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Revisiting L.A.: Brazilian and Mexican Renditions of Los Angeles from the 1930s and 1940s

Author
Cordoba de la Barrera, Jose Esteban

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Revisiting L.A.:
Brazilian and Mexican Renditions of Los Angeles from the 1930s and 1940s

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in
Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

José Esteban Córdoba de la Barrera

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Revisiting L.A.:
Brazilian and Mexican Renditions of Los Angeles from the 1930s and 1940s

by

José Esteban Córdoba de la Barrera

Doctor in Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literature
University of California, Los Angeles, 2017
Professor Maarten H. van Delden, Chair

My dissertation examines how Mexican and Brazilian authors depicted Los Angeles shortly before, during and after the Second World War. By delving into a variety of texts — ranging from poetry to letters and travel memoirs —, produced in the first half of the twentieth century about Los Angeles by Mexican and Brazilian writers, I contend that their perspectives, coming from the periphery, challenge the dominant discourse about the city. I argue that while American and European writers have been at the center of the collective imaginary of Los Angeles, writers from Latin America have for the most part been excluded from this discourse and discussion. By ignoring representations by Latin American and Brazilian authors, critics have left out important and distinct ways in which the city has been imagined and articulated.

Under their gaze, Los Angeles's polychromatism is unveiled and the effervescence of the city becomes tangible. Xavier Villaurrutia, unabashedly, brings to the fore the beguiling homosexual night life of Los Angeles, while Octavio Paz, casting his gaze on the pachuco, highlights the city's restlessness and singularity. Raul Bopp, moreover, gives prominence to Los Angeles's racial and cultural richness, deeming it as the single most important feature of the city. Refusing to see Los Angeles in extremes, Erico Verissimo showcases the full spectrum of human experience found in the city. Vinicius de Moraes, likewise, makes a point of displaying the city's humanity.

Furthermore, I maintain that paying heed to these representations reveals a stimulating and complex picture of Los Angeles that was at times antithetical to the dominant discourse, and which in turn allows for a reformulation of how the city has been mythicized. The body of my study consists of writings by Octavio Paz, Erico Verissimo, Vinicius de Moraes, Raul Bopp, and Xavier Villaurrutia, as well as American and European writers such as Theodor Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, Aldous Huxley, John Fante and Nathanael West.

The dissertation of José Esteban Córdoba de la Barrera is approved.

Teófilo F. Ruiz

Verónica Cortinez

Kevin B. Terraciano

Maarten H. van Delden, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

Para Aída, Edgar, Edgar Jr. y Lena,
doctores *honoris causa*

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VITA

EDUCATION

2008-2017 **University of California, Los Angeles**

Ph.D., Hispanic Languages and Literatures (2017, expected)

C.Phil., Hispanic Languages and Literatures, 2015

M.A., Portuguese, 2012

M.A., Latin American Studies, 2010

B.A., Comparative Literature, (Cum Laude), 2008

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of California, Los Angeles (2010-2017)
Teaching Fellow, Teaching Associate, Teaching Assistant

RESEARCH ASSISTANT AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

Research and Instructional Technology Consultant, 2015-2016
University of California, Los Angeles
Center of Digital Humanities

Graduate Student Researcher, 2009-2010
University of California, Los Angeles
UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center

Undergraduate Student Researcher, 2006-2007
University of California, Los Angeles
Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering

PUBLICATIONS

Scholar:
"Podcasting Towards Pedagogy" — *UCLA Center of Digital Humanities.* (2015)

Fiction:
"Gravura" — *Chiricú Journal: Latinao Literatures, Arts and Cultures*. Indiana University Press (2012)
"Melodía" — *La Gente de Aztlán*. (2008)

Translations:

Agência Riff Frankfurt 2012 Book (Portuguese to English)
Lya luft — O Tigre na Sombra
LES — Elite 2 Graphic Novel
Paulo Roberto Pires — Se um de Nós Morrer

PRESENTATIONS

Guest Lecturer. "Digging out Machado's *Memórias*." Spanish 44, UCLA. March 4, 2014.

"Educação em *Menino de engenho* de José Lins do Rego." XVI SoCal Brazilian Studies Conference. Soka University of America. October 6, 2012.

"Perda e unidade em *Menino de engenho* de José Lins do Rego." VI Transatlantic Studies Conference. Brown University. April 12, 2012.

"*Nadie* me verá callada: Cristina Rivera Garza." XXXVII International Symposium of Hispanic Literature. California State University, Dominguez Hills. March 9, 2012.

"On the Body: Carlos Drummond de Andrade." Graduate Colloquium on Brazilian Modernism. University of California, Los Angeles. February 10, 2011.

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Graduate Summer Research Mentorship
(UCLA Graduate Division)—Summer 2012

Shirley Arora Fellowship
(UCLA Spanish and Portuguese Department)—2010-2011

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship—Portuguese
UCLA Study-Abroad Program in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil
(US Department of Education and UCLA Latin American Institute)— Summer 2010

Spanish and Portuguese Department Spanish Short Story Contest
(UCLA Spanish and Portuguese Department)—June 2007
First Place

Dean's Honors List
(UCLA Division of Undergraduate Education)—2008

LANGUAGES

English – Native Speaker
Spanish – Native Speaker
Portuguese – Near-Native Speaker
Catalan – Basic
French – Reading Knowledge
Italian – Reading Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Todavía, *Nobody Walks in L.A.*

I

On the September 15, 2017 episode of Real Time with Bill Maher, whose guest list included the likes of novelist Salman Rushdie, author Fran Lebowitz, journalist Bret Stephens, and fashion personality Tim Gunn, Lebowitz was asked the question of what American cities, besides New York, she would describe as great. Lebowitz gave a telling answer. First, she swiftly responded Chicago, because it "is the only other American city that really feels like a city," adding, notwithstanding, a stinging critique of Los Angeles: "it's not densely populated, it's spread out…it doesn't feel like a city, it's not urban, because it's not dense enough." Los Angeles as a counterfeit city is an old trope. Views of Los Angeles, such as Lebowitz's, however, also echo in soberer voices such as David Ulin, who, after the publication of an anthology of literature of Los Angeles, and various articles on the city during his time as a reporter and book critic at the *Los Angeles Times*, came to be recognized as an authority on the subject. Ulin's latest book, *Sidewalking: Coming to Terms with Los Angeles* (2015), an introspective and personal essay about his relationship with Los Angeles, expands on his ideas and feelings about the city. Despite Ulin's attempt to escape the commonplace clichés about Los Angeles, he ends up, nonetheless, being seduced by them:

> 'It occurs to her,' Kate Braveman writes in *Palm Latitudes*, a novel published at the very moment I was first seriously considering a move to Southern California, 'that what she most appreciates about this City of Angels is that which is missing, the voids, the unstitched borders, the empty corridors, the not yet deciphered. She is grateful for the absence of history.' Yes, yes, although in the absence of history,

> we have no choice but to interpose our own. I walk here because I have always walked in cities. (Ulin, *Sidewalking* 9)

Here, Los Angeles is imagined, perhaps, as a tabula rasa on which to impose one's own sense of self and space. Ulin seems to suggest an absence of history, although not completely. He, for example, sees a clear tension between past and future in Los Angeles, where "history in these blocks exists just below the surface, a hidden language we teach ourselves to read" (Ulin, *Sidewalking* 14). This view of Los Angeles as lacking in history is, nonetheless, neither new nor original. As a matter of fact, it sounds awfully close to French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's opinion.

In a 1945 article published in *Le Figaro*, titled "American Cities," Sartre describes the differences he saw between American and European cities. Unlike European cities, which remained immutable despite the passage of time, American cities were ever-changing and its denizens mostly outlasted the city landscape:

> The result is that in the United States a city is a moving landscape for its inhabitants, whereas our cities are our shells […] We Europeans change within changeless cities, and our houses and neighbors outlive us; American cities change faster than their inhabitants do, and it is the inhabitants who outlive the cities. (Sartre 118)

There is a clear distinction for Sartre; Europe is the past and America the future: "For us a city is, all alone, a past, for them it is mainly a future; what they like in the city is everything it has not yet become and everything it can be" (Sartre 119). For Sartre, ultimately, the American city lies outside the boundaries of history; it lacks a past, it simply embodies the future. This, according

to him, can be seen in the way cities and houses are built. Los Angeles, for example, is "a camp in the desert" (Sartre 114), it exudes a poor urbanity,

> Many of them [American cities] have the rudimentary structure of a polypary. Los Angeles, in particular, is rather like a big earthworm that might be chopped into twenty pieces without being killed. If you go through this enormous urban cluster, probably the largest in the world, you come upon twenty juxtaposed cities, strictly identical, each with its poor section, its business streets, night-clubs and smart suburb, and you get the impression that a medium-sized urban centre has schizogenetically reproduced itself twenty times. (Sartre 121)

Moreover, Sartre cannot emphasize enough the temporariness of American cities whose structures, made mostly out of wood, are incapable to withstand the test of time (Sartre 119).

Thirty-nine years later, a compatriot of Sartre would suggest something similar about the United States and Los Angeles. In his 1988 text, *America*, Jean Baudrillard posits the United States as having been born outside of history; in other words, the United States, since its conception, has been modern:

> America has never been short of violence, nor of events, or ideas but these things do not of themselves constitute a history. Octavio Paz is right when he argues that America was created in the hope of escaping from history, of building a utopia sheltered from history, and that it has in part succeeded in that project, a project it is still pursuing today. The concept of history as the transcending of a social and political rationality, as a dialectical, conflictual vision of societies, is not theirs [the Americans'], just as modernity, conceived precisely as an original break with a certain history, will never be ours…From the day when this powerful modernity

> was born in all its glory on the other side of the Atlantic, Europe began to disappear. The myths migrated. Today, all the myths of modernity are American. It will do us no good to worry our poor heads over this. In Los Angeles, Europe has disappeared. (Baudrillard, *America* 81)

In other words, Los Angeles is conceived as the fault line between history and modernity. However, being intrinsically modern, Los Angeles is just the embodiment of "parodies of cities and urbanity in sprawl" (Baudrillard, *America* 103). The City of Angels, therefore, cannot be designated as a city but merely as a copy or, in Baudrillard's own terms, a "fake." Views of Los Angeles, such as those that maintain that the city is historyless, or see it as an unsuccessful simulacrum of urbanity, and other similar views, as expressed by Baudrillard and by contemporary intellectuals such Lebowitz and Ulin, are, nonetheless, recurring tropes, which trace back to the late 1930s and 1940s. However, as Kevin McNamara well contextualizes, derisive perspectives such as these must be understood as a response to the city's boosters:

> The story of one possible Los Angeles begins with the boosters — the School of Sunshine we might call them — who celebrated Los Angeles as a paradise found, and spun Arcadian myths from the world of the Californios, or early Spanish settlers. This myth quickly enough spawned a counter-myth. The School of Noir depicted the rot in Eden, from political corruption and financial chicanery to the ersatz culture and kitsch spewing from Hollywood. (McNamara 1)

A dominant view of Los Angeles as dystopic, corrupt, decaying and counterfeit emerged. Produced and promulgated by American and European intellectuals, these scathing depictions of Los Angeles cemented an unfavorable reputation of the city. In fact, these counter myths forever shifted the way Los Angeles was seen and continues, up to this date, to be discussed. However,

not only did they have a lasting impact on the social imaginary of Los Angeles, but they were also used as public policy, altering the design of the city and affecting, primarily, minorities such as African-Americans and Mexicans, as Norman Klein describes in *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (Klein 13). This dominant discourse, which came out of what McNamara calls the School of Noir, however, contrasts with the portrayals of Los Angeles by a handful of Brazilian and Mexicans intellectuals who lived or visited the city in the 1930s and 1940s. Their accounts of life in the city have nonetheless been neglected and forgotten.

Critics have, for the most part, turned a blind eye to writings about Los Angeles produced by non-American and non-European writers. Anthologies such as David Ulin's *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology* (2002), as well as others such as David Fine's *Los Angeles in Fiction* (1984) have "failed to acknowledge the existence of Chicano and Latino writing in Los Angeles" as Ignacio López-Calvo has pointed out (López-Calvo 14). That disregard, however, extends to writings about the city produced by Latin Americans, which have been overwhelmingly ignored in the construction of the social imaginary of Los Angeles. This is highly problematic given the fact that Los Angeles has arguably always been and continues to be the most "Latin American" city in the United States, not only culturally and historically, as it was a former territory of Mexico, but also demographically. Today, Los Angeles County has the largest Latino population of any county in the country with close to six million Latinos (Panzar); moreover, approximately five million of them are Mexican or of Mexican descent, making Los Angeles, after Mexico City, the city with most Mexicans on the planet (Pewhispanic.org). Carlos Monsiváis even asserted that "the heart of the Mexican Dream is L.A." (qtd. in Rieff 241). As a matter of fact, the "Latin Americanism" of the city has become an official talking point. Back in 2014, Mayor Eric Garcetti touted the city as the "western capital of the U.S., the northern capital

of Latin America and the eastern capital of the Pacific Rim."[1] Los Angeles, however, may also be "the most American city" as Amy M. Homes has suggested (Homes 10). One can argue though that Los Angeles is simultaneously the most "Latin American" and "American" city of the United States. But despite this deep duality of the city, the construction of the discourse on Los Angeles has been solely one-sided.

II

Given the disregard of the Latin American experience in the discussion and formation of the social imaginary of Los Angeles, a study that explores this neglected dimension, in relation to the dominant narrative of the city, is long overdue. However, considering the importance of Brazil and Mexico's relations with the United States during the late 1930s and 1940s, this study concentrates on examining representations of Los Angeles by Brazilian and Mexican authors during this period. The focus on Brazil and Mexico is apropos because of both nations' close political and cultural relationship with the United States at that time. In the geopolitical sphere, since the implementation of the Good Neighbor Policy by the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, Brazil was seen as an integral ally in the Southern Hemisphere. Fearing the long-standing friendly ties between Brazil and the Axis powers, Germany and Italy, the United States' attention shifted during these years to this resource-rich South American giant (Sadlier 4). This strategy by the United States proved to be successful. As Irwin F. Gellman avers, "Brazil played a crucial role in hemispheric defense," adding that "the Brazilian declaration of war in the summer of 1942 against Germany and Italy further cemented the alliance" between both nations (Gellman 136). As a matter of fact, Brazil's military was the only force from Latin America to

[1] Eric Garcetti's opening remarks at the National Council de La Raza. This message later became an official slogan, appearing on promotional videos, promoting the candidacy of Los Angeles to host the 2024 Olympic Games.

see action on a European front (Gellman 37). In addition, President Getúlio Vargas of Brazil also allowed the construction of an American air base in Natal in 1940 that "would prove crucial to the Allied war effort" (Sadlier 5). Mexico's importance was regarded similarly and, like Brazil,

> was actively cultivated by the United States […] to ensure unity in the North American continent. In 1942 Germany attacked Mexican ships bearing petroleum to the United States; Mexico responded by declaring war on the Axis powers in May of that year and later sent a fighter squadron to support Allied efforts in the Philippines (Saldier 5).

In fact, the State Department constantly sought "advice from nations like Brazil and Mexico" (Gellman 214). By the end of 1943, the United States had a strong inter-American alliance against the Axis powers, "thirteen countries had declared war; six others had severed diplomatic relations; Argentina maintained its solitary dissent," but Mexico and Brazil were the only ones who had contributed combat troops (Gellman 175). In the cultural realm, Mexico and Brazil also were paid special attention by the United States. The Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations, which was launched in 1940 and a year later expanded into the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), created major cinematic projects focusing, particularly, on Mexico and Brazil, which featured world-renowned directors. For example, given the strategic importance of Brazil, "combined with the dearth of footage on the country, resulted in a unique CIAA[2]-Office of Strategic Services (OSS) collaboration for a series of commercial and nontheatrical shorts supervised by one of Hollywood's finest directors, John Ford […] who had just finished shooting scenes of Mexico's military efforts" (Sadlier 68). However, more consequential commercial projects that involved the cultural dimensions of

[2] Darlene J. Sadlier uses the acronym "CIAA" to refer to Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs; however, I will use "OCIAA" throughout this dissertation.

Mexico, Brazil, and the United States were produced. Although the OCIAA made a deal with Walt Disney in 1941 to create a series of animated pictures with the intent to improve U.S. relations with Latin America, there are two feature films that stood out from the rest. As Sadlier asserts,

> Some of the films made in the Good Neighbor period were especially important and deserve more detailed consideration. Unique among Hollywood releases […] were Walt Disney's *Saludos amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1945), produced by RKO […] *Saludos amigos* has long been regarded as Hollywood's most successful film about hemispheric friendship and a brilliant piece of inter-American propaganda. (Sadlier 45-46).

Indeed, *Saludos amigos* was a box-office hit and the fact that it was premiered in the Brazilian capital, Rio de Janeiro, was particularly noteworthy: "the unprecedented opening of a Hollywood film outside the United States was an important Good Neighbor gesture, particularly toward Brazil, which coincidentally had just officially joined the Allied effort against the Axis powers" (Sadlier 46). *Saludos amigos* is a mix of documentary-live-action and animated sequences composed of four different segments, all beginning with Walt Disney and his staff of artists drawing elements of the featured countries or places. In the first segment, Donald Duck travels to Lake Titicaca to explore the indigenous culture and fauna. The second segment features a small anthropomorphic airplane stationed near the Chilean capital Santiago. This segment, however, is solely about the airplane and does not really explore any explicitly cultural elements. In the third segment, "Gaucho" Goofy visits the Argentinean pampas to learn about the ways of the gaucho. The closing segment, titled "Aquarela do Brasil," features a new character, José "Zé" Carioca, a green *papagaio*, or parrot, with a yellow blazer and a boater hat, who shows Donald Duck

around. They drink *cachaça* and dance samba. *The Three Caballeros*, on the other hand, despite its similar structure to *Saludos amigos*, consists of seven segments that revolve around Donald Duck's birthday. He receives three presents from his Latin American friends that prompt him to go on several adventures. The focus of the animated film is Donald Duck's friendship and adventures with Zé Carioca and Panchito Pistoles, a pistol-carrying Mexican rooster. Zé Carioca gives Donald Duck a book that transports them to Bahia, Brazil, where they continue to dance samba and drink and stumble upon Aurora Miranda, Carmen Miranda's sister, whom the American duck lusts for. Shortly thereafter, Zé Carioca helps Donald Duck open his third present that allows them to meet Panchito Pistoles. Together, Zé Carioca, Donald Duck and Panchito Pistoles become the "Three Caballeros." Led by the Mexican rooster, who takes them on a flying *sarape*, they visit several places in Mexico; they make stops in Pátzcuaro, Veracruz, Acapulco and Mexico City. In the Mexican capital, Donald Duck becomes infatuated with Mexican singer Dora Luz, who sings to him Agustín Lara's "You Belong to My Heart." Donald Duck's infatuation induces a sort of surrealist reverie that transports him to dance and sing "La Zandunga" and "Jesusita en Chihuahua" with Mexican actress Carmen Molina on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Zé Carioca and Panchito Pistoles intermittingly appear in Donald Duck's reverie and guide him to the final segment of the film in which they battle a toy bull that is full of explosives. The firecrackers explode signaling the end in Spanish, "Fin," with the colors of the Mexican flag, followed by Portuguese, "Fim," with colors of the Brazilian flag, and finally in English with the colors of the American flag. *The Three Caballeros* reveals the special consideration that the United States had in Mexico and Brazil during this period. However, there was another major cinematic production that concerned these three nations.

In 1942 Orson Welles was invited to become an ambassador of goodwill (Benamou 40). Welles, who had released *Citizen Kane* (1941) the previous year, embarked on making *It's All True*, a documentary with fictionalized elements. As Catherine Benamou points out, Welles's film was considered ambitious even by OCIAA and Hollywood standards: "the initial stages of the Wellesian location shoot, carried out in the heat of World War II, constituted a film expedition of unprecedented ambitions and proportions for U.S. film industry and the OCIAA alike" (Benamou 42). The film, in its final concept, consisted of three segments featuring Mexico and Brazil. The first, "My Friend Bonito," tells the story of a young boy and a bull in Mexico; the second, "Carnival," is a look into Rio de Janeiro's most important national party and music: samba; and the third, titled "Jangadeiros," explores the plight of several fishermen in a small town in Northeastern Brazil. Norman Foster, under the supervision of Welles, shot the segment of "My Friend Bonito," and Welles traveled to Brazil with a crew of about twenty people to shoot the remainder of the film (Benamou 8). Welles's film, unfortunately, never saw the light of day. RKO and the OCIAA's obstructionism, along with the mounting pressure of Vargas's regime, prevented the film from being completed because of Welles's insistence on portraying Brazil's dispossessed and black population (Sadlier 24). The footage, however, that was believed to be lost was found in the 1980s and released within a documentary about Welles's unfinished documentary titled *It's All True: Based on an Unfinished Film by Orson Welles* (1993).

These major cinematic projects reveal the importance of Mexico and Brazil for the OCIAA. As a matter of fact, Mexico's significance prompted it "to be targeted for the expansion of film activity by the OCIAA and the film industry" (Benamou 43). Scholars have even argued that Prencinradio, a clandestine OCIAA corporation to promote and facilitate relations between Mexico and the United States,

> provided the gilding for what became the 'golden age' of Mexican cinema […] By all accounts, Prencinradio enabled the CIAA to influence Mexico's film industry through direct payment, which, in turn, enabled Mexico to surpass 'neutral' Argentina, whose industry was struggling because of the U.S. embargo on raw film stock. (Sadlier 44)

In addition to the projects by the Motion Picture Division, there were other endeavors under the Press and Publication Division of the OCIAA that further underscore the importance of Brazil. Genevieve Naylor's photographic project on Brazil, which she exhibited at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1943, is one example and another is Brazilian novelist Erico Verissimo's travel narratives and lectures that came out during his time as an ambassador of goodwill. These two cases, particularly the latter, are discussed at greater length in the later chapters.

III

The 1930s and 1940s represented a major turning point in the history of Southern California. It was during this period that the city underwent major economic, urban and demographic changes. Between the outpouring of federal government spending on public projects and the Second World War, Los Angeles emerged as the leading economic and social center in the West. As Carey McWilliams asserts, "in retrospect it will be clear that the year 1940 marks an important transition in the social and cultural life of the region" (McWilliams 373). By 1939, two major public works were completed:

> […] the Union Railway Station was opened […] the station, named union for the unity of three railroad lines —The Santa Fe, Union Pacific and Southern Pacific— quickly established itself as the central transit point for rapid railroad

> service between the West and eastern sections of the country. Just six months later, desperately needed water began to make its way into Southern California through the Colorado River Aqueduct […] These two predominantly federally financed developments were completed just in time. By early 1940, defense orders from around the world began pouring into the Southland, and Los Angeles seemed to expand with each order. (Verge 14)

However, another major public project, which would dramatically shift the social and cultural fabric of the region, was inaugurated just a year after. In 1940, the Arroyo Seco Parkway, which connected downtown civic center with Pasadena, became the first freeway in Southern California, signaling, consequently, the urbanistic direction the city was taking as future auto mecca of the world. This, however, does not mean that the car was not ubiquitous prior the construction of the extensive freeway system; on the contrary, as Becky Nicolaides highlights, "in 1940, a WPA survey of industrial workers reported that 71.7 percent used autos, 20 percent used public transportation, and 7 percent walked […] by this time, the configuration of streets and highways superseded the routes of streetcars in importance. The automobile became the norm" (Nicolaides 73). The number of cars owned by Los Angeles residents was staggering, about 1,076,000, which at the time were more than to be found than in all but six states of the United States (McWilliams 236). The urban planning decision to adopt freeways, however, accelerated the decentralization of the city.

Arthur Verge sees that "real estate speculation and poor planning gave way to urban sprawl, and the city by 1940 had lost its distinct center" and that a "a 'freeway system' […] would encourage the city to spread away from a potentially overcrowded nucleus" (Verge 7-8). Norman Klein, on the other hand, is more critical of the reasons; in his description of Los

Angeles in the 1940s, in which he sees a merging of the sunshine city (1885-1929) and the Depression wartime, industrial city (1929-1945); Klein highlights the emergence of the industri-polis:

> The industrial freeway city (industri-polis) was built upon a profound anxiety about guarding against crime — crime being a code word very often for non-white slums too close by. Much of that anxiety centered, at first, around fears about Mexican neighborhoods close in, then later about African Americans. Soon it became an architectural necessity. Cars moved along guarded freeways. Civic buildings needed security against too many winding alleys or hidden public places. (Klein 49)

The war, however, also played a monumental role in the direction that the city took henceforth. It accelerated decentralization in all American cities. As Catherine Bauer explains, twenty billion dollars were spent building modern plants during the war, which almost doubled the value of the already existent ones, but the locations were not "in old city centers nor yet in isolated small towns, but for the most part on the outskirts of metropolitan areas" (Bauer 70). Nevertheless, out of all American cities, Los Angeles is the one that was, perhaps, most profoundly transformed by the Second World War; and, although the United States did not officially enter the world-wide armed conflict until December 7, 1941, the City of Angels was deeply involved in the war effort as early as 1938 as a major manufacturer of airplanes for Allied nations Britain and France.

The war exacerbated the industrialization and decentralization of Los Angeles, which caused the landscape of the city to change in several ways. One major effect was, in fact, the increase of population. As Nicolaides notes,

> The war's impact on population growth and housing was jolting and unsettling. As an important site of both defense production and military mobilization, Southern California attracted tremendous numbers of migrants. The numbers were staggering. In L.A. County, fully 25 percent of residents in 1944 had arrived since 1940. The overall county population jumped from 2.78 to 4.15 million from 1940 to 1950. (Nicolaides 219)

The increased number of residents, however, brought problems that city officials had a difficult time managing adequately. As Verge signals, "the housing crisis in Los Angeles had become so problematic by 1943 that some unhoused war workers worked night shifts so they would be able to sleep outside in the warmer daylight hours" (Verge 72). The housing shortage even caused the federal government to intervene in order to ameliorate the precarious situation. As a matter of fact, "Los Angeles during the war had the second largest wartime public housing program in the United States. The joint federal-city program built 33,000 units of public housing, which was three times the entire population of Los Angeles in 1880" (Verge 110). Interestingly, prior to the war, the city actually had a surplus in housing; vacancies, however, sharply declined in Los Angeles County from 6 percent in 1940 to 0.4 percent in 1943 (Nicolaides 190). The shortage in housing, however, affected the minority populations of the city more profoundly. As Nicolaides describes,

> Blacks were disproportionately confined to the City of Los Angeles. By 1950, L.A. city housed 78 percent of all blacks in the county; by comparison, the city contained 47 percent of all residents in the county, meaning a majority resided in outlying communities. Yet most suburbs remained off limits to blacks. African Americans were segregated residentially to a greater degree than any other

> minority group. This practice of confinement coupled with the general wartime housing shortages meant that blacks felt the housing pinch acutely. (Nicolaides 191)

The influx of African Americans to the region, along with population growth, and the confinement strategy by the city Los Angeles, highlighted by Nicolaides, nevertheless aggravated even more the uneasiness that developers felt towards the shanty towns in downtown. As Klein notes,

> Like war itself, the slums of downtown reminded developers anxiously of the Great Depression, and of wartime shortages and rationing — a world on the edge. Housing shortages were severe. Poverty seemed to be bursting at the seams. Whites were frightened by the rapidly growing black population, 84 percent larger by 1945— 60,000 more blacks, with only 3,000 'new units for [Negro] occupancy.' (Klein 44)

The white paranoia —racially motivated— pushed forward the plans, as was previously mentioned, of what would become the city of the freeway. Further decentralization, by means of the adoption of the highway and segregational housing policies, was seen as the most adequate response by the Los Angeles elite to the congested streets and the increase in the minority population.

Los Angeles's economic growth during the war years was staggering. The federal money that poured into the city by means of defense contracts spurred the massive industrialization of the county. As Verge describes,

> The financial impact on Los Angeles was nothing short of phenomenal […] overall production in Los Angeles was also facilitated by the involvement of the

> federal government. Through its financial backing, the industries of Los Angeles obtained record growth levels […] Los Angeles proved to be a worthy investment for the federal government. The region's defense industries responded to the monumental task of supporting a two-front war by producing a wide range of such vitally needed defense goods as ships, tanks, guns, uniforms, and parachutes […] emerging from the war as the nation's second largest defense producer, Los Angeles had earned a worldwide reputation as a leader in innovation, industrial prowess and technological development. (Verge 98)

The astronomical financial growth of Los Angeles, which transformed it into a powerful industrial center, however, does not eclipse the problems the city faced as a result of the rapid development prompted by the war, not to mention the social conflicts which were intensified during that time. Ironically, the United States, which had its own serious racial problems at home, was fighting a two-front war to rid the world of who would become one of the most tyrannical figures in history, Adolf Hitler, whose racist antics and crimes lead to the mass internment and genocide of millions of Jews in Europe. Although racism in Los Angeles was not as rampant as in other parts of the country, such as the South, the booming city would be the epicenter of one of the greatest civil liberties violations recorded in American history. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, animosity and hysteria towards the Japanese-American population grew to the point that Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942 issued the Executive Order 9006. The executive order, as Eric Avila points out,

> declared Americans of Japanese descent a 'hostile and enemy race' and ordered the seizure of Japanese American property and the prompt relocation of Japanese American families to makeshift encampments in the remote deserts of California

> and Arizona replete with barbed wire and armed sentries […] Almost overnight, Japanese American neighborhoods like Little Tokyo became ghost towns, boarded up and virtually abandoned. Detained in internment camps over the course of the war, Japanese Americans experienced the destruction of their communities and bore the brunt of racist anxieties in wartime California. (Avila 100)

This resulted in the forced evacuation of about 6,000 Americans of Japanese descent from Los Angeles (Verge 42). This was not, however, the first major act of severe racism that the Asian American communities suffered in Los Angeles. Seventy years before the internment of Japanese Americans, the Chinese American community was a victim of bloodshed. On October 24, 1871, a mob of 500 white men entered and pillaged Chinatown, killing eighteen Chinese residents. This tragic event would become known as the Chinese massacre of 1871.

The Asian American community, nevertheless, was not the only one that suffered the increase in racism during wartime. As was mentioned earlier, African Americans suffered from racist housing policies and widespread job discrimination. On June 25, 1941, pressured by the threats of protests by African American servicemen, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which prohibited racial discrimination in the defense industry or in Government. As Verge notes, the presidential mandate had a significant impact in Los Angeles: "the open hiring of blacks in high-paying defense industry led to the greatest black migration in Los Angeles history. By the summer of 1943 blacks were arriving in Los Angeles at a rate of between 10,000 to 12,000 a month, or approximately fifty percent of new migrants to the city" (Verge 52). Nevertheless, racism and discrimination in the workplace, even in the defense industry, persisted, and African Americans, who by 1944 made up 7.1 percent of the city's population, constituted

only 5.1 percent of the war workers (Verge 52). Furthermore, Hispanics were also racially discriminated in the workforce as well as outside of it. As Neil Wynn describes, "Although there was no consistent pattern in Los Angeles, African Americans (and Mexican Americans) were often barred from restaurants, bars, and movie theaters, and it was not unusual to see signs announcing Wednesday as 'Mexican night' and Thursday as 'colored night'" (Wynn 70). The war also intensified racial tensions between the whites and Mexican Americans, who, at the time, made up about 10 percent of the city's population, and

> like blacks, Hispanics resided in neighborhoods and attended schools segregated from white society. Even by 1946 there were still twenty-eight separate schools in Los Angeles County for Mexican-American children. School districts drew boundary lines down the center of streets without including dwellings on either side to connect settlements of Hispanics into segregated school districts. Forced into segregated and most often inferior housing districts as well, Hispanics coped with over-crowding and poor sanitary conditions throughout the war years. (Verge 58)

Racial animosity towards Mexican Americans during the war escalated to the point that, on June 3, 1943, a group of close to 200 servicemen from the U.S. Naval base headed to East Los Angeles and mobbed young Latino males wearing Zoot suits, assaulting and stripping them and then burning their garments. This episode, which became known as the Zoot Suit Riots, will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter of this dissertation. Overall, however, minorities were made to suffer due to the anxiety of the war. As Avila summarizes,

> The heightened state of national anxiety induced by the war, the drafting of sons and husbands into a global conflict, rumors of enemy aircraft and submarines

> surfacing just off the California coast — these factors unnerved Americans of all colors and shades during the early 1940s, and the recent memory of a massive economic depression during the previous decade compounded these anxieties. But while the war provided a common cause for unity among diverse Americans, it also proved deeply ingrained notions of racial entitlement among white majorities in American cities and inflamed xenophobic hostility towards non-white peoples. (Avila 100)

Franklin D. Roosevelt's federal order was, indeed, a step forward; the acknowledgment on the federal level for the need to advance the rights of minorities, despite being incapable of ending government defense contract discrimination entirely, allowed these marginalized groups to enter previously barred sectors of the workforce. Nevertheless, it did not calm anxieties, as the war only aggravated racial discrimination and segregation that already existed in Los Angeles.

On an economic level, as has been highlighted, Los Angeles's contribution to the war effort gave astounding results. Los Angeles came out of the war as the second leading industrial center in the United States; it became a major hub for technology and innovation. However, the financial success and the growth of the city had severe environmental consequences. The quality of the air in Los Angeles deteriorated so tremendously that,

> on 26 July 1943, the city of L.A. underwent a gas attack: four hours of thick, noxious misery, brought on by the industrial buildup during the war effort. Others followed, one in September. After blaming a rubber factory in East L.A., home incinerators, oil refineries, and automobiles, and asking numerous experts, by 1948 an Air Pollution Control district was set up. From that point forth, the issue of smog has been unmistakably a part of L.A. lore. In the fifties, the *New York*

> *Times* carried numerous articles about L.A. air, much as Ed Ruscha would use smog as a chiaroscuro in various paintings in the sixties. (Klein 86)

The air was not the only thing that had degenerated into a health hazard. The massive growth in population of Los Angeles saturated the local sewer systems to the point that the excess raw sewage waste began to be dumped in Santa Monica Bay, which prompted officials to shut down popular city beaches, adding, as well, the burden of a rise of intestinal diseases in beach goers and swimmers. The lack of sanitation throughout the county, in general, "raised the threat of rodent and insect-borne diseases such as the bubonic plague, typhus fever, and malaria" (Verge 118). Although the rampant industrialization of the city was celebrated, it came at a serious environmental cost.

Los Angeles, without a doubt, went through a deep transformation during the war. The defense contracts and money from the federal government allowed the city to become an industrial and economical power. And it was during this time, intensified by the changes happening in the city because of the war, that developers and city officials, albeit with their racist prejudices, heralded the freeway, over an improvement of the public transportation city, as the answer to Los Angeles's traffic congestion and overcrowding problems. Despite the financial success of the city, the unprecedented growth in population and industrialization created housing and environmental problems, and combined with the wartime anxiety, intensified racial tensions that led to outbursts of violence against minorities and violations of civil liberties. In a way, it is not hard to see the Los Angeles of the 1940s as the blue print of the metropolis, which decades later, would become the megalopolis that it is today.

IV

Los Angeles's deep transformation also coincided with counter-myths that rendered the city in a denunciatory and cynical light. The dominant narrative about Los Angeles that emerged during these transformative decades exposed the city as the epicenter of corruption, crime, simulation, materialism and philistinism. This vision, fatalistic in its roots, permanently cemented itself in the social imaginary of the city. As Mike Davis affirms, "Los Angeles understands its past [...] through a robust fiction called *noir*" (Davis 36). In other words, Los Angeles is a city that thinks, imagines, and remembers itself through the fictions that have been created and propagated about it. Hence, in order to understand the past of the city it is necessary to deconstruct the deeply embedded myths that remain in the social imaginary. Although it bears saying that Los Angeles also understands its present self through such relentless fiction, since, as it was posited earlier, most of the current stereotypes and cutting remarks about Los Angeles are recycled tropes that originated during that time. Nonetheless, the way that Los Angeles has been seen and understood, through the lens of the dominant narrative, has been heavily one-sided. Edward Said, however, wisely suggested in his influential book *Orientalism* (1978) that cultural representations are not inert facts of nature but that they are ever-active; they are in fact a two-way street. Hence, Los Angeles — like other seeming emblematic cities in the world —must also be approached as a constructed discourse where local and foreign actors play a role in its construction.

"Revisiting L.A.: Brazilian and Mexican Renditions of Los Angeles from the 1930s to the 1940s" involves the analysis of a variety of texts ranging from fiction, chronicles, and letters to travel memoirs. It is an attempt to investigate, from a multidisciplinary perspective, the construction of the social imaginary of Los Angeles. The intent of this study, more specifically, is to shed light on a contrasting image of Los Angeles offered by five Mexican and Brazilian

writers, whereby a more nuanced and complex understanding of the city and its history may be acquired. Paying heed to these representations of Los Angeles that were at times antithetical to the standard discourse will allow for a reformulation of how the city has been mythicized. Furthermore, my objective is also to call attention to the fact that these authors have not been studied in this context; this analysis, therefore, would be making a contribution, using the words of Michael Dear, "to correct […] the long-established analytical amnesia regarding Southern California" (Dear 20). With this motivation, my analysis is guided by conceptual tools borrowed from literary criticism and the social sciences. This study revolves around three central questions: 1) In what ways did Brazilian and Mexican writers diverge from their local and European counterparts in their assessment of Los Angeles? 2) How did the political, historical, and cultural time and relationship between the U.S. and Latin America inform and influence their representations of the megalopolis of the West? 3) What new ways of understanding Los Angeles do these representations by Latin American intellectuals give us?

