



TURUN  
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OF TURKU

# FROM CLOCK TIME TO POETIC TIME

Conceptions of Time in Julio Cortázar's  
Short Stories

lisa af Ursin





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# University of Turku

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Faculty of Humanities  
School of History, Culture and Arts Studies  
Comparative Literature  
Doctoral programme in History, Culture and Arts Studies (Juno)

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*This thesis is dedicated to my parents*

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates temporality in Julio Cortázar's short stories in the context of literary and cultural-historical frameworks. The analyzed material is comprised of ten short stories from different stages of Cortázar's writing career, from the first collection, *Bestiario* (1951), to the last, *Deshoras* (1983). While time has been recognized by scholars as a recurrent and central theme in Cortázar's oeuvre, the experience of "other" time, which Cortázar regards as a more genuine form of human time experience, has not been precisely defined. This doctoral thesis defines "other" time as *poetic time* and explores its relationship to clock time, the prevailing conception of time that Cortázar criticizes as the catalyst for modern alienation.

The concept of poetic time is examined in the context of a cultural countertradition originating in Romanticism and continuing through surrealism, Freud's conceptions of the subconscious and dreams, and Marcuse's views on Eros. In this tradition, art and imagination appear as a counterforce capable of resisting the domination of reductive reason characteristic of modern civilization. The concept of poetic time is rooted in the visual characteristics of dream and poetry, where boundaries between subject and object dissolve and time is experienced beyond the norms of temporal measurement. By examining and comparing the experiences of poetic time across the selected short stories of Cortázar, this thesis traces their changing implications. From an individual search for the Absolute to a communal effort to create a new man, manifestations of poetic time echo socio-historical and cultural evolutions, ultimately reflecting the tensions and instabilities of twentieth-century Latin American politics. This doctoral thesis outlines the concept of poetic time for further studies on time in literature.

**KEYWORDS:** Julio Cortázar, time, modernity, Romanticism, surrealism, dream, imagination, Latin American literature

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan ajallisuutta Julio Cortázarin novelleissa niiden kirjallisuus- ja kulttuurihistoriallisessa kontekstissa. Tutkimusmateriaali koostuu kymmenestä novellista, jotka on valikoitu Cortázarin tuotannon eri vaiheista ensimmäisestä kokoelmasta *Bestiario* (1951) viimeiseen *Deshoras* (1983). Tutkijoiden keskuudessa on yleisesti tunnustettua, että ajallisuus on toistuva ja keskeinen teema Cortázarin tuotannossa. Tästä huolimatta "toisen" ajan kokemusta, jonka Cortázar näkee aidommaksi kokemisen tavaksi, ei ole tarkasti määritelty. Tämä väitöskirja luonnehtii Cortázarin "toista" aikaa käsitteellä *poeettinen* aika ja tutkii sen yhteyttä kellojen aikaan, moderniin vallalla olevaan aikakäsitykseen, johon perustuvaa maailmankuvaa Cortázar kritisoi.

Tutkimuksessa Cortázarin aikakäsityksiä tarkastellaan osana kulttuurista vastatraditiota, joka syntyi romantiikan aikana ja jatkui Freudin näkemyksissä alitajunnasta ja unesta, surrealismissa sekä Marcusen näkemyksessä Eroksesta. Tässä vastatraditiossa taide ja mielikuviutus näyttäytyvät vaihtoehtoina modernissa yhteiskunnassa vallalla olevalle järkeen perustuvalla ihmiskäsitykselle. Poeettinen aika on aikakokemus, joka liittyy unen ja runouden visuaalisuuteen, jossa subjektin ja objektin rajat hämärtyvät ja jossa aika tuntuu jälkeinpäin tarkasteltuna paljon pidemmältä kuin kellon mittaama aika. Väitöskirja analysoi ja vertailee useita Cortázarin novelleja ja poeettisen ajan manifestaatioita. Se osoittaa, kuinka käsitys poeettisesta ajasta muuttuu individualistisesta absoluutin etsinnästä kohti yhteisöllistä tavoitetta luoda uusi ihminen, ja kuinka poeettisen ajan implikaatiot synkistyvät Cortázarin tuotannossa Latinalaisessa Amerikassa tapahtuneiden poliittisten kehityskulkujen myötä. Väitöskirjassa määriteltyä poeettisen ajan käsitettä voidaan soveltaa muussa ajallisuutta koskevassa kirjallisuudentutkimuksessa.

ASIASANAT: Julio Cortázar, aika, moderniteetti, romantiikka, surrealismi, uni, mielikuviutus, Latinalaisen Amerikan kirjallisuus

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30.4.2025

*Lisa af Ursin*

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Julio Cortázar and the problem of time

Julio Cortázar (1914–1984) was an Argentinian short story writer and novelist whose works were influenced by the European literary tradition. Cortázar was particularly inspired by surrealism, which is distinctly visible in his early short story collections, *Bestiario* (1951) (Bestiary), *Final del juego* (1956) (The End of the Game) and *Las armas secretas* (1959) (The Secret Weapons), and in the playful short prose collection *Historias de cronopios y de famas* (1962) (Cronopios and Famas). From 1944 to 1946, Cortázar taught French literature at the National University of Cuyo in Mendoza, but he resigned following his opposition to rising Peronism. In 1951, he left Argentina for France, where he worked as a translator for UNESCO and resided, in “voluntary exile”, until his death. Despite his commitment to the European tradition, Cortázar increasingly identified as a Latin American writer following the Cuban revolution and his own political awakening. The short story “Reunión”, (Meeting) published in the collection *Todos los fuegos el fuego* (1966) (All Fires the Fire) which takes place in Cuba just before the revolution, marked a watershed in Cortázar’s oeuvre.

Later short story collections, such as *Alguien que anda por ahí* (1978) (Someone Out There), *Queremos tanto a Glenda* (1980) (We Love Glenda so Much) and *Deshoras* (1983) (Unreasonable Hours) reveal an aesthetic motivated also by social and autobiographical themes. Although Cortázar is primarily known as a short story writer, the author achieved worldwide fame with the publication of his genre-busting novel *Rayuela* (1962) (Hopscotch), in which the reader leaps backward and forward through the chapters to construct their own version of the story. The furor surrounding *Rayuela* overshadowed the publication of Cortázar’s later experimental novels, including *62/modelo para armar* (1968) (62: A Model Kit) and *Libro de Manuel* (1973) (Manual for Manuel). Cortázar was a versatile writer: he also wrote short prose, poems, a graphic novel *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales* (1975) (Fantomas

Versus the Multinational Vampires), and a variety of essays on wide range of topics such as art, literature and politics.<sup>1</sup>

Temporality appears as a central theme throughout Cortázar's oeuvre, where is it not treated as an abstraction but as an experiential facet of reality that shapes subjectivity. For Cortázar, time exceeds all modern, measurable frameworks, as he states in his characteristically playful way: "Cada uno es loco a su manera, y yo tengo mi locura: mi espacio y mi tiempo son diferentes."<sup>2</sup> ("Everyone is crazy in their own way, and I have my madness: my space and my time are different.")<sup>3</sup> In his fiction and essays, Cortázar probes prevailing notions of time and reality as he strives to articulate a distinct temporality that would resonate with authentic lived experience.

Cortázar was well-read and influenced by many sources, but his work chiefly reflects the European literary tradition, and particularly surrealism and Romanticism.<sup>4</sup> The European influence on Argentine literature is notable, due to the absence of Native American cultures in the country; a large part of its population consists of relatively late European immigrants.<sup>5</sup> The most famous example of these influences is Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), whose narratives, drawing on European cultural heritage, strongly influenced Cortázar. Borges was also the publisher of Cortázar's earliest short stories. In addition to Borges, Cortázar admired and was inspired by the idiosyncratic, surrealistic stories of the Uruguayan short story writer Felisberto Hernández (1902–1964).<sup>6</sup> Surrealism made its way to

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Bell has noted on the intermediality and exploration of open forms in Cortázar's work: *Rayuela* and the collage books *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (Around the Day in Eighty Worlds) and *Último round* (Last Round) show "a process of expansion from perfect, circular, closed short stories to open, multimedial, collaborative forms" (Bell, 2014, 67).

<sup>2</sup> Urondo, 1970, 49.

<sup>3</sup> All translations are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> See for example de Sola, 1968; Alazraki, 1992; Scholz, 1977; Picon Garfield, 1975. Among his surrealist influences, Cortázar mentions Antonin Artaud, René Crevel and Louis Aragon, and the whimsical predecessor of surrealism, Alfred Jarry (Kerr, 1974, 39).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Boldy, 2000, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> Cortázar considered Felisberto as his soulmate and opponent of the rational worldview. The two never met but, after Felisberto's death, Cortázar published a letter addressed to him, "Felisberto Hernández: Carta en mano propia": "[A] los dos nos gustó siempre transgredir los tiempos verbales, justa manera de poner en crisis ese otro tiempo que nos hostiga con calendarios y relojes [...] Siempre sentí y siempre dije que en Lezama [Lima] y en vos [...] estaban los eleatas de nuestro tiempo, los presocráticos que nada aceptan de las categorías lógicas porque la realidad no tiene nada de lógica, Felisberto, nadie lo supo mejor que vos [...]" (Cortázar, 1994b, 263, 268) ("[W]e both always liked to transgress verbal tenses, just a way to put in crisis that other time that harasses us with calendars and clocks [...] I always felt and always said that in Lezama [Lima] and in you [...] they were the Eleatics of our time, the pre-Socratic who accept nothing from the logical categories because reality has no logic at all, Felisberto, no one knew it better than you [...]" )

Argentina after the First World War and, by the 1930s, had already crystallized as a movement. Although Cortázar rejected surrealism as a school, he was fascinated by its ideas.<sup>7</sup>

Cortázar's literary career began in 1938 with the publication of an anthology of poems, *Presencia* (Presence), under the pseudonym Julio Denis. In the 1940s he wrote essays on poetry, along with the treatise *Teoría del túnel* (1947) (Tunnel Theory) in which he propounds the need to integrate surrealism with existentialism.<sup>8</sup> In Argentina, Cortázar was affiliated with the neo-romantic literature group "Grupo 40", which was intrigued by myths, deemed the passage of time to be tragic, and emphasized poetry as the realization of life.<sup>9</sup> Poetry, particularly as it was understood and employed by Arthur Rimbaud and John Keats, offered solutions both to existential questions and to the tragedy of time's passage.<sup>10</sup> In 1949, Cortázar published the first work under his own name, the dramatic poem *Los reyes* (The Kings), which reimagines the myth of the Minotaur and envisages the consequences of evil that stem from suppressing inner monsters. His interest in poetry – as artistic technique, communicative style and ethical worldview – strongly influenced his later prose work.

The influence of Romanticism is manifest in Cortázar's attention to dreams and imagination. His experience of reality bordered on the fantastic, and he claimed to catch glimpses of "another reality". Like the Romantics, Cortázar saw in poetry an opportunity to explore and conquer this other world that prevailed in the human mind although he disagreed with the notion that poetry offered a passage to some transcendent reality.<sup>11</sup> Among the Romantics, Edgar Allan Poe and John Keats were

<sup>7</sup> Yurkievich in Cortázar 2005b, 17–18.

<sup>8</sup> In "Teoría del túnel", Cortázar writes that for Lautréamont, the predecessor of the Surrealists, "*lo poético es el solo lenguaje significativo porque lo poético es lo existencial, su expresión humana y su revelación como realidad última*" (Cortázar, 2005b, 96) ("*the poetic is the only significant language because the poetic is the existential, its human expression and its revelation as ultimate reality*").

<sup>9</sup> de Sola, 1968, 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> In his 1941 essay on Rimbaud, published under the pseudonym Julio Denis, Cortázar notes that, "[o]curre que Rimbaud [...] es ante todo un hombre. Su problema no fue un problema poético, sino el de una ambiciosa realización humana, para la cual el Poema, la Obra, debían constituir las llaves. Eso lo acerca más que todo a los que vemos en la Poesía como un desatarse total de ser, como su presentación absoluta, su entelequia." (Cortázar, 1994a, 18) ("Rimbaud [...] is above all a human being. His problem was not a poetic problem but one posed by an ambitious human realization, to which end the Poem should be the key. This brings him near to those of us who see poetry as the fulfillment of the self, as its absolute embodiment and its entelechy.") In his essay on John Keats (1946), Cortázar writes about poetry's potential to stop time and usher in an eternal present, "el milagro poético de un instante eterno" (Cortázar, 1994a, 55).

<sup>11</sup> Scholz, 1977, 63–64.

notable influences on Cortázar's thought.<sup>12</sup> In 1951 and 1952, Cortázar wrote a free-form, essay-like book on John Keats, *Imagen de John Keats*,<sup>13</sup> in which he sheds light on how Keat's poetics blur the binaries between subject and object, even obscuring the boundaries of one's own self. Cortázar was fascinated by the poet's chameleon-like identity as a way of opening up the experience of time.

For Cortázar, surrealism was more than a literary trend: it was a cosmovision aspiring to grasp reality. In his essay "Muerte de Antonin Artaud" (1948), he writes that, "surrealismo es cosmovisión, no escuela o ismo; una empresa de conquista de la realidad" (Cortázar, 1994a, 153) ("surrealism is a cosmovision, not a school or ism: an endeavor to conquest reality").<sup>14</sup> Surrealism's foundations were embedded in the Romantic emphasis on dreams and imagination as a means for understanding the world, a vision articulated in Rimbaud's verse, "Il faut changer la vie". Cortázar supported the surrealists' cause for spiritual revolution, where reality, completed with dream and imagination, could take shape through language that is broken down and rebuilt. As Jaime Alazraki notes, although Cortázar did not employ automatic writing as a technique, he admired its underlying philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Latin American literary traditions were deeply entangled with European traditions. Surrealism held a particularly strong grip, partly explained by the repudiation of colonialism – the desire to stand against European rationalism – and by Latin American culture's fascination with the magical and the fantastic. According to Gerald Martin, surrealism's appreciation of the subconscious and of human primitiveness, as well as its understanding of an authentic world obscured by rational reality, were tailored to the needs of a developing economy.<sup>16</sup> Cortázar is associated with the boom of 1960's Latin American literature, alongside such writers

<sup>12</sup> Keats's optimistic world view was a core tenet of Cortázar's poetics alongside Edgar Allan Poe's gloomy one, as Ana Hernández del Castillo (1981) has shown. Olivia Loksing Moy (2020, 5) points out the surprising absence of scholarship on Cortázar's connection to Keats in comparison to Poe.

<sup>13</sup> Moy describes *Imagen de John Keats* as follows: "Composed over the course of a decade, *Imagen de John Keats* is not a strict biography or 'life' of a poet, but a spirited work combining translation, passage analysis, prose poetry, and literary homage. [...] Cortázar has the ability to place himself in Keats's world but also to pull Keats right onto the scene of 1940s Argentina and Europe" (Moy, 2020, 6–7).

<sup>14</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 153.

<sup>15</sup> Alazraki & Ivask, 1976, 11. The method for the Surrealists to combine dream with wakefulness was automatic writing, an ambitious attempt to write without control of the consciousness and let the subconscious emerge (Pick & Roper, 2004, 256). The method of automatic writing was based on incorporating "into the poet's technique Freud's observations on the role of language in dream and in dream interpretation: the condensation that results in a density of imagery; displacement of the senses of time and space in the vision; the importance of figurative language" (Balakian, 1972, 130).

<sup>16</sup> Martin, 1998, 142.

and social commentators as Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa. However, unlike his peers, Cortázar did not write magical realism – or rather, “lo real maravilloso”, marvelous real<sup>17</sup> – a generic staple of Latin American tendencies, which shared many characteristics, along with notable differences, with surrealism. Magical realism draws on the myths and legends of Christianity and Native American cultures to lend realism to the supernatural; in surrealism, the miraculous and the strange arise from the human psyche and the manifestation of everyday things in extraordinary contexts.<sup>18</sup> Cortázar was inspired by the intellectual and fictional fantasy world of Jorge Luis Borges, but believed, in contrast to Borges, that it was possible to exceed the reality that had been hedged in by language.<sup>19</sup> By the 1970s, Cortázar had established himself as a Latin American intellectual and his style was described as neo-fantasy.<sup>20</sup> The heir of surrealism shared an agenda with magical realism: to criticize realist bourgeois literature and dismantle the dichotomies created by Western culture.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2 The modern conception of time and its criticism in modernist literature

Julio Cortázar was fascinated by the attempts of surrealism to elucidate an alternative to the historical trajectory offered by Western culture, which was dominated by modern rational conceptions of knowledge and time which are rooted in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment philosophy, which saw science gain privilege over religion to shape

<sup>17</sup> Lo real maravilloso, marvelous real, was the term used first by Alejo Carpentier (1949) and describes a uniquely American form of magical realism. According to Parkinson Zamora, it differs from European surrealism in that it does not imply an attack on prevailing reality but rather acknowledges the fantastic as an inherent part of reality (Parkinson Zamora & Faris, 1995, 75).

<sup>18</sup> Bowers, 2004, 5, 23–24.

<sup>19</sup> Alazraki & Ivask (1976, 8) highlight the key difference between Borges and Cortázar: unlike Cortázar, Borges did not believe in the possibility of reaching the world beyond language.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Alazraki, 1983 and Cruz, Julia G., 1988. Neo-fantasy should not be confused here with the fantasy genre, where the events take place in a supernatural environment and where supernatural beings appear (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien). It refers instead to the legacy of surrealism, where the human mind is shown to be miraculous and things thought to be mundane are shown to be strange. This is how Cortázar himself describes his perception of the miraculous: “Marvelous [...] in the sense that our daily reality masks a *second reality* which is neither mysterious nor theological but profoundly human. Yet, due to a long series of mistakes, it has remained concealed under a reality prefabricated by many centuries of culture, a culture in which there are great achievements but also profound aberrations, profound distortions.” (Jaime Alazraki, 1976, 9, quotes in English García Flores, 1967, 11)

<sup>21</sup> Bowers, 2004, 23.

an objective worldview and steer the development of a universal morality. The Enlightenment saw nature ceded to man as an objectifiable resource, tamed by industrial and technological developments, a tendency that fed into the social and historical upheavals of the French Revolution.<sup>22</sup> Man no longer lived alongside nature; he ruled over it. The rise of capitalism brought with it the machines needed for more efficient use of nature, including improved labor-saving and cost-saving possibilities.<sup>23</sup> Mechanistic control infiltrated human culture: man was rapidly alienated from himself, his resources and his environment, in other words from the conditions of the pre-modern world.

Modernist art revolted against the oppressive homogeneity created by rapid modernization, although it admired its technological achievements.<sup>24</sup> In modernism, language, like culture more broadly, was viewed as a man-made construction that could be emancipated through romantic investment in linguistic creativity, exemplified by literature and poetry. Poetic language allowed alternate images of reality to surface, and Cortázar threw himself into the creative perception of reality through poetic imagery and metaphors. He refused to accept the Kantian view that we are limited by our a priori structures of thought, such as time, place and causality.<sup>25</sup> Prominent examples of this can be found in his most experimental short stories “Las babas del diablo” and “Anillo de Moebius”, which attempt to articulate the ineffable.

Sustained interest in anthropology at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offered modern man a retrospective alternative to prevailing conception of reality. The anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl described the thinking of “primitive” man, while the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer detailed early magical-mythical thinking. Both reflected radically different alternatives to the abstract modern binary thinking of the West.<sup>26</sup> Cortázar saw in the thinking of Lévy-Bruhl’s “primitive”

<sup>22</sup> See for example Koselleck, 2004, xviii–xix, 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> Childs, 2008, 18.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Childs, 2008, 18–19.

<sup>25</sup> In *Vuelta al día en ochenta mundos I*, Cortázar writes: “Nunca me convenció Kant de que estábamos definitivamente limitados; mientras él lo afirmaba, un tal Jean-Paul (Richter, no te confundás) y un tal Novalis ya bailaban con un ritmo que la pedantería no me impedirá llamar cósmico, y obedecían al guarda del ómnibus a un punto que terminaban saliendo por las ventanillas, que es lo que deberíamos hacer todos. Negar la supuesta unidad y finitud de los hechos [...]” (Cortázar, 2004a, 103) (“Kant never convinced me that we were definitely limited; While he was saying it, a certain Jean-Paul (Richter, don’t be confused) and a certain Novalis were already dancing with a rhythm that pedantry will not prevent me from calling cosmic, and they obeyed the bus guard to a point that they ended up leaving through the windows, which is what we should all do. Deny the supposed unity and the finiteness of the facts [...]”)

<sup>26</sup> See Cassirer, 1955 and Lévy-Bruhl, 1931; 1975.

man a worldview that was reminiscent of the poet's or the child's, perceived through analogy and metaphor to bring the "other" reality closer than rational thought would allow.<sup>27</sup>

With the Cuban Revolution, Cortázar's criticism of the instrumental reason underlying the Enlightenment was joined to the Latin American literary tradition, presenting an opportunity to break free from the burden of European rationality. The main character of *Rayuela* (1962), Horacio Oliveira, an Argentine living in Paris, battles an intensifying sense of alienation: his attempts to break free of a culture shaped by Enlightenment rationalism amount to nothing since any means of escape is a product of that same pervasive culture.<sup>28</sup> Following the Cuban Revolution, the emergence of socialism presented Latin American writers with an alternative to capitalism that, in the 1960s and from the margins of European culture, proposed to emancipate humanity. This drive towards a utopian worldview is, according to Santiago Colás, a central feature of Latin American modernism and its proponents, including Cortázar, although they would later be criticized for their idealism.<sup>29</sup>

The Revolution's recognition of Latin America's colonial past and present transformed Cortázar's vision of the future: those who had been left "outside of history" had to be integrated into its modern development and history. The future was to be built by the people themselves, rather than imposed by imperial mandates which had left Latin Americans vulnerable to unequal structures of power and obscured them from their own history. This idea of revolution as the foundation for a new kind of future unexpectedly connects Cortázar's thinking of time with its modern historical conception which Cortázar had previously looked down on: the future can be different from the past and change can be affected by individual endeavors.<sup>30</sup>

According to Reinhart Koselleck, the modern concept of time where future is unknown and different from the past was born with the Reformation in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> In the Catholic worldview, eschatology determined humankind's conception of time: there would be an end to time, marked by the second coming of Christ, although the precise date remained shrouded in obscurity and awareness of the passing of time was but a mortal irrelevance in the eternal kingdom of God. Although the Catholic Church foresaw the end of the world through scripture, Protestantism embraced the opportunities afforded by science and politics, and the predictions about the future were being made based on probabilities and the

<sup>27</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 267, 270.

<sup>28</sup> Colás, 1994, 41. See also Cortázar, 2004b, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Colás, 1994, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Koselleck, 2004, 18–19, 22–23, 39–41, 228.

<sup>31</sup> Koselleck, 2004, 17.

evidence of present actions on future outcomes.<sup>32</sup> Anticipation of the future and the awareness of time gradually moved from religious and political decision-making into individual lives: “historical time exercised a compulsion that no one could escape.” (Koselleck, 2004, 248) According to Koselleck, the future was uncertain and yet fast approaching, and its unknown potentials and disasters demanded preparation and planning.<sup>33</sup> The present moment was absorbed into the collision between past and future, experienced as a realized future possibility projected from the past.<sup>34</sup>

The modern concept of time was also rigidly connected to commercial and capitalist demands for measurement. Accurate measurement of time was not important in rural peasant communities, where time was primarily related to seasonal cycles of labor. In cities, however, the production of goods and commercial networks required more precise regulation of time.<sup>35</sup> Mechanical clocks were commonplace in Europe from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards but, despite this, time was often experienced unevenly, dependent upon different activities and contexts.<sup>36</sup> It was not until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the mainstream availability of pocket watches that awareness of clock time penetrated everyday life. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the measurement of time became increasingly accurate thanks to technical developments and, as more people acquired watches, clock time came to determine private life as well.<sup>37</sup> For David Landes, this had a major impact on the rise of individualism in the West.<sup>38</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the time of clocks had become a guiding factor in everyday life.<sup>39</sup>

Clock time is inextricably linked to a mechanistic understanding of nature and the instrumental reason of the Enlightenment. While man has separated himself from nature and exercised control over it to destroy his fear of the unknown, he himself has come under the domination of the same instrumental reason. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno have analyzed how the pursuit of profit and the manipulation of people form the reality of experience. Perception of the world narrows when intuition and the ability to imagine are suppressed. This has led not to enlightenment but to regression: “The regression of the masses today is their inability

<sup>32</sup> Koselleck, 2004, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Koselleck, 2004, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Koselleck, 2004, 22.

<sup>35</sup> Whitrow, 1988, 110.

<sup>36</sup> Whitrow, 1988, 108.

<sup>37</sup> Mäkikalli, 2007, 159–160.

<sup>38</sup> Mäkikalli, 2007, 164, quotes Landes, 1983.

<sup>39</sup> Aino Mäkikalli (2007, 159–160) describes how Robinson Crusoe organizes his days on a deserted island with the help of a calendar and a clock he makes himself, so that he would feel like a part of the community he left behind.

to hear the unheard with their own ears, to touch the unapprehended with their own hands [...]” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 36)

Modern, measurable time is abstract “empty” time, separate from the rhythms and cycles of nature. For the subject, time appears to enable modification of the object, but for example Michel Foucault has described how, as the subject forces the world into measurable time, it also submits itself to that time.<sup>40</sup> According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the desire for dominion over nature bespeaks a desire for security. In tribal communities, fear originated in the unknown, *mana*, the spirit that inhabits nature and its individual organisms: “Man images himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown. That determines the course of demythologization, of enlightenment, which compounds the animate with the inanimate just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate.” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 16) This security, however, precipitates a disconnection between man and nature and, ultimately, a disconnection between man to himself and all humankind.

Already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a counter-tradition to the Enlightenment project was born, aiming to disturb the binary created between subject and object. Andrew Bowie suggests that, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aesthetics was born as a branch of philosophy to articulate a worldview beyond the scientific one.<sup>41</sup> Human experience that could not be grasped by rational language could be expressed through artistic means, including music, poetry and art. The emphasis on human creativity, imagination, dream and the subconscious that arose from German Early Romanticism to show the limitations of rational utilitarian thinking continued into psychoanalysis and surrealism. The surrealists spoke of the “conquest of reality” or a “spiritual revolution,” in which dreams and the subconscious could be brought to waking consciousness by means of poetry. Their ideas were grounded in Romanticism and in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, where the secrets of the human mind were revealed in the subconscious. Man’s control over himself and his reality turned out to be an illusion: man was a stranger to himself and his subconscious impulses. Freudian psychoanalysis revealed the “other” lurking in the human mind and brought it to consciousness although, according to C. G. Jung, this instinctual reality was destructive only because it was rejected instead of valued.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas in Freudian psychoanalysis there is a clear difference between the outside world and the dream experience, André Breton saw sleep and wakeful state

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, 1982, 149–162.

<sup>41</sup> See Bowie, 1990.

<sup>42</sup> See Levenson, 2003, 22. Freud was fascinated by primitive life and artifacts, and the relationship of consciousness to the unconscious in his metaphorical discourse reflects the structure of colonialism with the unconscious as the region to be colonized and controlled by the ego (Ibid.).

as “communicating vessels” and the surrealists wanted to bring the dreaming mind to waking consciousness.<sup>43</sup> During sleep, Freud argued, ideas appear as images, and in dreams there is no abstraction, only thoughts manifested as concrete images and symbols. An important characteristic of dreams is their recourse to imagination and symbolism, often drawing on myths and legends.<sup>44</sup> According to Freud, everything happens in a dream in the present moment, without mediation,<sup>45</sup> and images require intense interpretation. Although the content of a dream requires only half a page, the analysis calls for ten times as many pages.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Freud highlighted the lack of contradictions in dreams, which do not express an either-or division but merge and unify distinct options into the same context as if they were of equal status.<sup>47</sup> Finally, Freud noted collective and composite persons in dreams constituted by a multiplicity of identities and perspectives: the dreamer can see or be more than one person at a time in their own dream.<sup>48</sup>

While Freud saw in dreams the frustrations caused by the suppression of desires, the surrealists emphasized the richness of imagination that was manifested in them.<sup>49</sup> Liberating the libido and understanding pleasure as the driving force for life were parts of the surrealists’ agenda.<sup>50</sup> Although dream and imagination are excluded from rational discourse, they are closely connected to the workings of wakefulness and must therefore be accepted as an integral part of the functioning of the human mind. Rejecting the binary that separated reason from imagination was the goal of the surrealists, who believed that science erased the mystery and wonder formerly enconced in a religious worldview.<sup>51</sup> For modern man, whose experience of Absolute had been lost to scientific reason, art and poetry offered a pivotal point of access.<sup>52</sup>

Art that opposes the Enlightenment tradition seeks to convey the experience of reality as it was lived before the reign of instrumental rationality, promoting unity with the object rather than control over it. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the

<sup>43</sup> Balakian, 1972, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, 1997, 225–226.

<sup>45</sup> Freud, 1997, 349, 376.

<sup>46</sup> Freud, 1997, 170.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, 1997, 200.

<sup>48</sup> Freud, 1997, 180–182

<sup>49</sup> Balakian, 1972, 130.

<sup>50</sup> See Breton, 1937; Balakian, 1972, 14, 220.

<sup>51</sup> Balakian, 1972, 81.

<sup>52</sup> In the surrealist vision of the Absolute, the unification of separate or distinct things is essential. The unusual image, where two opposite elements combine, showed the existence of eternity through endless combinations. The extraordinary combination of things was guided by objective chance, where surprise and fate combined (Balakian, 1972, 14, 44, 136, 148–149).

work of art has a possibility to undergo the same doubling of the thing as in the experience of primitive people: the thing is simultaneously the thing itself but also a manifestation of spiritual *mana*, an undefined force containing both good and evil. In this perception of reality, the whole, the Absolute, is manifested in a particular object.<sup>53</sup> Language tends to classify things; modern art focuses instead on imagery to express reality through metaphor and analogy that emphasize association rather than differentiation.<sup>54</sup> Octavio Paz attributes to modern poetry a new kind of sacredness, quoting a verse from Novalis: “La poesía es la religión natural del hombre.” (Paz, 1983b, 150) (“Poetry is the natural religion of man.”) The central thesis of this counter-tradition to the Enlightenment aimed to show that, through art, it is possible to attain the experience of the Absolute.

### 1.3 Cortázar and the critique of measurable time

Poetry, much as it had been employed by Keats and later by Rimbaud, offered to Cortázar a conformity-breaking means of expressing human consciousness and the limits of the unknown.<sup>55</sup> Cortázar was critical of the way the surrealists privileged language over experience, intent on dismantling the language structuring rational experience without attending to the construction of a new language that would convey the authenticity of lived reality.<sup>56</sup> For Cortázar, the surrealist project sought a poetic understanding of reality but fell down in the focus on language above experience.<sup>57</sup> This critique expressed the core differences between Latin American

<sup>53</sup> Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 14–19.

<sup>54</sup> Analogy is defined as similarity or correspondence. It differs from other relationships, such as analytical comparison, where the focus is on the separation and classification of the comparable objects. According to Barbara Stafford (1999, 8), analogy observes correspondences, similarities between seemingly different things. According to Cortázar, it demonstrates an immediately experienced parallelism that goes back to the visual thinking of childhood grounded in emotional response rather than intellectual or abstract thought (Cortázar, 1994a, 268). Unlike allegory, which is based on textuality and nonrepresentational abstraction, analogy practices “putting the visible into relationship with the invisible and manifesting the effect of that momentary unison” (Stafford, 1999, 23–24). Cortázar’s understanding of metaphor reflects the Early Romantic tradition to resist analytical thinking (on the Early Romantic tradition, see Johnson, 1981, 14–16). Cortázar describes metaphor – quoting an unnamed source – as “la forma mágica del principio de identidad”, the magical form of the origin of the identity (Cortázar, 1994a, 269). Jaime Alazraki (1992, 7) has argued that, for Cortázar, metaphor is a means of exposing the mystery that prevails in reality.

<sup>55</sup> Sosnowski, 1971, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Alazraki, 1992, 67.

<sup>57</sup> In his essay “Muerte de Antonin Artaud”, Cortázar presents the surrealists’ aspiration as “el reconocimiento de la realidad como poética”, the recognition of reality as poetic. (Cortázar, 1994a, 154)

and European culture and it was shared by many Latin American writers. Although Latin America had been marked by European rationalism, it maintained a connection to pre-modern modes of experiential thinking rooted in myth and magical belief that were imprinted in both unconscious and conscious thought.<sup>58</sup> Dream was thus not the only way to accede to the fantastic; Cortázar observes that the same mental processes occurring during sleep also partially prevail when awake. This is where the “feeling of the fantastic”, “sentimiento de lo fantástico” comes from, a feeling that Cortázar was familiar with since childhood:

Ese sentimiento, que creo se refleja en la mayoría de mis cuentos, podríamos calificarlo de extrañamiento; en cualquier momento les puede suceder a ustedes, les habrá sucedido, a mí me sucede todo el tiempo, en cualquier momento que podemos calificar de prosaico, en la cama, en el ómnibus, bajo la ducha, hablando, caminando o leyendo, hay como pequeños paréntesis en esa realidad y es por ahí, donde una sensibilidad preparada a ese tipo de experiencias siente la presencia de algo diferente, siente, en otras palabras, lo que podemos llamar lo fantástico. (Cortázar, 1982.)<sup>59</sup>

That feeling, which is reflected in most of my stories, could be described as estrangement: at any moment it can happen to you, it will have happened to you, it happens to me all the time, at any moment we can call as prosaic, in bed, on the bus, under the shower, talking, walking or reading, there is like a small parenthesis in that reality and it is there, where a sensitivity prepared for that

<sup>58</sup> Parkinson Zamora, 1995, 3.

<sup>59</sup> In an interview with González Bermejo, Cortázar explains: “[L]o fantástico es la indicación súbita de que, al margen de las leyes aristotélicas de nuestra mente razonante, existen mecanismos perfectamente válidos, vigentes, que nuestro cerebro lógico no capta pero que en algunos momentos irrumpen y se hacen sentir [...]” (Bermejo, 1978, 42) “[T]he fantastic is the sudden indication that, apart from the Aristotelian laws of our reasoning mind, there are perfectly valid, current mechanisms that our logical brain does not grasp but that at some moments burst in and make themselves felt [...]” In his *La mentalité primitive*, Lévy-Bruhl describes the attitude towards miracles in “primitive” cultures. For modern man, miracle is clearly different from everyday reality. For primitive men, “[a]u contraire, le surnaturel intervient constamment dans la nature. A ses yeux, le miracle est chose quotidienne et banale: à chaque instant le cours ordinaire des choses est interrompu ou dévié par l’action de puissances extranaturelles.” (Lévy-Bruhl, 1931, 14) (“[o]n the contrary, the supernatural constantly intervenes in nature. In his eyes, the miracle is an everyday and banal thing: at every moment the ordinary course of things is interrupted or rerouted by the action of extra-natural powers.”)

type of experiences feels the presence of something different, what we can call the fantastic.

The “feeling of the fantastic” can be traced to a state of *semisueño*, semisleep, where the boundaries between subject and object dissolve and the experience of time transmutes into an unmeasurable perpetual present. For many poets, among them Keats, Cortázar believed that semisleep was a condition of writing, producing a state of “oneness”. In 1951 and 1952 he wrote *Imagen de John Keats*, in which he praises Keat’s ability to seize the moment and experience reality through impulse.<sup>60</sup> There was a difference, however, between Keats’ writing in a dream-like state and the automatic writing of the surrealists. The surrealists’ attempt to write without conscious control emphasized language over experience, as Cortázar proposed.<sup>61</sup> According to Cortázar, Keats is a chameleon, whose characteristic sensual connection to reality is created by renouncing the boundaries of the subject and living in symbiosis with an ever-changing world. Cortázar borrows from Keats to describe the poet’s transitory being:

I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness [...] I look not for it if it be not in the present hour, nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights or if a Sparrow comes before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel. (Cortázar, 1994a, 48)<sup>62</sup>

Keats descends with the setting sun and begins pecking at the sand like a sparrow. As the world of experience extends from the limited perspective of the individual human subject, reality is in constant flux. This is reminiscent of the Freudian interpretation of dream identities, in which the individual inhabits multiple identities and perspectives all at once. Keats’ expression of dream-like being is also manifest in the concentration of thoughts as images, which transcends the interpretative structure of language, and the focus on the present moment at the expense of past reminiscence and future expectation. According to Cortázar, Keats was “the poet of the moment”. “[E]l poeta [...] tiene un tiempo propio, en sí, ajeno al tiempo calendario, que lo dispensa del devenir. Todo poeta habita *ahora* este tiempo [...]” (Cortázar, 1996, 105) “[T]he poet has his own time, in himself, foreign to calendar time, which exempts him from future. Every poet *now* inhabits this time [...]” Through Keats, according to Cortázar, we can understand that the present is

<sup>60</sup> Cortázar, 1996, 202, 259, 238.

<sup>61</sup> See Alazraki, 1992, 67.

<sup>62</sup> Cortázar quotes Betty Askwith, *Keats*, Londres, 1941, 111.

not time but being.<sup>63</sup> Poetic experience surpasses differentiation, bringing seemingly contradictory things into relation with one another, expressed through imaginative resources of symbols and metaphors.<sup>64</sup> For Cortázar, the prevailing Western concept of clock and calendar time lends power to the “Gran Costumbre”, “Great Habit”, the repetition of routine day after day, structured by the predictable schedules of clocks and calendars.<sup>65</sup>

The watch, Cortázar remarked, is a “dungeon of air”, “un calabozo de aire”,<sup>66</sup> from which the struggle for escape was detailed throughout his oeuvre, from his earliest collection of short stories, *Bestiario* (1951), to his last, *Deshoras* (1983). He was fascinated by Eastern conceptions of time as cyclical, although he conceded that this would unlikely hold the key to the resolution of what he saw as a crisis of Western reality; the roots of cultural tradition ran too deep.<sup>67</sup> Throughout his work, but particularly in the short story “El perseguidor” (1959), he criticizes living in the time of clocks and articulates a different concept of time based on his own experience. Following Cortázar’s symbolic employment of the clock in his work, I use the term “clock time” or “time of clocks” in this study to describe the modern measurable concept of time.

Our conception of time is not, as Norbert Elias argues, natural and necessary; it is learned and acquired in infancy.<sup>68</sup> According to Cortázar, the original experience of time has not, however, been definitively destroyed by the time of clocks and is described as emerging in the transient poetic experiences of his characters.

In Cortázar’s view, the short story is a “sibling” genre of poetry and facilitates a connection between author and reader through poetic experience.<sup>69</sup> For this specific reason, I have chosen short stories as the primary material of this study. Cortázar sought to write as if “he were dreaming”, pursuing the unmediated shape of experience emerging directly from the subconscious as images unmastered by language: “Escribir, para mí, es hacer el esfuerzo de soñar, una tentativa de romper barreras y sucede que a veces, escribiendo, algunas ventanas se entreabren.” (González Bermejo, 1978, 137) (Writing, for me, is making the effort to dream, an attempt to break barriers and it happens that sometimes, while writing, some

<sup>63</sup> Cortázar, 1996, 105.

<sup>64</sup> See Cortázar, 1996, 300. The poet fuses contradictions together either through analogies or by creating constellations between them.

<sup>65</sup> See Campra, 1986, 221; Alazraki, 1992, 98.

<sup>66</sup> Cortázar, 1971, 23. Translated by Paul Blackburn

<sup>67</sup> Alazraki, 1992, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Liisa Saariluoma (1992, 53) quotes Norbert Elias, *Über die Zeit, Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie II*, ed. Michael Schröter. Frankfurt a.M. 1985.

<sup>69</sup> Lucy Bell (2014, 67) notes that “Cortázar’s short stories are driven by the desire to create participation through immediacy”.

windows crack open.”) Cortázar’s writing process of short stories is eminently dream-like, as Miriam Di Gerónimo notes: “El proceso de la escritura nace – para Cortázar – en un sector alejado de la razón, que podría situarse en una zona que comparte las características que Freud postula para el inconsciente y los sueños.” (Di Gerónimo 2004, 164) (“The writing process is born – for Cortázar – in a sector far from reason, which could be located in an area that shares the characteristics that Freud postulates for the unconscious and dreams.”)<sup>70</sup>

Cortázar describes the short story as an opening to “another”, wider reality, which is unfamiliar in everyday experience.<sup>71</sup> He notes a long gestation period prior to the writing of a short story, so that the material production itself resembles an unmediated genesis from a trance-like state: the book essentially writes itself.

[H]ay como un enorme coágulo, un bloque total que ya es el cuento, eso es clarísimo aunque nada pueda parecer más oscuro, y precisamente ahí reside esa especie de analogía onírica de signo inverso que hay en la composición de tales cuentos, puesto que todos hemos soñado cosas meridianamente claras que, una vez despiertos, eran un coágulo informe, una masa sin sentido. ¿Se sueña despierto al escribir un cuento breve? Los límites del sueño y la vigilia, ya se sabe: basta preguntarle al filósofo chino o a la mariposa. [...] Escribir un cuento así no da ningún trabajo, absolutamente ninguno; todo ha ocurrido antes [...]

(Cortázar, 2005d, 49–50)

[T]here is like an enormous clot, a total block that is already the story, that is very clear although nothing can seem darker, and precisely therein lies that kind of dream analogy of inverse sign that exists in the composition of such stories, since all we have dreamed crystal clear things that, once awake, were a shapeless clot, a meaningless mass. Do we daydream when writing a short story? The limits of sleep and wakefulness are already known: just ask the Chinese philosopher or the butterfly [...] Any work is not required when writing a story like this, absolutely none; everything has happened before [...]

This moment of writing resembles a dream, the story unfolding “sin ningún ‘think’ previo”, without any prior thinking, “todo está visto por algo mío que no es mi conciencia, pero que vale más que ella en esa hora fuera del tiempo y la razón”, (“everything is seen by something of mine that is not my consciousness but that is worth more than it in that hour outside of time and reason”), “olvido de la

<sup>70</sup> Also Estela Cédola (1994, 159–177) shows in detail the connection between Freud’s dream theory and the poetics of Cortázar’s short stories.

<sup>71</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 371–372.

circunstancia [...] en una región que diurnamente me es ajena [...] temblor original, su balbuceo arquetípico”, (“I forget the circumstance [...] in a region that is foreign to me during the day [...] original tremor, its archetypal babbling [...]”) (Cortázar, 2005d, 50–51) For Cortázar, the immediacy of language goes hand in hand with the immediacy of experience, both emerging from a visual realm beyond conscious awareness.

What Cortázar calls “another” time is characterized by the experience of the Absolute, which is not a supernatural reality but the continuous potential of reality accessed through poetry. In *Rayuela*, Cortázar sees dream and poetry as vestiges of an ordinary and authentic experience of human consciousness: “[S]olo en sueños, en la poesía, en el juego [...] nos asomamos a veces a lo que fuimos antes de ser esto que vaya a saber si somos.” (Cortázar, 2003b, 636) (“Only in dreams, in poetry, in play [...] do we sometimes arrive at what we were before we were this thing that, who knows, we are.”)<sup>72</sup> Cortázar believed that reason was historically constructed and preserved in language, but it could never grasp the full potential of reality.<sup>73</sup> Reality becomes readily available only through poetry, which achieves what Cortázar calls a magical cosmovision. This is a state of mind in which things lose their separateness and form connections, not unlike the rites of Indigenous tribal shamans, who strove to realize the essence of things by merging with them. Rational man conquers reality through specification; poetic man blends with it through identification. In this way, the latter not only understands the essence of things, but also the essence of himself.<sup>74</sup>

Thinking in images, symbols and metaphors is critical both to dream and to poetry and is the key to understanding temporality beyond the time of clocks. I suggest that the experience of time outlined by Cortázar and manifested in his short stories, where awareness of the passage of time disappears and subjectivity expands through identification and participation, is best characterized as poetic time. Poetic time is rooted in the visual characteristics of dreams and poetry, where rational, linguistic and analytical thinking disappear. In the poetic experience, associations,

<sup>72</sup> All translations of *Rayuela* are from *Hopscotch* (2013), translated by Gregory Rabassa (New York: Pantheon Books).

<sup>73</sup> Cortázar’s thinking is reminiscent of Hamann’s notion that “[o]ur reason is constituted historically by the work of previous generations and by its transmission in particular languages to us” (Bowie, 1990, 7).

<sup>74</sup> Herder associated dream with artistic creation, a connection later shared by the Romantics and also, for example, Nietzsche, Freud and Jung. According to Herder, our nature is most deeply revealed in a dream, and it brings us closer to our childhood and also to the childhood of humanity. German Romantics like Novalis saw dream as a kind of “natural poetry”. Like the surrealists later, they emphasized the poetic aspect of the dream. Dream signaled a passage towards truth, towards deep existence (Steinby, 2023, 98–99).

analogies and metaphors, as well as intuition and sensuality, guide consciousness; in the poetic experience of time, boundaries between self and others, or subject and object, disappear. Poetic time is primarily related to the hypnagogic state that lies at the border between sleep and wakefulness, and so the temporality of dreams forms an important theoretical framework for this study.

In his essay “El estado actual de la narrativa en Hispanoamérica”, Cortázar mentions peculiar experiences of time in the story “El perseguidor”, and refers to his own observation of the mutability of time. He describes how time in dreams operates according to its own meter, so that one can be jolted awake suddenly due to a noise like a knock on the door which simultaneously causes an unfolding of a long and winding dream narrative inspired by the knocking sound: “[E]l cumplimiento del sueño ha sido casi instantáneo, mientras que el hecho de soñarlo parecía producirse a lo largo de un prolongado período de tiempo [...] podría decirse que en ciertas ocasiones penetramos en un tiempo diferente [...]” (Cortázar, 1994b, 105) (“[T]he fulfillment of the dream has been almost instantaneous, while the fact of dreaming it seemed to occur over a long period of time [...] It could be said that in certain occasions we enter a different time [...]”)

This experience is reminiscent of the hypnagogic states studied by psychologist Alfred Maury, cited by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. Maury noticed the extreme rapidity of thought processes affecting his patients in response to particular stimuli. Like André Breton, Maury saw this rapidity as analogous to the hypnagogic hallucinations that occur on the border between wakefulness and sleep. In his study “Le sommeil et les rêves” (1861), he examines the exceptional perception of time during such transitional states.<sup>75</sup> These hallucinations of the hypnagogic state explain the physiology of enabling a poetic perception of time, but the difficulty of reaching this liminal state from wakeful consciousness is a problem for which Cortázar seeks a solution. He strives to achieve a certain state of mind that he calls “distracción”, a wandering mind or absent-mindedness. From here, the control of consciousness

<sup>75</sup> See Maury, 1861, 139–140; Freud, 1997, 343–344. Charles Dickens describes this hypnagogic state in his novel *Oliver Twist*: “Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrapped in perfect unconsciousness. At such time, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers, its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate. Oliver was precisely in this condition. He saw the Jew with his half-closed eyes; heard his low whistling; and recognized the sound of the spoon grating against the saucepan’s sides: and yet the self-same senses were mentally engaged, at the same time, in busy action with almost everybody he had ever known” (Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, chapter IX).

breaks down and linguistic, abstract thinking gives way to figurative. This happens to the characters of Cortázar's short stories when sinking into memories or imaginings through art (literature, music, visual arts) or during an erotic encounter.

In Cortázar's thinking, the subject's free will is limited, dictated in advance by a constellation – or “figura” – of unconscious and uncontrollable influences.<sup>76</sup> The idea of a constellation dates back to Jean Cocteau, who observed that individual stars cannot be aware of the role they play within a larger constellation. For Cortázar, the individual is similarly part of a constellation of which they are unaware but which affects them in undetermined ways, guiding individual actions and behaviors. Cortázar's understanding of the constellation deepened throughout his career, but it began as a way of connecting disparate factors, whether permanently or in a moment of transient simultaneity. In his essay, “Un cristal con una flor adentro”, Cortázar writes:

[P]uede ocurrirme que una serie de fenómenos iniciada por el ruido de una puerta al cerrarse, que precede o se superpone a una sonrisa de mi mujer, al recuerdo de una callejuela en Antibes y a la visión de una rosa en un vaso, desencadene una figura ajena a todos sus elementos parciales, por completo indiferente a sus posible nexus asociativos o causales, y proponga – en ese instante fulgurante e irrepetible y ya pasado y oscurecido – la entrevisión de otra realidad en la que eso que para mí era ruido de puerta, sonrisa y rosa constituye algo por completo diferente en esencia y significación. (Cortázar, 2005d, 272–273)

It may occur to me that a series of phenomena initiated by the sound of a door closing, which precedes or superimposes a smile from my wife, the memory of a narrow street in Antibes and the vision of a rose in a glass, triggers a figure alien to all its partial elements completely indifferent to its possible associative or causal nexus, and proposes in a fleeting and unrepeatable moment and already past and obscured – the glimpse of another reality in which what for me was the noise of a door, smile and rose constitute something completely different in essence and significance.

In his work, there is extraordinarily little description of the characters' personal histories. Their guiding constellations are shaped by chance, producing illogical and inexplicable encounters and unpredictable patterns.<sup>77</sup> The constellation enables the

<sup>76</sup> Cortázar explains his concept of figura in Harss & Dohmann, 1966, 227, 235–236.

<sup>77</sup> Cortázar witnessed many chance encounters in his own life. For example, Cortázar said that one time he got into a taxi and talked to the taxi driver about strange chances (*azar* in Spanish). It later turned out that the taxi driver's name was Jules Corto. (Herráez, 2001, 39)

creation of meaning beyond analytical cause and effect. Constellation, as an operating principle of reality, emphasizes continuous change, so that anything – including oneself – appears as if for the first time in each a new constellation. Poetic subjectivity, born not of linearity but of analogy, is renewed in the present moment of the constellation, manifested as a moment of authentic experience, where the mind detaches from the ego and from the illusion of linear cause and effect. Just like analogy, constellation is the poet’s way of creating connections between things.<sup>78</sup>

In Cortázar’s early work, time is problematized as subordination to repressive structures, to the Great Habit. The natural human experience that is intrinsic to children and primitive peoples has been suppressed by culture. Through his own experience, Cortázar became aware of the fallacy of measurable time instilled by Western culture. In interviews, he testified to the possibility, as a child, of transitioning to another time while reading books.<sup>79</sup> In Keats’ poetry, Cortázar found a point of access into timelessness, where measurable time ceased to have significance.

In Cortázar’s first short stories in *Bestiario*, the poetic experience of time has not yet taken shape. Rather, he brings out the conflict between culture and the inner life of the individual. The central question in the short stories is, as in *Los reyes*, what happens when culture suppresses the genuine encounter with the subconscious? The result is not liberation but destruction, evidenced by the ruin of characters in Cortázar’s early stories, such as in “Lejana” and in “Las armas secretas”. Things do not go well either for those who take solace in the shelter of clock time and a belief in the future, although they continue to live out their unsatisfactory lives seemingly contented. In “El perseguidor”, published in 1959, Cortázar deals with this explicitly through the main characters, Johnny and Bruno, attempting, for the first time, to articulate a different experience of time.

During his career as a writer, Cortázar broke away from the isolation of the “ivory tower” and began to embrace encounters with others and the importance of community over individuality. At the same time, his view of literature changed, as he describes in a famous quote: “De la Argentina se alejó un escritor para quien la realidad, como lo imaginaba Mallarmé, debía culminar en un libro; en París nació un hombre para quien los libros deberán culminar en la realidad.” (Cortázar, 1994b, 36) (“A writer left Argentina for whom the reality, as Mallarmé imagined, had to

<sup>78</sup> “La sola polarización es para el poeta analogía suficiente; si no puede conectarlos por rasgos intrínsecos, hace lo que todos al mirar las estrellas: inventa la constelación, las líneas uniendo los astros solitarios.” (Fue Jean Cocteau quien lo dijo.)” (Cortázar, 1996, 300) (“Polarization alone is sufficient analogy for the poet; if he cannot connect them by intrinsic features, he does what everybody does when looking at the stars: he invents the constellation, the lines uniting the solitary stars (It was Jean Cocteau who said it.)”)

<sup>79</sup> Prego, 1985, 63.

culminate in a book; in Paris a man was born for whom books must culminate in reality.”) The Cuban Revolution put pressure on Cortázar to write about social themes and he strove, like other Latin American intellectuals, to effect political change. For a long time, Cortázar clung to his aesthetic principles, but he eventually opened up to a political agenda. He emphasized, however, that his writing would always be guided by a metaphysical search.<sup>80</sup> With this political awakening, the future took on a new meaning in Cortázar’s work, and the revolution in thinking caused by the social revolution saw clock time cede to poetic time. New possibilities stirred: if the modern mechanistic conception of reality and the time of clocks were cultural structures of experience, and the human sense of time is prone to change, would it not ultimately be possible to free oneself from the prevailing conception of time? In his first political short story, “Reunión”, written in 1966, Cortázar looked to connect inner and outer realities by creating a reality that could meet the internal needs of man. The Cuban Revolution inspired Latin American writers as it proclaimed the freedom of art and emphasized literary and spiritual values over possession and consumption. The collectivism of socialism offered an alternative to bourgeois individualism and the alienated subject of the market economy. In “Reunión”, Cortázar creates a figure of the new man who would liberate his inner poet to be free through imagination.

However, in Cortázar’s later work, the contradictions related to poetic time return. The Cuban Revolution resulted in disappointments, and socialism did not offer the solution Cortázar was seeking for an alternative history. The socialism of the 1970s, and especially the right-wing dictatorships that rose up in Latin America, bound Cortázar to his social commitments. Like other writers of the boom, Cortázar was accused of blindly believing in Fidel Castro’s utopian vision. “Recortes de prensa”, published in 1980, shows a new critical attitude towards the possibilities of art to tell and influence global atrocities. In Cortázar’s later work, the inability to experience poetic time emerges as a troublesome obstacle. Capitalism had won as an economic system and Cortázar wrote, in 1978, that we live in a historical time that has nothing to do with the time of poetry.<sup>81</sup> Media coverage made events at every corner of the world appear ever-present, tying the individual to ever-accelerating developments. However, Cortázar continued his political activity; among other things, he supported the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. While his pessimism and disappointment is palpable in his short stories, his political actions and speeches show an underlying optimism. In his personal life, he maintained the ability to enter into poetic time, as seen in his book of travel *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*

<sup>80</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Cortázar, 1978, 103.

(1983), which he wrote with his wife Carol Dunlop shortly before her untimely death.<sup>82</sup>

## 1.4 Previous research and an outline of the study

Cortázar's short stories have been extensively studied and time has been recognized as a recurrent and central theme in his oeuvre. The experience of an "other" time, however, which Cortázar regards as a more genuine form of human time experience, has not been precisely defined, nor have its implications in relation to clock time been investigated in its various forms. My study fills this gap in Cortázar scholarship by defining this "other time" as "poetic time" and producing knowledge of its implications in his short stories. In addition to clock time and poetic time, it examines stopped time or *nunc stans* and mythical time in Cortázar's short stories. More broadly, it aims at contributing to the study of temporality in modern literature.

