

THE TWO-STEP FORMATION MODEL
OF ÁNGEL RAMA AND ANTONIO CANDIDO:
LATE MODERNISM AND AESTHETIC AUTONOMY

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Introduction¹

The Brazilian critic Antonio Candido and the Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama met in Montevideo in 1960, initiating an important dialogue for Latin American critical theory. This dialogue allowed them to bring together two intellectual and literary experiences—the Brazilian and the Spanish-American—which, despite their different rhythms of development, hold basic elements in common. Furthermore, at a time when the region was struggling for its political, economic and cultural autonomy *vis-à-vis* imperialist subordination, Rama and Candido’s effort seemed particularly relevant. In the decades that followed their first meeting they engaged in a more programmatic collaboration. As we will argue, in their writings of the period it is possible to identify categories, historical diagnoses and literary choices held in common. This enabled them to map, in a coherent critical perspective, Spanish-American and Brazilian literary works and movements on an expanded Latin American frame. In their essays, they offered a sense of internal orientation in the cultural sphere based on an accumulated intellectual experience and in a sustained collective effort, proper to peripheral nations, that Candido had originally called “formation.”² However, the common project in which both critics engaged since the 1960s was abruptly interrupted in 1983 by the death of Ángel Rama in an airplane crash. According to Candido, the project could not be continued in the same way, with his colleague being one “of the rare unreplaceable men, because without them things will not be done as well as they would do with them.”³

The original idea of writing the present essay jointly, based on shared reflections on Latin American literature of the post-1945 period, was certainly inspired by the lead of this interrupted dialogue between two major figures of peripheral critical theory. But our times are, indeed, very different. In the 1960s, there was a strong impulse toward national and regional autonomy, and, as we shall see, literary critics sought balanced and consistent modernist forms.

In recent decades, Latin American criticism has emphasized a global shift to a post-autonomous condition, acutely felt in our region after the shortcomings and failures of so many modernization projects.⁴ In our contemporary situation, critics rarely seek literary works based on a strong sense of artistic autonomy. And, in some cases, they have suggested dismissing the autonomy principle altogether.⁵

In this article, by commenting and reconsidering some key critical concepts and cultural strategies shared by Candido and Rama, we would like to suggest an alternative critical path. We will maintain our focus on what was perhaps the central literary subject of their joint reflection: the so-called Latin American “New Narrative” (*nueva narrativa latinoamericana*), a movement that thrived during the developmentalist period (1940-1970). Our main task will be to present and reappraise this literary movement from the standpoint of the negative diagnosis of Latin American postwar modernization that has come to prevail from the 1970s onwards. Distancing our position from the current trend to reject in abstract manner emblematic works and basic assumptions of the New Narrative, we will try to advance a critical perspective more sensitive to the complex forms in which it was able to reveal the contradictions and dissonances of its historical material. This perspective could, perhaps, help to reactivate a much-needed contemporary discussion on the critical potential of aesthetic autonomy.

Two-Step Formation: Literary System, Transculturation and Super-Regionalism

The confluence between Candido and Rama’s projects was grounded mainly in the emphasis and defense of a process of national or regional formation capable of driving a complicated dialectic between local and cosmopolitan elements. In his seminal work *Formação da Literatura Brasileira (Momentos Decisivos)*, for instance, Antonio Candido stated he was guided by the goal of “studying the formation of Brazilian literature as a synthesis of universalist and particularistic tendencies” (25).⁶ However, if the rhythm of the oscillation was considered a threat to the formation of local literature, both Candido and Rama certainly understood that the solution for such a problem was not to abolish any of these tendencies, which constituted what they saw as the evolutionary law of peripheral intellectual life. Instead, the most promising strategy would be to imagine a sufficiently autonomous cultural realm that would be able to guide the double dynamic of Latin American literature and thought.

With regard to this, Candido would suggest the concept of a “literary system” (25) for the first time in 1959, stating that the idea of literary formation required a minimum organization constituted by a “group of literary producers, more or less conscious of its role;” by a “group of readers, constituting the dif-

ferent types of public;" and by a "transmitter mechanism (generally, a language and a set of styles), that links them" (25).⁷ As Candido would say:

When the activity of writers from a specific period is integrated into such a system, another decisive element occurs: the formation of literary continuity: a sort of passing of the torch between runners, which assures their movement together in time, defining the lines of the whole.⁸ (25)

The literary system would function, then, as the first instance (or first step) of the mediation between the particular and the universal, allowing the configuration of a continuity (accumulation or internal causality) where beforehand there were only dualities and oscillating poles.⁹

Ángel Rama, in turn, seems to have perceived the implications of such a theory, deriving from it a systematic approach, which he extended to other countries in a 1964 text, "Diez problemas para el novelista latinoamericano." Explicitly relying on Candido, the Uruguayan critic would agree with the thesis that the relative autonomy of Brazilian literature was won at the end of the nineteenth century, though he also pointed out the difficulty of the majority of Spanish America to constitute analogous systems. From his point of view, among Spanish-speaking nations, this had only occurred in Mexico and Argentina by the first decades of the twentieth century, though it would continue gradually on a regional scale.