V

Chapter one deals with Erico Veríssimo's travel memoirs *Gato preto em campo de neve* (1941), which covered his travels throughout all of the United States, from coast to coast, and *A volta do gato preto* (1946), which narrates his two-year residence in Los Angeles and San Francisco. I argue that Veríssimo's writings, despite being funded by the Good Neighbor foreign policy of the American government, paints a nuanced and complex picture of Los Angeles contrary to the dominant narrative about the city. More specifically, I reveal the ways that Veríssimo's writings on Los Angeles escape mythifying, stereotypical, or over-generalizing assertions or opinions. In addition, Verissimo's rendition of Los Angeles is contrasted with that of his European contemporary Aldous Huxley. I show that unlike Huxley, Verissimo offers a

dispassionate approach in which to see and understand Los Angeles. Lastly, this chapter contends that Veríssimo's account is one of the most compelling literary documents written about Los Angeles, which, however, has been completely neglected by critics. Therefore, I highlight the critics' shortcomings in recognizing its inestimable documentary value.

Chapter two examines the writings of Los Angeles by Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia and Brazilian poets Vinicius de Moraes and Raul Bopp. The first section discusses seminal works about Los Angeles by Aldous Huxley, Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West, and John Fante, all published in 1939, highlighting how they take on the task of denouncing the city as corrupt, frivolous, and as a breeding ground for human pathology. Next, Xavier Villaurrutia's 1936 poem "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" is examined, drawing attention to the fact that the poem has not been read in the context of its importance to Los Angeles, especially given its unapologetic look into the city's gay underground life. The contention here is that Villaurrutia's poem, unique in its candidness, shines a light on a repressed and ignored dimension of the city, thereby presenting a vision of the city as fluid and transformative. The following section of the chapter surveys letters, poems, and chronicles that Vinicius de Moraes wrote about Los Angeles. Analyzing the Brazilian poet's writings about Los Angeles, it is contended that Vinicius's vision of the city is rooted in a compassionate reading of human nature, which, among other things, prompted him to seek out and explore the Black subculture of the city. Finally, the chapter ends with a look into Raul Bopp's *America* (1941) and a selection of travel memoirs of his time when he served under the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty). It is argued here that Bopp's rendition of Los Angeles as an auspicious metropolis is particularly important because it is rooted in the cultural diversity of the city. The assertion of this chapter is that Villaurrutia,

Vinicius, and Bopp's portrayals of Los Angeles, unlike the dominant narrative about the city, are characterized by a degree of tolerance and sympathy.

Chapter three is dedicated to undertaking a critical reading of Octavio Paz's representation of Los Angeles via the pachuco. It focuses especially on the first chapter of Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), titled "El pachuco y otros extremos," looking at 1940s Los Angeles through the figure of the pachuco. However, this reading is later juxtaposed with that of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's consequential essay, "The Culture Industry." I argue that while Adorno and Horkheimer put forth a vision of life and culture in Los Angeles as homogenized and monotonous, Paz, on the other hand, observes the opposite. The Mexican poet casts his gaze on the singularity and rebelliousness of the city embodied in the marginal and controversial nature of the pachuco.

The culmination of this study is dedicated to the conclusions of my analysis, in which the problems and general questions raised in the beginning of it are discussed and summarized in a comprehensive manner. However, a brief overview of a few contemporary Mexican and Brazilians writers that have recently written about Los Angeles, such as Antônio Xerenesky, Carlos Rubio Rosell, Susana Iglesias, and Paloma Vidal is offered. The point of this is to show the interest that Los Angeles continues to elicit from Mexican and Brazilian authors. Examples of how a couple of these works, such as Vidal and Iglesias,' echo major works of Los Angeles fiction are succinctly discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

City of *Anjos*: The Case of Erico Verissimo

I

In 1941 the Brazilian novelist Erico Verissimo was invited, under the Good Neighbor policy, to visit the United States as a cultural ambassador. Verissimo's brief trip, which lasted three months and consisted in traveling across the United States visiting intellectuals, institutions, and delivering lectures, was so successful that, a couple of years later, he was invited back. Sponsored again by the cultural arm of the Good Neighbor policy, Verissimo was invited to teach a couple of courses at the University of California, Berkeley and continue to present lectures in different parts of the country. This second time around, Verissimo spent the majority of his stay, which lasted two years, living in Berkeley and Los Angeles. The memoirs of his first trip are gathered in *Gato preto em campo de neve* (1941), and the recollections of his second sojourn are compiled in *A volta do gato preto* (1946). Both books were a success, selling thousands of copies in Brazil and the United States, setting in motion the translation of several of Verissimo's novels into English, and catapulting his career abroad. Aside from their literary and aesthetic values, these travel narratives are, undoubtedly, an important document on urban life in the United States in the 1940s. It is in this light, therefore, that this chapter explores how, coming from the periphery, and against the backdrop of the inflated rhetoric of the dominant discourse about the city, Verissimo produced a dispassionate image of Los Angeles. Unmoved by the fervor and trends of the time, Verissimo constructs a picture of Los Angeles that escapes the reductionist depictions of his American and European counterparts.

This chapter deals largely with the sections in *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto* that concern Los Angeles; however, before delving into Erico Verissimo's texts, I

provide a brief background on the United States Government's Good Neighbor policy, in particular its cultural diplomacy. Second, I give a short summary of Verissimo's life and the circumstances that resulted in him receiving an invitation from the State Department to travel to the United States as a cultural ambassador. Afterward, I present an overall view of *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto*. Next, I look at how critics have discussed these two works, pointing out that, preferring to highlight the literary and aesthetical aspects, or their overall political significance, the studies on Verissimo's travel narratives have, by and large, ignored their immeasurable documentary value. I argue that this feature in Verissmo's travel narratives presents an important and indispensable historical window into the lives of American cities. Taking a peek inside this window, I analyze, in the following section, Verissimo's representation of Los Angeles. Contrasting Verissimo's depiction of Los Angeles to that of his contemporary British counterpart, Aldous Huxley, I contend that the nuances in Verissimo's representation renders the city in a less reductionist and one-sided manner. Moving beyond superficialities and stereotypes, the Brazilian novelist reveals a city rich in human depth. Lastly, I demonstrate that Verissimo's written account of Los Angeles is an indispensable document in the effort to have a more unprejudiced and precise picture of the city in the 1940s.

The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy

II

Franklin D. Roosevelt's election in 1933 marked a change in the direction of United States foreign policy towards Latin America. After "surveying inter-American diplomacy since the Spanish American war, [Roosevelt] concluded that Latin Americans resented United States intervention" and as such decided to shift the course of his administration's dealings with his neighbors to the south (Gellman 11). The highly unpopular military interventions in Nicaragua

and Haiti in 1927, along with the effects of the crash of the stock market in New York, threatened American hemispheric hegemony. The depression threw Latin America into political and economic turmoil,

> […] countries entered a period of political and social crisis. In the two years following the crash of the stock market in New York, 1930, and 1931, six Latin American countries, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, experienced military take-overs or extra-constitutional changes in government […] In general […] there was a movement away from the nineteenth century liberal parliamentary model of government and toward stronger forms of authoritarian control. Moreover, the depression brought into clear light the extent to which Latin American economies were heavily dependent on foreign markets and foreign sources of capital, an awareness that stirred a nationalist resentment. (Fejes 31)

Despite the efforts to ameliorate the crisis and improve relations with Latin America, the Hoover Administration, which preceded Franklin D. Roosevelt's, did not relinquish its right to intervene in the region and, as such, continued to strain the United States' ties with its southern neighbors.

However, Franklin D. Roosevelt's rise to power would turn the diplomatic tide. The new approach aimed at improving the relations with Latin America in order to revert the antagonism generated by the previous administrations:

> The new Latin American policy — termed the 'Good Neighbor Policy' after Roosevelt's vague inaugural pledge to follow the 'policy of the good neighbor' in foreign affairs— was aimed at removing the cause of many of the Latin American complaints about the United States and reopening the channels of trade between

> the two continents. The specific elements of the new policy were revealed […] at the seventh Pan American Conference in Montevideo in December 1933. To the amazement and gratification of the representatives of the other American states, Hull [Secretary of State] agreed to sign a proposed convention that prohibited the intervention by one state into the affairs of another. A few days later in Washington, Roosevelt emphasized the change in policy by stating in a speech that 'the definite policy of the United States from now is opposed to armed intervention.' (Fejes 32)

In addition, as a sign of progress in bilateral relations, the United States moved the date for the withdrawal of American troops in Nicaragua and Haiti. Nevertheless, as Irwin F. Gellman argues, there was something more to this:

> The Administration found the nonintervention principle appealing to the general public. The idea was easy to explain, and it was promoted simplistically. Nevertheless, few understood the complex nature of nonintervention […] no intervention was never an absolute reality— only an illusion that was valuable in popularizing the Good Neighbor principle. (Gellman 39)

In other words, the Monroe Doctrine was still the unilateral principle of the foreign policy of the United States; what had shifted, however, was the way that Latin America perceived it: "Before the Roosevelt administration came into office, the other American republics believed that the United States would use the doctrine against them. Under the current conditions, the opposite was true" (Gellman 96).

Furthermore, David Green argues that, although historians at the time of Roosevelt's death considered his foreign policy to be a success, "over the long run, the Good Neighbor

Policy was a failure" (Green 291). What the Good Neighbor policy created, in fact, was an economic dependency of the region on the United States, which would undermine political stability. Merle Kling saw this as a dilemma in American foreign policy,

> Economic colonialism promotes political instability, which detracts from the power of reliable diplomatic allies of the United States; but, while the achievement of political stability would augment the power of the Latin American states, the elimination of a status of economic colonialism may diminish the diplomatic reliability of their governments! (Kling 80)

Green, however, rejects this idea, as he sees that such a dilemma never really existed. He considers that the United States did not want to deal with strong and dependable allies as Kling asserts, since "[…] in the Western Hemisphere, there was no real need for strong allies, because there was no real external threat against which the United States needed strong allies for defense purposes […] The whole point of the political approach of the Good Neighbor Policy was that the United States preferred allies in the Western Hemisphere who were dependable *and weak*" (Green 296). Ultimately, Green argues that the implementation of the Good Neighbor policy, over the course of two administrations, led to a policy of containment.

Cultural Diplomacy

III

In this section, I will provide a succinct overview of the cultural branch of diplomacy under the Good Neighbor policy. More pertinent to this study, however, is the way that the Good Neighbor policy played out in the cultural arena. Borrowing Joseph S. Nye's term "soft power" to describe cultural diplomacy, Darlene Sadlier argues that the period from 1940 to 1945 was the "most fully developed and intensive use of soft power in U.S. history" (Sadlier 2). In other

words, it would be safe to say that cultural diplomacy reached its pinnacle during World War II. As Gellman points out,

> Unwholesome stereotypes of lifestyles prevailed throughout the hemisphere. Latin American critics portrayed Yankees as aggressive, militaristic imperialists who were obsessed with accumulation of wealth. Many United States journalists depicted Latin Americans as shiftless daydreamers, who lacked intelligence and took siestas under huge sombreros or who were preoccupied with emulating the sexual conquests of the legendary Don Juan. These characterizations were seriously challenged during Roosevelt's presidency for the first time in a systemic fashion. The United States awoke to realize that fighting the Axis in hand-to-hand combat was not enough; the battle extended to winning the allegiance of men's minds. (Gellman 142)

Although cultural cooperation had begun to grow with the partnership of the private sector —for example, the increase of Guggenheim Fellowships—and the government under the Roosevelt administration, it does not come close to what it would become at the beginning of the 1940s when the United States entered the war. As a matter of fact, it was one man, Nelson A. Rockefeller, who spurred the American government to invest more time and effort in cultural diplomacy towards Latin America. Having traveled widely through South America with some business partners in the spring of 1940, Rockefeller was worried by the spread of Nazism across Europe (Gellman 150).

On August 16, 1940, the Office for the Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between American Republics was created at the behest of Franklin D. Roosevelt; a year later it would be renamed as the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs

(OCIAA). Appointed by President Roosevelt, Rockefeller ran what would be one of the first government agencies specifically established to expand and enact wide-ranging cultural diplomacy, and whose "primary objective […] was to influence governments and individuals throughout Latin America as well as the public at home about the vital importance of hemispheric solidarity and defense in combating Axis infiltration and domination" (Sadlier 3). One of the most important challenges that the agency faced was the manner in which it was going to depict the way of life of the United States to its southern neighbors and, conversely, how it was going to render Latin America:

> From an assemblage of selected cultural interests, values, and traits, the CIAA tried to shape a Good Neighbor U.S. imaginary that would seem familiar and/or appeal to Latin Americans while offering U.S. audiences equally familiar and/or attractive images of Good Neighbors to the south. Ultimately, the 'way of life' promoted abroad was sharply focused on modernity and prosperity, emphasizing the growth of an industrial economy and proffering utopian visions of a rising middle class. Where and whenever possible, the CIAA touted these values in its information on and image-making of the other Americas. (Sadlier 4)

Latin American countries successfully secured U.S. investments in agriculture, industry, health and cultural programs in return for the establishment of American military bases, supplies, and political support. Governments in Latin America also had a vested interest in the OCIAA's propagandistic messages. Concerned with prosperity and modernity, some leaders wanted to push forth the message of modernization, while at the same time censoring any evidence of underdevelopment. A prime example of this concern is the case of *It's All True* (1941), Orson Welles's sabotaged and unfinished documentary about Brazil and Mexico. Getúlio Vargas, the

Brazilian dictator who ruled the South American nation from 1930 to 1945 —a period known as the Estado Novo—, deliberately obstructed the completion of the feature film when the famed American director began to film the impoverished black populations of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro and of the Northeast of the country (Sadlier 24).

As was mentioned above, one year after the creation of the Office for Coordination of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics in 1940, the name of the agency would be changed and its purpose expanded. The objective of the newly named and expanded Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), nevertheless, remained the same, which was to increase the economic and political solidarity of the United States with its neighbors to the south due to the increasing presence of the Axis. With the impending participation of the United States in the war, "the agency's early emphasis on economic and psychological defense measures shifted to that of economic and psychological warfare" (Sadlier 10). Faced with the need to develop sophisticated methods of persuasion, Rockefeller turned to a former classmate of his from Dartmouth named Leonard W. Doob, a psychology professor at Yale University and author of the 1935 book *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique*, which was based on research conducted in Germany (Sadlier 16). Doob wrote a twelve-page report calling the United States to combat Axis propaganda that, as Sadlier reveals, turned out to be important because its language and rhetoric was later reflected in OCIAA's 1942 report titled "Philosophy and Organization of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs," which had a section for a "proposed Department of Propaganda and three 'credos' to be established for U.S. citizens toward Latin America and vice versa […] cast in opposition to the 'Axis Credo'" (Sadlier 17). Interestingly, however, after the war, Doob would comment on the

> CIAA's uneasiness with the word 'propaganda,' whose associations with Soviet and German totalitarianism were anathema to proponents of Western Liberalism. Thus, the CIAA preferred the term 'information' —as if it were more honest, truthful, and devoid of value judgments. This attitude was not unique to the CIAA; on the contrary, it was implied or even explicit in the titles given to wartime propaganda agencies such as the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF). (Sadlier 19)

In 1942 Rockefeller would create separate propagandistic divisions, or rather "information" divisions, which included Motion Picture, Radio, and Press and Publication, as well as others for economic and transportation development.

The Motion Picture Division played a central role in the spreading of information. Rockefeller appointed multimillionaire John Hay Whitney, who was vice president of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)—and the president of its Film Library— to direct the OCIAA's Motion Picture Division in Los Angeles. The undertaking of the Motion Picture division was to strengthen U.S. relations with Latin America by making feature and short films that, for a change, would break away from the demeaning representations of the region that were common in Hollywood movies; hence, the objective was to cast Latin Americans in a more positive light, which would promote the spirit of goodwill. However, as important as this was, it was also vital for the OCIAA to stop the dissemination of damaging movies in Latin America that gave negative impressions of the United States, "which distorted life in the United States by portraying gangsterism, corruption, and incompetence" (Gellman 152). Three cinematic projects by the Motion Picture division would stand out. As already discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, Walt Disney's *Saludos amigos* and *The Three Caballeros* and Orson Welles's

unfinished documentary *It's All True* were arguably the most consequential projects for this division of the OCIAA. As a matter of fact, Walt Disney's cooperation with the U.S. government may have had a major impact in his career; as Sadlier suggests, it made the Disney empire possible: "with the artists' strike resolved during his [Walt Disney's] South American tour, with the widespread success of *Saludos amigos*, and with the additional government contracts for propaganda and educational films at hand, Disney was well on his way to creating the empire that we know today" (Sadlier 27).

The OCIAA's focus on Brazil can also be seen in the other projects by other "information" divisions of the governmental agency. The case of Genevieve Naylor, a photojournalist who traveled to Brazil in October 1940, is a prime example. Naylor was a photographer for the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal program, and the Associated Press. In fact, she was the first American female photographer hired to work for a news agency (Mauad 50). However, Naylor's other work published in prestigious magazines such as *Life* and *Time* caught Rockefeller's eye, which resulted in an invitation from the OCIAA for the young American photographer to go to Brazil. Naylor traveled to Brazil with her soon-to-be husband, the Ukrainian-American artist Misha Reznikoff, who, as a matter of fact, would also contribute to the cultural cooperation between the two countries (Sadlier 140). However, once in Brazil, Naylor faced the same obstruction, perhaps not as severe, that Orson Welles encountered when shooting his unfinished documentary. Naylor, who, as a matter of fact, coincided with Welles in Rio de Janeiro and whom she photographed, showed the American director the location where to film the "authentic" Black carnival (Mauad 53). Naylor, however, did not escape the harassment and obstruction by the Departmento de Imprensa e Propaganda (DIP), the governmental agency in charge of censorship during Getúlio Vargas' military dictatorship.

On the eve of her arrival, Naylor received clear instructions from the DIP as to what she should photograph. The document stated that she needed to give particular importance to certain subjects, such as modern architecture, primarily government buildings, homes in affluent neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro, famous beaches like Copacabana and Ipanema, and the Jockey Club, and other middle-to-upper-class areas and peoples of the city (Levine 16). Despite the obstacles imposed on her by the government, during their three years of residency in Brazil, Naylor and Reznikoff managed to travel outside Rio de Janeiro. Traveling to the North and Northeast, as well as through the interior of the country, Naylor was able to photograph objects and subjects that were more of interest to her and less official in nature (Sadlier 140). Naylor's style of photography was guided by her earlier education and work; studying under Berenice Abbott at the New School for Social Research in New York, Naylor's oeuvre reflected the influence of socially conscious photography of the Depression era (Mauad 50). Hence, in Brazil, Naylor was drawn to capture with her photographs the complexity and heterogeneity of the country's social reality. As Ana Lucia Gazolla describes,

> Naylor resiste à apresentação de uma visão homogênea do país e recusa os estereótipos fáceis do paternalismo e do exotismo latino-americano [...] Suas fotos buscam retratar uma realidade contraditória, múltipla, diversa, da qual nenhuma síntese é possível [...] O país que retrata não é o das paisagens assépticas e des-historicizadas, nem o do desenvolvimento e do progresso absolutos, mas sim o do contraponto, da decalagem, do processo de modernização que acentua desigualdades. (qtd. in Mauad 20)

In January 1943, an exhibition of fifty of Naylor's photographs, titled *Faces and Places in Brazil*, opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Her photographs would also appear

in a larger exhibition at MoMa titled *Brazil Builds*, which showcased Brazil's modernist architecture and filled almost the entire ground floor of the museum. However, unlike Naylor's solo exhibition, which gave a more nuanced and complex portrayal of the country, *Brazil Builds* emphatically drove home the idea that the Vargas regime and U.S. government were trying to push: the progress and modernity of Brazil (Sadlier 150).

As Ana Maria Mauad highlights, "entre os recursos destinados a promover a integração entre as Américas, a imagem técnica foi […] fundamental, denotando o importante papel da cultura visiual como forma de persuasão e de elaboração de conceitos e emoções" (Mauad 60). Visual culture was, indeed, an important indoctrination tool for Good Neighbor diplomacy. It is no coincidence that, out of all the different divisions of information, Rockefeller himself saw the Motion Picture Division perhaps as the most powerful:

> Of the three arms of psychological warfare—radio, news, and movies— the latter, from my point of view, has by far the greatest potentialities as it combines the impact of sight and sound...[Film] is an industry that stands ready to produce the most potent instrument of war possessed by any nation in the world (qtd. in Sadlier 137).

One cannot help but be reminded of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's essay "The Culture Industry," in which the German intellectuals vehemently critique the appropriation of mass culture by governments as a tool for control and manipulation. Adorno and Horkheimer's text, however, was not published until 1947, nor does it mention the U.S. government's Good Neighbor policy (Sadlier 8). Notwithstanding, what Rockefeller's statement and Adorno and Horkheimer's essay highlight is a historical moment where the production and spread of culture on a mass scale were made possible by the technical and technological advances of the period.

This began to profoundly change the way that certain cultural goods and their circulation were imagined and evaluated.

As Antônio Pedro Tota asserts, cultural diplomacy under the Good Neighbor policy was nothing more than another form of U.S. imperialism, however seductive (Tota 193). Despite the clear purpose of the OCIAA, there were artists under their watch that did not subscribe to the limiting and propagandistic parameters set out by the government's cultural agency. Naylor and Welles were two prime examples of artists who moved outside the stipulated guidelines and escaped censorship by staying true to their artistic and political instincts. Naylor, in this regard, was more successful since she was allowed to finish her work and showcase it; Welles, on the other hand, never got the opportunity to finish his documentary. There is, however, another interesting case that comes from the Press and Publication Division. Brazilian novelist Erico Verissimo, who, like the famed American photographer and filmmaker, did not shy away from topics deemed controversial by the U.S. and Brazilian governments. The case of Verissimo will be explored next.

The Visit of the "Gato"

IV

On October 1940, after being paid a brief and unexpected visit by the American consul of Porto Alegre, Brazilian novelist Erico Verissimo received a formal invitation by the Department of State, signed by Cordell Hull —who in 1945 would receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in establishing the United Nations—, to visit the United States. Three months later, after the New Year, in 1941, Verissimo embarked on what would be his first of two American state-sponsored visits. The chronicle of the first trip, of three months' duration, was published under the title *Gato preto em campo de neve* in 1941 and the chronicles of his prolonged second stay, of two

years in Berkeley and Los Angeles, came out in 1946 as *A volta do gato preto*. At the time of the first invitation, Verissimo was considered one of the most popular writers in Brazil. Although Verissimo began publishing in 1932, he did not reach considerable commercial nor critical success until the publication of his fifth novel *Olhai os lírios do campo* (1938), which catapulted him into stardom. As Carlos Minchillo reveals**,**

> A primeira edição de *Olhai os lírios do campo*, lançada em 1938, foi em alguns meses reimpressa cinco vezes e em pouco mais de um ano beirava a marca de 30 mil exemplares. Já em 1939, somente a venda de seus livros garantia a Erico uma renda mensal de três contos de reis. Com a quinta edição, de 1943, a obra alcançava a marca de 40 mil exemplares impressos e presumivelmente vendidos, em um mercado editorial que àquela época costumava produzir tiragens únicas de 500 a 2.000 exemplares. (Minchillo 45)

Moreover, as Richard Cándida-Smith points out, *Olhai os lírios do campo* "turned without any expectation into Brazil's first bestseller" (Cándida-Smith156). Indeed, Verissimo's ascent to bestselling author may be appropriately described as unexpected. Far from the two important cultural centers — São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro —, and from the literary conventions in vogue at the time, Verissimo managed to make a name for himself quite successfully.

Erico Verissimo was born on December 17, 1905 in Cruz Alta, a small town in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where he lived until he was twenty-five years old (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 38). Although Verissimo came from a landowning family with money, both the paternal and maternal fortunes were lost; and his father, who owned a pharmacy, went bankrupt in 1922, exacerbating the family's financial and personal woes, which ultimately prevented Verissimo from continuing with his education (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 151). Finding life

with her spouse insufferable and volatile, Verissimo's mother, with the support of Verissimo himself, divorced his father and moved out with her children to her parents' house, where, working day and night as a couturier, she kept the family afloat (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 155). However, under intense pressure to help his family out financially, Verissimo decided not to return to finish his last year at the the Colégio Cruzeiro do Sul, a private high school run by American Episcopalians, and went to work at his uncle's food warehouse and subsequently in a bank (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 158). As a result, Verissimo's family plan to send him to study at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland never materialized (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 159). However, a few years later, at the age of twenty, with the help of a close family friend, Verissimo became part owner of a pharmacy, which he ran while also imparting private English and literature classes (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 197). Running the pharmacy, nonetheless, was more complicated than Verissimo imagined. In the end, unable to maintain the pharmaceutical business afloat, the Farmácia Central went bankrupt. The debt accumulated by the failed business venture was so high that it took Verissimo seventeen years to pay the debt collectors back; as a matter of fact, right up to the time Verissimo was teaching Brazilian literature at the University of California, Berkeley. However, it was the sale of the movie rights to his novel *Olhai os lírios do campo* at a mediocre price that allowed him to settle his debts once and for all.

This failure, however, was a point of inflection in Verissimo's life and literary career. In 1930 he decided to move to the capital of his state, Porto Alegre, to try out his luck as a writer. With the help of a loan from an uncle of his, which would allow him to live in the capital for at least a year, Verissimo left his hometown Cruz Alta (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 234). The transition to the big city was not easy, as Verissimo went a year unemployed; nonetheless, before

the New Year, along with deciding to publish one of Verissimo's short stories, the director of the *Revista Globo* offered him a job as a writer and translator (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 236-237). His main responsibility, though, was to translate short stories and articles from American, British, Argentinean, French, and Italian magazines. To make ends meet, as the salary at the magazine was insufficient to support himself and his wife, Verissimo began translating books from English into Portuguese (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 247). The first book he translated was Edgar Wallace's *The Ringer*, which he did not particularly enjoy, as he did not like the author nor the story (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 247). However, Verissimo would later translate more regarded and well known writers such as Katherine Mansfield and Aldous Huxley. In fact, these two writers would later influence his own writing:

> Nunca escondi ou neguei o fato de ter sido esse livro de Huxley o responsável pela técnica que usei num romance que escrevi em 1934, em algumas dezenas de tardes de sábado: *Caminho cruzados*. Creio que Aldous Huxley também nunca negou que seu *Point Counterpoint* tivesse sofrido uma certa influência de *Les faux monnayeurs*, de André Gide. E essa técnica do romance simultaneísta já havia sido tentado em 1910 por W. S. Maugham no seu *Merry-go-round* (*Carrossel*). (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 255)

Despite Verissimo's own predictions, his translation of Huxley's novel became a publishing success in Brazil (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 255); and several years later, as part of his first visit sponsored by the U.S. government, he would get the opportunity to meet Huxley in Los Angeles. Verissimo chronicled this encounter in *Gato preto em campo de neve*, in which he describes his encumbering shyness during the meeting with the acclaimed British author, whose work he admired.

Verissimo's move to Porto Alegre was consequential in his aspiration of becoming a writer. Living in the state capital and working in the publishing world allowed him to be part of a cultural sphere that he would not have had the chance to navigate otherwise, rubbing elbows with intellectuals and the right people that would end up helping him advance his career as an author. The publication of his first book, *Fantoches* (1932), a collection of short stories, was, for example, a product of such happenstance; during a casual conversation, Henrique Bertaso, the son of the owner of *Revista Globo*, offered the Brazilian writer to publish his book at no cost (Verissimo, *Solo de clarienta 1* 250). 1,500 copies were printed but only 400 sold during the first year, but, due to a fire in the warehouse where the publisher kept the inventory, the rest of the unsold copies were paid for by the insurance company, prompting *Globo*, according to Verissimo, to want to publish his subsequent novels (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 253). In fact, a close and lifelong friendship would be forged between Verissimo and Bertaso; and, after the death of the publisher in 1972, the Brazilian novelist wrote a short biography of his friend and founder of Editora Globo titled *Um certo Henrique Bertaso: pequeno retrato em que o pintor também aparece (1973)*. Furthermore, the following year, Verissimo published his editorial debut, the novel *Clarissa* (1933), a coming of age story of a thirteen-year-old girl, inspired by Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss* (1920) and Francis Jammes' *Clara d'Ellébeuse* (1899), two books which he later translated into Portuguese (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 253). However, as was mentioned above, it was his fifth novel, *Olhai os lírios do campo* which catapulted him into bestselling-author status. As Candida-Smith highlights, "He was one of three Brazilian writers at the end of the 1930s whose income as an author, while modest by standards in Europe and the United States, could conceivably support him and his family" (Candida-Smith 156). Due to the notoriety gained by *Olhai os lírios*, the publication of his next novel, *Saga* (1940), presented the

Brazilian author with his first fan autograph session at the Saraiva bookstore in São Paulo: "aceitei, entretanto, o convite e tive uma das grandes surpresas da minha vida. Muito antes da hora marcada para o princípio da sessão, formou-se uma longa fila que começava na metade da quadra e estendia-se até mesa junto da qual eu me encontrava" (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 274). *Saga*, considered by Verissimo himself as his worst book, narrates the story of Vasco Bruno, who after fighting in the Spanish Civil War, as a soldier of the international brigades, returns to his native Porto Alegre just to be disillusioned by the bigotry and hypocritical and routine nature of middle class life, inducing him to move away and live on a farm in hopes of finding a sense of dignity and peace (Verissimo, *Solo de clarineta 1* 272).

According to Carlos Minchillo, the spirit of Pan-Americanism found in *Saga*, along with the success of *Olhai os lírios* and his involvement as vice president of the Instituto Cultural Brasileiro Norte-Americano de Porto Alegre (ICBN), as well as his personal and professional long-established language and cultural ties with the United States, positioned Verissimo as an extremely desirable candidate to be an ambassador of the Good Neighbor policy (Minchillo 190). And, in fact, the potential interest of Hollywood in Verissimo's book may have been an important factor:

> O cinema, aliás, poderia ser mais uma indicação de que entre os escritores brasileiros, Erico fosse um dos mais aptos para se comunicar com audiências mais amplas [...] o sucesso de *Olhai os lírios do campo* já havia chegado aos ouvidos de empresários de Hollywood, interesse que se confirma mais tarde com a notícia dada em 1941 pelo jornal *O Momento*, de Caixas (RS), de que os direitos cinematográficos de *Olhai os lírios do campo* haviam sido comprados pelo produtor Walter Wanger. (Minchillo 192)

Furthermore, as Richard Cándida-Smith highlights, documents of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs of the State Department identified Verissimo as one of fifty-something Latin American authors capable of publishing a best-seller in the United States (Cándida-Smith 8). In addition,

> What attracted Veríssimo [sic] to the State Department's officials who discovered his work was his apparent similarity to popular U.S. writers of the time, authors like Edna Ferber, A.B. Guthrie, or John Steinbeck. His ability to describe contemporary Brazil made his work, in the State Department's opinion, more accessible to U.S. readers, and his intercultural skills could contribute to securing popular support in the United States for an alliance with Brazil and a significant number of U.S. troops being based there. (Cándida-Smith 159)

Hence, the sum of these factors —popularity in Brazil, close ties with American culture and language, and monitoring of U.S. officials— resulted in a formal invitation by the State Department to visit the United States for a three-month long stay, which Verissimo received in December 1940. A few years later, in 1943, after deeming his first visit to the United States to have been successful, Verissimo was invited to the United States a second time, however this time around for a more prolonged stay in which he taught Brazilian literature at the University of California, Berkeley and in which he lived primarily in Los Angeles. Verissimo published the accounts and impressions of these two American experiences in two books: *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto*, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Critical Reception

V

The reviews of *Gato preto em campo de neve* from that time were, for the most part, approving of Verissimo's travel narrative. For example, Daniel Wogan, in a book review for

Revista Iberoamericana highlights the author's tolerance, respect, and research. And although Wogan critiques Verissimo for the evasion of difficult questions with regards to Brazil and the monotonous and easy "escape" via anecdotes to tackle such issues, the review is, overall, favorable. Wogan concludes by having "a ilusão de que viajou comigo" (Wogan 421). Moreover, D. Lee Hamilton's review of Verissimo's abridged version of the text, intended for language instruction and recommended to be introduced "at the end of the first year of Portuguese study or during the second year," also praises the work of the Brazilian novelist (Hamilton 398). Highlighting the disregard or unpopularity of Verissimo at that time amongst critics and writers in Brazil, who considered him popular and secondary, Hamilton argues that,

> Whether or not we agree fully with the verdict on Sr. Verissimo, we might agree that it results in part from the liking of contemporary Brazilian writers for kinds of writing which Sr. Verissimo has not done (for example, the pseudo-metaphysical, the social documentary slanted politically, *l'écriture artiste*). However that may be, his temperament and abilities collaborated to produce a book of lively interest in *Gato Preto*, excerpts from which form this reader [sic]. (Hamilton 398)

And it is Verissimo's humility, according to Hamilton, which may set his book apart from other texts; underscoring the lack of pomposity, the American critic writes, "[p]recisely because of the author's lack of pretentiousness, the book may be of more value even as a social criticism than some which have labored under the burden of vague intellectual importance" (Hamilton 398). The biggest flaw, however, which Hamilton sees in Verissimo's text is the closing section, precisely because he finds the anecdotal evidence, from which the Brazilian writer draws his opinions about Americans, as lacking depth. Contemporaneous to these two reviews, L.L. Barrett's critique strikes the same chords. Like Hamilton's appraisal, Barrett underscores the

striking personality and humbleness in Verissimo's book, "[t]o a North American, one of the most engaging qualities in that personality is the innate modesty, the absolute lack of any hint of pomposity, in the man; another and concomitant one is his invincible sense of humor, always ready to puncture any touch of self-importance" (Barrett 265). The review also highlights the huge sales of Verissimo's travel narrative and asserts that the "[…] editors could hardly have found more interesting material for Portuguese classes in our schools and colleges than a book by Erico Verissimo" (Barrett 265). Moreover, Samuel Putnam underlines Verissimo's "[…] real contribution to the cause of inter-American understanding, at least as regards his country and our own. He has shown us how such books ought to be written and the spirit in which our ambassadors of good will should set upon their journeyings" (Putnam 335). Putnam, echoing the other reviews of the time, praises Verissimo's keen observation and humility; and he makes note of the fact that "[…] Verissimo is no ordinary hit-and-run tourist, but an observer of extraordinarily quick perceptions, with an eye for the finer shading and the fleeting nuance" (Putnam 336). And, contrary to other critics, who are circumspect about some parts of Verissimo's narrative, he finds no aspects of the text to criticize; save, perhaps, the odd and uncanny title of the book.

Book reviews of that time aside, the scholarly writings that examine *Gato preto em campo de neve* for the most part neglect the documentary elements of the memoirs. A significant portion of the studies seem only to discuss the fictional and literary quality of the travel narratives. Anita Moraes, in her article titled "Os olhos do gato – O narrador de viagens Erico Verissimo," underlines the importance of Verissimo's travel memoires in his overall body of work, which, as she asserts, has been by and large neglected by critics. Moraes sees in Verissimo

perhaps the biggest Brazilian travel writer and makes a note of the closeness of his travel narratives to that of his fictional work:

> […] pode-se constatar a existência de uma escrita de viagem singular, muito próxima dos princípios ficcionais, sendo este aspecto um dos mais relevantes de sua obra litéraria, a qual remonta a um homem que além de ser romancista e 'contador de histórias', foi um importante –senão o maior--- narrador de viagens brasileiro. (Moraes 7)

In fact, Moraes sees the theme of travel as central to all of Verissimo's literary production, suggesting that both the fictional and travel/memorialistic writings must be understood as interdependent of one another. In the words of Moraes, "[é] evidente que o Erico viajante não consegue afastar-se do Verissimo romancista. A escrita do viajante norteia a relação existente entre esta modalidade narrativa e os rumos da produção literária do autor" (Moraes 14). Although Moraes underlines the symbiotic relationship between the fiction and non-fiction writing of Verissimo and its importance in understanding his work, the breadth of her study only goes as far as to deal with the more strictly literary and artistic aspects of it.

Maria da Glória Bordini, perhaps the most prolific critic of Verissimo's work, offering a more historical and descriptive overview of the Brazilian novelist's time as an ambassador of good will, strikes a similar chord as Moraes in her article "A identidade do viajante Erico Verissimo nos Estados Unidos." More specifically, Bordini highlights the shifts in identity, on an intellectual and personal level, that Verissimo experienced as a result of his brief and prolonged stays in the United States. Bordini argues that these changes over time became visible in all of his literary production. Moreover, borrowing from Walter Benjamin's ideas about the traditional storyteller and modern one, Bordini argues for a new of category of storyteller: the "chronist-

traveller." The "chronist-traveller," as she calls him/her, would be the closest to Benjamin's traditional storyteller, who, in spite of the roadblocks of modernity, is capable to translate not only an individual but also a collective experience. However, unlike Benjamin, Bordini is adamant in pointing out that this traditional storyteller "se torna um outro, ao narrar as histórias do passado do grupo, sejam as andanças por regiões desconhecidas. Nesse […] caso, quem narra é modificado pela própria narração" (Bordini 78). Hence, Verissimo would be that storyteller who, in the act of translating different types of experiences, is also transformed simultaneously. Consequently, Bordini sees Verissimo as a new man after his American experience upon his return to Brazil, giving him a perspective to see the realities of his country and the world in a new light, which later prompted him to write what would become his master piece, the first volume of *O tempo e o vento* (1949). Verissimo's observations of the United States, according to Bordini, are keen enough to withstand the test of time:

> Seu olhar sobre a nação norte-americana revela-se perspicaz na maioria de suas análises: suas constatações sobre o *modus vivendi*, atitudes morais e contradições sociais podem bem valer para os Estados Unidos de hoje, ainda ensimesmando, temendo o Outro, propenso a policiar o mundo e dominá-lo tecnologicamente, advogando a igualdade e descriminando outros povos e religiões, fechando suas fronteiras e interferindo na autonomia de outros Estados. (Bordini 90)

Bordini, ultimately, echoing other critics, extols *Gato preto em campo de neve.*

Eva Paulino Bueno, on the other hand, in a succinct article on the travel narratives of Verissimo, is critical of the Brazilian novelist. She expressly criticizes the fact that, during his travels to the United States, Verissimo did not come into contact with anyone outside his social circle. As she asserts, "a julgar por seus relatos de viagem — tanto *Solo de clarineta* como *Gato*

preto em campo de neve — não entrava em contacto com ninguém que não pertencesse ao seu círculo social, que [...] é situado no universo senhorial" (Bueno 90). Bueno's assertion, however, could not be further from the truth. Although Verissimo, in fact, primarily bumps elbows with known and less known cultural figures of the United States, he narrates several encounters with people outside his social class. Furthermore, *Solo de clarineta*, volume one and two, are not travel narratives nor were they ever advertised as such. They were memoirs of his life, which, ultimately, became the last texts Verissimo wrote and published. As a matter of fact, volume two, which came out in 1976, was published posthumously. Nevertheless, Bueno makes a note of criticizing what she sees as Verissimo's petit bourgeois ways. In particular, the manner in which he traveled, whose trip to the United States "[…] parece mais uma excursão exclusiva, organizada por uma agência de turismo com pretensões literárias e acesso à alta sociedade americana" (Bueno 91). Ultimately, she sees Verissimo's life and travels as an inexorable search for an "external" Brazil to reproduce the "mythical" and "sensorial" one he conjured in his fiction.