Cortázar research has frequently explored the nature of the "other" or "fantastic" reality. Several comprehensive monographs examine his corpus in these broad terms; on the other hand, much of contemporary research concentrates on specific works, approaches or perspectives.<sup>83</sup> The penetration of fantasy into everyday life and the search for "another" reality is examined in several studies, such as Graciela de Sola's *Julio Cortázar y el hombre nuevo* (1968), Jaime Alazraki's and Ivar Ivask's collection of articles, *Final Island* (1976), and Alazraki's *Hacia Cortázar* (1992). In her comprehensive study, *Cortázar. El escritor y sus contextos* (1994), Estela Cédola observes the contexts of Cortázar's oeuvre and also Peter Standish's study *Understanding Cortázar* (2001) covers most of Cortázar's works. Hector García Canclini's *Una antropología poética* (1968) is a thorough introduction to Cortázar's metaphysical poetics. The critique of rationality is examined in Lida Aronne Amestoy's study of Cortázar's poetics, *La novela mandala* (1972), and in Juan

<sup>82</sup> The intention was that they would drive the highway from Paris to Marseille and would not be allowed to leave the highway at all. The trip was an exploratory excursion aimed at proving that a place called Marseille truly existed. In this book, Cortázar reveals how they managed to "find themselves" and enter poetic time by limiting the options of choice to a minimum and forgetting the routines and the world that expected them to participate and react. They focused on the details of the rest stops, such as nature and insects, and reached "ese mes fuera del tiempo, ese mes interior donde supimos por primera y última vez lo que era la felicidad absoluta" (Cortázar & Dunlop, 2008, 368) ("that month outside of time, that inner month where we knew for the first and last time what absolute happiness was").

<sup>83</sup> Today, the subject areas of Cortázar research are broad and often precisely targeted, ranging from the translation of Cortázar's work and the problematics of exile to the relationship between humans and animals.

Carlos Curutchet's *Julio Cortázar o la crítica de la razón pragmática* (1972), a thorough analysis of the supremacy of logos in his short stories and novels. The connection of Cortázar's work to myths and archetypes has been noted in several studies, such as Saúl Sosnowski's *Una búsqueda mítica* (1971) and Steven Boldy's *The novels of Julio Cortázar* (1980). An informative article on Cortázar's mythopoesis is Ana Hernández del Castillo's article, "Keats, Poe, and the Shaping of Cortázar's Mythopoeisis" (1981). These all have been useful for my study in illuminating Cortázar's metaphysical search and his critique of Enlightenment rationality, both of which are vital aspects in understanding temporality in his oeuvre. My study contributes to research on the "fantastic" in Cortázar's work by shedding light on the temporality of experience that emerges when the illusion of rationality breaks down.

Attempts have been made to categorize Cortázar in different ways, whether as a surrealist (Evelyn Picon-Garfield 1975) or as a neofantastic (Alazraki 1983), and his position in the literary canon at the intersection of modernism and postmodernism has also been examined (e.g. Santiago Colás 1994, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth 1992). However, many scholars agree that attempts to label Cortázar's works are both impossible and futile.

An important question in Cortázar studies has been the dialectic between the aesthetic, i.e. the artistic, and the political. Cortázar's later short stories have been studied in connection with his social awakening and his changing perception of art as a political instrument. Should art be completely autonomous, or should the writer be politically committed, taking a stand on social problems? Insightful studies on this topic are Maurice Hemingway's and Frank McQuade's article, "The Writer and Politics in Four Stories by Julio Cortázar" (1988), and Aníbal González' articles, "Revolución y alegoría en 'Reunión' de Julio Cortázar" (1987) and "Press Clippings' and Cortázar's Ethics of Writing" (1998). The problem of the relationship between the autonomy of art and political commitment has remained a central tenet of Cortázar research well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The subject has been compellingly discussed by Soledad Pérez-Abadín Barro in *Cortázar y Che Guevara* (2010), by Jaume Peris Blanes in "'Reunión' de Julio Cortázar: Reescritura y conflicto de poéticas en el debate sobre el intelectual y la revolución" (2014) and by Carolina Orloff in *The Representation of the Political in Selected Writings of Julio Cortázar* (2013). In my study, I approach this question through temporality, which reveals new implications of Cortázar's political awakening: can the metaphysical search for a more genuine experience of time through poetry produce collective change in society?

*Julio Cortázar: New Readings* (1998), a collection of articles edited by Carlos J. Alonso, renewed Cortázar research with a deconstructive approach that argued it was

impossible to ever exhaust interpretative efforts.<sup>84</sup> According to Alonso, early research focused on analyzing the dualism present in Cortázar's work, but later research has specifically highlighted how the author dismantles dichotomies.<sup>85</sup> Alonso's collection includes numerous interesting articles, such as Aníbal González's "'Press Clippings' and Cortázar's Ethics of Writing" and Doris Sommer's "Pursuing a Perfect Present". In recent decades, research articles on Cortázar's oeuvre have emphasized the author's attempts to reach a liminal space by breaking the conventions of traditional prose.<sup>86</sup> My study continues this research tradition by examining Cortázar's articulation of an experience of time that eludes familiar linguistic concepts.

Among the studies of the early 2000s, Miriam Di Gerónimo's *Narrar por knock-out. La poética del cuento de Julio Cortázar* (2004) is a comprehensive study on Cortázar's short stories. Furthermore, among insightful short story analyses of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are Davi Arrigucci Jr.'s article, "El alacrán atrapado: La poética de la destrucción en Julio Cortázar" (2002), Steven Boldy's "Cortázar's Controllers" (2005) and Alice Jedlicková's "From otherworldliness and Two-World Scheme to 'Heterocosmica': A visit to a museum with Cortázar and Nabokov" (2006). Cortázar's poetics is compellingly examined by Gisle Selnes in her article "Cortázar's Orphism? Poetic ontology through posthumous utopia" (2007).<sup>87</sup>

Although temporality is acknowledged as a central theme in Cortázar's body of work and is the subject of great number of studies, it is mostly discussed and analyzed on the margins of other related issues. To date, there is no comprehensive study of conceptions of time in Cortázar's short stories. There are meritorious studies about time that observe the motif from a certain point of view, such as Lois Parkinson Zamora's article, "Movement and stasis, film and photo: temporal structures in the

<sup>84</sup> In her article "Between Utopia and Inferno (Julio Cortázar's version)" (in Alonso, 1998), Ana María Sánchez reflects on the common view that almost everything that it is possible to say has already been said about Cortázar, so that he is doomed to be a "representative of an irremediably lost golden age of Latin American letters". (Translated by M. Elisabeth Ginway)

<sup>85</sup> Alonso, 1998, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Popular research questions also include genre roles and physicality in Cortázar's work. Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz, among others, has conducted research focusing on gender in *Mothers, Lovers, and Others. The Short Stories of Julio Cortázar* (2004). Margherita Cannavacciuolo has focused on physicality in her article "El cuerpo en vilo: otro acercamiento a los cuentos fantásticos de Julio Cortázar". *Anales de literatura hispanoamericana*, 2019, Vol. 48, 331–347.

<sup>87</sup> In this study, I will not actually discuss the role of play and invention in Cortázar's thought, although they are related to poetic time and the deconstruction of the Great Habit. Santiago Colás's articles "Living Invention, or The Way of Julio Cortázar" (2003) and "Writing Life and Love. Julio Cortázar and Gilles Deleuze" (2006) shed light on this central aspect of Cortázar's work.

recent fiction of Julio Cortázar” (1983), Pedro Ramírez Molas’s book, *Tiempo y narración. Enfoques de la temporalidad en Borges, Carpentier, Cortázar y García Márquez* (1978), and Doris Sommer’s article, “Pursuing a Perfect Present” (1998). Recently, Cortázar’s conceptions of time have been discussed by José David Amado Cano in his dissertation *La configuración del tiempo en los cuentos y microrrelatos de Julio Cortázar: Historias de cronopios y famas (1962) y Todos los fuegos el fuego (1966)*, (Universidad de Extremadura, 2023). Amado Cano maps accurately the prevailing study on Cortázar’s problematic of time. He calls Cortázar’s representation of time in general “un tiempo extraño”, a strange time and acknowledges the poetic features of this strange temporality.

Studies on the concept of time have largely focused on “El perseguidor”, where the problem of time emerges most prominently. In terms of temporality, a useful article for my study is Manuel Cifo González’s “Relativismo espacio-temporal en “El perseguidor” de Julio Cortázar” (1980). Research articles published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the short story “El perseguidor” include García Graciela’s “Time, Language, Desire: Julio Cortázar’s “The Pursuer” (2003), Patricia E. Reagan’s “Going under: the metro and the search for oneself in Julio Cortázar’s “The Pursuer” (2006), Jaume Peris Blane’s “El perseguidor, de Cortázar, entre la figuración de la vanguardia y la emergencia de una nueva subjetividad” (2011) and Blanca Santos’ “Esto lo estoy tocando mañana”: poética del tiempo y de la eternidad en El perseguidor de Julio Cortázar” (2021).

I would, however, argue that none of these studies offers a fully satisfactory description of Cortázar’s various conceptions of time in his short stories. The temporality of Cortázar’s short stories exceeds the dualistic subdivisions that are commonly drawn up, exhibiting, as I see it, at least four different configurations.

The “other” time experienced by Johnny in “El perseguidor” is the most compelling and provocative temporality presented in Cortázar’s short stories. This experience of time beyond measurable objectivity is often thought of as mythical time. Saúl Sosnowski convincingly examines the myths of Cortázar’s literary works but somewhat misleadingly divides the concepts of time in “El perseguidor” into the profane and the sacred.<sup>88</sup> Saúl Yurkievich uses the same division in relation to the concept of time in *Rayuela*.<sup>89</sup> Other researchers of the experience of time in “El perseguidor” have distinguished between objective and subjective time (Patricia Reagan quotes Gordana Yovanovich)<sup>90</sup> or existential and categorical time (Pedro

<sup>88</sup> Sosnowski, 1971, 79–82.

<sup>89</sup> Yurkievich, 1976, 102–103.

<sup>90</sup> Reagan, 2006, 382, quotes Gordana Yovanovich: Julio Cortázar’s Character Mosaic: Reading a Longer Fiction”. Toronto. U. of Toronto, P., 1991, 189–190.

Ramírez Molas),<sup>91</sup> or seen Johnny's experience as occurring entirely outside of time, in eternity. Graciela de Sola, for example, speaks of "tiempo", time, and "no-tiempo", non-time,<sup>92</sup> while P. García Graciela bisects experiences into linear and non-linear time: "linear time and another kind of time, a non-time or a time outside of time".<sup>93</sup>

Many researchers examining Cortázar's poetics have elucidated the poetical essence of reality and the possibility of poetry to reach another reality. These researchers include, for example, Alazraki, Graciela de Sola, Laszlo Scholz, Nestor García Canclini and Santiago Colás. This feature of his poetics is generally recognized, but its connection with his conception of time has not been properly clarified. The "other" time experienced by Johnny has been persuasively explored by studies that focus on his efforts to reach the present moment, and on the dreamlike or poetic nature of these timeless instances. In her excellent article, Doris Sommer names this coveted time "the perfect present",<sup>94</sup> while Estela Cédola descriptively titles it "tiempo de la imaginación", the time of imagination.<sup>95</sup> These characterizations incorporate the associativity, visuality and dream-likeness of the experience. Along with Lois Parkinson Zamora, who argues that Johnny's desire to transcend linear time is possible through the improvised rhythm of jazz,<sup>96</sup> musicality in the experience of time is emphasized by Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, who analyzes the condensation of time in *Rayuela* as "rhythmic time".<sup>97</sup> The link between imagination and poetry in the fluctuating experience of time has been explored but an accurate description of the "other time", its relation to poetic imagination, its fluctuating character and finally the changes that take place in the experiencing subject are still missing.

The research question of my dissertation concerns temporality in Cortázar's short stories, examined in its literary and cultural-historical contexts. How does Cortázar's treatment of poetic time change throughout his short fiction, and to what extent do these transformations reflect broader aesthetic, ethical and political shifts in Cortázar's worldview? Cortázar's short stories are analyzed in relation to his essays and literary and cultural influences. The complexity and ambiguity of Cortázar's short stories requires a precise and detailed reading, where the researcher converses with the original text without relying too heavily on perceptions informed

<sup>91</sup> Ramírez Molas, 1978, 122–123.

<sup>92</sup> de Sola, 1978, 57–60.

<sup>93</sup> García Graciela, 2003, 38.

<sup>94</sup> See Sommer, 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Cédola, 1994, 93.

<sup>96</sup> Parkinson Zamora, 1981, 54–55.

<sup>97</sup> According to Deeds Ermarth (1992, 14) rhythmic time, where the present is highlighted instead of the past and the future, is a trademark of pleasure. Challenging the Cartesian principle that, "I think, therefore I am", Cortázar proposed that, "I swing, therefore I am".

by any particular research tradition. The study comprises texts written in different decades. According to Peter Standish, Cortázar was a “man of his time”, influenced by contemporary agendas. But Cortázar was also a “subconscious” writer, as he himself put it, whose short stories were partly created without conscious guidance, and the metaphysical search remains at the core of his poetics.<sup>98</sup> Thus, when studying temporality in Cortázar’s oeuvre, permanence and change go hand in hand.

The material of this study comprises ten short stories from different stages of Cortázar’s writing career, from the first collection, *Bestiario* (1951), to the last, *Deshoras* (1983). I have chosen the texts that best illuminate Cortázar’s dealing with the problem of time. The study is divided into four main chapters, each dedicated to a key phase in Cortázar’s unraveling of temporality. I will first examine the short story “Carta a una señorita en París” and “La autopista del sur”, where the power of clocks and the “Great Habit” exert oppressive force. In the second chapter, I examine “El perseguidor” and other short stories from the late 50s and 60s, in which poetic time offers an alternative to clock time. In the third chapter, I examine the connection between eroticism and poetic time. The final chapter deals with Cortázar’s political awakening and the changes it provoked in his understanding of poetic time: on the one hand, his burgeoning faith in the possibilities of the cultural change launched by the Cuban revolution to replace rational man with poetic man; on the other hand, the weakening of this faith. The short story analysis that concludes my research examines “Fin de etapa” from Cortázar’s last collection of short stories, in which the author returns from political themes to aesthetic ones. In “Fin de etapa”, poetic time is relegated to the past.

I will outline the evolution of the problem of temporality in Cortázar’s works. Rather than a change in Cortázar’s perception of time, we will observe a deepening, a refinement as the connection between the experience of time and the meaning of an individual’s life remains a central theme. The implications of poetic time diversify and expand, and the meanings associated with them take on new shades. The perception of history changes as well: while in the beginning the individual subject stays outside of history, later it turns out to be one’s duty to step into it.

In the first chapter, I examine the implications of the time of clocks in Cortázar’s short stories “Carta a una señorita en París” and “La autopista del sur”. In these stories, Cortázar’s interpretation of the clock and of routine as a prison is revealed. In his first collection of short stories, *Bestiario*, which also includes “Carta a una señorita en París”, the destructive power of time is shown as characters are painted as slaves to the Great Habit. They follow exact routines determined by the time of

<sup>98</sup> See Standish, 2001, xi; Kerr, 1974, 39, and Picon Garfield, 1981, 18. To Picon Garfield, (1981, 18), Cortázar tells that “[e]l cuento es algo que pasa a través de mí, que me utiliza” (“the story is something that passes through me, that uses me”).

the clock and do not change their behavior, even when the reality around them appears absurd and chaotic. In “La autopista del sur”, the absurdity of clock time is realized from the endless time of a traffic jam. People regress to live in a pre-modern community as their experience of time changes. However, they immediately return to clock time as traffic resumes, proving themselves to be victims of the Great Habit. This short story illustrates the construction of the modern conception of time and the possibility of alternate ways of experiencing it.

In the second chapter, I examine Cortázar’s short story “El perseguidor” and through it introduce the concept of poetic time, which I discuss in relation to dream theory, anthropology, child psychology and the views of the Early Romantics on poetry. In this chapter, I also analyze two other short stories in which poetic time is strongly manifest: “La isla a mediodía” and “Las babas del diablo.” In “La isla a mediodía” I show how the stretching of time in imagination is revealed to the reader, and in “Las babas del diablo” I explore the relationship between the temporal immediacy of the image and the linear temporality of the word.

In the third chapter, I discuss sensuality as it is related to the poetic experience of time. Cortázar advocates for social liberation, where sensuality and pleasure are not rejected in the name of reason. It is also possible to reach a poetic experience of timelessness through eroticism, as in the short story “Lugar llamado Kindberg” and the novel *Rayuela*. The problem of time in Cortázar’s most challenging short story “Anillo de Moebius”, “Moebius strip”, is explored through Arthur Schopenhauer’s concept of *nunc stans*. What happens to time when individual consciousness ceases to exist? Through this short story, Cortázar’s vision of cosmic time unfolds, situating the individual as part of an eternal cycle where life and death occupy the same side of the Moebius strip.

In the fourth and the final chapter, I examine the latter phase of Cortázar’s writing career, when he became interested in political issues through the Cuban Revolution. In the short story “Reunión”, different conceptions of time come together: the time of clocks, mythical time and the poetic conception of time, which informs a new kind of history. In this chapter, I will also discuss Cortázar’s views on history, which changed with his political awakening and also influenced his conception of time. While “Reunión” is brimming with idealism, “Recortes de prensa”, written ten years later, is a pessimistic description of the artist’s limited power to change the world. The negative aspects of poetic time, including the dark forces emanating from the subconscious, are at the forefront of investigation. The last short story analysis of the fourth chapter examines “Fin de etapa”, from Cortázar’s final collection. In my view, the implications of this short story reflect a reality vacated of meaning and guided by a market economy ruled by the time of clocks, where we move forward without aspiration or intent and where time has stalled in exhausting repetition.

## 2 Clock Time

“¡No me hables del tiempo!” (Cortázar & Dunlop, 2008, 299) (“Do not talk to me about time!”)

In *Historias de cronopios y de famas* (1962), Cortázar playfully rejects common clock time and suggests that, when one is gifted a watch, it is not the watch that is gifted to the person but the person who is gifted to the watch. Cortázar strongly rejects clocks in his works, describing them as “a dungeon of air”, “un calabozo de aire”,<sup>99</sup> and purveyors of modern measurable time. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth captures the extent of Cortázar’s disgust by noting that a concern for clock time is often associated with a character’s malignancy; it is easy to tell the villain in Cortázar’s stories because they keep glancing at their watch.<sup>100</sup> One of Cortázar’s “weapons” against clock time is his translation of temporal markers, such as motorways or metros, into fantastic elements or poetic images, reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe.<sup>101</sup> In *Historias de cronopios y de famas*, the clock appears as a vampire, sucking the blood of the one who wears it: “Se sabe de un viajante de comercio a quien le empezó a doler la muñeca izquierda; justamente debajo del reloj de pulsera. Al arrancarse el reloj, saltó la sangre: la herida mostraba la huella de unos dientes muy finos.”<sup>102</sup> (“There was a story about this traveling salesman whose left wrist began to hurt him, just under his wristwatch. When he removed the watch, blood spurting out. The wound showed the imprints of very tiny teeth.”)<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Cortázar, 1999, 23. Translated by Paul Blackburn

<sup>100</sup> Deeds Ermarth, 1992, 52. Killer Morand in “El idolo de las Cicladas” (*Final del juego*, 1956) is looking at his watch: “Agachándose, mojó las manos en la sangre que corría por la cara y el pelo del muerto, mirando al mismo tiempo su reloj pulsera que marcaba las siete y cuarenta.” (Cortázar, 1993b, 100) (“Crouching down, he soaked his hands in the blood running from the face and scalp of the dead man, checking his wristwatch at the same time, twenty to eight.”) Translated by Paul Blackburn.

<sup>101</sup> In several of Poe’s stories the clock is a fantastic element. In “The Masque of the Red Death” and “The Pit and the Pendulum”, the clock is a symbol of death and in “The Devil in the Belfry” a village is organized as the face of a clock.

<sup>102</sup> Cortázar, 1971, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Translated by Paul Blackburn.

One of Cortázar's key arguments is that the Western project of rationality and the concomitant modern conception of time have led to a routinization of everyday life, or what he calls the "Great Habit".<sup>104</sup> The Great Habit forecloses surprise and exception; it is a practice of acting not upon intuition but rather according to rules and conventions. All prevailing orders, although seemingly handed down through history as instinctive authorities, are nonetheless the product of human intervention. As Don Slater summarizes: "[T]he routinization of everyday life derives from a systematization of the world, which is experienced as natural and lawlike rather than historical and resulting from human agency." (Slater, 2009, 218) The Great Habit destroys idiosyncrasy, transforming individuals into a uniform mass.<sup>105</sup> The systematization of time, including the demand for its measurement, is a part of this process.<sup>106</sup> Although it could be argued that the Great Habit bears a resemblance to pre-modern and rural cycles of time, it is conversely devoid of meaning and purpose.

In the following chapter I analyze the conception of clock time and its implications in Cortázar's short stories. I show how the modern, historically constructed conception of time alienates individuals from their true selves, and I examine how clock time affects characters' identities and their conceptions of reality. Furthermore, I analyze the twofold aspect of clock time in Cortázar's stories: on one hand it represents a prison that devastates individual identity; on the other hand, clock time may yield a comforting shelter.

I examine two stories in which routine and linear time play essential roles. The stories demonstrate both the causes and consequences of routinization from individual and collective perspectives. Already in Cortázar's first story collection, *Bestiario* (1951), the clock appears in connection with alienated subjectivity. In "Carta a una señorita en París", the narrator's fear that his secret – a tendency to vomit up bunnies – be revealed originates in a desperate desire for normalcy. In "La autopista del sur", a traffic jam lasting for months forces people to co-operate and build a new life together on the motorway, free from the temporal limitations of modern civilization. Clock time, this story shows, is socially and historically constructed but may give way to alternate temporal experiences. Through these

<sup>104</sup> Rosalba Campra (1986, 221) defines Great Habit as "el presunto orden del mundo, que se conserva solo mientras todo ocupa en el casillero el lugar que la razón le ha asignado" ("the supposed order of the world, which is preserved only as long as everything occupies the place in the box that reason has assigned it"). Alazraki (1992, 98) describes Great Habit as a "mundo codificado y sistematizado de la cultura occidental" ("codified and systematized world of Western culture"), and refers to Oliveira's definition of Great Habit in *Rayuela*: "la crisis y la quiebra total de la idea clásica del *homo sapiens*" ("the crisis and total bankruptcy of the classical idea of *homo sapiens*").

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979.

<sup>106</sup> See Landes 1983; Mäkilalli 2007; Whitrow 1988.

stories, I examine the implications of clock time in Cortázar and ask, what kind of subjectivity may be formed within a modern conception of time? How does a clock come to intimate a prison?

## 2.1 Routine and order: “Carta a una señorita en París”

In the short story “Carta a una señorita en París” (1951) (“Letter to a young lady in Paris”), the protagonist and narrator, a translator, moves into the flat of his friend Andrée in Buenos Aires while she is away in Paris for four months. He writes a letter to Andrée expressing his guilt about bringing a physical disorder in her beautifully decorated apartment and confesses his secret problem: he vomits bunnies. Although normally he vomits a bunny roughly once a month, during his stay in Andrée’s flat the rabbits start to appear almost daily. As the number of rabbits in the flat accumulates, the bunnies take to sleeping in the closet during the day while the narrator is at work. At night, however, the rabbits are awake and they start to ruin the furniture; the narrator can no longer sleep. The number of rabbits seems to stabilize at ten, but when the narrator vomits up an eleventh rabbit, he makes a decision: he will throw the rabbits from the balcony and then jump himself.

From the opening lines, the narrator’s chief concern is to maintain established order. Moving even one item in Andrée’s flat feels illicit. Although the narrator claims that it is only natural – to him – to vomit up rabbits, his attempts to hide them suggest a sense of shame in disrupting the perfect order set out in Andrée’s home:

Ah, querida Andrée, qué difícil oponerse, aun aceptándolo con entera sumisión del propio ser, al orden minucioso que una mujer instaaura en su liviana residencia. Cuán culpable tomar una tacita de metal y ponerla al otro extremo de la mesa [...] (Cortázar, 1986, 23–24)

Ah, dear Andrea, how difficult it is to stand counter to, yet to accept with perfect submission of one’s whole being, the elaborate order that a woman establishes in her own gracious flat. How much at fault one feels taking a small metal tray and putting it at the far end of the table [...] <sup>107</sup>

The narrator’s future is uncertain, suspended in a permanent limbo between temporary accommodations:

<sup>107</sup> All translations of “Carta a una señorita en París” are from *Blow-up and Other Stories* (1985), translated by Paul Blackburn (New York: Pantheon Books).

He cerrado tantas maletas en mi vida, me he pasado tantas horas haciendo equipajes que no llevaban a ninguna parte, que el jueves fue un día lleno de sombras y correas, porque cuando yo veo las correas de las valijas es como si viera sombras, elementos de un látigo que me azota indirectamente, de la manera más sutil y más horrible. (24–25)

I've closed so many suitcases in my life, I've passed so many hours preparing luggage that never manages to get moved anyplace, that Thursday was a day full of shadows and straps, because when I look at valise straps it's as though I were seeing shadows, as though they were parts of a whip that flogs me in some indirect way, very subtly and horribly.

This dark simile of valise straps as parts of a whip suggests the narrator lives under the rule of his prescribed nomadic lifestyle, forced to move time after time without any specific destination. Time is counted in rabbits, “a month is a rabbit”, but this material measure becomes blurred as the rabbits start to appear more often, up to once every few days, disrupting the rhythm to which he had grown accustomed. Reliable anticipation of the future becomes impossible and, with it, any possibility to found a life shaped by routine or order. As the narrator's isolation deepens, he hopes that his next move will bring about an end to the production of rabbits: “[H]asta que septiembre la traiga de nuevo a Buenos Aires y me lance a mí a alguna otra casa donde quizá ...” (24) (“[U]ntil September brings you back again to Buenos Aires and I amble off to some other house where perhaps ...”) He hopes that, one day, the bunnies will no longer appear, and that they will even disappear from the flat: “Y cuando regreso y subo en el ascensor [...] me formulo noche a noche irremediabilmente la vana esperanza de que no sea verdad.” (31) (“And when I get back home and am in the elevator [...] night after night, hopelessly, I formulate the vain hope that really it isn't true.”) For the protagonist, resolution of the present moment's uncertainty and unfulfillment can only come from the future.

Norms and routine offer possible relief from the precarity of the present.

Las costumbres, Andréa, son formas concretas del ritmo, son la cuota del ritmo que nos ayuda a vivir. No era tan terrible vomitar conejitos una vez que se había entrado en el ciclo invariable, en el método. (27)

Habits, Andrea, are concrete forms of rhythm, are that portion of rhythm which helps to keep us alive. Vomiting bunnies wasn't so terrible once one had gotten into the unvarying cycle, into the method.

Juan Carlos Curutchet has noted that habits may be a defense mechanism when faced with chaos.<sup>108</sup> They create the illusion that individuals govern their own lives and that reality is constant and predictable. In the story, despite vomiting rabbits, the protagonist insists on trying to schedule his life, although ultimately he fails. As Saúl Sosnowski notes, the main character tries to avoid understanding or even noticing the irrational by imposing order on the incomprehensible.<sup>109</sup> He attempts to manage, rather than explain, the mounting presence of rabbits. In his own home, from which he had to flee for an unknown reason, he planted clover on the balcony for the rabbits to eat:

Mire usted, yo tenía perfectamente resuelto el problema de los conejitos. Sembraba trébol en el balcón de mi otra casa, vomitaba un conejito, lo ponía en el trébol y al cabo de un mes, cuando sospechaba que de un momento a otro... entonces regalaba el conejo ya crecido a la señora de Molina, que creía en un *hobby* y se callaba. (26)

Now, look, I'd resolved the problem perfectly. I grew clover on the balcony of my other house, vomited a bunny, put it in with the clover and at the end of a month, when I suspected that any moment... then I made a present of the rabbit, already grown enough, to señora de Molina, who believed I had a hobby and was quiet about it.

In Andrée's apartment, he stows the rabbits away in a closet during the day, but their irrefutable presence ultimately drives him to suicide.

The narrator goes to extraordinary lengths to clean up the mess caused by the rabbits: "Hago lo que puedo para que no destrocen sus cosas." (31) ("I'm doing the best I can to see that they don't break your things.") The bunnies break Andrée's lamp: "El trizado apenas se advierte, toda la noche trabajé con un cemento especial que me vendieron en una casa inglesa – usted sabe que las casas inglesas tienen los mejores cementos – y ahora me quedo al lado para que ninguno la alcance otra vez con las patas [...]" (32) ("The crack where the piece was broken out barely shows, I spent a whole night doing it with a special cement that they sold me in an English shop – you know the English stores have the best cement – and now I sit beside it so that one of them can't reach it again with its paws [...]" "A las cinco de la mañana [...] los pongo en el armario y hago la limpieza." (32) ("At 5 a.m. [...] I put them in the wardrobe and do the cleaning up.") Through the narrator's practical attempts to manage the rabbits' chaos, the absurdity of the Great Habit is revealed.

<sup>108</sup> Curutchet, 1972, 58.

<sup>109</sup> Sosnowski, 1971, 39.

The main character's tendency to maniacally rearrange the house and clean up the mess caused by the rabbits reflects André Breton's view of adulthood: "C'est qu'il appartient désormais corps et âme à une impérieuse nécessité pratique, qui ne souffre pas qu'on la perde de vue." (Breton, 1946, 14) ("It is that he now belongs body and soul to an imperative practical necessity, which cannot be lost sight of.") Unlike adults, children throw themselves into any activity at the drop of a hat, which makes it possible, according to Paul Fraisse, to lose track of time. Adults, however, hold themselves back because of a desire to adhere to social norms and expectations.<sup>110</sup> The problem with modern man is that he is expected to conform to certain molds, as for example Michel Foucault has pointed out: this leads to the constant observation of one's own self through someone else's eyes.<sup>111</sup> Forgetting oneself, and thereby forgetting time, becomes impossible as one's own mind becomes the object of constant observation. The narrator of "Carta" is dependent on external constructions; he does not write a diary for himself but a letter that is addressed to someone else. Nonetheless, despite the constant existence of others in the narrator's mind, he is lonely and isolated from other people. There prevails an incongruity between the narrator's thoughts and actions. He is as alienated from himself as he is alienated from the outer world.

### 2.1.1 Risks and chances of disorder

The struggle between purity and dirt, chaos and cosmos, forms the vital tension in "Carta a una señorita en París". Mary Douglas has explored the relationship between purity and dirt from an anthropological perspective. According to Douglas, the body is symbolic of society,<sup>112</sup> and social norms define ideas of purity and dirt. Transitional states, such as the birth of a child, imply danger, "because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable".<sup>113</sup> However, in primitive cultures, transitional states were considered resources of power; dreams and fits of passion were significant. "Order implies restriction; from all possible material, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So, disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for pattern is indefinite." (Douglas, 1969, 94) According to Douglas, primitive rituals admit the potency of disorder but, for the protagonist of "Carta", disorder becomes the new norm. His behavior reflects social expectations,

<sup>110</sup> Fraisse, 1963, 206.

<sup>111</sup> See Foucault, 1982.

<sup>112</sup> Douglas, 1969, 115.

<sup>113</sup> Douglas, 1969, 36.

suppressing dream-like or transitional states and transforming exceptions into everyday rules.

The surrealism intended to correct this error in respecting dreams and madness. Only through disorder, destroying the readymade concepts, was possible to create new patterns. As Douglas notes, poetry and art are spaces where ambiguity can flourish,<sup>114</sup> a sentiment reflected by Cortázar, who praises disordered states as sites of an “other” reality, the “isle of the absolute”. The return to routine is nonetheless ultimately inevitable, entailing certain death: “[D]espués de nuevo la costumbre, donde él y tantos más estamos muertos.” (Cortázar, 2004a, 109) “[A]fterward routine returns, where he and so many more of us are dead.”<sup>115</sup>

Many researchers have interpreted the bunnies as metaphors of poetic or artistic creation.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the narrator himself compares the bunnies to poems: “pero el minuto inicial, cuando el copo tibio y bullente encubre una presencia inajenable... Como un poema en los primeros minutos, el fruto de una noche de Idumea: tan de uno que uno mismo [...] y después tan no uno, tan aislado y distante en su llano mundo blanco tamaño carta.” (27) (“but in the maiden moment, the warm bustling fleece covering an inalienable presence [...] like a poem in its first minutes, ‘fruit of an Idumean night’ as much as oneself [...] and afterwards not so much one, so distant and isolated in its flat white world the size of a letter.”)<sup>117</sup> Once born the rabbit, like a poem, loses its inalienable presence and becomes a part of the surrounding “flat” world, separated and isolated from other people and things. It is only in the moment of the rabbit’s birth, the moment of a poetic creation, that the narrator experiences a sense of unity, wonder and meaningfulness: he is at the same time both himself and the rabbit. This feeling does return, however, when the rabbit is close to his skin as he tries to hide it from Sara, the housekeeper. This proximity between narrator and rabbit engenders a poetic experience as the narrator empathically imagines how the rabbit must feel in his pocket and envisions the world from the bunny’s perspective:

Su menuda conciencia debía estarle revelando hechos importantes: que la vida es un movimiento hacia arriba con un clic final, y que es también un cielo bajo, blanco, envolvente y oliendo a lavanda, en el fondo de un pozo tibio. (28)

<sup>114</sup> Douglas, 1969, 37.

<sup>115</sup> Translation by Evelyn Picon Garfield.

<sup>116</sup> See Deeds Ermarth, 1992, 184, and de Sola, 1968, 45.

<sup>117</sup> “Idumean night” refers to the poem of Mallarmé, “Don du poème”, “Gift of the poem”, and the line is “I bring you the child of an Idumean night”.

His minuscule consciousness would be revealing important facts: that life is a movement upward with a final click, and is also a low ceiling, white and smelling of lavender, enveloping you in the bottom of a warm pit.

Cortázar has disclosed that this story was written during a period of neurosis, and that writing the story helped him to recover.<sup>118</sup> Jaime Alazraki compares this “exorcism” – how Cortázar describes the process of writing his first stories, referring to the therapeutic effect of getting rid of inner “demons” – to Romanticism. The cure for neurosis occurs not through logical reasoning but through sublimation of manic thought into a poetic image.<sup>119</sup> The story itself stages an ambiguous space where a dream or a frenzy are transformed into art. Despite the moments of poetic creation, however, the narrator of “Carta” cannot sublimate his entire existence into metaphor and imagery. Instead, he must adapt and change to conform to the norms of society: “[Y] que puedo dejarlo e irme, continuar por un tiempo una vida no distinta a la de tantos que compran sus conejos en las granjas.” (26) (“[I] can leave him there now and go on my way for a time, lead a life not very different from people who buy their rabbits at farmhouses.”) Western society is a society built on exclusion, where exceptions, ambiguity and transitional states must be adjusted to observe the prevailing norms and laws. As a prisoner of the linear conception of time, the narrator’s only hope is that someday the rabbits will no longer appear, or that they will vanish from his apartment.

Alazraki notes that there exists no simple and unique code for reading “Carta”; it welcomes multiple different interpretations and the role of the reader in this process is essential.<sup>120</sup> The protagonist’s own bewilderment and hopelessness is communicated and transferred to the readers, who receive no explanations that might guide a rational, teleological interpretation but only poetic images, interpreted with intuition and feeling. “Carta” shares many characteristics with Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, as Alazraki has pointed out,<sup>121</sup> but, whereas Kafka’s cockroach is disgusting, the rabbits are soft and cute. The horror does not emerge from the rabbits themselves but rather from their proliferation in the wrong place and at the wrong time. In contrast to Kafka’s story, “Carta” inspires a sense of peculiar wonder, hastily suppressed by the protagonist in the desire to appear normal to the outside world.

Later, the narrator again adopts the rabbits’ viewpoint, but this time the act is closer to anthropomorphic projection than to poetry: he projects the norms of

<sup>118</sup> Alazraki (1983, 73) quotes Cortázar’s words in Harss & Dohmann, 1966. Alazraki, 1983, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Alazraki, 1983, 78–79, 74.

<sup>120</sup> Alazraki, 1983, 73, 75.

<sup>121</sup> Alazraki, 1983, 73.

humanity onto the consciousness of the rabbits and sees himself as a god from their perspective. “[E]s casi hermoso ver cómo les gusta pararse, nostalgia de lo humano distante, quizá imitación de su dios ambulando y mirándolos hosco;” (32) (“[I]t’s almost lovely to see how they like to stand on their hind legs, nostalgia for that so-distant humanity, perhaps an imitation of their god walking about and looking at them darkly;”) He imagines that the lamps must be like suns for the rabbits, but his godlike status begins to bother him when the bunnies do not act as he would like: “[Y]o quisiera verlos quietos, verlos a mis pies y quietos – un poco el sueño de todo dios, Andrée, el sueño nunca cumplido de los dioses [...]” (30) (“I’d like to see them quiet, see them at my feet and being quiet – somewhat the dream of any god, Andrea, a dream the gods never see fulfilled [...]”) Despite what he perceives as the bunnies’ indiscipline, the narrator believes that the rabbits are worshipping him, committing rites that he does not understand: “[E]stuvieron en círculo bajo la luz de la lámpara, en círculo y como adorándome, y de pronto gritaban, gritaban como yo no creo que griten los conejos.” (34) (“[T]hey stood in a circle under the light of the lamp, in a circle as though they were adoring me, and suddenly they were yipping, they were crying like I never believed rabbits could cry.”) It is only shortly before the narrator’s suicide that the rabbits lose their animal-like characteristics and are able to cry like humans.

### 2.1.2 Towards poetry

The rabbits in “Carta a una señorita en París” reflect values and tendencies of the narrator and of humankind. In the Biblical Old Testament, the profound difference between God and man is established through original sin, marking man as an intruder in paradise. The narrator’s sole existence in the world breaks the well-established order. His godlike presence among the rabbits can be seen as analogical to his own relationship with God. As the rabbits are intruders in his life, he himself is an intruder in the world as he vomits bunnies in André’s neat apartment. He sees himself as a source of the mess and chaos that disrupts normal external order. Even when he anticipates his own death, he pictures himself as decaying rubbish on the pavement, a corpse which must be cleared away before children go to school the following morning.

The poetic moment of empathy between the narrator and the rabbit under his jacket was an exceptional instance of complementarity and symbiosis. This joining together, reminiscent of child’s play and primitive cultures, appears frequently in Cortázar’s later works as the key to overcoming alienation and acceding to the other conception of time. For the narrator of “Carta”, the chance for artistic or poetic freedom that would come from a harmonious symbiosis with the bunnies is too brief, opening up only at the moment they are born from his mouth. After that fleeting

moment of the present, the narrator's focus on the restoration of order and routine, imposed by hierarchical structures of power to the extent of considering himself as their god, and the anticipation of future normalcy, quashes the potential for poetic license.

The process of routinization leading to the alienation of the Great Habit appears in many stories in *Bestiario*. In "Casa tomada" this need for adaptation and habit is a source of horror. "Casa tomada" tells the story of a sister and brother who are living in a house that is gradually being taken over by strangers. The siblings accept this bizarre situation, slowly retreating to the parts of the house not yet taken over. They have their own strictly established routines. In the last chapter, when the siblings are forced to leave their house completely, the brother closes the door and notices that he is still wearing his watch. He glances at it: it is 11 pm. The siblings have lost their house and, with it, their whole lives, but they still refuse to address what has really happened, believing that their only option is to continue with their routines. Despite the absurdity of looking at one's watch in the midst of such upheaval, the watch is the only thing that links them with an external order. "El absurdo es que no parezca un absurdo [...] Es ese estancamiento, ese así sea, esa sospechosa carencia de excepciones" ("The absurdity is that it doesn't look like an absurdity [...] It's this stagnation, this so be it, this suspicious lack of exceptions"), says Oliveira in *Rayuela*.<sup>122</sup> What is absurd in the story is not only that the house is being taken over, but that the siblings continue about their lives as though nothing out of the ordinary is going on; they merely make new arrangements that allow them to continue living as before. This blindness to reality and its peculiarities and uncertainties is maintained through habits that are ruled by the clock. The same striking ignorance of a strange phenomenon occurring right in front of one's eyes unfolds in "Bestiario", where a tiger roams a house. In several stories, Cortázar shows the fantastic aspects of everyday life, including the clock and humanity's nonsensical attachment to its arbitrary rule. The real absurdity, Cortázar suggests, is the way in which people accept concepts like clock time as natural phenomena.

His characters demonstrate passive adjustments, which leads to boredom and uniformity. In "Ómnibus", characters travelling without flowers fear the obviousness of their difference and purchase their own flowers as soon as it is possible. The absurd estrangement stems from the characters inactivity; they are incapable of changing their common attitude even when they are faced with incomprehensible phenomena or fantastic convulsions in their reality.

In *Bestiario*, "Lejana" is an exception, providing a glimpse into Cortázar's later experiments in coping with chaos. The protagonist, Alina, creates her own reality

<sup>122</sup> Cortázar, 2003b, 314–315. Translation by Gregory Rabassa.

through word play. Whereas the other characters remain in the realm of clock time and their dull, routinized lives, Alina searches for a way out. She does not accept the established order as truth and creates her own reality through a game which, according to Alazraki, finally allows her to be herself.<sup>123</sup> Whereas in most of the stories in *Bestiario* the freedom of the subject to exert agency over dull routine is almost nonexistent, later work replicates Alina's poetic liberation and shows a more active attempt to take control over one's own destiny. Cortázar seeks not simply to reveal the domination of the Great Habit over human life and psyche but to escape its prison-like confines through poetry and wonder.

## 2.2 Outside clock time? "La autopista del sur"

Whereas in "Carta a una señorita en París" the main character faces chaos alone, in the later story "La autopista del sur", a large group of people together face a situation where common order and routine have been completely disrupted. What happens to the conception of time when clocks and calendars lose their significance as tools of measurement and it is no longer possible to maintain normal routines?

The story "La autopista del sur", ("The Southern Thruway"), was published in 1966 in the short story collection *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, "All Fires the Fire". In the story, cars returning from a weekend away get stuck in a traffic jam on the highway outside of Paris. The traffic jam is unrelenting; days and weeks pass by and calculating the duration of time eventually becomes pointless. In this fantastic story, the traffic jam becomes a permanent space where motorists adapt to a new life. Nobody knows the reason for the traffic jam, although many rumors circulate. The main character of the story, an engineer in a Peugeot 404, gets to know the drivers around him and their automobiles: a young woman driving a Dauphine, two nuns in a 2CV, a depressed man in a Caravelle, several young men in a Simca, farmers in an Ariane, a soldier and his wife in a Volkswagen, a couple with their little daughter in a Peugeot 203, two men and a little boy in a Taunus, and an old couple in a Citroen ID. As they wait in the traffic jam, the engineer talks with the other drivers about such ordinary topics as taxes and road conditions. Once in a while, the queues of cars advance, and the drivers return to their cars only to grind to a halt again soon after. Little by little, the drivers begin to work together: they form groups with those in nearby cars, share food and drink, take care of the children and senior citizens and elect a leader. Seasons change, but the traffic jam remains. The engineer falls in love with the girl driving the Dauphine, and she falls pregnant. One day, the traffic jam suddenly disbands and everyone returns to their cars and drives back to the city. The

<sup>123</sup> Alazraki, 1992, 102.

engineer loses sight of the Dauphine and realizes regretfully that their community has fallen apart for good.

In an interview with Ernesto González Bermejo, Cortázar described how the characters of “La autopista del sur” enter another realm of time beyond our comprehension but, as the queue starts to move again, “click, eso se rompe y todo el mundo vuelve al tiempo ordinario”, “click, it breaks and everybody return to the ordinary time”.<sup>124</sup> From a temporal perspective, the short story embodies Cortázar’s view on the culturally constructed nature of modern time. At the same time, the story reveals that this temporal experience is flexible and alterable, albeit only momentarily and in exceptional circumstances. In this subsection I will examine the relationship between clock time and the alternate experience of time on the thruway, outside the routines of modern city life. In the short story, the thruway becomes a metaphor for modern, linear conceptions of time, but it asks how the experience of time is altered when the forward movement stops.

### 2.2.1 Spatial measurement of the movement

At the beginning of “La autopista del sur”, the engineer in the Peugeot 404 comments on the redundancy of measuring time since there is no use looking at the clock while sitting in a motionless queue of cars. Clock time is a valid measurement only for those who are not stuck on the motorway:

Cualquiera podía mirar su reloj pero era como si ese tiempo atado a la muñeca derecha o el *bip bip* de la radio midieran otra cosa, fuera el tiempo de los que no han hecho la estupidez de querer regresar a París por la autopista del sur un domingo de tarde [...] (Cortázar, 2007, 9)

Anyone could look at his watch, but it was as if that time strapped to your right wrist or the beep beep on the radio were measuring something else – the time of those who haven’t made the blunder of trying to return to Paris on the southern thruway on a Sunday afternoon [...]<sup>125</sup>

On the motorway, travel time, distances and speed are inseparably related to one other: a certain distance can be traveled at a certain speed per hour. For the engineer, clock time has lost its usual meaning and importance: speed and distance traveled do not correlate with the time shown on his watch, and one cannot estimate the distance

<sup>124</sup> González Bermejo, 1978, 57.

<sup>125</sup> All translations of “La autopista del sur” are from *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories* (2005a), translated by Suzanne Jill Levine (London, New York: Marion Boyars).

traveled by looking at the watch. Jaime Alazraki cites Milan Kundera's description of motorways as alienating and dehumanizing transition routes, particularly when compared to the small old roads which were distinctive and meaningful:

A highway differs from a road not only because it is solely intended for vehicles, but also because it is merely a line that connects one point with another. A highway has no meaning in itself; its meaning derives entirely from the two points that it connects. A road is a tribute to space. Every stretch of road has meaning in itself and invites us to stop. A highway is the triumphant devaluation of space, which thanks to it has been reduced to a mere obstacle to human movement and a waste of time.<sup>126</sup>

The motorway thus describes the uniformity of the modern individual's mind, which is dominated by the efficient use of time. Time has no content, no meaning; it is a commodity to be consumed, utilized and saved – or wasted. This principle also separates individuals into their own realities, where they strive to control their own allocation of time and avoid obstacles and delays in its planned use.<sup>127</sup>

At first, the young woman in the Dauphine feels obligated to glance at her watch continuously, but she soon understands the impotence of such a gesture as the queue of cars has barely advanced at all. “[L]a muchacha del Dauphine recordó que ese plátano (si no era un castaño) había estado en la misma línea que su auto durante tanto tiempo que ya ni valía la pena mirar el reloj pulsera para perderse en cálculos inútiles.” (11–12) “[T]he girl in the Dauphine remembered that this plane (if it wasn't a chestnut) had been in line with her car for such a long time that she would no longer bother looking at her watch, since all calculations were useless.” The artificial nature of clock time is revealed in the incompatibility between speed, distance and time, and the rush and compulsion to progress are themselves revealed to be absurd: the characters do not appear to have any meaningful past in the city, nor do they have any compelling reason to return there: “Al matrimonio del Peugeot 203 le importaba sobre todo no perder los juegos televisados de las nueve y media, la muchacha del Dauphine le había dicho al ingeniero que le daba lo mismo llegar más tarde a París pero que se quejaba por principio [...]” (11) (“The couple in the Peugeot 203 were particularly interested in not missing the games on television at nine-thirty; the girl

<sup>126</sup> Alazraki, 1992, quotes Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, New York, Grove Press Inc., 1991, 223. (Translated by Peter Kussi)

<sup>127</sup> Aino Mäkikalli (2007, 163–164) has argued that clock time is realized through individual functions and measured, for example, in relation to distance (kilometers per hour).

in the Dauphine had told the engineer that she didn't care if she got to Paris a little late, she was complaining only as a matter of principle [...]” )

Although clock time has turned out to be senseless in the traffic jam, the compulsion to measure progress persists. Instead of glancing at their watches, characters monitor the numbers on the odometer and time is measured relative to the distance traveled on the highway. Drivers see their individual cars as part of a heaving mass of vehicles moving along the highway, and they determine their own progress in relation to the other cars and to the trees growing alongside the road:

(ahora el Dauphine estaba ligeramente retrasado con relación al 404, y más tarde sería al revés, pero de hecho las doce filas se movían prácticamente en bloque, como si un gendarme invisible en el fondo de la autopista ordenara el avance simultáneo sin que nadie pudiese obtener ventajas.) (14)

(now the Dauphine was slightly behind in relation to the 404, later it would be the opposite; actually, the twelve rows moved as a block, as if an invisible traffic cop at the end of the highway were ordering them to advance in unison, not letting anyone get ahead.)

The position of each car in relation to other vehicles and landmarks along the highway becomes a more appropriate way to measure time than the hands of wristwatches. However, this spatial measurement of time is only another version of clock time, equally based on the need to realize and measure progress. The distance traveled is regularly estimated in the short story although, towards the end, the accuracy of these estimates dwindles. The necessity to measure distances becomes less important for the characters as they adapt to life on the motorway. They have stepped outside of clock time into a realm of time that cannot be measured. For the reader, this translates into the impossibility of ever really knowing the duration of the story's events.

At first, the engineer and the other motorists are frustrated, constantly glancing at their watches. Waiting becomes a way of life: When will the queue finally advance? When will they get to the city? However, concrete needs, such as food and water, gradually become more important than progress: the motorists must survive first and foremost. This leads them to organize their lives on the highway as efficiently as possible in such circumstances, resulting in the formation of a functional community on the motorway. Collaboration begins when the little girl in the 203 is thirsty and others find her something to drink. The occupants of eight cars around the engineer's Peugeot start to cooperate; children and elderly citizens are cared for, and even the young men in the Simca, who at first steal water for themselves, are ashamed of their behavior and help convert the engineer's car into

an ambulance. The drivers exchange food and water and choose a leader among them. They notice that, all around them, other groups have done the same. The impossibility of physical advance and the necessity to find food and water forces people to leave their own cars and “their own time”. Towards the end of the story, life on the motorway in the haphazard community formed by small groups of cars becomes the unquestioned *status quo*. The engineer’s attitude shifts from frustration into “una indiferencia casi agradable”, “almost pleasant indifference”.

Although at the beginning of the story, some drivers understand that it would make sense to keep track of time in some way to compensate for the lack of information coming from the radio, it becomes clear that calendars are useless.

[E]ra tan poco lo que podía hacerse que las horas acababan por superponerse, por ser siempre la misma en el recuerdo; en algún momento el ingeniero pensó en tachar ese día en su agenda y contuvo una risotada [...] (17)

[T]here was so little to do that the hours began to blend together, becoming one in memory; at one point, the engineer thought of striking that day from his appointments book and had to keep from laughing out loud [...]

Because there is so little to do, the passing hours become tangled up together, indistinguishable one from the next. In the absence of any other stimuli, the color and light of the sky capture the motorists’ attention, and the woman in the Dauphine and the engineer concentrate on watching a butterfly on the car window: “En algún momento (suavemente empezaba a anochecer, el horizonte de techos de automóviles se teñía de lila) una gran mariposa blanca se posó en el parabrisas del Dauphine, y la muchacha y el ingeniero admiraron sus alas [...]” (15) (“At one point (night was softly falling, the horizon of car tops was turning purple), a big white butterfly landed on the Dauphine’s windshield, and the girl and the engineer admired its wings [...]). As time passes and still the traffic jam remains, the desire for the forward movement of linear clock time, transitioning from the past to the future, is replaced by another way of experiencing time: cyclical repetition.

## 2.2.2 Cyclical repetition and time that does not pass

When, in “La autopista del sur”, calculating clock time and measuring distance turn out to be useless and trust in the authorities wears thin, the fulfillment of immediate physical needs forms the basis for an alternate conception of time. The measurement of time is not new but is an ancient cultural phenomenon serving to direct and organize activities. As Helga Nowotny notes, the measurement of time has a biological background and the internal body clock mirrors the repeated movements

of the sun and stars.<sup>128</sup> Although at the beginning of the story exact clock time is frequently mentioned, in due course time is measured as in pre-modern societies, determined not by hands on a watch but by the position of the sun. Reference to clock time is still made, but only in relation to the time of day and the weather conditions, determining the course of action: “(era la una de la tarde, y el sol los acorralaba en los autos)” (21) “(it was one in the afternoon, and the sun kept them in their cars)” “Cuando al atardecer soplaron bruscamente unas ráfagas tormentosas y el sol se perdió entre las nubes que se alzaban al oeste, la gente se alegró pensando que iba a refrescar.” (22) (“At dusk, when some gusts of wind swept through, and the sun went behind the clouds in the west, the people were happy, thinking it would get cooler.”) In the August heat, the drivers retreat to their cars and dream of forests and shade. At night the engineer and other men stay awake to make plans and take action. The darkness makes it possible to move from the highway to the edge of the road to answer the call of nature. Although routines arise to make life easier, they stem from bodily needs and are ruled by circumstance.

Changes in the weather and the seasons control the rhythm of the motorists’ lives. Unlike in modern city life, they come to rely on the people in their own small community rather than on the police or other authorities, who have seemingly left the motorists to fend for themselves. The group of motorists resemble a pre-modern community in which, as E.P. Thompson has observed, the task-oriented individual becomes a part of his environment and its passage of time.<sup>129</sup> The focus on survival reawakens a pre-modern drive even in the midst of modern-day infrastructure. Yet, while pre-modern man had an organic connection to nature, modern man does not, so that survival by adaptation to the cycle of nature does not imply animistic beliefs nor religious rituals. Despite liberation from the claustrophobic order of the Great Habit, characters are not reacquainted with pre-modern spirituality, and their performance of tasks remains meaningless and automated.

The men of the narrator’s car community venture into the surrounding countryside to find food, but they encounter hostility from local villagers. Beyond the new life on the highway, the ominous power of the authorities remains strong and prevents the villagers from helping the stranded motorists:

El amigo de Taunus dio detalles: las granjas estaban abandonadas o la gente se negaba a venderles nada, aduciendo las reglamentaciones sobre ventas a particulares y sospechando que podían ser inspectores que se valían de las circunstancias para ponerlos a prueba. (26–27)

<sup>128</sup> Nowotny, 1994, 55.

<sup>129</sup> See Thompson, 1967, 58–71.

Taunus' friend gave details: The farms were either abandoned or the people refused to sell to them, alleging regulations forbidding the sale to private individuals and suspecting that they were inspectors taking advantage of the circumstances to test them.

Society's system of care, with hospitals and morgues, is beyond the reach of the motorists, who must care for the sick and deal with the dead by themselves. These tasks are assigned according to an individual's strengths and capabilities: the owner of the Taunus is intuitively considered to be the best leader; women take care of the children and the sick; men search for food like hunters of pre-modern times and organize drivers to move abandoned cars away from the queuing traffic. Some happiness is found only in the rare moments of physical proximity, when cars serve as venues for nocturnal encounters.

