nature of this trouble?[11] In the following, I will endeavor to work out the fundamental phantasma that, as mentioned, in my opinion underlies "El otro cielo": the phantasma of foundational violence, mediated through various shapes of otherness.

Otherness, in Cortázar's story, is not simply a matter of pure alterity. The narrator introduces different kinds of otherness linked to the imaginary and the symbolic respectively. The Galeríe Vivienne is introduced as a place of escape for the narrator. However, as he lets us know, escape from family expectations (like marriage and grandchildren) is merely *one* of the reasons he trespasses the border between space and time. He is not specific about his other, maybe more important reasons, but he assures us it is essential that he met Josiane precisely in Galérie Vivienne, where the *guirnaldas* are, and not on some of the streets or boulevards (cf. EC: 158). The gallery is – ostensibly – the place of the imaginary, and so it is logical that here the narrator, speaking with Lacan, encounters various mirror images, doppelgängers of himself. He is thus repeatedly confronted with the alienation which is, for Lacan, constitutive of any form of identity. What is important to note is, however, that the doppelgängers he meets do not incite significant anxiousness – they are bearers of alienation, yes, but they are so as *l'autres*, 'little others': they are in the end reflections or projections of the ego and provide, hence, an illusionary otherness only (cf. Evans 2006: 135–136).

The first such mirror image the narrator encounters inside the galleries is the character who provides an anagram of the very word *l'autre*: Laurent, the strangler.

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[11] An explanation given in the research literature could be a suppressed homosexuality of the narrator, as Rodríguez Monegal (1976) or Bernard McGuirk (1986) have argued. While I acknowledge the plausibility of such a reading - there are several parts in the story, like the alleged sexual 'aberrations' of the South American, which certainly point to this conflict – what I am interested in here is a deeper, twisted structure of anxiety; a structure which is, however, partly accompanied by sexual anxiety, as we could see in the sounds of *deseo* above and as we will see, to some extent, later, when *jouissance* takes over the Pasaje Güemes.

The topic of the doppelgänger is made quite obvious here, as the narrator tells us how Josiane apparently suspected him to be the murderer at first and how both used to laugh afterwards "a la sola idea de que yo pudiera ser Laurent." (EC: 159) What is of radical alterity for the other characters – esp., of course, for the female ones – is, however, just of slight alienation for the narrator: the fear of Laurent for him is an alien fear ("miedo ajeno", ibid.: 160). The second imaginary counterpart the narrator meets in the galleries is "la vaga *silueta* de aquel que Josiane llamaba el sudamericano" (ibid.: 161, my emphasis). The relationship between the South American and the narrator is essentially imaginary as they never manage to speak to each other. The *sudamericano* always remains silent (apart from one time when he told the prostitute La Rousse that he came from South America). He is image and gaze rather than words and therefore a perfect specular image for the narrator. What is more, both figures, Laurent and the *sudamericano*, lack a proper name for the major part of the story: Laurent is only called Laurent because a psychic claims to have seen this name in her crystal ball, and the *sudamericano*, in turn, has never told anyone his name. We learn only after his death that it was of French origin, but it becomes forgotten instantly.[12] They are therefore both situated outside the symbolic, which operates within the realm of language, names, signifiers, and the law; they hence both serve as little others for the narrator.

There is, however, a third and probably surprising character, which also meets the requirements of the imaginary other for the narrator: his lover, Josiane. This twist works through a connection that is established between Josiane and the South American, his second counterpart. The narrator, somewhat surprised by his own thought, admits:

> […] da gusto besar en la boca de Josiane que pensativa se ha puesto a mirar al hombre – casi un muchacho – que nos da la espalda y bebe su ajenjo a pequeños sorbos, apoyando un *codo* en el *mostrador*. *Es curioso*, ahora que lo pienso: a la primera imagen que se me ocurre de Josiane, y que es siempre Josiane en la banqueta del café, una noche de nevada y Laurent, se agrega inevitablemente aquel que ella llamaba el sudamericano, bebiendo su ajenjo y dándonos la espalda. (EC: 163, my emphasis)

He cannot form a picture (*imagen*) of Josiane in his head without simultaneously thinking of the picture of the *sudamericano*. Roughly two pages later, Josiane is again linked to the South American double, this time through a certain terminology:

> Me gustaba saborear una copa aquí y otra más allá, atisbando sin apuro el momento en que descubriría la *silueta* de Josiane en algún *codo* de las galerías o en algún *mostrador*. (Ibid.: 165, my emphasis)

Here, the text condenses successively via small shifts in meaning in the form of repetitions, approximations, and little changes, blurring the lines between Josiane and *el sudamericano*. The words *silueta* (cf. ibid. 161), *codo*, and *mostrador* had been previously used in the descriptions of the South American and are now put into the direct neighborhood with Josiane: this time, the *codo* is not the elbow but the architectural bow of the gallery, the *mostrador* probably a showcase of a shop inside the gallery instead of the counter of a bar; whereas the silhouette remains the same: a vague, somewhat shadowy metonymy, each time representing the real body. If Josiane is thus interwoven with the *sudamericano*, then we can hardly avoid reading her name accordingly: In Josiane, there is Yo, I, pronounced with the soft Argentinian ye and reinforced by the following si (or, *sí*): me, yes. The

[12] As mentioned above, the *sudamericano* is, at least in some respect, a fictional duplication of the Comte de Lautréamont – someone who, like Laurent, is, of course, as well 'other' - *l'autre* - already through his self-chosen pseudonym.

sudamericano, Josiane, the narrator, and to some extent Laurent are thus, in a way, altogether imaginary shapes of the same character.

Laurent, however, is a double-edged sword in this context. In the beginning, he serves, as stated above, as imaginary other (*l'autre*) for the narrator. Yet, over the course of the story, the information we receive about his almost superhuman strength creates a link to another powerful entity in the narrative, which – at least at first – belongs to the realm of the symbolic: Josiane's pimp, her *amo*. The *amo* is the inverted mirror image of Laurent in that the former has a name, which can, however, not be pronounced aloud ("no le gustaba llamarlo por su nombre" [EC: 160]) while the latter's real name remains unknown until the last pages of the narration, which is why he is given the name 'Laurent' in order to be able to refer to him and his crimes. Moreover, the two characters correspond to each other in terms of the power or violence they are capable of exercising. Of Laurent we learn that he has "la fuerza que permitía estrangular a sus víctimas con una sola mano" (ibid..: 164). The *amo* in turn represents ultimate protection for Josiane: "la protección suprema que todo lo allanaba." (Ibid.: 167) The two enigmatic figures are thus entangled with each other through their respective power and their violence, or, at least, potential of violence.

For the narrator, Josiane's *amo* is, at this point, the big Other (*l'Autre*) whose intentions and wishes he can only guess but never really know.[13] He flatters himself of probably having earned his confidence, but the *amo* remains mostly invisible and – just like the *sudamericano* – silent; an enigmatic figure. As he is the one who professes power over Josiane and also over the narrator himself, he represents much bigger alterity to the narrator than Laurent and the South American do. The big Other is situated within the realm of the symbolic, he is the bearer of the law.

The *amo* is hence the complementary piece of another Other of the symbolic order: the stock market (*la Bolsa*). The bourse cruises between the two worlds just as the narrator himself does. It is located in a direct neighborhood to both Pasaje Güemes and Galérie Vivienne, and even when he finds himself in Paris, the narrator sometimes works in the bourse during the day, where, he says, the colleagues talk about nothing but Laurent and his crimes (ibid.: XX). Other reminders of the symbolic within the imaginary realm of the galleries are Albert, the narrator's male friend who is known to be a police spy (and therefore in cahoots with the law) and also, to some extent, Josiane's friend and colleague La Rousse. The latter's name suggests the famous publishing house that specializes in dictionaries and encyclopedias, hence in the naming, defining, and remembering of things and signifiers: a capability the imaginary world lacks in the respect that it cannot seem to provide and/or remember the 'correct' names for the elements it consists of.[14]

However, it is precisely the fact that the imaginary world repeatedly fails to provide 'correct' names, which leads us to the core of the story: the otherness contained in Laurent – *l'autre*. This otherness, I would argue, is not so much an otherness felt by the South American subject that settles in Paris but, rather, an otherness that comes from within. What we are dealing with is not a re-actualization of the

[13] Hence Lacan's famous question towards the Other is "Che vuoi", what do you want: "[…] quelque chose d'autre va se produire qui est lié au fait que c'est dans cette expérience de langage que se fonde son appréhension de l'Autre comme tel, de cet Autre qui peut lui donner la réponse, la réponse à son appel, cet Autre auquel fondamentalement il pose la question […] *Che vuoi*? Que veux-tu? (Lacan 1958: 23, emphasis in the original).