It should be noted that, in the dialogue between the critics, a relevant line of thought for peripheral criticism began to be constituted. The category of "literary system" provided a firm grounding with which to think about local problems from a complex and objective perspective: neither xenophobic, nor acculturated. Furthermore, it is important to mention, this project received a boost both by the unprecedented surge of industrialization which occurred throughout Latin America between the 1930s and the 1960s, and also by the sense of radical national autonomy, which the 1959 Cuban Revolution had produced throughout the region. In such a context of economic development and social revolution, the assertion of Latin American autonomy seemed to be gaining strength, amid cultural and economic efforts toward regional emancipation.

In this sense, the 1960s and 1970s would also be an important period for Rama and Candido's intellectual work together. Aiming to map what they considered to be a culminating point in the formation process, both would suggest conceptual novelties with the goal of comprehending the works of writers such as Juan Rulfo, João Guimarães Rosa, Juan Carlos Onetti, Mario Vargas Llosa, Gabriel García Márquez and others. Thus, for instance, Rama would reformulate the problem of the mediation of the dialectic between the

local and the universal by adapting the theory of “transculturation”¹⁰ from Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, whereby a residual culture is submitted, through contact with a dominant culture, to a series of acquisitions and losses (acculturation and deculturation).¹¹ In the process, Rama thought, such losses would be redressed by the creation of new elements.

According to this theory, which would become very prominent in Latin American literary theory, the dominant urban pole would impose modernization upon a recessive country pole which, in turn, would try to defensively preserve its own non-modern culture. This left the latter with two equally fatal options: “to retreat and die or to die immediately” (231).¹² That is, the scheme supposed, in the manner of developmentalism, the sudden or gradual erasure of the non-modern pole. In contrast to contemporary developmentalists, however, Rama would reject a unilateral perspective of progress, defending instead the organic incorporation of the non-modern in modernist literary forms.

What matters for our argument is not to go back once more to the (very much debated) topic of literary transculturation in the abstract but rather to understand the keen way by which Rama introduces it as a new phase—specifically related to the developmentalist cycle—in the formation project shared with Candido. Specifically, Rama imagines the formation of a national literary system occurring in the following sequence. At first, in the moment in which the system is constituted, the mediation between cosmopolitanism and localism was only possible in very relative terms. As the Uruguayan critic wrote:

The dialogue between the regionalist and the modernist writer occurs through a semi-established structure: the Latin American literary system, understood as a field of integration and mediation, with a functionality capable of self-regulating to a considerable degree.¹³ (243)

Up to this point, we are still in the formation’s first step. Nevertheless, Rama would then point out, transcultural actions contributed to this step’s reinforcement. In this way, the critic seems to suggest that such literary works would serve to continue the mediation that the literary system had already begun in a new level of complexity; that is, evidently, a two-step formation theory. We would like to underline, however, a novelty in this articulation of the formation; namely, the compensatory feature that was ascribed to literary composition. Regarding this, the critic’s words about Brazilian writer Guimarães Rosa can be taken as an example: “In the Brazilian linguistic area, the monumental work of Guimarães Rosa represents the improved elaboration of linguistic contributions, transformed into unities of a structure which is *meticulously governed by principles of artistic composition*” (237). What is lost in the struggle between modernization and local culture is aesthetically recovered

here: "If there is a clear surrender of regional languages, there is a simultaneous effort to recover them inside literary speech" (237). Summarizing this second step of the formation, Rama would say: "At this level, the *original* contribution of transculturators is the linguistic unification of the literary text, in response to *principles of artistic unity*, but using, in the place of a composed and learned language, its own language" (237).¹⁴ This means that, unlike classic regionalism's naturalistic approach, the transculturators followed the modern principle of internal coherence inherited from literary modernism.¹⁵

This two-step formation scheme drawn by Rama supposes a distinction, within the historical process, between a first "institutional" or "sociological" moment of cultural autonomy—that is, the consolidation of the literary system at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth—and a later moment, better understood as formal and aesthetic; namely, the conquest of a strict artistic autonomy at the level of the works themselves. It is important to note that this conquest was not won by one author or another but was rather a general aspect of transcultural narrative, and, furthermore, was a conquest of Latin American New Narrative as a modernist movement. This fact, characteristic of the formation's second, "modernist" moment, would come to enhance through formal immanence the conciliatory project started by the literary system. Such a move would offer a wider margin in which to experiment with artistic solutions, addressing a second modern organicity beyond the developmentalist cycle's inorganic dualisms.