Individuality is replaced by collectivity and, with little variety to choose from, identical routines are repeated from day to day, with everybody working equally to keep the community running. In the story's language, this is reflected in the use of expressions, which emphasize the collective tendency of the action and obscures an individual agent: "Bajo mantas sucias [...] algo de felicidad duraba aquí y allá" (33) ("Some kind of happiness endured here and there under dirty blankets"), "siguieron días frescos y soleados en que ya era posible salir de los autos, visitarse" (34) ("it was again possible to leave your car, pay visits"). Use of collective subjects, like "everyone" and "no one", emphasizes the communal perspective of the story: "a pocos les preocupaba" (29) ("few cared"), "[y]a nadie llevaba la cuenta de lo que se había avanzado" (30) ("[n]obody kept track anymore of how much they had moved"), "[a] nadie se le hubiera ocurrido asombrarse" (32) ("[n]o one would have conceived of being surprised"). When the weather gets colder and it starts to snow, highway drivers must adapt to the new conditions and look for warm clothes and blankets. "Todo ese día y los siguientes nevó casi de continuo, y cuando la columna avanzaba unos metros había que despejar con medios improvisados las masas de nieve amontonadas entre los autos." (32) ("That day and the following days, it snowed almost continuously, and when the line moved up a few yards, the snow that had accumulated between cars had to be removed by improvised means.") Whereas at first, the events are told in relative detail one day at a time, "hacia las dos de la madrugada bajó la temperatura" (25) ("toward two in the morning, the temperature dropped"), "a las ocho llegó el médico" (26) ("at eight, the doctor came"), "el médico, que vino hacia las cuatro y media" (27) ("the doctor, who came around four-thirty"), as the days continue, the passage of time is condensed into increasingly vague and lengthy periods. Attention to exact times given earlier in the short story is later replaced by generic and plural expressions of time, "en alguna de esas noches

heladas” (31) “one of those freezing nights”, “[e]l Ford Mercury y un Porsche venían cada noche” (32) “[t]he Ford Mercury and a Porsche came every night”.

By the time the traffic jam finally clears, the drivers have adapted to the temporal ambiguity of their new lifestyle: “[T]odo sucedía en cualquier momento, sin horarios previsibles” (35) “[A]nything would happen at any moment, without prearranged schedules”. The unpredictability of life, including fights, illnesses and deaths, as well as uncertainty surrounding the sufficiency of food and everyday boredom have spawned “indiferencia casi agradable”, an almost pleasant indifference in the engineer. Life is improvised according to physical needs and desires. The motorists have abandoned the time of clocks, inhabiting an alternate realm in which time no longer appears to move forward. The reader is not able to grasp the duration of time spent on the highway, and the characters themselves do not reminisce about the past nor plan for the future.

In addition to cyclical, repetitive time, this experience is also reminiscent of stopped time, what Arthur Schopenhauer describes as *nunc stans* – the eternal present. In Schopenhauer’s concept of *nunc stans*, time is comprehended in human consciousness. Human beings situate themselves along a continuum stretching from memories of the past to the anticipation of the future. Outside of this individual consciousness there is no time but the eternal present.<sup>130</sup> On the highway, the repeated, unchangeable rhythm of life prevails in this frozen time, where forward movement has stopped. When the line of cars does occasionally move, the flurry of activity is not measured in relation to past or future life in the city but interpreted as an erratic and unpredictable natural occurrence to which the characters must react and adapt in the moment. Time is no longer measured by individual consciousness but gives way to the eternal present of the collective, an aspect reflected also in the anonymity of the characters, who, towards the end of the story, are referred to by the make of their cars.

### 2.2.3 Back to the future

When the line of cars finally starts to nudge forward, the protagonist of “La autopista del sur” returns to his car and starts the engine. The young woman in the Dauphine is pregnant and expecting his child, and the engineer excitedly begins to plan their future. The narration turns to the engineer’s internal stream of consciousness: “[P]ensó que iban a llegar a París y que se bañarían, que irían juntos a cualquier lado, a su casa o a la de ella a bañarse interminablemente y a comer y beber, y que después habría muebles, habría un dormitorio con muebles [...]” (36) (“[He] thought that

<sup>130</sup> Schopenhauer, 1909, 283.

they would make it to Paris and take a bath, or somewhere together, to her house or his to take a bath, eat, bathe endlessly and eat and drink and later there would be furniture, a bedroom with furniture [...]”) However, these comforting thoughts become darker the further he looks into the future: “[A]ntes de empezar a pensar en lo que iban a hacer, en el hijo y los problemas y el futuro [...]” (36) (“[B]efore beginning to think about what they were going to do, about the child and all the problems and the future [...]” Concrete thoughts of furniture, baths, soap and food mutate into abstract concepts of “problems” and “future”. After all, there is no freedom in the city, only responsibilities and concerns. The cyclical time of the traffic jam is once again partitioned into past, present and future.

The engineer loses the Dauphine and other familiar cars from sight when the symmetrical progression of queuing cars stops, accelerating forward in their own lanes. He understands that their group is disbanding: “El grupo se dislocaba, ya no existía [...]” [38] “The group was falling apart; it didn’t exist anymore [...]” His hope that he will see the Dauphine among the other cars diminishes: “El 404 había esperado todavía que el avance el retroceso de las filas le permitiera alcanzar otra vez a Dauphine, pero cada minuto lo iba convenciendo de que era inútil, que el grupo se había disuelto irrevocablemente [...]” (38) “404 still hoped that with the gaining and losing of ground he would again catch up with Dauphine, but each minute that slipped by convinced him that it was useless, that the group had dissolved irrevocably [...]” The Dauphine is no longer within his reach, and his thoughts of a future together are set aside. His mind wanders back into the past, and he begins to reminisce about his life on the highway. He recognizes the finality of this change and of everything he has lost.

[P]ero cada minuto lo iba convenciendo de que era inútil, que el grupo se había disuelto irrevocablemente, que ya no volverían a repetirse los encuentros rutinarios, los mínimos rituales, los consejos de guerra en el auto de Taunus, las caricias de Dauphine en la paz de la madrugada, las risas de los niños jugando con sus autos [...] (38)

[B]ut each minute that slipped by convinced him that it was useless, that the group had dissolved irrevocably, that the everyday meetings would never take place again, the few rituals, the war councils in Taunus’ car, Dauphine’s caresses in the quiet of night, the children’s laughter as they played with their little cars [...]

Surprisingly, he wishes he could return to that life, which no longer seems hard and laborious but pleasurable and almost poetical: “[D]espués sería la noche, sería Dauphine subiendo sigilosamente a su auto, las estrellas o las nubes, la vida.” (39)

(“[T]hen it would be night, Dauphine sneaking into his car, stars or clouds, life.”) Herbert Marcuse has suggested that happiness may be experienced through nostalgia: “The lost paradises are the only true ones not because, in retrospect, the past joy seems more beautiful than it really was, but because remembrance alone provides the joy without the anxiety over its passing and thus gives it an otherwise impossible duration. (“Die verlorenen Paradiese sind die wahren, nicht weil, im Rückblick, die vergangene Freude glücklicher erscheint, als sie wirklich war, sondern weil allein die Erinnerung Glück ohne die Angst des Vergehens gibt und ihm so eine sonst unmögliche Dauer verleiht.”) (Marcuse, 1955, 64) Memories do not fly by like the present moment; it is possible to return to them time and again. The pleasure derived from memories also arises from their strong connection to imagination. When what is experienced is not immediate reality but a reenactment, sourced from the inner images of the mind, memories open up a window to another reality, richer and more meaningful than the present.

The stream of consciousness in the final scene differs from the rest of the story in that the reader does not follow the events from an external perspective but enters the engineer’s mind. In his memories, the engineer reconnects with his feelings, which were suppressed by the daily stresses of survival. With this affective awakening, he also realizes the absurdity of the reality he has reentered. In the last sentence of the story, the true nature of the modern lifestyle is revealed as an oppressive world “donde todo el mundo miraba fijamente hacia adelante, exclusivamente hacia adelante”. (40) (“where no one knew anything about the others, where everyone looked straight ahead, only ahead”). The word “ahead” is emphasized in the last sentence with the adverbs “fijamente” (straight or fixedly) and “exclusivamente” (only or exclusively), and the tautological expression “hacia adelante”, correctly rendered as “adelante” or “hacia delante”, emphasizes the modern insistence on looking ahead.<sup>131</sup>

Paul Fraisse describes, how Maurice Merleau-Ponty compares the modern concept of time to a river: “[W]hen we imagine the flow of time we are always spectators standing on the bank, watching a river flow by which remains unknown to us. Change is transformed into an object.” (Fraisse, 1963, 292) When they are forced to stop in the traffic jam and to survive day to day, the drivers no longer subject their lives to objective mediation: they live, rather than think of living.

<sup>131</sup> Bruno in “El perseguidor” uses this same tautological exaggeration. He thinks about the day after tomorrow and starts to schedule his timetable. He finds relief in this: “Me he puesto a pensar en pasado mañana y era como una tranquilidad, como un puente bien tendido del mostrador hacia adelante.” (Cortázar, 2003a, 157) (“I began to think of the day after tomorrow and it was like tranquility descending, like a bridge stretching beautifully from the zinc counter into the future”.) Translated by Paul Blackburn.

However, in the final part of the short story, immediately after he realizes the dissolution of the traffic jam, the engineer begins to think about his life instead of simply living it. He transports himself into the uncertain future and, at the same time, into the lost past. In the modern concept of clock time, the individual is always on a highway, moving towards some uncertain future goal without realizing the value of living in the moment before it is too late. Against the backdrop of this sad reality, where experience is always coming or gone, Horacio Oliveira's claim, in *Rayuela*, becomes understandable: "Hay que instalarse en presente." (Cortázar, 2003b, 231) ("We must establish ourselves in the present once more.")<sup>132</sup> The only truly happy characters in the story are the children, who have enough food, water and warmth, but who also play endlessly, creating their own imagined highway where they can reside within *another* time. Play and imagination, that would enable recognizing happiness at the present moment, is what adults lack both in the city and on the highway.

This kind of meaningful experience of life is unavailable to adults on the highway, who remain concerned with the survival, but also to people in the city, where basic needs would be satisfied. The motorists operate automatically in any reality, whether in stopped time or clock time, instead of creating their own world. Although, towards the end of the story, the engineer catches a glimpse of this possibility, he realizes too late that it is already lost to him. The story shows the power of routine and the constructive nature of modern conception of time, where people can never be truly happy. In the story "El perseguidor", instead, an alternative to this situation is shown: Cortázar's temporal poetics express how paradise does not exist in the past but can only be experienced in the here and now.

In this chapter, I have discussed the implications of Great Habit in Cortázar's short stories and examined routine as an essential feature of the modern conception of measurable time, which I call clock time. For Cortázar, living under the rational conception of reality and the time of clocks is equal to life in prison; it forces individuals to count and externalize the passage of time and to turn strange phenomena and wonders into norms. The significance of the present is annihilated by the anticipation of the future, which is harnessed to measure time and make plans. The modern individual does not live according to the rhythm of natural changes, like pre-modern people used to do, but according to objective measures and expectations. Although the protagonist of "Carta a una señorita en París" experiences a phenomenon that transcends the rational world view, he attempts to control it through routine, and he looks forward to a future in which he will no longer vomit up bunnies.

<sup>132</sup> Translation by Gregory Rabassa.

In the short story “La autopista del sur”, the characters experience stopped time, *nunc stans*, on the highway as they surrender their individuality and their “own time” on their wristwatches. Clock time proves illusory when the conventions of rational and predictable reality fall apart. The motorists become part of a community and fulfil repetitive tasks according to natural physical needs, but they do not comprehend the value of their actions; as soon as the traffic jam begins to ease, they return to the routines of modern society. Any creative impulse, allowing the creation of alternate selves and alternate worlds not governed by traditional norms and orders, remains out of reach.

## 3 Poetic Time

At the end of the 1950s, Cortázar began to articulate ever more precisely the concept of an alternative to clock time; another time, where awareness of time disappears and the present moment seems eternal. This can be seen both in the narration of the short stories and in the characters' unusual experiences of time. In "El perseguidor" (1959), ("The Pursuer"), Johnny reaches this present moment while playing the saxophone or sitting on the metro; in "La isla a mediodía" (1966), ("The Island at Noon"), the flight attendant Marini's sense of time disappears while watching an island from the airplane; the photographer Michel in "Las babas del diablo" (1959), ("Blow-up"), experiences a crack in linear time as the "other" reality is revealed to him through a photograph. While these experiences are not identical, they undoubtedly possess common characteristics: condensation of time, intuition and imagery flowing from the subconscious instead of from rational logic, and an emphasis on the present moment in contrast to the linear time of past, present and future.

In this chapter I will examine these experiences of "other" time, which I call poetic time, where the everyday conception of time ceases to exist and characters step into the "timeless" present moment. I will analyze closely three short stories: "El perseguidor", "La isla a mediodía" and "Las babas del diablo". I ask: in what kinds of situations and states of mind does this poetic present time appear and what are the characteristics of the identity it implies? Furthermore, by examining the language used to describe and explain this experience, I demonstrate that analogy and metaphor are used as central techniques to convey Cortázar's poetic conception of time.

### 3.1 The other time in "El perseguidor"

The problem of time is a central theme in "El perseguidor". The title refers to the main character, Johnny Carter, a celebrated American saxophonist, who pursues another experience of time through his music. Johnny is staying in Paris for recordings and concerts with his band, and to see lovers and friends, including the music critic Bruno, the narrator of the story, who is writing a biography about Johnny. "El perseguidor" takes the form of a private diary in which Bruno writes about Johnny and his own intentions and limitations in trying to understand him.

According to Bruno, Johnny is manic about time: he has difficulty living in the same clock time as others and suffers from what he perceives as its falsity and fabrication. Johnny believes that he occasionally enters another, more authentic time, but these transient experiences are like dreams, vanishing the moment he awakens. Johnny tries to explain this problem to Bruno, who does not really understand: he can sense that there is a remarkable point in Johnny's thinking, but he cannot grasp it completely nor, it seems, does he particularly want to. He is content to live with, as Johnny berates him, "nothing to do but tell time". Bruno epitomizes the connection between clock time and rationality, whereas Johnny's poetic experience of time brings forth the possibility of a more authentic perception on reality and of oneself. The turning point in the story occurs when Johnny's daughter, Bee, dies, and his drug addiction spirals out of control. He returns to New York, intending to commit suicide, but ultimately succumbs to a heart attack likely caused by his drug addiction. For Bruno, Johnny's death is a relief as the musician can no longer query and refute the biographer's representation of himself and his music. Consequently, the biography has the final word on Johnny.

A crucial opening section of the story, where the other time is explicitly manifested, unfolds when Johnny forgets his saxophone on the metro and Bruno is called to his hotel to help. Johnny tells Bruno about a peculiar experience: while riding the metro, he became wrapped up in memories of his childhood and of a time when he still lived with his wife and children in Baltimore. Suddenly he awoke, realizing that the metro had traveled only one stop, although the time he had spent reminiscing seemed to last much longer. He recounts this experience to Bruno, describing what he was thinking – or rather, seeing – before he awoke. It would take about fifteen minutes to tell all of the tale; how can one think a quarter of an hour in only a minute and a half? Such experiences happen to Johnny from time to time, often on the metro, which he calls a moving clock and where it turns out to be easier than elsewhere to realize that time felt and time measured do not match.

The narration of Johnny's experience draws heavily on Cortázar's personal experience. In "El estado actual de la narrativa en Hispanoamérica", he described a state of mind he occasionally entered into while on the metro to explain Johnny's experiences:

En un impreciso estado de semisueño, el personaje reflexiona extensamente sobre el pasado, recuerda escenas infinitas, tararea mentalmente una canción y los recuerdos empiezan a encadenarse interminablemente. (Cortázar, 1994b, 106)<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup> See also González Bermejo, 1978, 55–56; Prego, 1985, 64; Cortázar, 2009, 416.

In a vague state of semi sleep, the protagonist reflects extensively the past, remembers endless scenes, hums mentally a song, and the memories start to bind together interminably.

“El perseguidor” establishes the basis of Cortázar’s problem with time, drawing not on a philosophical idea but on real lived experience. Here, Cortázar’s approach to time differs from that of Jorge Luis Borges, or of many other writers and philosophers of the twentieth century. In his essay, Cortázar compares Johnny’s experience to that of the protagonist Jaromir Hladík in Borges’ short story “El milagro secreto”. In Borges’ story, Hladík is sentenced to death, but at the moment of his execution he is granted an additional year in which to finish his play, during which the chronological passing of time will stop for everyone else. As Cortázar notes, Borges’ story is philosophical rather than based on personal experience, although the original idea may also stem from an interest in the peculiarities of the dream psyche.<sup>134</sup> Cortázar takes as an example the time during semi-sleep, when one witnesses a long scene of acts in a dream that correspond to a comparatively brief and insignificant external stimulus, such as the noise of someone knocking at the door:

[E]l cumplimiento del sueño ha sido casi instantáneo, mientras que el hecho de soñarlo parecía producirse a lo largo de un prolongado periodo de tiempo [...] podía decirse que en ciertas ocasiones penetramos en un tiempo diferente [...] (Cortázar, 1994b, 105)

The fulfilment of the dream has been almost instantaneous, while the act of dreaming seemed to take place during a longer time period of time [...] it can be said that in certain occasions we penetrate into another time [...]

The experiential basis of Cortázar’s poetic time is evident; he has personally witnessed the notable variations in experiences of time. Through Johnny and Bruno, he examines the possibility of profoundly altering the everyday notion of clock time by bringing aspects of the dream psyche into the state of wakefulness.

Within the story, it is suggested that Johnny’s mania stems from his childhood, when his religious parents were constantly fighting over the mortgage. For Johnny, mortgages and religion are symbolic of clock time, in which the future cannot be forgotten. Only by playing the saxophone could Johnny enter a different time, where mortgages and religion no longer existed. He tells Bruno: “La música me sacaba del

<sup>134</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 106.

tiempo, aunque no es más que una manera de decirlo. Si quieres saber lo que realmente siento, yo creo que la música me metía en el tiempo.” (Cortázar, 2003a, 147) (“Music got me out of time, but that’s only a way of putting it. If you want to know what I think, really, I believe that music put me into time.”)<sup>135</sup> There is a further connection here with Cortázar’s own childhood experiences. Cortázar claims that, in his youth, he could step into another time by reading books, and he trained his mind to make these transitions through a variety of media. Like Johnny, Cortázar suggests that this “superposición de tiempos diferentes”, superposition of different times, could be used to reach a certain immortality.<sup>136</sup> For Johnny, man could live one “thousand times faster” and for “hundreds of years” if he could only enter this other time permanently.

In “El perseguidor”, Johnny’s travels on the metro precipitate the flow of associations in his mind, uncontrolled by his consciousness.

Y después miré la cara de Lan y la de los chicos, y después me acordé de Mike que vivía en la pieza de al lado, y cómo Mike me había contado la historia de unos caballos salvajes en Colorado, y él que trabajaba en un rancho y hablaba sacando pecho como los domadores de caballos [...] y cómo Hamp tocaba *Save it, pretty mama* y yo escuchaba cada nota, entiendes, cada nota [...] (Cortázar, 2003a, 152–153)

Then I looked at Lan’s face and at the boy’s faces, and then I remembered Mike who lived in the next room, and how Mike had told me a story about some wild horses in Colorado, once he worked on a ranch, and talked about the balls it took for cowboys to break wild horses...[...] and how Hamp played *Save it, pretty mama*, and listened to every note, you dig, every note [...]

The piece played by Hamp is fused into memories of Johnny’s childhood and of his parents, “también le oí a mi vieja una oración larguísima, donde hablaba de repollos [...]” (153) (“I heard an endless harangue of my old lady’s, she was saying something about cabbages [...]”) Although Johnny repeats “después”, “then”, as if his memories would unfold chronologically, it proves impossible. He sees everything in one and a half minutes, although it would take fifteen minutes to tell it all. These associations are like Russian matryoshka dolls; endless layers of memories emerge, each adding visual details, new emotions, details of stories told and pieces played.

<sup>135</sup> All translations of “El perseguidor” are from *Blow-up and Other Stories* (1985), translated by Paul Blackburn (New York: Pantheon Books).

<sup>136</sup> Prego, 1985, 63–65.

As Cortázar proposes in “El estado actual de la narrativa en Hispanoamérica”, Johnny’s vivid visions of the past occur in a distracted state of semi-sleep.<sup>137</sup> In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud reads Alfred Maury’s guillotine dream, in which the Frenchman dreamt he had been condemned to death by guillotine during the French Revolution.<sup>138</sup> The dream story was long and detailed, eventually ending as the blade of the guillotine falls and Maury wakes up, noticing that the bed’s headboard had fallen on the back of his neck. Maury’s conclusion is that the small board falling on the back of his neck had caused him to awaken but, in the state between sleep and wakefulness, the mind had created an entire story in an extremely short period of time as an almost instantaneous reaction to the external stimulus. This, he argued, was evidence of the extreme condensation of time in hypnagogic states. Freud, however, was critical of Maury’s conclusion, arguing that Maury’s mind could not create such a varied story in only a second or two. He argued that the story of the guillotine must have already existed in Maury’s mind, created previously through combinations of history, literature and imagination, and was simply activated in the act of waking, when memory allowed for its recollection and reconstruction. Maury’s dream was, for Freud, evidence of the workings of the unconscious, where, triggered by a single stimulus, webs of recollections could arise all at once. One need only listen to the opening chords of Mozart’s *Figaro*, for example, to hear the whole opera in one’s head. Freud explains that, “[t]he rousing stimulus excites the psychical port of entry which allows access to the whole guillotine phantasy. But the phantasy is not gone through during sleep but only in the recollection of the sleeper after his awakening.” (Freud, 1997, 344)<sup>139</sup>

A similar phenomenon affects Johnny on the metro. The story of wild horses, relayed to him by Mike, is activated in his mind in a very short period of time. In addition, the jazz piece played by Hamp is heard in its totally – every single note – because the piece is already stored in his mind. In this fantasy, the memories are not organized into separate groups and arranged chronologically but, rather, they emerge in unison, following intuitive associations. Cortázar has suggested that one’s memories and one’s senses are the food of creative impulses,<sup>140</sup> so Johnny’s act of remembrance appears as an imaginative, creative practice in which the memories are lived anew, as if in an emphatic reading of a book or improvisation to a piece of

<sup>137</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 106.

<sup>138</sup> See Freud, 1997, 343–344 and Maury, 1861, 139–140. André Breton (1990, 12–17) also refers to this dream in *Communicating Vessels*.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Fraisse (1963, 231) describes the same phenomenon.

<sup>140</sup> Cortázar, 2004a, 71.

music one knows by heart.<sup>141</sup> Johnny does not go back into the past; he creates the past anew and lives it in the present. Riding the metro can be seen as an exceptional distraction from the outer world, where the lack of external stimuli concentrates the stream of images flowing into the mind.<sup>142</sup> Paradoxically, this loss of focus gives way to alternate forms of attention and concentration not governed by ratiō and reason:

El estado que definimos como distracci3n podr3a ser de alguna manera una forma diferente de la atenci3n, su manifestaci3n sim3trica m3s profunda situ3ndose en otro plano de la psiquis: una atenci3n dirigida desde o a trav3s e incluso hacia ese plano profundo. (Cort3zar, 2005d, 272)

The state that we define as distraction could be in some way a different form of attention, its deepest symmetrical manifestation situated on another level of the psyche: an attention directed from or through and even towards that deep level.

Cort3zar argues that his own experience that he embodies in his writings, can help readers to understand the potential of distraction to permeate the binaries of time and order, the possibility of which the routines usually obscure in their lives.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Remembering as a creative act and its connection to imagination is discussed in recent research in the field of cultural memory studies. “[A]ll remembering is mediated and involves an interpretative-imaginative aspect” (Meretoja, 2017, 33–34).

<sup>142</sup> Cort3zar was fascinated by the metro, using it as the site of many of his stories, such as “Cuello de gatito negro” (Throat of a Black Kitten) and “Manuscrito hallado en un bolsillo” (Manuscript Found in a Pocket). He suggested that the underground is home to a poetic world, which Baudelaire and Nerval would have loved. Paradoxically, in the metro, time ceases to oppress the subject since the freedom of choice is reduced to the minimum: “Pero aqu3 todo es r3gido y como intemporal, y *no hay nada que ver ni o3r ni oler* porque todo es recurrente y peri3dico y forzoso y casi id3ntico en cualquier estaci3n de metro.” (Cort3zar, 2009, 413–414) (“But here everything is rigid and like timeless, and there *is nothing to see or hear or smell* because all is recurrent and periodic and compulsory and almost identical in any metro station.”)

<sup>143</sup> Gonz3lez Bermejo, 1978, 89. Octavio Paz describes this distracted state as an intuitive inner search: “The poetic revelation involves an inner search. A search that in no way resembles introspection or analysis; more than a search, a psychic activity capable of bringing on the passivity that favors the outcropping of images” (Paz, 1956, 54).

### 3.1.1 Metaphors of poetic time: the bag and the elevator

What enables the protagonist, Johnny, to enter these states of distracted semi-sleep in “El perseguidor” so often appears to be the exceptionally weak control of the consciousness. Johnny describes to Bruno the retrospective realization of his thoughts:

Nunca he pensado en nada, solamente de golpe me doy cuenta de lo que he pensado [...] ¿Qué gracia va a tener darse cuenta de que uno ha pensado algo? Para el caso es lo mismo que si pensaras tú o cualquier otro. No soy yo, yo. Simplemente saco provecho de lo que pienso, pero siempre después, y eso es lo que no aguanto. (147)

I never thought of nothing, only all at once I realize what I thought of [...] How’s it funny to realize that you’ve thought of something? Because it’s all the same thing whether you think, or someone else. I am not I, me. I just use what I think, but always afterwards, and that’s what I can’t stand.

Johnny only retrospectively becomes consciously aware of the torrent of images and thoughts in his mind. Although he finds the unconventional functioning of his mind to be oppressive at times, it is this that enables him to experience poetic time. In contrast to the self-reflexive inner monologue of other adults, Johnny does not have the intuition of the inner observer, the continuous sense of “I think”. According to Immanuel Kant, human thinking and awareness is always accompanied by self-awareness, that is, awareness of oneself thinking.

It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. (Kant, 1986, 152–153)

According to Kant, there is no thinking that does not include self-awareness, that is, the awareness of one’s own self as a separate and uniform subject.<sup>144</sup> In Johnny’s experience, such subjectivity is called into question as the experiencing and thinking subject is not distinct from experience or thought but experiencer and experience are interdependent, separated only belatedly through reflection. Johnny’s subjectivity is in a constant state of adaptation, much like John Keats’, whose “chameleon-like” identity Cortázar often evoked. Keats wrote, in one of his letters, that when a bird

<sup>144</sup> Kant, 1986, 152–155.

flies by his window, he felt himself merge with its being and found himself pecking at the ground in his own mind.<sup>145</sup>

According to Cortázar, this kind of “chameleonic” function of consciousness, based on analogy and fusion with the other’s identity, prevails among poets – such as Keats – but also among Indigenous people and young children. In his essay “Para una poética”, Cortázar uses Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of participation in primitive cultures to show this analogical way of thought in “primitive” men, children and poets. Participation is a way for “primitive” people to see intuitive analogies between things and people, understanding that things are connected by duality-unity, rather than by differentiation between subject and object. Cortázar quotes Lévy-Bruhl’s view of “primitive” consciousness, where the subject is both himself and the other with whom he is participating.<sup>146</sup> According to Lévy-Bruhl, participation is alien to our modern paradigms, being *felt* rather than thought.<sup>147</sup> Lévy Bruhl notes that, “duality-unity is not the synthesis or reunion of one thing with another thing, such that while being two they are yet only one [...] but it is simply a complex reality, felt at one and the same time as one and as two without this causing any difficulty”.<sup>148</sup>

The formation of subjectivity in such an affective way, emphasizing connection rather than separation from the other, resonates with what Lévy-Bruhl considered to be an original human experience.<sup>149</sup> This is supported by Ernst Cassirer’s

<sup>145</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 48. Cortázar quotes John Keats’ letter: “I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness... I look not for it if it be not in the present hour, nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights or if a Sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel.” (Cited by Betty Askwith, *Keats*, London, 1941, 111) Johnny has usually been compared in studies to Charlie Parker, but he can be seen to resemble also – just by his first name – John Keats.

<sup>146</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 272, quotes Lévy-Bruhl, *Las funciones mentales en las sociedades inferiores*. Lautaro, Buenos Aires.

<sup>147</sup> The “feeling of fantastic” is felt instead of thought. See Cortázar, 1982.

<sup>148</sup> Lévy-Bruhl, 1975, 71. Lévy-Bruhl takes a concrete example of the participation felt between the ghost and the corpse: “When, in order to express this complex, we say that primitive man feels an intimate participation between the ghost and the corpse, this expression is right in so far as we say: he feels. But it ceases to be right when we say that he feels it between two given terms of things. It is from our point of view that they are given first, and participation is established between them and felt afterwards. From the point of view of primitive man’s consciousness what is given is the complex, that is to say above all emotion caused by death, the felt participation; the isolated representation of either the corpse of the ghost, if it comes, comes only afterwards” (Lévy-Bruhl, 1975, 3).

<sup>149</sup> By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was noted that this view of “primitives” having a wholly opposed worldview to that of a modern man was unscientific. See Levenson, 2003, 21.

understanding of mythical thinking, where the most important feature is comprehensiveness. Cassirer explains that original experience of reality is holistic; there is no difference between object and subject, and sleep and wakefulness are not strictly divided into separate, discrete realities.<sup>150</sup>

Cortázar emphasizes that the way children's consciousness works is similar, based on analogy, although this is gradually lost with socialization. A child may ask why trees dress up in the summer when people reduce their clothing.<sup>151</sup> According to Jean Piaget, children, unlike adults, perceive the world through non-differentiation. The understanding of difference between subject and object is not innate in humans but is learned. For young children, things in the world do not exist independent of them or their actions, so that all things are formed in an analogous relationship with the self.<sup>152</sup> The birth of the self is inseparably connected with the perception of oneself as on a linear continuum, along which it is possible to understand the present self as contiguous with the same self in the past. According to Freud and Piaget, the child's world of experience resembles the free association and hypnagogic state that adults experience at the onset of dream.<sup>153</sup> According to Cortázar, it is precisely this borderland between sleeping and waking that is the playground of poets. Like surrealists, he believed that dream is a trace of this original experiential reality, through which poets can express and overcome their feelings of alienation.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Cassirer, 1955, 36–37.

<sup>151</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 267. The same analogy between a person and a tree is voiced by the little boy Bobby in the short story “En nombre de Bobby” and by La Maga in *Rayuela*.

<sup>152</sup> Piaget, 1985, 13.

<sup>153</sup> Gopnik, 2009, 163.

<sup>154</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 278. In his essay “El cuento breve y sus alrededores”, Cortázar explains the dreamlike state in which his short stories are written. His writing takes place “sin ningún “think” previo”, without any prior thinking. (Cortázar, 2005d, 49) “Todo está visto por algo mío que no es mi conciencia, pero que vale más que ella en esa hora fuera del tiempo y la razón.” (Cortázar, 2005d, 49) (“Everything is seen by something of mine that is not my conscience but that is worth more than it in that hour outside of time and reason.”) In this state, Cortázar ceases to be himself in the usual sense and *turns into* his characters: “[A]sí me tocó escribir muchos de mis cuentos; incluso en algunos relativamente largos, como ‘Las armas secretas’, la angustia omnipresente a lo largo de todo un día me obligó a trabajar empecinadamente hasta terminar el relato y solo entonces, sin cuidarme de releerlo, bajar a la calle y caminar por mí mismo, sin ser ya Pierre, sin ser ya Michèle.” (Cortázar, 2005d, 47) (“This is how I had to write many of my stories, also some relatively long ones, like ‘Las armas secretas’. The omnipresent anguish throughout an entire day forced me to work stubbornly until I finished the story and only then, without worrying about rereading it, go down to the street and walk by myself, without being Pierre anymore, without being Michèle [the main characters of ‘Las armas secretas’].”)

The workings of Johnny's consciousness, where thought succeeds experience and the subject of thought or experience is not distinct from its object, means that the reality of lived experience appears to be constantly changing. As in the consciousness of a small child, the subject adapts to changes in an object, and this also affects the experience of time. Johnny's grasp on both reality and time is in constant flux: "[T]odo es elástico, chico. Las cosas que parecen duras tienen una elasticidad [...]" (150) ("[I]t's all elastic, baby. Things that look solid have an elasticity [...]") In the absence of an inner guardian who would uphold a sense of subjectivity along the continuum from past to future, Johnny invents a metaphor that describes his reality as elastic. Time is described as a bag that stretches itself endlessly or shrinks, depending on the situation:

Lo mejor es cuando te das cuenta de que puedes meter una tienda entera en la valija, cientos y cientos de trajes, como yo meto la música en el tiempo cuando estoy tocando, a veces. La música y lo que pienso cuando viajo en el *metro*. (149)

The best is when you realize you can put a whole store full of suits and shoes in there... hundreds and hundreds of suits like I get into the music when I'm blowing sometimes. Music, and what I'm thinking about when I ride the metro.

This constantly changing experience of time mirrors the temporal awareness of primitive peoples and children. In the mythical-magical experience, time is not empty, waiting to be filled with something, but always has content; time is a qualitative record of something happening or becoming.<sup>155</sup> In a young child's perception of time, every situation has its own unique time, relative to the current activity and to the speed of all the moving elements. Thus, time is not a unitary, continuous or uniform dimension. Every individual event has its own time scale with its own pace, which may be accelerated or decelerated according to the speed of the related movements. When movement comes to a standstill, time too stops dead, interrupted and discontinuous.<sup>156</sup>

The experience of poetic time is connected to the erasure of uniform subjectivity of linear time and subjective binaries separating oneself from other objects and persons.<sup>157</sup> As Ramírez Molas has noted, Cortázar describes the porosity of the

<sup>155</sup> Cassirer, 1955, 110–111, 118–119.

<sup>156</sup> Friedman, 1982, 51.

<sup>157</sup> The connection between consciousness of time and subjectivity is widely recognized. See for example Fraisse 1963; Piaget, 1985; Saariluoma 1992.

subject's borders in his essay "El sentimiento de no estar del todo",<sup>158</sup> where he writes that, "a veces soy más grande que el caballo que monto, y otros días me caigo en uno de mis zapatos [...]" (Cortázar, 2004, 34) ("sometimes I am bigger than the horse I ride, and other days I fall in one of my shoes [...]" )

Cortázar calls forays outside of subjective borders "paravisions".<sup>159</sup> In *Rayuela*, paravisions affect Oliveira, who can step out of himself to see himself from the outside, living experiences that might occur as he is waking or in unpredictable, fleeting moments when he is walking down the street:

[E]s decir (lo malo es eso, decirlo) una aptitud instantánea para salirme, para de pronto desde fuera aprehenderme, o de dentro, pero en otro plano, como si yo fuera alguien que me está mirando (mejor todavía – porque en realidad no me veo - : como alguien que me está viviendo). (Cortázar, 2003b, 568–569)

[T]hat is to say (that's the worst of it, saying it) an instantaneous aptitude for going out, so that suddenly I can grasp myself from outside, or from inside but on a different plane, as if it were somebody who was looking at me (better still – because in reality I cannot see myself – : like someone who is living me).<sup>160</sup>

As can be observed in Johnny's experience on the metro, during paravisions the orders of time and of subjectivity vanish, obscured by the dissolution of the binary between self and others, or between past, present and future. In contrast to the Kantian idea of the unity of the self, in Johnny's experiences the otherness of the self, shown by Freud and earlier by the Romantics and by Rimbaud (*car je est un autre*), is manifested. In the final part of the story, Johnny tells Bruno about his marvelous experience in New York while listening to Miles Davis:

Miles tocó algo tan hermoso que casi me tira de la silla, y entonces me largué, cerré los ojos, volaba. [...] Me oía como si desde un sitio lejanísimo pero dentro de mí mismo, al lado de mí mismo, alguien estuviera de pie... No exactamente alguien... [...] *Y lo que había a mi lado era como yo mismo pero sin ocupar ningún sitio, sin estar en Nueva York, y sobre todo sin tiempo, sin que después* [...] Por un rato no hubo más que siempre... (199)<sup>161</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Ramírez Molas, 1978, 121.

<sup>159</sup> See González Bermejo, 1978, 55.

<sup>160</sup> Translation by Gregory Rabassa.

<sup>161</sup> Italics by I.U.

Miles played something so lovely it almost pulled me out of my chair, then I let loose, I just closed my eyes and I flew [...] And I was hearing it like from a place very far away, but inside me just the same, beside myself, someone was standing there... Not exactly someone... [...] And *who I had beside me was like myself but not taking up any space, without being in New York at all, and especially without time, without afterwards...[...]* for a while there wasn't anything but always...<sup>162</sup>

This example of a paravision illustrates the relation of subjectivity to the unity of time and space. When subjectivity expands, time and space cease to define the subject in a certain place and time. It is as if the original Johnny were no longer existing in the present spacetime at all. The timelessness of the unconscious, as Freud has described,<sup>163</sup> makes possible a space of the present, in which recollection of the past and anticipation of the future cease to exist.

In a poetic experience, perception expands beyond the subject's limited field of vision, so that the metaphoric bag can hold innumerable things, accumulating affectively charged images that spring from the subconscious without any definite experiencer. It is the rational control of consciousness, from which subconscious images and impromptu external stimuli are excluded, that leads to a narrowing of perceptual reality.<sup>164</sup> In this case, the metaphorical bag fits only shoes and a suit. This can be seen in Bruno's thinking, where a future-oriented linear perception of time curbs any digressions proffered by unplanned stimuli and maintains the apprehension of a unified and unchanging subject. This is brought to the fore in an incident following Johnny's criticism of Bruno's biography of him, as Bruno sinks into a fearful pit of obsessive thoughts concerning the loss of his reputation. His senses are dulled and his attention narrows to focus only on himself and his

<sup>162</sup> Italics by I.U.

<sup>163</sup> Fraisse (1963, 163) refers to and quotes Marie Bonaparte, who summarizes Freud's view on the temporality of the unconscious, saying that the processes of the unconscious are not organized in time and do not change over time. They have no connection to time, which is connected to the activity of consciousness. (Bonaparte quotes Freud, *Das Unbewusste*, 1915 in *L'inconscient et le temps*, *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 1939, 11, 61–105) "The sense of reality and the sense of time are both apparent in the system of Perception-Consciousness alone. The unconscious knows nothing of them: the intemporal unconscious in which the secondary process dominated by the reality principle is not yet master, the unconscious which has remained entirely governed by the primary process guided solely by the pleasure principle" (Bonaparte, *ibid.*, 100).

<sup>164</sup> The Mystic Writing Pad is Freud's metaphor for the workings of the mind. It describes how, in a linear concept of time the mind is protected from the flood of perceptions and stimuli as new experiences and memories are moved to the background of the subconscious (See Freud, 1925).

potentially threatened reputation. He can barely hear Johnny, whose voice echoes in his ears as if from afar.

Sí, escuchar atentamente y proceder con rapidez, porque en manos de otras gentes estos posibles desmentidos podrían tener consecuencias lamentables. *Y la urna del medio, la más grande, llena de un polvo casi azul* – está diciendo Johnny – *y tan parecida a una polvera que tenía mi hermana*. Mientras no pase de las alucinaciones, lo peor sería que desmintiera las ideas de fondo, el sistema estético que tantos elogios... *Y además el cool no es ni por casualidad lo que has escrito* – está diciendo Johnny. Atención) (191)

Yes, listen closely and proceed rapidly, because in other people's hands any possible contradiction might have terrible consequences. *And the urn in the middle, full of dust that's almost blue*, Johnny is saying, *and very close to the color of a compact my sister had once*. As long as he wasn't going into hallucinations, the worst that could happen would be that he might contradict the basic ideas, the aesthetic system so many people have praised... *And furthermore, cool doesn't mean, even by accident ever, what you've written*, Johnny is saying. Attention.

In this quote, several characteristics associated with the waking consciousness typical of adults are highlighted.<sup>165</sup> In the section above, Bruno's ego controls his thought processes by filtering out external stimuli and his inner monologue is based in language rather than imagery. His fear of contradictions arising in the book is debilitating and may even have "terrible consequences". Bruno's thinking is linear and future oriented: he devises a plan to correct any mistakes in the next edition. Johnny's efforts to explain himself and his experiences simply spur Bruno on to justify his writing for the readers. Paradoxically, however, Bruno is not even listening to Johnny, although this demand is at the center of the inner monologue (*listen closely* and *attention*). In his distraction, Bruno distances himself from reality and the present moment, in which he is berated by Johnny, dissipates into an anticipated future where Bruno takes solace in potential action to remedy his mistakes.

<sup>165</sup> Jung's idea of the richness of dream compared to conscious processes of mind can be seen here: "There is no ground for the assumption that the unconscious processes underlying the dream are more limited and one-sided, in form and content, than conscious processes. One would rather expect that the latter could be limited to known categories, since they usually reflect the regularity or even monotony of the conscious way of life" (Jung, 2008, 73).

Along with the metaphor of the bag, Johnny also employs another metaphor of time as an elevator:

[Y]o no me abstraigo cuando toco. Solamente que cambio de lugar. Es como en un ascensor, tú estás en el ascensor hablando con la gente, y no sientes nada raro, y entre tanto pasa el primer piso, el décimo, el veintiuno, y la ciudad se quedó ahí abajo, y tú estás terminando la frase que habías empezado al entrar, y entre las primeras palabras y las últimas hay cincuenta y dos pisos. Yo me di cuenta cuando empecé a tocar que entraba en un ascensor, pero era un ascensor de tiempo... (149)

[I] don't get lost when I'm playing. Only the place changes. It's like in an elevator, you're in an elevator talking with people, you don't feel anything strange, meanwhile you've passed the first floor, the tenth, the twenty-first, and the city's down there below you, and you're finishing the sentence you began when you stepped into it, and between the first words and the last ones, there're fifty two floors. I realized that when I started to play I was stepping into an elevator, but the elevator was time...

In Cortázar's first novel, *Los premios* (1960), time is defined as a space in a consecutive form.<sup>166</sup> The metaphor of the elevator can be seen in the light of this notion. When one compares elevators and stairs, one discovers that the space is constant – for example, ten floors – but the duration of time is far longer when taking the stairs. Metaphorically, the same difference prevails between visual and verbal language. The image communicates a message far quicker than words. Images condense time into a shorter duration that can be observed in a fleeting moment; words are linear and need far more time to be expressed. Bruno's thinking is typically based on inner monologue, within which words and sentences follow one other in a linear continuum;<sup>167</sup> Johnny thinks in images, giving him more time to fit thoughts in. Thinking in images minimizes the control of the consciousness over one's mind; only afterwards, like after a dream, does he become conscious of what he has thought.

The metaphors of the bag and the elevator are conflicting. In the elevator, space is large and time is small; in the bag, space is limited but time is vast. However, both these metaphors describe the essence of poetic time, which is paradoxical in nature: intense, fast and compact, but at the same time it is capacious; one can move about slowly, as can be seen in Johnny's brief tale of Lan's dress: “[M]e estaba paseando

<sup>166</sup> Cortázar, 2005c, 195.

<sup>167</sup> On the consciousness of adults, see Gopnik 2009, 145, 156–162.

alrededor del vestido de Lan y lo miraba despacito.” (152) (“[I] was walking around Lan’s suit and looking at it pretty slow.”)

At the beginning of the story, Johnny’s discussion of time is ambiguous and incomprehensible to Bruno. Only when the musician radically narrows his strange experience on the metro to the description, “a quarter of an hour in a minute and a half”, does Bruno understand him: “Nunca me preocupo demasiado por las cosas que dice Johnny pero ahora, con su manera de mirarme, he sentido frío.” (153) (“I never pay too much attention to the things Johnny says, but now, with his way of staring at me, I felt cold.”) Johnny finds a way, between poetry and rational logic, to create an analogy that makes Bruno “feel cold”, and his reaction is physical, not intellectual, affective rather than rational. At this moment, Bruno begins to wonder if Johnny may have a point. Yet, Johnny is ultimately caught in the same trap as Bruno: “A todo le pones un número, tú.” (142) (“You, you put a number on everything”.) Only by talking in numbers can Johnny make his experience comprehensible to Bruno. Nevertheless, by doing this he is able to get his ideas across to Bruno and, from this point on, Bruno opens up to Johnny’s more poetic analogies, including the unconventional metaphor of time as a bag full of suits, which requires some detachment from rational logic and a receptiveness to images, to intuition and to vague, multiple significations.

### 3.1.2 Detail and totality: the invention of God

In “El perseguidor” religious imagery is evoked by both Johnny and Bruno. In several sections, Bruno envisages Johnny as a Christ-like figure, but he then revokes this comparison, comparing the musician instead to an ape or a baboon. In Bruno’s eyes, Johnny is a striver, who suffers for others in his search for another reality, but his failures undermine his attempts and the biographer also ungenerously compares him to an ape struggling to read. Bruno both admires Johnny and despises him, and ends up casting himself – half satirically – as his apostle.

Johnny’s view on religion is nonetheless skeptical and unenthusiastic. Having grown up in a religious household, he associates religion with routine, dull, everyday life. Johnny’s most virulent critique of Bruno’s book touches on a connection Bruno makes between his music and religion. He declares that Bruno’s God is an invention. Religion has accommodated a mystical and undefinable God into everyday humdrum life: “No quiero tu Dios [...] Yo no sé si hay Dios, yo toco mi música, yo hago mi Dios, no necesito de tus inventos [...]” (196–197) (“I don’t want your God [...] I don’t know if there’s a God, I play my music, I make my God, I don’t need your inventions [...]”) The invention that Bruno considers as God does not recognize the mystery prevailing in reality nor evoke an experience of the Absolute. Johnny, like Bruno, needs to believe in something or someone to compensate for the sense

of unfulfillment and uncertainty that pervades his everyday life. At times, Bruno admits that he is depressed: “Tendría que recordar esto en los momentos de depresión en que me da lástima no ser nada más que un crítico.” (192) (“I should remember this in moments of depression when I feel dragged that I’m nothing more than a critic.”) His unhappiness stems from a lack of connection to both his inner feelings and to wider reality, his identity worn like a “mask” that caters for expectations and norms.

Orienting himself towards the future and the fulfillment of obligations helps Bruno to tolerate insecurity: “Cuando no se está demasiado seguro de nada, lo mejor es crearse deberes a manera de flotadores.” (157) (“When one is not too sure of anything, the best thing to do is to make obligations for oneself that’ll act as pontoons.”) Bruno’s methods of coping with insecurity are similar to those Johnny describes as characteristic of people in general, accepting everything at face value. According to Johnny, people do not believe in reality but in *representations* of reality constructed through language, “a slime” that envelops and protects them from seeing authentic reality. This understanding of reality relates back to the aspersions Johnny casts on Bruno’s conception of religion as a constructed realization of immaterial ideals. When Bruno makes a comparison between Johnny’s music and the imagery of religion in Afro-Black music, Johnny is incensed: “No se puede decir nada, inmediatamente lo traduces a tu sucio idioma. Si cuando yo toco tú ves a los ángeles, no es culpa mía.” (197) (“A man can’t say anything, right away you translate it into your filthy language. If I play and you see angels, that’s not my fault.”) In approaching Johnny’s music through the analysis of the genre instead of allowing it to evoke impulsive images, Bruno sees only clichés of Christian iconography and fails to understand what Johnny is searching for through his music.

Johnny finds himself uneasily situated within an inauthentic reality that is full of “holes”. In moments of poetic time, however, he attains a state of totality and perfection, the Absolute<sup>168</sup>: “Era la seguridad, el encuentro, como en algunos sueños [...]” (199) (“It was the sureness, the meeting, like in some dreams [...]”) In Christian theology, the Absolute is synonymous with or an essential attribute of God. Johnny’s experiences of totality are not culturally determined, like religious rites, but are created – or rather found – within himself. Johnny describes these experiences of poetic time as moments in which he opens a door to another reality. Although he concedes that religion also strives to reach another reality, he argues

<sup>168</sup> Liisa Steinby has shown how Robinson in Michel Tournier’s novel *Friday* reaches the Absolute under Friday’s guidance while on the desert island. At this point, he no longer aims to conquer the object – the island – and plan a future but lives in a perpetual present, where the boundaries between subject and object have dissolved (Steinby, 2023, 212).

that God presides over that entry, insisting on payment in the form of belief, rites and doctrines. For Johnny, it is not necessary to wait for the last judgement to grasp the absolute if this other reality prevails in one's own unconsciousness. The profound difference between Bruno's and Johnny's kingdom of heaven is not only temporal – existing either in the future or in the present – but also relates to subjectivity: for Bruno, who represents the lay view of religion, God appears as an object of authority who judges human beings; for Johnny, God it is his own *experience* of God.

During the Enlightenment, the Bible was no longer held to be the divine teachings of the Holy Spirit, as Luther had thought, but was considered to be of human origin. Deism, espousing religion and Enlightenment principles, believed that God had created the world but had no hand in its everyday activities. Johann Gottfried Herder went further, arguing that the Deists' abstract conception of God was insufficient to provide guidance for humanity, whose reality was concrete and sensual and demanded a God who would similarly take on a concrete, anthropomorphic shape.<sup>169</sup> The Biblical proclamation that man is created in the image of God is, thus, turned around; by imagining the shape of God, man invents the ideal image of himself. For German Early Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, modernity itself demanded a new God, who would reflect more accurately the contemporary image of man.<sup>170</sup>

In German Early Romanticism, imagination and mythopoesis were combined in the conceptualization of the Absolute.<sup>171</sup> The close connection, in Early Romanticism, between poetry and religion, which at its most extreme meant replacing religion with poetry (so called *Kunstreligion*, cult of art, cf. Auerochs 2009),<sup>172</sup> resurfaces in the later surrealist movement. When belief in a deity independent of man had been eroded, a new deity, poetry, was to be found within man.<sup>173</sup> The task of art and of poetry was to manifest the Absolute in the present, and Cortázar wields his poetry with similar aims, as Nestor García Canclini has pointed out, by filling the void left by the absence of religion.<sup>174</sup> Thanks to imagination and

<sup>169</sup> Herder, 1993, 967–8; Steinby, 2009, 54–79.

<sup>170</sup> Schlegel, 1988, no. 13, 2239, no. 29, 224, no. 95, 229; Novalis, 1981, Vol. III, 491–2, 523, 667; Vol. IV, 272.

<sup>171</sup> C.f., e.g., Schelling. 1976, 11–14. Liisa Steinby demonstrates the relationship between religion and poetry in the thought of Schlegel and Novalis: “If the gods are nothing but human mythopoetic creations representing the Absolute, the boundary between poetry (the arts) and religion is abolished” (Steinby, 2023, 89).

<sup>172</sup> Auerochs, Bernd 2009: *Die Entstehung der Kunstreligion*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (2006).

<sup>173</sup> Balakian, 1972, 71.

<sup>174</sup> García Canclini, 1968, 103.

to poetry, Cortázar makes possible the realization of a full present moment that overcomes the sensation of want and incompleteness.

It is the ideal of perfection that generates a relative sense of lack or deficit, an ideal that is, according to Manfred Frank, manifest in art.<sup>175</sup> In the customary perception of time, where one constantly negotiates forwards and backwards from the present moment, one never experiences the fullness of being, always either reminiscing or anticipating. The work of art, however, enables a momentary experience of totality in which the individual's consciousness expands. Octavio Paz describes the possibility of art to dissolve the boundary between subject and object, where the magical object "*nos invita a cambiar y a ser otros sin dejar de ser nosotros mismos*", ("*invites us to change and be others without ceasing to be ourselves*").<sup>176</sup> According to Paz, the desire to be a part of another living entity is the basic essence of man; a person can only be himself if he is capable of also being someone else. Through the work of art, an individual experiences transformation, merging momentarily with the object of their appreciation.<sup>177</sup> Linear time, associated with the unified self, comes to a temporary halt in this transformative instant.

Through his art, Johnny creates his own God, but it is not music itself that is the key to reaching the Absolute. Indeed, Johnny's experiences of the Absolute are realized both through music and on the metro. It is thus not music but rather the sensuous and visual analogies and metaphors of his poetic attitude that allow him to transcend modern reality.<sup>178</sup> In "El perseguidor", poetic imagination precedes and exceeds music in its capability to express meaning and, thus, to challenge and transform the rational mentality of modern man.

Johnny's visual thinking is replete with details that supplement his imagination and precipitate his course towards the Absolute. Johnny describes what he sees while sitting on the metro, giving intricate details of his wife Lan's dress:

Entonces seguí pensando en Lan y vi a mi vieja cuando volvía de hacer las compras, y empecé a verlos a todos a *estar con ellos* de una manera hermosísima [...] para decirte una sola cosa, veía a Lan con un vestido verde que se ponía cuando iba al Club 33 [...] Veía el vestido con unas cintas, un moño, una especie de adorno al costado y un cuello... No al mismo tiempo, sino que en realidad me estaba paseando alrededor del vestido de Lan y lo miraba despacito. (152)

<sup>175</sup> Bowie in Frank, 1997, xxxii.

<sup>176</sup> Paz, 1983a, 154.

<sup>177</sup> Paz, 1983a, 154–155. See also Balakian, 1972, 176.

<sup>178</sup> According to Andrew Bowie, music appeals to the obscure area of human mind which, in contrast to language, cannot be articulated. Like the poetic allegory, it refers to somewhere else, to the Absolute.

Then I went on thinking about Lan, and I saw my old lady when she was coming back from doing the shopping, and I began to see them all around, to *be with them* in a very beautiful way [...] Just to tell you one thing, I saw Lan in a green suit that she wore when she came to Club 33 [...] I was seeing the suit with some ribbons, a loop, a sort of trim down the side and a collar... Not at the same time, though, really, I was walking around Lan's suit and looking at it pretty slow.<sup>179</sup>

The details in Lan's dress are apparently insignificant, but for Johnny they are extremely important, each one a fragment of the Absolute. Whereas Bruno, as a critic, embraces definitions, generalizations and genre stereotypes, Johnny regards every object as unique. As Andrew Bowie puts it, aesthetic works "live from their particularity, which is not reducible to conceptual generalization".<sup>180</sup> For the German Early Romantics, it was only through the fragment that one was able to grasp the totality; only in a fragment can totality be divined.<sup>181</sup>

For Johnny, Lan's suit acts as a magical or childhood object to enchant and tempt the senses. As Cortázar proposes, in "Para una poética", images nurture the poet as a primitive man, a shaman, "el mago", who accedes to another reality, *becoming* the other thanks to a "participación sentimental", emotional participation.<sup>182</sup> "[E]l poema y la imagen analógica que lo nutre son la zona donde las cosas renuncian a su soledad [...] la imagen es *forma lírica* del ansia de ser siempre más [...]" (Cortázar, 1994a, 285) ("[T]he poem and the analogical image that nourishes it are the zone where things renounce their loneliness [...] the image is a *lyrical form* of the desire to always be more [...]")