[14] It is an interesting coincidence that Larousse publishing was founded in the first year of the Second Empire (1852), which is on the verge of its decline in the narrated French present of "El otro cielo".

civilización y barbarie topos of Sarmiento, assigning the former to Paris and the latter to Buenos Aires[15] – it is, I believe, far more complex than this. The question at stake here is the problem of otherness within one's own country, the conflicts between the classes. This goes for Argentina just as well as for France, which is why I think that the violence the story repeatedly points to, is the founding violence of the political, respectively of the revolutionary realm. Following Walter Benjamin's writing "On the Critique of Violence" (1920/21), Jacques Derrida wrote, regarding the necessity of foundational violence: "Elle [the foundation of the state, J.B.] inaugure un nouveau droit, elle le fait toujours dans la violence. *Toujours*" (Derrida 1994: 88, emphasis in the original). This violence is, then, perpetuated in the police apparatus and the death penalty, both of which are present in our story: through the guillotine as well as through the police informer Albert and the 1940s police forces trying to suppress demonstrations in Buenos Aires, respectively.

With this axiom in mind, we could state that both France and Argentina experienced crucial revolutions in the 19th century which went hand in hand with foundational violence.[16] The nation-building process of Argentina after the independence of 1816 included not only constant conflict between *federales* and *unitarios* but also violent confrontations with indigenous groups, culminating in the *Campaña del desierto* between 1878 and 1880 that cost the lives of over 1000 indigenous people.[17] Moreover, there is the constant problem of leadership, which time and again results – as in many South American countries – in the ambiguous figure of the *caudillo*: in Argentina most prominently incarnated in Juan Manuel de Rosas and later Perón. According to Pedro Castro, *caudillaje*, which can, of course, take several different shapes,[18] usually comes with the phantasma of the powerful and charismatic leader who emerges at a time when the people' confidence in (former) state structures has vanished (cf. Castro 2007: 10–11). Another difficulty encountered by the young Argentinian nation were the *golpes de estado*, which prompted – sometimes, but not always in connection with *caudillismo* – a military dictatorship, as the one the narrator of "El otro cielo" explicitly mentions by the end of the story: "estábamos entonces en plena dictadura militar, una más en la interminable serie" (EC: 177).

The repetition and seriality the narrator brings into play here, establish a significant link with the history of France in the 19th century, that is, the era we are dealing with in the story. The revolution of 1789 brings with it a series of foundational violence, most infamously noticeable in the likewise sheer interminable series of executions in the *Terreur or Grande Terreur*, respectively, between 1793 and 1794. From the beginning of the First Empire to the Second World War, however, the French history of the 19th century was – similar to the series evoked by our narrator – a structure of (violent) repetition: Revolution, Republic, and First Empire were followed by Restauration, Revolution, Constitutional Monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, the Paris Commune and its violent end, and, again, a

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[15] This is the reading of Reichardt 1986.

[16] For an analysis of the foundational violence of the French and Russian revolutions respectively, see for instance Mayer 2000.

[17] See for instance Hedges 2011, esp. the chapter "National Consolidation 1853-80", and Centeno 2002.

[18] Castro talks of an "elasticidad de término" allowing for different possible formations. For the central topic of ambiguity in Cortázar's story, it is of great significance to keep this "elasticidad del término" (Castro 2007: 10) in mind with regards to the also ambiguous, scintillating figure of the *caudillo*.

Republic. Both First and Second Empire were the results of a coup d'état, which creates, within the realm of "El otro cielo", an at least structural alignment between Napoleon I and III and the series of *golpes de estado* that took place after the Argentinian independence. In the last chapter, I want to show, therefore, that the imaginary world, the 'second reality' of 19th century Paris is the projection screen where the ambivalent stance of the narrator towards the imminent new *caudillo* Perón can be articulated through metaphorical condensations within the realm of the text. These condensations give rise, then, to ultimate anxiety that cannot be resolved within the 'first reality' – the narrator's bourgeois life in Buenos Aires. The events that take place in the last third of the story, therefore, complete the allegorical garland and aim for reconciliation of the narrator with his own otherness or at least with the imperative to face the otherness in his home capital.