C. David Turpin, in "The Travel Literature of Erico Verisimo," echoes the positive reviews and sentiments noted thus far. He reiterates the fact that critics have, for the most part, neglected Verissimo's travel narratives. For Turpin, there is a parallel between the Brazilian novelist's use of imagery in his travel chronicles and in his fiction; he sees Verissimo going beyond mere factual representation. Therefore, the vivid imagery and description of his experiences moves the reader into the literary realm. Turpin, in particular, underscores the use of literary devices, which, from his point of view, enrich the narrative. As he opines,

> […] Verissimo's literature of this orientation is demonstrated to have evident documentary value, depicting, in cultural and historical context, countries visited

> by the author […] what is more, Verissimo's travel literature also has notable literary value […] perhaps the greatest contribution that Verissimo has made to travel literature is his poetic, imaginative manner of depiction. Describing himself as a 'frustrated painter who had turned writer,' Erico Verissimo, in his travel literature, presents a picture of life in several countries of the world, as told and as interpreted by a very capable and accomplished writer. (Turpin 35)

Overall, Turpin finds Verissimo's observation of the United States pertinent and revealing, which makes his narrative all the more valuable; and especially for American readers who, upon reading *Gato preto em campo de neve*, will have a better perspective on themselves.

Grace Costa Pedroso, similarly, makes a note of highlighting the importance that Verissimo's travel chronicles have in his literary production. In both *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto*, she sees important discussions and ideas that will provide the basis for two of his novels of that period, *O resto é siléncio* (1943) and the first part of the trilogy *O tempo e o vento*. Moreover, Pedroso posits that reading these travel chronicles

> observamos que, por meio do outro e pela literatura desse outro, o romancista buscava a si mesmo numa espécie de autoexame, e buscava também compreender e reconhecer o próprio país e a cultura brasileira. Através da troca cultural, Erico pode refletir acerca das questões políticas, sociais e literárias. Outro assunto que o escritor fazia questão de discutir em conferências e em diálogos com intelectuais eram o papel da arte e a tarefa do artista num mundo assolado pela guerra. (Pedroso 86)

This is something that is also echoed by Denise de Castro Ananias, who, likewise making note of the literary quality in *Gato preto em campo de neve*, observes Verissimo's travel narratives as a

search for national identity, wherein the influence of avant-garde tendencies of *modernismo* can be observed. Ultimately, Pedroso observes Verissimo's sojourn in the United States as the time where he was able to unwind and write the books that won him the praise from critics.

Marcela Miller Barbosa, although also concurring with the line of critics who see the literary spectrum of Verissimo's travel narratives, stresses that his chronicles are profoundly based on facts. And despite the fictional strategy employed in the narratives, he never distances himself from the historical discourse, "o que significa dizer que as personagens e fatos ali tratados são referenciais — ou seja, remetem a uma realidade externa ao texto —, e que o espaço abarcado pelo relato é localizado tanto geográfica quanto temporalmente, e portanto inserido na história" (Barbosa 65). Moreover, Barbosa points out that while both *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto* engage with the tradition of the travel narrative, not shying away from the informative tone nor the discussions on geographic and economic data, statistics and facts, Verissimo constructs his narratives through the inverse of experience of the classical ethnographer, who moves from the center to the periphery. Hence, Verissimo would be a traveler that leaves the periphery in the direction of the center. In this sense, his travel narratives are texts that deal with the two societies — the Brazilian and American — through comparative discourse, constructing simultaneously the knowledge of the self — Brazil— and that of the United States. As she argues, "[…] o encontro de EV com a realidade norte-americana permite-lhe elaborar sua reflexão sobre o que faz dos brasileiros, brasileiros, ao mesmo tempo em que busca descobrir o que os faz dos americanos, americanos. Ou seja, no encontro entre diferentes culturas, parece inevitável que a questão da identidade se imponha de forma incontestável" (Barbosa 75). Ultimately, Barbosa sees Verissimo as a translator of cultures, who, through his literary sensitivity, elucidates the practices of culture itself. Nevertheless, as other critics have pointed

out, the real value that she sees in Verissimo's travel narratives is their literary nature. In other words, his subjective impressions: "tipificação das personagens; as técnicas extremamente visuais de descrição das paisagens; as gags literárias onde o elemento surpresa subverte a narrativa garantindo-lhe comicidade que garantem o prazer da leitura e a permanência dessa obras para além de seu mero caráter documental" (Barbosa 173). All these elements, in Barbosa's view, makes Verissimo's translation of foreign culture more effective.

Richard Cándida-Smith, on the other hand, provides a historical analysis of Verissimo as a cultural ambassador in the United States. Delving into the reasons and motivations that prompted the United States State Department to invite him on a brief tour of the country, which would subsequently lead to a prolonged academic appointment in California, Cándida-Smith examines the vicissitudes of Verissimo's ambassadorial and intellectual journey in American territory. Interestingly, in shedding light on the initial difficulties that Verissimo encountered in getting his work published in English, Cándida-Smith reveals "[…] a point of division in how different groups within the United States defined authenticity and accessibility" (Cándida-Smith 159). On the one hand, a negative report drafted for the publishing house Macmillan by Lewis Hanke, director of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress, criticized Verissimo's literature as being "[…] untypical of literature in South America and his picture of southern Brazilian society did not sufficiently distinguish Brazil from other countries," on the other,

> What attracted Verissimo to the State Department's officials who discovered his work was his apparent similarity to popular U.S. writers of the time, authors like Edna Ferber, A.B. Guthrie, or John Steinbeck. His ability to describe contemporary Brazil made his work, in the State Departments' opinion, more accessible to U.S. readers, and his intercultural skills could contribute to securing

> popular support in the United States for alliance with Brazil and a significant number of U.S. troops being based there. (Cándida-Smith 159)

However, through the endorsement from writers like John Dos Passos and internal support in Macmillan by Theodore Purdy, Verissimo's *Caminhos cruzados* became his first book to be translated into English. Its success prompted Macmillan to release a new novel by Verissimo every two years, as well as a book on Brazilian history (Cándida-Smith 161). Verissimo became a commercial success in his own right,

> […] he was the only Latin American author to have more than two titles published between 1940 and 1967, during which time Macmillan released eight separate books by him, a record that exceeded all other Latin American authors in the United States book market before 1970, when there was a sudden explosion of titles by Latin American authors in English translation. (Cándida-Smith 163)

Cándida-Smith shows the positive reception that Verissimo's books received from American critics, however, he makes a point to highlight the shortcomings of the English translations, which rid the original of important cultural idiosyncrasies necessary to understand the full dimension of Verissimo's social commentary.

Furthermore, Cándida-Smith makes a point of bringing to light the scope of Verissimo's life as a cultural ambassador. For example, he reveals that, between 1943 and 1945, by his own estimate "based on Verissimo's archives and records in the State Department is that he spoke to no less than 200 groups, traveling to all parts of the country […] His audiences at any given event could be as small as twenty, more often were in the lower hundreds, and at one event six thousand people showed up to hear him speak" (Cándida-Smith 167). The picture that he paints of Verissimo's successful performances is fascinating; Verissimo's popularity during these talks

was such that, at the end of them, after garnering effusive praise from the crowds, it would not be uncommon for him to receive job offers. However, Verissimo's ascent and success stagnated and receded with the end of the war, provoking changes in the book industry as well as in the intellectual and political arena. Verissimo's "anti-communism ironically made him less interesting to critics and readers in the United States […] Criticism in Brazil that he was an agent of the United States government was a controversy that had no marketable value in the United States" (Cándida-Smith 172). Nevertheless, Verissimo's success in the United States, according to Cándida-Smith, was predestined to be temporary, not only because the pinnacle of interest in foreign culture remains between 1940 to 1970, but also due to the fact that few writers continue to be read by succeeding generations; Verissimo's decline in popularity, therefore, parallels that of his American contemporaries such as Thorton Wilder and John Dos Passos.

In another important study titled "Erico Verissimo, escritor do mundo: *cosmopolitismo e relações interamericanas*," Carlos Cortez Minchillo takes as main point of reference Verissimo's three novels that take place outside Brazil — which are heavily tied to the United States— in order to establish and examine connections between the writer's international projection, the thematic transformations of the books and their critical reception; he discusses, in particular, the transmutations that Verissimo's cosmopolitanism and humanism suffered during three decades of intense intellectual and artistic endeavors. He reveals a Verissimo who, despite always being undogmatic in his approach to art and politics, was first enamored by the spirit of Pan-Americanism, only to be later disenchanted by the geo-political and social realities of the post-war period. *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto* play an important role in Minchillo's mapping of Verissimo's ideological and thematic evolution. For the Brazilian scholar, these two travel narratives pin-point the inception and height of Verissimo's enthusiasm

and commitment to the Pan-American project, but also unveil the first symptoms of his disillusionment with it. In *Gato em campo de neve*, Minchillo sees Verissimo as creating an outstanding image of the United States, without giving too much emphasis on the negative aspects of American society. As Minchillo describes, "Erico Verissimo compõe uma imagem estelar do país visitado, esforçando-se para fugir das sínteses simplificadoras ao tratar da variedade de paisagens geográficas, económicas, sociais e culturais que pôde conhecer em pouco mais de três meses" (Minchillo 220). In his first American experience, he sees Verissimo as an idealist committed to cultural exchange who, rather than exacerbating the differences between the United States and Latin America, highlighted the similarities between both neighbors from the North and South of the continent. In other words, the portrait that Verissimo paints is one of a humanized America,

> para além da opulência capitalista, mais diversa, menos padronizada, mais íntima e mais compreensível para nós, latinos. América, vale ressaltar, que preservava a essência da 'gente simples' de classe média que em sua honestidade, autenticidade, laboriosidade e perseverança convertia-se no modelo do homem universal propagado na era Roosevelt, dentro e fora dos Estados Unidos. (Minchillo 231)

Furthermore, even in regard to maladies that plague American society, such as racism towards African-Americans, Minchillo notes that Verissimo had an optimistic outlook in *Gato preto em campo de neve.* In Verissimo's first description of the United States, racial prejudices, according to Minchillo, were redeemed by exceptional anecdotes but above all by the American values that he appreciated the most, such as democracy, the right of the people to peaceable assembly, freedom of speech, and the guarantee of equal protection (Minchillo 237). In a way, Minchillo

likens Verissimo's travel narrative to that of a pilgrimage tale, wherein the Brazilian novelist narrates a visit to the relics of civilization threatened by barbarism and totalitarianism. However, Minchillo makes a point to emphasize Verissimo's awareness of the limitation and absurdity of the Pan-Americanism project, as well as his role in it. Nevertheless, he sees in Verissimo's choice a type of "realpolitik of good," opting to put aside the criticism of the United States as a way to concentrate the efforts against the totalitarian threat to the world; however, he makes a point to note that many other intellectuals opted for this same approach:

> Thomas Mann, o exilado com quem Erico se encontrou nos Estados Unidos, assim refletiu sobre sua atuação no período da II Guerra Mundial: 'Foi ele [o fascismo] que [...] me converteu numa espécie de orador ambulante a favor da democracia – um papel cuja comicidade sempre percebia, mesmo na época do meu ardente anseio pela queda de Hitler'. Vê-se que Erico não era o único camelô na praça. (Minchillo 238)

Minchillo sees Verissimo, ultimately, as a "merchant" of Pan-Americanism, however, he was not the only one.

In *A volta do gato preto*, on the other hand, the Brazilian scholar notes a change in tone and message. To begin with, Verissimo discusses the United States in more depth, perhaps because the country had fully entered the war and Franklin Roosevelt's *New Deal* was under fire; secondly, he is also more candid and direct in criticizing the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil (Minchillo 264). Lastly, as Minchillo observes, *A volta do gato preto* "apresenta um Erico Verissimo frequentemente mais ferino em suas análises, talvez menos 'adequado' na função de promotor da boa vizinhança e mais ambíguo no senso de esperança que sempre o acompanhou em suas análises do mundo e que, em verdade, nunca o abandonará por completo"

(Minchillo 265). For example, he makes a point of underscoring the contrasting differences between the openings of both books. In the first narrative, the Brazilian novelist is fascinated and captivated by the cosmopolitanism on board the ship *America*, where the perils of war appear just as background noise; the second time around, Verissimo travels by airplane and stresses the traumatic and almost catastrophic turbulence aboard the aircraft, which, according to Minchillo, sets the tone for the rest of the narrative where various episodes are imbued with melancholy and reticence:

> […] o périplo inicial da família de viajantes da Flórida até a Califórnia dá continuidade ao tratamento anticlimático da matéria narrativa. Ao contrário da atmosfera festiva e quase felliniana do navio de *Gato preto em campo de neve*, agora, quando a viagem se prolonga por vários estados do sul dos Estados Unidos, predomina certa decepção dos outros membros da família e do próprio narrador-viajante com o que viam e sentiam. (Minchillo 269)

Verissimo is more invested in deconstructing hegemonic representations of the United States, while at the same time being more openly critical of Vargas' Estado Novo; in other words, the Brazilian novelist gains more of a distrustful gaze in *A volta do gato preto* (Minchillo 274).

Although Minchillo's analysis of both travel narratives and Verissimo's overall work is well substantiated and discussed, it only goes as far as to analyze the vicissitudes of the Brazilian's ideological transformations, without delving into other important aspects, such as the representations of the spaces and cities and peoples he encounters in his American travels. These are considerable aspects given the fact that the majority of the sections and subsections of his narratives deal with the cities and people he encounters and experiences. In a way, Verissimo's overall reading of the United States is unmistakably informed by the design and life of the cities

he travels through. Hence, while Minchillo's examination of Verissimo's American narratives is successful in mapping and scrutinizing the general tropes of his aesthetic project, as well as his personal and political outlook, it falls short, as other studies, to explore significant representational elements that are necessary to understand the breadth of his reading of the "other" in all of its subtleties.

Gato in the U.S.

VI

According to Erico Verissimo, *Gato preto em campo de neve* was a total success, becoming a number one best-seller in Brazil by selling ten thousand copies in twenty days and later being translated into Spanish (Minchillo 205). The almost six-hundred-page travel memoir depicts Verissimo's impressions of the several places and people he encountered in his brief three-month visit to the United States. Although a seemingly non-fiction travel narrative at first glance, Verissimo plays with the fictional elements, from beginning to end, in order to structure and develop his text. Right from the start, Verissimo introduces the reader to Malazarte, a fictionalized version of his younger self, who, in contrast to the current tempered and matured writer, is more impulsive and less emotionally inhibited in his impressions and expectations of the trip. Malazarte accompanies Verissimo throughout the book, serving as a counter force to the more rational and carefully nuanced views of his "present" self. However, Malazarte is not merely a contrasting element in the narrative but a rhetorical device; it allows Verissimo to engage and discuss his political and cultural ideas concerning the relationship between the United States and Latin America. The fabrication of his younger, impish and more visceral self allows Verissimo to tackle some preconceived notions that exist between the two regions in a more fluid and fun, *novelesque* way. The fictionalized interaction between Malazarte and

Verissimo, however, will take a different shape at the end of the narrative. In the final section of the book, titled "Diálogo sobre os Estados Unidos," which seems more like a forced addendum to the narrative itself, possibly as a way to keep in line with the cultural mission of the Good Neighbor policy, as pointed out by Minchillo, Verissimo presents a fictionalized dialogue between two characters: an author, in other words himself, and a reader, closely resembling Malazarte's demeanor, whose lingering curiosities prompt him/her to probe more extensively into the socio-historical-political relationship between the United States, Brazil and Latin America.

In the preface of the second edition of the book, Verissimo cites the preface of the first edition in which he mentions that "'Gato Preto em Campo de Neve' [sic] não passa, pois do relato simples e objetivo de um passeio que foi, antes de mais nada, o feriado de um contador de histórias" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* n.pg.). That assertion, however, as Minchillo has shown, is not entirely accurate:

> Para começar com o argumento mais óbvio, sabe-se pela correspondência de Erico que ele continuou a trabalhar no livro, a partir de anotações, depois de sua volta ao Brasil e que se sentia exausto ao final do processo porque teriam sido necessárias extensas pesquisas sobre os Estados Unidos: história, sociologia, teatro, literatura. Onde a simplicidade desse trabalho? (Minchillo 208)

Verissimo's work was not an uncomplicatedly written text, on the contrary, it required research. This is apparent in the final section of the fictionalized dialogue, where, rather than maintaining the rhythm and structure of the sections that precede it, the conclusion of the book seems more like a political history lesson than a straightforward account.

Gato Preto em Campo de neve is divided into fifteen sections covering different cities and regions, from coast to coast, of the continental United States; in addition, however, there are several subsections dedicated to Verissimo's adventures and encounters with ordinary people and important cultural figures, such as writers, actors, directors, artists and policy makers. According to Verissimo himself, his main interest on the trip, which was more like a marathon-like non-stop multicity tour of the United States, was the people he would encounter on his visit: "Viajei com um ser humano interessado principalmente em sêres humanos, mas convencido também de que tôdas as coisas merecem ser vistas — o sublime e o sórdido, o trivial e o raro — porque tudo é expressão de vida e um romancista não deve voltar as costas à vida" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* n.pg.). This distinct interest in *human beings* is showcased by Verissimo from the very beginning of the narrative; an example being the first section titled "A primeira viagem de Sinbad," in which he describes the start of his journey on board the ship *Argentina*, which will transport him from Rio de Janeiro to New York. Echoing the preface, Verissimo writes,

> Hoje meu interêsse se concentra principalmente nas criaturas da vida real, na grande e inesgotável comparsaria da comédia humana. Vejo em cada homem uma história, uma novela, um conflito, um tema. Olho os seres humanos com um misterioso respeito e com uma tímida ternura; e o sarcasmo (se sarcasmo existe no que escrevo) com que às vezes os comento, não passa êle duma espécie de arma de defesa dum romântico frustrado. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 22**)**

What Verissimo vividly describes aboard the ship is an antecedent of what is in store for the rest of the trip and narrative. The Brazilian novelist encounters a menagerie of people of all walks of life. This moves him to liken the heterogeneity on the vessel to that of Babel: "Pois não estamos em plena Babel? Os homens de Shinar quiseram erguer uma tôrre cujo cume tocasse nos

céus...Nossas pretensões são bastante mais modestas: queremos apenas chegar sãos e salvos a Nova York. Que Deus não lance sôbre nós o seu castigo!" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 26). The exciting allusion to the harmonious congregation and close coexistence of a diversity of cultures, languages and peoples on the ship will be a consistent trope throughout the narrative. One, especially, that goes bolsters and goes hand-in-hand with the conspicuous message of the Good Neighbor Policy. As such, this picturesque image of camaraderie and goodness and coexistence of all races and classes foretells the experience he will live in the United States, notwithstanding the obvious socio-political problems, inherent to the country and the turmoil of the war, which he addresses at different moments.

A volta do gato preto maintains the same structure as *Grato preto em campo de neve*; however, the sections are reduced from fifteen to four with several subsections dedicated to his encounters with intellectuals, celebrities, political figures, and ordinary people he meets along his journey. Moreover, Verissimo also brings back the fictionalized dialogues and interactions with feigned interlocutors in order to expand on his ideas about the things he observes during his time living in the United States. As an indispensable element in his first chronicles, Malazarte, Verissimo's young alter ego, also plays an important role this second time. However, unlike the first installment of his travel narratives, in which he visits a significant number of American cities, Verissimo spends the majority of his time in Los Angeles and Berkeley. He describes his brief stopover in New Orleans, for example, on his way to California; however, the bulk of the narrative is dedicated to the two years he spent living in the Golden State. Verissimo spent his time in Northern California teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, where he imparted courses on Brazilian literature and culture; and in Southern California, he just enjoyed a sabbatical year, although he had a few obligations such as giving a few lectures. In contrast to

Gato preto em campo de neve, Verissimo's tone in *A volta do gato preto* towards his travels and the United States is warier; for example, he explores at greater length the contradictions of the country, such as the fact that it fights to free the world from the grasp of Nazism and totalitarianism while completely marginalizing with violence and racism its Black population. Whereas the opening of his first travel narrative celebrated the trip with a colorful party of people on the ship, the subsequent collection of chronicles begins with the terrifying description of the Brazilian novelist's airplane ride that almost crashed into the ocean off the coast of Miami: "Volto a cabeça e passo em revista a família. No rosto de minha mulher e de meus filhos vejo refletido o verde da tempestade, da náusea e do pavor. São três caras lívidas e ansiosas. Sorrio para elas, mas obtenho como resposta apenas olhares de interrogação e dúvida (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 12). Furthermore, he even doubts the necessity of his second sojourn in the United States: "Pensamos nos milhares de quilômetros percorridos de avião e nos mais de três mil que ainda nos separam da Califórnia. Trocamos olhares de dúvida, encolhemos os ombros e não chegamos a concluir se nossa viagem é ou não necessária…" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 40). Despite the uncertainty and wariness about the trip, his second stay in the United States proved to be an invaluable experience to Verissimo as he later asserts:

> [N]ão trocamos por coisa nenhuma os momentos que vivemos neste país, nem os amigos que aqui fizemos. Mariana [his wife] me assegurou há pouco, comovida, que os dois anos que passou na Califórnia foram os mais calmos e felizes de que tem memória. Mas quem poderá saber o que vai na alma de meus filhos? Habituaram-se à vida de San Francisco como se habituariam mais tarde à Hollywood. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 518)

Just as *Gato preto em campo de neve, A volta do gato preto* retains the project of depicting the United States in an unprejudiced manner, with the desire to reveal a more nuanced and compelling picture of Latin America's northern neighbors.

The Cat in the Cal — Erico Verissimo in Los Angeles

VII

Out of all the places that Erico Verissimo visited or lived in the United States, Los Angeles was the city he spent the most time in and, as a matter of fact, the one he wrote the most about. As we will explore in this section, Verissimo's depiction of Los Angeles escapes the commonplaces by which the city had been imagined; far from portraying Los Angeles in hyperboles, Verissimo examines the city in an even-tempered manner.

In both *Gato preto em campo de neve* and *A volta do gato preto*, Verissimo makes a point of highlighting the good and the bad of Los Angeles. He will oscillate, throughout these narratives, between acknowledging enthralling aspects of the city and signaling the pernicious ones. The way Malazarte, his alter ego, and Verissimo, as the authorial voice, approach the city is symptomatic of the Brazilian novelist's intent in portraying Los Angeles in an even-handed manner:

> À tardinha chegaremos a Hollywood. Malazarte está comovido. É que êle vai ao encontro de velhos sonhos, do que sempre se lhe afigurou a terra do romance. Quer ver de perto os seus heróis, sentir o clima dessa cidade mágica que fala à fantasia de milhões de criaturas através do mundo. Quanto a mim, o que me interessa principalmente em Hollywood é a sua expressão humana, a sua mirabolante função de fábrica de emoções e de divertimentos, as suas largas

> possibilidades como instrumento de expressão artística, o seu tumultouso e vário conteúdo de vida. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 446)

The dichotomy between grasping the city with the child-like giddy fascination of Malazarte and with the more composed anthropological curiosity of "himself" will be the Brazilian novelist's strategy to explore the complexities and contradictions of Los Angeles.

In this regard, the city's geography and weather is something that Verissimo emphasizes with favorable eyes throughout these chronicles. In the beginning of *Gato preto em campo de neve*, this is the first thing he notes; the Brazilian novelist is taken aback by the beauty of the landscape bestowed upon him: "A paisagem é bela e basta. O sol é uma festa. Fundas, frescas e azuladas são as sombras dos parques e dos jardins. Bonitas e coloridas, as raparigas que nos acenam dos pomares floridos" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 445). Similarly, in *A volta do gato preto*, the weather is the first thing he discusses; upon his return to Los Angeles, Verissimo continues to be fascinated by the light and temperature of the city:

> Quem foge das névoas da Bay Area e desce para esta cálida reigão, não pode deixar de ficar contagiado pela alegria de feriado que nada na atmosfera luminosa. Porque o ar do sul da Cálifornia sabe a mel. A luz aqui é em geral tão intenso, que às vêzes chega a ser esbranquiçada. Dizem que nesta parte do estado há um mínimo de 355 dias de sol por ano. As tormentas são pràticamente inexistentes, de sorte que os californianos do sul nunca ouviram o ronco do trovão nem ouviram o fuzilar dos relâmpagos. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 296)

The weather, however, is also a point of familiarity for him. Unlike other cities he visited in the United States, Los Angeles reminds Verissmo more of Brazil and its tropical landscape:

> Hollywood tem um colorido tropical. Está cercada de colinas verdes e cada passo encontramos jardins e tabuleiros de relva, palmeiras, ciprestes e plátanos, pórticos e arcadas brancas. Há momentos em que tudo aqui nos lembra Copacabana. A qualidade da luz do sol. Os cheiros que pervagam o ar – gasolina e óleo queimados, pó de asfalto, folhagens úmidas e maresia. O aspecto esportivo das gentes que andam pelas ruas. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 457)

As a matter of fact, in an interview on a radio program in Sacramento, Verissimo stressed how much California was like Brazil:

> The sunlight — the woods smell in the air — the plane and magnolia trees and even the faces of people. Another thing, they don't rush — that's a Brazilian trait […] people on the East Coast and New England are a bit different [from Brazil], but not in California. You have so many foreign influences and a similar climate and landscaping makes Brazilians and Californians rather alike. You know, I believe that geography and environment has a lot of influence on the soul of people (qtd. in Cándida-Smith 163)

Contrasting Los Angeles to Brazil is something that Verissimo will do throughout his chronicle, mentioning on more than one occasion the similarities between Rio de Janeiro and the City of Angels. In an afternoon with screenwriter Lou Edelman, Verissimo makes this parallel: "Porque êste sol, êste ar, estas montanhas, êste ritmo de vida — tudo aqui lembra o Rio…" (*Volta do gato* 465). Furthermore, he will use Rio's geography to describe Los Angeles's: "viajar do centro de Los Angeles ao centro de Hollywood é — para usar termos da vida carioca — mais ou menos o mesmo que ir do posto 6, em Copacabana, à Cinelândia" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 455). Verissimo's choice of words, such as using "tropical" and "fauna" to describe Los Angeles's

landscape and its residents, at the same time exoticizes and makes the city seem familiar. In fact, the closeness he finds between Los Angeles and Brazil allows him to feel easily adapted in the city: "É incrível, mas começo já ter a impressão de que moro nesta casa há muito meses. Fico a pensar em se essa capacidade de adaptação — que toda minha família também parece possuir — é uma coisa boa ou má. E chego a conclusão de que ela apenas é..." (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 318). Verissimo's flattering discussion of the weather and its geography does not end with underlining the prodigious sun and light, which makes writing anything serious impossible: "Como é possível escrever alguma coisa séria na Califórnia, com êste sol, com êste ar…" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 392). He also brings to the fore Los Angeles's privileged geographical position and the ingenuity of its citizens in taking advantage of its landscape and transforming it:

> Com seus largos e longos bulevares, os seus sessenta parques, Los Angeles é a cidade mais sem cerimônia que conheço. Aqui ninguém sente a angústia da falta de espaço, do abafamento, da claustrofobia. Tudo é amplo, arejado, luminoso e abundante. A vegetação dêstes jardins e parques é em parte um produto da mão do homem com a colaboração do rio Colorado, cuja água é trazida para cá em aquedutos. Repuxos e fontes faíscam ao sol na relva dos jardins particulares ou nos parques públicos. Por todos os lados se nota a presença refrescante da água. Homens de torso nu trabalham nos seus jardins cortando a relva ou regando as flores, os arbustos e a terra. O resultado de tudo isso é que os angelinos transformaram um deserto adusto num verde e rútilo oásis. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 298)

By highlighting the exceptionality of the weather and geography of Los Angeles, Verissimo acknowledges the dimension that it has in the social imaginary of the city: "Em matéria de clima,

para meu gôsto, nada existe no continente que se possa comparar com êste claro e môrno sul da Califórnia" (Verissimo, V*olta do gato* 409). Nevertheless, not everything is a bed of roses.

For Verissimo, Los Angeles is neither more beautiful or interesting than other Brazilian cities: "Tira-se a Hollywood o prestígio que o cinema lhe dá e não vejo razão para que se diga que êle é mais belo que o Rio, mais tumultuoso que São Paulo, mais pitoresco que o Recife e mais exótico que a Bahia" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 461). Furthermore, he finds Brazilian nights more enthralling and poetic:

> E agora — meia noite passada — estou na frente de minha casa a caminhar insone na calçada, para cima e para baixo [...] para tentar descobrir por que as noites suburbanas de Los Angeles são menos silenciosas e evocativas que as dos subúrbios brasileiros. E concluo que é porque as nossas noites têm a acentuar-lhes a poesia e a quietude, o canto dos galos. Aí está! O silêncio desta rua é leve e azul; é um silêncio que a bruma amortece ainda mais. Mas esta calma noturna não me diz nada, ao passo que nas madrugadas brasileiras o canto dos galos nos terreiros me fazia pensar em cemitérios sob o luar, trazia-me vozes do passado, acordava fantasmas, e parecia ecoar longe os corredores insondáveis da noite. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 381)

Los Angeles may have the most auspicious climate in the world, however, it lacks the poetry of the Brazilian landscape. This kind of comparison, as prejudiced as it may be, is not exclusive to Los Angeles. In fact, Verissimo will examine, at times, Americans and Brazilians in a similar fashion; for example, the way he explains the importance of money to the two: "Para êles o dinheiro é um símbolo comercial. Para nós é um símbolo moral e literário. Para os americanos é uma moeda ou uma nota que serve como meio de troca ou medida de valor [...] Em suma, para

nós o dinheiro é antes de mais nada o 'vil metal'" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 472). Notwithstanding Verissimo's bias towards the beauty of his country, the climate in Los Angeles is a significant element for flattery. However, the stupendous climate is also "responsible" for one of the most controversial aspects of the city: as Verissimo points out, the constant sun and little rain of Southern California brought the film industry.

The film industry is a source of criticism but also fascination for Verissimo. Echoing the concerns that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer will voice in their 1944 essay "The Culture Industry: Enlighten as Mass Deception," Verissimo lashes out against the influence of cinema to negatively alter social behaviors and trends; he draws attention to the pervasiveness of disingenuous gestures and attitudes that circulate in different spaces:

> [...] às vêzes pergunto a mim mesmo se o *glamour* de suas ruas, gentes, casas e coisas não será apenas uma lenda fabricada e mantida pelos cronistas de jornais e revistas cinematográficos, e pelos departamentos de publicidade dos estúdios... Porque o próprio espírito de Hollywood torna difícil para o forasteiro discernir o falso do genuíno. Seus filmes padronizaram gestos, frases, modas e até sentimentos, e essa padronização estendeu-se altamente pelo mundo inteiro, chegando a penetrar até em certos setores de países como a China e a Índia, os quais, pela sua idade, sabedoria e peculiaridades pareciam impermeáveis a influências de tal natureza.
>
> Como exemplo dessa padronização citarei um *gag* que os filmes exploram com freqüência: O herói conversa pelo telefone com a heroína: de repente a ligação é cortada e o homem exclama impaciente: *Hello! Hello*!; por fim,

> desanimado, trata de repor o fone no lugar, *mas antes olha para dentro dêle com uma expressão de perplexidade*.
>
> Ora, isso é um gesto artificial, que nunca ninguém fêz mas que muitos já estão começando a fazer (principalmente quando se sentem observados) por influência do cinema. Outro *gag* deplorável — mas de efeito sempre cômico — é o da reação retardada. Uma pessoa não entende no primeiro momento o que lhe dizem ou não presta devida atenção a uma coisa que vê, e após um ou dois segundos, quando a compreensão lhe vem, ela sacode a cabeça, rapidamente, com uma expressão de imbecil espanto no rosto. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 303)

In general, Verissimo finds that the films produced in Hollywood glamorize life to an extent that it gives real life a dimension of color and charm that it does not always have (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 383). Despite casting a spotlight on certain deleterious effects, such as the artificiality and vanity begot by the film industry, he, at the same time, acknowledges the importance of the film industry in the world: "Hollywood está longe de ser um tema fútil. Porque esse subúrbio de Los Angeles exerce hoje em dia uma influência profunda e poderosa sobre mais de metade do mundo (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 446). Verissimo understands the impact of films; he sees the production of motion pictures as having a serious artistic, social, and pedagogical function, which, according to him, is a sign of Hollywood growing up: "Hollywood está entrando na sua idade adulta […] Seja como fôr, o que não se pode negar é que Hollywood, a descuidosa, a divertida, a que-me-importista, *começa a pensar*" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 447). He observes for example, the industry's important role in the war as a fundamental catalyst to this maturation he witnesses, as well as cinema's influence on the composition of the contemporary novel. Nevertheless, what Verissimo is hinting at is the relevance and role of the dream-making capital

of the world in people's lives. He understands the relationship with fiction, whether in books or films, as an important element in human life, which stems from "[…] um desejo de viver mais, de ampliar a órbita individual, de participar de outras vidas e em outros lugares" (Verissimo, *Gato preto 4*52). As a matter of fact, Verissimo will observe this desire to amplify life amongst *Angelinos*: "Nota-se em quase todas essas criaturas um desejo de ser original, de parecer 'gente de cinema'" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 458). The quest to be different, as a way potentiate the fabric of life, whether with favorable or unfavorable consequences, sets Los Angeles apart. This striving, rather than producing uniformity, fosters the heterogeneity Verissimo sees in the city:

> […] dá-nos a imperssão duma feira. Porque por entre estas lojas, tendas, casas de diversões, jardins e praças passeiam monstros e beldades, aventureiros, mercadores, basbaques, mascates, histriões e turistas. Homens apregoam jornais ou artigos de novidade. Pelas calçadas passam condes falsos e legítimos; escritores e atores em busca de trabalho e de glória; mocinhas que sonham com ver seu nome em letras luminosas na fachada dos cinemas; professôres de dança e de canto; amestradores de animais; prestigitadores e barítonos; ventríloquos e pintores. Às vêzes, junto duma deslumbrante *girl* que parece saída dum desses cartazes de propaganda de sabonetes ou roupas de banho, caminha um homem mal-encarado que parece no último filme de horror da Universal. (Verissimo, *Gato preto 458*)

The intensity of the human gamut Verissimo encounters is also mirrored in the city's social life: "A vida noturna de Hollywood é intensa. Desde o anoitecer as salas de aperitivo se vão enchendo. Depois, são os restaurantes que fervilham de gente, duma colorida sociedade em que encontramos representantes de inúmeras raças. Dificilmente as mulheres andam

desacompanhadas" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 495). It is important to note that Verissimo underscores the diversity of people and races in the social life of the city. He is, in fact, enthralled by the plurality of sounds and colors he witnesses throughout Los Angeles:

> [Pershing Square] É uma praça no coração de Los Angeles. Parece-se com as praças brasileiras [...] Mas a nota curiosa desta praça é ainda de natureza humana. São as pessoas que a freqüentam, em geral veteranos de outra guerra, empregados aposentados, mulheres que vivem nos edifícios circunvizinhos, e turistas ociosos como eu.
>
> Ando por aqui a olhar as pessoas, a ouvir as discussões. A praça tem os seus tipos populares, entre os quais o mais conhecido é um prêto alto, com tipo de argelino, a cabeça metida num barrete negro [...] Ao redor dêle juntam-se muitos homens para ouvi-lo [...] O que mais se discute aqui é política e religião — principalmente política internacional. Há cavalheiros muito bem vestidos e homens que pelo sotaque e pelas roupas são imigrantes que não fizeram carreira. Não raro um dêsses tipos trepa num banco e começa a fazer um discurso, sendo muito aparteado. As discussões se acirram e o círculo de curiosos se aperta em tôrno dos dois contendores. E os latinos, acostumados às paixões, aos ímpetos da raça, param, esperando que eles se atraquem em luta corporal, que se dilacerem mutuamente a facadas. Mas nada disso acontece. A tôdas essas, alto-falantes amplificam brutalmente a música de discos. Há nesta praça *stands* que vendem bônus de guerra, escritórios de informações para soldados e marinheiros. Crianças correm dum lado para outro. Vagabundos dormem estendidos na relva. Mulheres fazem tricô sentadas nos bancos. Velhos lêem jornais ou lagerteiam ao sol.