Johnny does not identify himself using generic conventions, such as his occupation – saxophonist – or even his name – Johnny Carter. He identifies himself always through analogy: he sees himself in Lan's suit, in a loaf of bread, in a straw that flows down the Seine. Johnny is thus like La Maga in *Rayuela*, who "*es, no piensa que es*", as Lida Aronne Amestoy summarizes.<sup>183</sup> ("She *is*, she doesn't *think she is*.") La Maga does not have a self-reflexive understanding of her identity in a Cartesian and Kantian sense but experiences the world with a childlike wonder, as Sara Castro-Claren notes: "For La Maga, the sensory evidence of the outer world and the psychic reality experienced by the mind are one single event of an unquestionable inherent unity." (Castro-Claren, 1975, 227) Much like Johnny, La Maga also prefers to observe and concentrate on unique details, a common

<sup>179</sup> Italics by I.U.

<sup>180</sup> Bowie, 1990, 5.

<sup>181</sup> See Frank, 1984 ; Striedter, 1985.

<sup>182</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 274, 284.

<sup>183</sup> Aronne Amestoy, 1972, 67.

characteristic of many of the more poetic-minded characters in Cortázar's stories.<sup>184</sup> In *Rayuela*, the philosopher Morelli tells the story of a man who spent his entire life watching a screw. At first, everybody laughed at him, but finally they understood that this screw "was peace".

Quizá el error estuviera en aceptar que ese objeto era un tornillo por el hecho de que tenía la forma de un tornillo. [...] A lo mejor el Napolitano era un idiota pero también pudo ser el inventor de un mundo. ¿Por qué entregarse a la Gran Costumbre? Se puede elegir la tura, la invención, es decir el tornillo o el auto de juguete. (Cortázar, 2003b, 545–546)

Perhaps the error was in accepting the fact that the object was a screw simply because it was shaped like a screw [...] The Neapolitan was most likely an idiot, but he also might have been the inventor of a world. [...] Why surrender to Great Habit? One can choose his ture, his invention, that is to say, the screw or the toy car.<sup>185</sup>

Through an intricate attention to details, the poetic mind approaches totality. Whereas the rational mind prefers to generalize and relativize unique aspects of reality with definitions and laws, the poetic mind extracts the whole from the details. The absolute connects every part of reality to a greater totality.<sup>186</sup>

In "El perseguidor", the experiences on the metro and at the Miles Davis concert intimate the beauty of poetic time. However, poetic time also elicits a horror that stems from the loss of one's subjectivity and the accompanying implication of death. Life, as Octavio Paz has noted, implies a temporal separation between birth and death.<sup>187</sup> The loss of subjectivity constitutes a regression towards a pre-conscious state prior to birth. The nightmarish horror of losing one's ego appears in many of Cortázar's stories, including "Las armas secretas" and "Las babas del diablo".

<sup>184</sup> These include, for example, Pierre in "Las armas secretas", Michel in "Las babas del diablo" and the protagonist of "Reunión".

<sup>185</sup> Translation by Gregory Rabassa

<sup>186</sup> Cortázar emphasized this connection, *oneness*, in his book on John Keats, and saw it as the only way to reach an understanding of the connections behind the diversity of the world: "El mundo es un problema mal resuelto si no contiene, en alguna parte de su diversidad, el encuentro de cada cosa con todas las demás." (Cortázar, 1996, 301) ("The world is a poorly solved problem if it does not contain, in some parts of its diversity, the encounter of each thing with all the others.") This same idea of the search for the Absolute in single things appears in Michel Tournier's *Friday*. (See Steinby, 2023, 210)

<sup>187</sup> Thomson, 2000, 113.

Johnny experiences one such nightmare. Before recording *Amorous*, he is assailed by a terrible dreamlike vision that he is walking in a field covered with burial urns and comes across his own urn, full of ashes. Johnny's colleague, Art, recounts the event to Bruno:

Hacía rato que me daba cuenta de que Johnny tenía una especie de contracción en el brazo derecho, y cuando empezó a tocar te aseguro que era terrible de ver. La cara gris, sabes, y de cuando en cuando como un escalofrío; y no veía el momento de que se fuera al suelo. (169)

After a while I noticed that Johnny was having a kind of contraction in his right arm, and when he began to blow it was terrible to watch... His face all gray... and every once in a while a chill'd shake him; and I didn't catch that moment when it got him on the floor.

Later Johnny tells Bruno about this vision himself:

Campos llenos de urnas, Bruno. Montones de urnas invisibles, enterradas en un campo inmenso. Yo andaba por ahí y de cuando en cuando tropezaba con algo. Tú dirás que he soñado, eh. Era así, fíjate [...] (172)

Fields filled with urns, Bruno. Piles of invisible urns buried in an immense field. I was wandering around there and once in a while I'd stumble across something. You'd say that I'd dreamt it, huh? It was just like that, believe it [...]

This vision occurs just before Johnny goes on to record *Amorous* which, according to Bruno, will become one of the great masterpieces in the history of jazz. But the nightmarish vision has tarnished the record for Johnny, who wants it destroyed, even attempting to burn down his hotel room, from which he escapes naked down the halls. When Johnny later finds Art and Bruno listening to the record, he is furious:

Comprendo que le enfurezca la idea de que vayan a publicar *Amorous*, porque cualquiera se da cuenta de las fallas, del soplido perfectamente perceptible que acompaña algunos finales de frase, y sobre todo la salvaje caída final, esa nota sorda y breve que me ha parecido un corazón que se rompe [...] (178)

I understand why the idea that they were going to release *Amorous* infuriated him, anyone could hear its deficiencies, the breathing perfectly audible at the ends of the phrase, and especially the final savage drop, that short dull note which sounded to me like a heart being broken [...]

Johnny's vision of the urns and the recording of *Amorous* – which is, in some ways, a musical rendering of the vision – coincide with the death of his daughter, Bee. Even after the tragedy of Bee's death, Bruno's concerns are mainly about Johnny's music. This somewhat indifferent reaction to Bee's death and his lack of empathy are, to some extent, explained by his reinforced boundaries between self and other. Unlike Johnny, whose sense of self melds frequently with others and with other objects, Bruno's steadfast self-reflexive grasp of his own relative identity prevents his empathic identification with Johnny. The "mask" that he wears, assuring his professional identity as a music critic, acts as an additional layer preserving the distinction between self and other. For this reason, such a protective mask – albeit illusory – appeals to Johnny, whose last words are a line from a Dylan Thomas poem: "Oh, hazme una máscara" (204) ("Oh, make me a mask"). When Bee dies, Johnny lies in bed with a towel over his face, a mask that shields him from the reality of her death. This mask he wears also symbolically, when he quotes the Bible instead of expressing his feelings directly to Bruno: "Bruno, ella era como una piedrecita blanca en mi mano. Y yo no soy nada más que un pobre caballo amarillo, y nadie, nadie, limpiará las lágrimas de mis ojos." (184) ("Bruno, she was like a small white stone in my hand. I'm nothing but a pale horse with granulated eyelids whose eyes'll run forever.")

Religion promises immortality, and Bruno's fascination with Johnny's pursuit of poetic moments suggests the critic's own fascination with the realization of eternal life. Bruno's own obsession with clocks recalls his habit of "counting the time all the time" and fixedly concentrating on the future. For Johnny, poetic time is Absolute, a feeling of totality grasped in the present moment. Paradoxically, however, this feeling of totality is only achieved by casting off the comforting objective certainties of reality. Without the oppressive control of the consciousness, one may experience totality, but one also risks confrontation with the fear, horror and chaos that run amok in the psyche. Johnny's experience of the Absolute, understood through dream psychology, is profoundly human. This Absolute is not supernatural but is rather the transcendence of modern subjectivity faced with increasing alienation. Even a modern analytical mind such as Bruno's, Cortázar suggests, may one day reach the Absolute.

### 3.1.3 The poet in Bruno

In "El perseguidor", Bruno's commitment to the time of the clocks shelters him from uncertainty. After an unsettling conversation with Johnny, Bruno calms himself by visiting a café for a cognac and making plans for the day after tomorrow: "Me he puesto a pensar en pasado mañana y era como una tranquilidad, como un puente bien tendido del mostrador hacia adelante." (157) ("I began to think of the day after

tomorrow and it was like tranquility descending, like a bridge stretching beautifully from the zinc counter into the future.”) As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth comments, “[t]he future, like a shot of cognac, relieves him of the moment and of the insistent definitions of present actuality. Bruno’s time – the time of history and project – is a smooth hard path to the future.” (Deeds Ermarth, 1992, 52) For Bruno, anticipation of the future fills the yawning lack of substance in the present moment.

Although Bruno represents a rational perspective and Johnny a more poetic approach to reality, the relationship between their respective worldviews is far from dichotomous. If it is Bruno who accuses Johnny of being preoccupied with time, he too, as Doris Sommer has suggested, is obsessed by it. Although Bruno appears to be far more analytical than Johnny, who is naturally more artistic and intuitive, their personalities are in fact not, as Sommer points out, all that dissimilar: Johnny is surprisingly analytical when explaining his strange experiences and Bruno is artistic in his writing style.<sup>188</sup> I have already analyzed Johnny’s poetic side and also his analytic side, which surfaces in his use of numbers to explicate his experience on the metro. Despite his generally analytical approaches and mannerisms, Bruno also thinks through analogies and metaphors on occasion. When he feels threatened, for example when Johnny is criticizing his biography, he employs the detached discourse of a critic: “[L]os creadores [...] son incapaces de extraer las consecuencias dialécticas de su obra, postular los fundamentos y la trascendencia de lo que están escribiendo o improvisando.” (103) (“[T]he creators... are incapable of extrapolating the dialectical consequences of their work, of postulating the fundamentals and the transcendence of what they’re writing down or improvising.”) By contrast, when writing candidly in an attempt to uncover hidden truths, Bruno uses analogies and metaphors:

Pero esto ocurre siempre al otro día, no cuando Johnny me lo está diciendo, porque entonces siento que hay algo que quiere ceder en alguna parte, una luz que busca encenderse, o más bien como si fuera necesario quebrar alguna cosa, quebrarla de arriba abajo como un tronco metiéndole una cuña y martillando hasta el final. Y Johnny ya no tiene fuerzas para martillar nada, y yo ni siquiera sé qué martillo haría falta para meter una cuña que tampoco me imagino. (155)

But this always happens the next day, not when Johnny’s talking to me about it, because then I feel that there’s something that I’d like to admit at some point, a light that’s looking to be lit, or better yet, as though it were necessary to break something, split it from top to bottom like a log, setting a wedge in and

<sup>188</sup> Sommer, 1998, 220.

hammering it until the job's done. And Johnny hasn't got the strength to hammer anything in, and me, I don't know where the hammer is to tap in the wedge, which I can't imagine either.

As co-participants in this ambiguous psychic quest, Bruno's language leans intuitively on the use of metaphors rather than attempting to employ the logic of analytical language. Lying beyond conventional language, obscure and amorphous feelings and affects are accessible, or at least sought out, through the language of metaphor and analogy. If Bruno initially uses the common metaphor of a light, he ultimately invents his own metaphor of a log to better describe his intense but frustrated search for the truth behind Johnny's words.<sup>189</sup>

Bruno describes the flipping of his mind from the intuitive to the rational as an omelet, one or the other taking responsibility for his thinking in turn, a metaphor he borrows from Johnny. Curiously, however, it is not Johnny's words that have the strongest effect on Bruno, but rather his corporeal behavior. Much like a child, Johnny is unreserved in his physical actions and his behavior is ruled by impulses rather than analytical thought. During one of their meetings, Johnny touches Bruno's face before fondling his own wristwatch. Despite Johnny's aversion to clocks, he touches both faces tenderly, instilling a parallel between his biographer and the watch: "Fumamos, callados, y a veces Johnny estira el brazo y me pasa los dedos por la cara, como para identificarme. Después juega con su reloj pulsera, lo mira con cariño." (173–174) ("We smoke silently, and occasionally he moves his arm and runs his fingers over my face as though he were identifying me. Then he plays with his wristwatch, he looks at it tenderly.")

Despite the delicacy of this touch, Bruno is left feeling like a "hueco a su lado", "a hole beside him", transparent and empty:

[Q]uizá lo que pasa es que Johnny es un hombre entre los ángeles, una realidad entre las irrealidades que somos todos nosotros. A lo mejor es por eso que Johnny me toca la cara con los dedos y me hace sentir tan infeliz, tan transparente, tan poca cosa con mi buena salud, mi casa, mi mujer, mi prestigio. (177)

<sup>189</sup> As surrealists, among others, recalled, language based on worn-out metaphors must be destroyed if new metaphors for reality are to be created. New metaphors are surprising, recreating the world by showing everyday reality beyond common perceptions. (Kaitaro, 2001, 136) Balakian notes that "the successful metaphor becomes in surrealist writing [...] the measure not merely of literary satisfaction but of a victory over ordinary existence" (Balakian, 1972, 137).

[M]aybe what is really happening is that Johnny is a man among angels, one reality among the unrealities that are the rest of us. Maybe that's why Johnny touches my face with his fingers and makes me feel so unhappy, so transparent, so damned small, in spite of my good health, my house, my wife, my prestige.

If, in the transience of the poetic realm, objects have no enduring essence they nonetheless transmute from one form to another as they come into contact with other things. This poesis transforms the watch face into a human one. Bearing witness to this equivocal conversion between subject and object, self and other, Bruno comes to understand how Johnny's subjective reality is real amid the construct of objective reality.

Doris Sommer has shown that there is a constant dislocation of time in the story; Bruno writes as if he were unsure of which tense to use. Ultimately, he settles on the use of the present perfect, a compound verb tense uniting past and present, implying the continuation of the past into the present. As Sommer suggests: "It is as if the writing refused to fit into time, the conventional grammatical time that opposes past to present in neat, mutually exclusive categories." (Sommer, 1998, 214) The almost constant use of the present perfect indicates the unremitting intrusion of the past into the present moment, its refusal to cede to clear segregation in the continuum of time. After Johnny dies, however, the tenses do retreat to their rightful places: without Johnny's presence any longer posing an incessant threat to Bruno's view of reality, the past can finally be put into its proper place and the story ends in the present tense.<sup>190</sup>

This is not, however, the only time the present tense is used. For example, earlier, when Johnny recounted his experience on the metro, Bruno switches between the present and the simple past: "Nunca me preocupo demasiado por las cosas que dice Johnny pero ahora, con su manera de mirarme, he sentido frío." (153) ("I never pay too much attention to the things Johnny says, but now, with his way of staring at me, I felt cold.") The perfect tense gives way to the simple present: "En ese momento estoy seguro de que Johnny dice algo que no nace solamente de que está medio loco, de que la realidad se escapa [...]" (154) ("And in that moment I'm sure that what Johnny's saying doesn't just come from his being half-crazy, that he's escaping from reality [...]" Bruno anticipates that after leaving Johnny's company, he will forget the short feeling of certainty about the truth in Johnny's words. This indeed happens, and the tense changes back to the perfect and the opportunity to understand Johnny does not materialize. Thus, also the tenses used reveal, that Johnny represents not only a threat for Bruno, but also a possibility to find a more authentic reality.

<sup>190</sup> Sommer, 1998, 215.

Despite his rationality, Bruno occasionally displays an emerging poetic tendency, a glimmer of the original poetic nature of the human mind. He catches glimpses of this other, poetic reality but, as a prisoner of the Great Habit with an egoistic desire for public prestige, he is unable to hold on to these brief moments.

Researchers have typically divided the representation of time in “El perseguidor” into two distinct camps: subjective and objective time (for example Patricia Reagan and Gordana Yovanovich),<sup>191</sup> or existential and categorical time (Pedro Ramírez Molas).<sup>192</sup> These approaches are, for me, all problematic. A person’s subjective time, for example, varies according to their moods: when waiting for something to happen, clock time seems to slow down, while in moments of excitement and passion, such as when falling in love, it speeds up.<sup>193</sup> Manuel Cifo González has observed this relativity of time in the short story, where the experience of time varies depending on the situation.<sup>194</sup> It should be noted, however, that Johnny’s experience of time does not fit within the scope of these subjective variations because it implicates instead the *dissolution* of subjectivity. As Johnny enters another time, his subjectivity fades and he is unaware of himself as an experiencer. Rather than experiencing time subjectively, Johnny experiences time as the dissolution of the binary between subject and object. That which Ramírez Molas calls Johnny’s existential or own experience of time is similarly problematic: the existential subject is a self-reflective and free subject, but Johnny lacks the ability to experience himself as the subject of his own actions. Although existential freedom may also imply an internal experience of timelessness that is not governed by the time of clocks, the partially unconscious nature of this freedom suggests the experience occurs in the unruly subconscious of the human mind. Poetic time, in my opinion, describes the temporality experienced by Johnny more precisely and comprehensively than the previously presented interpretations, bringing together elements of surrealist and existentialist thinking that Cortázar celebrated in his liberatory writing.

Another group of researchers have interpreted Johnny’s experience as prevailing completely outside of time, as timelessness or in eternity. For example, Blanca Santos aptly divides the story’s time into the measurable and the perceived, but connects Johnny’s experience of time to Christian symbolism and the eternity of static or stopped time.<sup>195</sup> Graciela de Sola describes “tiempo”, time, and “no-

<sup>191</sup> Reagan, 2006, 382, quotes Gordana Yovanovich: “Julio Cortázar’s Character Mosaic: Reading a Longer Fiction”. Toronto. U. of Toronto, P., 1991, 189–190.

<sup>192</sup> Ramírez Molas, 1978, 122–123.

<sup>193</sup> See Fraisse, 1963.

<sup>194</sup> Cifo González, 1980, 416–418

<sup>195</sup> Santos, 2021, 253, 255.

tiempo”, no-time.<sup>196</sup> de Sola argues aptly that Johnny’s experience occurs in a “poetic state,”<sup>197</sup> but overlooks that timelessness is not apparent in this creative state. Although Johnny does lose his sense of time, his experience is not outside of time because movement and events still unfold. Indeed, Johnny himself says that playing music takes him *into* time rather than out of it.

Still other researchers emphasize the prevailing desire for non-differentiation in Cortázar’s work. This is a promising approach, although the concept of non-differentiation should be clarified. Non-differentiation does not mean complete fusion with others and the concomitant disappearance of the subject, but rather an active sensitivity to the outside world and an ability to immerse oneself in the imagery produced by one’s own mind. The other time experienced by Johnny is not a completely undifferentiated state, since he is able to describe it afterwards it must have left a trace in his own memory. Moreover, as is clear from the subway scene, the self does not completely dissolve merging into an indistinguishable mass; the images revived on the metro are memories of Johnny’s own past, events that he himself experienced. In this experience, Johnny is not a subject remembering his past but *is* this past, or at least his vision of it. He becomes what he imagines; he is himself and other. In the same way that, in a dream, the dreamer can be all its persons, Johnny is not the experiencer but rather the experience *is* him. Here, the rational subject, for whom thinking is a tool and not an organic and inseparable part of the subject, has disintegrated. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, nothing is left of the subject formed by the Enlightenment project but “that eternally same *I think* that must accompany all my ideas”.<sup>198</sup> In Johnny’s experience this “I think” disappears. Thus, time is not subjective, which would be the definite subject’s experience of time, but neither is it timeless. Rather, time is experienced outside of these definitions; it is *another* time.

Saúl Sosnowski divides the overarching times of “El perseguidor” into the profane and the sacred. According to Sosnowski, Johnny enters a “supra-reality”, where mythical time prevails.<sup>199</sup> I agree with Sosnowski’s view that Cortázar’s “other” conception of time includes a mythical-magical form of thinking inspired by Ernst Cassirer and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl but, even if there are similarities to a “primitive” man’s conception of time, Johnny’s is not a mythical time. According to Mircea Eliade, mythical time is an unchanging primeval time, where an individual imitates and repeats archetypes and, through reproducing these exemplary gestures,

<sup>196</sup> de Sola, 1968, 58.

<sup>197</sup> de Sola, 1968, 57.

<sup>198</sup> Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 26.

<sup>199</sup> Sosnowski, 1971, 79–82.

is transported into the mythical epoch.<sup>200</sup> According to Eliade, in the “primitive” world “an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype”.<sup>201</sup> For Johnny, other time is not about imitation but creation; images flow into his mind unrestrained, as in a dream. Other time implies elements of creativity, novelty and uniqueness that are missing from mythical time.

Perhaps most similar to my own conception of other time are interpretations that emphasize an aspiration to reach the present moment and those that focus on the poetic essence of moments where time stretches. In an article, Doris Sommer argues that Johnny aims to achieve “the perfect present”, referring not only to the beauty of the possible moment but also the tenses used in the short story. Estela Cédola revealingly describes this time as “*tiempo de la imaginación*”, the time of imagination.<sup>202</sup> This characterization evokes the associativity, visuality and dream-likeness of Johnny’s experience of time, but the notion of imagination does not account for such a holistically creative state which also includes aspects of musicality and eroticism. For both Sommer and Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, music is critical to the experience of time both in “*El perseguidor*” and in *Rayuela*, where Deeds Ermarth describes what she calls Cortázar’s use of “rhythmic time”.<sup>203</sup>

Poetic time, the essence of which I have examined in this subsection, describes the nature of Johnny’s experience of time more comprehensively than other interpretations. It embodies the particular features of the hypnagogic state at the onset of dream, and is also reminiscent of a child’s or primitive man’s experience of reality, characterized by the weakening control of consciousness, the richness of the imagination and the disappearance of the boundaries of subjectivity. Poetic time also goes some way towards illuminating the religious imagery of the story, in which the Absolute may be reached through art.

### 3.2 A few minutes in paradise: “*La isla a mediodía*”

Cortázar’s short story “*La isla a mediodía*” (1966), (“*The Island at Noon*”), demonstrates the role of imagination in achieving poetic time. Like “*El perseguidor*”, “*La isla a mediodía*” reveals the possibility of authentic and meaningful experience as the alienated subject momentarily and temporarily realizes the unification of subjectivity. I agree with Lucy Bell’s analysis that, instead of the common interpretation of critics such as Saúl Sosnowski, the protagonist’s realization that takes place in the precise instant of time at noon is a product of a modern temporality

<sup>200</sup> Eliade, 1954, 34–35.

<sup>201</sup> Eliade, 1954, 34.

<sup>202</sup> Cédola, 1994, 93.

<sup>203</sup> See Sommer, 1998, 119–220 and Deeds Ermarth, 1992, 45–54.

rather than an escape into a mythical, unchanging time.<sup>204</sup> The appearance of the island at exactly twelve o'clock is a stimulus for the realization of poetic time.

In "El Perseguidor", poetic time is conveyed to the reader only obliquely through Bruno's recollections of Johnny's descriptions, disclosed in conversational fragments. "La isla a mediodía" communicates the protagonist's experience directly, implicating the reader in the process of imagination. "La isla a mediodía" relates what appears to be a linear and realistic story up until the final paragraph, when the reader must radically revise their understanding of the plot and its duration. At the end of the short story, the reader discovers that a series of events, seemingly lasting for several days, actually takes place over a period of only a few minutes as the protagonist, Marini, stands by an airplane window looking out at the Greek island of Xiros. In this denouement, the reader must revise their interpretation of the events and their time, experiencing for themselves the disorienting realm of poetic time.

Marini is an air steward. Unlike Johnny, who is a jazz musician, and La Maga in *Rayuela*, for whom an intuitive attitude to life and living "outside of time" are a natural part of her personality, Marini is an easily relatable ordinary guy. He demonstrates that poetic experience is not dependent upon artistic sensibilities but may be realized by anyone who can enhance their sensitivity and attention to the surroundings. Marini is bored with his customer service job and with his life, which, in addition to work, consists only of encounters with flight attendant girlfriends, including his long-term girlfriend, Carla, who becomes pregnant, and with his younger brother. During the short story, he is working on a route to Tehran and his passengers consist mainly of vacationing tourists.

On its route to Tehran, the plane flies over the Greek islands three times a week. Above the Aegean Sea, Marini catches sight of a beautiful turtle-shaped island. Without knowing why, he glances at his watch: it is exactly twelve. Working regularly on this route, Marini becomes fascinated with the island down below, at first stealing glances at it only occasionally but eventually deliberately seeking it out during the flight. He learns the island's name, Xiros, from a radio operator, and his colleague urges him to visit the island as soon as possible, before it becomes a tourist hotspot. The enchanting otherness of the island is maintained through both its physical distance from the aircraft and its unfamiliarity as a tourist destination. The relatively untouched island and the modern commercial world synchronize only at noon, but the threat of future traffic as the island becomes a part of the airline's flow of tourism jeopardizes this separateness. Marini finds out all he can about the island from books and learns to say hello in Greek, *kalimera*. He even turns down a more desirable flight route to avoid being separated from the island. Recounting to his

<sup>204</sup> See Bell, 2014, 76; Sosnowski, 1971, 45.

girlfriend Carla that he has declined the offer of a better route, his thoughts are consumed with the island: “La desconcertada decepción de Carla no lo inquietó; la costa sur de Xiros era inhabitable pero hacia el oeste quedaban huellas de una colonia lidia o quizá cretomicénica [...]” (Cortázar, 2007, 111) (“Carla’s bewildered disappointment did not disturb him; the southern coast of Xiros was uninhabitable, but toward the west remain traces of a Lydian or perhaps Creto-Mycenaean colony [...]”)<sup>205</sup>

Marini’s interest in the island grows deeper. On each flight, he studies the island more comprehensively, and intricate new details seamlessly contribute to the knowledge gained on earlier trips. When Marini observes that the nets usually sprawled out on the beach are missing, he is disappointed. His relationship with the island is first and foremost a relationship between subject and object; he strives to gain control over the island, to understand its character. His fascination is such that his colleagues grant him leave for “a few minutes” during his shift while the plane passes over the island.

The turning point in the short story occurs in a paragraph that begins “ese día”, that day. This time, something different happens. As Marini looks at the island, he is certain that he sees somebody on the beach, perhaps a fisherman, who returns his gaze, observing the airplane from the island: “Ese día las redes se dibujaban precisas en la arena, y Marini hubiera jurado que el punto negro a la izquierda, al borde del mar, era un pescador que debía estar mirando el avión.” (114) (“That day, the nets were clearly sketched on the sand, and Marini could have sworn that the black dot on the left, at the edge of the sea, was a fisherman who must have been looking at the plane.”) On that day, what takes place is not a one-way study of the object by a subject but a two-way encounter.

Marini imagines greeting the man in Greek and, like a child, he presses his lips up against the window. Marini decides that he will go to the island, despite earlier hesitations and a lack of funds (he handed over two weeks’ wages to Carla for an abortion):

Con los labios pegados al vidrio, sonrió pensando que treparía hasta la mancha verde, que entraría desnudo en el mar [...] Nada era difícil una vez decidido, un tren nocturno, un primer barco, otro barco viejo y sucio [...] la noche en el puente, pegado a las estrellas [...] (Cortázar, 2007, 114)

With his lips against the window, he smiled, thinking that he would climb to the green spot, that he would enter the sea of the northern coves naked [...] Nothing

<sup>205</sup> All translations of “La isla a mediodía” are from *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories* (2005a), translated by Suzanne Jill Levine (London, New York: Marion Boyars).

was difficult once decided – a night train, the first boat, another old and dirty boat [...] the night on the bridge, close to the stars [...]

Marini embarks on his trip to the island, where he discovers a community of twenty people are living. He meets the island's patriarch, Klaios, and gets to know his sons and, in the morning, he swims naked in the sea, feeling like he has merged with the island, entering into a symbiotic relationship. Marini wants to stay. His relationship with the island is like a love affair, symbiosis. He no longer observes the island as an object but surrenders himself to it, losing himself in the process: “[L]a isla lo invadía y lo gozaba con una tal intimidación que no era capaz de pensar o de elegir.” (115) (“[T]he island impregnated him, and he enjoyed it with such intimacy that he was incapable of thinking or choosing.”)

Despite this momentary fusion with the island, Marini cannot avoid thinking about clock time. At first, he estimates the time according to the position of the sun, but as noon approaches, he glances at his watch. He sees the plane flying above him, and watches as it begins to fall, plummeting towards the island. Marini runs to the place where the plane has crashed, jumps into the sea, and rescues a man from the wreckage. He drags the sole survivor back to the beach, but the man dies. After this, the story quickly unravels. Klaios arrives on the beach with the other islanders where they find only one body: “Klaios miró hacia el mar, buscando algún otro sobreviviente. Pero, como siempre, estaban solos en la isla y el cadáver de ojos abiertos era lo único nuevo entre ellos y el mar.” (118) (“Klaios looked toward the sea, searching for other survivors. But, as always, they were alone on the island, and the openeyed corpse was all that was new between them and the sea.”)

Everything, it seems, has taken place in Marini's imagination. From the moment Marini begins to imagine his journey to the island, according to David Lagmanovich, time bifurcates into objective, chronological time on the plane and Marini's internal, non-chronological time.<sup>206</sup> Yet this distinction is not so clear cut, since even in Marini's imagination, he tracks the passage of time and observes his watch. Nevertheless, immersed in Marini's imagination, time expands – using the metaphor of “El perseguidor”'s Johnny – like a bag, that suddenly holds “a whole store full of suits and shoes”.<sup>207</sup> The first part of “La isla a mediodía”, which spans several months, is the same length as the second part of the story, which takes place in only a few minutes. While, on many occasions in the first part of the story, Marini often

<sup>206</sup> Lagmanovich, 1973, 646–647.

<sup>207</sup> Malva E. Filer (1970, 69) has compared Marini's experience of the dilation of time to Jorge Luis Borge's short story “El milagro secreto” Cortázar himself, in his essay “El estado actual de la narrativa en Hispanoamérica”, has compared Johnny's experience in “El perseguidor”'s to the same story. (See Cortázar, 1994b, 104–106)

leans over the window to look at Xiros, the passage of time is neatly observed and succinctly packaged to reflect a realistic contemplation of the view: “el breve, punzante contacto” (110) (“the brief, pricking contact”), “un largo minuto” (113) (“a long minute”), and “unos pocos minutos” (113) (“few minutes”). It is only on “ese día”, that day, that the poetic experience that occupies the second half of the short story takes place, when Marini presses his lips against the window and immerses himself fully and totally – like a child – in his imagined escapade to the island.

### 3.2.1 Imagination

According to Freud, the dilation of time in Alfred Maury’s hypnagogic states, as demonstrated by his guillotine dream, was made possible by the memory traces of the human mind. In the brief moment when the headboard fell on the sleeping Maury, images of the French Revolution, earlier gleaned from a book and stored in his mind, were activated and, upon waking, projected in the form of dream stories.<sup>208</sup> The protagonist of “La isla a mediodía”, Marini, has created such a detailed image of Xiros in his mind that, as he enters a dreamlike state of reverie, extensive and comprehensive stories covering many hours emerge almost instantaneously.<sup>209</sup> As Lagmanovich argues, the intense colors of the island are described in intricate detail, providing a stark comparison to the colorlessness of the airplane,<sup>210</sup> and a similar effect can be observed in “El perseguidor”, where Johnny’s poetic experiences often elicit detailed visual descriptions. In the episode on the metro, Johnny conjures up the memory of Lan’s green suit, perusing its every detail with painstaking meticulousness. By contrast, in “La isla a mediodía”, the “blurred” imprecision of everyday life flies by in broad approximations: “a veces”, (“sometimes”), “casi siempre”, (“almost always”).

No llevaba demasiado la cuenta de los días; a veces era Tania en Beirut, a veces Felisa en Teherán, casi siempre su hermano menor en Roma, todo un poco borroso, amablemente fácil y cordial y como reemplazando otra cosa [...] (114)

He didn’t keep a very strict account of the days; sometimes it was Tania in Beirut, sometimes Felisa in Teheran, almost always his younger brother in Rome, all a bit blurred, amiably easy and cordial and as if replacing something else [...]

<sup>208</sup> Freud, 1997, 344.

<sup>209</sup> Lucy Bell (2014, 80) notes that the image of the island “is the product of the active enactment of a dream, the construction of a whole world from a fragmentary vision”.

<sup>210</sup> Lagmanovich, 1973, 649–650.

In the same way that a photo that Marini takes of the island is blurry, a substitute for the real island, Marini's life, emptied of all meaning, is also undefined, a poor substitute for a real life that he seeks on the island.

Marini is fascinated by the island in part because it is so different from the plane in its vast array of colors and intense beauty: “[E]l Egeo la rodeaba con un intenso azul que exaltaba la orla de un blanco deslumbrante y como petrificado [...]” (109) (“The Aegean Sea surrounded it with an intense blue that exalted the curl of a dazzling and kind of petrified white [...]”) Marini's metaphoric description of the island as a turtle demonstrates his growing sensitivity towards a poetic consciousness, where the active creation or invention of reality makes life meaningful and experiences refreshed and dynamic. As Peter Standish states, the airplane and its schedule are a way of structuring time and creating uniformity so that, while the airline's tourists seek out new experiences from their travels, the rigid organization simultaneously renders these opportunities fake or unrealized.<sup>211</sup> The illusory world of new and exotic experiences offered by tourism is predefined and restricted by the mandates of Western consumerist culture. What we call free time, leisure time apparently liberated from routine and regulation, nonetheless observes the same rules as working life, generically structured and limited by the expectation to perform or pursue certain pre-produced activities or plans.<sup>212</sup> This readymade world of experiences is convenient, but at the same time it leads to regression and seclusion, characterized by the inability to “hear the unheard of with [one's] own ears, to touch the unapprehended with [one's] own hands”.<sup>213</sup> With the island finally awakening Marini's imagination, he takes an active – albeit it immaterial – role in the creation of this world rather than picturing the island as only one iteration of the limited pre-packaged options available to commercial tourists.

All this set routine and timetabling makes Marini anxious, and it is from within the confines of this regulated existence that he finds both an escape and a new regime. The island is incorporated into Marini's existing schedule: three times a week, precisely at noon, he glances at his watch and leans over the window to look at the island. Unlike the other routines, imposed by airlines, managers and traffic controllers, this new habit is rooted in individual desire. As Juan Carlos Curutchet has described, routine imposed by external authorities and demands destroys the intellect, turning people into animals whose existence is regulated and personality taken over by externally ruled behaviour.<sup>214</sup> This kind of routine prevails for example in “Verano” (*Octaedro*, 1974), where an elderly couple's life is emptied of

<sup>211</sup> Standish, 1976, 390.

<sup>212</sup> See Slater, 2009, 218.

<sup>213</sup> Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, 36.

<sup>214</sup> Curutchet, 1972, 139.

everything meaningful as they fall victim to the indiscriminate rule of routine. Marini's self-created routine, however, brings a playful or ritual-like structure to the cosmos in chaos.<sup>215</sup> Establishing his own routine in tandem with the island, Marini turns strict regime to the momentary exploration of freedom and imagination, at once bringing order to chaos and simultaneously unchecking its limits.

Like the protagonist Michel in "Las babas del diablo", Marini achieves poetic experience and a sense of meaning by learning to look in the right way. Mónica Tamboranea and Lagmanovich have emphasized the role of looking in the short story: the words "ver" (see) and "mirar" (look) are repeated an extraordinary number of times.<sup>216</sup> In his book *Imagen de John Keats*, Cortázar writes: "[M]irar no es tarea pasiva [...]; mirar es grave, lo más terrible que se puede hacer con el silencio, la luz y el espacio. Enfrentar cada cosa, *acosarla*." (Cortázar, 1996, 81) ("[L]ooking is not a passive task [...]; looking is serious, the most terrible thing that can be done with the silence, the light and the space. Face every thing, *harass it*.") At first, Marini observes the island like an object, checking out its details, but his curiosity compels him to look ever more closely. He studies facts about the island and takes a photo of it, but is dissatisfied with only superficial knowledge. Like Michel in "Las babas del diablo", who discovers the world of his photo by immersing himself in it, Marini eventually penetrates the island himself. The last narrated observation of the island before "that day", combined with the sensory experience of the coolness of the window glass, demonstrates a shift from objective, analytical observation to the realization of poetic analogy as the island that looks like a turtle *becomes* a turtle and the window glass of the airplane becomes the glass of the aquarium: "[H]asta la hora de ir a inclinarse sobre la ventanilla de la cola, sentir el frío cristal como un límite del acuario donde lentamente se movía la tortuga dorada en el espeso azul." (114) ("[U]ntil it was time to lean toward the tail window, to feel the cold crystal like the boundary of an aquarium, where the golden turtle slowly moved in the thick blue.")

An important reason for Marini's interest in the island is its appearance in the window of the plane at exactly twelve o'clock. As in many other short stories, Cortázar imbues the clock with magical powers. The peculiar, almost mythical simultaneity in the union of the island and the chiming of noon creates a feeling of fateful relevance. For Marini, the distinction between imagination and reality vanishes: "Nada de eso tenía sentido, volar tres veces por semana a mediodía sobre Xiros era tan irreal como soñar tres veces por semana que volaba a mediodía sobre

<sup>215</sup> Johan Huizinga has noted the connection between play, ritual, and poetry: "[Play] creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection" (Huizinga 1980, 10).

<sup>216</sup> Tamboranea, 1986, 23; Lagmanovich, 1973, 648.

Xiros.” (111) (“None of it made any sense – flying three times a week at noon over Xiros was as unreal as dreaming three times a week that he was flying over Xiros.”)

The concrete reality of the plane and its passengers feels as senseless as his visions. Marini’s daydreaming, it seems, is not an escape from reality – since reality is already unreal – but rather an effort to find an authentic experience that might fill up his empty time.<sup>217</sup> The short story inverts modern conceptions and spaces of rationality and irrationality: where modern, rational society should prize public control over oneself and one’s time and place, irrationality should be the domain of dreams and derangement. For Marini, however, the monotonicity and conformity encountered on the plane is absurd, and it is only through the imagined foray onto the island that reasoned and coherent order are established. Through his imagination, Marini’s experiences are suffused with senses and sensuality: “[E]ntró en un mundo donde el olor del tomillo y de la salvia era una misma materia con el fuego del sol y la brisa del mar.” (116) (“[H]e entered a world where the smell of thyme and sage were one with the fire of the sun and the sea breeze.”) Marini’s immediate and unmediated encounter with this poetic world is at odds with his work life, where he must behave according to the expectations and conditions dictated by unseen authority, following timetables and putting on the signature facial expressions required for customer service roles.

However, Marini cannot completely rid himself of this former robotic persona; his watch, most notably, also accompanies him in his daydream to Xiros. As he walks along the island, he is aware of the passage of time: “Debían ser las diez cuando llegó al promontorio del norte [...]” (115) (“It must have been ten when he reached the northern headland [...]”), “se tiraron juntos a un mar ya tibio, deslumbrante bajo el sol de las once”(116) (“they dived together into an already lukewarm sea, dazzling under the eleven o’clock sun”), “Marini miró su reloj pulsera y después, con un gesto de impaciencia, lo arrancó de la muñeca y lo guardó en el bolsillo del pantalón de baño” (116) (“Marini looked at his wrist watch and then, with an impatient gesture, put it in the pocket of his bathing trunks”). Although he puts the watch in his pocket, out of sight, he cannot bring himself to abandon it completely. The clock typifies his air steward-self, whom he sees flying over Xiros, but at the same time, it is also analogically connected to the island through the ritual he created, when the clock face would indicate the appearance of the turtle-shaped island and the regular

<sup>217</sup> Paul Fraisse’s explanation of daydreaming shows a common view of escapism: “Domination by the past or the future the refuge offered by daydreams is to be seen in fatigue, in psychasthenia, and in mental illnesses in general. [...] these daydreams are intemporal and thereby we agree with Freud [...] that they are an eruption of the unconscious, which is also intemporal [...] they are an escape from the present reality” (Fraisse, 1963, 190).

repetition of this synchronicity became a subjectively meaningful routine: “Todo estaba falseado en la visión inútil y recurrente; salvo, quizá, el deseo de repetirla, la consulta al reloj pulsera antes de mediodía [...]” (111) (“Everything was falsified in the futile and recurrent vision; except, perhaps, the desire to repeat it, the consulting of the wristwatch before noon [...]”)

Glancing at the watch becomes a rite that instills and upholds meaning in life, cutting through the blurry and vague temporality that plagued his earlier existence. The important role of the clock in the creation of this ritual, and especially its appearance within the poetic experience on the island, demonstrates the impossibility of ever achieving absolute independence from the clock, even in dreams. In this short story, the clock is not only a symbol of a historically constructed consciousness, outside of which some original, mythical reality may prevail but assumes mythical proportions, already impressed upon the human subconscious. Marini’s inner reality comes up against the same dead end as his outer reality, where homogenizing consumer culture, which will later be called globalization, is rapidly mapping, commercializing and destroying uncharted regions of the world.

### 3.2.2 Double time

The theme of the double appears in many of Cortázar’s short stories.<sup>218</sup> For example, the main character of “Lejana”, Alina, turns into her own doppelgänger, a poor girl living in Budapest, while Pierre, in “Las armas secretas”, turns into a Nazi who previously raped Pierre’s current girlfriend. Compared to these earlier stories, in “La isla a mediodía” the theme of the double concerns less fantastic and more psychological splitting or doubling of the self. In a scene where Marini imagines himself lying on the island observing the plane, the Marini on the island closes his

<sup>218</sup> See for example Morello-Frosch, Marta: “El personaje y su doble en las ficciones de Cortázar, *Revista Iberoamericana*, Vol. 34 No. 66, 1968; Picon-Garfield, Evelyn, 1975; Bolaños Villalobos, Isabel Cristina, Cerdad Ramírez, Gabriela & Ramírez Acosta, Jimmy: *El doble y tres relatos de Julio Cortázar*, *LETRAS*, (54), 2013, 51–69. Freud refers to Otto Frank’s view of the “double” as “originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an ‘energetic denial of the power of death’, as Rank says; and probably the ‘immortal’ soul was the first ‘double’ of the body” (Freud, 1955, 235). In an interview with González Bermejo (1978, 34) Cortázar explains his view of the double: “Son una de las constantes del espíritu humano como proyección del inconsciente convertida en mito, en leyenda. Parecía que el hombre no se acepta como una unidad sino que, de alguna manera, tiene el sentimiento de que simultáneamente podría estar proyectado en otra entidad que él conoce o no conoce pero existe.” (“They are one of the constants of the human spirit as a projection of the unconscious turned into a myth, into legend. It seemed that man does not accept himself as a unit but, in some way, has the feeling that simultaneously he could be projected into another entity that he knows or does not know but exists.”)

eyes so as not to see “the worst part of himself”, who is flying above his head in the airplane: “Cerrando los ojos se dijo que no miraría el avión, que no se dejaría contaminar por lo peor de sí mismo, que una vez más iba a pasar sobre la isla.” (117) (“Closing his eyes, he told himself he wouldn’t look at the plane; he wouldn’t let himself be contaminated by the worst of him that once more was going to pass over the island.”)

Marini does open his eyes and, at this point, he can be interpreted as being either on the island or in the plane. I call these two “selves” “Plane-Marini” and “Island-Marini”. The description that follows could be narrated by either Island-Marini or Plane-Marini:

Incapaz de luchar contra tanto pasado abrió los ojos y se enderezó, y en el mismo momento vio el ala derecha del avión, casi sobre su cabeza, inclinándose inexplicablemente, el cambio de sonido de las turbinas, la caída casi vertical sobre el mar. (117)

Unable to fight against all that past he opened his eyes and sat up, and in the same moment saw the right wing of the plane, almost over his head, tilt unaccountably, the changed sound of the jet engines, the almost vertical drop into the sea.

The two simultaneously prevailing viewpoints form two different ways of interpreting the central act, that is, opening or closing the eyes. Island-Marini closes his eyes so he does not have to see “the worst part of himself” traveling on the plane but activities from the interior of the airplane invade his imagination. Island-Marini cannot dissociate himself completely from this other world and other self: he opens his eyes and watches the plane start to fall.

As a double of Island-Marini, Plane-Marini closes his eyes at this same moment and loses sight of the island. Earlier in the short story, Marini placed great significance on the need for a direct line of sight between himself and the island in order to imagine better; a photograph of the island failed to capture the image – the picture is blurry – and it is only at midday that a clear view of the island will come into view. By closing his eyes, Plane-Marini disrupts his visual contact with the island and thus also stalls his poetic imaginings, and he is thrust back into the reality of the airplane. Island-Marini tries to escape his unhappy self by closing his eyes; Plane-Marini, on the contrary, loses the eye contact with the island and is forced to face the illusory nature of his reborn, happy self. Island-Marini was never real; it

was a product of his own subconscious, as Daniel Reedy presents.<sup>219</sup> A radical change takes place; Marini must die. It is up to the interpretation whether this death occurs in imagination or in reality.<sup>220</sup>

I agree with David Lagmanovich that the theme of the double in the story may be interpreted to convey different possibilities of Marini's self.<sup>221</sup> One possible Marini lives on the island, where he lives at one with the environment, understands men by "gestures and laughter" and has sincere and meaningful relationships with women. The Marini who works on the airplane fills his empty life with meaningless female relationships and pretends to be friendly to customers. These two Marinis exist synchronously, but different conceptions of time define their subjectivity; when Marini enters poetic time, the alienated Plane-Marini gives way to a new Island-Marini, who can live fully and feel part of the surrounding world. Still, this new self cannot be realized permanently, since it cannot merge the Plane-Marini as part of itself. At the end of the story, it appears that Island-Marini is either reincorporated back into the reality of Plane-Marini or, alternatively, the two are killed off in the tragedy of the plane crash on the beach, Island-Marini having been the fleeting release of euphoric imagination as Plane-Marini plummeted to his death: "[L]a herida parecía abrirse un poco más y era como una boca repugnante que llamaba a Marini, lo arrancaba a su pequeña felicidad de tan pocas horas en la isla [...]" (118) ("[W]ith each convulsion, the gash seemed to open a little more and was like a repugnant mouth that called to Marini, tore him from his little happiness of such few hours on the island [...]" )

Following a brief enquiry, the radio operator told Marini the name of the island, and a stewardess predicted that the island will be inundated with tourists within as little as five years: "Genghis Cook vela." (111) ("Genghis Cook is watching.") The tourist destinations and routes that are the foundation of Marini's own working life will one day come to incorporate this remote island. One day, tourists will reach the island, and the secluded paradise Marini seeks out will be forgotten. Even if his visit

<sup>219</sup> Reedy, 1977, 132.

<sup>220</sup> According to Rosalba Campra (2009, 86–87), the name of Klaios proves that Marini's foray to the island is more than mere imagination. "Queda sin explicación, es cierto, en qué otra dimensión espaciotemporal – en qué otra dimensión de la realidad – estén situados esa isla y ese Klaios." ("It remains unexplained, it is true, in what other space-dimension – in what other dimension of reality – that island and that Klaios are situated.") "[E]l sueño es tan verdadero como lo real si se puede morir a causa de un sueño, si la memoria se impone al presente, si las imágenes tienen la misma consistencia de los objetos físicos." ("The dream is as true as the real if one can die from a dream, if memory imposes itself on the present, if images have the same consistency as physical objects.")

<sup>221</sup> Lagmanovich, 1973, 643.

<sup>221</sup> Lagmanovich, 1973, 643.

to the island were realized, the dream idyll will not last forever. Marini seems not even to notice the irony of his own visit: he is already but one of the tourists that, in their desire to escape their empty lives, descend on the untouched paradises of the world.<sup>222</sup> His death, therefore, might be read as what Gustavo Pellón describes as a “mercy death”.<sup>223</sup> Marini understands the necessity of his own destruction: just as the clock time was an inseparable part of his vision of paradise, his “worst side” is also an inseparable part of him. Marini makes a mistake in his desire to purify himself from the past and recreate himself: one’s evil side must be faced, not rejected.

Although in “El perseguidor”, Johnny’s experience was largely singular, in the collection *Todos los fuegos el fuego*, many short stories feature individuals who seek out poetic experience through interaction and engagement with the broader community. This can be seen particularly in “Reunión” and in “La autopista del sur”, where the role of the community is essential. Looking beyond the individual to engage with a collective is also connected to Cortázar’s social awakening. In “La isla a mediodía”, Marini is lonely and unable to create meaningful relationships – his attempts to discuss the island with others are largely futile. He tries to talk about the island with stewardess Lucia, but she is only interested in her vodka lime at the Hilton. According to Roberto González Echeverría, the island represents a longed-for community to Marini,<sup>224</sup> and he calls the island’s inhabitants “his people”. However, although Marini hopes to be able to understand the islanders from “gestures and laughter” alone, this intuitive understanding is not fully realized in his imagination. Even on the island, language is the central means of communication, and Marini and Klaios’ son Ionas teach each other words in their own languages.

In the reality of the plane, Marini fails to establish or maintain meaningful connections with other human beings, whether that be Carla, Lucía, Felisa or any of his other girlfriends, although Felisa is said to understand him a little. Despite his indifferent attitude, Marini seems to seek out human connection, suggested by his frequent use of the Greek greeting “kalimera”, which he uses in his mind to greet the island’s fisherman when he enters the poetic time. Despite his enthusiasm for his new Greek word, its singularity in Marini’s vocabulary suggests his relative isolation from the people of the island. It is the only word he knows in Greek, and Klaios’ son doubles over with laughter when he pronounces it. It becomes clear that private

<sup>222</sup> In Cortázar’s play “Adiós, Robinson” (written for radio theatre in 1977 and published in 1984), Robinson Crusoe’s deserted island has been destroyed and it has become a tourist paradise where tourists are confined to high-rise hotel complexes.

<sup>223</sup> Pellón, 1998, 126. According to Pellón, the birth of “La isla a mediodía” reflected Cortázar’s disappointment with the change between ancient and modern Greece during his trip to Greece.

<sup>224</sup> González Echeverría 1971, 138.

paradises are impossible, since they cannot be separate from the reality shared by other people. The tragedy of the short story is the representation of an inner emptiness that characterizes consumer society, where existence is determined objectively and encounters between self and other remain locked in individual subjectivities, never permitting the fusion of a common paradise.

### 3.3 Within poetic time: “Las babas del diablo”

The short story “Las babas del diablo” (1959), (“Blow-up”), reflects the surrealist ambition to dismantle the language of rationalist culture and create new metaphors from the subconscious. This highly visual story questions the conventional application of such narrative practices as chronology, narrator, milieu and characters. Where and when does the short story take place? Who is the narrator and who is the protagonist? All these questions are left open in the story and the responsibility of interpretation is left to the reader. In this subchapter, I examine the peculiar time structure in the story, which is reminiscent of a dream image rather than a linear narrative. If, in “El perseguidor”, poetic time is described explicitly by the protagonists, and in “La isla a mediodía” the experience is shown to the reader through the narration, in “Las babas del diablo” the whole story is arguably told from within poetic time. The narrator exists in a state reminiscent of a dream, in which his subjectivity has expanded to encompass the object and he has entered another time without proceeding into the future.

In “Las babas del diablo”, translator Roberto Michel goes for a walk in Paris and takes photographs. He notices a couple, a woman and a boy, whom he initially mistakes for mother and son before realizing something more sinister is afoot. He takes a photo, but the woman becomes angry and demands that Michel give her the film. Michel refuses to hand it over and, while they are arguing, the boy runs away. A man in a grey hat, who had been sitting in a nearby car, clearly an accomplice for the woman, intervenes and Michel leaves the scene. A few days later, Michel develops the film, enlarging the photographic image which he hangs on his wall. Later, while working on a translation, he seemingly re-enters the scene through the photograph, becoming the lens of the camera. Returned to the scene where he observed the couple, Michel realizes with horror what is at stake: the woman is attempting to seduce the boy for the old man. Fixed and rigid as the camera lens, Michel is unable to intervene and foretells the fate of the young boy. Eventually closing in on the image of the couple and the boy as one with the camera, Michel moves towards the woman and the boy is able to escape again but, as the image comes to focus squarely on the man, Michel covers his face and begins to cry. When he reopens his eyes, he sees only clouds and birds moving across the photo on the wall, an image taken from the perspective of a camera lying on the ground, lens

facing the sky. The image conjured in the final paragraph returns the reader to the opening of the short story.

At the beginning of “Las babas del diablo”, the possibility of telling the story is questioned. The impossibility of forming a coherent view of the events – whether now or in the future – is evoked, and the narrator grapples with the limitations of grammar, which offers only one viewpoint at a time:

Nunca se sabrá cómo hay que contar esto, si en primera persona o en segunda, usando la tercera del plural o inventando continuamente formas que no servirán de nada. Si se pudiera decir: yo vieron subir la luna, o: nos me duele el fondo de los ojos, y sobre todo así: tú la mujer rubia eran las nubes que siguen corriendo delante de mis tus sus nuestros vuestros sus rostros. Qué diablos. (Cortázar, 2003a, 123)

It'll never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural or continually inventing modes that will serve for nothing. If one might say: I will see the moon rise, or: we hurt me at the back of my eyes, and especially: you the blond woman was the clouds that race before my your his our yours their faces. What the hell.<sup>225</sup>

The subjectivity of the narrator exceeds linguistic convention; even the invention of new forms of language would not suffice. Later, the identity of the narrator becomes even more obscure. “Uno de todos nosotros tiene que escribir” (124) (“One of us all has to write”), says the narrator, and adds that he of them all should be the storyteller because he is dead. However, after noting that he is dead, in parenthesis he adds that he is also alive: “[Y]o que estoy muerto (y vivo, no se trata de engañar a nadie)” (124) (“I who am dead (and I’m alive, I’m not trying to fool anybody”). Upon realizing his need to tell the story, the narrator begins, adding that perhaps telling the story will be beneficial, at least for one of the readers. Throughout, however, the narrator seemingly cannot decide whether to write in the first person or the third: he is both “Michel” and “I”.

### 3.3.1 Image as a narrative space

The narrative is based on language, which is linear and sequential in nature. It unfolds over time, as the reader or the listener understands the message over sequential phases of the communicative event. Also the traditional narrative of the

<sup>225</sup> All translations of “Las babas del diablo” are from *Blow-up and Other Stories* (1985), translated by Paul Blackburn (New York: Pantheon Books).

novel or the short story is constructed along a linear plot. In *Rayuela* (1962), Cortázar breaks the successive structure of the novel genre by giving the reader a guide to jump from chapter to chapter or to choose the order themselves. In Cortázar's short stories, however, the linearity of narrative is challenged further still. He considers the short story to be reminiscent of a poem, and the process of writing is an aspiration to dream and to give up control of the consciousness.<sup>226</sup> In "Las babas del diablo", the use of image induces an immediacy that troubles conventions of narrative linearity, affecting both time and subjectivity. While the narrative initially appears to offer a chronological recollection of events, the visual re-immersion into the scene thrusts the reader into an uncountable time.