Hors-de-là: The galleries closing in, or, re-writing Maupassant

The last third of the story is also the climax of the isotopia of violence that runs through the text. While the murders of Laurent always remain elliptical – we hear the news of a new victim, but due to the internal focalization of the first-person-narrator, we are never present at the scene of action –, we now become witnesses of a state-executed murder, so to speak: the execution of a poisoner by guillotine. It is also in this last part of the story where the imaginary realm of the galleries becomes haunted not only by elements of an ambiguous symbolic – like the powerful *amo* or the police spy Albert – but also by the third element of the Lacanian triad: the Real. The imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real together form a Borromean knot in the Lacanian paradigm, they are closely entangled with each other. The Real is the realm beyond language and beyond images; it is the sphere of unspeakable, the unknowable, the un-symbolizable; the realm of excess:

> [*C]e qui n'est pas venu au jour du symbolique, apparaît dans le réel*. […] *Ausstossung aus dem Ich* [German in the original], l'expulsion hors du sujet. C'est cette dernière que constitue le reel en tant qu'il est le domaine de ce qui subsiste hors de la symbolisation. (Lacan 1966: 388, emphasis in the original).

And Lacan continues: "Car le reel n'attend pas, et nommément pas le sujet, puisqu'il n'attend rien de la parole." (Ibid.) The Real is therefore closely linked to the notion of *jouissance*: an excessive, un-symbolizable enjoyment stretching the limits of mere pleasure, exceeding it to a lethal dimension of violence and death (cf. Evans 2006: 93–94). It is in the realms of the Real and of *jouissance* where we encounter the individual and collective affects that we witness in the section of the public guillotination in "El otro cielo" and accordingly in the bridging section before the guillotination.

This bridging paragraph is very interesting as it differs significantly from the other parts of the story. The narrator tells us extensively about an experience in the Pasaje Güemes, where he seeks refuge after having made up some pretext to leave the vacation home of Irma's parents on the Paraná Island in order to return to the city.

> El primer sábado pretexté cualquier cosa y volví a la ciudad, anduve como a los tumbos por calles donde los tacos se hundían en el asfalto blando. De esa vagancia estúpida me queda un *brusco recuerdo delicioso*: al entrar una vez más en el Pasaje Güemes me envolvió *de golpe* el aroma del café, su *violencia* ya casi olvidada en las galerías donde el café era flojo y recocido. Bebí dos tazas, sin azúcar, saboreando y oliendo a la vez, *quemándome y feliz*. Todo lo que siguió hasta el fin de la tarde *olió distinto*, el aire húmedo del centro estaba *lleno de pozos de fragancia* (volví a pie hasta mi casa, creo que le había prometido a mi madre cenar con ella), y *en cada pozo del aire los olores eran más crudos, más intensos*, jabón amarillo, café, tabaco negro,

> tinta de imprenta, yerba mate, todo olía *encarnizadamente*, y también el sol y el cielo eran *más duros y acuciados*. (EC: 169, my emphasis)

This section is remarkable because, unlike any other time, the Pasaje Güemes here seems to be almost superior to the Galérie Vivienne. It enchants the narrator with its violent coffee and its strong odors. The enjoyment he feels while drinking the hot coffee is pure, albeit innocent *jouissance*. The coffee is so strong and intense, that he describes it as violent, and so hot that he happily burns himself while enjoying it. What we have here is an isotopia of *jouissance*, immediate sensuality and violence, where enjoyment (*feliz*), abysmalness (*pozos*) and blood (*encarnizadamente*) are entwined. In this isotopia we have: "un brusco recuerdo delicioso", "de golpe", "su violencia", "saboreando y oliendo", "quemándome y feliz", "pozos de fragancia", "olores crudos", más intensos", "olía encarnizadamente", "el sol y el cielo eran más duros, más acuciados". Violent, almost brutal sensuality on the verge of awkwardness has a positive, energetic connotation here, and therefore it seems somewhat contradictory when the narrator states in the next section that he hopes for the "gran terror" to have finally reached its end (ibid.: 170). Here, the narrator uses the words "gran terror", supposedly in a direct allusion to the *Terreur*, followed by the *Grande Terreur* of the 1890s.[19] This terror that comes from Laurent is here connected to the Lacanian Real and to *jouissance* as it is an unspeakable, excessive action operating beyond the symbolic. The narrator who had previously experienced the terror from Laurent as "miedo ajeno" only, now more and more feels it at his own body because through the expression "gran terror" he now implicitly links the individual terror to the historical event, the collective, political terror. This finally positions the terror also for him within the realm of the 'Real': the double-faced terror, so to speak, poses a smoldering political threat – that of the (foundational) violence of the guillotine, a machine which will be at the center of the narration during the following long paragraphs. However, as the connection between the violent coffee and the public execution suggest, the narrator is not excluded from this lurking political violence – through his very own *jouissance*, he rather becomes an active part of it.