> Gosto de aparecer por aqui quando em quando, depois do meio-dia. Gentes de todas raças reúnem-se na Pershing Square. O som de muitas línguas ergue-se no ar luminoso, enquanto pombas cinzentas esvoaçam ao redor da fonte dos anjos verdes... (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 465-466)

The multiculturalism he observes appears to be an important quality of the city, which can be appreciated in the day and night life. He, for example, highlights the omnipresence of Black musicians at jazz clubs. Moreover, Verissimo discusses a nightclub named *O Mocambo*, which is a "Brazilian style" establishment, but whose Brazilian band is ironically composed of "*muchachos* centro-americanos" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 496). Although intense, the night life of the city is not entirely glamorous and may reveal a lesser-known side of it:

> Em cima da casa onde está instalado o *Brown-Derby*, o chapéu-de-côco do letreiro luminoso azul e vermelho, apaga e acende. Os automóveis correm, conduzindo bandos ruidosos. Por todo o canto se vêm raparigas. São em sua maioria empregadas dos estúdios ou extras com o sem trabalho. Vivem estas últimas numa semiprostituição. Começam a beber ao anoitecer e assim vão até a madrugada. E dançam sempre. Desesperadamente. É possível que muitas procurem atordoar-se para esquecer os fracassos. Mas perece que a maioria busca apenas *good time*: quer divertir-se. Seus nomes nada significam para o mundo: não aparecem em cartazes, nem em letras luminosas. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 496)

Verissimo, nonetheless, is fascinated by the wide display of people he encounters in Los Angeles. It is for that reason that the Brazilian novelist spends a significant portion of his chronicles recounting his meetings with celebrities and renowned intellectuals, such as Alfred Hitchcock and Jean Renoir, as well as detailing his encounters with ordinary people on the

streets. Immersing himself in the multiplicity of people he finds in Los Angeles is a way for him to reveal a more balanced picture of the city.

An expatriate British writer living in Los Angeles, who Verissimo greatly admired and in fact translated, on the other hand, was not so even-tempered when it came to the city. Aldous Huxley's two Los Angeles novels, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939) and *Ape and Essence* (1948), like many of his other works, are an example of his magnifying lens approach to examining what he sees as mankind's woes. As such, Los Angeles, in these two novels, appears as either the center of human delusion, personified in unscrupulous millionaire Jo Stoyte's pursuit of immortality, or as the epicenter of civilization's destruction. Moreover, in a short piece titled "Los Angeles: A Rhapsody," which appeared in the collection of essays *Jesting Pilate* (1926), Huxley paints Los Angeles in a scathing light. He lampoons the city's growth from "one-horse—half a horse—town" to a city as big as Paris (Huxley 267). Ridiculing its bigness and gayness, Huxley dubs Los Angeles as "the great Joy City of the West" (Huxley 267). The British novelist satirizes the city's frivolous and dangerous joy, "And what joy! The joy of rushing about, of always being busy, of having no time to think, of being too rich to doubt. The joy of shouting and bantering, of dancing and forever dancing to the noise of a savage music, of lustily singing" (Huxley 268). The debauchery and effervescence of the city is so great that it far exceeds that of the great Babylon or Rome:

> And oh, how strenuously, how whole-heartedly the people of Joy City devote themselves to having a Good Time! The Good Times of Rome and Babylon, of Byzantium and Alexandria were dull and dim and miserably restricted in comparison with the superlatively Good Time of modern California. The ancient

> world was relatively poor; and it had known catastrophe. The wealth of Joy City is unprecedentedly enormous. (Huxley 268)

Huxley, with a heightened sense of irony, takes a stab at Joy City's capacity to enjoy itself while being completely oblivious to the harsh realities of the world, such as war, famine, and revolution. In other words, Huxley sees the city as a bubble of ignorant bliss, which he calls a "safe and still half –empty Eldorado" (Huxley). However, this is merely fantasy, fabrication, which is why "the truest patriots, it may be, are those who pray for a national calamity…" (Huxley 68). Los Angeles, nonetheless, escapes from verity: "…Truth is not wanted in the City of Dreadful Joy…" (Huxley 268). Hence, Huxley imagines the city as the epitome of frivolity. The carelessness of the "City of Dreadful Joy" is so great that not even Rome rivals it. The implication here, too, is that just like Rome, Los Angeles, and consequently the American empire, will fall due to its excesses and imperviousness to the inequalities and violence that surround it. The British novelist, true to his hyperbolized way of depicting the human experience, takes seemingly positive aspects of Los Angeles, such as its rapid growth into a metropolis and its liveliness, and renders them ominously as the reason for the city's inevitable collapse. Huxley's observations of Los Angeles are far from the even-temperedness that Verissimo exhibits when talking about the city.

Furthermore, Verissimo had the opportunity to meet with Huxley at his Santa Monica house where he, in the Brazilian's novelist's own words, resided with his wife isolated from the social life of the city: "O casal vive segregado, não participa da vida social de Hollywood onde raramente ou nunca é visto" (Verissimo, *Gato preto 524*). Despite the brevity of the meeting between these two intellectuals, their encounter, as described by the Brazilian novelist, reveals, perhaps, something about their characters. Although Huxley may be the "cínico, irônico e quase

inumano escritor de *Contraponto*, que tratava suas personagens como un cientista desligado disseca uma rã ou injeta micróbios numa cobaia," the Brazilian novelist, fleeing extremes, finds ways to subvert his own opinion (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 524). A simple gesture, for example, such as an insignificant beckon to Verissimo and his companion upon their arrival by Huxley, becomes a redeeming act, wherein the Brazilian novelist sees "[…] uma atitude menos fria e mais terna para com a vida… [where Huxley] se humaniza" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 524). Contrastingly, Huxley, during the beginning of their acquaintance, cannot conceal his cynicism and unflattering conception of Los Angeles:

> Estende a manopla na qual a minha mão se some. Vamos sentar em cadeiras em de lona, debaixo dum caramanchel, ao lado das janelas que respiram para o vale […] a mão espalmada apoiando o rosto, êle se volta para mim e pergunta:
>
> — A que se prende sua viagem à América, Mr. V?
>
> — *Good will*.
>
> Êle sorri mostranlo [sic] os dentes graúdos.
>
> — Não é mesmo curiosa a maneira como aqui em Hollywood eles interpretam o *good-will*? Põem o visitante entre duas moças bonitas em trajos de banho e batem fotografias ... Não foi o que fizeram como senhor?
>
> — Infelizmente não, Mr. Huxley. Até agora só tenho tirado retratos com homens ... cidadãos de dois metros de altura e em geral vestidos de aviador ou de soldado do exército. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 526)

Of course one cannot make overgeneralizing assumptions about Huxley and Verissimo based on the Brazilian novelist's chronicle about his meeting with the British author, let alone on the exchange between them described above; however, it would not be outlandish to recognize, at

the very least superficially, the tenor of both intellectuals' demeanor: one more equanimous in his judgments and the other more vehement and rash in his assessments.

Verrismo demonstrates his poise in his assessment of the city; summarizing his opinion of Los Angeles in one of the final sections of *Gato preto em campo de neve*, titled "Isto, então é Hollywood," Verissimo tries to paint a dispassionate picture of the city:

> Eis a pergunta que me faz Malazarte na véspera de nossa partida da California.
>
> — Decepcionado? — indago.
>
> Êle dá de ombros.
>
> — É difícil dizer. E você?
>
> Tento explicar-lhe que Hollywood não é melhor nem pior do que eu esperava. Mesmo deixando de lado o sortilégio do cinema, é um lugar agradável, de vida calma, cercado de belas paisagens, com um clima ideal – o dia suportàvelmente quente e as noites frescas. Encarada como a capital da indústria cinematográfica, é também um interessante centro de trabalho onde se encontram talvez as mais belas mulheres do mundo, grandes escritores, pintores, músicos e uma vasta quantidade de artistas e artífices de tôda a sorte. É também um lugar *diferente*. Pode não corresponder ao que dêle dizem as crônicas de propaganda e os próprios filmes […] As grandes figuras — atores, atrizes, diretores e escritores — moram longe uns dos outros e não se encontram com muita freqüência. Acabaram-se as orgias romanas dos tempos de Rodolfo Valentino e Teda Bara. Reúnem-se hoje os *stars* uma vez por semana num *night-club*, e, periòdicamente, numa première no Teatro Chinês ou em alguma festa de caridade. Fora disso, trabalham e repousam. (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 520-521)

Verissimo tries to depict the city as matter-of-factly as he can. He neither wants to glamorize nor demonize. In a way, his approach to the city is very *Wabi-sabi*-like, inasmuch as it accepts the imperfections of the City of Angels. In fact, the Brazilian novelist embraces the flaws of the city as just a part of "real" life: "Os que amam a ilusão da vida mais que a própria vida, não devem vir a Hollywood, meu caro Malazarte. Mas os que amam a vida aceitando tudo quanto ela tem de bom e de mau, de agradável e desagradável, encontrarão [...] as mais coloridas e sugestivas paisagens humanas" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 522). In other words, Verissimo warns potential visitors: Los Angeles is not for everyone. The city has to offer everything within the gamut of the good and the bad. Once again, the Brazilian novelist makes a point of giving prominence to the breadth of experience — human and material — found in Los Angeles, suggesting this to be a compelling aspect of the city.

Such is the wide range of experience in the city that the worst and the best is inevitably manifested or encountered. For example, on one side of the spectrum, as Brazilian poet Raul Bopp so enthusiastically discusses with Verissimo, when they coincided in Los Angeles, the ingenuity of the *Angelinos* to will the city into existence is something to marvel at:

> Raul Bopp, cônsul do Brasil em Los Angeles, e em cujo automóvel tenho corrido estes bulevares e ruas, na ansiosa busca duma casa, não se cansa de dizer:
> — Veja só que a água faz! Água, meu caro, água! Tudo isto é um milagre da água. E com seu jeito agitado e pitoresco fala apaixonadamente dos problemas do Brasil e nos benefícios que a água abundante poderia trazer para certas regiões de nosso país. (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 298)

On the other side, however, lies the artificiality and frivolity begot by the film industry, which in and of itself creates a vicious cycle: "o observador acaba convencendo-se de que o mal de

Hollywood é que ela sofre demasiadamente a influência de Hollywood. Não é paradoxo. Olhando esta cidade e seus habitantes, penso num cachorro que andasse à roda tentando morder a ponta do próprio rabo. É um círculo vicioso" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 302). At the same, nonetheless, the Brazilian novelist makes a point of highlighting the city's impulse toward difference as an important characteristic: "essa busca do 'diferente' é um dos característicos do lugar" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 460). It is precisely this quest for difference which in turn generates the diversity of people and experiences: "E por isso tudo a metrópole do cinema é uma das comunidades mais coloridas dos Estados-Unidos. Em parte alguma encontrei como aqui tão grande e variada exibição de cores nas roupas, nas faces, na linguagem, nos hábitos e na moral (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 303). Likewise, he notes the restlessness of the city from refusing to conform: "A cidade do cinema está tomada de inquietação […] a ausência de inquietação leva ao marasmo, ao conformismo, à formula, à estagnação" (Verissimo, *Gato preto* 490). It is for that reason that he breathes the intensity of life in its streets: "Los Angeles, brutalmente iluminada, palpita de vida. Vejo estampados nestas faces todos os apetites. Fome de celebridade, de sucesso, de prazeres. Fome de vida" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 511). This hunger for life reveals the multifarious dimensions of the city: "É que aqui há muita coisa excepcional junta!" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 489).

VIII

Summarizing his thoughts about Los Angeles, Verissimo likens the city to eating a delicious and alluring cake but which, after having several slices, leaves one with an upset stomach: "Você se atira a êle e começa a comê-lo com voracidade e encanto — uma, duas, quarto, seis fatias… até que se enfarta. Assim é […] Um doce bonito, gostoso, mas enjoativo" (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 489). However, it is an irresistible cake, one which he would eat again

without hesitation: “E se eu voltar a esta cidade daqui a cinco anos, estou certo de que, sem me valer da experiência de hoje, eu me atirarei de novo ao bolo vorazmente, para chegar mais uma vez ao enfaramento. A vida é assim mesmo” (Verissimo, *Volta do gato* 489). Los Angeles, as the analogy underlines, has the capacity to fascinate and stultify. In other words, the wide gamut of — human and material — experience of the city brings out the best and the worst, in a manner which is particularly conspicuous. Ultimately, Erico Verissimo escapes the dominant paradigms in which Los Angeles was represented by his American and European counterparts, such as Aldous Huxley, who, using an incendiary approach, depicted the city as brimming over with frivolity and chaos. As a matter of fact, the templates on which Verissimo examines the city are utterly subversive for their time. Refusing to see Los Angeles in extremes, Verissimo instead draws a dispassionate portrait of city; and by rendering it as matter-of-factly as possible, he diminishes the luster of the dominant discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

Remembering the *Angels* of Villaurrutia, Vinicius and Bopp

I

At a time when the dominant narrative about Los Angeles seemed primarily focused on unmasking it as a "bright, guilty place,"[3] Xavier Villaurrutia, Vinicius de Moraes, and Raul Bopp's writings bring to light unnoticed dimensions of the city. Their less cynical gazes, not compromised by the fervent desire to denounce the seeming fraud and maladies of the city, rendered Los Angeles in redeeming and less jaundiced ways. In other words, Villaurrutia, Vinicius, and Bopp give us another perspective from which to think about Los Angeles, one that flees from the myths created and heavily perpetuated during the 1930s and 1940s and which continue to circulate until today. Their perspective made conspicuous unknown aspects of the lives of the less visible denizens of the largest urban area in California. This, in itself, is important because as Norman Klein suggests, the myths propagated about Los Angeles rarely presented a faithful picture of the bustling life of the communities:

> We believe the romance; we need the romance. But we must realize that the myths, whether of tinsel town, of the sunny village, or of the downtown Babylon, have never represented the city accurately. They have always systematically ignored the life of communities in the city. As if […] a mix of classes together in a neighborhood could not exist in our imagination when we think of Los Angeles. Indeed, these imaginary cities reveal the futility of our good intentions. (Klein 62)

Hence, the works of these Brazilian and Mexican poets are an important puzzle piece for at least a partial reconstruction of the intentionally or unintentionally forgotten, erased, or ignored lives

[3] Orson Welles: "Los Angeles—a bright, guilty place." See Richard Rayner's *A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder, Corruption, and L.A.'s Scandalous Coming-of-age* (2009).

of the City of Angels. Rather than merely dismantling the veil of paradise in whatever sardonic manner possible, Villaurrutia, Vinicius, and Bopp bring to the forefront the existence of subcultures of the city as the most compelling and redeemable feature of Los Angeles; however, they also make the effort to see aspects of themselves or their cultures when casting their gazes on the City of Angels.

This chapter is organized in the following order: The first part of this study will focus on the seminal year of Los Angeles literary history, 1939, discussing, succinctly, how works by American and European authors, such as Aldous Huxley, Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West, and John Fante, take on the task of exposing the city as the dangerous, shallow, corrupt, and greedy epicenter of human pathology. The following section will discuss the writings of Mexican poet and playwright Xavier Villaurrutia, focusing on his 1936 poem "Nocturno de Los Ángeles," examining, particularly, its significance as a text which unabashedly explores the city's gay underground life. It will highlight how, by bringing to the fore this ignored facet of Los Angeles, Villaurrutia reveals the city in ways completely antithetical to the dominant discourse on the city. Furthermore, a few of German writer Bertolt Brecht's texts about the city are discussed in contrast to Villaurrutia's at the end of this section. The Brazilian poet and musician Vinicius de Moraes' writings about Los Angeles are analyzed next. Reviewing letters, poems, and chronicles he wrote about the city, this section underlines how, despite being uneasy with certain aspects of Los Angeles, Vinicius went out of his way to make sense of the City of Angels with unprejudiced eyes. This, for example, allowed him to explore and render less known facets of Los Angeles, such as the Black jazz subculture, in a complimentary light. Moreover, Vinicius's conception of Los Angeles is further examined, revealing a nuanced picture of the city. The last section of the chapter examines Brazilian poet Raul Bopp's *America* (1941) and some travel

memoirs of his time when he worked for the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty). A closer look at Bopp's writings reveals a city with an interesting present and a particularly auspicious future. In a similar way to Vinicius and Villaurrutia, Bopp casts his gaze on an unnoticed aspect of Los Angeles in order to form his picture of the city. Lastly, the conclusion recapitulates the arguments hitherto made throughout the chapter, suggesting, moreover, the importance of Villaurrutia, Vinicius, and Bopp's writings in rescuing some of the city's lost memories.

1939: The Year the Angels Fell from Heaven

II

1939 saw the publication of several works of fiction that would later become canonical Los Angeles novels: Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, John Fante's *Ask the Dust*, and Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. Despite the different backgrounds and styles of the writers and plots of these novels, Los Angeles, more often than not, was rendered in analogous tones: cynical, gloomy and fatalistic. Chandler's novel, for example, painted the city as a hotbed of corruption and crime, where the climate such as the hot and dry Santa Ana winds, as his prior long short-story "Redwind" (1938) touched on, incites the residents of Los Angeles to become unhinged and commit criminal acts, as the opening of that text highlights:

> There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their

> husbands' necks. Anything can happen. You can even get a full glass of beer at a cocktail lounge. (Chandler 2)

Aldous Huxley's novel, on the other hand, as will be briefly discussed in the following chapter, is an indictment of the flagrant greed and philistine essence he perceived in Los Angeles. Similarly, Fante's *Ask the Dust* and West's *The Day of the Locust*, as David Ulin contends, explored "dismantling the glittering promises of the dream city and finding unsettling realities underneath" (Ulin, *Writing L.A.* xvii). On the one hand, Fante's protagonist Arturo Bandini, a struggling Italian-American writer from Colorado, exposes the decrepitude of the Los Angeles dream for the flux of people coming from all over the country:

> The old folk from Indiana and Iowa and Illinois, from Boston and Kansas City and Des Moines, they sold their homes and their stores, and they came here by train and by automobile to the land of sunshine, to die in the sun, with just enough money to live until the sun killed them, tore themselves out by the roots in their last days, deserted the smug prosperity of Kansas City and Chicago and Peoria to find a place in the sun. And when they got here they found that other and greater thieves had already taken possession, that even the sun belonged to the others; Smith and Jones and Parker, druggist, banker, baker, dust of Chicago and Cincinnati and Cleveland on their shoes, doomed to die in the sun, a few dollars in the bank, enough to subscribe to the Los Angeles Times, enough to keep alive the illusion that this was paradise, that their little papier-mache homes were castles. The uprooted ones, the empty sad folks, the old and the young folks, the folks from back home. These were my countrymen, these were the new Californians. With their bright polo shirts and sunglasses, they were in paradise,

> they belonged […] You'll eat hamburgers year after year and live in dusty, vermin-infested apartments and hotels, but every morning you'll see the mighty sun, the eternal blue of the sky, and the streets will be full of sleek women you never will possess, and the hot semi-tropical nights will reek of romance, you'll never have, but you'll still be in paradise, boys, in the land of sunshine. As for the folks back home, you can lie to them, because they hate the truth anyway, they won't have it, because soon or late they want to come out to paradise, too. You can't fool the folks back home, boys. They know what Southern California's like. After all they read the papers, they look at the picture magazines glutting the newsstands of every corner in America. They've seen pictures of the movie stars' homes. You can't tell them anything about California. (Fante 45)

West, similarly, had an analogous take on the people migrating to Los Angeles, whose sole purpose was to fry slowly in the sun:

> Scattered among these masquerades were people of a different type. Their clothing was somber and badly cut, bought from mail-order houses. While the others moved rapidly, darting into stores and cocktail bars, they loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and stared at everyone who passed. When their stare was returned, their eyes filled with hatred. At this time Tod knew very little about them except that they had come to California to die. (West 23)

West's protagonist, Tod Hackett, a graduate student from the Yale School of Fine Arts, moves to Los Angeles after being recruited by a scout in order to learn set and costume design for the film industry; at night he toils to finish a painting, which he is convinced will be his masterpiece. The

title of the painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles," foreshadows the end of the novel where a throng of desperate people, waiting outside Kahn's Theater to see their favorite Hollywood stars arrive for the premiere of a movie, and riot in a frenzy like a swarm of locusts destroying everything in sight. Being caught in the middle of the turmoil, Tod loses himself in the thoughts of his apocalyptic painting:

> As he stood on his good leg, clinging desperately to the iron rail, he could see all the rough charcoal strokes with which he had blocked it out on the big canvas. Across the top, parallel with the frame, he had drawn the burning city, a great bonfire of architectural styles, ranging from Egyptian to Cape Cod colonial. Through the center, winding from left to right, was a long hill street and down it, spilling into the middle foreground, came the mob carrying baseball bats and torches. For the faces of its members, he was using the innumerable sketches he had made of the people who come to California to die; the cultists of all sorts, economic as well as religious, the wave, airplane, funeral and preview watchers — all those poor devils who can only be stirred by the promise of miracles and then only to violence. A super "Dr. Know–All Pierce–All" had made the necessary promise and they were marching behind his banner in a great united front of screwballs and screw-boxes to purify the land. No longer bored, they sang and danced joyously in the red light of the flames. (West 200)

West's doomsday scenario of Los Angeles, notwithstanding their differences, is also echoed in Fante's novel; however, rather than being a blazing fire that sweeps the city, Arturo Bandini imagines the destruction being driven by nature:

> The tall buildings forming black canyons were traps to kill you when the earth shook. The pavement might open. The street cars might topple […] Los Angeles was doomed. It was a city with a curse upon it. This particular earthquake had not destroyed it, but any day now another would raze it to the ground […] those big buildings. They'll kill you. Today, tomorrow, next week, next year, but they'll kill you. (Fante 102)

There are more similarities between these two novels, another being, for example, the fact that both protagonists are recently arrived migrants who, on top of their almost delusional artistic aspirations, display a significant degree of aggressiveness, racism, and violence, especially when met with rejection by their respective love interests; they fantasize either about murdering, raping or battering them.

Moreover, these seminal texts published in 1939, on top of their bleak portrayal of Los Angeles, do not explore the subcultures of the city, nor offer a redeeming picture of the social life of the city. Although of these books it can be argued that Fante's comes closer to depicting an underrepresented social class in and around downtown Los Angeles, his rendition is more often than not seen through a prism of decadence, disillusion, and delusion. Moreover, it bears pointing out that while an important character of the book is Mexican, Camilla Lopez, Arturo Bandini's love interest, she is just a medium for the protagonist to vent his racist anger and reaffirm his own sense of whiteness. I am not saying that Fante does not show a critical vein here, in exposing Arturo Bandini's insecurity about his Americanness. However, there is not much depth to Camilla's character; she remains the exoticized image of an emotionally unstable woman of color, the protagonist's "Mayan" princess. As Matthew Elliot suggests, "he continues to see her as the embodiment of an ethnic category; she is still 'Mayan' in his eyes […] while he

becomes one of the pale anxious faces of the modern American city" (Elliot 538). For Elliot, the racial romanticism of Fante's novel prevails, since as Arturo Bandini's "final romanticized version of Camilla suggests, by the novel's end Arturo has not become the honest, clear-sighted author that Fante critics have often described. Rather, as the narrator of her tale, and by extension as the author he has become, he is notably unreliable" (Elliot 539). Despite the change or lack of change in Arturo Bandini's character, Camilla's tragic fate, committing suicide in the scorching Mojave desert, perpetuates the exoticized and romanticized portrayal of her character, without ever exploring her "otherness." He "fills her absence with a chimerical narrative about her 'return' to her roots and the place 'she belonged'" (Elliot 539). As Arturo Bandini exclaims, "Let her go back to the loneliness of the intimate hills. Let her live with the stones and sky, with the wind blowing her hair to the end" (Fante 160).

These novels offer a highly pessimistic and cynical representation of Los Angeles, at times even vitriolic. The impetus of these narratives appears, sometimes, to be propelled by only the desire to denounce the maladies of the city. In them, there is barely space for the exploration of other dimensions of the city, perhaps with the exception of *Ask the dust*, however, as we have seen, that is even problematic at a closer look.

The Ludic and Desirous L.A. Night: Villaurrutia in Los Angeles

III

In 1936 the Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia, taking advantage of a ten-month scholarship to study theater at Yale University, traveled to California. The last stop on his first and only trip outside of Mexico was Los Angeles, a city that made a great impression on him. Being a scholar of theater, Villaurrutia was enraptured by the human richness of the city. As his close friend Salvador Novo writes, in one of his last stops of that North American sojourn "se transmutó en

uno de tus [Villaurrutia's] más hermosos poemas: El "Nocturno a los Ángeles [sic]" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 14). Villaurrutia would publish that same year in Mexico this poem dedicated to the nights of Los Angeles. From Villaurrutia's letters to Novo, we know that he was fascinated by the night life he encountered in the city. Having spent time in New York shortly before his visit to the City of Angels, Villaurrutia preferred what he saw in Los Angeles: "ni en Nueva York, fluye, como aquí, el deseo y la satisfacción del deseo" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 75). Contrary to the impression given to him by New York, which left him depressed, "los rascacielos […] me dejaron deprimido por otros tantos [days]," Los Angeles left him euphoric and awestruck (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 37). It was not the beauty of the city, for he thought it had none, but the night in Los Angeles certainly did, "Los Ángeles no tiene belleza sino en la noche irresistible" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). Villaurrutia arrived in Los Angeles in June 1936 and spent a month studying theater at the Gilmor Brown theater in Pasadena, today known as the Pasadena Playhouse, before heading back to Mexico City. Villaurrutia may not have been swept away by the city's architectural beauty, although he found Pasadena, for example, neat: "salí a tomar un poco de aire en esta pequeña ciudad perfecta por su ambiente, por su elegancia sin mancha" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 75). But he was enthralled by the effervescence of Los Angeles's night life; he would visit the night clubs and drink (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). It was in the nights of Los Angeles where Villlaurrutia found peace, something that had escaped him during his time on the East Coast:

> No creo justo permanecer en Yale más tiempo. Voy a tratar de desplazarme […] Si no lo logro, volveré pronto a México. Por lo que toca a la vida misma, New Haven es un infierno helado donde los hijos de Cromwell han venido a refugiarse. No hay vida. El gótico de la Universidad, la austeridad de las celdas, la fisonomía

> falsamente inglesa de los profesores […] todo obliga a los alumnos a concentrarse, a encerrarse en la hipocresía y en la soledad. (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 48)

Already in his missives to Salvador Novo, Villaurrutia was describing life in Los Angeles as divine, referring to his hotel room on the ninth floor as heaven, a metaphor he will also use in his poem about the city.

Los Angeles, at the time Villaurrutia visited the city, was starting to see the first traces of a public community of gay men and women emerge (Hurewitz 57). The circuit of bars, parks, and bathhouses made "love, sex, and social activity […] available to homosexually interested men. From parks and bathhouses to bars and more welcoming clubs, a widely varied network of homosexual liaisons and meeting sties spread across the city" (Hurewitz 59). Although there was an absence of a "clear" community, "from the 1920s through the 1940s, these pockets of homosexual activity and socializing became entrenched in Los Angeles life" (Hurewitz 49). The most prominent of these pockets of homosexual activity in the city was "The Run":

> By the late 1930s, Pershing Square, Main Street, Hill Street, the park at the public library, the bathroom in the subway building, the bust depot— all were stopping points on a downtown circuit of male same-sex activity that some referred to as 'The Run' […] The Run […] was part of a network or circuit— a 'broader expanse of terrain' in which men 'with stealth and cunning moved in, across and out of these spaces.'A fair portion of encounters along the Run occurred outdoors, along specifics streets and in certain parks […] Pershing Square, the busiest site on the Run, occupied a square block in the heart of downtown and was flanked by some of the finest hotels, stores, and theaters in the city […] in the evenings, at

> least since the 1910s, the square also became a magnet for male homosexual contacts (Hurewitz 49).

Indeed, even sumptuous hotels were part of The Run. The men's bar at Biltmore Hotel, for example, whose front entrance faces Pershing Square, had been known as a cruising spot and to have been frequented by servicemen looking for male companions (Faderman and Timmons 73). This square and hotel were notorious even outside Los Angeles, it actually "had a 'national reputation' among gay men, and visitors staying at the adjacent Biltmore Hotel knew through the gay grapevine that they would find what they were looking for in the Pershing Square underbrush" (Faderman and Timmons 82). Furthermore, there were "many other accounts of Pershing Square [featuring] a still wider swath of cruising men— including rougher men and marines looking for action" (Hurewitz 51). As a matter of fact, Villaurrutia's poem seems to depict The Run, considering that the Mexican poet renders the enthralling hookup scene where ordinary men and sailors, identifying their affectionate or sexual longing for one another, materialize their desires by going up to a hotel bed. Moreover, in *El deseo, enorme cicatriz luminosa* (1999), Daniel Balderston appears to hint at this while succinctly describing Villaurrutia's poem: "menciona ángeles—varones, sensuales y objetos del deseo de los hombres de la ciudad—que frecuentan las plazas del centro de Los Ángeles" (Balderston 54). Although Balderston does not mention or specify Pershing Square nor The Run, it seems quite apparent or at least highly probable that Villaurrutia was immortalizing in his poem this specific scene of Los Angeles homosexual underground culture.

Although Villaurrutia witnessed a thriving trysting homosexual culture and network in Los Angeles, homosexual men and women faced harassment by the Los Angeles police

department during this time. In fact, the same year and month the Mexican poet arrived in the city, a group of homosexual men were attacked in a nearby beach community:

> Suspicions of homosexuality caused a mini-riot in El Porto, a small beach community south of Los Angeles, where the movie start William Haines and his lover Jimmy Shields had summered for years and hosted parties for their gay film friends […] In the summer of 1936, Haines, Shields, and several friends […] were attacked by a mob that alleged Shields had molested a minor. The crowd hurled tomatoes at the men, beat them, and booted them out of town. The scandal effectively ended Haines' career […] Hollywood gay elders remember to this day the horror of 'Billy Haines being tarred and feathered out at the beach.'
>
> (Faderman and Timmons 57)

More specifically, however, there were conflicting sentiments toward homosexuality in Los Angeles. Although by the mid-1930s homosexual men and women were suffering greater prosecution from the police, "[f]or a time in the early 1930s, the wider public embraced the city's 'fairies,' and female impersonators were celebrated in the city's nightlife. In fact, in the early 1930s, the city witnessed something akin to the 'pansy craze' George Chauncey identified in New York City" (Hurewitz 118). Fairies, who were men impersonating women or dressed up in effeminate fashion in order to express their homosexual desires, were the main attraction in the city's most popular clubs and the source of public fascination (Hurewitz 117). This interest in fairies in the Los Angeles nightlife created a "pansy craze," which, however, was counterbalanced by police raids (Hurewitz 121). There was a coordinated effort on behalf of the Los Angeles police department to raid known homosexual hangout spots and make arrests:

> Officers were given specific orders to 'go after' homosexuals. Vice squad officers often staked out homosexual bars, both gay and lesbian, and wreaked havoc on the lives of the patrons […] harassment was only one of the techniques that the Vice Squad use to carry out its homophobic policies. Entrapment […] was the squad's most pernicious method […] using undercover officers to respond to and even solicit sexual come-ons, which would permit them to make an arrest […] LAPD officers were said by victims to excel in this cruel practice because 'Hollywood reject,' attractive would-be actors who failed to find work in the movies, were employed by the vice squad to carry out entrapment scams. (Taderman and Timmons, 78-79)

This police activity signaled a change in attitude towards homosexuality, politicians and city officials "shifted increasingly toward viewing fairies and other homosexually active men as possessing a fixed and dangerous fundamental essence." (Hurewitz 123). Consequently, there were a surge of raids between 1936 and 1937 (Hurewitz 131), precisely during the time that Villaurrutia was in Los Angeles. Also, in the winter 1936, the police declared a "War on Vagrants," which targeted the Run and other homosexual spots (Hurewitz 132). Moreover, a couple of years later, in 1938, Mayor Shaw of Los Angeles established the Sex Bureau that was created to contain "sexual degenerates" (Hurewitz 132). This bureau, however, targeted overwhelmingly men who "inverted the sex and gender code" (Hurewitz 133). In other words, the homosexual man was considered a sexual pervert. The increase in arrests by the late 1930s generated a climate of intense anxiety for homosexual men (Hurewitz 142).

Notwithstanding this climate of persecution suffered by homosexuals, Los Angeles was unlike any other American cities:

> [The] sexual freedom often played itself out in nightclubs and bars that resembled the color nightspots of Europe and the clubs of Manhattan […] Men who wished to make gay contact with other men might go […] to various hotel bars and the most elegant of nightclubs— the Mocambo, the Trocadero, Ciro's— which were primarily heterosexual but permitted gay costumers to cruise there as long as they behaved with discretion: no touching, no flamboyant clothes, no effeminate gestures. (Taderman and Timmons 43-45)

Moreover, Hollywood parties, held in the private residences of actors, producers and directors, were also safe havens where there was freedom to be openly gay or experiment with members of the same sex (Taderman and Timmons 45). It is also important to point out that, despite the police's constant interference with the nightclubs' business, they were not capable of ever shutting these venues down or diminishing their interest (Hurewitz 121). On the contrary, "the Hollywood clubs in which those of all sexual persuasions met and mingled continued to flourish" (Taderman and Timmons 47). As a matter of fact, towards end of the 1930s, there were even suggestive guidebooks such as Jack Lord and Llyod Huff's *How to Sin in Hollywood* that recommended homosexual nightclubs for those seeking them (Taderman and Timmons 47). With the help of the film colony, Los Angeles was "a bohemian and artistic world that offered unprecedented opportunities for gay expression" (Taderman and Timmons 55). Hence, when Villaurrutia came to Los Angeles, he witnessed first-hand this titillating world. Decades before John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963), Villaurrutia had already heralded gay Los Angeles as the "City of Night" with his 1936 poem "Nocturno de Los Ángeles."

On the first of December of 1936 Villaurrutia published "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" with one hundred copies being printed. The poem, dedicated to the Mexican film producer Agustín

Fink, who accompanied Villaurrutia in Los Angeles and on a trip to San Francisco, can be read as an ode to Los Angeles's gay underground life. In other words, it is a poetic attempt to capture the riveting and intractable exploration of human desire in Los Angeles, a gesture which, compared to his American and European counterparts, seems to be truly out of the ordinary. An undertaking that even preceded the expression of sexual freedom of the Beat Generation of Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. By casting his gaze on a suppressed and shunned population of the city, Villaurrutia reveals a hidden dimension of Los Angeles as utterly stimulating. A flood of tantalizing energy permeates the poem from beginning to end. There is no respite from the inebriating effervescence flowing from the streets. Indeed, Villaurrutia's "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" brings to the forefront the gay experience. However, it does so not only in a romanticized form but also in a highly erotic manner. Villaurrutia's poem depicts, in suggestive and metaphorical language, the gay hook-up scene ushered in by the sailors docking at Los Angeles. In fact, Daniel Balderston deemed it "el más explícito entre los textos homoeróticos de Villaurrutia" (Balderston 54). Moreover, as Balderston further points out, the "angels" that appear in the poem have proven to be unquestionably gay sailors by the appearance of the poem's manuscript among Carlos Pellicer's papers: "El manuscrito del poema, que Villaurrutia regaló a Carlos Pellicer, ha sido publicado en edición facsimilar, con dibujos del poema que muestran a marineros abrazándose, besándose y tocándose las piernas" (Balderston 54).

Xavier Villaurrutia's poem's significance does not solely rest on its homosexual dimension as critics have pointed out already, but also on the way that the city is rendered through the eyes of a gay Mexican writer in 1936. In other words, it paints a revealing portrait of the city. The first stanza of the poem succinctly introduces the elements of the beguiling world he presents to the reader:

Se diría que las calles fluyen dulcemente en la noche.

Las luces no son tan vivas que logren desvelar el secreto,

el secreto que los hombres que van y vienen conocen,

porque todos están en el secreto

y nada se ganaría con partirlo en mil pedazos

si, por el contrario, es tan dulce guardarlo

y compartirlo sólo con la persona elegida. (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 1).

The first stanza vividly traces the outline of a captivating site: a landscape shaped by fluidity. There is nothing rigid. The streets flow harmoniously like a river in the night. The picture he presents of the city is marked by movement. It is the faintness of the light of night, however, that animates the rhythmic flux of bodies revolving around the secret only shared with the chosen ones. The L.A. night, therefore, is rendered in a kind and blissful light, as a sort of paradise, or at least safe haven, in which the intransigent canons of society relent their tight grips. There is no sense of oppression, though there is a secret involved. On the contrary, there is a sweetness in the circulation and revelation of it, insofar as it is shared with the right person. Villaurrutia uses a pun to highlight this: it is better to "compartir," share it with exclusivity, than "Con partirlo," divide it into one thousand pieces. The scene described by Villaurrutia is one of disenthrallment. Los Angeles is depicted here as a place of release, where even the most recondite desires can be fulfilled. As the narrative voice of the poem expresses in the second and third stanza,

Si cada uno dijera en un momento dado,

en sólo una palabra, lo que piensa,

las cinco letras del DESEO formarían una enorme cicatriz luminosa,

una constelación más antigua, más viva aún que las otras.

> Y esa constelación sería como un ardiente sexo
> en el profundo cuerpo de la noche,
> o, mejor, como los Gemelos que por vez primera en la vida
> se miraran de frente, a los ojos, y se abrazaran ya para siempre (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 1)

The homerotic dimension becomes more explicit here, nonetheless, underscoring the possibility for the Los Angeles night to unencumber desires. In a very candid way, Villaurrutia likens the marks created by these desires to that of a throbbing phallus of the body of the night.