The use of ekphrasis in the short story "Las babas del diablo" transports the reader between alternating times, spaces and perspectives. The narration takes place simultaneously in a room on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor and in the park a month earlier. For example, one can go down the stairs of the apartment building and end up in the past, on a Sunday one month ago: "Uno baja cinco pisos y ya está en el domingo [...]" (125) ("One goes down five floors and stands then in the Sunday [...]") As Peter Standish has noted, "Las babas del diablo" raises the question of how an image can be turned into words.<sup>227</sup> This fusion of image and words is also apparent in the complex temporality of the story, which is neither fixed in the frozen image of the photograph nor held fast by the perspective of the narrator. Preserving neither the linearity of narrative structure nor the fixed time of the photograph, the narrator unites different temporalities through the integration of image and words.

Roberto Michel walks around the city with his camera, observing and analyzing his surroundings: "Como no tenía nada que hacer me sobraba tiempo para preguntarme por qué el muchachito estaba tan nervioso, tan como un potrillo o una liebre [...]" (128) ("As I had nothing else to do, I had more than enough time to wonder why the boy was so nervous, like a young colt or a hare [...]") Michel observes the peculiar scene unfolding between the boy and the woman as if he were watching a play at the theatre. He interprets the scene and imagines how it may play out, forming a picture of the boy's character and life in his mind. There is a clear distinction between the subject who observes and the objects of his gaze:

Nunca el viento, la luz del sol, esas materias siempre nuevas para la piel y los ojos, y también el chico y la mujer, únicos, puestos ahí para alterar la isla, para mostrármela de otra manera. (131)

<sup>226</sup> See Cortázar, 1994a, 371–372 and Cortázar, 2005d, 49–51.

<sup>227</sup> Standish, 2001, 30.

Never like saying wind, sunlight, those elements always new to the skin and the eyes, and also the boy and the woman, unique, put there to change the island, to show it to me in another way.

As an object of surveillance, the camera is a symbol of division between subject and object, and it gives Michel a sense of power. Jonathan Crary argues that *camera obscura* was, for Locke and Descartes, a model of human understanding that, for centuries, reflected the distinction between the knowing subject and the world.<sup>228</sup> This dominant model of understanding can be seen in Michel's approach to reality as separate from himself but accessible and comprehensible through observation.

The first part of the story is told chronologically, until the photo starts to enchant Michel to the extent that it comes alive. First, Michel realizes that, “nunca se me había ocurrido pensar que cuando miramos una foto de frente, los ojos repiten exactamente la posición y la visión del objetivo” (135) (“it had never occurred to me that when we look at a photo from the front, the eyes reproduce exactly the position and the vision of the lens”). Sitting at his typewriter in front of the large picture – three meters away from the picture when in the park he was standing five meters from the woman and the boy – he understands this. The photo distracts him from the translation work at hand: “Cada tantos minutos [...] alzaba los ojos y miraba la foto; a veces me atraía la mujer, a veces el chico, a veces el pavimento donde una hoja seca se había situado admirablemente para valorizar un sector lateral.” (135) (“Every few minutes [...] I raised my eyes and looked at the photo; sometimes the woman would catch my eye, sometimes the boy, sometimes the pavement where a dry leaf had fallen admirably situated to heighten a lateral section.”) Little by little the photo consumes his attention, reminding him of the scene in the park and of his fortuitous actions that saved the young boy.

Like Marini, whose intent focus on the turtle-shaped island ultimately draws him in, Michel too, in his keen observation of the photo, slips from one space to another. The scene descends into the fantastic when Michel sees that the leaves of the tree in the photo start to move and, seeing the woman's hands begin to move, he suddenly disappears from his chair: “De mí no quedó nada, una frase en francés que jamás habrá de terminarse, una máquina de escribir que cae al suelo, una silla que chirría y tiembla, una niebla.” (136) (“There was nothing left of me, a phrase in French which I would never have to finish, a typewriter on the floor, a chair that squeaked and shook, fog.”) As the photo comes to life, Michel cannot maintain the role of the observer but is compelled to participate in the events as intuition takes over logical thought. As Saúl Sosnowski notes, intuition enables Michel to see the terrifying

<sup>228</sup> See Crary, 1992.

reality of what was really at stake in the park that Sunday.<sup>229</sup> He intuits that the woman had been sent to groom the boy for the man in the car. “[C]omprendí, si eso era comprender, lo que tenía que pasar, lo que tenía que haber pasado, lo que hubiera tenido que pasar en ese momento, entre esa gente [...]” (137) (“I understood, if that was to understand, what had to happen now, what had to have happened then, what would have to happen at that moment, among these people [...]”) The wider perspective emerges from the dreamlike state of distraction, where the darker aspects of reality, which had been hidden from view in the limited range of the original observation, come into focus. Michel becomes like a lens of his camera:

De pronto el orden se invertía, ellos estaban vivos, moviéndose, decidían y eran decididos, iban a su futuro; y yo desde este lado, prisionero de otro tiempo, de una habitación en un quinto piso, de no saber quiénes eran esa mujer, y ese hombre y ese niño, de ser nada más que la lente de mi cámara, algo rígido, incapaz de intervención. (138)

All at once the order was inverted, they were alive, moving, they were deciding and had decided, they were going to their future; and I on this side, prisoner of another time, in a room on the fifth floor, to not know who they were, that woman, that man, and that boy, to be only the lens of my camera, something fixed, rigid, incapable of intervention.

He cannot stand the idea of not being able to intervene and he, suddenly unfrozen, manages to step forward into the image. He screams and the narration intensifies, as though he has stepped into a nightmare where images burst forward at high speed. From then on, the events are said to be happening during “that moment”, “en ese instante”, even though their narration covers many pages:

Todo iba a resolverse allí mismo, *en ese instante*; había como un inmenso silencio que no tenía nada que ver con el silencio físico. Aquello se tendía, se armaba. Creo que grité, que grité terriblemente, y que *en ese mismo segundo* supe que empezaba a acercarme, diez centímetros, un paso, otro paso, el árbol giraba cadenciosamente sus ramas en primer plano, una mancha del pretil salía del cuadro, la cara de la mujer, vuelta hacia mí como sorprendida iba creciendo, y entonces giré un poco, quiero decir que la cámara giró un poco, y sin perder de vista a la mujer empezó a acercarse al hombre que me miraba con los agujeros negros que tenía en el sitio de los ojos, entre sorprendido y rabioso miraba

<sup>229</sup> Sosnowski, 1971, 66.

queriendo clavarme en el aire, y *en ese instante* alcancé a ver como un gran pájaro fuera de foco que pasaba de un solo vuelo delante de la imagen, y me apoyé en la pared de mi cuarto y fui feliz porque el chico acababa de escaparse [...] (138)<sup>230</sup>

Everything was going to resolve itself right there, *at that moment*; there was like an immense silence which had nothing to do with physical silence. It was stretching it out, setting itself up. I think I screamed, I screamed terribly, and that *at that exact second* I realized that I was beginning to move toward them, four inches, a step, another step, the tree swung its branches rhythmically in the foreground, a place where the railing was tarnished emerged from the frame, the woman's face turned toward me as though surprised, was enlarging, and then I turned a bit, I mean that the camera turned a little, and without losing sight of the woman, I began to close in on the man who was looking at me with the black holes he had in place of eyes, surprised and angered both, he looked, wanting to nail me onto the air, and *at that instant* I happened to see something like a large bird outside the focus that was flying in a single swoop in front of the picture, and I leaned up against the wall of my room and was happy because the boy had just managed to escape [...]<sup>231</sup>

During that moment, time stretches out: all the images that Michel sees, including the woman, the man with deep eyes, the tree and the bird flying over the photo appear almost simultaneously. The conception of time here is very different from the earlier scene when Michel was observing the woman and the boy in the park: chronological time has changed into poetic time. Subjectivity, too, is sublimated and the totality of Michel's subjectivity is reminiscent of the dream psyche, where the mind constructs collective and composite persons.<sup>232</sup> The person in a dream can be a composition of several people, whose image endures even as his personality changes.<sup>233</sup>

To look, *mirar*, becomes a way of stepping into poetic time. Like Johnny and Marini, Michel has a keen eye for details and he is a skilled observer: "Creo que sé mirar [...]"(128) ("I think I know how to look [...]") However, there are many different ways to look. Looking can be terrible, a way to abuse power and even attack, as the eyes of the blond woman show: "[D]ejaba al mundo de pie y horriblemente solo delante de sus ojos negros, sus ojos que caían sobre las cosas como dos águilas, dos saltos al vacío, dos ráfagas de fango verde." (129) ("[The

<sup>230</sup> Italics by I.U.

<sup>231</sup> Italics by I.U.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Freud, 1997, 181.

<sup>233</sup> Freud, 1997, 180.

woman] put the world at her feet and horribly alone in front of her dark eyes, her eyes fell on things like two eagles, two leaps into nothingness, two puffs of green slime.”) Michel’s unidirectional gaze becomes bidirectional when he steps into the photo, which is both a product of his own creative enterprise and an index of reality. In his distracted state, where the clear distinction between subject and object is obscured, Michel’s objective observation of the scene becomes a subjective experience, his gaze turned from outside to inside.<sup>234</sup> This poetic leap through the image dissolves the division, traditionally symbolized by the camera, of the one who looks and the one who is looked at. Another view on human understanding and subjectivity emerges from the bidirectional poetic act. Thus, Cortázar’s story shows how the camera may be alternatively employed to merge subject with object, rather than to reinforce their distinction, so that the photograph, too, no longer represents reality but creates it.

### 3.3.2 The slime of language

The narrator of “Las babas del diablo” cannot tell with accuracy what he saw in the park. Common descriptive language fails to describe the woman: “Era delgada y esbelta, dos palabras injustas para decir lo que era [...]” (“She was thin and willowy, two unfair words to describe what she was [...]”) “Todo el viento de esa mañana [...] le había pasado por el pelo rubio que recortaba su cara blanca y sombría – dos palabras injustas [...]” (128–129) (“All the morning’s wind [...] had blown through her blond hair which pared away her white, bleak face – two unfair words [...]”) Attempting to capture the eyes of the woman, Michel uses peculiar images and metaphors:

[La mujer] dejaba al mundo de pie y horriblemente solo delante de sus ojos negros, sus ojos que caían sobre las cosas como dos águilas, dos saltos al vacío, dos ráfagas de fango verde. No describo nada, trato más bien de entender. Y he dicho dos ráfagas de fango verde. (129)

[The woman] put the world at her feet and horribly alone in front of her dark eyes, her eyes fell on things like two eagles, two leaps into nothingness, two

<sup>234</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora has noted that, “the history of art is the history of the spatial relationship between the object and the painter: the object has moved progressively closer to the painter’s point of view until, with the Cubists and Surrealists, it has moved inside his mind.” Parkinson Zamora notices the similarities between “Las babas del diablo” and René Magritte’s paintings *Le soir qui tombe* and *Les promenades d’euclide*, where the scene on the window is mirrored in the broken windowglass on the floor. (Parkinson Zamora, 1981, 52–53)

puffs of green slime. I'm not describing anything, it's more a matter of trying to understand it. And I said two puffs of green slime.

In contrast to the two earlier citations, here the narrator's act of seeing lacks the objectivity of a rational observer. The gaze of the woman evokes such a strong feeling of disgust or even horror in him that only poetic language will suffice. The narrator understands that the *description* is not enough; one must try to *understand*, and this understanding will only be possible through the use of intuitive images and metaphors. Moreover, the narrator does not only criticize common descriptive language but condemns the word "ahora", "now", as a falsehood: "Ahora mismo (qué palabra, *ahora*, qué estúpida mentira) [...]" (127) ("Right now (what a word, *now*, what a dumb lie) [...]") Despite this, the word is used repetitiously – twenty-two times – in the story.

"Las babas del diablo" is reminiscent of an oral tale in giving an impression that it is narrated – albeit written – in dialogue with the reader. The narrator comments occasionally on what he is seeing or thinking while telling the tale. These comments are expressed in parenthesis:

De repente me pregunto por qué tengo que contar esto, pero si uno empezara a preguntarse por qué hace todo lo que hace, si uno se preguntara solamente por qué acepta una invitación a cenar (ahora pasa una paloma, y me parece que un gorrión) [...] en seguida empieza como una cosquilla en el estómago [...] (124)

All of a sudden I wonder why I have to tell this, but if one begins to wonder why he does all he does do, if one wonders why he accepts an invitation to lunch (now a pigeon's flying by and it seems to me a sparrow) [...] there starts up something like a tickling in the stomach [...]

Similar comments are repeated throughout the story. As a result, the reader is continuously reminded that the present of the story is not actually the present at all: rather, the present of the narration is the time of the storyteller. At first, this appears to be the reason the narrator understands the word "now" as a lie:

Ahora mismo (qué palabra, *ahora*, qué estúpida mentira) podía quedarme sentado en el pretil sobre el río, mirando pasar las pinazas negras y rojas, sin que se me ocurriera pensar fotográficamente las escenas, nada más que dejándome ir en el dejarse ir de las cosas, corriendo inmóvil con el tiempo. (127)

Right now (what a word, *now*, what a dumb lie) I was able to sit quietly on the railing overlooking the river watching the red and black motorboats passing

below without it occurring to me to think photographically of the scenes, nothing more than letting myself go in the letting go of objects, running immobile in the stream of time.

Despite denouncing the word “ahora” as a lie, the word is employed again almost immediately: “No había más que una pareja, y claro, palomas; quizá alguna de las que ahora pasan por lo que estoy viendo.” (127) (“Nothing there but a couple and, of course, pigeons; maybe even some of those which are flying past now so that I’m seeing them.”) There appear to be two different presents: that of the story and that of the narrator. Although there should be a clear distinction between these two “nows”, the narrator has difficulties in distinguishing them. The parenthesis he normally uses to describe his actual present while writing is suddenly used to describe Michel’s perception and thoughts in the past: “Ahora, pensándolo, la veo mucho mejor en ese primer momento en que le leí la cara (de golpe había girado como una veleta de cobre, y los ojos, los ojos estaban ahí.)” (128) (“Now, thinking back on it, I see her much better at that first second when I read her face (she’d turned around suddenly, swinging like a metal weathercock, and the eyes, the eyes were there).”). In this sentence, the actual present – the action – occurs in the past, interrupting the narrator’s intervention.

Poetic time explains the story’s peculiar temporality. Both the telling of the story and what is being recounted take place in the “eternal” present moment of poetic time. Narrating these events occurring in poetic time proves difficult, since language is linear in nature and has historically evolved to describe rational timebound processes in contrast to timeless dream images of the subconsciousness. When the narrator relates the events that occur after the photo comes to life, he says that everything happens in almost the same moment that it is narrated: “Lo que sigue ocurrió aquí, casi ahora mismo, en una habitación de un quinto piso.” (134) (“What happened after that happened here, almost just now, in a room on the fifth floor.”) However, later it is said that everything took place many days ago: “Ahora pasa una gran nube blanca, como todos estos días, todo este tiempo incontable.” (139) (“Now there’s a big white cloud, as on all these days, all this untellable time.”) In poetic time, where subjectivity has vanished, time becomes uncountable: it is vast, yet it is brief, and it is part of the dream psyche, where there are no contradictions.<sup>235</sup>

Steven Boldy has noticed the twofold meaning of the comment of ladies about the instability of the weather in recent years. As weather, “tiempo”, also means time

<sup>235</sup> Freud observes the lack of contradiction in dreams: “Dreams are particularly fond of reducing antitheses to uniformity, or representing them as one and the same thing” (Freud, 1997, 202).

in Spanish, the comment can be read as an opinion on the instability of time.<sup>236</sup> Time, indeed, is instable in the story, and it manifests the instability not only of time but of truth. The impossibility to know is expressed explicitly at the beginning:

[N]adie sabe bien quién es el que verdaderamente está contando, si soy yo o eso que ha ocurrido, o lo que estoy viendo (nubes, y a veces una paloma) o si sencillamente cuento una verdad que es solamente mi verdad, y entonces no es la verdad salvo para mi estómago, para estas ganas de salir corriendo y acabar de alguna manera con esto, sea lo que fuere. (125)

[N]obody really knows who it is telling it, if I am I or what actually occurred or what I am seeing (clouds, and once in a while a pigeon) or if, simply, I'm telling a truth which is only my truth, and then is the truth only for my stomach, for this impulse to go running out and to finish up in some manner with, this, whatever it is.

This instability of meanings is expressed through the metaphors describing the morning haziness: it can appear as both angelic or demonic, at once *hilos de la Virgen* (threads of the virgin) and *babas del Diablo* (the devil's slime): “[E]l chico [...] echaba a correr [...] perdiéndose como un hilo de la Virgen en el aire de la mañana. Pero los hilos de la Virgen se llaman también babas del diablo [...]” (133) (“[T]he poor kid [...] running past the side of the car [...] disappearing like a gossamer filament of angel-spit in the morning air. But filaments of angel-spittle are also called devil-spit [...]”)

*La baba*, spit or slime, is a metaphor for language in “El perseguidor”. Johnny tells Bruno about his view on the falsehood of mirrors: “Pero es como en Palm Beach, sobre una ola te cae la segunda, y después otra... Apenas has sentido ya viene lo otro, vienen las palabras, no son las palabras, son lo que está en las palabras, esa especie de cola de pegar, esa baba. Y la baba viene y te tapa, y te convence de que el del espejo eres tú.” (174) (“But it’s like at Palm Beach, on top of one wave the second one falls on you, and then another.. You’ve hardly felt and already another one comes, the words come... No, not words, but what’s in the words, a kind of glue, that slime. And the slime comes and covers you and convinces you that that’s you in the mirror.”) In “Las babas del diablo” it is the old man in the car, whose eyes and mouth give him the look of a devil, who is associated with the devil’s spit. He tries to destroy the innocent freedom of the young boy. The woman, too, is described as a monster who lays waste to others with her eyes, condemning them to loneliness.

<sup>236</sup> Boldy, 2005, 380.

The woman and the man can be seen as metaphors of rational culture – including language – which strips children of their innocence and freedom. When the boy “flies” over the island after Michel has saved him, it appears that, by opening the door to his subconscious and telling the tale, Michel has prevented the realization of the couple’s dark fantasies and escaped the destruction of conventional language. Escape from language also occurs concretely when Michel is spirited away from his chair while writing the translation, so that the French sentence is left in suspense and will never be finished.

The narrator of “Las babas del diablo” hopes that telling the story will benefit some of the readers, who may possess knowledge or intuition of his own experience. The narrator does not know the full truth and neither does he seek to establish it definitively. Similarly to Herder, Cortázar criticizes the view of language as a set of readymade categories.<sup>237</sup> Through the active creation of a new language, perhaps, established notions of reality and time may change. The role of the reader is vital in acknowledging the obscure experience behind language and the possibilities of stretching and breaking the limits of reality. For Cortázar, writing stories equals dreaming and breathing – he does not have time to think while he writes.<sup>238</sup> In “Las babas del diablo” this creative process is manifested as writing *becomes* an experience instead of being merely the presentation of an experience. In Cortázar’s utopic vision during this period of his work, the totality of human experience can be altered through art, whether it be through a photograph, music or a story.

In this chapter, I have defined the “other” conception of time in Cortázar’s short stories: poetic time, which is opposed to clock time. In “El perseguidor”, this other time is explicitly discussed by the narrator, Bruno, and the protagonist, Johnny. In the other stories, “La isla a mediodía” and “Las babas del diablo”, poetic time is manifested implicitly on the narrative level when describing the experiences of the protagonists. I have specified features related to poetic time, which are above all related to the temporality on the borderline between sleep and waking, the hypnagogic state, in which, according to Cortázar, poets – and he himself – operate when writing short stories.

In dream and poetry the mind creates metaphors and symbols that enable an experience of timelessness where the linearity manifested by language and consciousness abates and the experiencer enters the immediacy of visual thought, the mind suffused with plentiful images in an extremely short time. The boundaries between subject and object disappear and subjectivity expands. Only afterwards can one realize that the time experienced is not equal to the time measured by the clock.

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Herder, 1985.

<sup>238</sup> See González Bermejo, 1978, 137; Cortázar, (1967), 2004a, 11; Cortázar, 2005d, 49–52.

This happens to Johnny in “El perseguidor” when he is playing music, making love or is lost in thought. In this way, Johnny reaches for the experience of the Absolute. However, poetic time implies also chaos and fear of losing one’s ego, the uncontrollable subconscious powers that the narrator of the story, Bruno, who lives in clock time, can reject through the oppressive control of the consciousness.

The protagonist in “La isla a mediodía”, Marini, sinks into his imagination in the same way as Johnny and experiences an extraordinary extension of time. However, this prolongation is not known to the main character; only the reader is shown the content of his imagination and the tragic end in which Marini dies – either mentally or in reality – as a result of his inability to rid himself of his old self, imprisoned in the time of clocks. I have also analyzed the short story “Las babas del diablo” through the concept of poetic time. The short story’s seemingly obscure and contradictory conception of time can be understood through the temporality of a dream, where subjectivity expands and the experience of time is simultaneously very long and very short.

## 4 Eros and Time

In Julio Cortázar's short story "El perseguidor", Bruno buys Johnny a new saxophone after Johnny leaves the previous one behind on the metro. Johnny tells Bruno: "Es un saxo formidable, ayer me parecía que estaba haciendo el amor cuando lo tocaba." (Cortázar, 2003a, 163) ("It's a great horn, yesterday I felt like I was making love when I was playing it.")<sup>239</sup> Johnny's ability to step outside of time is related to his open sexuality.

Sexuality plays an important role in Cortázar's oeuvre. It is an essential theme especially in *Rayuela* and also in the stories of the collection *Octaedro*, (1974), "Lugar llamado Kindberg", "Verano" and "Cuello de gatito negro". Many scholars have examined sexuality in Cortázar's work, where it is often manifest as sadism.<sup>240</sup> Cortázar's stories contain a number of rape scenes, particularly in the short stories "Las armas secretas", "Verano", "El cuello de gatito negro" and in "Anillo de Moebius" to name only a few. However, other aspects of sexuality are also present in his work, although mostly as an unattainable dream: the freedom brought about by sexuality and love, the similarity between poetry and eroticism, the physical and spiritual fusion of lovers, and the disappearance of the boundaries of subjectivity. Hence, it appears that sexuality is manifested as a dual, ambivalent force, with violent sadism on one side and perfection on the other, where it is accompanied by the loss of alienation and separateness and the poetic experience of connection. Oliveira, in *Rayuela*, wants desperately to free himself from the burden of alienating Western rationality through the desire he feels towards his intuitive and impulsive lover, La Maga, and in the essay collection *Territorios* (1978) a woman's body is figured as a route to rebirth. In will ask, why does an element of sadism dominate Cortázar's descriptions of sexuality and in what way could sexuality lead to a poetic experience of timelessness?

According to Freud, Eros is the central life drive. According to him, in order to survive, culture has to suppress the libido and sublimate it into various functions. The surrealists placed Eros and the pleasure principle at the centre of human nature

<sup>239</sup> Translation by Paul Blackburn.

<sup>240</sup> See, for example, Picon Garfield, 1981, 70–72.

and questioned the necessity of suppressing it: repressing Eros would lead humankind into displeasure, while desire could guide human action. Maurice Nadeau summarizes the surrealists' view of libido:

Their reiterated attacks against society were also inspired by the fact that it did not permit the free and complete realization of a desire no less demanding than hunger. Freud had made the libido the essential motive-force of behavior, and the study of patients had convinced him that the metamorphoses imposed by society were far from being universally beneficial to the individual. (Nadeau, 1973, 145)

Herbert Marcuse later brought forward similar views to those expressed by the surrealists in the 1920s. Marcuse suggested that the reality principle, based on reason, had led civilization to exert hierarchical structures of domination, harnessing people to work and fulfill duties in the name of the common good. According to Marcuse, Eros is a self-directed life instinct, the repression of which leads to violence and alienation.<sup>241</sup> The reality principle should be based on Eros, instead of Logos, so that civilization may be perfected and reach a state of happiness. According to Marcuse, there was no domination in primitive societies in the same way as in rational modern societies, because communities accepted desire – what Freud calls

<sup>241</sup> Herbert Marcuse's views on Eros are based on Freud's theories about the pleasure principle, which controls subconscious processes and has been replaced by the reality principle that controls consciousness. Marcuse questions Freud's view that suppression of the pleasure principle is necessary for civilization and its progress (see Marcuse, 1987). Marcuse considers Eros to be an instinct of life that creates culture. According to him, restoring the pleasure principle as the guiding force of civilization is a prerequisite for man's liberation from domination. "The progress of civilization has been accompanied by an attitude towards the existing, which in modern times has become completely dominant: the material world and one's own personality are perceived as something that must be managed and controlled. Life appears like a constant struggle against human nature and nature outside humanity. Satisfaction, peace and pleasure are secondary and conditional [...]" ("Der Fortschritt der Zivilisation war mit einer Grundhaltung zum Seienden verbunden, die in der modernen Periode zur ausschließlichen Herrschaft gekommen ist: die gegenständliche Welt und die eigene Person werden erfahren als etwas, das gemeistert und kontrolliert werden muß. Das Dasein erscheint als sein dauernder Kampf gegen die Natur innerhalb und außerhalb des Menschen. Befriedigung, Ruhe, Lust sind sekundär und bedingt [...]" (Marcuse, 1955, 47) "When the essence of being is defined as logos, it is already the logos of domination – the reason to which man and nature have to submit." ("Wenn das Wesen des Seins als Logos gefaßt ist, ist es schon der Logos der Herrschaft – die Vernunft, der sich Mensch und Natur zu unterwerfen haben.") (Marcuse, 1955, 49).

the pleasure principle – as their guiding force. This same wish prevails in modern society, but it has not been realized.<sup>242</sup>

Like Freud, Marcuse examines how the repression of the pleasure principle affects society and individuals. Marcuse borrows Freud's quote, "all pleasure thirsts for eternity" ("Den alle Lust will Ewigkeit...") meaning that timelessness is the fulfilment of pleasure.<sup>243</sup> According to Freud, time has no power over the id (i.e. pleasure), while the ego is completely controlled by time.<sup>244</sup> Marcuse states that, "[t]he anticipation of the unavoidable end is present in every moment of pleasure [...]" ("Die Vorwegnahme des unvermeidlichen Endes ist in jedem Augenblick der Lust gegenwärtig")<sup>245</sup>. Individuals have been taught that pleasure is impermanent, and so they strive to forget past moments of happiness and do not question the oppression to which they are subjected. According to Marcuse, a society focused on the maintenance of law and order takes advantage of this "flow of time, the natural law of transience" ("der Strom der Zeit, das Naturgesetz der Vergänglichkeit"). Marcuse suggests that Eros, the culture-creating life instinct, which is above all else the pursuit of pleasure, stands against time and in favor of the eternity of pleasure.<sup>246</sup>

According to Don Slater, Marcuse's libidinal hedonism was part of the cultural change that took place in the 1960s, when the liberation of libido and spontaneity broke through the ubiquity of routines. Routine was perceived as an alienating mode of operation that forced the individual to act according to the needs of society. The heroes of their own lives allowed themselves to be guided spontaneously and surrendered to their desires.<sup>247</sup> The routine of the modern era differed from pre-modern cyclicity, in which only through repetition was reality attained.<sup>248</sup> For a modern individual alienated from nature, repetition implied empty and meaningless recurrence. A return to pre-modern cyclicity was no longer possible, so meaning had to be sought by breaking the numbing routine. Cortázar's appreciation of surrealism had led him, already in the 1950s, to bring forward ideas presented by Marcuse: spontaneity, free eroticism, the abandonment of routines.<sup>249</sup> This is one of the reasons why young people, in particular, were excited about his fiction, and especially the novel *Rayuela*.

<sup>242</sup> Marcuse, 1955, 50–52.

<sup>243</sup> Marcuse, 1955, 63.

<sup>244</sup> Marcuse, 1955, 63.

<sup>245</sup> Marcuse, 1955, 63.

<sup>246</sup> Marcuse, 1955, 64.

<sup>247</sup> Slater, 2009, 219.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Eliade, 1954, 34–48.

<sup>249</sup> For example, Steven Boldy (1980, 186–187), Estela Cédola (1994, 15, 24) and Saúl Sosnowski (1971, 84–85) have pointed out the relationship between Cortázar's and Marcuse's thoughts.

In this chapter, I examine sexuality and love in two of Cortázar's short stories. In "Lugar llamado Kindberg" ("A place named Kindberg"), a gap opens up between an older generation, who remain attached to the structures of routine, and a new generation, who give in to their own desires. While Marcelo, a seller of ready-made element solutions, belongs to the older generation that performs rigid routines, Lina, whom he picks up on the side of the road, is a young hippie who follows her impulses and does not believe in the future. "Anillo de Moebius" (*Queremos tanto a Glenda*, 1980) ("Moebius strip"), on the other hand, shows, on a metaphorical level, the essence of Eros as a driving force and the consequences of its suppression.

#### 4.1 The cage of repressed desires: "Lugar llamado Kindberg"

In the short story "Lugar llamado Kindberg" (*Octaedro*, 1974), Marcelo, a married Argentinean traveling salesman is on a business trip in Austria where he picks up a hitchhiker on a rainy evening. A young girl, Lina, is on her way to Copenhagen to visit hippies whom she has never met before. They stop in a village called Kindberg and Marcelo offers to pay for Lina's hotel room, but Lina insists they sleep in the same room. They eat in a restaurant and end up in their room to have sex. The next day, Lina prepares to continue the trip together but Marcelo declines and leaves without her, dying when his car crashes into a plane tree.

The story is narrated almost entirely from Marcelo's point of view, and it unfolds as Marcelo's breathless and unsettling stream of consciousness. The reader gets inside Marcelo's head, as it were, to observe the movements of his mind. The sentences are long and the dialogue with Lina merges with Marcelo's rambling inner monologue. Marcelo is not able to concentrate on dining with Lina as his thoughts move constantly between the past and the anticipation of the future. He observes Lina's appearance and behavior and projects his own assessments and conclusions. The story begins within Marcelo's thoughts as he sits with Lina at a table in the hotel's restaurant. Marcelo is not a happy person, and he sees in both Kindberg and in Lina the possibility to change his life and himself. The long sentences, punctuated only by commas and occasional semicolons, not only reflect his nervous agitation but also a sense of intense indifference towards the world: no thought or observation or dialogue emerges as more important than any other, nor is the present moment privileged over the past or the future. Events in the past are partly narrated in the present tense:

Llamado Kindberg, a traducir ingenuamente por montaña de los niños o a verlo como la montaña gentil, la amable montaña, así o de otra manera un pueblo al que llegan de noche desde una lluvia que se lava rabiosamente la cara contra el

parabrisas, un viejo hotel de galerías profundas donde todo está preparado para el olvido [...] y la sopa en la gran sopera de plata, el vino blanco, partir el pan y darle el primer pedazo al Lina que lo recibe en la palma de la mano como si fuera un homenaje, y lo es [...] (Cortázar, 1974, 97)

Named Kindberg, ingenuously translated as child mountain, friendly mountain, something or other like that, a town which they reach at night coming in out of a rain that washes itself wrathfully against the windshield, an old hotel with deep hallways where everything has been prepared for forgetting [...] and soup in a large silver tureen, white wine, breaking the bread and giving the first piece to Lina, who takes it in the palm of her hand as if it were an homage, and it is [...] <sup>250</sup>

The old hotel in heavy rain resembles the milieu of a horror novel, which contradicts the connotations attributed to the name Kindberg. This discrepancy reflects the later events in the story, where the impossibility of a return to youth leads to tragic consequences.

While Marcelo and Lina eat, Marcelo remembers his first encounter with her on the road and their arrival at the hotel. At the same time, he anticipates what will happen after eating. He observes Lina's appearance and tries to interpret her behavior. Marcelo's mind constantly wanders back and forth in time, and he is unable to share in the present with Lina.

[M]ejor paramos en Kindberg y te invito a cenar, si gracias qué rico, así se te seca la ropa, lo mejor es quedarse aquí hasta mañana, que llueva que llueva la vieja está en la cueva, oh sí dijo Lina y entonces el parking, las galerías resonantes góticas hasta la recepción [...] (99)

[B]etter for us to stop in Kindberg and for me to invite you to dine with me, oh yes great, that way you can dry your clothes, the best thing is to stay over here until morning, it's raining, it's pouring, the old man is snoring, oh yes, Lina said, and then the parking shed, the resonant Gothic galleries to the desk [...]

Marcelo's sexual desire for Lina is described as a "tickling" feeling, and his inner monologue poses questions about what may or may not happen between them: what if she is a prostitute who exploits men in exchange for her services? Will Lina agree to have sex later, or will she put pillows in the bed as a wall? "Y la cosquilla, casi un

<sup>250</sup> All translations of "Lugar llamado Kindberg" are from *A Change of Light and Other Stories* (1980), translated by Gregory Rabassa. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf.)

calambre ahí abajo, Lina mirándolo toda flequillo, las piezas qué tontería, pide una sola. Y él no mirándola pero la cosquilla agradesagradable, entonces es un yiro, entonces es una delicia, entonces osita sopa chimenea [...]” (99–100) (“And the tickling, almost a cramp down there, Lina looking at him all bangs, the rooms what foolishness, just ask for one. And he no, looking at her but the tickle disagreeable, so she’s a hooker, so she’s a delight, so little bear quite pretty [...]”)

Marcelo is fascinated by Lina’s youth and freedom and her girlish insouciance towards the future: “[N]o creo en el futuro, en mi familia no hablan más que del futuro, me hinchan los huevos con el futuro [...]” (104) (“[I] don’t believe in the future, my balls swell up with the future [...]”) Marcelo’s uncle resembles Lina’s parents, since he raised the boy to think about the future: “[H]ay que pensar en el mañana, m’hijo [...] lo que hace falta es un gobierno fuerte [...]” (104) (“[Y]ou’ve got to think about tomorrow, m’boy [...] what’s needed is a strong government” [...]). Lina allows herself to be carried away by her impulses: “[P]ero qué importa después, Marcelo, ya te dije que no quiero atarme, noquiero-noquiero, Copenhague es como un hombre que encuentras y dejas (ah) un día que pasa [...]” (104) (“[B]ut what did afterward matter, Marcelo, I already told you I don’t want to be tied down, donwanna-donwanna, Copenhagen is like a man you find and leave (ah), a day that passes [...]”) During the conversation Marcelo confronts his own dull life: is he hopelessly tied down to repeat conventional patterns of behavior or could Lina help him to find a way out?

Thanks to Lina, Marcelo remembers his own youth, a time when he too wanted to experience adventures. In Argentina, he gathered with his friends at a café called Rubí where they planned to sail on a windjammer to Rotterdam. Their plan was never realized. He notices that he has turned into one of those adults whom Lina calls walking corpses, referring to a film by Romero, a film director that Marcelo does not know. Marcelo is very clearly aware of the generation gap between them and feels boring and old in front of Lina: “[Q]ué es eso de prefabricados, pero desde luego tema aburrido, qué le va a hacer, no puede decirle que es domador de fieras o director de cine o Paul McCartney [...]” (99) (“[W]hat’s all that prefabricated stuff, a boring subject right off, but what can he do, he can’t tell her that he’s a lion tamer or movie director or Paul McCartney [...]”) Lina belongs to another generation that listens to and hums the avant-garde jazz of Archie Shepp: “[E]s otra generación, es una osita Shep, ya no tango, che.” (99) (“[I]t’s a different generation, it’s a little Shepp bear, no more tango, eh?”) Although Marcelo and his wife also listen to Shepp, they don’t know how to live the music like Lina: they can’t improvise.

With Lina, Marcelo does not only notice his own old age but also his rigidity and conformity. He observes Lina and tries to understand her but fails. He is not able to break out of his ego, as if in a cage of his own thoughts, where the inner monologue flows between past and future, and the encounter with Lina slips away. At the very

beginning of the story, he wishes he could see Lina's thoughts, see the images of her memories:

[P]artir el pan y darle el primer pedazo a Lina que lo recibe en la palma de la mano como si fuera un homenaje y lo es, y entonces le sopla por encima vaya a saber por qué pero tan bonito ver que el flequillo de Lina se alza un poco y tiembla como si el soplido devuelto por la mano y por el pan fuera a levantar el telón de un diminuto teatro, casi como si desde ese momento Marcelo pudiera ver salir a escena los pensamientos de Lina, las imágenes y los recuerdos de Lina que sorbe su sopa sabrosa soplando siempre sonriendo. (97)

[B]reaking the bread and giving the first piece to Lina, who takes it in the palm of her hand as if it were an homage, and it is, and then she blows on it, who knows why, but in that way seeing Lina's bangs rise up a little and tremble as if the blowing on the hand and the bread were about to raise the curtain in a tiny theater, almost as if from that moment on Marcelo could see Lina's thoughts come out onstage, Lina's images and memories as she sips savory soup still smiling.

The next paragraph states that this wish will not be fulfilled: "Y no, la frente lisa y aniñada no se altera [...]" (97) ("But no, the smooth animated forehead doesn't change [...]" )

Marcelo is fascinated by Lina's way of enjoying food. She praises the food and admires the hotel while Marcelo does not seem to pay attention to the meal or the surroundings except to appreciate purely pragmatic aspects: the fireplace in the room creates an atmosphere where it is possible to approach Lina; aspirin taken with coffee and whiskey enhances its effect. In Marcelo's thinking, sadistic and tender sexualities alternate. On the one hand, Marcelo feels protective of Lina and calls her "osita", little bear. On the other hand, his concern is motivated by his sexual appetite: he wants Lina to trust him so that he can later proposition her.

Their relationship develops when Lina falls for Marcelo's charm evoked by his protective behavior and he takes her hand. They become friends and Marcelo feels that Lina understands him despite his excessively staid and conventional language. The fact that Lina understands his tone of voice rather than his words reminds Marcelo of a teacher he had when he was twelve years old. His desire for a closeness that is not contingent on words speaks to a sensory and physical bond between the two, a desire for symbiosis, which Marcelo is ironically aware of:

Y en realidad él no había dicho que no le gustara Copenhague pero la osita parecía entender el tono de su voz más que las palabras, como él cuando aquella

maestra de la que se había enamorado a los doce años, que importaban las palabras frente a ese arrullo, eso que nacía de la voz como un deseo de calor, de que lo arroparan y caricias en el pelo, tantos años después el psicoanálisis: angustia, bah, nostalgia del útero primordial [...] (103)

And really he hadn't said he didn't like Copenhagen but the little bear seemed to understand the tone of his voice more than his words, like him with that teacher he'd fallen in love with at the age of twelve, what did words matter in the face of that cooing, that thing that was born out of the voice like a desire for heat, to be wrapped up and stroked on the skin, so many years later psychoanalysis: anguish, bah, nostalgia for the primordial uterus [...]

In the story, this corporeal desire culminates in a momentary symbiotic experience when Marcelo and Lina make love.

#### 4.1.1 Making love, forgetting time

Although in the short story “Lugar llamado Kindberg” the protagonist Marcelo’s inner monologue moves between past and future, the reader is given the impression that everything is happening in the here and now. This idea is intensified by the fact that the verbs often use the gerund, “estando”, “hablando”, which in Spanish refer to an event that is currently taking place. Aside from the gerund, verbs are often in their base or root form. The lack of active forms suggests that Marcelo’s actions are, as it were, pre-codified, and even his profession, a merchant of prefabricated elements, references a way of acting and speaking guided by pre-determined modes of action stripped of independent agency.

However, when Marcelo and Lina go to the hotel room and Marcelo touches Lina the narrative style changes. While making love, Marcelo’s viewpoint disappears; the narrative becomes a list of sensations and poetic, physical impressions. The movement between past and future ceases and the narration focuses on describing the present moment.

[L]as bocas, el otro fuego, las caricias de rosados bordes, la burbuja que tiembla entre los labios, fases del conocimiento, silencios en que todo es piel o lento correr de pelo, ráfaga de párpado, negación y demanda [...] (107)

[T]he mouths, the other fire, the caresses with pink edges, the bubble that trembles between the lips, phases of the knowledge, silences in which everything is skin or the slow running along of hair, a wave of eyelids, denial and demand [...]

In this scene, the boundaries of the subject disappear and the two become one, exemplified in their “a single thirst” for water: “[B]otella de agua mineral que se bebe del gollete, que va pasando por una misma sed de una boca a otra [...]” (107) (“[A] bottle of mineral water drunk from the neck which is passed from one mouth to another to quench a single thirst [...]”)

Similar poetic language was also evident earlier in the story when Marcelo was reminiscing about his beloved childhood teacher. In Cortázar’s work, love scenes are characterized by the present tense and by poetic language. The word “now” is often used in these scenes to emphasize this sense of immediacy.<sup>251</sup> In “Lugar llamado Kindberg”, physical contact, including holding hands, brings Marcelo back to the present and makes him feel love: “[C]uando ahora, con esa manita blanca y caliente bajo la suya, todo podía llamarse Copenhague [...]” (105) (“[W]hen now, with that little hot white hand under his, everything could be called Copenhagen [...]”) Copenhagen is, for Marcelo, a metaphor for the object of desires and the possible fulfillment of desires.

In *Rayuela*’s chapter 7, Oliveira and La Maga make love. This scene contains features that aptly describe the importance of love in Cortázar’s work. When making love, one loses track of time; making love is the domain of play and poetic creation. The techniques used by Cortázar to create this impression of a timeless moment are the use of the present tense, repetition, poetic language and metaphors in which the body is seen through analogies connected to nature. Lovemaking is experienced as if everything were happening for the first time: “Toco tu boca, con un dedo toco el borde de tu boca, voy dibujándola como si saliera de mi mano, como si por primera vez tu boca se entreabiera [...]” (“I touch your mouth, I touch the edge of your mouth with my finger, I am drawing it as if it were something my hand was sketching, as if for the first time your mouth opened a little [...]”) Lovemaking is also playful: “Me miras, de cerca me miras, cada vez más de cerca y entonces jugamos al cíclope, nos miramos cada vez más de cerca y los ojos se agrandan, se

<sup>251</sup> Richard Young has analyzed the sex scene in the story “Cuello de gatito negro” (*Octaedro*, 1974). Using the word “ahora”, “now”, the narrator positions himself in the present and identifies himself with Lucho, the main character, who is making love with a girl he met on the metro: “[L]a tendió contra él, bajo él, la poseyó dulcemente y casi sin deseo desde una larga fatiga, la entró y la remontó sintiéndola crisparse y ceder y abrirse y ahora, ahora, ya, ahora, así, ya [...]” (Cortázar, 1974, 140) (“[He] held her against him, under him, possessed her gently and almost without desire from a long fatigue, entered her and rode her feeling her curl and give way and open and now, now, already, now, like that, already [...]”) Translated by Gregory Rabassa. The word “ahora” is used frequently by Cortázar to create the illusion of being in the present moment while simultaneously helping the reader to identify with the character. (See Young, 1993, 29–31)

acercan entre sí [...]” (“You look at me, from close up you look at me, closer and closer and then we play cyclops, we look closer and closer at one another and our eyes get larger, they come closer [...]”) The language of lovemaking creates similes and metaphors, where bodies fuse with natural phenomena: “[N]os besamos como si tuviéramos la boca llena de flores o de peces, de movimientos vivos, de fragancia oscura.” (“[W]e kiss as if our mouths were filled with flowers or with fish, lively movements and dark fragrance.”)<sup>252</sup>

Then intensity of love and the experience of merging into one another in Cortázar is reminiscent of surrealist interpretations: “Love makes the senses keener and the imagination more acute, delivers the poet better than anything else from the notions of time and space [...]” (Balakian, 1972, 220) In this poetic fusion of bodies, clock time ceases to have importance. For Octavio Paz: “Poesía y amor son actos semejantes. La experiencia poética y la amorosa nos abren las puertas de un instante eléctrico. Allí el tiempo no es sucesión: ayer, hoy y mañana dejan de tener significado: solo hay un siempre que es también un aquí y ahora.” (Paz, 1983b, 148) (“Poetry and love are similar acts. The poetic experience and the experience of love open the doors of an electric moment for us. There time is not succession: yesterday, today and tomorrow cease to have meaning: there is only an always that is also here and now.”)<sup>253</sup>

In *Rayuela*, Oliveira describes explicitly this fusion and losing track of time:

Por qué no había de amar a la Maga y poseerla bajo decenas de cielos rasos a seiscientos francos, [...] si en esa vertiginosa rayuela, en esa Carrera de embolsados yo me reconocía y me nombraba, por fin y hasta cuándo salido del tiempo y sus jaulas con monos y etiquetas, de sus vitrinas Omega Electron Girard Perregaud Vacheron & Constantin marcando las horas y los minutos de las sacrosantas obligaciones castradoras, en un aire donde las últimas ataduras iban cayendo y el placer era espejo de reconciliación, espejo para alondras pero espejo, algo como un sacramento de ser a ser, danza en torno al arca, avance del sueño boca contra boca, a veces sin desligarnos, los sexos unidos y tibios, los brazos como guías vegetativos, las manos acariciando aplicadamente un muslo, un cuello... (Cortázar, 2003b, 233)

Why shouldn't I love La Maga and possess her beneath all those ceilings purchased for six hundred francs [...] in that crazy hopscotch, in that race of moneybags I recognized myself and called myself by name, finally and until I

<sup>252</sup> Cortázar, 2003b, 160.

<sup>253</sup> Schlegel and Novalis also observed a similarity between love and poetry: like dreams, love was considered to be “natural poetry” (Steinby, 2023, 91).

would escape from time and all its labeled monkey-cages, where from its show windows Omega Electron Girard Perregaud Vacheron Constantein marked the hours and the minutes of sacrosanct castrating obligations, into an atmosphere where the last bonds were being loosed and pleasure was a mirror of reconciliation, a mirror for larks but a mirror, something like a sacrament from one being to another, a dance around the altar, a coming on of sleep with mouth to mouth, sometimes without untangling ourselves, our sexes warmly joined, our arms like twining vegetative signposts, our hands determinedly caressing thigh and neck...<sup>254</sup>

This romantic and sensual fusion takes place within a mode of open sexuality, while sadism and violence are seemingly connected to the oppression of sexuality. The old couple, Zulma and Mariano, in “Verano” have distanced themselves from each other: “Le pasó la mano por el pelo, los dedos resbalaron hasta el hombro, rozaron los senos. Zulma se volvió de lado, dándole la espalda, sin hablar; también eso era como tantas otras noches del verano.” (Cortázar, 1974, 77) (“He stroked her hair, his fingers slid down to her shoulder, grazing her breasts lightly. Zulma turned on her side, her back toward him, not speaking; this too was like so many other summer nights.”)<sup>255</sup> Mariano ends up taking his wife by force. Rejected sexuality in the short story “Las armas secretas” also leads to violence and rape:

Entonces si uno no sabe nada de Michèle, basta dejar de verla un momento para que el hueco se vuelva una maraña espesa y amarga; te tiene miedo, te tiene asco, a veces te rechaza en lo más hondo de un beso, no se quiere acostar contigo, tiene horror de algo, esta misma mañana te ha rechazado con violencia [...] (Cortázar, 2003b, 215)

Well, if you know nothing about Michèle, all turn into a dense, unpleasant thicket; she’s afraid of you, you disgust her, at times she rejects you at the deepest moment of a kiss, she doesn’t want to go to bed with you, she’s horribly afraid of something, just this morning she pushed you away violently [...]<sup>256</sup>

Previously raped by a German soldier, Michèle does not dare to tell Pierre who, feeling rejected by his girlfriend, ultimately turns into a rapist himself.

Both the repression of sexuality and the routinization of making love lead to unfavorable sexuality. The definition and transmutation of love and corporeality into

<sup>254</sup> Translated by Gregory Rabassa.

<sup>255</sup> Translated by Gregory Rabassa.

<sup>256</sup> Translated by Paul Blackburn.

linguistic and conceptual forms destroy erotic impulses. Oliveira cheats on La Maga with Pola, but the relationship with Pola proves to be just as disappointing: “Pola París, cada vez más suya, senos sin sorpresa la curva del vientre exactamente recorrida por la caricia, sin el ligero desconcierto al llegar al límite antes o después, boca ya encontrada y definida [...]” (Cortázar, 2003b, 591) (“Pola Paris, every time more his, breasts without surprise, the curve of the stomach traced exactly by his caress, without the slightest fear of reaching the limits before or after, a mouth found now and defined [...]”)<sup>257</sup>

Words always get in the way of Horacio Oliveira’s feelings, destroyed by their grammatical and linguistic configuration: “Entre la Maga y yo crece un cañaveral de palabras, apenas nos separan unas horas y unas cuerdas y ya mi pena *se llama* pena, mi amor *se llama* mi amor...” (Cortázar, 2003b, 233–234) (“A whole canefield of words has grown up between La Maga and me, we have only been separated by a few hours and a few blocks and my sorrow is already *called* sorrow, and my love is *called* love...”)<sup>258</sup>

Although Marcelo believes that making love to Lina will help him escape the monotony of his current life, their union only leads to disappointment. Like Marini in “La isla a mediodía”, Marcelo is a prisoner of the culture ruled by Logos, where surrendering to the pleasure principle is impossible. His own youth is a thing of the past, forever gone, and he carries around his lost dreams and failures: “Entonces ni siquiera así, ni siquiera en el amor se abolía ese espejo hacia atrás, el viejo retrato de sí mismo joven que Lina le ponía por delante acariciándolo [...]” (108) (“Then not even like that, not even in love could he get rid of that rearview mirror, the old portrait of his young self that Lina put in front of him by stroking him [...]”) The young Lina only reminds Marcelo of his own lost youth.

#### 4.1.2 Love: anarchy against predicted future

In “Lugar llamado Kindberg”, the young hitchhiker, Lina, changes her attitude towards the protagonist after making love. Lina does not see Marcelo as a “walking corpse” but thinks that the experience accrued with age contributes to his vitality for life: “De manera que la osezna lo sentía vivo a pesar de, más vivo que los de su edad, los cadáveres de la película de Romero [...]” (108) (“So the teddy bear felt he was alive in spite of, more alive than people her age, the corpses from the Romero movie [...]”) Lina proposes to continue the trip with Marcelo a little further. She enjoys his company and even suggests they sleep in the forest. Lina’s hand is in Marcelo’s but he pulls it away and declines: “[Y] sentir que sí, que quería, que no había ninguna

<sup>257</sup> Translated by Gregory Rabassa.

<sup>258</sup> Translated by Gregory Rabassa.

razón para que no quisiera, y apartar lentamente la mano y decirle que no, mejor no, sabes [...]” (109) (“[A]nd feeling that yes, that he wanted to, that there was no reason for him not to want to, and slowly pushing her hand away and telling her no, best not to, you know [...]”) Here Marcelo’s automation-based behavior is strongly manifested: he is not able to give in to his desires and feelings but adapts to the codes of behavior prescribed by society.<sup>259</sup>

Right after the refusal, Marcelo continues his journey alone, fulfilling a predetermined plan to sell prefabricated materials. Marcelo’s death, crushed at the wheel of his car as he drives – whether accidentally or on purpose – into a plane tree at high speed, suggests the realization of an uncharacteristic impulsive behavior. In coming face to face with the confines of his own rigidly routine and pre-determined life, Marcelo perhaps seeks escape by the only means possible: not love and sex but death. This short story, like so many of Cortázar’s stories, ends with a foreshadowing of the routine future – related in the present tense – of Marcelo’s life as a traveling salesman without Lina or a detour to Copenhagen. But, while thinking about the future offered comfort to Bruno in “El perseguidor”, for example, it only causes anxiety for Marcelo:

[L]a ruta abierta para los corredores de materiales prefabricados, la ruta sin Copenhague y solamente llena de veleros, podridos en las cunetas, de empleos cada vez mejor pagados, del murmullo porteño de Rubí, de la sombra del plátano solitario en el viraje, del tronco donde se incrustó a ciento sesenta con la cara metida en el volante como Lina había bajado la cara porque así la bajan las ositas para comer el azúcar. (109)

[A] route wide open for a salesman of prefabricated materials, a route without Copenhagen and full only of rotting windjammers along the curb, of jobs that paid better and better, of the Buenos Aires gossip about the Rubí, of the shadow of the solitary plane tree at the curve, the trunk against which he was squashed at eighty miles an hour with his head bent over the steering wheel the way Lina had lowered her head a few minutes ago because a bear cub always lowers its head like that to eat sugar.

<sup>259</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth explains the essential characteristics of pleasure: “[V]alue and pleasure have radical implications precisely because, while habits are passive, enjoyment is not [...] To savor the arbitrariness of an activity – to receive its surprises with pleasure rather than denial – is no easy work. It involves a capability for equipoise, for flexibility [...] improvisation” (Deeds Ermarth, 1992, 191).

Lina's own freedom remains ambivalent in the story. Her chatter seems idle to Marcelo, and Lina herself says that she should start "reading". Marcelo reacts patronizingly to this comment, thinking of philosophers that Lina may read in the future. Does Lina live in the kingdom of youth, Kindberg, only because she is young? What will happen when she grows up? To what kind of reality does she bear witness? After all, Lina's rebellion against the future does not necessarily imply that she possesses a real and meaningful conception of time instead. Lina says that Copenhagen is like "a man you leave and a day that passes". Her fear of commitment is so fierce that it risks having negative consequences. If love is a path to poetic time and merging with another in happiness, Lina is no more inclined towards it than is Marcelo. In her desire for independence, she seeks to leave every man and place behind. In this way, she too is a victim of the linear concept of time.

In love, the laws of linearity do not apply. In *Territorios*, Cortázar describes instead the sense of an eternal return, where sexual desire is endlessly renewed:

Los territorios fuera del tiempo porque el país, escúchalo bien, no tiene tiempo, es un presente que superpone sus valles, sus lagos y sus bosques como un niño superpone una y otra vez el mismo juego, el mismo ritual, el mismo cuento; y la delicia del país y del niño está en que lo mismo sea siempre otra cosa y que cada nueva cosa lleve siempre a lo mismo. (Cortázar, 1978, 137)

The territories are outside of time because the country, listen carefully, does not have time; it is a present that superimpose its hills, its lakes and its forests like a child superimposes repeatedly the same play, the same ritual, the same story; and the delight of the country and the child is that the same thing is always something else and that every new thing always leads to the same thing.

Through love, it is possible to step into a "territorio fuera del tiempo", "territory outside of time", where there is no sense of finality nor any compulsion to move always forward towards new destinations.

## 4.2 Now without time: "Anillo de Moebius"

In the story "Anillo de Moebius", ("Moebius Strip"), published in 1981 as part of the collection *Queremos tanto a Glenda*, a young English woman, Janet, is spending her holiday in France. She cycles through a wood where the vagabond Robert is having a nap. When Robert sees her, he impulsively attacks her, rapes her and accidentally kills her. Robert is sentenced to death for the killing. Janet, after her own death, assumes an undifferentiated state outside of time. From here on, the synopsis of the plot is entirely dependent on interpretation: does she somehow

continue to exist and, if so, in what form? It appears that in the state – or rather, states – after her death, time and space, which are essential aspects of human reality, vanish, and along with them, subjectivity.