What the narrator, therefore, does in the passage where he describes his enjoyment in the Pasaje Güemes, is to establish a connection between 1) his own *jouissance* experienced in there, 2) the subsequent *jouissance* of his group of friends and the masses in participating in a guillotination – the sign of the *Terreur* par excellence – and, finally, 3) the past foundational violence executed by the different foundations, formations and buildings of the states of Argentina and France in the 19th century.

Consequently, the terror is of course not over yet in the world of the galleries. To the contrary, the paragraph with the violent coffee was actually only a foreshadowing of the violent *jouissance* the narrator is about to experience over there – particularly in the crowd that has come to watch the execution. The execution scene begins with the narrator managing once more to slide over into the galleries. One of the first things he tells us is that Josiane was now under the personal protection of the *amo* and therefore, he can catch a glimpse of him while he kisses Josiane to celebrate his return:

> […] recuerdo que entre dos besos alcancé a entrever su silueta en el hueco de un portal defendiéndose de la cellisca envuelto en una larga capa gris. (Ibid.)

[19] Cf. for instance Sicard (1997).

Here, the *amo* becomes entwined with the *sudamericano*: the *silueta* emerges again and his *capa gris* recalls the *gato gris* of the *sudamericano*, which a friend of Josiane's colleague Kiki had once seen in the young man's hotel room:

> […] un gato gris, muchos papeles borroneados, un piano que ocupaba demasiado lugar, pero sobre todo papeles y al final otra vez el gato gris que en el fondo parecía ser el mejor recuerdo de Kikí. (Ibid.: 168)

The cat Kiki remembers so well alludes to, I would argue, Jorge Luis Borges' short story "El sur" (1953/2008).[20] There, a black cat lives in a café in the Via Rivadavia, which, for the narrator in Borges' story, marks the beginning of the phantasmatic South where Borges' protagonist Dahlmann travels to – or seems to travel to – in order to visit an old *casa rosada* he remembers from his childhood. He never gets to the house, but somewhere in the Pampa, he gets into a conflict with some *gauchos* instead, one of whom challenges him to a duel with knives – a fight the protagonist will most probably lose. The cat is, therefore, a phantasmatic reminder of an equally phantasmatic South, which, in Argentina, and, of course, especially for Sarmiento, is related to 'wilderness', *gauchismo* and, not least, *caudillismo*. The subliminal idea of foundational violence which haunts Borges' story also haunts Cortázar's text. However, in Cortázar's case, this mixture of anxiety, ambiguous libidinal enjoyment and haunting memory is not only true for the domestic conflict between center and periphery but, rather, takes on a more complex, transnational shape.
The *amo*, linked to the *sudamericano* and his gray cat by being wrapped in a large *capa gris*, ceases at this point to be the narrator's distant, undecipherable big Other. Through his indirect association with the *sudamericano*, the *amo* now comes closer to the narrator's specular image. This will be further emphasized during the execution scene, when Josiane anxiously bites the narrator in the lip, whispering words 'she has seldomly uttered' and making him thus feel "como si por un momento hubiera sido el amo" (ibid.: 174). He feels a masterly empowerment and thus a connection to the upcoming political violence. In a second step, his empowerment is simultaneously mirrored by the masses that appear here for the first time as an empowered 'body' (and will gain even more agency later on, when they try to lynch Laurent):

> Un mundo clandestino se codeaba, se pasaba botellas de mano en mano, repetía una broma que corría entre carcajadas y chillidos sofocados […]. (Ibid.: 173)

The metonymically described crowd becomes an ambivalent political body here, awaiting the forthcoming execution of a criminal. It is, however, not an exclusively French crowd that came together here. Apart from the narrator himself, his little other also appears in the crowd. Having already implicitly been announced by the mentioning of the 'codo' ("un mundo clandestino se codeaba") that had previously referred to him, some moments later the narrator sees the *sudamericano* or rather, his silhouette, standing close to one of his friends. Shortly afterwards, the term 'silhouette' that had previously referred both to the *sudamericano* and the *amo* appears again, yet this time in connection with the executioners that guard the