In the 1970s, the explanatory force of the transcultural model was such that it appeared in a very similar way in the form of Candido's work on the theory of "super-regionalism" (195).¹⁶ Just as in Rama's work, Candido's scheme supposed a strong dualism which was part of what he called the "lacerated consciousness of underdevelopment" (195). Once more, the mediation of extremes was attributed to the artistic form, whose crafters were the same as the ones mentioned in Rama's theory of transculturation: mainly Guimarães Rosa, Rulfo, and Arguedas. According to Candido, such writers were producers of a "new kind of literature, which still addresses in a transfigurative way the subject which was once nativism" (196).¹⁷ In addition to the lexical similarity between them (transfiguration/transculturation), it is important to note how the key concepts of Candido and Rama were the same. Ultimately, for both, transcultural literature would represent a form of the oscillations between old regionalism and modernism, making it possible to preserve, in a "super-regionalist" way, what modernization was supposed to annihilate (that is, the old regionalism).

Indeed, Rama quickly perceived the interchange of categories and sent a letter to his Brazilian friend (dated November 8, 1973), in which he acknowledged and enthusiastically celebrated the convergence. Rama wrote:

It amazes me how we walk through parallel tracks, which, I believe, is due to similar critical perspectives. I entirely agree with the thesis that progressively brings you from the shift in the thirties from the new country consciousness to the underdeveloped country consciousness in a new perspective which you call super-regionalism. That is exactly what I suggested—under the title, “The Transculturators of Narrative”—could be one of the topics of the seminar in my visit to São Paulo, so that your paper itself can be the basis for the debate.¹⁸ (38)

But if the transculturation model is the most influential version of the dialectic between universalism and localism in Rama’s work, there is also a lesser-known version of the critic’s theoretical approach to New Narrative which, from our point of view, is complementary and deserves more attention: the theory of “technification.” This theory addresses all the works of the movement we are discussing, not only the ones that prioritize regional subject matter. Although it has no equivalent in Candido’s work, Rama used this theory to address the same strategy of formation as mediation and conciliation, and, in this sense, can be understood as part of the reflections Candido and Rama shared about the Latin American novels of the 1950s and 1960s.

Late Modernism and Narrative Technification

Before dealing with Rama’s theory of technification, it is time to present the major art-historical category in which we have based our general approach to the New Narrative: the notion of “late modernism.” In *A Singular Modernity* (2002), Fredric Jameson argued that, during the decades that followed 1945, the world witnessed a revival of modernist formal devices and ideologies stemming from the artistic movements of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. He proposed calling the latter “high modernism,” and its post-1945 renewal, “late modernism”. According to Jameson, late modernism developed as an uneven international movement that responded to different national and regional situations. Nonetheless, common to all was a stress on artistic technique and formal mastery; and, on a more fundamental level, a strong defense of the principle of artistic autonomy inherited from high modernism. This principle functioned, to a greater or lesser extent, as an aesthetic ideology or doctrine, giving way, in many cases, to formalist art and formalist critique.¹⁹

Although Jameson claimed that, as a global movement, late modernism presented an uneven development, he did not refer with any detail to cases outside the core regions (United States and Europe). In the present article,

intending to complement this international framework, our strategy has been to approach Latin American New Narrative—its works as well as its theory—as an important peripheral variant of late modernism. In so doing, we hope to specify some singularities that would support the idea of an uneven global development. This unevenness, though suggested by Jameson, has not been, to our knowledge, worked through on a wider world frame.²⁰

As we have argued, and will continue in the pages that follow, in Rama and Candido's approach to the New Narrative, strong artistic autonomy was not theorized in opposition to extra-artistic content. Rather, they assumed that in achieved artistic autonomy, authors and readers could (and should) sense a local quest for cultural, political and economic autonomy. This quest, we have suggested, was theorized as the second step of a project of local formation that sought to combine and reconcile, within modernist literary forms, both international and regional impulses. Thus, despite their major concern with artistic form, the version of late modernism advanced by Rama and Candido had little in common with aestheticist doctrines of art for art's sake. For these critics, it seemed possible to assert, simultaneously, strong artistic autonomy and strong social function. In the last section, we noted an implicit connection between these seemingly opposed programs at the base of the "transculturation" theory. In this section, we will focus on how it presented itself in Angel Rama's theory of "technification," a theory that addresses another fundamental dimension of the New Narrative: an unprecedented local fascination with literary technique.