“Anillo de Moebius” has elicited intense discussion among scholars. Studies have mainly focused on female sexuality and the theme of sexual violence in the story. Peter Standish and Terry Peavler see the story as the most disturbing among Cortázar’s works because, according to them, it is implied that Janet feels sexual pleasure during the rape.<sup>260</sup> Alicia Helda Puleo and Estela Cédola similarly consider the story to be an apology for violence.<sup>261</sup> John Turner, conversely, argues that the story is a criticism of machismo attitudes, while Doris Sommer examines the concept of sexual desire through the metaphor of the Moebius strip.<sup>262</sup>

It seems to me, however, that a basis for understanding the topic of sexuality, as well as the story more broadly, is gained only by grasping the metaphysics of death. In the story, the states after death are beyond common concepts; Cortázar struggles, more than ever, to find words commensurate with the concepts and sensations he wants to express. Therefore, the task of interpreting the story is an exceptional challenge. In most interpretations, the description of Janet’s state after her death is considered as a kind of reincarnation, in which Janet regains her “soul” or “spirit”.<sup>263</sup> I will argue that this interpretation should be challenged, and the story read in a more metaphysical and simultaneously more metaphorical way.

#### 4.2.1 The temporary existence of the ego

At first glance, the opening of “Anillo de Moebius” appears obscure. The narrative starts in the midst of an ongoing thought:

Por qué no, acaso bastaría proponérselo como ella habría de hacerlo más tarde ahincadamente, y se la vería, se la sentiría con la misma claridad que ella se veía y se sentía pedaleando bosque [...] (Cortázar, 2004d, 149)

<sup>260</sup> Peavler 1990, 30; Standish, 2001, 47.

<sup>261</sup> Puleo, 1986, 206–207; Cédola, 1994, 76.

<sup>262</sup> Turner, 1987, 144; Sommer, 1986, 86–87.

<sup>263</sup> See Puleo 1986; Peavler 1990, 30–31; Ilian Taranu 2012, 7–8.

Why not, maybe it would have been enough just to try as she would try eagerly later on and she would be seen, she would be felt, with the same clarity that she was seen and felt pedaling into the woods [...] <sup>264</sup>

The intention to do something to “be seen and be felt” is expressed by an unknown female character. It is revealed that this character is Janet, who, in the past, was pedaling into the woods with her bicycle. The narration describes chronologically the events occurring when Janet entered the woods. Like in “Las babas del diablo”, where the story concerns a state not representable by common concepts, the reader cannot grasp the situation in which the story takes place until the very end, but the enigmatic beginning is essential for eventually grasping the form of the story.

Janet is cycling in the forest, where Robert – a homeless illiterate orphan “with hunger and that useless rage” – has been sleeping on the ground and has just woken up. Robert sees Janet and without thinking, incapable of repressing his impulse, attacks her. Although Robert is slow at rational thought, he acts fast when he follows his instinct and intuition:

Antes de que Janet lo viera él ya sabía todo, todo de ella y de él en una sola marea sin palabras, desde una inmovilidad que era como un futuro agazapado. Ahora ella volvía la cabeza, la bicicleta inclinada y un pie en tierra, y encontraba sus ojos. Los dos parpadearon a la vez. (151)

Before Janet saw him he already knew everything, everything about her and about him in one single wordless wave, taking off from an immobility that was like a future crouching in wait. Now she was turning her head, the bicycle tilted, and one foot on the ground, and she found his eyes. They both blinked at the same time.

Intuitively, Robert “knows everything”, a feeling that seems to stem from his sudden strong desire for the girl.

The rape is described from the viewpoints of both Janet and Robert. They do not understand each other’s language nor actions. Janet is terrified, but the stream of consciousness that unfolds during the rape gives the impression that she feels something more complicated than sheer horror. It is implied that deep down Janet intuitively that Robert is not a monster: “[E]l horror no venía totalmente de la bestia barbuda porque no era una bestia, su manera de hablarle al oído [...]” (153) (“[T]he horror didn’t come only from the bearded beast, because he wasn’t a beast, his way

<sup>264</sup> All translations of “Anillo de Moebius” are from *We love Glenda so much and Other Tales* (1984b), translated by Gregory Rabassa (London: Harvill Press).

of speaking into her ear [...]”) Janet is a virgin and her attitude towards sex is primarily fearful, triggered by her religious teacher and a friend’s terrible account of her wedding night. However, it is implied that Janet is curious about sexuality. She has read *Fanny Hill* in secret, the infamous erotic novel of John Cleland, which was banned in the eighteenth century due to its “obscene” content:

[C]ómo explicarle que hasta entonces nunca, que *Fanny Hill*, que por lo menos esperara, que en su maleta había crema facial, que así no podría ser, no podría ser sin eso que había visto en los ojos de su amiga [...] (154)

[H]ow to explain him that up until then never, that *Fanny Hill*, that at least he should wait, that in her bag there was facial cream, that it mustn’t be like that, it mustn’t be without what she’d seen in the eyes of her friend [...]

Janet wants to say to Robert that “at least he would wait” and that in “her purse there is facial cream”. Would Janet let Robert have sex with her if he were to proceed more slowly and use the facial cream as lubricant? Would the situation be different if Janet were not a virgin? By any realistic criteria it is impossible to believe that this is the case. Robert is far from attractive; he is a foul-smelling stranger with dirty fingernails. Robert’s incapability to understand why Janet is “absurdly” fighting back seems therefore strange: “[U]na decisión seguida de un deseo de que todo durara mucho, que esa chica no se debatiera absurdamente puesto que él no quería hacerle daño [...]” (152) (“[A] decision followed by a desire for everything to last for a long time, for that girl not to fight absurdly, since he didn’t want to hurt her [...]”) Why would she not fight back as hard as she can?

Ilian Taranu argues that Janet’s horror stems from the circumstances of her first sexual act rather than from the aggressive act in itself.<sup>265</sup> Helda Puleo argues that it is implied that the society is the reason for the rape – Robert, and consequently Janet, are victims of society. Puleo considers that Robert may even be Janet’s “bienhechor”, her well-doer in awakening her desire.<sup>266</sup> The claim that Janet secretly desires to have intercourse with Robert recurs in interpretations.<sup>267</sup> The question of the nature of the experience of the rape can, I argue, be answered only when the complicated circular structure of the story is taken into account. As in the case of “Las babas del diablo”, the structure of the story affects both *what* is told and *how* it is told. To understand this, we have to read the story once through to the end and then go back to the beginning.

<sup>265</sup> Ilian Taranu 2012, 6.

<sup>266</sup> Puleo 1986, 206–207.

<sup>267</sup> See Peavler 1990, 30; Standish, 2001, 47.

Robert is afraid that someone will hear Janet's shouts. His attempts to keep her quiet ultimately result in her death as, in the throes of lust, Robert does not notice how violently he presses her throat. The moment of death is described as Janet's loss of bodily sensation:

Ni lágrimas ni aire, el aire había faltado de golpe, desde el fondo del cráneo una ola le había tapado los ojos, ya no tenía cuerpo [...] un silencio pegajoso, algo que duraba sin ser, algo que era de otro modo donde todo seguía estando pero de otro modo, más acá de los sentidos y del recuerdo. (155)

Neither tears nor breath, the breath had stopped suddenly, from the depths of her skull a wave had covered her eyes, she no longer had a body [...] a sticky silence, something that lasted without being, something that was in a different way where everything was still there but in a different way, this side of sense and memory.

Normally, in a literary text, when someone dies the focalization is removed from that person to those who are looking at the dead corpse. Here, instead, the state after death is shown from within. When Janet dies, there should be no question of describing her thoughts or actions since she no longer acts nor thinks. Nevertheless, "everything was still there". From this section on it is problematic to speak of Janet. Therefore, from now on, I will use quotation marks around Janet's name when I speak about her existence after death. "Janet" has no body or consciousness and is in a state where she – or whatever is left of her – is not a distinct entity but has become diffuse and amorphous:

De otro modo, tal vez desde el principio mismo, en todo caso ya no allí, movida a algo como una diafanidad, un medio translúcido en el que nada tenía cuerpo y donde eso que era ella no se situaba desde pensamientos u objetos, ser viento siendo Janet o Janet siendo viento o agua o espacio pero siempre claro, el silencio era luz o lo contrario o las dos cosas, el tiempo estaba iluminado y eso era ser Janet, algo sin asidero, sin una mínima sombra de recuerdo que interrumpiera y fijara ese decurso como entre cristales, burbuja dentro de una masa de Plexiglas, órbita de pez transparente en un ilimitado acuario luminoso. (156)

Different, perhaps from the very beginning, in any case not there, becoming like something diaphanous, a translucent medium in which nothing had a body and where what had been her wasn't located through thoughts or objects, to be wind while being Janet or Janet being wind or water or space but always clear, the silence was light or the opposite or both things, time was illuminated and that

was to be Janet, something without a handle, without the slightest shadow of memory to interrupt and fix that course as among crystals, a bubble inside a mass of Plexiglas, the orbit of a transparent fish in a limitless lighted aquarium.

Janet as a person has disappeared, and yet she remains. She is a part of the flow of occurrence in a state without differentiation. This undifferentiated state after death is expressed through reference to amorphous states and materials such as water, wind and Plexiglas.

Where is Janet? Or more accurately: *is* there a Janet? And if she is, *how* is she? Terry Peavler and Helda Puleo speak of a soul that remains. In religious thought, the soul is separated from the body in the moment of death.<sup>268</sup> However, it is evident that in the state after Janet's death all distinctions have vanished all together. Therefore, "soul" certainly is not the right word for grasping Janet's amorphous state since the soul is something distinguishable and separated from its surroundings. In addition, Helda Puleo uses the word "unconsciousness" to describes Janet's posthumous state, but this is a psychological concept which suggests that there exists something that, as such, can become conscious.<sup>269</sup> A more correct expression would therefore be "lack of consciousness", which does not have such psychological implications.

As discussed above, Cortázar describes this diffuse state with amorphous natural phenomena and elements, such as wind and water, but he also employs a metaphor, "bubble inside a mass of Plexiglas". It is evident that Cortázar does not describe a realistic event: the use of metaphor corresponds to an attempt to compensate for the lack of existing terminology in language that would accurately describe Janet's new state. The metaphorical tendency of the story is revealed here and it is important to take this into account and interpret the story metaphorically rather than realistically.

Although it is difficult to pin down what remains of Janet, it is clear that something of her endures after her death. Cortázar's search for a metaphorical and poetic expression for Janet's disembodied preservation could be described in more philosophical terms borrowed from Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer argues that we do not completely disappear in death:

From the fact that we now exist, it follows, if well considered, that we must at all times exist. For we are ourselves the nature which time has taken up into itself in order to fill its void; consequently it fills the whole of time, present, past, and future, in the same way, and it is just as impossible for us to fall out of existence as to fall out of space. Carefully considered, it is inconceivable that what once

<sup>268</sup> Puleo, 1986, 207; Peavler, 1990, 30.

<sup>269</sup> Puleo, 1986, 207

exists in all the strength of reality should ever become nothing, and then not be, through an infinite time. (Schopenhauer, 1909, 283)

Likewise, in Cortázar's description, Janet ceases to exist and yet somehow continues to exist. In an interview with Luis Harss, Cortázar says that death can be considered as a metamorphosis rather than an end.<sup>270</sup>

[T]he notions of time and space, as they were conceived by the Greeks and after them by the whole of the West, are flatly rejected by Vedanta. In a sense, man made a mistake when he invented time. That's why it would actually be enough for us to renounce mortality [...] to take a jump out of time, on a plane other than that of daily life, of course. I'm thinking of the phenomenon of death, which for Western thought has been a great scandal, as Kierkegaard and Unamuno realized so well; a phenomenon that is not in the least scandalous in the East where it is regarded not as an end but as a metamorphosis. (Harss & Dohmann, 1966, 219)

The books of Vedanta, to which Cortázar refers,<sup>271</sup> were also an inspiration for Schopenhauer to reflect on the circularity of life and death and the role of an individual in this circulation.<sup>272</sup> Schopenhauer notes that the ego, embedded in consciousness, vanishes in death:

But every one places his ego in *consciousness*; this seems to him therefore to be bound to individuality, with which, besides, everything disappears which is peculiar to him, as to this, and distinguishes him from others. His continued existence without individuality becomes to him therefore indistinguishable from the continuance of other beings, and he sees his ego sink.<sup>273</sup>

The disappearance of the ego is manifest in Cortázar's description of "Janet" after her death: events take place, but there is no subject to act or react. Things happen

<sup>270</sup> See Harss & Dohmann, 1966, 210.

<sup>271</sup> Cortázar was interested in Zen Buddhism and Vedanta, perhaps through Borges. (See Peavler, 1990, 3)

<sup>272</sup> See for example Schopenhauer 1909, 307–308. Schopenhauer explains the ideas of Veda writers: "Death is the moment of that deliverance from the one-sidedness of an individuality which does not constitute the inmost kernel of our being, but is rather to be thought of as a kind of aberration of it. The true original freedom re-enters at this moment, which, in the sense indicated, may be regarded as *a restitutio in integrum*" (Schopenhauer, 1909, 308).

<sup>273</sup> Schopenhauer, 1909, 284.

without anybody making them happen and “Janet” cannot be distinguished from these amorphous materials and movements.

#### 4.2.2 *Nunc stans* and the return to consciousness and time

Schopenhauer explains his views with reference to Kant’s doctrine of the ideality of time, where time is a form of human apperception, an aspect of consciousness that perceives it, and disappears with the loss of consciousness:<sup>274</sup>

Beginning, ending, and continuing are conceptions which derive their significance simply and solely from time, and are therefore valid only under the presupposition of this. But time has no absolute existence; it is not the manner of being of the thing in itself, but merely the form of our *knowledge* of our existence and nature, and that of all things, which is just on this account very imperfect, and is limited to mere phenomena. (Schopenhauer, 1909, 288)

If time has no existence of its own, but is merely a form of human apperception, the flow of time vanishes with the loss of consciousness. What remains is the immutable present, or *nunc stans*:

[T]he really essential part of things, of man, of the world, lies permanently and enduringly in the *Nunc stans*, firm and immovable; and that the change of the phenomena and events is a mere consequence of our apprehension of them by means of our form of perception, which is time. (Schopenhauer, 1909, 283)

In “Anillo de Moebius”, in the protagonist Janet’s death induces the loss of her individual consciousness and, by the same token, the loss of a sense of time that contains “before” and “after”:

[S]er viento siendo Janet o Janet siendo viento o agua o espacio [...] Derivar en lo inmóvil sin antes ni después, un ahora hialino sin contacto ni referencias, un estado en el que continente y contenido no se diferenciaban, un agua fluyendo en el agua [...] (156)

[T]o be wind while being Janet or Janet being wind or water or space [...] To drift in the immobile with no before or after, a hyaline now without contact or

<sup>274</sup> The lack of consciousness of time in young children in connection with the undifferentiated state, where the ego has not yet been formed, is widely recognized. (See for example Piaget, 1985)

references, a state in which the container and the contained were undifferentiated, water flowing in water [...]

After her death, “Janet” is deindividuated in *nunc stans*, diffused across a state without differentiation and without time. In this amorphous state, “now” is described as “hyaline”, transparent. This “now” is without reference to temporal markers like “before” or “after” and therefore does not imply an identifiable point in a linear continuum of time.

This state, which lacks distinction, time and consciousness, is however not the final state reached in the story. Time, distinctions and some kind of consciousness return towards the end, when they begin simultaneously to take shape. The undifferentiated state continues until an impetus provokes a change that ushers in the beginning of time:

[H]asta que sin transición era el ímpetu, un violento *rush* proyectándola, sacándola sin que algo pudiera aprehender el cambio, solamente el *rush* vertiginoso en lo horizontal o vertical de un espacio estremecido en su velocidad. Alguna vez se salía de lo informe para acceder a una rigurosa fijeza igualmente separada de toda referencia y sin embargo tangible, hubo esa hora en que Janet cesó de ser agua o viento del viento, por primera vez sintió, se sintió encerrada y limitada, cubo de un cubo, inmóvil cubidad. (156–157)

[U]ntil without transition it was the impetus a violent rushing projecting her, drawing her along unable to grasp the change in any way except in the dizzy rush on the horizontal or the vertical of a space that shuddered in its velocity. Sometimes it would come out of the shapeless and accede to a rigorous fixedness also separated from all reference and nevertheless tangible, there was that moment when Janet ceased to be water of water or wind of wind, for the first time she felt, felt herself closed in and limited, cube of a cube, motionless cubeness.

From her previously undifferentiated, deindividuated state after death, “Janet” is eventually reduced and restricted down to a new state. From the chaos, the shape of a cube is formed; this is the beginning of a new “Janet”.

The language reflects an extreme difficulty in describing this return to individuation: “Janet” is, but what is, is not actually Janet: “[S]er Janet en el tiempo, ser eso que no era Janet pero que pasaba del estado cubo al estado fiebre o volvía al estado oruga [...]” (159) (“[B]eing Janet in time, being what was not Janet but which was passing from the cube state to the fever state or returning to the caterpillar state [...]”)

The individuation of “Janet” is a subtle process, reminiscent of the cosmogony of the Maori, which Cortázar describes in *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967). In contrast to the view of Western science, this cosmogony is not based on dualism between chaos and cosmos:

[H]an intuido que entre la confusión original y el orden previo a la concepción de un tiempo y un espacio racionales, no hay nuestro fulminante *fiat lux* y un ponerse a fabricar en serie la creación. Sospechan que ya del caos a la materia hay un proceso sutilísimo, y tratan de figurarlo cosmogónicamente. (Cortázar, 2004a, 106–108)<sup>275</sup>

They have sensed that between the original confusion and the order prior to the conception of a rational time and space, there is no our lightning *fiat lux* and a mass production of creation. They suspect that there is a very subtle process from chaos to matter, and they try to figure it out cosmogonically.

Time is now a more solid moment of “now”, and it has a duration, but this duration is still without a before or after:

En ese estado cubo fuera de lo translúcido y lo huracanado, algo como una duración se instalaba, no un antes o un después pero un ahora más tangible, un comienzo de tiempo reducido a un presente espeso y manifiesto, cubo en el tiempo. (157)

In that cube state outside the translucent and the hurricane, something like a duration was being installed, not a before or an after but more tangible now, a beginning of time reduced to a thick and manifest present, cube in time.

<sup>275</sup> The cosmogony is described further: “Los primeros pasos maoríes hacia la creación son los siguientes: hay el vacío original, y a ese vacío le siguen: el primer vacío, el segundo vacío, el vasto vacío, el extendidísimo vacío, el seco vacío, el vacío generoso, el vacío delicioso, el vacío atado, la noche, la noche suspendida, la noche fluyente, la noche gimiente, la hija del sueño intranquilo, la alborada, el día permanente, el día brillante, y por último el espacio.” (Cortázar, 2004a, 106–108) (“The first Maori steps toward creation are as follows: there is the original emptiness, and that emptiness is followed by: the first emptiness, the second emptiness, the vast emptiness, the very extensive emptiness, the dry emptiness, the generous emptiness, the delicious emptiness, the bound void, the night, the suspended night, the flowing night, the moaning night, the daughter of restless sleep, the dawn, the permanent day, the bright day, and finally space.”)

The change between the two states is subtle. Expressions like “in some way”, “perhaps” and “something like” are repeated. Our language is designed for the cosmos not for chaos, and it is bound to the production and conservation of distinctions and expressions of time. To describe the subtle change from timelessness and the lack of distinctions towards time and definition is not easy:

Poco a poco (¿poco a poco en una condición fuera del tiempo? Maneras de decir) se iban dando otros estados que acaso ya se habían dado, aunque ya significara antes y no había antes; ahora (y tampoco ahora) imperaba un estado viento [...] (158)

Little by little (little by little in a condition outside of time? a manner of speaking) other states were presenting themselves, had perhaps already been presented, although already would mean before and there was no before; now (or any now either) a wind state prevailed [...]

In this excerpt, Cortázar comments, on a metatextual level, on the poetical and metaphorical character of the story; he must use all the possibilities of poetic and metaphoric language to describe the condition outside of time – “little by little” is nothing but “a manner of speaking” borrowed from language grounded in a common reality.

Along with time, difference is born as cube state, fever state and wave state are separated. “Now” becomes *more* “now”:

Ser ahora el estado cubo o ser ola contenía una diferencia, se era sin fiebre o sin reptación, el estado cubo no era la fiebre y ser fiebre no era el estado cubo o el estado ola. En el estado cubo ahora – *un ahora de pronto más ahora* – por primera vez (un ahora donde acababa de darse un indicio de primera vez), Janet dejó de ser el estado cubo para ser en el estado cubo, y más tarde (porque esa primera diferenciación del ahora entrañaba el sentimiento de más tarde) en el estado ola Janet dejó de ser el estado ola para ser en el estado ola. (159)

To be the cube state now or be the wave held a difference, it existed without fever or without reptation, the cube state was not fever and being fever was not the cube state or the wave state. In the cube state now – *a now suddenly more now* – for the first time (a now where an indication of first time had just been given), Janet ceased being the cube state to be in the cube state, and later (because that first differentiation of the now contained the feeling of later) in the wave state Janet ceased being the wave state to be in the wave state.

With this differentiation, there is “each time more Janet”: the more there is time, the more there is “Janet”. Time broadens little by little to encompass an “afterwards” that simultaneously creates a “before”. “Now” is not transparent anymore and “the shadow of time” is born:

Y todo eso contenía los indicios de una temporalidad, ahora se podía reconocer una primera vez y una segunda vez, un ser en ola o ser en fiebre que se sucedían para ser perseguidos por un ser en viento o ser en follaje o ser de nuevo en cubo, ser cada vez más Janet en, *ser Janet en el tiempo*, ser eso que no era Janet pero que pasaba del estado cubo al estado fiebre o volvía al estado oruga, porque cada vez más los estados se fijaban y establecían y de algún modo se delimitaban no solamente en tiempo sino en espacio [...] (159)<sup>276</sup>

And all that contained the indications of a temporality, now a first time could be recognized and a second time, a being in wave or in fever that succeeded each other to be pursued by a being in wind or being in foliage or being again in cube, being each time more Janet in, *being Janet in time*, being what was not Janet but which was passing from the cube state to the fever state or returning to the caterpillar state, because more and more the states were becoming fixed and established and in some way delimited not only in time but in space [...] <sup>277</sup>

The differentiation of “Janet” from the surroundings occurs not only through the dawning of time but also through the formation of space; the interconnection of time and space are shown especially in the expression “being Janet in time”. “Janet” is not a wave or fever, as she was before; “Janet” is *in wave* or *in fever*, *in time*. Thus, the creation of “Janet’s” sentience and time and space occur in three phases: the chaos, an amorphous substance with which Janet who has ridden her bicycle in the wood merges; the creation of the cube out of the amorphous substance, where “Janet” feels separated from the surroundings; the beginning of linear time, that is, concepts of before and after, where “Janet” is no longer cube-like but experiences a new phase of differentiation in being *in* the cube. “Now” is no longer timeless but determines a fixed location in a linear continuum of time where “Janet” is situated.

#### 4.2.3 What remains: will and desire

In “Anillo de Moebius”, following the emergence of linear time, the process of “Janet’s” individuation proceeds along with an important change. A significant

<sup>276</sup> Italics by I.U.

<sup>277</sup> Italics by I.U.

aspect of “rudimentary mental operations” is born: memory. Images from “Janet’s” past appear. Memory is presented as an autonomous entity piecing together what “Janet” had been: “[S]upo de algo que había sido Janet, inconexamente una memoria intentaba entrar y fijarse.” (160) (“[S]he learned something of what Janet had been, unconnectedly a memory was trying to enter and be fixed.”) “Janet” is a medium for fragmented aspects of consciousness and sentience to enter and act. “Janet” does not remember, but a memory is remembering her:

En alguno de los pasos habría de darse el primer rudimento de un recuerdo, resbalando entre las hojas o al cesar en el estado cubo para ser en la fiebre supo de algo que había sido Janet, inconexamente una memoria intentaba entrar y fijarse, una vez fue saber que era Janet, acordarse de Janet en un bosque [...] (160)

In some one of the steps the first rudiments of a memory would be born, slipping among the leaves or at the end of the cube state to be in the fever she learned something of what Janet had been, unconnectedly a memory was trying to enter and be fixed, once it was knowing that she was Janet, remembering Janet in a wood [...]

The memory gathers more and more images from Janet’s life just before her death. Through these images a “feeling of person was becoming clearer”, including the embodied sensations of Janet “being face up and held down by a convulsive force”:

[U]na vez fue saber que era Janet, acordarse de Janet en un bosque, de la bicicleta, de Constance Myers<sup>278</sup> y de unos chocolates en una bandeja de alpaca. [...] y con las ráfagas de imágenes se precisaba poco a poco un sentimiento de persona, una primera inquietud, la visión de un tejado de maderas podridas, estar boca arriba y sujeta por una fuerza convulsiva [...] (160)

<sup>278</sup> Constance Myers refers to Silvia Constance Myers (later Blennerhassett), whose mother was the photographer Eveleen Myers, who took renowned portraits of her children. Silvia Constance Myers’ father was Frederic Myers, a poet and one of the founders of the Society of Psychical Research. Frederic Myers wrote a book, *Human personality and its survival of bodily death*, in 1903. In this book, based in Buddhist principles, Myers examines phenomena considered supernatural, such as premonition, telepathy and hypnosis, and suggests, among other things, that these phenomena show uncharted, spiritual areas in the human mind that show how a person is not a limited individual but a part of a great connection. According to Meyers, through telepathy (which, according to him, is also love), one can overcome the spiritual loneliness of the individual to feel that he is at home in the universe: “We are every one members one of another [...] Like atoms, like suns, like galaxies, our spirits are systems of forces which vibrate continually to each other's attractive power.” (344) (*Human personality and its survival of bodily death*. Frederic W. H. Myers and L. H. Myers, Project Gutenberg, January 3, 2012.)

[O]nce it was knowing that she was Janet, remembering Janet in a wood, the bicycle, Constance Myers and some chocolates on a nickel-plated tray [. . .] and with the gusts of images a feeling of person was becoming clearer, little by little, a first disquiet, the vision of a shed of rotten boards, being face up and held down by a convulsive force [...]

Memory unearths the sights and feelings once experienced by the formerly living Janet, although her individual thoughts have disappeared along with her ego.

Eventually, “Janet memory” realizes images and feelings that occurred directly before the death:

Una y otra vez llegó a las sensaciones últimas, al picor de una piel barbuda contra su boca [...] antes de perderse de nuevo instantáneamente en una Carrera fragorosa [...] En el estado cubo no podía pasar del límite donde todo era horror y revulsión pero si la voluntad le hubiera sido dada esa voluntad se habría fijado ahí donde afloraba Janet sensible, donde había Janet queriendo abolir la recurrencia. (161)

On occasion she reached the last sensations, the scratch of a bearded skin against her mouth [...] before getting lost again instantaneously in a thunderous careening [...] In the cube state she could not pass from the limit where everything was horror and revulsion but if will had been given her that will would have become fixed there where a sensitive Janet was blooming, were there was Janet wanting to abolish the recurrence.

The memory enables the sentience to grow stronger and consequently, the sentience makes it possible for the will to be born; it is predicted that if will had been given to her, it “esa voluntad se habría fijado ahí donde afloraba Janet sensible” (161) (“that will would have become fixed there where a sensitive Janet was blooming”). “Anillo de Moebius” reflects Schopenhauer’s view of will and desire. In Schopenhauer’s philosophy, the will to live is a lifelong drive shared by all living creatures and is eternal. It is embodied by new beings when the old ones have died, the new generation proof of former generations’ will to live and continue the species through procreation.<sup>279</sup> The will to live, according to Schopenhauer, is in its most basic form sexual desire, because it is through this that life reproduces itself.<sup>280</sup>

As “Janet memory” assumes a more fixed, corporeal form, “Janet” is transported back in time, back to her bed in her family house in Kent, before the rape ever took

<sup>279</sup> Schopenhauer, 1909, 270.

<sup>280</sup> Schopenhauer, 1909, 270.

place, “desde algo que se parecía al despertar de un sueño sin sueños, al caer en el despertar de una mañana en Kent, ser de nuevo Janet y su cuerpo [...]” (160) (“something that was like waking up from a dreamless sleep, falling into the awakening one morning in Kent, being Janet and her body again [...]”) Dream functions here as a passage; memory finds Janet in her bed in her family house in Kent, further back in time.

In this section an important change occurs as “Janet” feels her body. The room in Kent transports the reader back to the young woman’s former life in a place where the horror of the rape does not yet exist, and an alternate future is still possible. A quotation from Clarice Lispector’s novel, *Cerca del corazón salvaje*, (*Close to the Savage Heart*), given as an epigraph to the story describes the birth of one young woman’s sexuality, a sexuality which is not defined conceptually from the outside but is sensually experienced and felt:

Imposible explicarlo. Se iba apartando de aquella zona donde las cosas tienen forma fija y aristas, donde todo tiene un nombre sólido e inmutable. Cada vez ahondaba más en la región líquida, quieta e insondable donde se detenían nieblas vagas y frescas como las de la madrugada. (149)

Impossible to explain. She was leaving that zone where things have a fixed form and edges, where everything has a solid and immutable name. She was sinking deeper and deeper into the liquid, quiet, and unfathomable region where vague and cool mists like those of morning hovered.

A similar sensuality can be seen emerging in “Janet”, whose *thinking* has vanished along with the individual Janet’s ego: “Janet” does not see her body, but she feels it. Through physical sensation alone, “Janet” “se movió, adelantó un brazo y tendió las piernas en un impulso de natación, diferenciándose por primera vez de la masa ondulante que la envolvía” (161–162) (“moved, put out an arm and stretched her legs in an impulse of swimming, differentiating herself for the first time from the undulating mass that enwrapped her”).

When “Janet” enters again the cube state, the horror of the rape that permeated her memories is no longer there; instead, the rush of sensory and sensual feeling evokes sexual desire: “De la sensación pura al conocimiento, de la fluidez de las olas al cubo severo, uniéndose en algo que de nuevo era Janet, el deseo buscaba su camino, otro paso entre los pasos recurrentes.” (163) (“From pure sensation to recognition, from the fluidity of the waves to the severe cube, coming together into something that was Janet again, desire was looking for its road, another step among the recurrent steps.”) What remains is pure desire, guiding “Janet’s” will.

Desire becomes a force motivating “Janet’s” pursuit of Robert, ultimately suppressing the uncontrollable changing of states:

[A]l principio la memoria y las sensaciones se habían dado sin un eje que las modulara, ahora con el deseo la voluntad volvía a Janet, algo en ella tendía un arco como de piel y de tendones y de vísceras, la proyectaba hacia eso que no podía ser, exigiendo el acceso por dentro o por fuera de los estados que la envolvían y abandonaban vertiginosamente, su voluntad era el deseo abriéndose paso en líquidos y constelaciones fulminantes [...] su deseo era deseo y Robert, era Robert en algún estado inalcanzable pero que la voluntad Janet buscaba forzar, un estado Robert en el que el deseo Janet, la voluntad Janet querían acceder [...] (163 )

[A]t first memory and sensations had been given without an axis to modulate them, now along with desire will was coming back to Janet, something in her stretched out an arch like one of skin and tendons and viscera, projected her toward what couldn't be, demanded access inside and outside the states that enveloped her and abandoned her dizzily, her will was desire opening a way in liquids and flashing constellation [...] her desire was desire and Robert, was Robert in some unreachable state but which Janet will sought to force, a Robert state in which the Janet desire, Janet will, wanted to accede [...]

Robert, Robert state, embodies a fixity to be harnessed through desire and will. The use of the name Janet alongside “will” and “desire” in this last part of the story indicates that a “Janet desire” has emerged from the undifferentiated state of death and cannot be identified with the single individual Janet.

“Janet desire, “el deseo Janet” gives in to Robert and is thrown into his prison cell. Although many scholars regard this scene as Janet’s resurrection, a sort of reincarnation of her soul or consciousness, I argue that the story must not be read literally, as if the individual Janet would continue her existence after the death and reappear in Robert’s cell. Even though Cortázar never directly indicates a difference between the living Janet and the dead “Janet”, examination of the metaphoric and metaphysical implications of the story reveal their separation. By focusing on these aspects, it becomes clear that “Janet’s” continuity as herself is a poetic and metaphoric expression. Although death brings about the loss of individual consciousness and connection, evidence of desire provides proof of the entanglement of all human beings, who are profoundly intertwined in the eternal movement of life and death. Thus, the section of “Janet’s” appearance in Robert’s cell shall be read as a poetic metaphor of the philosophy of desire. Desire is timeless, repudiating the losses arising from death with continuity and connection.

#### 4.2.4 On the Moebius strip: the eternal return of desire

The Moebius strip is formed of a loop with only one surface. In the story “Anillo de Moebius”, the Moebius strip symbolizes the view that life and death are not two separate matters but rather the same thing seen from two perspectives. Schopenhauer describes birth and death as a “line drawn in two directions”, an idea that is reminiscent of the metaphor of Moebius strip in Cortázar’s story:

What birth is, that also is death, according to its nature and significance: it is the same line drawn in two directions. If the former is an actual arising out of nothing, then the latter is also an actual annihilation. But in truth it is only by means of the *eternity* of our real being that we can conceive it as imperishable, and consequently this imperishableness is not temporal. (Schopenhauer, 1909, 281)

Human existence is not a line between birth and death but it is a Moebius strip where life and death are not distinct but exist in an inextricable union.

In “Anillo”, the change from individuation back to the state of chaos and the timeless “now” is succeeded by accession to Robert state. This movement is repeatedly described as reptation, reminiscent of movement along the Moebius strip, where one always ends up back at the beginning. Reptation is a reptilian movement, conjuring images of crawling and sliding: “[A]lgo como resbalar en el entero follaje de una selva, sostenida de hoja en hoja por una apesantez de baba del diablo [...]” (157) (“[S]omething like sliding along through the entire foliage of a jungle, held up from leaf to leaf by a weightlessness of devil’s drool [...]”)

The narration of the short story alternates between the unstable and amorphous recollection of the rape and shifting states, and Robert’s story of incarceration, which is recounted in indented excerpts inserted into the main text. The style in the indentations is realistic, describing Robert from an external perspective that omits his own viewpoint. While in the prison cell Robert commits suicide, entering the same vacillating and shifting state of reptation as Janet before him. What occurred to Janet after death is therefore suggested to be a common posthumous experience, when death precedes the loss of individuality and the movement of reptation. Commenting on Robert’s death, the narrator states that “hopelessness becomes hope”: “[P]aso al ser en olas, primeras brazadas como una felicidad que ahora tenía un nombre, hélice invirtiendo su giro, desesperación vuelta esperanza [...]” (165) (“[A] passage to being in waves, first strokes like a happiness that had a name now, a propeller reversing its spin, a hopelessness become hope [...]”)

“Janet” and “Robert” are both now in reptation between different states: “En algún momento ser fiebre Janet o ser en olas Janet podía ser Robert olas o fiebre o estado cubo en el ahora sin tiempo [...]” (165) (“At some moment being fever Janet

or being in waves Janet it could be waves Robert or fever or cube state in the now without time [...]”) This “now without time”, which here concerns “Robert”, is the state where the linear conception of time has not yet emerged: there is no “before” nor “after”.

The structure of the story follows the form of the Moebius strip with no clear beginning nor end. In the final section, “Janet desire” hopes that “Robert” will reach out his hand to her:

[E]l deseo Janet luchando contra cada estado para sumirse en los otros donde todavía Robert no... entera sintiéndose y sabiéndose Janet, pero allí alguna vez Robert, allí seguramente alguna vez al término del tibio balanceo en olas cristalinas una mano alcanzaría la mano de Janet, sería al fin la mano de Robert. (166)

Janet desire struggling against every state to sink itself in the other where still not Robert... feeling herself whole and knowing herself Janet, but there some time Robert, there surely some time at the end of the warm swing in crystal waves a hand would reach Janet’s hand, it would at last be Robert’s hand.

As mentioned earlier, the story requires multiple readings. At first glance, the beginning seems nonsensical:

Por qué no, acaso bastaría proponérselo como ella habría de hacerlo más tarde ahincadamente, y se la vería, se la sentiría con la misma claridad que ella se veía y se sentía pedaleando bosque [...] (149)

Why not, maybe it would have been enough just to try as she would try eagerly later on and she would be seen, she would be felt, with the same clarity that she was seen and felt pedaling into the woods [...]

Having reached the end, it becomes clear that the story begins where it ends. Now, the rape and all its attendant thoughts and actions, including Janet’s curious thoughts of facial crème, appear in a new light. The “protagonist” of the story is not Janet or Robert, but will to live – desire – that is incarnated or individuated in them. Janet is horrified, but the *desire* in her wants Robert. From the point of view of the blind will of being, which exists in living beings as desire, Janet, a living and willing individual, should have desired Robert; the intercourse should not have resulted in death. As “products” of very different circumstances, Janet and Robert are shaped by their distinct responses to impulse. Robert is an orphan who must steal to survive and has difficulties repressing his impulses; Janet’s cultural background imposes on her a rigid control over her natural impulses.

“Anillo de Moebius” is reminiscent of “Las armas secretas”, not only because of its theme of rape but also because it too reincarnates desire within a new subject. In “Las armas secretas”, a Nazi soldier raped Michèle during the war, and the sadistic violence of the soldier is reborn in Pierre, who later rapes Michèle himself. However, whereas in “Las armas secretas” the narrative focalization follows the male violator, in “Anillo de Moebius” the female victim has the central viewpoint. In the states after the death, strings of ego and subjectivity being cut, “Janet desire” can bloom: it pursues to change the recurrence of repressed desire, which proved fatal in “Las armas secretas”, and takes “another step among recurrent steps”.

To conclude, it is clear that “Anillo de Moebius” has been widely interpreted too literally. Scholars commonly regard it as a sort of a macabre love story detailing the destinies of two individuals. I have shown that to grasp the true meaning of the story, it is vital to unveil the metaphysical dimension of the story and to read the sections concerning Janet’s and Robert’s existence after their death metaphorically.

Janet’s desire becomes the driving force for her existence, just as it did in the philosophy of Schopenhauer or in the surrealist utopia of André Breton: “Le désir, seul ressort du monde, le désir, seule rigueur que l’homme ait à connaître [...]” (Breton, 1937, 129) (“Desire, the only source of the world, desire, the only rigor that man has to know [...]”) Desire, common to all living beings, does not die, even if the individual Janet and Robert do. Returning from the story’s end to its beginning, “Janet desire” wants to incarnate in a new person Janet: “she would be seen, she would be felt” again. Releasing the shackles of human ego to understand the interconnections that unite all human beings together across time and place may turn the horror and hopelessness of death into hope.

In this chapter, I have discussed sexuality and love in Cortázar’s oeuvre from the perspective of temporality. Eroticism appears as an ambivalent force that includes both sadism and perfection. The surrealist emphasis on the value of desire in society and Herbert Marcuse’s ideas about liberating Eros from the supremacy of Logos are shown in Cortázar’s stories, in which a conflict between society’s norms and individual desires often occurs. The pleasure made possible by eroticism, where lovers merge with one another and slip into poetic time, can happen only occasionally. At its best, the erotic act can be a form of physical poetry, where one is freed from the necessity to measure time. In the short story “Lugar llamado Kindberg”, the middle-aged protagonist fails to break free of his captivity in social norms despite the love of a young woman. In the short story “Anillo de Moebius”, Janet is raped and murdered in a forest. Despite the loss of her consciousness, her innate life-sustaining desire does not disappear. In my interpretation, the story reflects time as a feature of human consciousness, beyond which exists the *nunc stans*, the eternal present. Desire, in contrast to reason and consciousness, is timeless, always reincarnated in and through new beings.

## 5 Politics of Poetic Time

Julio Cortázar's perception of history and the future underwent a change with his political awakening. The Cuban Revolution sparked a collective euphoria among the continent's writers. Cortázar had resisted the public pressure to engage politically and made statements in favor of artistic freedom but, after visiting Cuba in 1963, he was energized by the ideals of the revolution. Inspired by the revolution, Cortázar, who had previously identified as a European rather than Latin American writer, began to work in the political field to improve the conditions of the Latin American countries. This ideological change was also strongly reflected in his short stories, where political motifs became apparent. The settings of works, previously concentrated in Europe, now also encompassed Cuba, Argentina and Nicaragua. In a famous quote from his letter to Roberto Fernández Retamar, Cortázar writes: "De la Argentina se alejó un escritor para quien la realidad, como lo imaginaba Mallarmé, debía culminar en un libro; en París nació un hombre para quien los libros deberán culminar en la realidad." (Cortázar, 1994b, 36) ("A writer left Argentina for whom the reality, as Mallarmé imagined, had to culminate in a book; In Paris a man was born for whom books must culminate in reality.")

By the 1980s, Cortázar had become a political activist, attending conferences, giving speeches and regularly traveling to Nicaragua to support the Sandinista cause. Since the 1960s, debates around the writer's commitment had been fierce: many intellectuals believed the writer should primarily promote the cause of the revolution, while others thought it necessary to advance art without harnessing it to the needs of the revolution. Cortázar staunchly defended the latter point of view, although he did not consider art to exclude social influence. Indeed, social development and the development of art went hand in hand. The short story "Reunión" best represents this effort to combine social revolution and reform-minded art.<sup>281</sup> Cortázar's political awakening affected his worldview and his aesthetics, and also the implications of poetic time and its relation to clock time changed. How does Cortázar's treatment of temporality appear in his short stories after the new political approach to literature and art?

<sup>281</sup> See for example Peris Blanes, 2014.

Throughout its history, Latin America had a perception of the continent's marginal position in relation to the European cultural tradition. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this perception begun to change and, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the continent's marginal cultural status was viewed as an opportunity. Due to their dual identity as at once inheritors of European culture and outsiders to it, Latin American writers found themselves in a novel position to challenge and break away from the oppressive burden of Western history and literary traditions.<sup>282</sup> Numerous writers, including Jorge Luis Borges and Mario Vargas Llosa, spoke of the benefits of the marginal status of Latin American culture.<sup>283</sup> Although initially adopted from European traditions, Latin American translations of surrealist ideals and practices provided an apt language to describe the continent's emergent alternative culture. Surrealism had a strong influence in Latin America, initially in poetry and later in prose. Gerald Martin sees the enthusiastic adoption of surrealism in Latin America as a result of its emphasis on the importance of the unconscious and primitiveness over rationality, which supported the cultural aspirations of the developing countries.<sup>284</sup> In his famous essay, Alejo Carpentier saw a clear difference between French and Latin American surrealism: while French surrealism was an attack on the generally accepted concept of reality, in Latin America all reality was essentially fantastic.<sup>285</sup>

Cortázar also took part in this discussion. In *Rayuela*, as Santiago Colás has shown, Cortázar demonstrates his disillusionment with the European cultural project. According to Colás, for Oliveira, the protagonist of the novel, rationality and irrationality were both part of the same Western project, which as a whole had failed.<sup>286</sup> Cortázar pointed out, in a later essay referring to Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*, that Latin America's location outside of "European history" was not only a fact, but that Latin America had every right and even a duty to remain distant from it. Latin America was tasked with ushering in a new and different historical period for which, according to Cortázar, "socialism offered a practical, surrealism a spiritual

<sup>282</sup> See for example Martin, 1998, 184. This conversation had a long tradition. In the independence struggles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latin America sought to break away from Spain and to gain independence from the European cultural tradition. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this struggle for independence was turned against the United States, whose imperialist aspirations eyed the natural resources of South America. Enrique Rodó published the influential pamphlet "Ariel" in 1900, in which the United States in portrayed as Caliban from Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, and Latin America becomes the play's spirit of the wind, Ariel. This contrast reflected the material values of the United States alongside the spiritual values of Latin America.

<sup>283</sup> See Boldy 2000, 193.

<sup>284</sup> Martin 1998, 142.

<sup>285</sup> See Carpentier 1995.

<sup>286</sup> Colás, 1994, 42–43.

vision".<sup>287</sup> This statement reflected public opinion which, according to Colás, supported the realization of the continent's own history after the Cuban revolution, as envisioned by Carpentier.<sup>288</sup>

Cortázar states, in one of his interviews, that his work before the political awakening was located outside of time, because he himself was located outside of historical time.<sup>289</sup> Jaime Alazraki has argued that Cortázar's attitude to history in his early work was static and concerned with individual freedom, showing how history forces the individual to conform to a collective destiny.<sup>290</sup> In his early work, Cortázar's metaphysical searches were orientated towards the possibility of stepping outside of history. Historical time for Cortázar had been consummate with the realization of a predetermined identity and the enactment of repetition, often disguised as the illusion of a constant movement towards the future. The Cuban revolution and the rise of socialism in Latin America brought an opportunity for change and, for Cortázar, historical progress was compatible with literature which, in his speeches, became an "instrument of combat":

A nosotros, los que hemos elegido hacer de la palabra un instrumento de combate, nos incumbe que esa palabra no se quede atrás frente al avance de la historia, porque solo así daremos a nuestros pueblos las armas mentales, morales y estéticas sin las cuales ningún armamento físico conduce a una liberación definitiva.<sup>291</sup>

It is up to us, those of us who have chosen to make the word an instrument of combat, that this word not be left behind in the face of the advance of history, because only in this way will we give our people the mental, moral and aesthetic weapons without which no physical weaponry leads to definitive liberation.

In this chapter, I will discuss temporalities and the appearance of poetic time in connection with social change in three of Cortázar's short stories. "Reunión", ("Meeting"), published in 1966, was Cortázar's first political short story and a turning point in the development of his thought towards a new understanding of the future and history. In the short story "Recortes de prensa" (1980) ("Press

<sup>287</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 40.

<sup>288</sup> Colás, 1994, 72.

<sup>289</sup> Alazraki, 1992, 304.

<sup>290</sup> Alazraki 1992, 357. In an interview with Omar Prego, Cortázar states: "[N]uestros cerebros han sido muy manipulados por la evolución histórica [...]" (Prego, 1985, 118) ("[O]ur brains have been greatly manipulated by historical evolution [...]" )

<sup>291</sup> "Mensaje (al Primer Encuentro de Intelectuales por la Soberanía de los Pueblos de Nuestra América)" Cortázar, 1994b, 310.

Clippings”), published fourteen years later, the ambitious faith in social change has been demonstrably broken, and the disappointment is reflected in the implications of poetic time. Despite this disenchantment, however, the protagonist of “Recortes de prensa”, is still politically active and wants to change the world, a stark contrast to the protagonist of the short story “Fin de etapa” (1983), (“A Leg of a Journey”), which was published two years later and only a year before Cortázar’s death. In “Fin de etapa”, the protagonist passively accepts her life as void of meaning, and the uncontested market economy guides her life.

## 5.1 Poetic time in the battlefield: “Reunión”

The contradiction – or rather the dynamic – between the creative and the destructive appears frequently in Cortázar’s work.<sup>292</sup> Almost always it is the negative side that triumphs: if characters do succeed in escaping their prison of routine for a short while, in the end they are either destroyed by it or compelled to return to their former life once again.<sup>293</sup> The short story “Reunión” is an exception in this sense.<sup>294</sup> I agree with Juan Carlos Curutchet’s view that in “Reunión”, “se da la primera y única tentativa de Cortázar por resolver las intolerables tensiones de su mundo en una esperanza coherente y realizable”<sup>295</sup> (“occurs Cortázar’s first and only attempt to resolve the intolerable tensions of his world into a coherent and achievable hope”). In this short story, inspired by the Cuban Revolution, the poetic experience of time appears as harmonious and comprehensible for the first and only time among his short stories,<sup>296</sup> but the story is also structured around a myth of the re-creation of the world.

Cortázar wrote his first political short story, “Reunión”, in 1964 after he had been in Cuba as a guest of the Casa de Américas and had been inspired by the

<sup>292</sup> See Hernández Del Castillo 1981; Picon Garfield, 1975, 57–58.

<sup>293</sup> See Picon Garfield, 1976.

<sup>294</sup> In an interview with Lucille Kerr, Cortázar says that he does not write positive short stories. In the same interview, Cortázar admits that there is a contradiction between his essays and his short stories: his political essays exude belief in the future. Cortázar considers the reason for the negativity of his short stories to be the fact that he is not a “conscious writer”. The dark forces of the subconscious are manifest in his short stories (Kerr, 1974, 39).

<sup>295</sup> Curutchet, 1972, 139.

<sup>296</sup> This applies to short stories. In his travel book *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*, (1983), a similar harmony in relation to time appears. The book accomplishes on a subjective level what “Reunión” achieves on a political level: the realization of the poetic cosmovision.

revolution.<sup>297</sup> The story is based on the true story of the revolutionaries landing in Cuba in 1957, and the story's events partly follow Che Guevara's autobiography. The narrator of the short story is recognizable as Che Guevara, while the character Luis is based on Fidel Castro. According to Cortázar, quoted by Carolina Orloff, the writer was inspired by his reading of Che Guevara's memoirs on a plane returning from Cuba. Cortázar understood that a fictional work on the subject would appeal to the reader more than a factual account. As Orloff notes: "Cortázar believes that by giving the text a completely literary dimension – rather than it being partly testimonial and partly "mediocre" fiction – it would become "more real." (Orloff, 2013, 124) Such a view demonstrates, according to Orloff, Cortázar's understanding of the role of literature in the revolution. Literature could perform an "operación análoga", an analogical operation that aimed to convey the reality of the revolution to the reader as "truthfully" as possible, immersing them in the experience of the revolution firsthand, as if they were participating in it themselves.<sup>298</sup>

Realism and allegory are intertwined in the short story, and the combination of myths and historical events opens a new level of temporality. This chapter examines the three distinct temporalities appearing in the short story: the chaotic, immeasurable time at the beginning, the harmonic poetic time that follows, and the past, bourgeois time connected to the protagonist's previous life. First, each of these temporalities will be examined separately, but they will also be considered in connection to one another. What kind of concept of time is formed from them together? After this, I examine the idea of a new man in connection to these temporalities, and particularly the role of the future, appearing for the first time in Cortázar's work in conjunction with the possibilities of poetic experience in a social context.

The narrator of the short story describes the events in retrospect. First, the revolutionaries land and Batista's forces attack from the air. The revolutionaries lose

<sup>297</sup> Fidel Castro's investment in the development of literacy, the arts and cultural life inspired Latin American intellectuals to support the Cuban revolution together. By the seventies and the imprisonment of the poet Heberto Padilla, this enthusiasm had waned, and many turned against the revolution and its suppression of freedom of speech and artistic and sexual freedom. Cortázar, however, continued to support Castro.

<sup>298</sup> Orloff, 2013, 124. It is therefore understandable that Cortázar was disappointed that Che Guevara did not like the short story (Cf. Orloff, 2013). "Reunión" was meant to support the revolution and the common idea of the "new man". According to Peris Blanes, the idea of the new man was closer to the New Left and Marcuse's ideas than to Che Guevara's, even though the term was derived from Che Guevara's text (*El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba, 1965*). However, Che's and Cortázar's idea of a new man was united by the conviction that society cannot be changed only through structural reform but also requires that man himself had to change (Peris Blanes, 2011, 73).

a lot of men and their leader, Luis, disappears. The fighters are scattered and the narrative follows a small group, who carry their wounded comrade, Tinti, with them into the forest to set up camp. That night, the narrator, Che, lies awake and has a poetic vision in which the Mozart quartet playing in his mind merges with the movement of the leaves of the trees. He later interprets this as a vision of the revolution and its future. The next morning, they continue their trek and a rumor reaches their ears that Luis is dead. In the end, however, it turns out that the leader is alive and the separated groups are reunited. The narrator sees a star in the sky, which he connects to his nocturnal vision of a better future.

At the beginning of the short story, the first experience of time occurs. The situation is confusing and chaotic. The protagonist has landed with his group, but their journey to shore in small boats tossed around by the waves left the revolutionaries vomiting and unwell: “Nada podía andar peor, pero al menos ya no estábamos en la maldita lancha, entre vómitos y golpes de mar y pedazos de galleta mojada, entre ametralladoras y babas, hechos un asco [...]” (Cortázar, 2007, 63) (“Things couldn’t be worse, but at least we were no longer in the damn yacht, rolling in vomit and high seas and wet crackers and machine guns and drivel, filthy dirty [...]”)<sup>299</sup>

On land, Batista’s forces attack with airplanes. The revolutionaries lose track of time, men die, and the three groups are split up. Confusion reigns and an awareness of the passage of time fades: “Ya nadie se acuerda cuánto duró, el tiempo lo medíamos por los claros entre los pastizales, los tramos donde podían ametrallarnos en picada [...]” (64) (“Now nobody remembers how long it lasted, we measured the time by the clearings in the grasslands, the pieces of land where they could gun us down in a dive [...]”) With their enemies attacking from the air, time seems endless: “Duró vaya a saber cuánto [...]” (65) (“It lasted God knows how long [...]”)

José Amicola has compared this scene to the short story “La autopista del sur”, where measuring the duration of the traffic jam with clocks becomes senseless, but the passage of time can nonetheless be gauged in relation to other elements.<sup>300</sup> While in “La autopista del sur” time is measured in relation to the trees growing alongside the road, in “Reunión” it is measured “by the clearings of grasslands”. Time ceases to be abstract, becoming instead subjective, related directly to an individual and their movements. In the opening scenes of both stories, the characters have not escaped time and they still strive to measure it. They are not freed from time, but time feels endlessly long and painful (“it lasted God knows how long”). In both short stories, however, characters demonstrate a progressive movement away from the need for

<sup>299</sup> All translations of “Reunión” are from *All Fires the Fire and Other Stories* (2005a), translated by Suzanne Jill Levine (London, New York: Marion Boyars).

<sup>300</sup> Amicola, 1969, 186.

measurement of time. In “La autopista”, this is a shift to the archaic time determined by the cycle of nature, and in “Reunión” it is towards the poetic time, where the individual becomes part of the cosmic rhythm.

What is recounted in the short story is recollection of events. In the opening scene, memories and perceptions are confused, reflecting the protagonist’s immediate experience at the time of the events.<sup>301</sup> His inner turmoil is a flurry of contradictions, varying from joy to rage: “[Y] todo así, mal pensado y peor dicho, en una continua confusión de actos y nociones, una mezcla de alegría inexplicable y de rabia contra la maldita vida que nos estaban dando los aviones y lo que nos esperaba del lado de la carretera [...]” (64) (“[A]nd everything the same, badly planned and hopelessly executed, in a continuous confusion of acts and notions, a mixture of inexplicable joy and of anger at the hard time the planes were giving us and at what was waiting for us on the highway if we ever got there [...]”) The narrator describes the events as absurd. Batista’s forces have killed sixty men of the eighty that made it ashore and Luis, their leader – aka Fidel Castro – is nowhere to be found, assumed dead. Their hope for victory is fading rapidly.