[20] "El otro cielo" is a grateful target for several intertextual associations and this article is admittedly no exception. Rosa Serra Salvat (2012), for instance, has shown how Cortázar draws in "El otro cielo" and also in other works of his on poems of Luís Cernuda. Richard A. Young (1992) on the other hand sees Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Lautréamont mirrored in the garland of flowers. Cortázar's double insistence on the gray cat which has so far apparently been mostly neglected in research is, however, remarkable for a political lecture of the story as it leads us from Cortázar's enigmatic South American to Borges' phantasmatic South and hence to the ambivalent phantasma of violence in which, I believe, Cortázar is interested here from a perspective of foundational violence in association with old and new *caudillismo*.

convict. The latter is, in turn, present as a metonymy only, namely as "la mancha blanca" (of a shirt, ibid.: 175.) The *amo* and the *sudamericano*, that is, their silhouettes, and the narrator as their double are thus metonymically linked to the executioners and therefore depicted as accomplices of the violent political act, which serves as a renewal of the original foundational violence.[21] What we have here is thus a mixture of Latin American reminders of violent heritage, embodied by the dark silhouettes of the silent South American and the *amo*, whose mastery over Josiane and the other girls working for him as well as the protection he offers bear some resemblance to the traditional *caudillo* figure, and of French political violence serving likewise as an uncanny reminder of revolutionary power and foundational violence. The narrator then describes the execution scene as follows:

> [U]na tercera sombra voluminosa *se inclinaba sobre ella* [la mancha blanca, J.B.] con los gestos del que *abraza o amonesta* o dice algo al oído o da a *besar* alguna cosa, hasta que se hizo a un lado […] (EC: 175, my emphasis)

The third big shadow is the shadow of a priest, offering the convict the cross to kiss. However, beyond the mimetic dimension of this description, the expressions *inclinarse sobre ella*, *abrazar* and *besar* and the indecisiveness brought upon by the multiple usages of 'or', respectively the semantic difference between the alternatives *abrazar* and *amonestar* introduce a certain ambiguity into the sentence. This ambiguity in the description and the proximity of death and somewhat libidinal corporeality links this section, I would argue, to Guy de Maupassant's 1887's fantastic story "Le Horla".[22] In this text, the first-person narrator describes, as well with a certain libidinal ambiguity, how a mysterious, invisible creature kneels on his chest at night, preventing him from breathing, pressing its mouth on his mouth, sucking the life out of him.

> Je sens bien que suis couché et que je dors,… je le sens et je le sais… et je sens aussi que quelqu'un s'approche de moi, me regarde, me palpe, monte sur mon lit, s'agenouille sur ma poitrine, me prend le cou entre ses mains et serre… serre… de toute sa force pour m'étrangler. (Maupassant 1887: 10)

And some time later:

> Cette nuit, j'ai senti quelqu'un accroupi sur moi et que, sa bouche sur la mienne, buvait ma vie entre mes lèvres. (Ibid..: 18-19)

Maupassant's text, I would argue, conveys the ambiguous political anxiety of a – presumably – aristocratic first-person-narrator who experiences the threatening arrival of a creature from Brazil – a country, which, at the time, was a monarchy under the rule of Emperor Pedro II. The system was, however, already fragile, threatened by the forthcoming revolution, the movement of independence and the dawning of the republic.[23] The invisible intruder is hence the outsider or other of

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[21] Benjamin states that the death penalty combines law-making (*rechtsetzende*) and law-keeping (*rechtserhaltende*) powers. It is the death penalty that confirms the law (*das Recht*) and ensures its applicability (cf. 1921/1989: 186-188). As we are under the Second Empire, it is of course not the original foundational violence of the Republic that is repeated here. What strikes me as more important in this respect is, however, the guillotine as an outstanding symbol of foundational and political violence and for a multifaceted, ambiguous stance towards Revolution and the Republic – phenomena which are perceivable during the whole 19th century, and, as Lisa Zeller has shown, allegorically present in many texts of the era (cf. Zeller 2016).