The aqueous imagery continues in the following stanza. The movements become more apparent: "De pronto el río de la calle se puebla de sedientos seres,/caminan, se detienen, prosiguen./Cambian miradas, atreven sonrisas,/forman imprevistas parejas..." (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 2). There is an inebriating element to the tempo of the city dictated by the movement of these beings with a deep hankering for one another. They stop and go, exchange gazes and smiles as if they were displaying an intricate and sublime dance of desire. A choreography ordained by delicateness. Walk, stop, and go. The pulse of the city in perfect unison. Villaurrutia renders the ebb and flow of this riveting dance: "El río de la calle queda desierto un instante./ Luego parece remontar de sí mismo/deseoso de volver a empezar./Queda un momento paralizado, mudo, anhelante/como el corazón entre dos espasmos" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 2). The expectation, however, does not cease and despite the brief interlude, the streets swell again and again with intimacy and desire: "Pero una nueva pulsación, un nuevo latido/ arroja al río de la calle nuevos sedientos seres./ Se cruzan, se entrecruzan y suben./Vuelan a ras de tierra" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 2). In this part of the poem, the "sedientes seres," who stumble upon one

other, start to become less inconspicuous. They, thrust by the flow of the waves, are pushed onto the shores of the streets; the double entendre of the title of the poem becomes clear here:

> Nadan de pie, tan milagrosamente
> que nadie se atrevería a decir que no caminan.
> ¡Son los ángeles!
> Han bajado a la tierra
> por invisibles escalas.
> Vienen del mar, que es el espejo del cielo,
> en barcos de humo y sombra,
> a fundirse y confundirse con los mortales,
> a rendir sus frentes en los muslos de las mujeres,
> a dejar que otras manos palpen sus cuerpos febrilmente,
> y que otros cuerpos busquen los suyos hasta encontrarlos
> como se encuentran al cerrarse los labios de una misma boca,
> a fatigar su boca tanto tiempo inactiva,
> a poner en libertad sus lenguas de fuego, (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 3)

The aqueous imagery intensifies here again; these beings, who swim upright through the causeways of the city, are "los Angeles" that have descended down to earth. However, they come from the ocean on ships of steam and shadows, which, as the narrative voice of the poem asserts, is the mirror of heaven. These beings, just as the city, become more fluid, enabling the melding with "mortal" denizens. With each successive line, the metaphorical language turns more concrete. It becomes clear that these "angels" are sailors who, docked at the port, have made their way into the city. There is again this imagery of fluidity in the way Villaurrutia describes

the blurring of lines between the inhabitants of the city and these "angels" of the sea; not only do they coalesce with the "mortals" but they are also easily confused with them. Essentially, more explicitly, they move in between gender normative experiences. They can indulge in the thighs of women, but they allow for "other hands" to touch their bodies feverishly and "other bodies" to search for their bodies until they are met. The desire of the "angels" are realized, which sets free their fiery tongues. The liberation of desire is fully manifested in the rituals of love: "a decir las canciones, los juramentos, las malas palabras/ en que los hombres concentran el antiguo misterio/ de la carne, la sangre y el deseo" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 3). In the eighth stanza the "angels" take more form, however, Villaurrutia defines them again by a lingering ambiguity: "Tienen nombres supuestos, divinamente sencillos./ Se llaman Dick o John, o Marvin o Louis./ En nada sino en la belleza se distinguen de los mortales" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 3). Moreover, they are moved by the cadence of their movements, as Villaurrutia once again stresses: "Caminan, se detienen, prosiguen./ Cambian miradas, atreven sonrisas./ Forman imprevistas parejas" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 3). The rhythmic movement, however, that is constantly repeated throughout the poem as a palpitating heartbeat, intensifies as the narrative voice takes the reader closer to the source of the vibration: "Sonríen maliciosamente al subir en los ascensores de los hoteles/ donde aún se practica el vuelo lento y vertical" (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 3). The angels' "vertical flight" is the approximation and intensification of the desires of the flesh. It is in the hotel room where, unrestrained, the choreography of unhindered desire finds its climax:

> En sus cuerpos desnudos hay huellas celestiales;
>
> signos, estrellas y letras azules.
>
> Se dejan caer en las camas, se hunden en las almohadas

que los hacen pensar todavía un momento en las nubes.

Pero cierran los ojos para entregarse mejor a los goces de su encarnación misteriosa,

y cuando duermen sueñan no con los ángeles sino con los mortales. (Villaurrutia, *Nocturno* 4)

The angels finally expose their marks. In other words, the sailors reveal their tattoos and essentially just let go in order to relish the earthly desires of the body.

As has been discussed, "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" gives a revealing picture of Los Angeles. It renders the city in an inebriating and exciting trance governed by fluidity. Despite the suggestive description of the flowing desires of the body, there is nothing vulgar about it. There is this kind of tender and gleeful gaze which portrays the city in a redeeming light. Night, rather than being ominous, becomes reassuring in Villaurrutia's Los Angeles. This benevolent gaze, furthermore, uncovers a city by night liberated and open to the gates of unrestricted forms of love. There is no shame or ugliness despite the surreptitiousness and discretion of the movements of the unconventional pairings. Los Angeles, rather than a place of seeming inauthenticity and artificiality, is painted as a guileless and lenient space where to find fellowship. Villaurrutia thereby humanizes a city often seen by the dominant discourse as inorganic and counterfeit; indeed, perhaps because the city had a similar effect on the Mexican poet, as he described in one of the last letters that he sent to Salvador Novo from the United States: "El Xavier de ayer y el de mañana admiran, aplauden, envidian, todo al mismo tiempo, al Xavier de hoy. Tú me entiendes. No hay sombra de vanidad en lo que digo: me he sentido plenamente vivo, joven, inteligente, aquí como nunca antes" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 79). The one month Villaurrutia spent in Southern California invigorated him in a profound way. Although the opportunity never materialized, the

Mexican poet wished to go back to Los Angeles with his friend Salvador Novo: "Algún día, presiento, vendremos juntos, a pasar unas semanas" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). He never expressed himself about any other place in the United States in such a manner; it was in Los Angeles where he felt alive and in his own skin.

Villaurrutia's portrayal of Los Angeles was not fortuitous, on the contrary, he took the road less traveled intentionally. He made a point not to see the stereotypical Los Angeles and, as a matter of fact, openly avoided it: "He evitado, cuidadosamente, los encuentros con las estrellas mexicanas de acá. No he visto los estudios sino por fuera" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). This is not to say that he did not partake in some criticism of the film industry, in fact he was well aware of Hollywood's defects just like Vinicius de Moraes and others: "Las películas americanas cada vez más perfectas de técnica y cada vez más vacías" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 50). Nonetheless, he rejected to subject his gaze merely through that prism. The Mexican poet took notice of an unobserved side of Los Angeles, thereby discovering a particularly fascinating dimension of the city, given the repression against homosexuals at the time. In other words, it gives visibility to a part of the city's underground life and the people who animated it. Villaurrutia's poem, without a doubt, stands as a consequential document of Los Angeles's cultural life and history. As Cristopher Merrill asserted when reviewing Eliot Weinberger and Esther Allen's translations of Villaurrutia's *Nostalgia for Death* and Octavio Paz's *Hieroglyphs of Desire*, "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" may be "perhaps the earliest significant poem about Los Angeles" (Merrill, "Streets that Flow"). This is a significant thought, given the fact that it is a heavily homoerotic poem by a gay Mexican writer in 1936. Villaurrutia's Los Angeles is intoxicatingly vivid; at a time when the city was seen as a cesspool of disease and depression and the night was synonymous with danger and crime, notions perpetuated by the hardboiled novels and the noir aesthetic,

Villaurrutia redeems the L.A. night: Los Angeles, perhaps, in its highest ludic and endearing expression of beauty and humanity. However, one can say the same about Villaurrutia's own poetic production, as Octavio Paz asserts: "'Nocturno de los ángeles [sic] […] represent[s] the maturity, the highest moment of his poetry" (Villaurrutia and Paz 133). Villaurrutia describes Los Angeles to Salvador Novo the same way as he renders it in his poem, deeming it beautiful for its irresistible night, where "Los night clubs son preciosos y en ellos descanso, bebiendo cerveza antes de emprender una nueva ascensión al cielo de mi cuarto, en el noveno piso" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). Just as the mortals and angels in his poem, Villaurrutia takes the sublime flight up to cloud nine that is his hotel room, and goes through the same hypnotic and riveting motions of satiating desire and replenishing it: "Cuando crees que esa ascensión será la última de la noche, una tentación, una nueva oportunidad. No sé de qué color es el sueño de Los Ángeles, sólo sé que éstos son azules" (Villaurrutia, *Cartas* 72). As a mortal, he is ravished by the dreams of his blue sailors, his angels; these dreams would perhaps be hieroglyphs of desire, as Paz ascertains in his essay on Villaurrutia : "with psychoanalysis, sleep ceases to be Quevedo's 'mute image of death' and becomes hieroglyphic writing of desire" (Villaurrutia and Paz 128). It is no surprise that Paz regarded "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" as "one of Villaurrutia's most erotic poems" (Villaurrutia and Paz 128). It is through these nocturnal beings, celestial and earthly, that Villaurrutia portrays a compelling and one of a kind picture of Los Angeles, a city rendered through an enchanting and generously humanizing way: an enthralling place. The nocturnal angels are a reflection of the city and vice versa. Although not expressed directly about Villaurrutia's poem about Los Angeles, but about his poetic work and that of his contemporaries, such as Salvador Novo and Carlos Pellicer, Paz asserts the following which can make us think about what we have been discussing: "People are the city, and the city is the double face of the

people who inhabit it, the nocturnal face and the diurnal" (Villaurrutia and Paz 105). Villaurrutia, certainly, reveals at least one beautiful face of Los Angeles.

Villaurrutia's poem stands in clear contrast to German poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht's "Hollywood Elegies," published only a few years later. Brecht, who arrived in Los Angeles in 1941 as an exile, was not fond of the city. In "Hollywood Elegies," Brecht paints a harrowing picture of Los Angeles, deeming it as a paradisiacal hell; he denounces it as nothing but a village, which echoes how he, at another point, in a dairy entry, had referred to the city as a "Tahiti in the form of a big city" (Brecht, *Journals* 184). Unlike the angels in Villaurrutia's poem, who were excitingly redeeming beings, Brecht's angels reek of oil just like the city and display contraceptives around their necks: "The city is named after angels and you meet angels/ And you meet angels on every hand. / They smell of oil and wear golden pessaries/ And, with blue rings round their eyes/ Feed the writers in their swimming pools every morning" (Brecht, *Poems* 361). The poem's ending is also quite bleak, as it describes how the Defense Department fighter planes fly over the city as a way to get away from the stench of inequality: "So that the stink of greed and poverty,/ Shall not reach them" (Brecht, *Poems* 361). For Brecht, the "dream factory" as he referred to Los Angeles, seems to be more of a "nightmare" factory, which reeks of "oily smell" of petroleum and films (Brecht, *Poems* 361). In Brecht's eyes, Los Angeles was nothing but artificial, even the city's sense of nature:

> they have nature here, indeed, since everything is so artificial, they even have an exaggerated feeling for nature, which becomes alienated, from dieterle's [sic] house you can see the san fernando valley [sic]; an incessant, brilliantly illuminated stream of cars thunders through nature; but they tell you that all greenery is wrested from the desert by irrigation systems. Scratch the surface a

> little and the desert shows through: stop paying the water bills and everything stops blooming. (Brecht, *Journals* 184)

Ultimately, the German writer understood the city as nothing but a greedy enterprise, "where you try to 'sell' everything from a shrug of the shoulders to an idea, ie you have always to be on the look-out for a customer, so you are constantly either a buyer or a seller, you sell your piss, as it were, to the urinal. Opportunism is regarded as the greatest virtue" (Brecht, *Journals* 185). Whereas Villaurrutia felt in his own skin in Los Angeles, Brecht felt "exiled from our era" by living in the Tahiti of the West Coast (Brecht, *Journals* 184).

Raul Bopp in L.A.

IV

In the beginning of 1941, Brazilian poet and diplomat Raul Bopp moved to Southern California, where he served three years as Consul General of Los Angeles. Bopp later published a book of memoirs, *Memórias de um embaixador* (1968), where, mimicking more or less Erico Verissimo's travel narrative's structure— sections on people, places, and things encountered—, he describes his experiences as a diplomat in different parts of the world, including an extensive segment on Los Angeles. Back home in Brazil, however, Bopp was actively engaged in the Brazilian literary scene and debates. Bopp, who was a close friend of Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade, participated in the Semana de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1922. In fact, Bopp's most consequential book, *Cobra norato* (1931), is considered a seminal modernist text, which is rooted in the themes and concepts explored in the "Manifesto Antropófago" written be Oswald de Andrade. As it happens, Bopp along with Antônio de Alcântara Machado, started the *Revista de antropofagia* (1928), inspired by Andrade's manifesto, which was then published in their magazine. The concept and goal behind the anthropophagous movement was the

"devouring" of external and local culture as a way to create a unique writing free of imitation. In other words, the gobbling up of the Other as an expression of self-assertion and liberation. Actually, Bopp spent a significant part of his life "gorging" on foreign cultures working for the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or as it is widely known, Itamaraty. One of Bopp's most important "preys" while living and working abroad was Los Angeles and, as a matter of fact, his depictions of the city warrant special attention. Bopp paid particular heed to Los Angeles, heralding the important role of the city on the world stage and revealing his high esteem for it.

Apotheosis of Civilization— Bopp Imagines Los Angeles

V

Raul Bopp's most extensive writing on Los Angeles is found in his aforementioned book of travel memoirs, in which he recollects his experiences living and working abroad for Itamaraty. However, *Memórias de um embaixador* is not the only text in which Bopp discusses Los Angeles. In 1942, as part of the four-hundredth and fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of America by Cristopher Columbus, Bopp delivered a speech for the Latin American Consular Association of Los Angeles at the Ambassador Hotel, which was then published later that year in an abridged form. Bopp's speech is imbued, from start to finish, with a strong Pan-American and humanist tone, as well as with a tinge of motivational fervor. The Brazilian poet, seeing civilization on the brink of destruction, makes a call for the American continent, north and south, to come together, restore peace and save humanity from the encroachment of barbarism. Being of a celebratory temper towards the role of the Americas in the world, Bopp's speech highlights the seemingly unique virtues and qualities of the continent. However, upon close examination, the qualities Bopp attributes to the Americas are indeed European and, as a matter of fact, parts of the text read more like a defense of the Spanish colonial enterprise. Bopp fashions Columbus

as embodying the American spirit of adventure, capable of overcoming any difficult obstacle at hand. He extols Columbus, Cortez and Pizarrro's undertaking as a reflection of the true American spirit: "Quando Cortêz, com um punhado de homens, chega ao Mexico e manda incendiar aos náos para acabar com a nostalgia da volta, faz uma afirmação pratica de americanismo. No seu sentido heroico, é ainda uma continuação do sonho de Colombo" (Bopp, *America* 2). He justifies the barbarism and violence committed by these "adventurers": "alguns episódios, da sua crueza, se valorizam. São problemas do tempo" (Bopp, *America* 2). The Brazilian poet sees this as an unavoidable consequence of the progress of the American continent, which in time will be "um continente sem sondo, uma terra sem fronteiras" (Bopp, *America* 3). The culmination of the historical process, therefore, in Bopp's belief, would bring on an American continent unified by one language and free of borders and armed conflict. Ultimately, Bopp sees history as containing a hidden design that will culminate in a new world order. In other words, when he describes the "evolução histórica" of the American continent and the world, the Brazilian poet is doing nothing more than imbuing history with a predestined and preordained meaning, which, consequently, allows him to gloss over and justify the uncomfortable realities and events brought upon by the adventurers (and civilizations) he adulates. Bopp, however, takes this belief in history to the next level by suggesting that it was precisely the follies or evils of colonialism which planted the seed of what would become the American spirit:

> O tempo, no seu recúo, vai depurando a historia. Apagam-se os erros. Desaparecem os equívocos. E o que muitas vezes, a um exame simplista, parece cruél ou errado, para o sociólogo, que trabalha num plano de maiores dimensões, os fatos adquirem valores novos. Os erros se dissolvem numa unidade superior. E

> é sob esse critério que vemos brotarem as raizes do Novo Mundo. Os acidentes da éra clolonial correspondem a um esforço histórico nestes cenários desafogados, com novas captações de forças, novas integrações: o homem aderindo ao solo, modelando-se á sua geografia, com aspirações a uma coexistencia pacifica. (Bopp, *America* 3)

Hence, the "accidents" are purged by history, which then in turn allows for their preordained recasting.

Although Bopp's seeming objective is to exalt the distinctive American spirit, his words reveal the contrary. The ostensible praise that Bopp addresses to the American continent is, in reality, entirely directed at Europe. Bopp, for example, sees the Americas as just a copy of Europe: "nestes cenários de cansaço e miséria ergue-se a America, como uma réplica, como uma reserva de forças" (Bopp, *America* 5). The Americas, therefore, is imagined as a simulacrum of Europe. Notwithstanding, it is interesting to note that, even though Raul Bopp gained notoriety as a modernist poet, he does not mention, even once, the autochthonous cultures of the Americas. In fact, Bopp predicts a future where the remnants of a "backward" people and civilization are overcome by the unstoppable technological and mechanical impulse of the Americas, whose reach will be extended

> em todos os angulos esquecidos, acordando territórios, libertando o homem sitiado pelas florestas. E as estradas se sucederão, furando cordilheiras, seguindo atrevidamente o caminho de Pizarro ou de Antonio Raposo. Chegaremos certamente um dia, por *highways*, de Los Angeles ao Chile, Rio de Janeiro ou Buenos Aires […] E numa visão do Século da America, no lugar onde eram paisagens de hamacas e palmeiras, teremos chaminés como afirmações de

> vitalidade, trabalhando para que os povos do continente desfrutem as comodidades da éra moderna. (Bopp, *America* 8)

In other words, Bopp sees the political and technical unification of the Americas, spurred by the threat to save civilization from its destruction, as a catalyst to realize its predestined objective: "Os dias de sacrificio passarão. Então a America poderá outra vez cuidar inteiramente de si mesma, realizar os seus destinos dentro de bases pre-existentes" (Bopp, *America* 7). It is precisely the realization of a technological modernization of the continent that will liberate the "besieged" men in the jungle and allow them to ditch their hammocks and enjoy a future of commodious living.

Hence, as has been stated above, Bopp sees history as a phenomenon with a beginning and an end, which is an idea that would take a more explicit and radical form in the work of Francis Fukuyama, who almost fifty years later, in his 1989 essay "The End of History?," proclaimed the end of history. The American political scientist saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War as indicating the end of history, "that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama 2). Bopp was not in a more "propitious" historical moment to declare he was witnessing the "end of history," since the world was still in a full-scale war against Nazism and totalitarianism, but he was in a position to believe or to think that it was heading to its predestined point. The culminating point for the Americas and the world Bopp envisioned and predicted was the fulfillment of a universal order dictated by peace, cultural unification and, above all, by means of technological modernization —spearheaded by the Americas. This is where Los Angeles comes into the picture. Interestingly, the City of Angels, in

Bopp's eyes, would come to epitomize this culminating world order. The reason for this was the strategic cultural and geographical position of Los Angeles.

Although Bopp seems to be blinded by his staunch belief in history as having an intrinsic meaning and in Pan-American and humanist ideals, the Brazilian poet is extraordinarily percipient in foreseeing the symbiosis of culture and technology and its central role in society: "[…] assistiremos a iniciativas atrevidas: A cultura, ou o que se entende por ela, aliada a novas modalidade de técnica, se recobrará de valores. Abrirá caminha a novas indagações. E se desenvolverão em múltiplas formas processos práticos de divulgação" (Bopp, *America* 8). Notwithstanding, out of all forms of cultural expression, Bopp sees something in film and radio that sets them apart: "Com o radio e com o cinema, que são duas forças de expressão universal, teremos, com um sentido acústico pelo continente, escolas pelo ar; arte, musica, jornais pelo ar. Difusão do conhecimento pela imagem. O cinema é como um livro de figuras. (Dá uma ilusão de autenticidade.)" (Bopp, *Americas* 8). It is particularly interesting to point out the importance that Bopp gives film and radio in the future of education. He is chillingly right on point about the development of diverse practical forms for distribution, especially as it pertains to film and radio. Even though he foretells schools, art, music, and newspaper "on air," which imply a diffusion of this knowledge by radio waves, one cannot help but to think of "on air" as the genesis of the internet. Precisely because what he is describing is closer to what the world wide web has become today: wireless flow of information, online universities, Wikipedia, podcasts, online art and music, and the rise of the new online media; the list is interminable. In a way, Bopp did accurately envision the diffusion of knowledge "on air," seeing that Wi-Fi is just a type of radio wave that occupies the radio frequency band of the electromagnetic spectrum between actual radio waves and microwaves. As far as it concerns the role of the image, Bopp was, perhaps,

more exact in his prediction of its prominence in the age of the new world order. The image, as the Brazilian poet anticipated, particularly in its filmic and audiovisual form, has become, quite possibly, the most dominant way information is shared, circulated, and assimilated in the current state of the world. Video streaming services like Netflix or YouTube have become sources of information, rather than mere tools and gadgets for entertainment. Bopp likened cinema to a book made of figures, which gives the illusion of authenticity. However, it appears that at times, and most likely for a large quantity of individuals, film or audiovisual objects have acquired a more authentic essence than the established sources of knowledge such as books or news media. *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad,* and *Narcos*, just to name a few series, appear to reveal a more authentic and reliable source of information, critique, and socio-economic and political examination in the eyes of some. In his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," German philosopher Walter Benjamin argued that the technical reproductions of works of art, even the most perfect and seamless copies, lack the unique existence in time and space of the original. Hence, Benjamin sees artworks as having an aura — their temporal and spatial uniqueness— that is absent in their reproduction. In other words, Benjamin claims that the realm of authenticity lies outside the technical, which is why the original artwork will always be independent of the copy. However, what Bopp intuited in *America* appears to point in the opposite direction, at least for the time being. The technical reproductions of artworks, whatever their form and format, manufacture and heighten a sense of authenticity and reliability that seems lacking in institutions or daily occurrences. Theorists like Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrilliard have explored a vein of this topic extensively. In his 1973 essay "Travels in Hyppereality," Eco posited the idea of the "absolute fake," which is the concept where imitations are not mere reproductions of reality but an attempt at improving it,

creating, therefore, what he calls a hyperreality. In the hyperreal, realistic fabrications aim at creating something that is superior to the real. For Eco, the demand of the real is so great that in order to attain it the absolute fake must be fabricated. Baudrillard later theorized about this same topic in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), where he argues that society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, thus converting human experience into a mere simulation of reality. These simulacra, however, are copies that portray things with no origin or reality, in other words, a hyperreality. Baudrillard sees a situation where the territory no longer precedes the map, but the map precedes the territory, which in turn engenders the territory; this is what the French theorist calls the precession of simulacra. Moreover, the manufacturing of the imaginary or fake is done in order to make one believe that the rest is real, in order to hide the fact that the real is no longer real, thereby saving the reality principle. Both Eco and Baudrillard's premise seems to rest on a presumption that whatever is real and meaningful is no longer present in society, since it has been replaced by simulacra. However, although compelling in some regards, such as in the critique of consumerism and capitalism, these claims seem impossible or at best difficult to substantiate. It presupposes that the "real" or the "authentic" life experience is entirely fashioned and mediated, for the good or the bad, at the behest of the human will. This reveals, nonetheless, the anthropocentrism of Eco and Baudrillard's supposition. Notwithstanding, a detailed discussion and analysis of simulacra and hyperreality lie outside the scope of this study. A slight approximation to these concepts is, nevertheless, pertinent to our analysis of Los Angeles.

As it relates to the final words of Bopp's speech, what I see as right on point about his prediction about audiovisual materials in society is not this annihilation of the real by way of the absolute fake, as theorized by Eco and Baudrilliard, but their transcendence, in the public eye, as

being more trustworthy and authentic in their rumination and critique of the world. Hence, these audiovisual works, which are technical reproductions, have gained an earnest aura of authenticity and trustworthiness. As Bopp foresees, "tempos virão em que, com uma economia de esforço mental, só se estudará geografia pelo cinema; historia pelo cinema; astronomia, modalidades da ciência pelo cinema. Cada aula em cada escola será uma sessão de cinema" (Bopp, *America* 8). An "economy of mental labor" is something that is already a reality with the mechanization and automatization of manual labor, along with the online economy. Film and other visual materials have already achieved a more central and reliable role in the diffusion of information and education. This is precisely where Los Angeles comes into Bopp's Pan-American and humanist vision. In the eyes of Bopp, the City of Angels will have an important role in the future he paints for the Americas and the world:

> Caberá naturalmente a Los Angeles, privilegiada e pioneira, com as aquisições maravilhosas da técnica, exercer uma função de alto avance cultural na éra moderna. E nem é preciso ser pequeno proféta para anunciar que esta cidade, com as duas forças referidas, cinema e radio, que ela vem desenvolvendo e que dominarão definitivamente outras formas de expressão, terá ainda um posto leader no mundo. (Bopp, *Americas* 8)

Los Angeles, therefore, is depicted as a pioneer city due to its privileged economic, social, and cultural character and history. In the modern age, as Bopp asserts, the two forms of expressions that city is known for, film and radio, will propel it to the world stage as a leader; the Brazilian poet foresaw these two cultural forces as undoubtedly dominating other forms of expression. As discussed above, it was an accurate prediction. The domination of audiovisual in the current cultural landscape is unparalleled and Los Angeles, as he indicates, is its cradle. Los Angeles —

Hollywood— has, for the majority of the twentieth and twenty-first century, been viewed through the prism of the film industry; and it is fair to say that it continues to be its strongest point of reference to the world. There is nothing singular in formulating an image of Los Angeles by means of the film industry, as it has been done ever since the city became synonymous with the production of motion pictures. As a matter of fact, a few years before Bopp's speech, to give one example referenced in a previous section, Nathanael West's novel *The Day of the Locust* portrayed Los Angeles as a decaying and amoral metropolis, corrupted by the greed and narcissism of Hollywood. William Faulkner's 1935 short story "Golden Land" also has an analogous portrayal of Los Angeles. In the same way as the American intelligentsia, the dominant discourse by European intellectuals depicted the City of Angels through the lenses of disreputableness and contemptibility —one being noir, pushing an image of a Los Angeles of moral degradation and urban blight. This is explored in more depth in Chapter 3. However, what stands out in Bopp's depiction of Los Angeles is the fact that it is utterly antithetical to those of his American and European counterparts. The Germans exiles who resided in Los Angeles, in particular, conceived the city to be the antithesis of high culture and civilization, as well as the epicenter of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer coined as the "culture industry." Bopp, contrastingly, saw and envisioned Los Angeles as the next great cultural center of the world:

> Cidade de sabor latino, de inspiração latina a principiar pelo seu próprio nome, centro magnético onde vivem os maiores intelectuais, compositores, escritores, pintores, artistas e mulheres bonitas, será fatalmente na éra que vai começar a Vitoria, um grande centro de cultura mundial. Como um dia foi Atênas. Como foi Roma. E, como foi Paris antes de 13 de Junho de 1940. (Bopp, *Americas* 8)

The Brazilian poet even highlights the city's Latin American heritage and character, taking into account this trait to be a factor in its progress towards becoming a Mecca of culture for the world. This is extraordinary, given the fact that, during this time, the blight and decay of the city was attributed to minorities, in particular to the Mexican and Afro-American population. However, Bopp ascribes a revolutionary value to the city's multicultural history and reality. Uniquely, Bopp likened Los Angeles's future to the great historical past of Athens, Rome, and Paris, something which seems unfathomable for that time. Bopp's forecast of Los Angeles when assessing the full context of his speech is even more subversive. Bopp proposes Los Angeles as the apotheosis of human civilization. The Brazilian poet sees the history of the Americas and Europe reaching its pinnacle in the embodiment of Los Angeles. In other words, the end point of the Pan-American and humanist project of civilization is the city of Los Angeles. The radicalness in Bopp's speech lies not in the deluded belief that history contains a hidden design that will culminate in a new world order, but in the farsightedness of seeing the momentous role of film and radio as practical forms of spreading information, as well as recognizing Los Angeles as the birthplace and epicenter of an emerging new techno-cultural paradigm. Bopp, ultimately, casts Los Angeles in a completely new light, as a trailblazing city, something uncommon for that time. With its historical and socio-cultural economical privilege, Bopp saw the city at the forefront of civilization. The true pioneer.

Bopp's meditation on Los Angeles's unique and privileged role in the formation of a new technical and cultural world order can be seen as the precursor of contrasting representations inspired and motivated by the film and culture industry. Adorno, Horkheimer, Eco and Baudrillard's theories and propositions are some of the most notable examples of it. The Brazilian poet's depiction of Los Angeles warrants attention. In a time where American and

European intelligentsia saw the city as an embodiment of civilization's evils and the harbinger of a somber future, Bopp recognized Los Angeles as the pinnacle of human development.

In *Memórias de um embaixador*, published twenty-six years after *America*, Bopp provides a more socio-historical account of Los Angeles and his recollections of the city from the 1940s. Rather than providing a more personal impression of his experience in Los Angeles, the Brazilian poet gives a more distant and fact-based report of the city and people he met. He discusses major historical developments of Los Angeles, such as the importance of the construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, which made possible the exponential growth of the city. Bopp's impressions of Los Angeles are, however, mediated by the passing of time. Having been published in 1968, these writings fall outside the scope of this dissertation. Nonetheless, there are a couple of things that ought to be examined. According to Bopp, he went to Los Angeles with a preconceived notion of what the city and its people were, only to find a more complex and rich urban area:

> Los Angeles, na imaginação dos que não moravam nela, estava envolvida de um magnético prestígio. Com a sua poderosa indústria cinematográfica, dentro do seu cinturão urbano, dava a impressão de uma cidade narcótica, manipulando mundos irreais. Hollywood, dentro dessa área, era um ponto geográfico de singular fascinação. O conceito que eu formava desse ambiente, antes da minha chegada a êsse pôsto, como cônsul, em 1941, padecia um pouco dessa imprecisão. Mas essa estranha comunidade do Pacífico era bem mais complexa do que eu prejulgava. Mostrava, em suas várias atividades industriais uma portentosa estrutura plutocrática. Não era apenas a indústria de ideias, na produção de filmes, que a animava. Possuía ainda, no seu rico subsolo, vastos lençóis de petróleo, com

> milhares de *derriks* em movimento. As gigantescas fábricas de aviões criavam aglomerações citadinas. Um sistema de auto-estradas emendava mais de dez cidadezinhas, na sua amplíssima extensão metropolitana. (Bopp, *Embaixador* 15)

Bopp's confession gets at the heart of the antipathetic representations of Los Angeles of the time; many of those depictions coming from the American and European intelligentsia chose to see Los Angeles entirely through that bias, however, with a more antagonistic tone. Bopp, on the other hand, recognized a richness and complexity. It is not that the Brazilian poet decided to disregard the maladies of the city that many intellectuals perceived, since he was also critical of, for example, Hollywood:

> Mas Hollywood pròpriamente dito, com os seus estúdios amuralhados, era como um feudo. Em tôrno dêle rondava uma fauna humana, sedenta de oportunidades na escalada artística. A ânsia do sucesso rápido dominava os espíritos. Pateneava-se em tudo a nevrose de *big-money*, com um luxo exibicionista. Era uma sociedade dominada pelo publicitário. (Bopp, *Embaixador* 16)

He did not, however, base his entire opinion of Los Angeles on one seemingly unwelcoming aspect of the city, nor, in a way, did he see this unflattering trait as merely disadvantageous:

> Tôda essa sociedade cosmopolita, vivendo em função da indústria cinematográfica, parecia agitada por uma ânsia febril, de escalar níveis mais altos, frenética, instável, ambiciosa, insatisfeita. A ronda quotidiana dos estúdios tinha qualquer coisa de circo ou de bastidor de teatro. Um cronista rotulava êsse ambiente, replete de figuras exóticas (cada qual com o seu estilo de vida próprio) de "terminal de civilização." (Bopp *Embaixador* 16)

One can say that that febrile anxiety and incessant ambition to reach higher levels is what Bopp also had in mind when he foresaw Los Angeles as being the Athens, Rome, or Paris of the future. In *America* he predicted Los Angeles as the culminating point in civilization, for reasons already thoroughly discussed. However, this belief was also informed in part by the multicultural character and history of the city. What he had witnessed in Los Angeles was already a sort of hub of cultures and civilization:

> Podiam encontrar-se, em Los Angeles, locais avulsos, com especialidades árabes, como o *menchui*, de aroma picante e penentrate; os *couscous*, do norte da África, preparados à base de milho. Na Olvera Street, localizava-se uma variedade de 'casas de pasto' mexicanas, que preparavam pratos regionais, apimentados, como *tamales*, *mole poblano*, *tacos*, *enchiladas*, *chilaquiles*. Mas o maior conjunto de restaurantes de comida internacional estava no *Farmers Market*. Compunha-se de uma série de pavilhões, com cozinhas especializadas, ocupando uma área de mais de dois hectares. Nesse recinto, encontravam-se restaurantes italianos, com suas *ministras*, *risottos, ossobucos*; restaurantes espanhóis com as *paellas*, condimentadas com açafrão e pimentos (cores nacionais) e seus jarros com sangrias; locais pratos típicos suíços, austríacos, sul-americanos; restaurantes russos, que serviam um tipo espetacular de *shaschlich*, com carnes espetadas em lâminas de aço, e *presentées au flambeau.* (Bopp, *Embaixador* 56)

As much as Raul Bopp highlighted the technical spirit of the city and its potential, he was also captivated by the multicultural landscape. His gaze unveils a more diverse and intricate Los Angeles.

Garoto de Santa Monica —Vinicius de Moraes in Los Angeles

VI

Poet, musician, and playwright Vinicius de Moraes lived in Los Angeles from 1946 to 1950, where he worked for the Brazilian consulate as vice consul. Author of the all-pervasive "A garota de Ipanema," Vinicius's evidence of his time in Los Angeles is found in different types of texts, such as poems, chronicles and personal letters. Vinicius's relationship with Los Angeles, however, is complicated. The first year living in Los Angeles, as manifested in his letters to his wife and friends, showed his fondness for the Southern California metropolis:

> O clima é uma maravilha. Me sinto melhor só de respirar o ar daqui. E já falei hoje com Gabriela Mistral e com Carmen Miranda, em casa de quem vou no domingo [...] Los Angeles, para esse efeito, é uma boa cidade. Um clima formidável, você não poder imaginar [...] Los Angeles tem tanta mulher bonita que até enjoa [...] Los Angeles é a melhor terra do mundo para uma pessoa se olvidar. (Castro 115)

In a letter dated a few days later to Raul Bopp, Vinicius expresses again his liking of the city: "Gostei de Los Angeles cara [...] Encontrei aqui a Gabriela Mistral, que é muito amiga e com quem tenho estado sempre" (Castro 116). Moreover, in a later letter to his daughter Susana de Moraes, the Brazilian poet continues to gush over the city: "Aqui tem coisa formidável. Vou comprar um automóvel para levar você na praia [...] Vou te botar no melhor colégio de Los Angeles, um que tenha piscina [...] vai ser uma farra louca [...] Os dias aqui são muito bonitos e você pode andar com umas roupinhas uns amores" (Castro 121). Indeed, as his biographer José Castello indicates, Vinicius seemed to enjoy his time in Los Angeles: "É verdade que, em Los Angeles, ele parece revitalizado, mais confiante e extrovertido. O mundo agitado de Hollywood

o arrasta. Vinicius se torna, de saída, uma presença obrigatória nas festas com que Carmen Miranda agita sua casa, em Beverly Hills" (Castello 146). However, after a year, in a letter to his mother, Vinicius appears to be less enthused about the city; he feels nostalgia for his food and country. Nine months later, in a letter to the poet Manuel Bandeira, Vinicius expresses his disdain for the United States and the city:

> Cada dia acho os Estados Unidos mais chatos, sobretudo esta Costa onde estou. Minha única amiga atriz é Margo, que é uma doçura — mas trata-se de uma mexicana. O resto é uma sensaboria, uma gente muito burra e self-satisfied, se achando o supra-sumo [...] O resto é de se jogar na latrina: preconceito, discriminação racial, empatia, unilateralismo, extrema ignorância e desprezo geral pelo estrangeiro, na seguinte ordem: respeitam, naturalmente os anglo-saxões; desprezam cordialmente o latino, considerando mexicano escória; depois vem o negro, que é feito cachorro. (Castro 128)

He even asserts that Americans are the new Nazis, whose intolerance does not allow them to consider the United States as anything but paradise itself. The racial prejudice and intolerance he seems to encounter among certain sector of the population irks him. However, Vinicius's daughter paints a different picture: "Nós morávamos como uma família americana. Não tínhamos empregada. Então, um dia um lavava a louça, outro arrumava. E isso foi muito bom. Nesse período, ficamos lá uns cinco anos [...] Em Los Angeles estudava em colégio público, com tudo misturado, chicano, preto, branco. Sem preconceito" (Ferraz 20). Be that as it may, Vinicius found comfort in the subcultures and people of Los Angeles. In that same letter, he begins to underscore the minority populations of the city — Mexicans and African Americans— as the only redeeming feature of the city; as he expresses to Manuel Bandeira, "Talvez haja um pouco

de exagero meu, não sei. Mas a impressão depois de um ano e meio, é essa, e só tende a se fortificar [...] Só tenho os meus pretinhos, o Duke Ellington, O Louis Armstrong, que é muito camarada" (Castro 129). Vinicius in fact was enthralled by the jazz scene in Los Angeles. As Eucana Ferraz highlights,

> Frequentar *boites* e *clubs* de jazz era um modo excelente de romper o isolamento. A música e os músicos ofereciam a Vinicius outra face da sociedade americana, contestatária e desembaraçada da velha moralidade branca […] Assim, Vinicius foi fazendo novos amigos, aproximando-se de Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan e Ray Gillbert. (Ferraz 16)

Without a doubt, jazz and Black culture made him enjoy Los Angeles: "Há uma *boîte* negra aqui perto, O Billy Berg's, que é uma delícia" (Castro 147). Inaugurated in 1945, Billy Berg's was one of the first racially integrated nightclubs in Los Angeles (Ferraz 18). Moreover, in a chronicle, Vinicius decribes the sublime feeling of hanging out in the jazz jam sessions that would take place after the shooting of the film *A Song is Born* (1948):

> de vez que tinha lugar depois das filmagens diárias do filme A Song is Born, com Danny Kaye - e cujo título em português desconheço. Grandes homens de jazz participavam da filmagem. Grandes, quer dizer... De grande mesmo só havia um - o general Louis Armstrong. O melhor que vinha depois ficava, com relação a Louis, à mesma distância de uma supernova do nosso globo terrestre. Esse melhor era Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, o próprio Tommy Dorsey, Mel Powell, Charles Barnett e o Golden Gate Quartet - tudo gente proficiente, alguns já havendo tocado bom jazz, como Goodman e Hampton, mas tudo hoje em dia meio entregue às baratas. Mas era gostoso, o pessoal ensaiava e filmava o dia

> inteiro e à tarde, já cheios daquela história, se reuniam e tocavam como queriam. Havia sempre alguma figura importante em música popular que também vinha peruar a chacrinha, como Sarah Vaughan, e vários músicos brasileiros amigos meus que participavam da filmagem - José Carioca, Nestor Amaral, Russo do Pandeiro, Laurinda de Almeida, entre outros. A gente ficava por ali batendo um papinho com um e outro - e era gostoso ouvir as vozes, provindo de algum cantinho do set o som divino do trumpete de Louis ensaiando a pauta do filme (Moraes, "Jam Session").