On the third day after the landing, the narrator’s group are hiding in a cave awaiting information about Luis. The narrator is tired and feverish. He leans against a tree and watches the movement of the branches above him. At this point of the story, we move to another time experience. The narrative shifts to the present tense, because “quedan pedazos y momentos tan recortados en la memoria que solo se pueden decir en presente, como estar tirado otra vez boca arriba en el pastizal [...]” (67) (“pieces and moments remain so clearly etched in my memory that they can be told only in present tense, like being flat on our backs again in the grass [...]”) Mónica Tamborenea suggests that using the present tense indicates the slowing or stopping of time.<sup>302</sup> The overwhelming sense of chaos and confusion, from which is it possible to extract only a vague and unreliable sense of events, gradually disappears as the narrative slows down to become more detailed and precise. Like

<sup>301</sup> Peris Blanes compares the opening scene of Cortázar’s short story to the description of the landing in Che Guevara’s biography, and shows how Cortázar constructs through language and internal monologue the experience of nausea and confusion that Che Guevara analytically explains: “[S]i los textos de Guevara aludían a la fiebre, el asma y los vómitos que sufrían los guerrilleros en la sierra, el relato de Cortázar presentaba una enunciación entrecortada, enfebrecida, casi delirante, propia de un personaje que, efectivamente, estuviera sufriendo los rigores que Guevara describía en sus textos.” (Peris Blanes, 2014, 150–151) (“[I]f Guevara’s text alluded to asthma and vomiting suffered by the guerrillas in the mountains, Cortázar’s story presented a halting, feverish, almost delirious enunciation, typical of a character who was, in fact, suffering the rigors that Guevara described in his text.”)

<sup>302</sup> Tamborenea, 1986.

Johnny in “El perseguidor”, the narrator relives the experience through memory, assisted by the visual and aural elements of the story, such as the Mozart quartet, which revive the events in reminiscence.

When the narrator observes the sky through the branches of the trees, he notices the movement of the treetops and leaves against the starry sky.

Pero ahora vale la pena aprovechar de este respiro absurdo, dejarse ir mirando el dibujo que hacen las ramas del árbol contra el cielo más claro, con algunas estrellas, siguiendo con ojos entornados ese dibujo casual de las ramas y las hojas, esos ritmos que se encuentran, se cabalgan y se separan, y a veces cambian suavemente cuando una bocanada de aire hirviendo pasa por encima de las copas, viniendo de las ciénagas [...] (Cortázar, 2007, 69)

But now it's worth taking advantage of this absurd moment of rest, letting myself look at the sketch of the tree branches against the clearer sky, with some stars, following with half-closed eyes that casual design of the branches and leaves, those rhythms that meet, ride upon each other, and separate, and sometimes gently change when a whiff of boiling air passes over the treetops, coming from the swamps [...]

This rhythm reminds the narrator of Mozart's quartet, “The Hunt”, which has “always accompanied him”: “[M]e hace tanto bien recordar un tema de Mozart que me ha acompañado desde siempre, el movimiento inicial del cuarteto *La caza* [...]” (69) (“[I]t does me so much good to remember a Mozart theme that has always been with me, the first moment of *The Hunt* quartet [...])”

This is where the protagonist's “poetic contemplation” begins, as the external and internal worlds meet.<sup>303</sup> A poetic figure is formed, in which the elements of external and internal reality form a momentary constellation, the meaning of which is something more than just the sum of these elements.

Lo pienso, lo repito, lo canturreo en la memoria, y siento al mismo tiempo cómo la melodía y el dibujo de la copa del árbol contra el cielo se van acercando, traban amistad, se tantean una y otra vez hasta que el dibujo se ordena de pronto en la presencia visible de la melodía, un ritmo que sale de una rama baja, casi a la altura de mi cabeza, remonta hasta cierta altura y se abre como un abanico de tallos, mientras el segundo violín es esa rama más delgada que se yuxtapone para

<sup>303</sup> Graciela de Sola describes the narrator's condition as an “estado de contemplación poética” (1968, 67).

confundir sus hojas en un punto situado a la derecha, hacia el final de la frase, y dejarla terminar para que el ojo descienda por el tronco y pueda, si quiere, repetir la melodía. (69)

I think it, I repeat it, I hum it in my memory, and at the same time feel how the melody and the sketch of the treetop against the sky draw near, become friends, feel each other out a few times until the sketch is suddenly organized into the visible presence of the melody, a rhythm coming from a lower branch, almost at the level of my head, rises to a certain height and then opens like a fan of stems, while the second violin is that thinner branch placing itself next to the other, to fuse its leaves into a point situated to the right, toward the end of the phrase, letting it end so that the eye moves down the trunk and can, if it wishes, repeat the melody.

This poetic moment differs in its harmony and duration from the poetic experiences of the previous short stories. In the essay “Cristal con una flor dentro”, Cortázar explains how a poetic figure is created. Seemingly incompatible elements (for example the sound of the gate closing, the smile of his wife, the memory of a street in Antibes and the sight of a rose in a vase) can, when appearing simultaneously, cause a poetic figure. It is a completely extraordinary moment that disappears from the mind almost as soon as it appears, much like a dream, so that it cannot ever be experienced the same way again.<sup>304</sup> In “Reunión”, this poetic figure is different. The experiencer is able to extend its duration and to repeat it: he can look at the branches again and repeat the melody in his mind. This makes the experience harmonious and easy to relate to for the reader.

In his early treatise *Teoría del túnel* (1948), Cortázar emphasizes the analogical connection between music and poetry: “*la poesía es, como la música, su forma*” (Cortázar, 2005b, 87) (“*poetry is, like music, its form*”). According to Jean Piaget, music and poetry, their rhythm, are a human’s internal, most intuitive way of measuring time.<sup>305</sup> The internal rhythm, where, in the words of Octavio Paz, “we are the time”,<sup>306</sup> appears in “Reunión” as a natural way of experiencing time. The psychological perception of time is fundamentally based on change: a human is

<sup>304</sup> Cortázar, 2005d, 272–273.

<sup>305</sup> Piaget, 1985, 303.

<sup>306</sup> Paz, 1956, 57. “El tiempo no está fuera de nosotros, ni es algo que pasa frente a nuestros ojos como las manecillas de reloj: nosotros somos el tiempo y no son los años sino nosotros los que pasamos. El tiempo posee una dirección, un sentido, porque es nosotros mismos.” (“Time is not outside of us, nor is it something that passes in front of our eyes like the hands of a clock: we are time, and it is not the years but we who pass by. Time has a direction, a meaning, because it is ourselves.”)

aware that everything around him changes, natural events follow one another, animals are born and die, and he himself also changes.<sup>307</sup> This flow of change, its constant movement and rhythm, connects man with creation. In this perpetual motion, the elements of the cosmos encounter one another randomly in ever new constellations. From this randomness and flow of change arises a sense of mystical experience corresponding to the consciousness of primitive man in the modern individual. According to the surrealists, only through this randomness can an individual reach the feeling of eternity.<sup>308</sup> Through poetic contemplation, the individual experiences himself as part of the ever-changing kaleidoscopic pattern of the cosmos, merging with the rhythms that are repeated both in the movements of the stars, in nature, in living beings and in the human mind. Such an experience belongs to Cortázar's idea of a poetic cosmivision that would replace the historically-constructed rational consciousness. Poetic cosmivision is a mythical concept that Cortázar associates with surrealism: it is based on the effort to conquer reality through poetic contemplation and attitudes.<sup>309</sup>

In the time experience of "Reunión", an analogy can be observed between music's ability to "combine diachronic (linearly progressing thematics related to the melody) and synchronic (harmonic thinking based on simultaneity)".<sup>310</sup> The melody is repetitive, but also new each time one listens to it.<sup>311</sup> This seemingly paradoxical temporality is reflected in the narrator's natural surroundings. The treetops are each individual and yet repetitious, tracing a recurring pattern across the starry sky. The musical analogy brings a sense of repetition and harmony – as well as elementary community ("in the gentle voice of the violins, that transposing of a savage rite to a clear introspective joy") – to a momentary and fleeting individual experience. Jaume Peris Blanes compares "El perseguidor" and "Reunión", suggesting that, while saxophonist Charlie Parker's metaphor, related to the protagonist Johnny, implies an isolated individual's search for freedom, Che Guevara's metaphor in "Reunión" evokes collective liberation.<sup>312</sup> Music, which for Johnny was a way to encounter "otherness", provides the narrator of "Reunión" with a means of connecting to others and uniting humanity through a poetic attitude. The narrator of "Reunión" inserts

<sup>307</sup> Fraisse, 1963, 1.

<sup>308</sup> Anna Balakian notes that "[t]he unexpected disorder in physical and social laws, which caused this chance meeting of objects, persons, and situations, was the only satisfying human knowledge of the infinite, for to grasp the concrete forms of disorder was the outer limit of the mental faculty" (Balakian, 1972, 136).

<sup>309</sup> Cortázar, 1994a, 153–155.

<sup>310</sup> Siljo, 2007, 105.

<sup>311</sup> Eero Tarasti notes the essential characteristic of music is that it is not recurrent. (Tarasti, 1989, 118)

<sup>312</sup> Peris Blanes, 2014, 146.

himself into the flow of constant change. The future is neither an escape nor a threat to him: the idea of a better, shared future enriches his experience of the present. As Nestor García Canlini summarizes, “el hombre [...] es posibilidad abierta al futuro [...] Su esencia no es algo que hay que captar sino que hay que crear. Se la capta creándola.” (García Canlini, 1968, 94) (“Man [...] is a possibility open to the future [...] His essence is not something that must be captured but something that must be created. He catches it through creating it.”) Through constant creation, an individual allows themselves to be “fully satisfied with the present situation”, no longer burdened by the passage of time but content with an ever-changing present.<sup>313</sup>

We do not know how long the narrator’s experience lasts, and it does not seem to matter to him. Unlike the chaos of the beginning, in which the narrator attempts to measure time without success, during the poetic experience his awareness of time disappears as it is absorbed into the natural experience of being. By feeling oneself at one with the cosmic rhythm, the individual is no longer distinct from time. The chaotic opening sequence gives way to the cosmos-like structure that follows, formed by the inner, sensory experience of the main character. The experience forms an intuitive synthesis where the past, present and future meet.

As Pedro Ramírez Molas and Doris Sommer have shown, Cortázar’s formerly individualistic characters and themes take on a collective ambition.<sup>314</sup> His solitary project becomes one of solidarity,<sup>315</sup> a common thread in Latin American literature from which Cortázar had previously distinguished himself.<sup>316</sup> The idea of a better future through revolution allows the “other” reality that Johnny desperately seeks in “El perseguidor” to appear in “Reunión” as a vision of a collective, realizable future. According to Sommer, in “El perseguidor”, knowing more than his readers begins to embarrass Cortázar, which is why he creates the character of an ordinary man, Bruno, who fails to understand the exceptional artist Johnny.<sup>317</sup> In his later works, Cortázar sought to develop more relatable characters, who also experience extraordinary moments. Even those with a bourgeois past, like the narrator of “Reunión” can ultimately fulfil socialist ambitions.

The third conception of time that appears in the short story is the bourgeois clock time prevailing in the past. After his comrade-in-arms Tinti dies, the narrator begins to reminisce about his former best friend from a time when he was still studying

<sup>313</sup> Fraisse, 1963, 206.

<sup>314</sup> Sommer, 1986, shows this at the level of personal pronouns: I becomes you, then we. See also Ramírez Molas 1978, 154 and Aronne Amestoy, 1976, 154, who writes: “[W]e shall notice a gradual and irreversible evolution from a self-centered subject toward an all-embracing subject, from the plain ‘I’ to the complex ‘we’.”

<sup>315</sup> Ramírez Molas 1978, 155.

<sup>316</sup> Parkinson Zamora 1989, 179.

<sup>317</sup> Sommer 1986, 73.

medicine, and wonders what he is doing at that very moment. This thought occurs to him (“curiosamente”, “curiously”) in a cave that smells of vomit and cold sweat. This olfactory world is like a dark version of Proust’s madeleine, and by analogy it evokes memories of a repulsive past. As the main character remembers his former life, he also determines the day of the week: it is Wednesday. “Calculando la diferencia de hora imaginé que en ese momento, miércoles, estaría llegando a su consultorio [...]” (74) (“Calculating the time difference I imagined that at that moment, Wednesday, he would be walking into his office [...]”) The narrator emphasizes that this is not a hallucination, as was his earlier vision of Luis, in which Luis removed his face and handed it to the narrator as if commanding him to take the reins of the operation. Imagining his friend from medical school is based on real past events and present possibilities, and so the narrator engages in analytical and poetic thought simultaneously. In this way, he seems more multidimensional and relatable than many of the characters in Cortázar’s earlier stories.

Like in Cortázar’s previous work, a life based on measurement and schedules is combined with a bourgeois lifestyle, such as the narrator once knew. The narrator is able to imagine his friend’s current life because his own life was once so similar, and so his friend’s actions and behaviors were also once his own: “[C]ada uno de sus gestos me era tan familiar, y esos gestos no eran solamente los suyos sino que abarcan todo mi mundo de entonces, a mí mismo, a mi mujer, a mi padre [...]” (74–75) (“[E]very one of his gestures was so familiar to me, and those gestures were not only his but embraced my whole world then, myself, my wife, my father [...]”) The narrator confesses that he was once no different to those he now despises: he too was once a “villain that keeps glancing at his watch”<sup>318</sup> but he took action to change his life by joining the revolution with Luis.<sup>319</sup> He is certain that his friend would reject his new socialist ideas, scornfully imagining him “defendiendo el derecho feudal a la propiedad y la riqueza ilimitadas” (75) (“defending the feudal right to property and unlimited wealth [...]”):

Me pregunté qué estaría pensando mi amigo de todo esto, de Luis o de mí, y fue como si viera dibujarse la respuesta en su cara [...] una cara pagada de sí misma, empastada por la buena vida y las buenas ediciones y la eficacia del bisturí acreditado. Ni siquiera hacía falta que abriera la boca para decirme yo pienso que tu revolución no es más que... No era en absoluto necesario, tenía que ser

<sup>318</sup> Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth (1992, 52) argues that, in Cortázar’s work, the villain is identified by the fact that he glances his watch.

<sup>319</sup> It is interesting that Cortázar, who criticized the bourgeoisie in his work, was himself accused of belonging to its ranks in the 60s and 70s and acknowledged his own bourgeois past.

así, esas gentes no podían aceptar una mutación que ponía en descubierto las verdaderas razones de su misericordia fácil y a horario, de su caridad reglamentada y a escote, de su bonhomía entre iguales [...] (75)

I wondered what my friend would be thinking about all that, of Luis or of me, and it was as if I saw the answer written on his face [...] a self-satisfied face, filled out by the good life and good editions and the efficiency of the accredited surgeon's knife. It wasn't even necessary for him to open his mouth to tell me I think your revolution is nothing but... It wasn't necessary but it had to be that way, those people could not accept a change that uncovered the real reasons for their easy and timetabled mercy, their regulated and metered charity, their good nature among equals [...]

Still, the past seems irrational and very far away. Even an image of his own son seems unreal because the boy is in the middle of civilization, sleeping in his own bed: “Pienso en mi hijo pero está lejos, a miles de kilómetros, en un país donde todavía se duerme en la cama, y su imagen me parece irreal [...]” (69) (“I think of my son but he is far away, thousands of miles away, in a country where they still sleep in bed, and his image seems unreal to me [...]”) The characters of the story have broken away from society and from their own histories, so that only the present moment and an as yet unknown future, which they are shaping, exist. The story anticipates the creation of a new time and a new world that are still to come.

### 5.1.1 Spiral of time

These three conceptions of time in “Reunión” – the chaotic timelessness in the beginning, where time cannot be measured, the earlier bourgeois time, and the harmonious cosmic time taking place in the present – can be viewed through the conceptualization of mythical time. According to Mircea Eliade, in the mythical interpretation of the world prevalent in archaic societies, the creation of the world is reproduced every year. Time has wasted the old world – in the case of “Reunión” the old bourgeois world – requiring a return to chaos from which will emerge a new cosmos. In this case, war and revolution are the key to mythical recreation.<sup>320</sup> Clock time, which structured the old bourgeois world, is destroyed by the chaos of war and disorder, from which a new history emerges.<sup>321</sup>

<sup>320</sup> Eliade, 1954, 62–73.

<sup>321</sup> Eliade, 1954, 54.

In “Reunión”, there are many references to the Bible and to myths.<sup>322</sup> Luis is compared to Jesus (“pantocrator”) and to Moses, who leads the people to the shores of a cleaner time:

Tendríamos que ser como Luis, no ya seguirlo sino ser como él, dejar atrás inapelablemente el odio y la venganza, mirar al enemigo como lo mira Luis, con una implacable magnanimidad que tantas veces ha suscitado en mi memoria [...] una imagen de pantocrátor, un juez que empieza por ser el acusado y el testigo y que no juzga, que simplemente separa las tierras de las aguas para que al fin, alguna vez, nazca una patria de hombres en un amanecer tembloroso, a orillas de un tiempo más limpio. (70–71)

We would have to be like Luis, no longer follow him but be like him, leave hate and vengeance irrepealably behind, look at the enemy as Luis looks at him, with a relentless magnanimity which has so often revived in my memory [...] an image of a Pantocrator, a judge who begins by being the accused and the witness and who does not judge, who simply separates the lands from the waters so that finally, someday, a nation of men is born on a trembling dawn, on the banks of a cleaner time.

“Tiempo más limpio” is a mythical concept that refers to the regeneration of time. According to Eliade, the annual ceremony of abolition of the past year is an attempt to restore a mythical, “pure” primordial time – the time of the “instant” of the creation.<sup>323</sup> The old, time-worn world is cleansed through the return to chaos. According to Eliade, this way of thinking was common when a new ruler assumed power.<sup>324</sup> In the mythic conception, the world returns to its original state and history begins again. For Cortázar, the achievement of pure time also entails a new social foundation, and a new “patria de hombres”, a socialist state, is born.

As the narrator sketches the pattern of the treetops to the rhythm of Mozart’s quartet, a political metaphor dawns on him. The constellation formed by the treetops, the stars and Mozart’s quartet becomes a metaphor for political revolution in the narrator’s mind:

Y todo eso es también nuestra rebelión, es lo que estamos haciendo aunque Mozart y el árbol no puedan saberlo, también nosotros a nuestra manera hemos querido trasponer una torpe guerra a un orden que le dé sentido, la justifique y

<sup>322</sup> See Pérez-Abadin, 2010, 95.

<sup>323</sup> Eliade, 1954, 54.

<sup>324</sup> Eliade, 1954, 80–81.

en último término la lleve a una victoria que sea como la restitución de una melodía después de tantos años de roncós cuernos de caza, que sea ese allegro final que sucede al adagio como un encuentro con la luz. (69–70)

And all that is also our rebellion, it is what we are doing, even though Mozart and the tree cannot know, we, too, in our way, have wanted to transpose a clumsy war into an order that gives it meaning, justifies it, and finally carries it to a victory that might be like the restoration of a melody after so many years of raucous hunting horns, it might be that final allegro which follows the adagio like an encounter with light.

Unlike the child-like Johnny, who was rather helpless in the face of his experience, the narrator's both poetic and analytical quality of mind draw a connection between the poetic experience and the historical situation. He understands that the revolutionaries are on their way to creating a cosmos that will replace the chaos created by clumsy war. The melody is a metaphor for the cosmos, which, through Luis' actions, takes shape from the chaos of war. It has the same structure and rhythm: allegro, adagio and allegro, of which the adagio is lived out in the short story. According to the narrator, after the adagio, a new, fast-paced phase begins, this time not marked by the intensity of war, but by the creation of a new society, "an encounter with light". Davi Arrigucci Jr. summarizes the role of Mozart's melody as an allegory for the realization of the revolution:

La música, como una fuerza ordenadora, es órfica, venida del pasado, de la primitividad salvaje de los comienzos, de la caza mítica de lo real, pasa por los acontecimientos caóticos, dándoles un sentido, continuando más allá, apuntando a la estrella simbólica de la conquista definitiva. (Arrigucci, 2002, 89)

Music, like an ordering force, is Orphic, coming from the past, from the wild primitiveness of the beginnings, from the mythical hunt for the real, it passes through chaotic events, giving them meaning, continuing beyond, pointing to the symbolic star of the definitive conquest.

The poetic vision of trees, stars and Mozart also corresponds to revolution: there is a certain permanence in the constellation even as it is constantly changing and moving towards something new. Lois Parkinson Zamora brings out, citing Octavio Paz, two different meanings of the concept of revolution:

Revolution is a word that implies the notion of cyclical time and therefore that of regular and recurrent change. But the modern meaning of the word does not

refer to an eternal return, the circular movement of worlds and stars, but rather to a sudden and *definitive* change in direction of public affairs.<sup>325</sup>

Parkinson Zamora suggests that in *Libro de Manuel*, Cortázar seeks to combine these two meanings, rejecting the current meaning of revolution as a path to a certain future.<sup>326</sup>

Cortázar's understanding of revolution combines a linear conception of history with an archaic eternal return. While in earlier works it was impossible for characters to escape from a timeless constellation, where they were guided by archetypal, numbing and thereby destructive patterns,<sup>327</sup> in "Reunión" the mythical image of a person is merged with the historical one: the individuals implementing the revolution are presented alongside the mythical hero as historical figures who can change their circumstances.

Although the narrator is worried about what will happen when a revolutionary fight with guns in the jungle turns into a fight over the phone in the office, a poetic vision of Mozart's quartet calms him down:

Pero bastaba mirar la copa del árbol para sentir que la voluntad ordenaba otra vez su caos, le imponía el dibujo del adagio que alguna vez ingresaría en el allegro final, accedería a una realidad digna de ese nombre. Y mientras Luis me iba poniendo al tanto de las noticias internacionales y de lo que pasaba en la capital y en las provincias, yo veía cómo las hojas y las ramas se plegaban poco a poco a mi deseo, eran mi melodía, la melodía de Luis que seguía hablando ajeno a mi fantaseo [...] (80)

But it was enough to look at the treetop to feel that the will again put its chaos to order, imposed on it the sketch of the adagio that would someday pass into the final allegro and accede to a reality worthy of that name. And while Luis was bringing me up to date on international news and on what was happening in the capital and provinces, I saw how the leaves and branches were bending little by little to my desire, they were my melody, Luis' melody whose talk was miles apart from my fantasies [...]

<sup>325</sup> Parkinson Zamora (1989, 95) quotes Paz: "Revolt, Revolution, Rebellion in Alternating Current".

<sup>326</sup> Parkinson Zamora, 1989, 95.

<sup>327</sup> Lanin Gyurko (1969, 341) notes that, in many of Cortázar's short stories, "characters become victims of a cyclical time that denies them integrity, freedom, and life as it reduces them to mere elements in a ritual process. [...] Time and identity are not linear but cyclical [...]" In these short stories, cyclical time, where events are predetermined, is destructive because it does not have world-sustaining significance, unlike in pre-modern times.

In the last speech before he died, “El escritor y su quehacer”, Cortázar combines notions of linearity, progress and eternal return in his explication of the revolutionary future, in which the “ascending spiral” of human actions in history and culture constantly encompasses more exploits and touches ever more people and nations.

[E]l símbolo y el signo del hombre en la historia y en la cultura es una espiral ascendente; de lo que se trata es que los accesos inmediatos o mediatos a la cultura se estimulen y faciliten para que esa espiral sea cada vez más la obra de todos, para que su ritmo ascendente se acelere en esa multiplicación en la que cada uno, hacedor o receptor, pueda dar el máximo de sus posibilidades. (Cortázar, 1984a)

[T]he symbol and sign of man in history and culture is an ascending spiral; what it is about is that immediate or mediate access to culture be stimulated and facilitated so that this spiral is increasingly the work of everyone, so that its ascending rhythm is accelerated in that multiplication in which each one, maker or receiver, can give the maximum of their possibilities.

For the “primitive” man everything was but the repetition of the same primordial archetypes. According to Eliade, repetition had a meaning, since it alone conferred reality upon events.<sup>328</sup> This repetition differs from the repetition of modern times, the Great Habit criticized by Cortázar, where repetition is a meaningless adaptation to predetermined routines. The symbol of the mythical cycle is a circle. With his spiral metaphor, Cortázar combines the mythic cycle with dynamic change and lends significance to the present moment. In the political story “Graffiti”, published in 1980, Cortázar writes:

[Q]uedaba lo bastante para comprender que había querido responder a tu triángulo con otra figura, un círculo o acaso una espiral, una forma llena y Hermosa, algo como un sí o un siempre o un ahora. (Cortázar, 2004d, 155)

[E]nough remained to understand that she had tried to answer your triangle with another figure, a circle or maybe a spiral, a form full and beautiful, something like a yes or an always or a now.<sup>329</sup>

<sup>328</sup> Eliade, 1954, 88–90.

<sup>329</sup> Translation by Gregory Rabassa.

Pedro Ramírez Molas states that the present is the “yes” of time placed between two negations: the past is “no longer” and the future is “not yet”.<sup>330</sup> In “Reunión”, both the past and the future are realized in the present: the past through memories and the future through visions. In contrast to the linear conception of history, Cortázar does not believe that the past is left behind but that it is always present in people, who repeat the actions of gods and other mythical beings.<sup>331</sup> In “Reunión”, this fatalism is shaken as myths are reviewed and revised, and even created anew. Luis’ character is inspired by the tale of the Savior in the Bible, but the narrator’s eerie hallucination gives it new meaning, offering to all those who follow him a chance to emulate his actions and his identity.

The narrator compares Luis to Mozart despite their lack of immediate similarities. Although Luis likes Mozart’s music, he laughs when he hears the narrator draw an analogy between them. From the reader’s point of view, however, “el músico del hombre”, the musician of the people is rather the narrator himself, and so the two characters, Luis and the narrator, take on complementary identities. Both Luis and the narrator are creative, in different but complementary ways. The narrator envisions a constellation of Mozart, trees and stars while Luis creates a constellation of struggle, the improvement of material conditions and the construction of a new society. Common to both – or rather to the entire group of revolutionaries – is humor, the ability to laugh at oneself, which Cortázar also emphasizes as a prerequisite for the realization of the revolution. The narrator believes that Luis would also be amused by his poetic experience, giving the revolutionary allegory its final, important touch.<sup>332</sup>

Luis’ revolutionary efforts might also be compared to those of Orpheus, the mythical musician and poet, whose descent into the underworld of Hades to save his wife, Eurydice, thrust him into the chaos of war and death from which he emerged to create the world anew. At the end of the short story, the narrator describes the appearance of a star in the center of his melodic sketch of the treetops against the sky. Although unsure if it is a star or a planet, the birth of this glowing orb in the sky as Luis describes the progress of the revolution across the country implies a radical new beginning. Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes” (1904) depicts this Orphic re-creation of the world:

<sup>330</sup> Ramírez Molas, 1978, 17.

<sup>331</sup> Several scholars have noted the enormous importance of myths in Cortázar’s work since *Los reyes* (1949), where he reinterpreted the Minotaur myth. For example, Ana Hernández Del Castillo (1981) has examined Jung’s influence on Cortázar.

<sup>332</sup> Hernández del Castillo (1981, x) argues that the awareness of one’s own actions formed through history separates the modern hero of the hero of the Romantic era who merely reproduces Romantic models.

A woman so loved that from one lyre there came  
 more lament than from all lamenting women;  
 that a whole world of lament arose, in which  
 all nature reappeared: forest and valley,  
 road and village, field and stream and animal;  
 and that around this lament-world, even as  
 around the other earth, a sun revolved  
 and a silent star-filled heaven, a lament  
 -heaven, with its own, disfigured stars - :  
 So greatly was she loved.<sup>333</sup>

The star is not Mars or Mercury, a symbol of war or commerce, but something else, something still unknown: according to Aníbal González and Gisle Selnes, the star symbolizes Cuba, “the island of youth”.<sup>334</sup> For Cortázar, Cuba was the realization of Marcuse’s “Orphic utopia”, where the progress of civilization had not eliminated affection for the pleasure principle, nor for play and love, as Selnes argues and highlights the emphasis on childhood in Cortázar’s essays on Nicaragua: “[I]t is the children who mark the greatest difference between pre- and post-revolutionary existence.”<sup>335</sup>

Laszlo Scholz calls Cortázar a neo-romantic, who uses poetry to search for an unknown reality. For Cortázar, however, this reality only lives in its people.<sup>336</sup> At first, this reality was sought by an individual, but later by whole communities. Cortázar, especially in his early work, wrote as if in a trance, conjuring up unknown, subconscious forces. The challenge Cortázar set for writers in his early texts *Teoría del túnel* and “Para una poética” to capture an unknown reality through poetry, expands in “Reunión” to encompass the whole of society. Only through revolution can society exorcise the ghosts of its past, as Cortázar writes in *Libro de Manuel*, “cambiar la realidad para todos [...] admitir la historia, es decir la carrera humana por una pista falsa [...] Método, la revolución” (Cortázar, 2004c, 14) (“change reality for everyone [...] admit history, the human career, on a false trail [...] Method, the revolution.”) After a trip to Cuba in 1976, Cortázar wrote “Nuevo itinerario cubano”, in which he described what this change would mean in practice:

Hay signos [...] de que los responsables de la educación y la cultura buscan progresivamente una modificación revolucionaria del estereotipo humano a

<sup>333</sup> Translated by Stephen Mitchell.

<sup>334</sup> González, 1987, 108; Selnes 2007, 653.

<sup>335</sup> Selnes, 2007, 653.

<sup>336</sup> Scholz, 1977, 64.

partir de la primera infancia, sospechando acaso que para crear el “hombre nuevo” no basta la mera formación ideológica si al mismo tiempo y desde un principio no se enriquecen y se encauzan las máximas posibilidades de la persona humana. (Cortázar, 2009, 298–299)

There are signs [...] that those responsible for education and culture are progressively seeking a revolutionary modification of the human stereotype starting in early childhood, perhaps suspecting that to create the “new man” mere ideological training is not enough if at the same time and from the beginning, the maximum possibilities of the human person are not enriched and channeled.

The creation of a new man necessitates education from an early age and the renewal of cultural structures so as not to shape the child according to predetermined historical stereotypes.

### 5.1.2 The new man

While in his early work, Cortázar had shown the devastation resulting from not accepting the subconscious powers as acknowledged part of human psyche, in “Reunión” he envisions what a person could be at his best. The narrator serves as an example of a new man, whose mental attributes do not exclude poetry. His wakeful state and dreamful unconsciousness connect seamlessly, and his thought is strongly visual. The night before the poetic experience, on the verge of sleep, he sees a vision in which Luis offers him a mask of his face. As a former physician, the narrator has recognized this condition, “[p]rofesionalmente hablando, una alucinación de la duermevela y la fiebre, fácilmente interpretable” (67) (“[p]rofessionally speaking, a hallucination from light sleep and fever, easily interpreted”). The condition itself can be scientifically explained, but the images that arise from it cannot: their meaning is poetic, metaphorical: “Pero si realmente habían matado a Luis durante el desembarco, ¿quién subiría ahora a la Sierra con su cara?” (67) (“But if they had really killed Luis during the landing, who would go up to the Sierra now with his face?”)

In Cortázar’s novel *Libro de Manuel* (1973), the protagonist’s dream reveals to him a demand to wake up from bourgeois conformism to the cause of the revolution. Similarly, in “Reunión”, the vision that arises in the hypnagogic state plays an important role. It comes to his mind in several situations in different ways and implicitly affects his thinking. The narrator realizes that all the revolutionaries must be like Luis, his counterparts and not just his followers, each one accepting the mask he offers them. The same vision repeats itself when the rumor of Luis’ death reaches the ears of the narrator’s splintered group. The narrator realizes that if Luis and

Pablo, the leader of the other group, are dead, he must take charge. The mask is also compared to his former surgeon-friend's macabre face that the narrator sees in a state on the borderlands of dream. It is a face of the past world that must be replaced by the face of Luis. Aníbal González argues that the structure of the short story duplicates the structure of the Romantic hero's journey, where the hero triumphs through physical and mental effort.<sup>337</sup> During short rest breaks in the midst of heavy battle, the narrator processes his visions, which are caused by constant fatigue. His belief in the future is rooted in his "hallucination" of Luis' face transformed into a mask of revolutionary leadership. His analytical side, indebted to his former life as a rational physician, gives way to the possible meanings of a seemingly irrational vision. When, during the hike, the narrator realizes how true this vision has turned out to be, it strengthens his (and the reader's) belief in the revolution. His nightly poetic contemplations – which he occasionally takes a little bit lightly – are not futile artistry but are meaningful on a deeper level.

The revolutionaries are outside of civilization, like the characters of "La autopista del sur", in a world where survival is key. However, unlike the characters of "La autopista", the revolutionaries are on their way to something new, no longer poised to return to the former world that awaits the characters of "La autopista". The narrator's dream is about to come true: the visions seen in the dreamlike state intertwine with the waking world. Thus, through the narrator, the story shows the "new man", one who is open to his subconsciousness. The bravery shown by the narrator confronted with his own possible death is also reflected in his fearlessness when faced with his own subconscious. Unlike Marini, who in "La isla a mediodía" cannot bear to look his former self in the eyes, the narrator of "Reunión" dares to remember his own past. The former friend's macabre face is also his face, and Luis' face could be worn by either man.

As noted earlier, for Cortázar the merging of politics and poetics allowed, in Carolina Orloff's terms, an "analogical operation" in which literature became a part of the revolution by making it more real. The quote from Che Guevara's memoirs that is placed at the beginning of the short story is important here: "Recordé un viejo cuento de Jack London, donde el protagonista, apoyado en un tronco de árbol, se dispone a acabar con dignidad su vida." (63)<sup>338</sup> ("I recalled a Jack London story in which the hero leans calmly against a tree and prepares to die in a dignified manner.") The excerpt is from a section where Che talks about being wounded. At that moment

<sup>337</sup> González, 1987, 108.

<sup>338</sup> Ernesto "Che" Guevara in *Episodes of the Revolutionary War*, 1968, 49 (originally from *La tierra y el llano*, Havana, 1961)

he remembers a scene from a Jack London story, where the protagonist dies with dignity against a tree.<sup>339</sup>

Similar images recur in the short story. The narrator leans on a tree when experiencing a poetic moment, and Luis leans on a tree at the end of the story. Trees are an important visual feature of the narrator's poetic experience, as he watches the movement of tree branches and allegorizes the revolution. Later, when the narrator enjoys a fleeting moment of relief after a long march, he feels that the trees are again alive and becoming his friends, "[...] los árboles que vuelven a aparecer como cosas vivas y amigas [...]" (78) ("[...] the trees are again living and friendly things [...]"). In "Reunión", the tree becomes an animistic symbol of the connection between people that the socialist future makes possible.<sup>340</sup> Harboring a sense not only of meeting, as in the English translation of the title, but also of bringing (back) together, the story also evokes the reconnection to the cosmos made possible through the revolutionary chaos.

According to González, Cortázar does to Che's text what Che himself did to Jack London's text: he allegorizes it, seeing it as part of his own destiny and thus uniting fiction and history.<sup>341</sup> Che's reference to Jack London no doubt excited Cortázar and fostered his enthusiasm for the role of literature in revolution. Literature offers a bridge between fiction and reality, providing a poetic model corresponding to an archaic myth that an individual can implement in his life. The example of Jack London's dying character relieves Che's fear of death, such that it may no longer be lonely, but shared with the rest of humanity. Thus, the short story raises questions over the role of literature on reader actions and responses. Unlike socialist realism or a political pamphlet, literary stories can, as Peris Blanes argues, provide the reader with the tools for their own private liberation.<sup>342</sup> Literature's use of analogy, providing flashes of identification for the reader, may even result in permanent change. In the end, Cortázar became disillusioned with Cuba, but later transferred his utopian thoughts to Nicaragua:

<sup>339</sup> González, 1987, 104.

<sup>340</sup> In his book on John Keats, Cortázar sees the tree as a symbol of the poem's time: "El tiempo es un árbol, con ramas que se ignoran, pero si de súbito, iluminándolo, la tempestad de la poesía crece, el árbol se encuentra consigo mismo, las zonas más lejanas se tocan y se palpan, la rama de John roza mi rama, huelo sus hojas, me empapo en su lluvia, entreveo, antes que la bonanza se la lleve, el color de un fruto suspendido en el extremo." (Cortázar, 1996, 214) ("Time is a tree, with branches that are ignored, but if suddenly, illuminating it, the storm of poetry grows, the tree finds itself, the most distant areas are touched and palpated, John's branch brushes against my branch, I smell its leaves, I soak its rain, I glimpse, before the bonanza takes it away, the color of a fruit suspended at the end.")

<sup>341</sup> González, 1987, 104–105.

<sup>342</sup> Peris Blanes, 2011, 90.

Cada vez que abro esos suplementos pienso que en ese mismo momento está llegando a todos el cuerpo del diario, y que millares y millares de ojos que no sabían distinguir las letras del alfabeto hace tan tiempo, van a leer junto conmigo el poema de un combatiente o de un niño, un ensayo sobre pintura o una entrevista a un médico o a un músico [...] y habrá las revelaciones inesperadas y fecundas que un artículo, un cuento, un poema o una imagen pueden provocar en un adolescente o en un adulto, y cambiar acaso completamente su vida. (Cortázar, 1984a, 96–97)

Every time I open those supplements I think that at that very moment the body of the diary is reaching everyone, and that thousands and thousands of eyes that did not know how to distinguish the letters of the alphabet for so long time, are going to read along with me the poem of a combatant or of a child, an essay on painting or an interview with a doctor or a musician [...] and there will be the unexpected and fruitful revelations that an article, a story, a poem or an image can provoke in a teenager or an adult, and perhaps completely change their life.

Cortázar praises the culture, music, visual arts and poetry of Nicaragua and suggests that all Latin America should follow their example.<sup>343</sup> By actively practicing their culture and using imagination, the people of Nicaragua create their own world, free from external influences. As Fraisse notes, “the necessity of keeping the social background in mind prevents us from becoming entirely absorbed in our work [...]” Only by breaking away from this social background defined by duties – or, as in Cortázar’s utopia, by creating a society without these duties – do “we have the impression of becoming independent of time because we are living body and soul in the rhythm of present changes”.<sup>344</sup>

## 5.2 Worse than the clock: “Recortes de prensa”

The prevailing belief, among Latin American intellectuals, that socialism would lead to a better future suffered a severe blow in 1971, when the poet Heberto Padilla was arrested in Cuba for his counter-revolutionary opinions. The serious problems in Cuban society became public knowledge.<sup>345</sup> For writer’s, Padilla’s case was shocking proof that the freedom of artists had not been realized with the revolution.

<sup>343</sup> See Cortázar, 1984a.

<sup>344</sup> Fraisse, 1963, 210.

<sup>345</sup> Herlinghaus, 2004, 584. On Jorge Edward’s experience in Cuba, see Edwards, Jorge. 1993. *Persona Non Grata: A Memoir of Disenchantment with the Cuban Revolution*. New York: Paragon House.

Although Cortázar continued to support Fidel Castro's rule even after many other intellectuals had turned their backs, his disillusionment with Cuba became apparent.

When a group of writers signed a letter of protest addressed to Castro, Cortázar also signed his name. However, Cortázar did not sign a second letter as he did not agree with its content. Castro's response to the first letter, in which he called the writers "bourgeois liberals", who did not understand the concrete reality of the revolution, nuanced Cortázar's criticism.<sup>346</sup> Cortázar later described his relationship with Cuba as a love affair, complete with ups and downs, with love and hate.<sup>347</sup> He also believed, with reference to Brezhnev distortion of Lenin's original views, that socialism as a whole should not be condemned, even if there are mistakes along the way.<sup>348</sup> Cortázar's vision of a socialist future was endorsed by the Nicaraguan civil war, won by the Sandinistas in the late 1970s, following which the social liberation of art flourished. The Cuban revolution, in comparison, had failed, and the unquestioning faith central to "Reunión" is no longer apparent in Cortázar's later works.<sup>349</sup> The dream of a new socialist liberation that had united Latin American writers was swiftly crushed by the rise of rightist dictatorships in Argentina, Chile and Brazil in the 1970s.

According to Aníbal González, "Reunión"'s allegorical approach to the revolution expressed a narrow and idealistic vision that Cortázar later found was no longer accurate to communicate the realities of the revolution. He began to experiment with other styles, among them a journalistic form, and to shift the focus of his political short stories away from Cuba towards Argentina.<sup>350</sup> The period of Argentina's "El proceso", the "dirty war", referring to the regime of Jorge Videla from 1976 to 1983, begun to occupy a prominent position in Cortázar's short stories. Under Videla, thousands of leftist activists disappeared, and Cortázar exile was enforced voluntary exile also become forced.<sup>351</sup> He, like many writers in exile, had to fear for his relatives living in Argentina. The faith in the future that Cortázar exhibits in some of his political speeches is palpably absent from his short stories about Argentina, including "Segunda vez" (1977), "Recortes de prensa" (1980), "Pesadillas" (1983) and "Satarsa" (1983). Following Videla's dictatorship, Cortázar emphasized the importance of remembering in his speech "Negación de olvido", exposing the crimes of the dirty war, including horrors such as the kidnapping of young children: "[Q]uién podría olvidar la desaparición de la pequeña Clara Anahí

<sup>346</sup> Boldy, 2000, 163.

<sup>347</sup> Picon Garfield 1981, 49.

<sup>348</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 154.

<sup>349</sup> Cortázar, 1984a, 8; Herráez, 2001, 231.

<sup>350</sup> González, 1987, 109.

<sup>351</sup> See for example Herráez, 2001, 227.

Mariani, entre la de tantos otros niños y adolescents que vivían fuera de la historia y de la política [...]” (Cortázar, 1994b, 315) (“[W]ho could forget the disappearance of little Clara Anahí Mariani, among so many other children and adolescents who lived outside of history and politics [...]”)

Jaime Alazraki sums up the problem Cortázar had to face: how could literature deal with tragedy without trivializing events or producing informative but emotionless political pamphlets?<sup>352</sup> Through “Recortes de prensa”, I will discuss this new phase of Cortázar’s writing, where the task of literature is reconfigured. “Recortes de prensa” (1980, *Queremos tanto a Glenda*) is generally considered to be the zenith of Cortázar’s political fiction. While in “Graffiti” (1980), as Irene Kacandes argues, Cortázar still displays a belief in the possibilities of art for revolutionary progress,<sup>353</sup> it is in “Recortes de prensa”, according to González, that Cortázar demonstrably rescinds this faith.<sup>354</sup> Peter Standish also points out that, in “Recortes de prensa”, Cortázar is skeptical about the possibilities of a fictional text to reveal reality.<sup>355</sup> These changes also affected the concepts of time in Cortázar’s work. In this chapter, I reflect on the changed role of literature in the short story and focus on the implications of this for poetic time: how does poetic time manifest itself in a new kind of historical reality which, in Cortázar’s words, “has nothing to do with the poem’s own time”?<sup>356</sup>

In the short story “Recortes de prensa”, (“Press Clippings”), activist writer Noemí is visiting a fellow Argentine in Paris, a sculptor who wants Noemí to write the text that will accompany the published prints of his new work. The sculptures evoke a subtle violence and Noemí shows her friend a newspaper clipping about tortures and murders committed in Argentina. Later that night, Noemí leaves the sculptor’s apartment and finds a little girl crying on the steps of a house. The girl takes Noemí to her rundown home, where her father is torturing her mother with lit cigarettes. Noemí has moved into a dreamlike state, where she does not quite understand what is happening. She hits the man on the head with a nearby broken stool and, with the woman, enacts revenge on the man, torturing him to death. When Noemí awakes in her own apartment the following day, she writes a text about her experience and sends it to the sculptor. Surprisingly, the sculptor sends her an article from an afternoon newspaper, which shows that similar events took place in Marseille instead of Paris. Confused, Noemí returns to the scene of the crime, but the scenery has changed and she cannot find the same house. Instead, she finds the

<sup>352</sup> Alazraki, 1999, 139.

<sup>353</sup> Kacandes, 1994, 329.

<sup>354</sup> González, 1998, 253.

<sup>355</sup> Standish, 2001, 142

<sup>356</sup> Cortázar, 1978, 103.

girl, but the girl runs away from her and the concierge informs her that the homeless girl will shortly be collected by a social worker. Noemí finishes writing the text in a café and takes it to the sculptor.

In Cortázar's later work, his protagonists are often female. Cynthia Schmidt-Cruz has argued that Noemí is one of the strongest female characters in Cortázar's later works,<sup>357</sup> and Standish notes similarities between Noemí and the writer himself, sharing many of his aesthetic and politic concerns.<sup>358</sup> Noemí's political activism is a sign of Cortázar's changed perception of literature, for which the writer is not only a conduit for unknown, subconscious forces but is also in active pursuit of personal ethics, activism, and moral justice.<sup>359</sup>

At the beginning of the short story, Noemí meets the sculptor to discuss his new work and her companion text. Noemí studies the figures, which depict an enigmatic, subtle violence, and shows the sculptor a newspaper clipping from *El País* sent by another Argentinian friend, in which a mother details a number of horrific crimes and appeals for news of her own daughter and son-in-law. The newspaper clipping is real, originally published in *El País* in 1978, and its veracity is pertinent to the short story.

Noemí intuits that the sculptures testify to the sculptor's own knowledge of political violence in Argentina. His works capture the violence and horror of the events so emphatically that, when he asks to read the newspaper clipping she remarks: “[N]o es necesario que lo leas después de lo que me mostraste.” (Cortázar, 2004d, 77) (“[Y]ou really don't have to read it after what you've shown me.”)<sup>360</sup> For the sculptor, however, the testimony relayed in the press clipping reminds him of the impotence of his artistic actions far away on another continent. The artworks, the testimonies, the articles, the petitions all suddenly seem useless when none of it manages to prevent the horrors taking place: “No sirve de nada, Noemí, yo me paso meses haciendo estas mierdas, vos escribís libros, esa mujer denuncia atrocidades, vamos a congresos [...]” (80) (“This is worth nothing... worth nothing, Noemí, I've spent months making this shit, you write books, that woman denounces atrocities, we attend congresses [...]”)

While the sculptor reads the article, Noemí stares at one of the sculptures left on the table. Here the short story's realistic style breaks for the first time as the narrative penetrates Noemí's inner world. She hears the ticking of the clock and realizes that it is the only way to “keep time alive”, the only thing standing between her and the

<sup>357</sup> Schmidt-Cruz, 2004, 209. Schmidt-Cruz has shown how women's representations change in Cortázar's work. While in his early work women appeared as unattainable “others”, in his later fiction they are presented as strong-willed subjects.

<sup>358</sup> Standish, 2001, 140.

<sup>359</sup> Cortázar, 1994b, 125, 127.

<sup>360</sup> All translations of “Recortes de prensa” are from *We love Glenda so much and Other Tales*. (1984b), translated by Gregory Rabassa (London: Harvill Press).

sculptor in the apartment in Paris and the events of the press clipping, which no words can describe, “lo que solamente podíamos llamar eso, todas las calificaciones gastadas, todos los gestos del horror cansados y sucios” (78) (“what we could only call that, all epithets exhausted, all expressions of horror fatigued and filthy”). The ticking of the clock here symbolizes the order outside of which Noemí feels she is falling. Noemí is aggrieved, like the sculptor, by the futility and impotence of words, which fail to convey even the experience of suffering. For both Noemí and the sculptor, social art and activism have failed to deliver any tangible results. Their attempts to end human rights violations in Argentina have been futile, passively and retrospectively representing the violence that is being committed in another time and another place.

As Noemí’s own experience of preventing one act of torture by committing physical violence, descriptions of violence and their actions are drawn into correspondence and, as Noemí revisits the testimonies of violence through her imagination, she eventually comes to enact it herself. I will examine this dreamlike section of the short story in detail and analyze its conceptions of time.

### 5.2.1 Other place, other time

When the protagonist of “Recortes de prensa”, Noemí, leaves the sculptor’s home late at night she looks for a taxi, but she inadvertently takes an unconventional route. This happens in a state that we can call poetic. Hearing her own footsteps on the pavement, she sinks into her thoughts and, as for Johnny in “El perseguidor”, her thoughts appear as images:

Un golpe de viento me obligó a levantarme el cuello del tapado, oía mis pasos taconeando secamente en el silencio, marcando ese ritmo en el que la fatiga y las obsesiones insertan tantas veces una melodía que vuelve y vuelve, o una frase de un poema, solo me ofrecieron ver sus manos cortadas de su cuerpo y puestas en un frasco, que lleva el numero veinticuatro, solo me ofrecieron ver sus manos cortadas de su cuerpo [...] (Cortázar, 2004d, 85)

A gust of wind made me turn up my coat collar, I could hear my heels clicking in the silence, marking out a rhythm in which fatigue and obsessions so often insert a melody that keeps coming back, or a line from a poem, but which only let me see her hands cut off her body and put into a bottle that bears the number twenty-four, only let me see her hands cut off her body [...]

This state where “fatigue and obsessions” come together is said to be common for Noemí, typically precipitating the sounds of a melody or a verse in her mind.

However, on the night in question, Noemí's imagination can only conjure up horrible images of a girl, tortured and killed, from the newspaper clipping. Although Noemí is not unfamiliar with this story, and many others like it, the visit to the sculptor and contemplation of his works have had a particularly provocative effect, causing these mental images to emerge.

"Recortes de prensa" uses a similar collage technique as *Libro de Manuel*, to which Cortázar attached real newspaper clippings. Estela Cédola has shown how the violence described in these clippings is reflected in the language of both the characters and the narrator.<sup>361</sup> In "Recortes de prensa", the violence described in the newspaper clippings infiltrates Noemí's imagination, blurring the limits of reality and imagination, or dream and wakefulness. While in "Reunión" the narrator's visions are connected to his immediate environment, Noemí's visions derive from the testimonial description of events taking place far away to produce violent reactions that directly affect others. As Doris Sommer has noted, the fantastic events in "Recortes de prensa", as in other stories of Cortázar's later work, do not take place in a surreal, timeless reality but are more closely connected to the real world.<sup>362</sup>

Noemí forces herself to think about the following working day: "[R]eaccioné bruscamente rechazando la marea recurrente, forzándome a respirar hondo, a pensar en mi trabajo del día siguiente; nunca supe por qué había cruzado a la acera de enfrente [...]" (85) ("I recovered quickly rejecting the recurrent nausea, forcing myself to take a deep breath, to think about tomorrow's work; I never knew why I crossed to the opposite sidewalk [...]"). At this point, the time of clocks offers momentary relief from the assault of violent images, as Noemí focuses on thinking about her work. Yet thinking of the future does not bring Noemí back to everyday reality; she sinks deeper into a state where the boundaries between reality and dream have become blurred. She realizes that she has wandered down a strange alley where she sees a little girl crying. Noemí describes the girl with great detail, giving the reader the impression that all is happening for real and not just in her imagination. The girl says that her father is doing bad things to her mother and leads Noemí to her home, where Noemí comes to the mother's aid and plays a part in enacting her revenge.

The events in the child's home are described differently to the other events of the short story. The journey from the alley to the child's home resembles a passage into the subconscious, where there is no time: Noemí asks, does it happen within time at all. Noemí sees the child's father from behind as he is torturing a woman who is tied to the bed with a lit cigarette. Noemí picks up a nearby stool and hits the man over the head. This action is narrated as if the chair, and not Noemí, were the subject:

<sup>361</sup> Cédola, 1994, 51.

<sup>362</sup> Sommer, 1986, 79.

El alarido y la sacudida del cuerpo en la cama que crujió bajo el espasmo se mezclaron con cosas y con actos que no escogí y que jamás podré explicarme; entre el hombre de espaldas y yo había un taburete desvencijado, lo vi alzarse en el aire y caer de canto sobre la cabeza del papá [...] (89)

The shriek and the shudder of the body on the bed that creaked under the spasm were mixed with things, with acts that I didn't choose and which I will never be able to explain to myself. Between the man with his back to me and myself there was a broken-down stool, I saw it rise up in the air and fall at an angle onto the papa's head [...]

When Noemí sees the man torturing the woman, she does not think before she acts, not even realizing her actions until they have already occurred. Paradoxically, at the same time, it still feels that there is endless time:

Antes de comprender, de aceptar ser parte de eso, hubo tiempo para que el papá retirara el cigarrillo y se lo llevara nuevamente a la boca, tiempo de avivar la brasa y saborear el excelente tabaco francés, tiempo para que yo viera el cuerpo quemado desde el vientre hasta el cuello, las manchas moradas o rojas [...] (88–89)

Before understanding, accepting being part of that, there was time for the papa to withdraw the cigarette and bring it up to his mouth again, time to enliven the lighted end and savor the excellent French tobacco, time for me to see the body burned from the stomach to the neck [...]

Throughout this scene, events take place in rapid succession, but time itself seems frozen and painfully slow. This paradoxical sense of time – at once immediate and yet never-ending – is typical for dreams. Alfred Maury connects the temporality of such a strong and sudden emotional experience with the temporality of a dream in which time seems to extend inexhaustibly.<sup>363</sup> González notes that the scene of domestic violence resembles a dream, as if it all happened in Noemí's imaginary world.<sup>364</sup>

Noemí's subjectivity dissolves like in the dream-like states described earlier, so that she is at once the agent of an action and the observer of that action. Noemí unties the woman and helps her to lift the unconscious man onto the bed and tie him up. Noemí watches as the woman undresses the man. It is implied that, this time, the

<sup>363</sup> Maury, 1861, 139–140.

<sup>364</sup> González, 1998, 244.

mother is torturing the father: “Solo sé que la nena no estaba con nosotras desde mi entrada en la pieza, y que ahora la mamá le hacía cosas al papá [...]” (91) (“I only know that the little girl wasn’t with us after my entry into the room, and that now the mama was doing things to the papa [...]”) Noemí describes herself from the outside, as if watching a movie or reading a book:

Lo que vino después pude haberlo visto en una película o leído en un libro, yo estaba ahí como sin estar pero estaba con una agilidad y una intencionalidad que en un tiempo brevísimo, si eso pasaba en el tiempo, me llevó a encontrar un cuchillo sobre la mesa, cortar las sogas que ataban a la mujer, arrancarle la toalla de la cara y verla enderezarse en silencio [...] (89–90)

What came afterward I could have seen in a movie or read in a book, I was there as if not being there, but I was there with an agility and an intent that in a very brief time – if it happened in time – led me to find a knife on the table, cut the bonds that held the woman, pull the towel from her face, and see her get up silently [...]