Rama elaborated this technicist tendency at length in a monographic 1981 essay with the title "La tecnificación narrativa."²¹ In this text, the critic resumes and expands a set of ideas first presented in his earlier essay, "Diez problemas para el novelista latinoamericano" (1964).²² According to Rama, from the 1940s onwards, in the historical context of local developmentalism and global technological revolution, the most advanced Latin American novelists sought technical models in modernist authors such as Joyce, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Musil, Hemingway, and Kafka. These international authors created "a set of technical innovations that transformed literature, but although they are intimately intertwined, in many cases, despite the essential unity of the work of art, they allow for curious transfers and instructive transformations" (84).²³ In Rama's account, the experimentation with such transfers and transformations would have reached a systematic and general character in local literature during the 1950s and 1960s: "Lately we have seen the invasion of these forms in Latin America, in the young generation of the big cities" (84).²⁴ Thus, Rama understood New Narrative as a movement initiated in the 1940s that actualized a set of formal devices drawn from first generation European and US modernist authors. Furthermore, he asserts that the standpoint from which this revival emerged was that of technicism.

Seeking an early model of the technicist impulse in Latin American New

Narrative, Rama rescued a brief excerpt published in 1939 by the young Juan Carlos Onetti in the journal *Marcha* of Montevideo. This article, written at an initial stage of local developmentalism, argued for a collective catching-up effort in both artistic and economic terms:

Importing from there (from Europe) what we do not have—technics, craft, seriousness—but nothing more than that. Apply these qualities to our reality and trust the rest will be given to us as a result. It is clear that all this careless criticism does not bother the leftist writers who—because of their nobility, disinterest, and modesty—have despised the bizantynisms of style and of technique.²⁵ (336)

In Rama's view, this excerpt is an example of the most basic and naïve conception of peripheral literary technification, which he calls "technical operative model" (347).²⁶ According to this model, artistic techniques constitute a neutral and universal repertoire, applicable to any material, under the optimistic assumption that the outcome would be, by necessity, positive. The writer isolates and appropriates techniques as if they were "a mode of intellectual work, that corresponds to international common law" (340). In opposition to neutral technique, local material would retain "a kind of privacy or interiority" (340).²⁷ The operative model, according to Rama, undermines the capacity of the writer to perceive the "forceful bonds [of artistic technique] with the material" leading to a fetishization of technique: a formalist *tour de force* in order to catch-up with the modernist production of Europe and the United States (325).²⁸

In a classical materialist fashion, Rama seems to approach the relationship between artistic technique and local material as if it corresponded to that between productive forces and nature. In his view, within a peripheral context, the process of technification unfolds in a singular manner. In the technique-producing core, the relationship between technique and local material would develop in a more organic vein, the former being produced in the same context as the latter. By contrast, in the developmentalist periphery, a structural unevenness expresses itself once again during the process of importing foreign technique to update local modernization. According to Rama, the Latin American writer should elaborate and correct this unevenness within modernist literary form. In his words: "There is a *décalage* that a novelist *must know how to resolve*" (87, emphasis added).²⁹ It should be noticed that, as in "transculturation," Rama presents post-1945 Latin American literary technification as if it were a new phase of the formation project: one that demanded that writers mediate and attenuate the intense unevenness that peripheral modernization produces (and reproduces). In his theory of technification, local writers bear the responsibility to "resolve" technically produced *décalages*.

Thus, reading the New Narrative from the perspective of this process of technification, Ángel Rama championed those literary works that sought formal balance and equilibrium between foreign technique and local material. After a first moment of naïve fascination and “sacralization of techniques” (corresponding to the aforementioned “operative model”), the local novelist should adopt a more mature attitude, which would allow him or her to introduce the same devices, now properly mastered, as one more element in the overall composition.³⁰ Rama presented García Márquez and the late Onetti as models for this mature attitude towards technique. Focusing on the latter, we could suggest that, while the interest of a novella such as *Los adioses* (1954) seems grounded in a spectacular and baffling control of point of view technique (*à la* Henry James), producing a game of snares for the reader, works like *Una tumba sin nombre* (1959) or *El astillero* (1962) reveal a technical mastery that, without losing its force, passes to the background, giving way to a more balanced overall form. We can observe an analogous path in García Márquez. If the presentation of consciousness through modernist formal devices seemed the fundamental concern in a story like “Monólogo de Isabel viendo llover en Macondo” (1955), in *Cien años de soledad* (1967) the author reached an extraordinary formal balance and consistency, presupposing rather than showing off his technical mastery of the medium. As a critic, Rama made a strong defense of this mature attitude towards literary technique, always within the framework of formation.