As a matter of fact, Vinicius's daugher even described the importance of jazz during her childhood in Los Angeles: "'Minha infância transcorreu ao som de jazz; era o que se ouvia—e se ouvia muito— em nossa casa'" (Ferraz 9). Furthermore, Vinicius's interest in the Black subculture of jazz, which helped him see Los Angeles more favorbly, prompted him to start taking classes at UCLA, "Entrei par auma extensão universitária aqui na famosa UCLA, de 'music appreciation" (Castro 146). During that time, he acknowledges taking delight in his new life in Los Angeles, "Depois de 35 anos, aprendi afinal a viver em casa e estou gostando muito" (Castro 147). Notwithstanding, Vinicius constantly oscillates between taking pleasure in the city and detesting it, which appears to hold true until his departure. By mid-late 1949, Vinicius expresses in several letters his dissatisfaction and dislike again to Manuel Bandeira: "Estou chateadíssimo da cidade e da vida aqui em geral" (Castro 150). A trip he made to Mexico City seemed to have exacerbated such feelings, "Mexico city […] me deixou louco […] adorei tudo. País formidável, povo louco, genial […] É a gente mais louca e mais linda que há no mundo. Grandes efusões […] Depois de três anos e meio nesta fecal cidade [Los Angeles], foi um banho de vida fantástico" (Castro 166). Vinicius arrived in Los Angeles in post-war times, when the

sentiment of Pan-Americanism and Good Neighbor spirit had receded; and although Vinicius expresses his displeasure in the city, it seems to be mediated more by irritation and anger at the racial and socio-cultural situation the country was going through. He was witnessing the beginning of the Cold War, which had installed itself in all orders of American society, from political and military, to cultural and ideological. This was taking a toll in the daily life of Americans and also in Vinicius's psyche:

> Estou achando cada dia mais difícil viver nesse mundo de medos e mal-entendidos que é a America, e me bicho-matificando a cada dia. Cada reunião com americanos é uma tensão, uma perspectiva de briga, uma mútua desconfiança e pé-atrás. Se você diz que gosta do Wallace, eles te olham como se você tivesse em casa um poderoso transmissor, com ligação direta com Moscou. Se eu disser então que sou comunista, estarei provavelmente com o FBI em casa no dia seguinte. É uma covardia enorme, e me angustia às vezes tremendamente. É ruim viver trancado. Só encontrarei liberdade para falar com suas ou três pessoas: um casal de austríacos. (Castro 133)

Vincius, indeed, seemed perturbed by the social and political situation of the United States, in which anti-communist hysteria, led by the infamous senator Joseph McCarthy, ran rampant. As he wrote to his mother in late 1947, "A mesma onda de facismo que passai aí está passando aqui" (Castro 131). Furthermore, as his daughter Susan de Moraes describes,

> De algum jeito, eu sabia que a minha família era diferente. Minha mãe era simpatizante do Partido Comunista e militante. O Carlos Prestes [communist leader of the revolts against Getúlio Vargas in the 1920s] esteve escondido na minha casa. Mandávamos roupas para a Anita, filha dele. Era uma coisa bem dos

> anos 1940 e 1950. A casa de Los Angeles era frequentada pelos roteiristas e diretores que estavam na lista negra do macarthismo. Tinha sempre gente lá em casa. (Ferraz 20)

He was, undoubtedly, affected by the persecution of his friends and acquaintances for having similar political and social views as he and his family shared.

Nevertheless, Vinicius's dissatisfaction with Los Angeles seems also to stem from personal woes, which made his writing more difficult: "De depressão moral da tropa [his family], problemas domésticos de empregada […] Desanimo diante da política internacional. Tenho trabalhado, às vezes, numa peça negra, a se chamar Orfeu tragédia carioca […]" (Castro 141). A year later he continues to struggle with his writing, "Não consigo trabalhar, nem fazer nada, com o pensamento na pátria amada e em vocês todos" (Castro 167). As José Costello states, "A temporada em Los Angeles é uma das menos férteis na vida do poeta Vinicius de Moraes. Ele está fascinado pelo jazz e pelo cinema e, praticamente, desinteressado da literatura" (Castello 147). Nonetheless, driven by the feeling of longing and solitude, he produced one of his most famous poems, "Pátria minha" and wrote part of the play *Orfeu da Conceição* (1954), which was later adapted into film and won an Academy Award in 1960. What one sees in Vinicius's letters is a mixed feeling about Los Angeles and American society. The political and social situation definitely mediated his picture of the city; however, Vinicius's contact with Black and Mexican culture brings to light an aspect of Los Angeles that was overlooked by the dominant discourse generated by the American and European intelligentsia of the time. Vinicius underscored his deep appreciation for Jazz and its scene in Los Angeles; the Brazilian poet held jazz in such high regard that he even defined bossa nova as "uma filha moderna do samba tradicional, que teve o seu namoro com o jazz, sobretudo o chamado 'West Coast'" (Moraes, "Contra capa para Paul

Winter"). As a matter of fact, he saw the subcultures and its people as the redeeming feature of Los Angeles, which, in and of itself, is something that makes him stand out.

Being a film critic for the Brazilian newspaper *A Manhã*, Vinicius wrote a number of chronicles in which he takes a few stabs at Hollywood for its homogenizing ways. Published in 1941, several years before his arrival to Los Angeles, "Hollywood impenetrável" criticizes the Mecca of film for its negative portrayal of Latin Americans: "Hollywood, quando invade a fronteira mexicana, ou qualquer país sul-americano, torna-se absolutamente impenetrável. Há uma incapacidade fundamental em Hollywood para arrancar qualquer coisa boa de um caráter hispano-americano" (Moraes, *Cinema* 81). This was an issue, as it has been discussed, that the Good Neighbor policy was purportedly attempting to remedy. A couple of years later, the U.S. government's approach seems to have worked on Vinicius. In "Pato patético," the Brazilian poet praises Walt Disney's effort to reveal the evil machinery of Nazism:

> Walt Disney dá-nos, com esse *A vida de nazista*, o primeiro desenho do esquema de propaganda que se traçou no sentido de cooperar com o governo do seu país no esforço de guerra. Nenhuma personagem sua, melhor que o Pato Donald, poderia satirizar o tema da vida de um civil na Alemanha hitlerista, sob o controle mecânico dos bonecos cruz-gamados. (Moraes, *Cinema* 106)

In this case, Hollywood is doing its job by representing the evils that threaten the world. However, in a 1951 chronicle titled "A morte em Hollywood," in which he examines the way death is understood and treated in Hollywood, Vinicius is again critical. Having lived by this time in Los Angeles, the Brazilian poet's conclusion is that death has a special but troubling role in Hollywood life:

> Não importa quem seja, a todos eles caberá um último grande papel a representar, nessa tragicomédia que é a morte em Hollywood [...] Terão os lábios pintados, as faces artificialmente coloridas, de modo a que não se veja nelas a oitava cor do espectro, a da morte. Foi assim que vi a Gregg Toland, o grande *cameraman*, e um dos poucos amigos que fiz, da minha estrada em Hollywood — pintada como um boneco, entre flores funerárias. Pois para Hollywood não só a vida, a verdadeira vida, mas a morte também é tida como uma coisa feia. (Moraes, *Cinema* 124)

Hence, death is, perhaps, the great role to be played. Vinicius sees Hollywood as incapable of accepting life itself in its full spectrum and seeing the intrinsic beauty in that. Hell-bent on seeing life and death as imperfect and ugly, Hollywood's crusade is to embellish all aspects of reality. In the chronicle, Vinicius references Evelyn Waugh's satire of the commercialization of death in his novel *The Loved One* (1948): "Quem já leu o sinistro [...] do romancista inglês Evelyn Waugh [...] sabe a que me refiro" (Moraes, *Cinema* 124). However, it was Aldous Huxley, the British expatriate and renowned resident of Los Angeles, who inaugurated this critique. The British novelist introduced it in an earlier travel book titled *Jesting Pilates* (1926), but it became more well known through his novel *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, where it is an important part of the plot. Hence, the commercialization of death in Hollywood was nothing new, it had been a trope in circulation for twenty-five years before Vinicius wrote "A morte em Hollywood." Nonetheless, it reveals Vinicius's antagonism towards Hollywood, which, as has been shown, is something that intellectuals of every ilk manifested. However, Vinicius is also susceptible to the charm of Hollywood. For example, in "A bela ninfa do bosque sagrado," the Brazilian poet describes a luxurious and riveting party of Hernan Hover in Beverly Hills.

Describing himself as a "modest meteorite" among all the famous Hollywood stars, Vinicius is enthralled by all the beauty that he witnesses. Ready to leave the party and say goodbye to the Brazilian superstar, he is taken aback in particular by the beauty of a woman who appears suddenly before him. The stunning and charming woman approaches them and offers Vinicius to dance; they end up dancing all evening. After the woman's departure, and gushing over her comeliness, Vinicius approaches Carmen Miranda to inquire about his new found goddess, only to receive Carmen's nonchalant response: "É uma atriz nova que está entrando agora. Bonita, não é? Chama-se Ava Gardner" (Moraes, "A bela ninfa do bosque sagrado"). Vinicius, nonetheless, is captivated by Hollywood life. Similarly in "Uma mulher, outrora amada," Vinicius expresses again his fascination with Hollywood. The Brazilian poet recounts his first cinematic teenage love. He describes how, at the age of seventeen, he had a poster on his wall, which he would always look at before he went to sleep. His love for this movie actress was blind and absolute, which prompted him to watch her films over and over again. Vinicius reveres the way her movies made it possible for him to travel the world and be multiple people. Already living in Los Angeles, one lonely and sad night, he decides to go to Ciro's, a famous bar on Sunset Boulevard, only to come across his teenage love. Discombobulated, he follows her stealthily. Love-struck, Vinicius approaches a waiter and tips him to get him a table close to her. He ends up gazing at her all night, but without ever receiving one look from her. The chronicle ends with Vinicius jokingly insinuating how his "wife" did not pay any attention to him. We see a similar theme and tone in the chronicle "A asa do arcanjo," in which Vinicius recounts running into Ingrid Bergman at a corner newsstand on Hollywood Boulevard. Vinicius is utterly dazzled by the apparition of the superstar, likening her beauty to that of a Renoir or Picasso painting; however, noticing her toned back, Vinicius implies she has the back and wings of an archangel.

Vinicius cannot help but be enthralled by the glamour and pervasiveness of the Hollywood imaginary. Despite his problems with the Mecca of film, he is susceptible to the magic of the big screen.

Furthermore, in another chronicle titled "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema da Bahia, minhas senhoras e meus senhores," Vinicius gives a more extensive overview of his impression of Hollywood; the goal of the chronicle, similar to other ones we have examined, is to expose its shortcomings. Although Vinicius's target is the film industry, he touches on several aspects of the city in order to expound his view of Hollywood. The Brazilian poet is adamant about revealing the frivolity he saw during his time in Southern California. As a matter of fact, he describes Hollywood as an "illness" without a "cure." Nevertheless, Vinicius's text analyzes the film industry and the city in a dualistic manner: having vs lacking. He begins by asserting that "Hollywood tem tudo" (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema"). On the one hand, it has an important tradition of filmmaking, which, in his opinion, once produced the best cinema in the world. Furthermore, the city has the best technicians and talent on the planet. The accumulation of talent, however, is also complemented by the powerful financial backing, which makes possible films with big budgets and high salaries for actors and film crews. Moreover, he highlights the superb climate and geography of the city,

> Hollywood tem uma esplêndida situação geográfica, dentro dos Estados Unidos, e é servida por um clima senão ideal, pelo menos favorabilíssimo para o processo da filmagem […] Sim, Hollywood tem tudo isso, e o céu também. Um céu sem chuvas, quase sempre azul, que permite às máquinas rodarem ininterruptamente, nas filmagens de exteriors. (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

Vinicius continues to describe the beauty of the city, for example witnessed in the sumptuous houses with swimming pools in neighborhoods such as Beverly Hills. Marvelous houses that are fully equipped with domestic appliances, ranging from washing machines to electric devices with which to slice bread, and that are acquired through “módicas prestações semanais ou mensais, pois em matéria de vender, a civilização americana faz qualquer negócio” (Moraes, “Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema”). The commercializing vein of American culture is what Vinicius precisely sees as a problem. It is for that reason that he, echoing his prior critique of burials in Los Angeles, underlines once again the mercantilist tendencies of funeral homes, whose aim is to embellish death:

> Sim, repito. Hollywood tem tudo. Tem até um famoso cemitério - Forest Lawn - que se anuncia pelas ruas em grandes cartazes que dizem: "Sleep under the stars" ("Durma sob as estrelas"). E a morte em Hollywood é, também, uma felicidade - há - há - há. Os cadáveres são cuidadosamente embalsamados, lavados, pintados. Tratam-se-lhes das unhas, que adquirem uma bela cor rosada. Colorem-se-lhes as faces e pintam-se-lhes os lábios. Eu vi meu amigo Gregg Toland sofrer essa suprema indignidade - ter a sua boca e o seu rosto pintados, para que neles se não pudessem descobrir os primeiros sinais da destruição da matéria. Se o cadáver for o de uma mocinha, se a veste de branco, e fica ela reclinada em coxins, suave e virginal, durante o período do velório. Porque os cadáveres em Hollywood devem parecer que estão dormindo, para que o pensamento do fim natural não ocorra àquelas gentes todas a quem a idéia da morte não compraz. (Moraes, “Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema”)

Vinicius will continue to repeat the phrase "Hollywood tem tudo" ironically, so as to show the absurdity of the place. In a way, he hints at the repercussions of what having everything looks like. An excess of excess. Vinicius is perturbed by the excess of the film industry and the city. In an anecdote, in order to highlight to the reader what he is really trying to convey, Vinicius narrates an incident he had at the estate of Edward G. Robinson, celebrated Hollywood actor, in which he makes a faux pas by making an unfiltered passing comment to the actor about the opulence of his residence. After the actor gives him a tour of his vast private art collection and solicits the Brazilian poet's opinion, Vinicius responds almost instinctively,

> Na saída me perguntou Edward G. Robinson o que é que eu tinha achado. Disse-lhe de como gostara e foi então que me veio à boca uma dessas frases infelizes - de resto dita sem maldade, a não ser, talvez, inconsciente - uma dessas frases que os americanos chamam com muito espírito de foot in mouth (enfiar o pé na boca). - Eu positivamente acho, Mr. Robinson, que o senhor tem muita coisa demais para um homem só. (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

Vinicius ends the anecdote by describing the distress that Robinson felt by his comment. For Vinicius, the houses of artists in Hollywood constitute everything that appears to be material happiness. Nevertheless, despite the excess of material possessions or seeming happiness, the Brazilian poet makes a point to highlight what lurks underneath it all. The crime statistics of the city, for example, is something he focuses on:

> Hollywood tem tudo, deixem-me repetir - inclusive uma média de quatro a cinco mulheres atacadas por dia; uma média de l0 a 15 assaltos à mão armada, em geral levados a efeito por delinqüentes jovens; uma média de 100 a 150 roubos de

> automóveis diariamente - isso na área de Los Angeles, é claro, da qual Hollywood é um bairro. (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

Crime in Los Angeles is something that Vinicius will discuss on more than one occasion. As a matter of fact, he wrote a poem titled "História Passional" inspired by the infamous Black Dhalia murder in 1947. But as it pertains to this chronicle, the Brazilian poet underlines the crime statistics in order to further reveal the paradox of the city. Indeed, Los Angeles may have everything, such as the most beautiful women in the world, but also a high incidence of crimes perpetuated against women. In Vinicius's opinion, Hollywood is the victim of its own excesses, it is "o idiota do si mesmo" (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema"). Hollywood itself is only to blame for its own shortcomings, as he underlines it:

> Voltemos a Hollywood. Que ficou à espera. Como se libertará ela do círculo vicioso em que se envolveu, com a comercialização a que submeteu seus diretores e artistas, e os códigos puritanos de moral que adotou para revelar a vida? Como sairá ela do impasse em que se encontra e do qual é a única culpada? (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

However, what one observes underneath Vinicius's criticism of the motion picture industry and the city is something that has surfaced in other chronicles but that is subtler in this one. The frivolity of materialism is something that indeed Vinicius hints at, however, what disturbs him more is the censorship of life. The lack of dignity in accepting life in its true colors, as he signaled in his passing critique of the funeral homes; however, also in the conservative nature of the censorship of films by certain groups. It is for that reason that, although he recognizes the potential and quality of good filmmaking by Hollywood, shown by its great figures of cinema

such as Edwin Porter, D.W. Griffith and Charlie Chaplin, he sees that the movie mecca is in a crisis of fear and lack of dignity in making motion pictures:

> Assim é que a crise que na realidade assola Hollywood é a crise do medo e da falta de dignidade. As associações e ligas de "pressão," bem como o Código de Produção, de um moralismo estreito e desnecessário, coíbem formidavelmente o esforço criador dos verdadeiros homens de cinema que há em Hollywood - pois os há. (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

Vinicius resents that, while having all the tools and talent at its disposal, Hollywood turns its back on the important mission of filmmaking to produce art as a tool to educate the public for the easy and safe option to create morally rigid and empty of meaning films. For that reason, it is not possible to make powerful moving films when the fabric of life itself becomes the subject of censorship. As the last words of this chronicle reveal,

> Os há [serious and capable filmmakers], mas que adianta? Como é possível, a não ser por acaso, fazer bom cinema quando mostrar uma muda grávida não é considerado de bom tom? Que verdade ou que realidade atingir quando se fecham assim os olhos ao que há de mais belo e puro em toda a criação humana? (Moraes, "Meus caros colegas do Club de Cinema")

Although this chronicle appears to be a harsh critique of the film industry and the city in which it makes it home, Vinicius also uncovers its humanity by shedding light on its fear and insecurities. As opposed to being a question of spirit, whether spiritual or material, it is about a blemished soul that is fearful and insecure. Interestingly enough, contemporaneously to Vinicius, the British philosopher Alan Watts published his consequential essay *The Wisdom of Insecurity* (1951), which, shrewdly diagnosing the zeitgeist of the time, introduced Eastern philosophy and thought

to the West as an antidote to an age inflicted by anxiety. Drawing from Taoism, Watts intended his public in the West to fully embrace the fear that stems from the insecurity of human existence, rather than to cling to a false sense of security, which results in unnecessary physical and emotional suffering. Notwithstanding the differences, Vinicius perceives and diagnoses the affliction of the city and the film industry as not embracing the fragility of life.

Unlike other chronicles that we have seen thus far, "Hollywood – Epístola Prudente de Moraes Neto" is a more detailed account of Los Angeles. Written as if it were a letter addressed to his cousin, the chronicle is an impressionistic report on Los Angeles. The missive form and playful tone of the chronicle echo the lampooning of Brazil's foundational text the Carta de Pêro Vaz de Caminha, the first account sent to the Portuguese crown of the Brazilian territory and its people, by Mário de Andrade in his modernist novel *Macunaíma* (1928). Similarly, to Macunaíma's letters to the Icamiabas relating his impression of São Paulo, Vinicius recounts his observations of Los Angeles in an often satirizing and mocking way. Regardless of the remarks made, he undercuts them with a playful remark. In the same way as other chronicles, Vinicius pins the ills of the city on an inability to accept the full spectrum of life. As such, he organizes his chronicle in a heavily dualistic manner, establishing nature or the "natural" as good and the "artificial" or modern as bad. Vinicius develops his text from this perspective, in which at times it seems he exerts a somewhat self-righteous stance. In the previously discussed chronicle, Vinicius also employs a dualistic way of describing the city, lacking vs. having; here, however, it concerns the natural vs. artificial. From the beginning of the text, Vinicius employs a language which is designed to parody Hollywood. He opens by writing, "Sômbolo mui prazente arrabalde do Bosque Sagrado" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). The erudite and infrequently used contraction "sômbolo" and the adverb "mui," as well as addressing Hollywood through a pun, set

the humorous tone of the text. Vinicius presents the reader, therefore, with an account of the "Holy" or "Sacred" forest. However, he undermines this "holiness" by asserting that he will discuss the "mais curiosos aparatos e utilidades" which left him "boquiaberto diante das montras com ganas de tudo comprar," but that, despite having the dollars to spend, he was too busy to partake in that cultural vice (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). In other words, the Brazilian poet presents the city as "holy" through a pun, or at least its name, but then adds that this "Holy Forest" is teeming with the most curious artifacts and products. Furthermore, he distances himself from the perhaps "unholy" consumption by stating that, despite the temptation of it all, he did not find the time to shop. Nonetheless, Vinicius will continue to steer his readers in a similar fashion until the end. Whatever seeming virtue of the city will always be mitigated by an opposing view set to question it.

As was observed above, this chronicle is structured around the dichotomy between the natural vs. the artificial. The natural, of course, having the moral high ground for Vinicius. He thereby underscores the fact that the "Bosque Sagrado" has hills, but not "tão íntimas como as de aí a terra" because "aqui [Los Angeles] são docemente afeiçoadas pela mão do homem," which build luxury homes with garages and "tanques de nadar" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). The hills of Los Angeles, therefore, have been corrupted by the hands of men, which, despite the inherent beauty that they may possess, the artificial alterations lessen their beauty. Furthermore, "tanks for swimming," which may be a marvelous thing, end up exposing the deleterious effects of modernizaiton, since despite being full of water, it is a water "de um lindo azul cansado pela substância química denominada cloro; do resto mui irritante para a cornea" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). In contrast to the "Bosque Sagrado," in Brazil it is the black populations that use the "water tanks," not the white and the wealthy, according to Vinicius.

Nonetheless, he signals how, if there was chlorine "over there," it could help clean the grime produced by these communities. He recognizes the ugly and dirty misery that runs amok in the hills of Rio de Janeiro but, unlike the "Holy Hills," the music of the "batucada" beats, sugar cane rum and disobedience to the sixth commandment makes it all tolerable. There is, undoubtedly, a glaring romanticization of the Brazilian experience by Vinicius.

Vinicius, as has been noted, extols an aspect of the city only to undermine it moments later. At another point in the chronicle, he describes the perfect design of the city's urban plan, which makes it impossible for a person to ever get lost. Nonetheless, he ends that paragraph by poking fun at the "suggestive" names of its boulevards, "mnemônicos de vaga escatológica, como Lacienega [sic], Cahuenga, Melrose e quejandos" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). This directly follows the succeeding paragraph in which he discusses the cultivation of grapes and production of wine in the state of California. He describes how the tradition of winemaking first introduced by Spanish priests makes a product of inferior quality to that of France and Chile, one closer to the Brazilian wine produced in Rio Grande do Sul, which easily ferments in the stomach and provokes terrible flatulence and diarrhea, capable of provoking "A Náusea"; this perhaps being a reference to Jean-Paul Sartre's existential novel (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). Moreover, the Brazilian poet continues his commentary on the artifacts and "institutions" of American life. He seems to criticize how the drive-through, which at a glance seemed to be an interesting invention, had fallen victim of atomization. The pretty girls dressed as boys on roller skates, which rouses the hunger of the flesh, as Vinicius describes, have been substituted by machines. A tragedy in his eyes because the food served at these places is now eaten without "o prazer primitivo, pois eu confesso, primo, que entre um bondinho a uma mulher, prefiro de muito a última" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola").

Vinicius goes on to describe the modern and jaw-dropping appliances around the house and technologies such as wireless telegraphs, so impressive that it would make the work of his most esteemed housekeepers obsolete. He continues by commenting on the amazing produce found in the supermarkets, where it is normal to find aesthetically perfect tomatoes and beets. However, these foods lack "o gusto ao paladar," which forces one to eat them with displeasure (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). Hence, beautiful food may be available but it is tasteless. Vinicius makes a similar observation when he sarcastically points out that "a vida no Bosque Sagrado, caro, primo, corre num fluxo maravilhoso," but generally in "quarto rodas" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). He stresses the fact that in Los Angeles there is a car for every three people; and having a car raises one's chances over fifty percent to run over pedestrians. Fortunately for him, he has a car, which although it raises his chances to kill, also gives him more probabilities to live, for he does not find himself walking. Regurgitating previous conceptions about how Los Angeles deals with death, Vinicius magnifies the propensity of catastrophe: "mas não só a vida, também a morte corre aqui num fluxo admirável, Primo. Caem aviões freqüentemente, os desastres assumem proporções fantásticas e comete-se só nesta Nossa Senhora de Los Angeles da Porciúncula, uma media de duzentes crimes diários" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). Hence, Los Angeles may boast of aesthetic beauty in many respects, but Vinicius makes a point to single out the fear felt by people, for whom horrible crimes are always looming. He alludes once again to the horrible fate of a woman who was dismembered, "Destes, alguns são verdadeiramente assustadores, como os ataques a mulheres e crianças, sendo que algumas os assaltantes desmembram com grande paciência, como aconteceu à desafortunada Black Dhalia, no caso de que terás certamente ouvido falar" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola").

Despite the disadvantages of these dangers, Vinicius writes sarcastically, he sees advantages of being a woman in the "Holy Forest." So much so that there is an overabundance of them. Mostly a surplus of beautiful women, although he informs his cousin that it is not uncommon to see faces in advanced stages of decay. Having said that, Vinicius mockingly underscores the beauty of the movie stars, who, for the most part, with their perfect smiles, seem to possess more teeth than the common "mortals" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). So visually striking are these women, Vinicius warns his cousin, that one's blood rushes swiftly to the nether regions of the body provoking lightheadedness. The Brazilian poet goes on to describe the breathtaking beauty of movie stars such as Ava Garner and Marlene Dietrich, jokingly asserting that he has seen men literally melt before his eyes and, in his own case, experiencing an atomic-like explosion in his head.

He ends the chronicle by apologizing to his cousin for cutting his chronicle short, for everyone needs to rest and sleep in the "Holy Forest," under the beautiful stars and palm trees, and "anúncios;" a well needed rest to confront life in Los Angeles with jovial humor and "sadio" distinctive of "esse espécimen raro da fauna humana, essa figura de retórica, esse pleonasmo, esse desconhecido - O Homo Brasiliensis!" (Moraes, "Hollywood – Epístola"). There is, undoubtedly, a more self-deprecating and relaxed tone to this chronicle. He voices his dislike of certain aspects of Los Angeles and its culture; however, his critique is expressed in a more tender and teasing way that makes this chronicle stand out in comparison to the ones earlier examined. By also poking fun at the strange "species" of the "Homo Brasiliensis," the often times tenor of righteousness expressed in his other texts is attenuated. His view on the Brazilian experience as being superior is noticeable here too; nonetheless, rather than a complete indictment of Los Angeles and the culture, it, in a way, subverts the concept of normativity in culture. "Homo

Angelinisis" is as strange and peculiar as "Homo Brasiliensis." He thereby presents a funnily moving picture of Los Angeles.

All things considered, Vinicius's apparent dislike of Los Angeles appears to be more driven by his disgust of how economic stability and growth hampers the human spirit in all its dimensions. Rather than an inherent dislike, Vinicius's pejorative comments about the city and its social actors can be understood as a fear-based cry to prevent the expansion and triumph of sheer economic values. Being told over and over again that material and economic assets were the measure of success and morality, Vinicius defensively opposes that. Although it will not be analyzed here, the poem "Olhe aqui, Mr. Buster" is an example of this. The poem, dedicated to a wealthy American man who could not understand why Vinicius wanted to go back to Brazil instead of staying in the United States, is an explanation as to why, despite the material abundance represented in mansions in Beverly Hills, penthouses in Park Avenue, vacuum cleaners, kisses from Marilyn Monroe, life in Brazil is beyond compare. As he pleads "Mr. Buster", tell me something, "Diga uma coisa, Mr. Buster/ Me diga sinceremaente uma coisa, Mr. Buster: / O Sr. sabe lá o que é um choro de Pixinguinha? / O Sr. sabe lá o que é ter uma jabuticabeira no quintal? / O Sr. sabe lá o que é torcer pelo Botafogo?" (Moraes, *Jazz* 142). Essentially, Vinicius is saying that his love for music, nature and for soccer are things that even all the material possessions or money in the world cannot ever really buy. Notwithstanding his rejection of a capitalist-driven understanding of life, Vinicius is generous in his view of the city. Vinicius does not negate the value, talent, and beauty of the city, nor does he give a full indictment, he just makes a point of singling out what he thinks are some troubling aspects of the culture of Los Angeles.

For example, Vinicius's chronicle "O anjo da paz" renders Los Angeles in a more heart-rending and complex way. In it Vinicius describes a touching moment he witnessed in a movie theater. He narrates how the public, at the first sight of war in a newsreel shown on the screen, began to boo and hiss. The stentorian and vociferous outburst of disapproval muted the audio of the war scenes and the applause of a few. The public was booing the war, not that particular war but in general: "Naquele dia, o povo que enchia um cinema de Los Angeles vaiou a guerra e tudo o que ela representa de horror e atraso de vida. O povo execrou a guerra com toda a sua força coletiva, e não hesitou em manifestá-lo claramente, em apupos e assovios que se estenderam durante todo o decorrer das imagens da tela" (Moraes, "O anjo da paz"). Questioning the public's derisive reaction to a war, which it was paying with its own blood, Vinicius posits that the cinema was being inhabited by the angel of peace. However, that angel of peace was none other than a silent vagabond who, with his worn down and humble attire, stirred the feelings of the public in such powerful way:

> Sua presença […] na cidade de Los Angeles amoleceu, no coração das platéias, o barro duro da vida com lágrimas de riso e de pranto. Todos se sentiram um pouco melhores, bastante mais certos de que a existência, e o mundo, não são feitos apenas de egoísmo, mal-entendidos, guerras e delações […] Que a sua presença, aliás, pouco noticiada, entre nós, possa trazer ao coração dos homens desta cidade, a que a luta cotidiana, os sacrifícios impostos, corrupção dos tempos, a desatenção e indiferença gerais vêm também endurecendo -, que ela possa trazer o calor das lágrimas que a sua emocionante figura e o seu emocionante caminho sabem melhor que nada neste mundo despertar e desatar. (Moraes, "O anjo da paz")

The vagabond, of course, alludes to the personification of Jesus Christ. The presence of the Son of God, therefore, gives the city a brief respite from the woes that afflict it. Notwithstanding the religious connotation and rhetoric of the chronicle, Vinicius portrays Los Angeles in a more compassionate manner, concerned about the wellbeing of mankind. He depicts the city as having a critical consciousness and with agency to refute authority: Los Angeles, as a community, coming together.

VII

The texts discussed in this chapter by Xavier Villaurrutia, Vinicius de Moraes, and Raul Bopp stand out in many respects. Their writings offer a counter picture of Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s, a different window from which to see the life of the largest metropolis in the West. Casting their gazes from a different angle, these Brazilian and Mexican writers were able to formulate an image of the city which allowed them to discern dimensions, more often than not, neglected or simply ignored. At a moment when the dominant discourse seemed determined to uncover Los Angeles as a fraudulent, corrupt, dangerous, and decaying metropolis, Villaurrutia, Vinicius, and Bopp immortalized the subcultures of the city. Giving a platform to the underground culture and denizens of Los Angeles, these poets imagined a truly remarkable city marked by diversity, desire, innovation, and excitement. Free from the gloomy and hyperbolic noir aesthetic and the cynical rhetoric of the hardboiled novel, they were able to conceive a more direct and earnest way of writing about Los Angeles.

Notwithstanding the hotness and coldness of Vinicius's opinion of the city, he undoubtedly shows care and understanding of what he perceives its strengths and problems to be, without forgetting, with self-deprecation and humor, the absurdities of his own culture. Vinicius always tries to see Los Angeles in the most humanizing way possible, for he understands that the

problems he observes are not inherent to the city itself, but are endemic to the human condition. Moreover, his determination to see past the superficialities and trivialities of the mainstream allowed him to cast the city in a kind light.

In the case of Xavier Villaurrutia, the Mexican poet and playwright shines a light onto a riveting underground scene by purposefully escaping the tourist traps and clichés about the city. Los Angeles, in his eyes, becomes a city marked by its fluidity of desire and enthralling movements. Unlike the texts of a dominant current of American and European writers whose purpose was to remove the deceiving cloak of paradise, Villaurrutia, discerningly, uncovers a truly moving and captivating element of the social and cultural life of Los Angeles, thereby giving visibility to a clandestine population. The unveiling of this aspect of the city is undoubtedly remarkable. It renders Los Angeles in a compassionate and compelling manner.

Raul Bopp also warrants recognition in his depiction of Los Angeles because, unlike the dominant narratives by American and European writers who fashioned the city in gloomy and fatalistic ways, he envisioned the City of Angels as the the city of the future. A city thrust forward by the winds of history to be the leader in the technological, social, and educational domains. However, what makes Bopp's vision unique is where that thought lies: in the diversely rich multicultural dimension of the city. In other words, what will catapult Los Angeles to be the new Rome or Paris of the twentieth-century is the richness of its diverse cultures. At a time when minority groups, such as Mexicans and Afro-Americans, were the targets of paranoiac racism and xenophobia, but more troubling the victims of persecution, Bopp's foresight is noteworthy. He imagined the Los Angeles in a compassionately promising light, as a truly pioneering city. Having the shrewdness to anticipate the direction the city would take, he was capable to foresee certain developments that in fact later materialized.

Villaurrutia, Vinicius, and Bopp had perspective when they imagined Los Angeles. Their writings shed light on aspects of the city that give a more nuanced picture of how the city really was in the 1930s and 1940s. More importantly, however, their renditions help us recover a memory of the city that was lost or at least left unnoticed. This redeeming picture of Los Angeles is one full of empathy, humanity and excitement. Los Angeles, at least through their eyes, ceases to be the dark and fatalistic city perpetuated by the dominant discourse, even if it is just for the duration of their texts.

CHAPTER 3

Rebellious L.A.: Octavio Paz

I

In *City of Quartz* (1990), a counter-reading of the history of Los Angeles, urban theorist and historian Mike Davis problematizes the mythifying representations that shaped the city and its image, at home and abroad, of the megalopolis of the West Coast. Writing about the German colony of exiles in the 1930s and 1940s, which included the likes of Bertolt Brecht and Theodor Adorno, just to name a few, the American scholar postulates that their assertions and representations of Los Angeles were sensationalist and apocryphal, which contributed to the already over-mythification of the city. Davis asserts that the German intellectuals turned a blind eye to the other realities of the city, preferring to see Los Angeles as the crystal ball of the future of capitalist societies (Davis 40). What Davis argues is that, willing or unwillingly, some of these exiled intellectuals failed to acknowledge or see a more tumultuous side of the city. Interestingly, contemporaneous with these German writers and thinkers, Mexican poet Octavio Paz also lived in the City of Angels. However, unlike his European counterparts, Paz would explore an aspect of the city which the likes of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer had ignored; a side of Los Angeles that is absent in the German scholars' influential text *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Hence, Paz's brief but not entirely uncontroversial examination of an L.A. figure, the pachuco, makes it all the more important to highlight. As this chapter will show, Paz's analysis of the pachuco reveals a side of Los Angeles that was often overlooked by the dominant discourse on the city.

This chapter will deal, primarily, with Octavio Paz's first chapter of *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), titled "El pachuco y otros extremos," looking at the representation of Los

Angeles 1940s through the figure of the pachuco. First, however, I will examine Adorno and Horkheimer's consequential essay, "The Culture Industry," underscoring the German intellectuals' homogenizing vision of culture and their understanding of Los Angeles as the center of this process. Third, I will provide a historical account of the pachuco. Fourth, I will analyze the figure of the pachuco as it appears in Paz's text, looking also at how his critics have discussed it. Later, these readings will be juxtaposed with the historical figure. Finally, I will show an intersection between Paz's analysis of the pachuco and Adorno's Culture Industry. The contrast between Paz and Adorno is truly striking. Despite both famed intellectuals using the same city as the matrix of their cultural analyses, the difference in their observations is stark, if not oppositional. Whilst Adorno chooses to notice a seeming uniformity in Los Angeles, which he will use to develop and corroborate his theory of what he defined as the "Culture Industry," Paz fixes his gaze on the excluded nature of an ostensibly marginal figure autochthonous to the streets of the City of Angels, ultimately providing the Mexican poet with the stepping stone from which to develop his examination of Mexico's character. The premise of my argument is that Paz's representation of the pachuco gives us a glimpse into an aspect of Los Angeles that is marked by resistance and singularity.