[22] Already in "Distante Espejo", a mixture of short story and journal entry, Cortázar alluded to "Le Horla" and its topic of the double and ego-splitting, apparently being inspired to do so by his friend Eduardo H. Castagnino (cf. Barchiesi 2009: 81, Footnote 11)

[23] Pedro II was deposed in 1889 by a hybrid, Republican military coup d'état: another flower, so to speak, in Cortázar's garland of coups d'état.

the aristocratic order. He poses a death threat to the nobility – just as the guillotine had under the *Terreur* in the aftermath of the 1789 revolution. The violent actions of the Horla that aim at the throat of its victim, are, I would argue, a phantasma that alludes to the anxiety of beheading and to the fundamental revolutionary and foundational violence embodied in the (*Grande*) *Terreur*.
Moreover, Maupassant's narrator expresses a deep distrust of the affects, the volatility and tamperability of the masses. Indicatively, he reflects on their behavior on the day of the Fête de la République, of all things, and concludes laconically they would vote for the Republic just as easily as they vote for the emperor:

> Le peuple est un troupeau imbécile, tantôt stupidement patient et tantôt férocement révolté. On lui dit : « Amuse-toi. » Il s'amuse. On lui dit : « Va te battre avec le voisin. » Il va se battre. On lui dit : « Vote pour l'Empereur. » Il vote pour l'Empereur. Puis, on lui dit : « Vote pour la République. » Et il vote pour la République. (Ibid.: 25)

This discomfort with the masses is, to some extent, also expressed in the narrator's description of the crowd at the guillotination in “El otro cielo”. He feels awkward and senses the need to justify his presence and that of his friends at the bloody event:

> "[…] seguíamos avanzando dificultosamente y cuidábamos de no separarnos como si cada uno supiera que solo la voluntad del grupo podía perdonar su presencia en este sitio." (EC: 175)

And there are more analogies between the two stories. Laurent, the other, the strangler with the almost superhuman powers, mirrors the figure of Le Horla, the outsider: both were given their names in lack of knowledge of how they are really called. Furthermore, in both stories, the respective narrator feels a peculiar connection to their other: after Maupassant's narrator has set his own house, including the trapped servants on fire, he realizes – or so he thinks – that the only way to get rid of Le Horla is to kill himself. The narrator of "El otro cielo" on the other hand, feels that with the deaths of Laurent and the *sudamericano*, he himself also has died in a certain manner. At least he cannot go back to the world of the galleries, the garland is closed for good.
However, Cortázar's approach to political anxiety is probably a more hybrid one than Maupassant's. With the intermingling of *Laurent*, *el sudamericano*, the *amo* and the narrator; with the potential for sensual, excessive *jouissance* expressed by the narrator in his proud identification with Josiane's *amo*, any unequivocal victim-perpetrator dichotomy remains suspended. The ambiguity introduced in the first paragraph with the *territorio ambiguo* of the Pasaje Güemes remains with us until the end of the story. This is especially true for the different approaches towards the masses taken in the text. There are two French masses, one at the execution, one later, resembling a lynch mob, when the police finally arrest Laurent and need to protect him from the crowd ("una muchadumbre que lo hubiera destrozado", EC: 180). These crowds are mirrored divergently in the crowds of 1945 Buenos Aires, who are painted in positive colors: the people come together on the streets, cheering for the allied forces and are in turn being tract and beaten by the local police force (cf. ibid.: 177). Ambiguity hence remains the central figure of the text: the narrator clearly approves of the empowerment and revolutionary energy of the Argentinian people, of the crowd in the streets – hence his indirect complicity in the act of repeated foundational power within the execution on the streets of Paris. At the same time, however, it was the job of the 'guirnalda fúnebre' (cf. ibid.: 172) to show him that the (re)founding of the state, be it through a coup d'état, be it through revolutionary power, can always extend its violence to him. The consequences

could be, for instance, the suppression or implicit expulsion of bourgeois subjects under the new powerful *amo*, that is, the new *caudillo*, as it happened to Cortázar himself who had to go into exile under Perón. By the end of the text, the narrator has fled, for the time being, into a state of inner migration, awaiting the foundational violence to come after the elections, be it a symbolic or real violence. The hybrid political creature of the transnational and trans-chronical labyrinth, uncanny in nature – at least to the members of the bourgeoisie – has articulated and revealed itself to the narrator within the 'second reality'. In 1945, it is, however yet to pronounce and name the 'virgin sacrifices' it is going to demand.

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