The boundaries of subjectivity become blurred, and it is difficult for Noemí to tell in retrospect what happened. In *Rayuela*, Oliveira refers to such a momentary exile of the self as a paravision, describing his own experiences sometimes when he walks on the street or when he wakes up from a dream. In a paravision, his own self is reflected back from outside, so that he is looking at himself “from inside but on a different plane”.<sup>365</sup>

For González, the scene of revenge torture can be seen as Noemí’s attempt to fight violence with violence, extracting “a tooth for a tooth”.<sup>366</sup> At the same time, the act of revenge reveals a monster hidden in Noemí’s subconscious, which accepts, and even perpetrates, the acts of torture. Violence becomes a part of her own reality:

Cómo saber cuánto duró, cómo entender que también yo, también yo aunque me creyera del buen lado, también yo, cómo aceptar que también yo ahí del otro lado de manos y de fosas comunes, también yo del otro lado de las muchachas torturadas y fusiladas esa misma noche de Navidad [...] (92)

How could I know how long it lasted, how could I understand that I too, I too even though I thought I was on the right side, I too, how could I accept that I too

<sup>365</sup> Cortázar, 2003b, 568–569. Translation by Gregory Rabassa.

<sup>366</sup> González, 1998, 242.

there on the other side from the cut-off hands and the common graves, I too on the other side from the girls tortured and shot that same Christmas night [...]

The reader, too, must reflect on their attitude towards the torture of the man. As Maurice Hemingway and Frank McQuade have suggested, revenge on a man who tortures his wife may seem justified, and even enjoyable.<sup>367</sup> Noemí is no longer an observer but the one who acts, complicit in the perpetration of violent torture. Although Noemí initially only observed the stool fly through the air to hit the man on the head, as if her own actions were unaccountable, she later acknowledges herself as the agent of this violent act: “[E]n el movimiento de alzar el taburete y descargarlo había puesto todas mis fuerzas [...]” (89) (“I had put all my strength into the motion of raising the stool and hitting him [...]”). She experiences a paravision, in which she is at the same time the one who acts and the one who observes herself acting. Her own subjectivity is diffused across the scene, so that it is impossible to locate its core.

One of short story’s key lines is delivered by the sculptor as he and Noemí discuss activism and its futility. According to the sculptor, violence always happens in another place, in another time: “Pero siempre es igual, siempre tenemos que reconocer que todo eso sucedió en otro espacio, sucedió en otro tiempo.” (82) (“But it’s always the same thing, we always have to recognize that all this happened in another space, another time.”) As mentioned earlier, the formation of subjectivity is closely related to linear temporality, and time and place demarcate one individual from all others. When the boundaries of the subject vanish, the experience of linear time also fades. In “Recortes de prensa” it is significant that Noemí steps outside of herself, as it were, into this “other” time and place where, in the sculptor’s words, “[n]unca estuvimos ni estaremos allí, donde acaso [...]” (82) (“[we] never were and never will be there, where maybe [...]”) Earlier, during a conversation with the sculptor, Noemí was reminded of a story in which a saint told the Frankish king, Clovis (466–511), about the crucifixion of Jesus. The king stood up, lamenting that he had not been there with his army. Emphasizing the perpetration of violence in another time and place dilutes the role of responsibility: those who are not directly present do not have to act in defiance but may be only rational observers, preaching moral values from a comfortable distance. This safe distance separating Noemí from the violence in Argentina breaks down as she becomes implicated in committing her own acts of torture.

Noemí acts in solidarity with the underdogs, the mother and her child, when she strikes the girl’s father over the head, but violence committed to assist the weak is

<sup>367</sup> Hemingway & McQuade, 1988, 62.

still violence. As Peter Beardsell states: “She [Noemí] may reverse the roles of torturer and victim, but she fails to change the reality of human behavior since she permits – and perhaps assists in – the brutal treatment of the man.” (Beardsell, 1994, 28) Here we return to the motif of good and evil, which runs throughout Cortázar’s work from the early play *Los reyes* (1949). The play deals with the myth of the Minotaur, but inverts the roles of monster and hero, so that the Minotaur becomes the victim of a system that externalizes evil. For Cortázar, the assumption that evil only exists outside oneself, in others, is the origin of violence and immorality. In his essay “Para una espeleología a domicilio”, Cortázar tackles the myth of Bluebeard and suggests that the door behind which Bluebeard’s dead wives are hidden can be opened by each of us in dreams.<sup>368</sup> Steven Boldy summarizes this idea, suggesting that the door is what separates the conscious from the subconscious.<sup>369</sup> For Cortázar, it is crucial to entice out the monsters that lurk in our own subconscious. As he writes in *Los reyes*: “Mira, solo hay un medio para matar los monstruos: aceptarlos.” (Cortázar, 1993a, 71) (“You see, there is only one way to kill monsters: accept them.”)<sup>370</sup>

Noemí later learns that the events she experienced did not happen to her in Paris, but to a family in Marseille. If imagining, surrendering to the subconscious and renouncing the boundaries of consciousness expand subjectivity and blur the boundaries of time and place, then was it all simply her imagination? Whereas rational thought keeps real events at a distance, imagination – and art – brings them closer, where they become real possibilities that may occur to anyone.<sup>371</sup> There is a reminder here of Cortázar’s belief in the intimate interconnection between all living beings: if something happens to one of us, it happens to all of us. Noemí takes the “leap of death” into her own subconscious, becoming “the other”, and renounces the safe boundaries of her ego.

## 5.2.2 The chaos of violence

However, this interpretation of “Recortes de prensa” is not sufficient. The end of the short story raises the narrative to a new level of ambivalence, where the reader must question their own interpretations. Noemí writes a text that brings together the sculptor’s works with her own, “authentic” experience of perpetrating torture. In return, the sculptor sends her an article from the sensational magazine, *France-Soir*, describing those same events. Did Noemí simply forget that she had seen these

<sup>368</sup> Cortázar, 2005d, 120.

<sup>369</sup> Boldy 2000, 178.

<sup>370</sup> Translation by Terry J. Peavler, 1990.

<sup>371</sup> Hemingway and McQuade, 1988, 163.

headlines and imagine that those events happened to her? Or, as González suggests as one possible solution, did Noemí meet the little girl who had run away from Marseille and recount her story as her own?<sup>372</sup> Another resolution is offered by Beardsell, who suggests that perhaps two similar events took place, one in Marseille and the other in Paris, the latter unreported.<sup>373</sup> Or, as Hemingway and McQuade speculate, has Noemí really effected a magical movement across time and place?<sup>374</sup> The mystery remains unsolved. Although Noemi goes back to look for the same alley she fails to find it, but she does find the little girl, who has the same last name as the girl who disappeared in Marseille. The short story remains open to interpretation, with no single solution offering resolution for the reader.

These existing interpretations attempt to explain the short story's plot, but they do not sufficiently consider the uncertainty and blurring between dream and reality. The reader is thrust into a text that offers insufficient explanations and impossible conclusions, forcing them to face the silent space outside the text. As Aníbal González points out, the short story encourages the reader to face their own helplessness in response to violence, a helplessness reminiscent of that felt by Noemí and the sculptor.<sup>375</sup> When a real document about torture in Argentina is compared to sensational journalism, an article in the tabloid magazine *France-Soir* that Cortázar has invented for his short story, questions arise: Do we read a real denunciation of torture as if we were reading a work of fiction? Is the understanding of true suffering always beyond our reach?

Both "Reunión" and "Recortes de prensa" refer to a story by Jack London. In the quote from Che Guevara's memoirs at the beginning of "Reunión", Guevara is reminded of the dying character in Jack London's story at the moment he thinks he is dying. Noemí is also reminded of a story by London, in which the narrator describes an Indian tribe carrying out torture. Noemí understands that reality can never be completely transformed into a story because something is always left out. While in "Reunión" literature merges seamlessly with reality and Jack London's story makes Che's suffering on the battlefield meaningful, in "Recortes de prensa" the possibility of literature to accurately portray and affect reality, to *be* one with it, is called into question. Literature cannot relay the experience of suffering, let alone eliminate it. The idealistic world of "Reunión" has changed to a far more complex reality, where the consequences of actions are never straightforward and there are no absolute truths.

<sup>372</sup> González, 1998, 250.

<sup>373</sup> Beardsell, 1994, 26.

<sup>374</sup> Hemingway & McQuade, 1988, 63.

<sup>375</sup> González, 1998, 252–253.

Noemí completes her own text at the end of the story. It seems, therefore, that the main character has not completely abandoned hope in the potential of literature to effect change. Like Noemí's story, the Jack London narrative she refers to, and the *France Soir* article that tears when she opens the envelope, the actual events and all observations and memories of them are fragmented and unreliable. When describing such events, literature cannot help but document this same fragmentation, insufficiency and uncertainty. The short story cannot do justice to the horror of the young girl's torture other than by testifying to the insufficiency of language to grasp the events. The narrative leaves behind only the essential, a knowledge of physical suffering that takes place in a silent reality beyond the text. Through this collage technique, the author also becomes one of the readers, a "narrador-lector", as Cédola has argued in her analysis of *Libro de Manuel*.<sup>376</sup> In relation to the newspaper clipping, the author is as helpless as the readers. Although the writer cannot put into words the experience of suffering, he articulates instead a shared feeling of helplessness and impotence.

Through "Recortes de prensa" we can examine Cortázar's multidimensional concept of being "out of time". The feeling of being "fuera del tiempo" appears in different guises across a number of his works. First, the poetic experience of time is a way of stepping outside of time. As Peter Standish describes, when discussing *Prosa del observatorio*, "it is a prelude to creativity and fresh perception".<sup>377</sup> Elsewhere, "fuera del tiempo" also appears in opposition to poetic experience, referring primarily to death, to nothingness, non-existence and stasis. Both uses are connected to the timelessness of the individual's subconscious, where on the one hand lies the richness of dreams and imagination and on the other hand uncontrollable emotions, nightmares and pathological states where time stops still.<sup>378</sup> While in "Reunión" the belief in the future and in the union of imagination and reason gave purpose to the flow of change and the present moment, in "Recortes de prensa" the destructive power of the subconscious shows itself in all its horror. The linear time of the clocks, generally perceived by Cortázar's characters either as a dungeon of air or as a comforting shelter, offers a fragile refuge to the troubled protagonist. Faced with the chaos of violence and disorder, Noemí retreats anxiously to the perceived safety of clock time, which she realizes is a sign of order and change, but this order is illusory and hopelessly out of reach.

Por primera vez escuché un tictac de reloj de pared, venía del vestíbulo y era lo único audible en ese momento en que la calle se iba quedando más y más

<sup>376</sup> Cédola, 1994, 36.

<sup>377</sup> Standish, 2001, 163.

<sup>378</sup> See Paul Fraise, 1963, 195–197.

desierta; el leve sonido me llegaba como un metrónomo de la noche, una tentativa de mantener vivo el tiempo dentro de ese agujero en que estábamos como metidos los dos, esa duración que abarcaba una pieza de París y un barrio miserable de Buenos Aires, que abolía los calendarios y nos dejaba cara a cara frente a eso, frente a lo que solamente podíamos llamar eso, todas las calificaciones gastadas, todos los gestos del horror cansados y sucios. (78)

For the first time I heard the ticking of a clock on the wall, it was coming from the vestibule and was the only thing audible at that moment in which the street was becoming more and more deserted; the soft sound reached me like a nighttime metronome, an attempt to keep time alive inside that hole where the two of us were stuck in a way, the duration that took in a flat in Paris and a miserable slum in Buenos Aires, that abolished calendars and left us face to face with that, what we could only call that, all epithets exhausted, all expressions of horror fatigued and filthy.

The false security of clock time is no longer the problem, but rather draws attention to what it conceals. Faced with the attempts of dictatorships to destroy history, including the reality of the past and the dreams of the future, historical time is a means of grounding events and identities. While in “Reunión” a new, pure time emerged from chaos, in “Recortes de prensa” we have been frozen in a permanent state of chaos. We cannot return to the time of clocks, which is revealed to be nothing but a false construction of a falsified history, but no alternate future time is offered either.

In his book *Territorios*, Cortázar claims that we live in a time that no longer has anything to do with the time of poetry, “tiempo histórico que ya nada tiene que ver con el tiempo propio del poema”.<sup>379</sup> Subjective time in which worlds are created through imagination, has become subordinate to historical time which rushes forward at an accelerating pace and requires the individual’s constant participation. How can one reach poetic experience in a world that disarms the individual of their ability to confront injustice and violence, whether it be in another country or in one’s own mind?

<sup>379</sup> Cortázar, 1978, 103.

### 5.3 When the movement stops: “Fin de etapa”

In the short story “Fin de etapa”, (“A Leg of a Journey”), from the last collection of short stories *Deshoras* (1983), poetic time appears under a different guise than it does in the political short stories. Political ideologies have seemingly vanished, and a prosperity guided by the market economy prevails. In the short story, the main character, Diana, who has lost her will to live, arrives in a small village where she stops on her way to the city. She stops by a museum where there is an exhibition of hyperrealist art. The museum closes for lunch and Diana does not have time to see the last exhibition room. She goes for a walk in the village and wanders into a house that is exactly like the house depicted in the paintings in the art museum. Diana goes to lunch and returns to the museum to see the last room of the exhibition. There is only one painting in that room, a picture of what she interprets as a dead woman, sat on a chair in the same house she visited earlier. Shocked, she drives her car away from the village but later turns around and returns to the house. She sits in the same chair that the dead woman occupies in the exhibition’s painting and lights a cigarette. The short story ends as Diana imagines freezing in her position, the shadow of her cigarette smoke preserved on the wall. Depending on whether one interprets the short story psychologically or fantastically, it is also possible to read Diana’s transformation into the woman in the picture.

In my own interpretation of Diana’s experience, the psychological approach is central. What happens to Diana? Her subjectivity is very fragile because it is not sustained by memories other than those connected to her ex-spouse Orlando or by future goals or by any sense of connection to the surrounding reality. Several different experiences of time, all familiar from Cortázar’s earlier stories, appear in this one. However, these conceptions of time are manifested in a new way: poetic time has been achievable, but all desire for reaching it has disappeared. Thus, I consider “Fin de etapa” as a fitting conclusion to this last phase of Cortázar’s work. How are Cortázar’s conceptions of time reflected in this short story? What has changed, and why?

#### 5.3.1 Cigarette, a metaphor for time

For Diana, the future is a meaningless, empty gap. She travels by car from one city to another and stays in hotels. Her ex-spouse, Orlando, has left her. While in Cortázar’s early short story “Carta a una señorita en París”, the individual was a prisoner of his own inner reality with no connection to external reality, in “Fin de etapa” the main character has lost her own inner reality. She is mentally lost, “perdida”. Diana remembers Duke Ellington’s tune *Perdida*, but cannot recall it. In the same way, she has lost her ability and desire to fill the present moment with anything other than smoking cigarettes. The outer reality has taken over the inner

world, and life has become a mere acceptance of what happens as it comes. The life of the depressed main character is frozen in a routine passage from one leg of a journey to another, and the future only appears as a repetition of the same without any ultimate goal. In her inability to remember, Diana radically differs from Johnny in “El perseguidor” and the protagonist of “Reunión”, who recalls Mozart’s quartet as the source of artistic inspiration. With few exceptions, in Cortázar’s work the main characters’ problem is typically their alienation from reality and the loss of meaning in their existence. Along with this, their experience of internal and external time is not synchronized. Even the time of clocks offers Diana little refuge, unlike Bruno in “El perseguidor” and numerous other characters in Cortázar’s short stories. Diana remembers having once experienced poetic time, the feeling of “living truly”, and so she is fully aware that clock time is not definitive or perfect. The time of clocks is someone else’s time, on which Diana builds her life because there is no other option.

In the short story, smoking cigarettes has a central function and can be seen as a metaphor for time. Diana’s perceptions of smoking and the situations in which she smokes embody her experience of time, as Peter Fröhlicher has pointed out.<sup>380</sup> I examine the short story’s representations of time in situations where Diana smokes, drawing out different conceptions of time that correspond to the different states of Diana’s subjectivity. These include, first, the already mentioned linear time, where the individual is fixated on the time of clocks as an observer; secondly, falling outside of time, where the boundaries of the subject disappear and smoking a cigarette becomes an unconscious act; thirdly, a stopped, static time, *nunc stans*, where the cigarette smoke stagnates and Diana’s subjectivity disappears as she turns into an image.

In the opening scene, Diana has stopped at the village café to have a drink. She downs the drink in one gulp. She watches the children amuse themselves while the men play cards and thinks that this image is happening outside of time.

Sentía en la piel una frescura de sombra, algunos parroquianos jugaban a las cartas, dos chicos con un perro, una vieja en el puesto de periódicos, todo como fuera del tiempo estirándose en la calina de verano. (Cortázar, 2022, 17)

She felt on her skin the coolness of the shade. A few customers playing cards, two children with a dog, an old woman at the news-stand: everything as if standing still outside of the flow of time, stretching out in the summer haze.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>380</sup> Fröhlicher, 1995, 201.

<sup>381</sup> All translations of “Fin de etapa” are from *Unreasonable Hours* (1995), translated by Albergo Manguel (Toronto: Coach House Press).

The hand of the man playing cards freezes for a moment in a position expressing the joy of victory. Diana remembers how she too used to be able to “prolongar cualquier cosa bella, sentirse vivir de veras en esa dilación deliciosa que alguna vez la había sostenido en el temblor del tiempo” (17) (“prolong something beautiful, feeling herself alive in that delicious procrastination that once upon a time had kept her afloat in time”). The expression “afloat in time” in the English translation does not convey the “temblor”, trembling or tremor, that is expressed in the original text. The tremor of time shares the same characteristics as the experiences of poetic time appearing in Cortázar’s work. The tremor of time refers to the experience of time as a material, bodily sensation, where surrendering to the experience of beauty causes the passage of time to stop or to extend. As the clock stops marking time, Diana’s subjective experience of time is prolonged. However, Diana can only remember having once experienced poetic time; she no longer has the energy nor the desire to experience the pleasurable state of procrastination.

Delayed experiences of beauty allowed Diana to live truly, “vivir de veras”. At that time, she was not a victim of the passage of time but was rather able to expand the present moment when she experienced something beautiful. Diana realizes that she no longer has any reason to experience such moments. Her ability to feel *alive* has disappeared. Vertical, vast internal time has become abstract, linear horizontal time outside of individual experience. Diana’s time is filled only by one cigarette after another, and when Diana lights up, she only anticipates their eventual extinction:

Dejaba el cigarrillo entre los labios, sabiendo que terminaría por quemárselos y que tendría que arrancarlo y aplastarlo como lo había hecho con esos años en que había perdido todas las razones para llenar el presente con algo más que cigarrillos, la chequera cómoda y el auto servicial. (18)

She felt her cigarette dangling from her lips, knowing she’d end up burning herself, and that she’d have to tear it away and furiously extinguish it as she had done through all those years when she had lost every reason to fill the present with something other than cigarettes, the convenient check-book, and the serviceable car.

Smoking cigarettes marks a life that consists of meaningless time-filling operations to fill the void before death. In the excerpt, it appears that Diana tends to forget she has a cigarette in her mouth and burns her lips, as happens later in the story. This way of smoking reflects Diana’s indifference and alienation. Her actions are not meaningful, and she repeats them without ever experiencing herself as their creator. Her journey continues from one place to another without her mind being attached to

any one thing in particular, except to painful memories of her former lover, Orlando. The reason for her feelings of insignificance is not only a broken heart, but also Diana's lifestyle: reference to the checkbook and to driving from hotel to hotel suggest an easy and prosperous life, which is nonetheless void of meaningful content. Unlike Noemí in "Recortes de prensa", Diana does not have a political mission. Her life has been reduced to the practice of mundane activities, as she herself reflects: "Curioso que vivir pueda volverse una pura aceptación." (17–18) ("Curious how the act of living can become mere acceptance.") Her experience of time has shrunk and she seems to skip the present moment, in which living takes place, preferring to run away before ever having arrived, "de irme casi antes de llegar" (18) ("leaving almost before arriving").

The memory of an earlier experience of poetic time appears to be the reason that Diana realizes her own state of vacuous being and, rather than moving on immediately to the next place, she stays for a while to walk around the village. Diana drifts into a museum and is impressed by the hyperrealist paintings which at first seem like photographs. Her indifference turns to interest. The paintings in the art museum are simple. They represent a room with few elements. Central to these paintings are chairs, tables and their long shadows. In each painting, the strong light is striking. In the next room, the style of the paintings is the same, but the paintings do not only feature furniture but also a man standing in a garden with his back to the viewer. Diana feels as if she has moved into the rooms of the paintings and is looking directly at the man in the garden. The man's essence is less intense than that of the furniture, as if he were an occasional visitor in the garden. For Diana, the paintings exude loneliness, which is only heightened by the man's presence. In her opinion, it stems from "solid" light, "esa luz que entra como una materia sólida y aplasta las cosas" (19) ("coming in like something solid, crushing things"). In the paintings, Diana is fascinated by "la perfección maniática del detalle" (18) ("the manic perfection of the details") and "una obsesión realista que llevaba al pintor hasta un límite peligroso y ambiguo" (18) ("an obsession with realism that had led the painter to a dangerously uncertain border"). The precision of the details in the paintings is a contrast to Diana's life, which is defined by her inability to decipher meaningful details from the ambiguous mass of reality. The insomnia resulting from her indifference and painful memories blunts Diana's imagination, and in states of absent-mindedness her mind is empty.

In the art museum, however, her imagination is awakened and she feels "un placer un poco amodorrado de ceder a la imaginación" (20) ("the somewhat hypnotic pleasure of giving in to her imagination"). In the same way as the sculptures in "Recortes de prensa" sensitize the protagonist to the realities of violence and stimulate her imagination, these paintings emphasize the power of sight. Observation changes the object of the gaze and breaks down the wall between the subconscious

and the conscious. The paintings appear in their manic detail as metaphors that the viewer must interpret. Diana thinks that shadows cast by the strong light look like funeral clothes and interprets the paintings as representations of death. She uses the word “silence” in connection with the paintings and in reference to her own loneliness. As Alice Jedlicková has suggested, the paintings, and later the house, which is perfectly reproduced in the paintings, can be seen to reflect Diana’s desolate inner reality.<sup>382</sup>

### 5.3.2 Symmetry

The motif of light and shadow recurs in “Fin de etapa”. The inertia of light symbolizes motionless time, a reference to death, while the passage of shadow signifies movement and change, the progression of time. Psychologist Paul Fraisse has described pathological states, in which the perception of the time continuum is lost due to traumatic memories, through reference to Henri Baruk’s research on those who have been victims of racial oppression and fled from one place to another. Such people cannot bear their memories and have no sense of an alternative future. These people live only in the present moment, which “destroys the impression of the purpose and finality of the personality and also the concept of the very value of this personality”.<sup>383</sup> Diana’s sense of purpose and value is similarly absent. As she says despairingly at the beginning of the short story: “[A] los cuarenta ya es solamente una manera de llorar dentro de una palabra.” (18) (“[A]t forty you are nothing more than a word that makes you cry.”) Diana’s past appears only through the painful memories of Orlando, and her future is nothing but a copy of the past. While in Cortázar’s earlier short stories it is typical for characters to flee from schedules and thoughts of the future, Diana strives to escape into timelessness. Repetition, where routines such as bathing in a hotel, reading a newspaper or filling up a car follow the same pattern endlessly, is for her a way to tolerate reality and her own self, which seem to have otherwise no value or function. Fraisse describes the condition of those living in timelessness: “They are incapable of ensuring the synchronism in their lives of the changes which take place within them and those that occur outside; thus their behavior takes refuge in immobility, which accords well with the domination of space even in their very thoughts (geometrism, reification).” (Fraisse, 1963, 197) The allure of symmetry can be seen in Diana’s routines and in her repetition of the same journey over and over again: “Todo simétrico como siempre para ella, una nueva etapa dándose como réplica de la anterior.” (25) (“Everything laid out in

<sup>382</sup> Jedlicková, 2006, 263–264.

<sup>383</sup> Fraisse, 1963, 185–186.

perfect symmetry for her, as always; a new leg of the journey becoming a mirror image of the previous one.”)

In the museum, the artist has placed the final painting apart from the others in a separate room. The museum official says that the museum closes at twelve and reopens in the afternoon. Diana says she will come back to see the last painting. She remembers Orlando, for whom noon was an important time to have lunch. Although Diana had often not been hungry at midday during their travels together, she became familiar with the ceremony of Orlando’s meals:

[P]ara Orlando el mediodía era el instante crucial, la ceremonia del almuerzo sacralizando de alguna manera el tránsito de la mañana a la tarde, y desde luego Orlando se hubiera negado a seguir andando por el pueblo cuando el café estaba ahí a dos pasos. (21)

[F]or Orlando, midday was the crucial moment, the ceremony of lunch come how ritualizing the passage from morning to afternoon, and Orlando would certainly have refused to continue walking through the town with the café just there, a few steps away.

Orlando’s ritual observance of lunchtime resembles a religious rite, and Diana had become accustomed to obeying her husband’s ritual. However, this time she does not go to lunch, but walks around the village. Acting for once according to her own desires, Diana refuses to submit:

Pero Diana no tenía hambre y pensar en Orlando le dolía cada vez menos; echar a andar alejándose del café no era desobedecer o traicionar rituales. Podía seguir acordándose sin sumisión de tantas cosas, abandonarse al azar de la marcha [...] (21)

But Diana wasn’t hungry, and thinking of Orlando hurt less every time; now, to walk away from the café was not to be disobedient or to betray a ritual. No longer feeling submissive, she could now allow herself to remember so many different things, she could abandon herself to the chance stroll [...]

This time Diana does not follow Orlando’s ritual: why would she eat if she is not hungry? During her holidays with Orlando, her spouse lay on the beach while she walked around aimlessly and drifted into courtyards: “Diana se iba perdiendo en las callejas sin nombres y sin gentes” (21) (“Diana kept on losing herself in the nameless, empty streets”). She remembers that, when she gave in to chance, she would experience reality differently, and a similar feeling overwhelms her as she

wanders through the village. Refusing to conform to the rules formerly laid down by Orlando, she also refuses to abide by the time of clocks and the subjectivity defined by it, where the individual is constantly aware of the passage of time and of one's own movements through time and place. Surrendering to her own intuition instead of following the dictates of the clock, Diana allows thoughts to arise in her mind that, for a change, have nothing to do with Orlando. She wanders into a courtyard where she sees the open door of an old house. She steps inside and notices that the house is exactly like the one in the paintings. The only difference is in the third room: its door is closed. Diana enters the room. She is disappointed, because there is nothing in the room but a chair and a table. She sits in the chair and lights a cigarette:

Vagamente decepcionada se acercó a la mesa y se sentó, se puso a fumar un cigarrillo, a jugar con el humo que trepaba en el chorro de luz horizontal, dibujándose a sí mismo como si quisiera oponerse a esa voluntad de vacío de todas las piezas, de todos los cuadros, del mismo modo que la breve risa en algún lugar a espaldas de Diana cortó por un instante el silencio aunque acaso solo fuera un breve llamado de pájaro allí fuera, un juego de maderas resacas [...]  
(23)

Vaguely disappointed, she walked up to the table and sat down, smoked a cigarette, played with the smoke climbing in the rain of horizontal light, sketching herself as if she were trying to set her own body against the deliberate emptiness of all those rooms, all those canvases, just like the short laugh behind her back that cut for an instant the overwhelming silence, even if it were nothing more than the brief call of a bird outside, the snapping of dry wood [...]

Diana earlier contemplated her habit of smoking a cigarette without thinking about it, so that only when the cigarette burns her lips does she realize that she has smoked. In the room, however, she smokes a cigarette fully aware of what she is doing: she uses the smoke to draw herself against the emptiness of the rooms. While normally Diana loses her subjectivity when smoking a cigarette, experiencing a sense of emptiness, now she draws with smoke in the air as if she were sketching herself into the painting in the last room of the museum. The silence and emptiness that define Diana's reality are akin to those of inanimate objects, but she attempts to reclaim her agency against the backdrop of this empty room. The sound of laughter is heard, although it may only be the calling of a bird outside. Her desire to hear another's laughter reflects the desire for companionship that might drive away loneliness, although no other person ever materializes.

On her way back to the center of the village, Diana is asked for the time by a young boy. Indeed, all the people she meets – including the museum official – talk

to her about time. The time of clocks appears as a construction that controls reality and freezes it according to familiar formulas. Noon reminds Diana again of Orlando, and this time she indulges in the ceremonies prescribed by him, even though they do not make sense: “Comer no tenía sentido pero en el mundo de Diana casi siempre se había comido así, ya porque Orlando decía que era hora de hacerlo o porque no quedaba más remedio entre dos ocupaciones.” (23) (“To eat made no sense, but in Diana’s world as she knew it, one always ate, either because Orlando would say it was time to eat or because there was nothing else to do between two other activities.”) Diana’s perception of time returns to the time of clocks and she to her usual routine.

Diana returns to the museum and to the last room, where she sees a painting of a woman sat in a chair with her back to the viewer. She gets the impression that there is something strange in the woman’s position: “[N]o solo se diferenciaba del otro personaje por el sexo sino por su actitud, el brazo izquierdo colgando a lo largo del cuerpo, la leve inclinación del torso que descargaba su peso sobre el codo invisible apoyado en la mesa [...]” (25) (“[N]ot only was this woman different from the other figure because of her sex, but because of her attitude – the left arm hanging down by the body, the slight inclination of the torso shifting its weight onto the invisible elbow leaning on the table [...]”) Diana becomes convinced that the woman in the picture is dead. If, according to the laws of symmetry, the last room in the museum is occupied by the same woman as the last room in the house, then it is Diana who not only observes the painting but is in it. She, like the woman, must consequently be dead.

After contemplating this painting, Diana finds herself back out on the street and in her car, although she does not know how she came to be there. She falls outside of consciousness and is not aware of time. If indeed Diana felt that she saw herself as dead, then this subsequent state may be interpreted as the result of terror. This state is opposed to the poetic time of the tremor hinted at earlier in the short story. Subjectivity here does not expand but contracts:

[P]oco a poco fue bajando la velocidad y solo empezó a pensar cuando el cigarrillo le quemó los labios, era absurdo pensar cuando había tantas casetes con la música que Orlando había amado y olvidado y que ella solía escuchar de a ratos, aceptando atormentarse con la invasión de recuerdos preferibles a la soledad, a la vaga imagen del asiento vacío a su lado. (25)

[L]ittle by little, she slowed down, and she only began to think when she felt the cigarette burn her lips. It was absurd, all these tapes of music that Orlando had loved and forgotten, tapes which she used to listen to from time to time, willing

to torture herself with the invasion of memories that were better than the loneliness, than the vague image of the empty seat next to her.

Diana only “starts to think” when the cigarette burns her lips, and her thoughts return to memories of Orlando. Diana is trapped in a vicious cycle of her own thoughts, thinking only of the painful memories of Orlando, of the emptiness and loneliness of the present, or of the aimlessness of the future, which she attempts to quell with her aimless travels.

Diana understands that the only possible future is a mirror image of the past with no alternatives. She understands her affection for symmetry and her desire that everything repeat itself in a same way. Originally, Diana returned to the museum to satisfy her longing for symmetry and to see that the last room in the museum would be the same as the last room in the house. The dead woman in the picture was an exception to the symmetry offered by the other paintings in the exhibition. This exception threw Diana off guard, and she returns again to fulfil her desire for symmetry. In the room of the house was a living woman, herself; in the room of the museum the woman was dead. Full symmetry, the reader understands, can only be fulfilled with the death of Diana.

### 5.3.3 The refuge in immobility

The protagonist Diana understands that she must complete the symmetry of the work of art and drives back to the house. The door of the house is open again. She enters the room – which resembles the museum’s last painting of the dead woman –, sits on the same chair as before and lights a cigarette. Ashes from the previous cigarette on the table prove that she has been here before.

Buscó el encendedor en el bolso, miró la primera voluta del humo que se enroscaba en la luz. Si la leve risa había sido al fin y al cabo un canto de pájaro, afuera no cantaba ningún pájaro ahora. Pero le quedaban muchos cigarrillos por fumar [...] (27)

She rummaged in her purse for her lighter, she watched the first spiral of smoke curling up in the light. Perhaps the soft laughter had, after all, been nothing but the song of a bird; there was no bird singing outside now. But she still had many cigarettes to smoke [...]

There are still many cigarettes to smoke. A repetitive, empty future unfolds before her. Diana runs through all the options in her mind, wondering what to do next. Two alternatives – to stay or to go – are ultimately condensed and frozen in place:

Podía irse cuando quisiera, por supuesto, y también podía quedarse; acaso sería hermoso ver si la luz del sol iba subiendo por la pared, alargando más y más la sombra de su cuerpo, de la mesa y de la silla, o si seguiría así sin cambiar nada, la luz inmóvil como todo el resto, como ella y como el humo inmóviles. (27)

She could leave whenever she wanted, of course, and she could also stay here; perhaps it would be beautiful to see whether the sunlight crept up the wall, continuing to lengthen the shadow of her body, of the table and of the chair. Or would it would remain like this, changing nothing, the light as motionless as all the rest, as motionless as herself and the motionless smoke?

Diana wonders if she should lean on the table and position herself in the same way as the woman in the painting. Or should she watch how time passes, as the shadows lengthen on the wall? The sound of distant laughter implies a fragile hope: maybe there is still someone to meet? In the end, all movement stops and she and the cigarette smoke are frozen in place.

As Diana enters the last leg of her journey inside the work of art, the forward flow of time, which is an essential feature of human consciousness, disappears. Human consciousness is imbued with the capacity for constant change and the compulsion to choose. For Montaigne, it meant also never being present with ourselves: “For we are never present with, but always beyond ourselves. Fear, Desire and Hope, are still pushing us on towards the future, depriving us in the meantime of the sense and Consideration of that which is to amuse us, with the Thought of what shall be, even when we shall be no more.”<sup>384</sup> This feeling of distance from the present moment and from ourselves is apparent in Diana’s constant travels and habit of leaving before she even arrives. However, Diana’s movements are not driven by desires or wishes such as the surrealists saw as essential to the human psyche.<sup>385</sup> Her interactions suggest instead that she dwells in the world of objects, in a static state void of desires and aspirations. In Diana’s transformation into the image of her earlier contemplation, one sees the absence of human life as she turns from subject to object. Only in human consciousness does time move forward; in reality *nunc stans*, the eternal present, prevails.

In the short story, the furniture and light are described as living beings: “[Y] por qué no verla de otra manera, como un rígido cuerpo a cuatro patas que acabara de ser despojado de sus ropas ahí caídas en una mancha negruzca.” (23) (“[A]nd why not see it differently, as a rigid fourlegged body stripped of its clothing, fallen in a blackish heap?”) The art works help Diana understand that objects can be looked at differently

<sup>384</sup> Montaigne, 1743, 21. Translated by Charles Cotton.

<sup>385</sup> See Breton, 1937, 129.

and transformed under her gaze. Animism, where the furniture appears alive, is reminiscent of the work of the Uruguayan Felisberto Hernández, who strongly influenced Cortázar. For Hernández, everyday things appear in an alienated light. A person may appear like an object, and an object like a person, as in the story “El caballo perdido” (The Lost Horse): “De todo aquello que era el piano, la lámpara y Celina con el lápiz todavía en la mano, me llegaba un calor extraño. En aquel momento objetos tenían más vida que nosotros.” (Hernández, 2004, 35) (“From everything that was piano, the lamp and Celina with the pencil still in her hand, a strange heat came to me. At that time objects had more life than us.”) Through the art exhibition, Diana has an opportunity to see in a new way. In a house reminiscent of the museum’s paintings, Diana experiences the surrounding reality as a reflection of her own inner world. But instead of seeing the furniture come to life like a poet might, so that the boundary between subject and object dissolves and subjectivity expands, Diana herself becomes dead matter. While in poetic time an individual merges with reality by feeling that she is part of it, in static time the dissolution of subjectivity results from death, as the person is absorbed into the timelessness of a non-event.

Diana’s inner reality, frozen in the repetition of her routines, also appears in the narrative. Lois Parkinson Zamora describes the short story and its narrative style as being as bare and motionless as the paintings.<sup>386</sup> The sense of unreality is created by the light, which does not seem to change as the narration progresses, even as the hours pass. Diana does not return to the museum until half past three, but still the light in the house is the same as when she left: “Para qué demorarse en las dos primeras habitaciones donde la luz rasante no había perdido intensidad [...]” (26) (“the slanting light had lost nothing of its intensity [...]). Diana also notices the unreality of the light when she returns to the museum: “Diana se detuvo ante dos o tres de los cuadros, y por primera vez el ángulo de la luz entró también en ella como una imposibilidad que no había querido reconocer en la casa vacía.” (24) (“Diana stopped in front of one or two of the pictures, and for the first time the angle of light hit her as well, another impossibility she had not wanted to admit when in the empty house.”) Time does not move, but the space changes, giving the sense that narrative time is spatial rather than linear. Diana does not move in time from one space to another but rather within the same space, where the light always remains the same. The museum, the paintings and the house all combine as if into one space. Returning to the house, Diana is no longer sure whether she saw the paintings in the museum, or whether she is misremembering: was there ever anything other than just the house? The short story creates a claustrophobic atmosphere where the house and its

<sup>386</sup> Parkinson Zamora (1983, 53) argues that “Cortázar’s narrative style in “Fin de etapa” seems itself to aspire to that of still life. The tone and spatial descriptions of the third-person narration are as bare as the paintings, and as motionless [...].”

representation are identical. They are compared to Diana's locked mind where, despite fragile attempts, there is no alternative representation or way out. Even the exception represented by the dead woman in the picture, is not a viable alternative but the inevitable fulfilment of the laws of symmetry. Nonetheless, it is precisely the exception offered by the art exhibition that fascinates Diana. By facing her own death, she rejects the compulsion to repeat the same journeys and finally feels something other than indifference.

According to Peter Standish, in the beginning of the story Diana feels a need to adopt a stasis of the pictures, a feat she accomplishes in the end.<sup>387</sup> But does she really want to become a static figure, or has relinquishing human agency through her routinized and passive way of life already produced this transformation? Does the realization of the symmetry created by the work of art and the house simply provide an opportunity to see herself as she already is? Diana has lost her desire to live in the tremor of time, in the extended present, where she can experience beauty and be a part of it. The prerequisites for acceding to poetic time are not fulfilled in Diana's case: the only memories left are haunting and obsessive images of Orlando. She lacks the love that would offer her an experience of fusion. Although she can see differently, for example viewing the chair legs as dog legs, her sight does not resonate with her inner memories.

Like "Anillo de Moebius" and "Las babas del diablo", "Fin de etapa"'s structure can also be perceived as a circle as the end returns to the beginning. When Diana sits on the same chair as the dead woman in the picture, the fantastic interpretation would be that she dies in order to achieve symmetry. However, if we observe the short story's circularity, it seems rather that she has actually been "dead" all along. Through contemplation of the artwork, she finally sees her own state, in which she has ceased to "live". Diana's situation at the beginning and at the end of the short story is the same. The only difference is that in the end she sees herself as she really is. Even before her break-up with Orlando, Diana lived a routine life with no political ideologies to believe in or fight for. She lives in a prosperous inertia, where even survival does not constitute a meaningful life, as it did for the characters of "La autopista del sur".<sup>388</sup> Being alone has exacerbated her state, which the art exhibition

<sup>387</sup> Standish, 2001, 57–58.

<sup>388</sup> While in "La autopista del sur" the characters step into a task-oriented premodern conception of time, Diana's conception of time can be compared to the prisoners of Anton Chekhov's work *Sakhalin Island*. As Tintti Klapuri writes of Chekhov's work: "Besides there being almost nothing to look forward to in the future, the convicts lack significant daily events which would help them to differentiate one day from another; consequently, Chekhov's prisoners have lost their interest in calendar time and find it difficult to remember what day it is [...] This experience of time may have cyclical elements, but might be better described as repetitive and empty in the sense of being

and the house bring out concretely as an image that she can step inside. Thus, it can be said that Diana has been “dead” since the beginning of the short story.<sup>389</sup> The work of art shows her own state as well as the state of the world she inhabits as a Huxleyan dystopia.<sup>390</sup> However, art still has a role to play in this desolate world.

In this chapter, I have shown the effect of Cortázar’s political awakening on the temporality in his short stories and the implications of poetic time. “Reunión” puts forward a worldview based on poetry, rather than reason, that could bring political and social cohesion through revolution. The protagonist’s poetic vision becomes a metaphor for the revolution and the new man that it will create. The structure of the short story repeats the re-creation of the world through mythical time, returning first to chaos and then to rebirth. With his growing interest in social issues, Cortázar also altered his view of history and became committed to changing the future. However, his high expectations for Cuba were not realized and Cortázar had to face a progressively disillusioned Latin America and an increasingly complicated world. Cortázar drew heavily on the social issues of Latin America, reflected in short stories like “Recortes de prensa”, which deals with the dictatorship of Jorge Videla and the waning belief in the writer’s ability to effect change. In this story, the time of clocks appears more positively than before, particularly when the only alternative is to fall completely outside of time, sliding into violence and chaos. The final analysis in my study concerns “Fin de etapa”, where the ideological emptiness of the new capitalistic society that emerged in the 1980s is shown. Diana, who lives a wealthy but lonely life, no longer feels the desire nor the need to experience poetic time as she freezes in meaningless repetition.

meaningless, since it lacks the inherent motivation that is typical of premodern cyclical temporality [...]” (Klapuri, 2015, 62)

<sup>389</sup> Carlos Pérez Ramírez (2017, 481) states that Diana is “muerta en vida”, “dead in life”.

<sup>390</sup> In *Rayuela*, Cortázar describes such a world where all material needs are satisfied: “El reino será de material plástico, es un hecho. Y no que el mundo haya de convertirse en una pesadilla orwelliana o huxleyana; será mucho peor, será un mundo delicioso, a la medida de sus habitantes, sin ningún mosquito, sin ningún analfabeto, con gallinas de enorme tamaño y probablemente dieciocho patas, exquisitas todas ellas, con cuartos de baño telecomandados, agua de distintos colores según el día de la semana, una delicada atención del servicio nacional de higiene, con televisión en cada cuarto, por ejemplo grandes paisajes tropicales para los habitantes de Reijjavik [...] compensaciones sutiles que conformarán todas las rebeldías.” (Cortázar, 2003b, 541) (“The kingdom will be made out of plastic material, that is a fact. And the world will not have to be converted into an Orwellian or Huxleyan nightmare; it will be much worse, it will be a delightful world, to the measure of its inhabitants, no mosquitoes, no illiterates, with enormous eighteen-footed hens most likely, each foot a thing of beauty, with tele-operated bathrooms, a different-colored water according to the days of the week, a nicety of the national hygiene servicio, with television in every room, great tropical landscapes, for example, for the inhabitants of Reykjavik [...] subtle compensations that will reduce all rebellions to conformity.”) (Translated by Gregory Rabassa.)

## 6 Conclusion

In this study, I have examined conceptions of time in Julio Cortázar's short stories in their cultural-historical contexts, from his first published short stories in the 1950s to his last in the 1980s, focusing on the human experience of time. The recurrent and important theme of time has been recognized and commented on before, but the particular experience of what I call poetic time has not been precisely defined. This study has produced a complex understanding of poetic time in the short stories and fills an important gap in Cortázar scholarship. My research contributes to the study of time in comparative literature more broadly through the concept of poetic time.

I define two central concepts of time in Cortázar's short stories, clock time and poetic time, and explore the relationship between these concepts. I also discuss stopped time, *nunc stans*, and mythical time. My analysis of Cortázar's short stories shows that the experience of time is closely related to the experience of subjectivity. Cortázar criticizes living in the modern time measured by a clock, where the individual is constantly aware of the passage of time and subjectivity atrophies in the repetition of time-bound and externally-controlled routines – a state that Cortázar calls the Great Habit. Cortázar suggests that there is another conception of time, one which would be closer to authentic human experience.

Cortázar opposes the modern historical conception of time, in which constant anticipation of the future is inevitable and obscures the possibility of experiencing reality directly in the present moment. Individuals living in the time of clocks isolate themselves in their own individual time, where they measure its passage and constantly anticipate, and make plans for, the future. This concept of time is shown in the way the protagonists Bruno in “El perseguidor” and Marcelo in “Lugar llamado Kindberg” live according to the norms of society, and in their nervous inner monologues, which move back and forth along a timeline from remembrance of the past to anticipation of the future.

The modern conception of time was born in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Reformation, when the need to discern the unknown future from the actualized past became imperative, and demand for the anticipation and planning of the future occupied not only collective politics but the lives of individuals. Clocks and calendars became the necessary tools to implement this modern project, and present

actions were oriented towards planning and shaping the future. The modern conception of time is associated with a mechanistic conception of nature and instrumental reason, in which man has separated himself from nature and taken control of it. According to Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the desire to control nature is rooted in fear but, in separating himself from nature, man has also exposed himself to this mechanistic perception of reality. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Cortázar emphasizes modern man's desire to exclude the unknown from the circle of consciousness. In his work, he examines the consequences of rejecting this unknown: the individual loses contact with himself and with reality and thereby loses his sense of meaning.

In Cortázar's short stories, the approach to the problematic of time varies both thematically and stylistically, but certain questions are repeatedly raised: how does living in clock time affect the characters? In what situations? How are different experiences of time manifested? And what happens to subjectivity? In his first short stories in the collection *Bestiario* in 1951, Cortázar examines the effect of the Great Habit on the lives of his characters through metaphors. In "Carta a una señorita en París", the protagonist vomits rabbits, dismissing the strangeness of this act by hiding the rabbits in his apartment and building routines that normalize the phenomenon. In the following decade, the short story "La autopista del sur" published in 1966, demonstrates the power of routines on a communal level. In the short story, characters stuck in a traffic jam for many months begin to live like pre-modern people, focusing on the satisfaction of their immediate needs and the measures required by the seasons. Individuality turns into community, and eventually on the freeway the dominating conception of time is *nunc stans*, the eternal present, where time does not appear as a linear continuum from past to the future. Unlike the man of mythical time, for whom repetition implied, according to Mircea Eliade, the recreation of the world, the cyclical time is produced only for practical needs and it does not imply any sacred purpose. Consequently, the characters go back to the time of clocks as soon as the traffic jam breaks up and in the end, they accept the conditions and the behaviors determined by any given time.

I argue that Cortázar's conception of poetic time implies an experience in which modern man's sense of meaning returns. From the end of the 1950s, poetic time often appears in Cortázar's short stories in various ways. The surrealists' views on poetry, the subconscious, dreams and love appealed to Cortázar, who considered surrealism as a "magical cosmovision" in which the entire perception of man and his worldview could be transformed from rational to poetic. In my study, I see Cortázar as continuing a tradition that sought to articulate a worldview beyond the scientific one. A counter-tradition to the mechanical control of nature and the inherent effort to subjugate man to the machinery of society was already available in the Early Romanticism of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Early Romantics argued that poetry and

art could reach the Absolute and the experience of meaningful totality of being, which had been lost when the mythical world view was replaced by a rational conception of reality. Cortázar's great influencers, John Keats and Arthur Rimbaud, embodied in their poems the same attempt to reach the totality of reality through poetry. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, psychoanalysis revealed areas of the human psyche that lay beyond reason. This, in turn, influenced the birth of surrealism and its spiritual revolution, where poetry, instead of reason, would be placed at the center of culture. In my research, I show what kind of temporality is related to this tradition. According to Cortázar, it is a time in which the individual can break free from the alienating conception of time formed by the history of rationality. Here, they can experience reality in direct connection with everything around them, just as children, poets and "primitive" people do, and they can live in the present rather than in anticipation of the future.

The poetic experience of time is accompanied by the blurring of the boundaries of the subject. The control of consciousness weakens and the boundaries between subject and object disappear. This experience of time takes place in a state where the mind starts to wander and sinks into a hypnagogic state on the border between wakefulness and sleep. In a dream, we can experience a very long and multi-phase chain of events in a very short time. This experience of prolongation was Cortázar's starting point for the exploration of time in his short stories. The experience is poetic: like in a dream it draws on images, metaphors and symbols that replace rational thought. Poetic time can be achieved through works of art and music, by making love or simply sinking into imagination. In the short story "El perseguidor", Johnny reaches another time while playing jazz and reminiscing on the subway. Poetic time does not mean falling outside of time or into total timelessness, but is rather another time in which the awareness of the passage of time disappears. In retrospect, the perceived moment in poetic time lasts much longer than the time measured by clocks. When playing the saxophone, Johnny's awareness of the passage of time dissipates as his subjectivity expands and the outer boundaries of the subject and object vanish. This is how Johnny reaches the Absolute, the unity of all. However, Johnny is unhappy as nobody else shares in nor understands his experience which lies in the essence of his music, although the narrator of the story, his biographer Bruno, tries to understand him and displays an emerging poetic tendency. Through the main characters, Cortázar shows the complexity of the relationship between clock time and poetic time; whereas Bruno searches illusory comfort from objective certainties of reality, for Johnny the ability of reaching the Absolute risks comfortation with the fear, horror and chaos that run amok in the psyche.

In poetic time, imagination takes over and a large number of experiences condense into a short time, just like in dreams. As the conceptual categorization of reality fades, the poetic experience shows reality to be immensely rich. This is what

happens to Michel in “Las babas del diablo” and to Marini in “La isla a mediodía”. In “La isla a mediodía”, Marini immerses himself in his imagination while watching an island from the airplane window and recreates himself as a double who travels to the island. However, as I show in my analysis, the clock has become a powerful myth, of which Marini cannot rid himself even in his imagination and, unable to liberate himself, Marini and his double perish.

In this study, I suggest that the strongly figurative and metaphorical language of Cortázar’s short stories enables these experiences to be brought to light. Cortázar considered short stories as the siblings of poetry, and he refers to writing stories as an intention to dream. While language based on concepts is tied to linear time, figurative language, i.e. images, metaphors and symbols, enables the transmission of a poetic experience to the reader. In the short story “Las babas del diablo”, the key characteristics of the narrative form are broken down: focalizer, time, place and situation remain unclear. I argue that the short story can be interpreted as a description of a poetic experience of time. Comprehension of the short story requires the reader’s unprejudiced imagination. Through poetic time, the story’s seemingly contradictory temporality, in which time is both very short and very vast, becomes understandable, although not exhaustively explainable, and interpretation requires an understanding of image rather than analytical language.

For Cortázar, the poetic view of reality also encompassed eroticism. I show how love and eroticism are also ways to reach poetic time. Although in Cortázar’s works sexuality is often associated with aggression and violence, eroticism can be an opportunity for an individual to lose their boundaries and reach unity with another. According to Freud, pleasure is a life instinct outside of temporal management that has been repressed and replaced by the reality principle to maintain civilization and progress. The surrealists and later Herbert Marcuse wanted to replace Logos with Eros in order to free civilization from the oppressive domination of power structures. In Cortázar’s novel *Rayuela*, Horacio Oliveira seeks such an experience of fusion and unity with his lover La Maga. In the short story “Llugar llamado Kindberg” (*Octaedro*, 1974), society’s demands are in conflict with the individual’s desires. In his work of the 1960s, Cortázar idealized hedonism and resistance to society’s suffocating atmosphere, but in his short story there is also a criticism of the hedonistic attitude to life, which emphasizes individuality over union through love.

In perhaps his most challenging story, “Anillo de Moebius”, Cortázar explores the metaphysical questions of being human with the help of metaphors. The short story has been criticized as an apology for rape, but by focusing on moral issues in the short story, the central metaphysical idea is missed. In my interpretation, the short story’s conception of time comes close to the *nunc stans* of mysticism, the present moment standing still. This is an idea described by the Buddhist Vedanta-books and, in modern times, by Arthur Schopenhauer. If, as they describe, individuality is an

illusion and linear time is only related to a particular subject, then *nunc stans*, the eternal present, prevails. Schopenhauer's thought is also related to a desire that guides all life and does not die when an individual does but continues to exist in other people and in other living beings.

The awakening of political consciousness and its influence on Cortázar's oeuvre has aroused keen interest in research, but its effects on conceptions of time have rarely been studied. In my research, I highlight how this change affected Cortázar's perception of the future and of the past, and how this change can be seen in the manifestation of temporality in his short stories. In his early work, Cortázar considered future thinking an alienating escape from the present. However, planning for and shaping the future, a key feature of the modern conception of time, reappear after Cortázar's political awakening. Inspired by the Cuban revolution, Cortázar's work engaged with the relationship between inner and personal experience and collective action. In the short story "Reunión", the protagonist, aka Che Guevara, envisions a future made possible by revolution through his poetic state of semi-sleep. The protagonist imagines a new man who is free from the modern social structures that cause alienation. The event structure of the short story repeats a mythical pattern, where the rebirth of the world requires a return to the primordial chaos from which the cosmos is born. This new world and its new man arise from an imagined reality based on poetry. The role of poetic time that had earlier isolated protagonists such as Johnny and Marini from others, and had been overlooked by the motorists of "La autopista del sur" now takes center stage. In Cortázar's new vision, inspired by the revolution, poetic time is available for the common good.

Unfortunately, the ideological goals of the Cuban revolution failed, and the unquestioned faith in socialism that appeared in "Reunión" remains a single moment in the author's short stories. Rightist dictatorships arose in Latin America in the 1970s, and Cortázar was most affected by the Argentine military dictatorship, the atrocities of which his countrymen had to suffer. "Recortes de prensa" (1980) takes place in this dark era, and it deals with the kidnappings and torture ordered by the Argentine dictator Jorge Videla. The short story contains genuine newspaper clippings of real disappearances, and the faith in political ideologies and their power to change the world have been lost. In "Recortes de prensa" Cortázar defends historical time and the necessity to influence the course of history through action and activism. Despair over Videla's dictatorship causes a surprising change in the experience of poetic time: it now also includes the horror of losing control of consciousness and subjectivity, and of falling prey to unknown forces hidden in the subconscious. The main character, Noemí, realizes that anyone can perpetrate violence and torture. Compared to such horror, even clock time and the false shelter of rationality it implies may be a better option.

Despite the despondency implied in “Recortes de prensa”, Noemí has a reason to live and act, unlike the protagonist Diana in “Fin de etapa” (1983). In a prosperous world based on ownership and consumption, which embodies the realization of the sociocultural ideals initiated by the age of rational Enlightenment, there is no place for poetry. The inner world of human existence has atrophied at the mercy of an outer, material reality. In the short story “Fin de etapa” from the last short story collection *Deshoras* (1983), poetic time appears to belong only to the past. Diana remembers a time when she could prolong beautiful moments if she so wanted, but in the present she no longer has any reason or desire to do so. There is no ideology, no love, nothing to fight for and, at the end of the short story, Diana is frozen as if in a painting. In a world where material needs are satisfied but existential meaning is lacking, people are stuck in an object-like inertia. However, “Fin de etapa” shows that art still has the power to express the human condition in a world devoid of meaning.

Cortázar’s conception of poetic time is both a praise of art and a criticism of modern humanity. Being chained to the clock means living under coercion: life is determined by an imposed order which vacates experience of significance. The effect is numbing and even deadening. Poetic time, which is exemplarily attained by immersion in a work of art but can also be reached in the experience of love – a kind of physical poetry –, sets our imagination free. It offers an experience of living that is more intense, more authentic and full of significance. Cortázar dreams of a revolution in which poetic time replaces clock time in human experience, even if this proves to be a utopian vision that cannot be realized.

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