German Exiles: Theodor Adorno in Los Angeles

II

From the 1920s to the 1950s, an important number of exiled German intellectuals resided in Los Angeles. The likes of Nobel laureate Thomas Mann and musician and theorist Arnold Schoenberg were some of the most prestigious adopted Angelenos. Mann, taking up residence in Pacific Palisades, a coastal neighborhood, spent several years writing and producing some of his best-known work, such as *Doctor Faust* (1947). Despite the seeming absence of Californian or

American themes in his writing, *Doctor Faust*, his major work written at the time, Mann's interactions and friendship with Arnold Schoenberg inspired the fictional character of a German-American musician who appears in an important episode in the novel. This, unfortunately, would cement an animosity between the two, which would also affect other members of the German community of exiles in Los Angeles. The great German novelist, nonetheless, was one of the few who actually enjoyed his life in Southern California. As Mike Davis underlines:

> With few exceptions they complained bitterly about the absence of a European (or even Manhattan) *civitas* of public places, sophisticated crowds, historical auras and critical intellectuals. Amid so much open land there seemed to be no space that met their criteria of 'civilized urbanity.' Los Angeles […] was experienced as a cultural antithesis to nostalgic memories of pre-fascist Berlin or Vienna […] as the September song of exile wore on, Los Angeles became increasingly symbolized as an 'anti-city,' a Goby of suburbs. (Davis 47)

Los Angeles would be observed through this antithetical looking glass by important members of the German community of exiles

German philosopher and sociologist, Theodor Adorno, who resided in Los Angeles, from 1941 to 1947, was another central member of the group of *émigrés.* It was in Los Angeles that he, along with Max Horkheimer — fellow German exile— co-authored *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, his best-known work, which became the main text of the Frankfurt School. The most paradigmatic essay in the collection, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," would come directly out of the experiences and observations of both German intellectuals whilst in Los Angeles. As Harvey Gross points out,

> [a]lthough Adorno made few direct references to the realities of American life, he

> was sensitive to the strangeness and unfamiliarity of his milieu: it was in Los Angeles that Adorno and Horkheimer accumulated those impressions of American popular culture that formed the matter of their most notorious essay, 'The Culture Industry.' (Gross 344)

Adorno would use Los Angeles as the starting point from which to extrapolate his vision and theory of culture and modernity.

Although Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal essay does not explicitly mention Los Angeles, the enigmatic opening of the text is a depiction of the city's landscape[4]:

> The older buildings around the concrete centers already look like slums, and the new bungalows on the outskirts, like the films structures at international trade fairs, sing praises of technical progress while inviting their users to throw them away after short use like tin cans. But the town-planning projects, which are supposed to perpetuate individuals as autonomous units in hygienic small apartments, subjugate them only more completely to their adversary, the total power of capital. (Horkheimer and Adorno 94)

In other words, Adorno and Horkheimer view Los Angeles as the paradigmatic example of the culture industry, where culture "infect[s] everything with sameness" (Horkheimer Adorno 94). Besides noticing that seeming homogeneity, Los Angeles —Hollywood— is also a metonym for the film industry, which is a medium that they vehemently denounced as validating and propagating the logic of the culture industry: "Film and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce" (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). As critic Russell A. Berman

[4] Mike Davis points this out too: "The sun also rises over Mount Hollywood in Adorno and Horkheimer's famous opening section of 'The Culture Industry'" (Davis 48).

indicates, “it was also possible to imagine Los Angeles as an extension of the film industry soon after the studios were established in the second decade of the twentieth century” (Berman 55). Horkheimer and Adorno pay particular attention to the mass commercialization of popular media, such as film, where differences are effaced: “The schematic nature of this procedure […] is evident from the fact that mechanically differentiated products are ultimately all the same […] It is no different with the offerings of Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer” (Horkheimer and Adorno 97). Film, according to Adorno, is an integral part of the mass deception:

> The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production […] Since the abrupt introduction of the sound film, mechanical duplication has become entirely subservient to this objective. According to this tendency, life is to be made indistinguishable from the sound film […] Far more strongly than the theater of illusion, film denies its audience any dimension in which they might roam in imagination. (Horkheimer Adorno 99)

Film, or more specifically sound film, is, therefore, seen as withering the “imagination” and “spontaneity” of the consumer of culture. Horkheimer and Adorno were highly critical and wary of the commodification of culture; ultimately, they hinted at a dreadful parallel between the practices of Hollywood and the methods of control in Nazi Germany.

Mike Davis, however, is critical of Adorno and Horkheimer’s interpretation and observations:

> In Los Angeles […] the exiles thought they were encountering America in its

> purest, most prefigurative moment. Largely ignorant of, or indifferent to, the peculiar historical dialectic that had shaped Southern California, they allowed their image of first sight to become its own myth: Los Angeles as the crystal ball of capitalism's future. And, confronted with this figure, they experienced all the more painfully the death agony of Enlightenment Europe. The Frankfurt critique of the 'Culture Industry' became the primary theoretical representation of this encounter. (Davis 48)

Davis underlines the shortsightedness of the German intellectuals' reading of what they conceived as genuine American culture. The American scholar's argument is compelling, as Adorno and Horkheimer paint all cultural and artistic artifacts, regardless of their origin and authorship, with the same generalizing brush stroke. This, especially, is made apparent in their skepticism, hostility, and rejection of sound film. However, understood in its historical context, the full-fledged war in Europe, the overly homogenizing and generalizing and alarmist tone of Adorno and Horkheimer's text can be understood. Nevertheless, it does not take away from the fact that their seminal essay profoundly shaped the way American culture and Hollywood, synonymous of Los Angeles, was perceived.

For Davis, Adorno and Horkheimer's vision is centered solely on Hollywood, which demonstrates the deficiency in their extrapolation. "The Culture Industry," therefore, would contribute to the mythification of Los Angeles as a city of counterfeit urbanity and decadence:

> Exhibiting no apparent interest in the wartime turmoil in the local aircraft plants nor inclined to appreciate the vigorous nightlife of Los Angeles's Central Avenue ghetto, Horkheimer and Adorno focused instead on the little-single family boxes that seemed to absorb the world-historic mission of the proletariat into family-

> centered consumerism under the direction of radio jingles and *Life* magazine ads. (Davis 48)

The acknowledgement of certain parts and aspects of the city that they chose to ignore perhaps would have qualified their cultural observations. However, more importantly, Davis suggests that the German exiles' encounter with Southern California "ultimately transformed the terms for understanding the impact of Modernism, at least in the minds of the intellectuals influenced by the Institute for Social Research" (Davis 48). Los Angeles became the full-fledged incarnation of capitalism's future, essentially a capitalist nightmare. Adorno's caveat was also repeated in a 1945 lecture given in the United States entitled "What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts," where he emphasizes that "the arts […] as far as they have contact with the broad masses, above all moving pictures, radio, and popular literature, will indulge in a kind of streamlining in order to please the customer, a sort of pseudo-Americanization" (Jeneman 385). It was through pseudo-Americanization, experienced firsthand in Los Angeles, that Adorno thought fascism could survive in Europe, and hence his fear of the commodification of culture.

Adorno's over-generalizing observation of American culture, mediated by Los Angeles, seems to have to do with the fact of how he felt while living in Southern California. As Gross argues:

> It is important to know, if we propose to understand Adorno's Los Angeles years, that he consciously resisted every compulsion to 'adjust' to the American scene. He admitted that he was 'an extreme case …. By nature and personal history, I was unsuited for 'adjustment' in intellectual matters.' It is fair to say that Adorno, to sustain his intellectual integrity, and, more important, to retain a sense of who he was, clung with calculated stubbornness to the conditions of his exile. (Gross

343)

In *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951), a series of aphoristic writings, which are heavily permeated by the theme of exile, Adorno underlines the sense of estrangement:

> In his text the writer sets up house […] For the man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live. And he inevitably produces there […] the demand that he harden himself against self-pity includes the technique to counter any slackening of intellectual energy with utmost vigilance, and to eliminate everything that begins to encrust the work, that ambles idly along […] in the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing. (Adorno 87)

This sense of exile and exclusion was also exacerbated by the toxic and insular relationship of Adorno within the group of German émigrés. In the same book, the German sociologist explains:

> Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated […] he is astray […] His language has been expropriated, and the historical dimension that nourished his knowledge, sapped. This isolation becomes even worse through the formation of exclusive, politically controlled groups, suspicious of their members, hostile toward those branded as different […] Relations among outcasts are even more poisonous than amongst the residents. (Adorno 33)

Gross recounts, from his investigations about Adorno in Los Angeles, that there was a lot of jealousy and tension among group members and that, in fact, Adorno was considered persona non grata by some.

Mike Davis describes the isolation of the German exiles in the following manner: "Segregated from native Angelenos, the exiles composed a miniature society in a self-imposed ghetto, clinging to their old-world prejudices like cultural life-preservers" (Davis 47).

Notwithstanding the self-imposed isolation, the fact of the matter is that Adorno's heartfelt feelings about his exile and the dire political and social situation of Europe and home country affected him. On the centenary of Henrich Heine's death in 1956, Adorno gave a speech, which, as Gross highlights, resonates deeply with the way he felt and saw himself in exile:

> Heine's stereotypical theme, hopeless love, is a metaphor for homelessness; and the lyric which authenticates it, is a staining, an estrangement, and drags itself into this other realm experience. Today, the fate Heine suffered has literally become the common fate: homelessness has been inflicted on everyone. All, in language and being, have been damaged as the exile himself was. His word answers for homelessness: no longer is there a world of really liberated mankind – a world from which no one could be cast out. Heine's wound will close only in a society which has achieved reconciliation. (Gross 350)

Adorno's words resonate strongly with Octavio Paz's description of the pachuco and, ultimately, the solitude that is inflicted on all humankind:

> Pero el exilio, la expiación y la penitencia debe preceder a la reconciliación. Ni mexicanos ni norteamericanos hemos logrado esta reconciliación. Y lo que es más grave, temo que hayamos perdido el sentido mismo de toda actividad humana: asegurar la vigencia de un orden en que coincidan la conciencia y la inocencia, el hombre y la naturaleza […] Es posible que lo que llamamos pecado no sea sino la expresión mítica de la conciencia de nosotros mismos, de nuestra soledad. (Paz 30)

Perhaps we can think of Adorno's time in Los Angeles as a period where the German intellectual came face to face not only with his own solitude, his homelessness, but that of the world that

seemed to be disintegrating right before his eyes.

Historical Vision of the Pachuco

III

The pachuco's most striking aspect was the suit he used; a suit that caused uneasiness in American culture in the 1940s, at a time when the United States was in the midst of World War II and when the symptoms of the Great Depression of the 1930s were still being felt. Curiously enough, the emblematic clothes of the pachuco, the zoot-suit, did not only belong to that figure of Mexican origin, but also to other ethnic groups such as African Americans and Filipinos. However, it must be noted that it was Afro-American musical culture that truly influenced the rest, especially the Mexican Americans. As historian Douglas Henry Daniels states in his article "Los Angeles Zoot: Race 'Riot,' the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture," the "zoot-suit was associated with black urban youth when it appeared on the scene around 1940 […] this aspect of black urban culture and clothing style […] influenced Mexican American, Filipino, and American popular culture" (Daniels 99). The zoot-suit was an integral part of the jazz and jitterbug culture; nevertheless, a large sector of the Anglo population saw the suit as an affront to the values of American culture, associating it with crime and juvenile racial violence. As a matter of fact, the suit became the outfit for the African American and Latino musical worlds. The zoot-suit, however, was not merely an aesthetic prop; it was vital for dancing the jitterbug, as Daniels describes: "narrow cuffs prevented whirling jitterbug dancers and lindy hoppers from catching their shoes in them while loose-fitting coats and baggy pants permitted the acrobatic movements that were central to these types of jazz dance" (Daniels 105). Furthermore, the zoot-suit did not only make an appearance in the United States; as historian Mauricio Mazón describes, the "zoot-suit was an international phenomenon" (Mazón 7). This suit also appeared in

the streets of London where it was popularized by merchants that sold perishable goods during the war.

The zoot-suit phenomenon truly signaled the appearance of an urban identity characterized by the poor Latino, Black or Asian urban adolescent. The war distorted the process of maturity of the adolescent, and many young people had to conform to a reality where war was part of daily life. As Mazón asserts, in order to truly understand the dynamic of the pachuco, it is necessary to point out that the prototype of the ideal American young man was that of someone who served in the armed forces; therefore, the antagonized individual naturally became the pachuco who represented a problem to patriotic values of the nation. The pachuco symbolized the lack of commitment, loyalty, ambiguity and leisure culture:

> Zoot-suiters were nonsensical because among other things they took pride in their ambiguity. The narcissistic self-absorption of the zoot-suiter in a world of illusory omnipotentiality was in opposition to the modesty of individual selflessness attributed to the defense worker and the soldier. Zoot-suiters transgressed the patriotic ideals of commitment, integrity, and loyalty with non-commitment, incoherence, and defiance. They seemed to be simply marking time while the rest of the country intensified the war effort. If there was a commitment, it was to nothing more enduring than sporting the zoot-suit way of life, with the emphasis on exhibiting themselves and indulging in their favorite forms of entertainment. (Mazon 9)

This caused the conflict between the pachuco and Anglo culture to escalate. However, the animosity between these two groups began to grow in big part because of the press which, as Ashley Lucas signals in her article "Reinventing the Pachuco: The Radical Transformation from

the Criminalized to the Heroic in Luis Valdez's Play Zoot Suit," were much to blame for inciting the hatred and violence against adolescents of Mexican origin: "The media targeted young Mexican Americans in distinctive dress as major threat to the safety of Los Angeles […] the *pachucos* were portrayed in the media as perpetrators of violence with enormous potential for further violent behavior" (Lucas 64). The mass media caused tensions to rise and the Sleepy Lagoon is a clear example of this. In August of 1942, the body of José Díaz was found near a road close to the Sleepy Lagoon dam, frequented by various adolescents of Mexican origin because they were not allowed to swim in the public swimming pools of the city of Los Angeles. The police investigation lead to the imprisonment of seventeen young Mexican American men, who would later be indicted and unjustly put on trial for the death of Díaz. The case was highly manipulated by the press that demonized the detainees, affirming that they were agents of Hitler's Nazi regime, whose motives were to destabilize American society in order to give off a negative image of the United States to the rest of the world. In the words of historian Rodolfo Acuña: "The Sleepy Lagoon defendants became the prototype of the Mexican hoodlum as portrayed in the press" (Acuña 169). However, in 1944 with the help of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee spearheaded by highly influential figures like Orson Welles and Anthony Quinn, the young men were absolved and set free after having spent a couple of years in San Quentin prison, in Northern California; it was proven that the young men bore no responsibility for the death of José Díaz.

The Sleepy Lagoon trial was the precursor of the famous riots known as the "Zoot-suit Riots," in which United States marines, stationed in Los Angeles, left their bases with the sole intention of creating disturbances and physically assaulting young Mexican American people in the streets. Moreover, the Los Angeles police saw the pachucos or, better yet, adolescents of

Mexican origin, as a security problem and a danger to the safety of Angelenos and military personnel. Once more, the press played an important role in inciting the violence in these riots; there were front pages of newspapers that informed, twelve hours in advance, of the location and the time of the public raids, which resulted in the gathering of thousands of Angelenos (Mazón 23). The feeling of animosity became so strong that taxis offered their services, free of charge, to those locations. As Mazón asserts:

> Certainly among the more culpable were the newspapers. On one occasion a guideline was printed on how to unfrak the quarry, directions were printed […] on how to 'de-zoot' a boy: 'Grab a zooter [...] take off his pants and frock coat and tear them up or burn them […] trim the Argentine ducktail that goes with the screwy costume.' (Mazón 76)

The interesting fact about these raids was that, in comparison to other altercations in different parts of the United States, the zoot-suit riots only represented a kind of symbolic disturbance. There were no large confrontations nor deaths, just 150 injured. That same year, it is worth noting, there were also riots in Detroit between African Americans and Anglos that left thirty-four dead and hundreds of injured (Mazón 78). Despite the fact that the press and other sectors of society tried to hold the pachucos responsible for the public brawls in Los Angeles, this could not be further from the truth, quite the opposite, as their involvement was minimal.

An important element in understanding the relationship between the American servicemen and the pachuco, or Mexican American, is the ritual that the soldiers practiced on them when they captured a zoot suiter; the ritual consisted in stripping them of their clothes, which were later burned, and then shaving their heads:

> They were not degrading Mexican youth as much as they were aggressively

> mimicking and reenacting their own experience in basic training […] in their role of drill instructors the recruits transformed and reconstituted the identity of the zoot-suiters through a series of denunciations and the physical destruction of the artifacts that gave symbolic meaning to their identity – their hair and clothing. (Mazón 87)

According to Mazón, the American servicemen saw the pachuco as easy prey to assault and on whom to take out the trauma and frustration that they had endured in their initiation into military service. However, one could also deduce that their frustration came from seeing the pachuco enjoying a freedom that they did not have. It was a resentment that they had towards a being that moved along racial lines; as Anthony F. Macias underscores, "the pachucos showed their Mexican American peers how to negotiate mainstream Anglo culture with African American popular culture" (Macias 81). Nevertheless, the pachuco was seen as a problem of youth delinquency.

Daniels likens the identity problems of the pachuco to that of the adolescent, underscoring that the "the zoot-suit and argot represented an important stage in an adolescent male's development […] as some youth grew older and gave up the slang, they gave up the zoot-suit" (Daniels 111). Therefore, the pachuco would be an adolescent in the process of becoming an adult, an individual in the middle of formative transition. The pachuco, according to this historical vision, did not know exactly what he was, his only aspiration was to become an adult: "for the pachuco […] the zoot suit was a mask which permitted adolescents to present themselves as adults and as urban sophisticates […] when they became more certain of themselves, they abandoned this mask" (Daniels 111). The pachucos projected an image of freedom by being an adolescent that rejected an antagonizing culture, like the Anglo, and move

away from the culture that they no longer felt identified with; a freedom boasted during a time of full-fledged war, which deeply upset American society. For Daniels, the pachuco "was rebelling against Mexican folk culture, which they felt had little relevance to their world, as well as their parents and the conventions of respectable society" (Daniels 130). And as Mazón highlights, Mexicans were seen as "good field workers, but impossible adolescents" (Mazón 66). Moreover, as Javier Durán explains in his article "The 'Pachuco' in Mexican Popular Culture: Germán Valdez's Tin Tan," the strategy of the pachuco "was not silence, but loudness" (Durán 43). His suit was a form of visual protest, loud and strong. The fact that the pachuco had a rebellious and loud essence derived more from being an adolescent in a society that shunned him. The problem of the pachuco derived from his conflictive transition into adulthood, in maturing in a country that was emerging from the depression and that was in the midst of a world war.

The apocryphal views and opinions about the pachuco were ignited by the sensationalism of the press, which spearheaded a slandering campaign against American citizens of Mexican descent; when, in reality, the true aggressors and instigators were the newspapers and military men that sought altercations with Mexican Americans. Nonetheless, the pachuco became a symbol of ambiguity and mystery, a figure that, analyzing its history, was mythified**.** A clear example of this is that, during the Sleepy Lagoon case, major Edward Duran Ayres, of the Los Angeles Sheriff Department, testified in front of the grand jury that genes of Mexicans were "responsible for Mexican juvenile delinquency and violence" (Mazón 22). In other words, Ayres' argument was that Mexicans came from the Aztec race, an extremely violent civilization that practiced human sacrifice and were indifferent to death; therefore, the young people of Mexican descent still maintained that worship to death and violence. The absurd allegations of Ayres show that the dangerous and violent image of the pachuco was, in reality, nothing more

than an illusion created by American xenophobia and sensationalism. The pachuco represented the youth that was against the rigid American establishment; this rebelliousness was manifested in their clothes and appearance.

What the Critics Say: Paz's Pachuco

IV

"El pachuco y otros extremos" perhaps remains as one of the most contentious sections of *El laberinto de la soledad.* Critics have been condemnatory of the way that Paz discusses the pachuco. Arturo Madrid-Barela, in his article "In Search of an Authentic Pachuco: An Interpretive Essay," dismisses Paz's interpretation as being decontextualized of its historical time, asserting that "[…] one would expect a minimal historical background to back up his conclusions. But Paz was not interested in examining the historical causes of the conflictive existence of the Pachuco and even less its possible solutions" (Madrid-Barela 37). Madrid-Barela emphasizes the level of abstraction in Paz's depiction of the pachuco. Jorge Aguilar Mora in his book, *La divina pareja: historia y mito en Octavio Paz* (1978), has a similar critique of Paz's treatment of the pachuco, hinting at a degree of depth in the Mexican poet's analysis:

> En el caso de la oposición mexicano-norteamericano, ésta se presenta tan maniquea, tan unidimensional, tan general, que termina por no tener ningún contacto con la realidad. Digo finalmente que todos esos rasgos son mecanismos y no posturas ontológicas, son epifenómenos y no esencias. (Aguilar Mora 42)

Moreover, Javier Durán in his article, "Border Crossings: Images of the Pachuco in Mexican Literature," is of the opinion that Paz's representation of the pachuco is incendiary: "Paz takes the Pachuco and dresses him up with a costume and a mask. The masking of the Pachuco allows him to place him in his museum of imaginary national oddities […] And this masking also allows

Paz to justify the attitude of U.S. Society toward the Pachuco and the violent campaigns against him at the time" (Durán 145). In other words, Durán sees Paz "conveniently transform[ing] the Pachuco not only into a hybrid, but also into a myth," which makes the critic see the Mexican poet as a "high priest of Mexican culture." (Durán 145). These denunciations of Paz's pachuco range from a mythification and abstraction of this polemical figure to an inherent disdain of Mexican-American culture. These scholars see Paz's pachuco as a passive entity, stripped of political agency and as a merely instinctive and menacing figure.

On the other hand, however, scholar Maarten van Delden questions and defies these entirely negative readings of Paz's pachuco. In his piece "El rebelde en Paz," van Delden qualifies Paz's seemingly negative representation of the pachuco, as asserted by the lopsided critiques, by contextualizing it within the text itself and with an important theme in the Nobel laureate's writing: rebelliousness. As is indicated by the title, van Delden suggests that the Mexican poet's favorable vision of the rebels of the 1960s help us better understand his analysis of the pachuco at the end of the 1940s. He underscores the ubiquity and significance of rebelliousness in Paz's writing and thinking, showing, therefore, contrary to the most outspoken critics, that the pachuco, in fact, must be reevaluated in a positive light; in other words, he highlights how the pachuco, for Paz, was the perfect embodiment of the rebel: "El pachuco es seguramente la versión más notable de la figura del rebelde en la obra de Paz" (van Delden 1). Van Delden, ultimately, offers a more nuanced and comprehensive evaluation of Paz's pachuco.

Paz *en* Los Angeles

V

In 1943, after being awarded the prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, Octavio Paz left Mexico to live in the United States. This would be the beginning of an extended period during

which Paz lived abroad. It was in 1945, in American territory, when he joined the Mexican diplomatic service. From 1946 to 1951, Paz would live in Paris, where he wrote *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950). However, Paz's first destination in the United States was San Francisco. His next stop was Los Angeles,[5] which was not all that unfamiliar to him, since it had been his home at a young age, when his father was exiled during the Mexican Revolution. In fact, Paz's father was Emiliano Zapata's representative in Los Angeles:

> My father was a political exile during the revolution. He had to leave Mexico and take refuge in the United States. He went ahead and then we joined him in California, in Los Angeles, where we stayed for almost two years. On the first day of school, I had a fight with my American schoolmates. I couldn't speak a word of English, and they laughed because I couldn't say *spoon*—during lunch hour. But when I came back to Mexico on my first day of school I had another fight. This time with my Mexican classmates and for the same reason—because I was a foreigner! I discovered I could be a foreigner in both countries. (MacAdam "The Art of Poetry No.42")

This quote, from a 1990 interview that Paz gave to the *Paris Review*, is quite telling, for his words evoke the essence of his examination of the pachuco.

As mentioned before, Paz's depiction of the pachuco in the first chapter of *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, "El pachuco y otros extremos," has been heavily debated by critics. On one hand, the current of critics that sees Paz's portrayal of the pachuco as derogatory has denounced its seeming demeaning, elitist, and harmful language. On the other, there are scholars that set Paz's

[5] As Jaime Perales Contreras highlights in his book *Octavio Paz y Su Círculo Intelectual*, in 1944, the Mexican poet sought to make a living by pitching ideas for movies in Hollywood (Contreras 54).

rendering of the pachuco in the context of the rest of his work, revealing the nuances of his political and philosophical thought, casting, ultimately, a more positive light on the representation of that marginal figure. What our reading aims to achieve, fundamentally, is to further contribute to that vein of criticism that attempts to read Paz's representation of the pachuco in a more nuanced manner. In fact, critics have noted and discussed some aspects of the figure of the pachuco, however, without discussing how it relates to Los Angeles. What follows, hence, is an attempt to interpret Paz's reading of the pachuco as a consequential reading of Los Angeles, which goes against the grain of the dominant discourse.

The purpose of our reading is to think about Paz's representation of the pachuco as ultimately a representation of Los Angeles in the 1940s, which, in my opinion, would not only be a contribution to the literary studies about the City of Angels but also an enrichment of our perspective of the Mexican poet's polemical essay. At a time when many writers and scholars, foreign and local, were writing and thinking about Los Angeles through the heavy influence of the already mentioned apocryphal *noir* and *counterfeit urbanity* sensibilities, Paz, contrary to this vein, explores a side of the city widely ignored. The mere fact of writing about the pachuco, a marginal figure in the Los Angeles city landscape, is in itself a significant gesture.

Paz begins his examination of the pachuco by highlighting something quite particular about the terrain of Los Angeles:

> Al iniciar mi vida en los Estados Unidos residí algún tiempo en Los Ángeles, ciudad habitada por más de un millón de personas de origen mexicano. A primera vista sorprende al viajero — además de la pureza del cielo y de la fealdad de las dispersas y ostentosas construcciones — la atmósfera vagamente mexicana de la ciudad, imposible de apresar con palabras o conceptos. (Paz 15)

Paz points out the ugliness of the city's architectural landscape, referring to the ostentatious structures, however, that seems to merit less attention than the Mexicanism in the streets. But what can we make of Paz's words? This passage could be read in different ways. Van Delden interprets Paz's words as an affirmation that Los Angeles is, in fact, a Mexican city and not an American one, which is precisely what might surprise a traveler who is visiting Southern California. Other critics, such as Madrid-Barela, interpret Paz's description of the Mexicanism of the city in a completely opposing manner; for him, what Paz highlights is a surprising lack of Mexican presence. Furthermore, Madrid-Barela, who reads Paz's interpretation of the pachuco as highly negative and harmful, argues that the lack of Mexicanism noted by the Mexican poet was the cause of self-segregation:

> Overwhelmed by Anglo America many Mexicans assimilated and acculturated, forgot their language, anglicized their names, and ostracized their own people. Their "Americanness" came to consist in their imitation of the Anglo American middle class and the denial of their past, both products of the social pressures generated by the American myths of Melting Pot and Anglo American superiority. That 'furtive air' was the result of the chauvinism and racism of Anglo America, whose contempt for Mexico and Mexicans was already over a century old when Paz arrived in Los Angeles. It was a manifestation of the fear of being found out, even when the protective coloration of dress and monolingualism overcame endorsable skin coloration and physical features. Mexicans were tolerated only when their labor was in demand. What better proof than their less fortunate and more visible brothers had lately suffered their most recent deportation during the Great Depression of the 1930's. (Madrid-Barela 36)

But even if we accept Madrid-Barela's interpretation, we would run into some issues. The problem in Madrid-Barela's analysis in trying to explain the "furtive air" of Mexicanism, which he does to prove Paz's observation as being socially and historically misinformed, is the fact that he fails to mention the actual policies employed by the city of Los Angeles to extirpate and cleanse the metropolis of the perceived perilous presence of Blacks and Mexicans. As Norman Klein underlines, "Mexican presence was worrisome, more than ten times what it had been in 1910. From Boyle Heights all the way across northern and western downtown, Mexicans seemed to cast a racially dark shadow across the future of the entire region" (Klein 45). The fear mongering, fueled by white racist paranoia, propagated the rhetoric of an infectious decaying city ridden by crime. The idyllic sunshine city, a myth sold by the boosters at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, began to be thought, in fact apocryphally, in the 1930s and 1940s, as a place of total degradation. This far from the truth image of Los Angeles, also expressed in literature and film — hard-boiled novels and *noir* films —, had a real social impact, which caused drastic changes in its urban planning projects. Freeways, thought of as a cleansing mechanism for the disease-stricken city, would become ubiquitous starting in the 1940s; more impoverished parts of the city were seen as "tooth decay," as Klein asserts: "Communities were not described as a delicate balance of institutions, damaged by high unemployment, declining commercial streets, growing absentee landlordism, or the loss of political, religious, and cultural centers of power. Instead, communities were massive urban cavities to scoop out, in order to restore a healthy tax base to the city" (Klein 41). These neighborhoods, described as disease-stricken, were, in fact, majority Mexican or ethnic. Hence, rather than interpreting the vague Mexicanism he encountered in the city as ignorance of the plight of Mexican Americans, or failure to acknowledge it all together, Paz's description and

emphasis on that Mexican vagueness should be read as part of Los Angeles's disquieting history. Let's not forget that, in the following description of that hazy Mexicanism, Paz alludes to a disturbing historical fact of the city:

> Esta mexicanidad — gusto por los adornos, descuido y fausto, negligencia, pasión y reserva — flota en el aire. Y digo que flota porque no se mezcla ni se funde con el otro mundo, el mundo norteamericano, hecho de precisión y eficacia. Flota, pero no se opone; se balancea, impulsada por el viento, a veces desgarrada como una nube, otras erguida como un cohete que asciende. Se arrastra, se pliega, se expande, se contrae, duerme o sueña, hermosura harapienta. Flota: no acaba de ser, no acaba de desaparecer. (Paz 15)

Paz's description of that Mexicanism sounds awfully kitschy, which perhaps brings to mind the Plaza area in Downtown, today known as Olvera Street. That quaint area of Los Angeles, however, has an interesting history:

> […] As the equivalent of godlessness in many white Angelinos' minds, there were more of the 'Mex,' even the 'Negro.' But noted most anxiously was the growing Mexican population downtown, in the wake of the Mexican Revolution. Around the Plaza (particularly Calle de Negro, translated as Nigger Alley) the non-white presence was extremely evident; it was only a few blocks north of major offices for insurance, real estate, oil and banking. The Plaza district was described in practically every guide book as the hub of non-white L.A. Sonoratown, Chinatown, and Little Tokyo crossed the Plaza, as did the bawdy ten to fifteen vaudeville and burlesque houses along Main. After 1930, the Plaza was emptied in stages, then converted into a tourist imaginary about Mexican crafts. The

master erasure of downtown had begun. (Klein 76)

Hence, contextualized with the city's history, Paz's description of that kitschy Mexicanism gains a political and social undertone, which, one can say, alludes, one way or another, to the troublesome and racist urban planning policy of Los Angeles in the 1930s and 1940s.

Paz vs. Adorno

VI

In the words of Mike Davis, Adorno and the rest of the Frankfurt School saw "Los Angeles as the crystal ball of capitalism's future" (Davis 40). This view of the city was informed by what they saw as the seemingly overbearing homogenizing power of the Culture Industry. And Hollywood, being the mecca of film, a medium considered conducive to the logic and perpetuation of the Culture Industry, was seen as emblematic of Los Angeles. While Adorno observed Los Angeles as the incarnation of the capitalist logic that extirpated differences in culture and society, Paz, in that same city, centers his analytical gaze on an Angeleno subject that seems to be and do the complete opposite of what is expected of him by normative societal standards. In other words, Paz, contrary to the German intellectual, was fixated on an aspect of the city that was emblematic of difference, resistance and rebellion.

Just as Adorno extrapolates his theory about the Culture Industry from his time living in Los Angeles, which will inform his view on modernity, Paz also extrapolates his views on the Mexican character from his observation of the pachuco in the streets of the City of Angels. As we saw, Paz references the Mexicanism that he encountered in Los Angeles; a Mexicanism that, as he describes, floats but never becomes, because it doesn't blend in or disappear in its entirety: "Algo semejante ocurre con los mexicanos que uno encuentra en la calle. Aunque tengan muchos años de vivir allí, usen la misma ropa, hablen el mismo idioma y sientan vergüenza de su origen,

nadie los confundiría con los norteamericanos auténticos" (Paz 15). Paz uses his initial description of Los Angeles to formulate an analogy with the experience of the pachuco. However, according to Paz, what forbids this individual to fully immerse or assimilate completely as other Americans is his surreptitious and restless air: "Lo que me parece distinguirlos del resto de la población es su aire furtivo e inquieto, de seres que se disfrazan, de seres que temen la mirada ajena" (Paz 15). What distinguished them, for Paz, was the very nature of their condition, not necessarily their physical traits and characteristics: "Y no se crea que los rasgos físicos son tan determinants como vulgarmente se piensa" (Paz 15). Hence, one can say that Paz sees the pachuco's nature as an act of resistance, at the very least if one follows his logic. The pachucos refused to play the role that they were given by American society.

However, there are critics who do not see Paz's point of view; instead they highlight the historical dimension of the conflict. Mardid-Barela, as we have seen already, asserts that the integration of the pachuco to Anglo popular culture was not possible because of the racism and discrimination suffered by the citizens of Mexican origin; moreover, he criticizes Paz for not being interested in examining the historical reasons nor its possible solutions (Madrid-Barela 37). But contrary to what Madrid-Barela asserts, Paz does acknowledge the fact that the hegemonic culture rejects the pachuco: "incapaces de asimilar una civilización que, por lo demás los rechaza, los pachucos no han encontrado más respuesta a la hostilidad ambiente que esta exasperada afirmación de su personalidad" (Paz 16). Paz's interest, however, is in the pachuco's response, rather than the rejection of Anglo culture. A few lines down he compares the African American experience with that of the Mexican American:

> Otras comunidades reaccionan de modo distinto; los negros, por ejemplo, perseguidos por la intolerancia racial, se esfuerzan por 'pasar la línea' e ingresar a

> la sociedad. Quieren ser como los otros ciudadanos. Los mexicanos han sufrido una respuesta menos violenta, pero lejos de intentar una problemática adaptación a los modelos ambientes, afirman sus diferencias, las subrayan, procuran hacerlas notables. (Paz 17)

Although it may not be sufficient for critics like Madrid-Barela, it is not as if Paz completely disregards the social and historical context. He is just simply more interested in underscoring the response of the pachuco. It is important to note that, as we saw earlier, African Americans were also an integral part of the counterculture of the zoot-suit, where the traits of being poor, urban, and coming from a racial minority were sufficient motivation to oppose the Anglo establishment that excluded them from the cultural and social sphere. Paz was aware of this and is correct when he points out that the confrontations between African Americans and Whites were much more violent, leaving several hundred casualties.

The point for Paz, therefore, is to underline the pachuco's obstinate will to be different, which seems to be unfazed despite the rejection:

> No importa conocer las causas de este conflicto y menos saber si tienen remedio o no. En muchas partes existen minorías que no gozan de las mismas oportunidades que el resto de la población. Lo característico del hecho reside en este obstinado querer ser distinto, en esta angustiosa tensión con que el mexicano desvalido —huérfano de valedores y de valores— afirma sus diferencias frente al mundo. (Paz 17)

Paz considers the pachuco's relentless drive to be different as the key component in understanding his particular response. However, that response is also informed by the seeming tension between his lost Mexican heritage and values. Hence, the negation of Mexican culture is

also essential in his affirmation to be different. Nevertheless, there seems to be a paradox in that search:

> Pero los 'pachucos' no reivindican su raza ni la nacionalidad de sus antepasados. A pesar de que su actitud revela una obstinada y casi fanática voluntad de ser, esa voluntad no afirma nada concreto sino la decisión — ambigua, como se verá— de no ser como los otros que lo rodean. El 'pachuco' no quiere volver a su origen mexicano; tampoco—al menos en apariencia— desea fundirse a la vida norteamericana. Todo en él es impulso que se niega a sí mismo, nudo de contradicciones, enigma. (Paz 16)

The pachuco's rejection, therefore, is seemingly two-fold. In other words, the pachuco's assertion to be different is such that, as Paz describes, it has no specific agenda other than to accentuate his distinctness. The pachuco's impulse is mere negation. This description resonates strongly with the first lines of Paz's chapter where he discusses the identity problem that afflicts all people in their adolescence.

It is important to point out that Paz starts off his argument ruminating about the inherent problem of identity that people undergo during their adolescence, stating that the adolescent is a being that cannot transcend his solitude because he is in constant vacillation between his infancy and youth:

> Casi siempre esta revelación se sitúa en la adolescencia. El descubrimiento de nosotros mismos se manifiesta como un sabernos solos; entre el mundo y nosotros se abre una impalpable, transparente muralla: la de nuestra conciencia […] el adolescente, vacila entre la infancia y la juventud, queda suspenso un instante ante la infinita riqueza del mundo. El adolescente se asombra de ser […]

> La singularidad de ser —pura sensación en el niño se transforma en problema y pregunta, en conciencia interrogante. (Paz 9)

In these first pages, Paz underlines the dilemma of the adolescent, a problem that leads to his solitude, a solitude that the child and the adult can escape, but not the adolescent**,** precisely because he does not have the tools to transcend it. This is significant because Paz likens the pachuco's problem of identity to that of the adolescent which, as seen earlier, was the way a great part of American society saw him: as an inconvenient and troublesome adolescent, a young person with a lack of commitment and an ambiguous existence, a dangerous individual for not having a well-defined character. But this analogy between the pachuco and the adolescent, as two beings whose singular existence brings them into conflict with the surrounding world, is also extrapolated to nations: "a los pueblos en trance de crecimiento les ocurre algo parecido. Su ser se manifiesta como interrogación: ¿qué somos y cómo realizaremos eso que somos? […] Frente a circunstancias diversas, las respuestas pueden variar y con ellas el carácter nacional, que se pretendía inmutable" (Paz 11). Paz, therefore, underscores that the Mexican was going through a self-reflective state, which, according to him, was to be expected after having suffered and lived through the Mexican Revolution.

What stands out, however, is the two-fold negation of the pachuco as described by Paz. In fact, the importance in likening the pachuco to an adolescent lies in the impulsive essence of that double rejection. In other words, despite the pachuco's seeming obstinate negation, the decision to affirm his distinctiveness stems from a seemingly genuine stance, free from ideology. This is a significant stance because even though it may not vindicate his past, as Paz states, the mere act of affirming his particularity by rejecting to participate in two imposing cultures is, like it or not, an act of resistance, for better or worse. This seeming failure to participate particularly in the

hegemonic culture, therefore, becomes all the more important, because, through the pachuco, we gain a richer social and cultural picture of Los Angeles in the 1940s. The pachuco becomes a window through which we can see a more nuanced representation of Los Angeles, which was often lost in the dominant discourse about the city.

But how do we conciliate this reading with Paz's statements regarding the pachuco's resistance to Mexican and Anglo values as being futile? After all, some critics, such as Daniels, have a similar point of view: "the zoot-suiters felt the injustices of racism and poverty but lacked a program or set of ideas about improving society" (Daniels 110). There are, in fact, thinkers and writers in the Chicano movement that see Paz as in important figure, despite the critiques he has received because of *El Laberinto de la Soledad*. Luis Leal, in his article "Octavio Paz and the Chicano," considers that Paz "provided some framework from which to begin to determine ourselves, in an intellectual sense, what were some of the things that made a Chicano a Chicano" (Leal 121). However, I am of the opinion that the pachuco's refusal to participate in either one culture is an act of resistance unto itself. The affirmation of refusing to be Mexican or American, at a time when war was raging and racial discrimination was rampant and systematic, qualifies as a significant gesture of resistance, despite the lack of a political program. This absence of ideology or political consciousness, however, will be important in our assessment of the pachuco, as we will explore in the following paragraphs.

Paz sees the seeming singularity of the pachuco as being responsible for the Anglo American backlash: "La irritación del norteamericano procede, a mi juicio, de que ve en el pachuco un ser mítico y por lo tanto virtualmente peligroso. Su peligrosidad brota de su singularidad. Todos coinciden en ver en él algo híbrido, perturbador y fascinante […]" (Paz 19). It is precisely the pachuco's singularity that becomes a threat to the Anglo American

establishment. Paz's reading, therefore, is not far from the manner that historians see the conflict between the pachucos and Anglo culture, for as we saw earlier, the mainstream Anglo American society perceived the pachuco as a menace and danger to society; moreover, as Paz signals, the pachuco's mythification only exacerbated the overly apocryphal representations about him. As Paz underlines:

> En torno suyo se crea una constelación de nociones ambivalentes: su singularidad parece nutrirse de poderes alternativamente nefastos o benéficos. Unos le atribuyen virtudes eróticas poco comunes; otros, una perversión que no excluye la agresividad. Figura portadora del amor y la dicha o del horror y la abominación, el pachuco parece encarnar la libertad, el desorden, lo prohibido. (Paz19)

The accumulated representations of the pachuco, as Paz stresses, are contradictory, suggesting unique erotic virtues and showcasing the violent and aggressive nature at the same time. Nevertheless, these sensationalist representations were not innocuous; they served as a mechanism to cleanse the city of the seemingly poor and Mexican population.

There are critics, such as Javier Durán, that also point to Paz's rendition of the pachuco as mythifying (Durán 145). But the simple fact that Paz calls out the highly contradictory representations of American society, when discussing the pachuco, is a testament that he acknowledges the treacherous readings of the Mexican American subject. Although there are parts in Paz's description of the pachuco that are hard to swallow, such as calling him "un clown siniestro," overall, Paz's analysis of the pachuco aims to do the opposite of what his detractors call him out on (Paz 15). He does state, after all, that, "Queramos o no, estos seres son mexicanos, uno de los extremos a que puede llegar el mexicano" (Paz 16). Paz's analysis of the pachuco is an attempt to understand the dynamic of a figure that we could all sympathize with or

relate to, one way or another. As Jorge Capetillo-Ponce underscores in his essay, "The Walls of the Labyrinth: Mapping Octavio Paz's Sociology through George Simmel's Method," the "[…] the overall ambiance of the Labyrinth […] as we read about the *Pachuco* […] takes on for us the quality of any marginalized, isolated human being living in any part of the world" (Capetillo-Ponce 166). Therefore, the pachuco's struggle is universal, like that of the adolescent or a new country or any disenfranchised human being.

As a result, we have in the pachuco, according to Paz's reading, an individual who embodies multiple contradictory representations. It is the pachuco's singularity that makes him the target of aggression but also of desire. However, according to Paz, that is part of the dynamic that the pachuco pines for: "Pasivo y desdeñoso, el pachuco deja que se acumulen sobre su cabeza todas estas representaciones contradictorias, hasta que, no sin dolorosa autosatisfacción, estallan en una pelea de cantina, en un *raid* o en un motín" (Paz 19). In other words, the cat and mouse game is something that he seeks as it will provide a sort of redemption: "Entonces, en la persecución, alcanza su autenticidad, su verdadero ser, su desnudez suprema, de paria, de hombre que no pertenece a parte alguna" (Paz 19). The Mexican sees the explosion of violence as coming full circle: "El ciclo, que empieza con la provocación, se cierra: ya está listo para la redención, para el ingreso a la sociedad que lo rechazaba. Ha sido su pecado y su escándalo; ahora, que es víctima, se le reconoce al fin como lo que es: su producto, su hijo. Ha encontrado al fin nuevos padres" (Paz 19). This is significant because Paz will extrapolate from this notion of the explosion of violence the idea, not only for the pachucos but for all humanity, that it is in those moments of tragedy where, momentarily, mankind can finally break free from the solitude that afflicts every living human being. As Paz states: "El 'pachuco' es la presa que se adorna para llamar la atención de los cazadores. La persecución lo redime y rompe su soledad: su salvación

depende del acceso a esa misma sociedad que aparenta negar. Soledad y pecado, comunión y salud, se convierten en términos equivalentes" (Paz 20). Some may find inappropriate to reduce the conflict between the pachuco and Anglo American culture to a hunting analogy, where the prey, in this case the "other," is desirous of the chase, without taking into consideration the hegemonic power at play. Nevertheless, following Paz's reasoning, one can say that the pachuco's gesture, of affirming his singularity, does not necessarily imply a desire to be the same or to integrate but an impulse for acceptance, to be simply acknowledged. I don't think Paz's words imply an implicit or unconscious aspiration for sameness but, in fact, for acceptance of those differences. It is not necessarily a desire for full assimilation but acknowledgment. It is something universal and not exclusive to the pachuco.

Paz considers that the ways of the pachuco of entering American society are "secretos y arriesgados," because, stripped of their traditional culture, the "pachuco se afirma un instante como soledad y reto" (Paz 19). In other words, the pachuco's gesture is defiant as it has no intention in assimilating into American culture. As Paz describes so vividly:

> El 'pachuco' se lanza al exterior […] para retarlo. Gesto suicida, pues el 'pachuco' no afirma nada, no defiende nada, excepto su exasperada voluntad de no-ser. No es una intimidad que se vierte, sino una llaga que se muestra, una herida que se exhibe. Una herida que también es un adorno bárbaro, caprichoso y grotesco; una herida que se ríe de sí misma y que se engalana para ir de cacería. (Paz 20)

Although his words may appear to be disdainful, it is precisely that obstinate affirmation of "not-being" that makes the pachuco stand out, inasmuch as that simple proclamation is an act of resistance unto itself. Because that gesture, whether it is taunting and inflammatory, will provide the pachuco with the recognition of his presence in the world. Paz interprets the seeming

provoking gesture of the pachuco's singularity as suicidal; however, my reading of these words do not carry a negative connotation, because "suicidal," suggests, at least to me, an extraordinarily strong determination or belief. Hence, the pachuco's so-called perilous and suicidal provocation is nothing more than an affirmation of his mere existence. Moreover, one has to qualify the severity that the word "suicidal" may connote overall in *El laberinto de la soledad*.

In the chapter "Todos Santos, Día de Muertos," Paz describes the relationship that the Mexican has with death and life: "La indiferencia del mexicano ante la muerte se nutre de su indiferencia ante la vida […] el mexicano no solamente postula la intranscendencia del morir, sino la del vivir" (Paz 60). However, Paz does not assume this indifference to life or death as inherently negative, on the contrary, he understands, for example, the worship of death by the Mexican as something completely positive: "la muerte es un espejo que refleja las vanas gesticulaciones de la vida" (Paz 56). For Paz, death would be something akin to a self-reflective mechanism that makes an objective critique of life possible. To stare at death right in the eyes, in other words, is to be reminded of the trivialities of life. Death makes it possible to put everything into perspective. The metaphor of death as a critical revelatory mirror of life calls to mind Paz's assertion about the "suicidal" gesture or open wound: "una herida que se ríe de sí misma" (Paz 20). What is important to highlight is that the "suicidal" gesture, at face value being negative, can be thought, in fact, as a positive aspect; because that indifference to and acceptance of death, "suicide," only reveals the critical nature of the pachuco's gesture. Better yet, describing it as a wound that makes fun of itself qualifies Paz's words, for it emphasizes the self-critical nature of the pachuco's gesture. Paz exalts the Mexican's relationship with death precisely because it provides a self-critical output, which reveals the banality of certain life experiences, and also the

pachuco's whose, conscious or unconscious, seeming "suicidal" gesture is an act of self-criticism. It is worth mentioning that, unlike the Mexican or the pachuco, Paz sees the American avoidance of death in a very negative light:

> No sería más exacto decir que los norteamericanos no desean tanto conocer la realidad como utilizarla? En algunos casos —por ejemplo, ante la muerte— no sólo no quieren conocerla sino que visiblemente evitan su idea […] así pues, el realismo americano es de una especie muy particular y su ingenuidad no excluye el disimulo y aun la hipocresía […] pues consiste en la negación de todos aquellos aspectos de la realidad que nos parecen desagradables, irracionales o repugnantes. (Paz 25)

American culture's evasion of death places the Mexican fascination with death in a more favorable light. Hence, unlike the American who suppresses death, the pachuco's act is one full of self-criticism. Moreover, one cannot help but to underscore the times that the self-reflective theme or topic is of importance to the Mexican poet.

In the beginning of the chapter "El pachuco y otros extremos," Paz discusses the signifance of self-reflection:

> […] me parece reveladora la insistencia con que en ciertos períodos los pueblos se vuelven sobre sí mismos y se interrogan. Despertar a la historia significa adquirir conciencia de nuestra singularidad, momento de reposo reflexivo antes de entregarnos al hacer. 'Cuando soñamos que soñamos está próximo el despertar', dice Novalis. No importa, pues, que las respuestas que demos a nuestras preguntas sean luego corregidas por el tiempo; también el adolescente ignora las futuras transformaciones de ese rostro que ve en el agua. (Paz 12)

Following Paz's own logic, therefore, one can say that the pachuco interrogates himself, just like the adolescent who questions his identity when he sees his reflection in the water:

> El adolescente se asombra de ser. Y al pasmo sucede la reflexión: inclinado sobre el río de su conciencia se pregunta si ese rostro que aflora lentamente del fondo, deformado por el agua, es el suyo. La singularidad de ser —pura sensación en el niño —se transforma en problema y pregunta, en conciencia interrogante. (Paz 11)

And also Paz himself who, "inclin[ado] sobre la vida norteamericana, deseoso de encontrarle sentido, me encontraba con mi imagen interrogante." Indeed, this image of the adolescent absorbed in her/his own reflection calls to mind the myth of Narcissus (van Delden 3), however, unlike the Greek legend, whose demise was his vain and uncritical behavior, the theme of self-reflexivity in Paz seems to hint at as a necessary critical exercise (Paz 14). Paz sees this critical exercise as an imperative task:

> pero así como el adolescente no puede olvidarse de sí mismo […] nosotros no podemos sustraernos a la necesidad de interrogarnos y contemplarnos. No quiero decir que el mexicano sea por naturaleza crítico, sino que atraviesa por una etapa reflexiva. Es natural que después de la fase explosiva de la Revolución, el mexicano se recoja en sí mismo y, por un momento, se contemple. (Paz 13)

The key, therefore, is that this self-reflection does not become a vain and deadly absorbing act, but an expository and revealing undertaking. Something that Paz himself does in this own analysis, which Maarten van Delden underscores:

> El adolescente descubre que es diferente de los demás, y empieza a preguntarse quién es. Paz percibe su diferencia con respecto a los norteamericanos y como

> resultado de este encuentro descubre su propia identidad como mexicano. Tanto para Paz como el adolescente, su identidad es un problema, una incógnita, es algo incierto y todavía sin resolución. (van Delden 3)

Hence, one can say that this self-critical process is something that the adolescent, Mexican society, the pachuco and Paz himself all have in common. But what could be the significance of this gesture? As we saw with pachuco, following Paz's argument, it opened the door to a wanted or unwanted recognition of his singularity.

As was earlier noted, the mere gesture of affirming nothing is an act of resistance in itself. But what could be a better way to describe this action or the pachuco himself? By contextualizing Paz's description of the Mexican American to the rest of his texts and his ideas about the counterculture of the 1960s, van Delden presents to the reader of *El laberinto de la soledad* a different way of thinking about the pachucho: one that is seemingly positive. Van Delden highlights the importance of the rebel figure and of rebellion in Paz's work, showing how the Mexican poet sympathized throughout his whole career with this theme, however only insofar as it expressed an instinctive and spontaneous sentiment and not an ideological or political program. That is the reason why he also praised and exalted the movement of the Mexican Revolution of Emiliano Zapata.

Van Delden's examination of the theme of the rebel in Paz's work, concentrating on the pachuco, is important because it offers a new way to think about the pachuco. As van Delden explains, "Paz escribió *El laberinto de la soledad* en un ambiente cultural que valoraba la rebeldía, y este contexto cultural nos ayuda a entender la vision que el poeta mexicano tenía de la versión mexicana de la figura del rebelde — el pachuco" (van Delden 12). And rebelliousness, as he highlights, is an integral part of the way that modernity has been thought about in the Western

world, “Es posible afirmar que el espíritu de rebeldía ha sido una parte íntegra de la modernidad occidental desde sus comienzos;” and also analogous to the manner the Mexican poet conceived it himself: “Si seguimos la definición de Paz, según la cual la modernidad se caracteriza por el espíritu de crítica, tiene sentido ver a la rebelión en contra de la modernidad como un elemento clave de la misma modernidad” (van Delden 12). Van Delden’s points are of utter importance because they demonstrate how the pachuco would be the Mexican rebel par excellence but also in a universal context. If one follow’s Paz’s definition of modernity as being characterized by the spirit of criticism, indeed, as van Delden highlights, rebellion against modernity would be a key component of modernity itself, hence the pachuco would also have to be considered a prominent modern figure inasmuch as he embodies a rebellious existence that is free of ideology and expresses an inherent desire to want, in addition to being self-critical. Discussing how Paz felt a profound affinity and identification with the romantic aspects of the countercultural movements of the 1960s, van Delden reminds us what the Mexican poet wrote in his book *Postdata* (1970):

> Pero hay otra cosa que le atrae de los jóvenes rebeldes de los años sesenta: en el fondo, considera que pertenecen a la misma tradición romántica con la cual él mismo se identifica como poeta. Igual que William Blake y los poetas surrealistas franceses, e igual que el mismo Paz, los jóvenes rebeldes han entendido que ‘La definición del hombre como un ser que trabaja debe cambiarse por la del hombre como un ser que desea’ (244). También ha entendido que el mundo moderno debe urgentemente instaurar un nuevo sistema de valores en el cual el presente no es sacrificado en nombre del futuro, y en el que la palabra ‘placer’ deja de estar prohibida (244). (van Delden 14)

Indeed, as Paz describes, “el pachuco parece encarnar la libertad, el desorden, lo prohibido” (Paz

19). This representation goes hand-in-hand with the manner that Anglo American society perceived the pachuco, whose seeming idleness and seeming juvenile freedom irked patriotic and protestant notions of the work ethic —although, of course, we must qualify that those sentiments or resentment were fueled by White racist paranoia that was culturally, politically and economically driven. As van Delden points out, "la rebelión del pachuco contra la sociedad norteamericana es completamente a-política. La esencia del pachuco es que se rebela de una forma instintiva y espontánea y que no tiene ningún programa politico que lo respalde" (van Delden 15). Van Delden makes us reconsider the figure of the pachuco by demonstrating how, for Paz, this Mexican American individual personified the rebel in its purest and finest form. However, by the same token, the pachuco would also have to embody modernity, since rebelliousness —the spirit of criticism— is an integral aspect in Paz's conception of modernity. As we saw in previous paragraphs, the pachuco's questioning of his own identity and seeming "suicidal" gesture were acts of self-criticism. But, ultimately, the pachuco's apolitical and instinctive actions and attitude —described in this study as acts of resistance — can be described as rebellious.

Hence, we can think of the pachuco's actions as an act of rebellion; and it is that act of rebellion that further "universalizes" his experience of being a pachuco. As van Delden underscores, "Después de todo, según Paz, el agudo sentimiento de nuestra singularidad forma parte de la experiencia de todos los seres humanos. En resumen, para Paz, *todos somos pachucos*" (van Delden 5). This brings to mind Paz's idea of the eruption of violence as the catalyst for camaraderie, fraternity, and basically as a means to end the solitude that afflicts mankind.[6] Paz affirms that a survey of all great human myths about the origin of man reveals that

[6] Bernadette von Dawans' scientific article "The Social Dimension of Stress Reactivity: Acute Stress Increases Prosocial Behavior in Humans" demonstrates that "Stress does not necessarily lead to negative feelings, social

every culture "parte de la convicción de que el orden del universo ha sido roto o violado por el hombre, ese intruso" (Paz 29). That violation, however, leaves an opening for a return to the natural state of things: "Por el 'hueco' o abertura de la herida que el hombre ha infligido en la carne compacta del mundo, puede irrumpir de nuevo el caos, que es el estado antiguo y, por decirlo así, natural de la vida" (Paz 29). Doesn't that wound bring to mind the "herida que se ríe de sí misma" of the pachucos? (Paz 20). It is through that wound that the pachuco breaks free from his solitude and finally finds recognition and reconciliation. Paz sees mankind's reconciliation with the universe and with the "fluir de la vida" as imperative, however, he has only witnessed it when death was near[7]:

> Recuerdo que en España, durante la guerra, tuve la revelación de 'otro hombre' y de otra clase de soledad: ni cerrada ni maquinal, sino abierta a la trascendencia. Sin duda la cercanía de la muerte y la fraternidad de las armas producen, en todos los tiempos y en todos los países, una atmósfera propicia a lo extraordinario, a todo aquello que sobrepasa la condición humana y rompe el círculo de soledad que rodea cada hombre […] en aquellos rostros —rostros obtusos y obstinados, brutales y grosersos, semejantes a los que […] nos ha dejado la pintura española— había algo como una desesperación esperanzada, algo muy concreto y al mismo tiempo muy universal. (Paz 30)

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conflicts, and aggressive behavior; acute psychological stress can instead increase prosocial behavior. Tend-and-befriend behavior appears to be a potentially inherent and effective coping mechanism in healthy humans during stress" (658). In other words, this study shows how the stress of disaster can bring people together, which what Paz is basically describing here.

[7] Furthermore, Rebecca Solnit's investigation in *Paradise Built in Hell* (2010) bolsters what Paz observes during the civil war in Spain. As she describes: "In the wake of an earthquake, a bombing, or a major storm, most people are altruistic, urgently engaged in carrying for themselves and those around them, strangers and neighbors as well as friends and loved ones. The image of the selfish, panicky, or regressively savage human being in times of disaster has little truth to it. Decades of meticulous sociological research on behavior in disasters, from the bombings of World War to floods, tornados, earthquakes, and storms across the continent and around the world, have demonstrated this" (Solnit 2).

Paz's description of those countenances he encountered in Spain as "grotesco" and "obstinado" sound awfully a lot like that of the pachuco. The pachuco's "suicidal" gesture, which erupts into violence during "motines" and "raids" and breaks the pachuco's solitude, is nothing more than a universal symptom of return. Paz asserts that he saw dawn in those Spanish men: "otro hombre;" but he considers that that universal dream was later broken and stained. Nevertheless, the memory of it does not abandon him, since "quien ha visto La Esperanza, no la olvida. La busca bajo todos los cielos y entre todos los hombres. Y sueña que un día va a encontrarla de nuevo, no sabe dónde, acaso entre los suyos" (Paz 31). Perhaps the Mexican poet found it, at least ephemerally, as in the Spanish case, amongst his compatriots: in the pachucos. Because, "la posiblidad de ser o, más exactamente, *de volver a ser*, otro hombre," according to Paz's logic, would be behind the pachuco's defiant and suicidal gesture. And I cannot help but think that the pachuco, due to his instinctive, more in tune desire for a "disorderly" life, and rebellious nature, is closer to keeping "la vigencia de un orden en que coincidan la conciencia y la inocencia, el hombre y la naturelaza," something that Paz considers lost in human life (Paz 30).

VII

This raises the following question: what is the significance of Paz's depiction of the pachuco in terms of thinking about Los Angeles? For one, it provides a revelatory image of the city at that time. Moreover, it also puts Paz's representation at odds with the dominant discourse about the city, particularly with Adorno and Horkheimer's.

Contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer who saw Los Angeles as the beacon of homogenizing culture, Paz fixed his gaze upon an aspect of Los Angeles culture that epitomized singularity and resistance, but most importantly rebelliousness. It was through that subject, which epitomized singularity and rebellion, that Paz developed his consequential study about the

Mexican character, but also about mankind. The contrast between Paz and Adorno's gazes is stark. Mike Davis considers that Adorno and Horkheimer's depiction of Los Angeles, through "The Culture Industry," did have its consequences, especially in corroborating in inflating the myth of the city as a capitalist and modern inferno.

On the other hand, Paz's representation of the pachuco obliges us to think about Los Angeles in a way that was not necessarily thought as during that time nor today: rebellious and singular. The pachuco's obstinate affirmation of his singularity, during a time of war and discrimination and displacement, makes that gesture all the more important to underscore. It was a sign of resistance— not political but therefore positive in Paz's eyes. It is no surprise that Paz noticed something similar in Paris:

> Cuando llegué a Francia, en 1945, observé con asombro que la moda de los muchachos y muchachas de ciertos barrios — especialmente entre estudiantes y 'artistas' — recordaba a los de los 'pachucos' del sur de California. ¿Era una rápida e imaginativa adaptación de lo que esos jóvenes, aislados durante años, pensaban que era la moda norteamericana? Pregunté a varias personas. Casi todas me dijeron que esa moda era exclusivamente francesa y que había sido creada al fin de la ocupación. Algunos llegaban hasta a considerarla como una de las formas de la 'Resistencia'; su fantasía y barroquismo era una respuesta al orden de los alemanes. Aunque no excluyo la posibilidad de una imitación más o menos indirecta, la coincidencia me parece notable y significativa. (Paz 20)

Carlos Monsiváis has noted that for the pachuco, "no hubo disfraz: hubo desafío, el deseo de existir orgullosamente – así fuese a través de la vestimenta conspicua y el habla rítmica y jazzística – en una sociedad que les negaba presencia, visibilidad social y participación política"

(Maciel 14). Although Monsiváis's words may seem to be at odds with Paz's representation of the pachuco, I don't think they necessarily are. The desire to exist is nothing more than a desire to be acknowledged by the other, to be recognized, nothing more than a universal feeling. This is precisely what Paz is saying.

CONCLUSION

Las ausencias de L.A.

I

Under the gaze of these Brazilian and Mexican authors, the effervescence of life in Los Angeles becomes palpable. The enthralling gay night life of Los Angeles is vividly on display, taking center stage, in Villaurrutia's writing. Aside from its aesthetic value, Villaurrutia's "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" proves to be an important record of homosexual life in the city. Villaurrutia's poem, however, is not a mere colorless account, on the contrary, it is a layered snapshot that successfully captures the subtleties of homosexual desire during a time in American society when the materialization of such longings was in some cases enough to send one to prison for life (Faderman and Timmons 81). Moreover, "Nocturno de Los Ángeles" is precisely remarkable for its candidness to push to the fore, unapologetically, the intimate experience of a minority group whose sexual orientation was reason enough to be persecuted. For Villaurrutia, Los Angeles was the place where a different way of *being* was possible, even if it was for one night. Contrary to the superficiality proposed by the dominant discourse, the city acquires depth, profundity. Furthermore, in a way, Villaurrutia's depiction of gay life in Los Angeles prefigures the importance of the city in the political realm: Los Angeles was the birthplace of homosexual rights in 1950 (White 7). As Moira Kenney asserts, "Los Angeles is the greatest hidden chapter in American gay and lesbian history" (Kenney 7). Interestingly, Harry Hay, considered the father of the gay rights movement, met his first long-term lover in the underground bathrooms of Pershing Square (Hurewitz 50), the plaza Villaurrutia immortalized in his poem. Hay's first homosexual encounter, however, is also fascinating because it evokes,

quite vividly, the manner in which Villaurrutia encapsulates the desire between sailors and ordinary men:

> His first sexual encounter was with a sailor named Matt, whom he met on a steamship bound for Los Angeles, when he was fourteen. After their encounter, the sailor gave Hay a bit of prophetic advice that Hay later claimed was 'the most beautiful gift that any older man ever gave a younger man': 'Someday you're going to come to a port, and you won't understand a word that's said around you, and you won't see a face, you won't get a smell that's familiar to you at all and you'll be frightened, and terrified, and afraid. And all of the sudden across this room, because you're a tall boy, you'll see a pair of eyes open and glow, at you, as you lift your eyes open and glowing a thin. At that moment of eye lock you are home, and you are safe, and you are free. This is my gift.' (White 11,12)

Villaurrutia's poem precisely conveys that freedom that Hay's anecdote manifests; a freedom that the Mexican poet himself found in Los Angeles. Villaurrutia's text is, undoubtedly, a remarkable window into life in Los Angeles during the 1930s.

Octavio Paz, on the other hand, evinces Los Angeles' restlessness. By casting his gaze on the pachuco, a marginal and persecuted figure of the Los Angeles landscape, he identifies the defiant vein of the city and its striving for singularity. He shines a light on the cultural manifestations and tensions of Los Angeles. Rather than seeing homogeneity, Paz gives prominence to the diversity of the city. More importantly, however, Paz recognizes and brings out into the open the rebellious essence of Los Angeles. This noncompliance is not expressed in negative terms, on the contrary, it is a virtue, because in Paz's view, the pachuco's rebelliousness is free from an ideological plan, it is spontaneous. One can argue that, at different points in its

history, Los Angeles has exhibited the restlessness and defiance noted by Paz. The Watts riots of 1965, often times called the Watts rebellion, and twenty-seven years after the 1992 Los Angeles riots, which until today is considered the largest civil unrest in the history of the United States, are perhaps expressions of that subversive spirit of the city.

Furthermore, Raul Bopp enthusiastically puts Los Angeles' multiculturalism in the spotlight. He sees the racial and cultural richness of Los Angeles as the main factor for its imminent auspicious future. Bopp considers the city's polychromatic social and racial fabric as its strongest feature. Under his gaze, Los Angeles is seen underway to becoming the next cultural capital of the world, surpassing the likes of Athens, Rome and Paris. Nonetheless, he also reckons the city's technological and mechanical core to be an important factor in Los Angeles' success and importance in the world. One can say that, to a certain extent, Bopp predicted what the city has become today. Los Angeles is an ever-growing multicultural metropolis that, with the greater reach of the film industry, continues to exhort its influence around the globe with greater efficiency and ease. Fascinatingly as well, Bopp foresaw the invention of the internet and its birthplace; he envisioned a monumental technological advance that would forever alter the way people communicated and learned and that would originate in Los Angeles. Lo and behold, in 1969, the University of California, Los Angeles became the birthplace of the internet.

Moreover, Erico Verissimo's way of describing Los Angeles, as matter-of-factly as possible, reveals an ordinariness and balance to the city that was often overlooked. Acknowledging the good and the bad, the Brazilian novelist exhibits the full spectrum of human experience found in the city. Although he makes a point of discussing these extremes, Verissimo puts forth a grounded image of Los Angeles. Verissimo does not fall into the temptation of casting the city in an inflated manner. On the contrary, he makes a point of presenting Los

Angeles as unexceptionally as possible, without, however, stripping off its charm. In fact, by grounding Los Angeles, the Brazilian novelist makes the city's ordinariness, in many respects, more alluring to the eye of the beholder. Lastly, through the lens of Vinicius de Moraes, Los Angeles displays its humanity. Despite not being shy about singling out the city's flaws, the Brazilian poet notices the ardor of life in Los Angeles. In a way, examining the city's follies without chastisement allowed Vinicius to reveal the breadth of life that Los Angeles offers.

II

Alluding to the effort it takes to notice the history of Los Angeles, in its streets and sidewalks, David Ulin suggests that the past is a hidden language that we must learn how to read on our own (*Sidewalking* 14). However, I think the task at hand is not so much to teach ourselves a recondite language, even metaphorically speaking, which will permit us to identify the remnants of the past, as it is to diligently inquire about the suggestive absences before us. In other words, what I mean to underline is the importance of paying heed to what is not always there or said. Thus, this dissertation was an attempt to inquire into the *absences* that the dominant discourse about Los Angeles, with its one-sided image of the city, made me notice.

As such, this inquiry led me to explore the works of a handful of Mexican and Brazilian authors that revealed dimensions of Los Angeles that not only enrich our understanding and discussion of the city but also brought to the fore its complexity. Villaurrutia, Paz, Verissimo, Vinicius, and Bopp all, in their own distinct manner, shine a light on the city's three-dimensionality. As a matter of fact, in spite of Los Angeles' terrible image and reputation, promulgated by the dominant discourse, the writings of Villaurrutia, Paz, Verissimo, Vinicius and Bopp rendered the city in different kinds of hues. Attempting to avoid seeing the city merely through a cynical lens, these Mexican and Brazilian authors escaped painting Los Angeles in a

reductionist manner. Rather than fixing their gaze on the apparent failings of Los Angeles, they indulged in the complexity of the landscape they threaded; driven more by curiosity than by a desire to merely condemn, they saw themselves, and their own cultures, in the social and cultural fabric of Los Angeles. In other words, they realized the way culture and society was organized in Los Angeles, although not at times the best, was essentially their own too. Far from totally dismissing it, they made an effort to see it with charitable eyes, just as they would see their fellow countrymen or nation. Ultimately, Villlaurruitia, Paz, Verissimo, Vinicius and Bopp had the wisdom to understand that casting a gaze at the Other is casting a gaze at Oneself.

III

Although almost seventy years have passed since the writings of Villaurrutia, Paz, Verissimo, Vinicius and Bopp about Los Angeles, the city continues to elicit interest from Mexican and Brazilian authors. Antônio Xerenesky, Carlos Rubio Rosell, Susana Iglesias, and Paloma Vidal are among the contemporary voices that have written about Los Angeles. These works, one way or another, echo well-threaded themes or texts about the city. Xerenesky's novel *F* (2014), for example, plays with *noir* sensibilities of the 1930s and 1940s, relying, however, more on a playful and mocking tone. The story follows a young Brazilian woman in the 1980s who, as a result of life's many twists and turns, finds herself with the job to assassinate Orson Welles in Los Angeles. Fantastical to its core, Xerenesky's novel does not render the city in realist tones. On the contrary, Los Angeles in *F* becomes a dream-like backdrop where fantasy and reality are blurred: "Apenas vaguei por Los Angeles […] Quando a luz do sul faz a cidade parecer um sonho […] Lá for a, as ruas de Los Angeles ardiam em chamas, o prédio queimava, e tive a certeza serena de que me encontrava no inferno" (Xerenesky 189). Nonetheless, similarly to Verissimo, Vinicius and Bopp, who saw similarities between Los Angeles and Brazil,

Xerenesky highlights this resemblance: “Certos aspectos da cidade me lembravam o Rio de Janeiro, e outros pareciam saídos de um cartão-postal” (Xerenesky 58). Xerenesky’s depiction of Los Angeles, notwithstanding, does not have the depth of that of his fellow countrymen. Xereneksy’s Los Angeles appears to be an amalgamation of clichés about the city: “Todas as ruas desse bairro se assemelham, como se tivessem sido projetadas por um arquiteto entetiado” (Xerenesky 206) or “[podia] usar um par de óculos wayfarer, para me proteger do sol desgraçado que iluminaria essa porção da Terra, revelando o que há de pior em todos nós” (Xerenesky 155). Nonetheless, Los Angeles remains front and center in Xerenesky’s novel.

Carlos Rubio Rosell, similarly, finds his aesthetic in the tradition of the *noir* and the detective novel. *Los Angeles-Sur* (2001), narrates the story of a young man from Culver City who, in order to avenge his brother’s unfair imprisonment, goes on a road trip to find the people responsible for the tragic fate of his brother and try reverse it. Although more realist in its narration than Xerenesky’s novel, Rosell, nonetheless, sees Los Angeles through the prism of noir:

> Los Ángeles es una ciudad que no crece hacia arriba, sino hacia los lados. Millones de ruidos la convierten en un panal gigantesco donde las personas revolotean como abejas ciegas. Todos creen tener una buena razón para estar ahí y se rigen por absurdos decretos que acatan sin entender. Podría decirse lo mismo de todas las ciudades del mundo. Sin embargo, ninguna como Los Ángeles logra engañar a sus habitantes haciéndoles pensar que son felices. El Progreso, el consumo hoy y la democracia están para eso; para eso están también las freeways […] las anchas autopistas que conducen a todas partes y a ninguna. (Rosell 178)

Los Angeles, therefore, is represented through a series of denunciatory clichés, which set the background for the tragic and violent narration of the story:

> En la ciudad demencial en la que todas las noches se oía el machacante ruido de los helicópteros sobrevolando los suburbios, a la busca de bandas de negros y de hispanos que intentaban demostrarse a sí mismos con un revolver en la mano que valían algo, gente que se drogaba para olvidar que estaba rodeada de una realidad falsa y deprimente, cuya verdadera voz era el rumor de miles aparatos de televisión encendidos vomitando estúpidos programas e hipócritas noticas todo el tiempo. Una ciudad indolente donde sólo podía triunfar una clase media homogénea y aburrida, indiferente a los problemas raciales, ajena por completo a la situación de los inmigrantes que trabajan para ellos […] En realidad sólo se trataba de una bestia hambrienta que lo devoraba todo, que vaciaba los cerebros a fuerza de deportes, sexo, televisión y religiones. (Rosell 33)

Ultimately, Rosell's Los Angeles, reproduces some of the dystopic and counterfeit stereotypes of the city.

Moreover, Paloma Vidal's *Algum lugar* (2009) and her Mexican counterpart Susana Iglesias' *Señorita Miss Vodka* (2013) are in direct dialogue with major works of Los Angeles fiction. Vidal's vision of Los Angeles cannot be understood without analyzing the striking degree of intertextuality between John Fante's *Ask the Dust* (1939) and her novel. More concretely, *Algum lugar* shares striking thematic, technical, and structural parallels with Fante's *Ask the Dust*. Critic David Wyatt has asserted Fante's antihero "[Arturo] Bandini is Los Angeles' first flâneur, a walker in the city, a wannabe who lives in perpetual state of yearning" (Wyatt 40). And what we have in Vidal's novel is exactly that, a clumsy flâneur who, despite the difficulties

that she faces, manages to explore the city to the best of her abilities. There are, however, more consequential similarities between these two texts, such as the almost identical interchange of narrative voices found in Vidal's novel which mirrors Fante's. Just as *Ask the Dust*, *Algum lugar* alternates between the first-person, second-person, and third-person point of view. Moreover, the protagonist directly references Fante's novel:

> Penso que isto é próprio de Los Angeles: uma arquitetura que parece não ter idade. Lembro de ter uma sensação esquisita ao ler *Pergunte ao pó*, porque o livro é 1939, mas tem uma atualidade geográfica que seria impossível em outros lugares, como se Los Angeles há 70 anos fosse essencialmente a cidade de fora ... Mas a cidade é essencialmente a mesma, espalhada, desordenada; nos montes, as casas com jardim e piscinas; descendo em direção ao sul, longe da praia, onde moram os mexicanos, os negros e, mais recentemente, os asiáticos, o abandono. 'Los Angeles, dê-me um pouco de você' — Bandini implorava e a cidade até certo ponto se entregava. O livro surgia dela (Vidal 91-92).

In order to understand Vidal's vision of Los Angeles and the novel itself, a close exploration of these parallels is clearly needed. Nonetheless, the way that Vidal discusses Los Angeles is more layered and nuanced, which in a way, reflects the vicissitudes of the protagonist's personal journey.

In the case of *Señorita Miss Vodka*, the seeming influence of Charles Bukowski's prose and project of depicting unpretentiously the lives of the lumpen class of Los Angeles in the Mexican writer's novel is evident. Similar to Bukowski, Iglesias utilizes a fast-paced and unembellished prose to render the life of her character in an unprejudiced way. Iglesias' book traces the life of a woman who, after failing at love, gives up writing and takes up stripping and

drinking; however, unfazed by these choices, she moves between Los Angeles and Mexico City trying to come to grips with the fissures of her life. Her life in Los Angeles, marked by her romance to Mike, whom she met at the Frolic Room on Hollywood Blvd, is a period of relative peace. In other words, Los Angeles, under Iglesias' gaze, does not seem as bad as the miseries of her life: "Me pintaron MacArthur y sus alrededores como el infierno, el mío era más grande así que nada de eso me afectó" (Vidal 136).

In *The Postmodern Condition* (2000), Michael Dear asserts that "[w]hat is special about LA […] is that most countries of the world get to observe pieces of the city's good and bad fortune on an almost daily basis, and in excruciating detail, via the movies and television" (Dear 16). I would qualify that statement, however, by adding that they not only observe but also participate in the formation of the current social imaginary of the city, as witnessed by these contemporary voices from Mexico and Brazil. Furthermore, it bears saying that Los Angeles literature is also made up of immigrant voices, not only of Anglo-migrant voices as suggested by David Fine in *Imagining Los Angeles: A City in Fiction* (2000). The writings of these contemporary writers, needless to say, are prime examples. Hence, a study, which explores the works of these authors, would be a much needed and important step in further correcting the Anglo and European-centrism of the Los Angeles literary critical establishment.

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