However, in the last part of the 1981 essay, Rama focuses on a second path of technification that we will call the *strident path*. The critic advanced a weaker and more hesitant defense of this particular path. His major example is *La casa verde* (1966) by the young Mario Vargas Llosa. It could be said that this novel repeated, in a more advanced moment of peripheral technification, the catching-up logic proper to the operative model. Nevertheless, in *La casa verde*, a strong and exuberant technical impulse coexists with an equally intense effort at probing local material. Far from a mere technicist formalism, Vargas Llosa seems to have worked rigorously within the formative program that Rama defended for the New Narrative: seeking to reconcile, in a consistent literary form, the lacerating dualisms resulting from the gap between international up-to-date technique and local material. But, in this case, the result turned out, according to the Uruguayan critic, strident and unbalanced (the Spanish term used by Rama is the word “chirriante,” or shrill):

Problems of the Stone Age and narrative technics of the Electronic Age enter into collision in *La casa verde*, unable to reach an equilibrium, and this is what constitutes the specificity of the invention of Vargas Llosa, the originality of his gambit, that is, the assumption of the conflict is carried out at the

level of writing. Given that the plane in which problems and techniques collide is that of narrative language . . . his project implies a modernization of perspective that acknowledges a crystalized reality, appearing thus as a system of revelation. In fact, *this writing consigns a protest*.³¹ (388)

In this passage, we believe it important to notice a brief departure, or deviation, from the orthodox project of formation. Instead of rejecting *La casa verde* for not achieving balanced form, for not being able to point to a possible reconciliation of intense unevenness, Rama realizes that, in this case, there is something eloquent and true about formal dissonance: he feels, and judges, against his main defense of the balanced path, that in this strident form a “protest” has been consigned.

We would like to suggest that this unexpected aesthetic judgement finds its historical basis in a negative diagnosis of the Latin American developmentalist project that Rama presented in this same essay. From the standpoint of 1981, the Uruguayan critic changed, or hardened, his evaluation of recent regional modernization, arguing that the developmental illusions of the recent past

obscured the perception of the constraints derived from the dependent context in which the continent operated, the backwardness in the Latin American economy and the vertiginous progress the imperialist centers would meet, from already higher levels, once the technological revolution was triggered. This placed the imbalance at new levels, increasing rather than diminishing the power of the structured global economy.³² (337)

Such a diagnosis was in tune with an increasing number of negative reappraisals of Latin American developmentalism that, from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, began to arise in the fields of sociology, economics, history and critical theory. In these reappraisals it was argued that the catching-up logic that, from a regional point of view, appeared so promising in the 1940s and 1950s, was a grand illusion.³³ Once the global picture was factored in (particularly the determinant role that the technological-cybernetic revolution led by the core countries would play in structuring the world political economy in the second half of the twentieth century), the Latin American developmentalist effort appeared, retrospectively, in a much gloomier light. Such a pessimistic perspective certainly was not in sight for the collective that undertook the modernization project and for the authors and critics that engaged in late modernist movements.

If, retrospectively, we accept some version of this negative diagnosis of Lat-

in American developmentalism, it follows that Rama's defense of a balanced and organic form of literary technification will easily appear to the contemporary mind as unconvincing and, perhaps, doctrinaire. Subject to the modernizing rhythms imposed by the core countries, the gap or mismatch between advanced technique and local material, far from diminishing, seemed only to increase during the 1960s and 1970s. Given this tendency, a change of the symbolic valence of the process of technification in the cultural and artistic spheres would seem natural. Rather than signifying, or standing for, an autonomous modernization project (as it did for the young Onetti and his post-1945 generation), shouldn't up-to-date technique start to signal, at some point in the process, a movement of international integration with a disadvantageous character? A subordination? In such a case, we should not be surprised to notice that, at some point in the literary trajectory of many authors guided by the principle "resolve the *décalage*," there is the emergence of formal deadlocks and a sense of impossibility, of the absurd, of frustration and of melancholy.

The uneasy, ambivalent, and seemingly irresolvable peripheral relationship with advanced technique points to the limitations of Rama's demand for a late modernism regulated by the idea of taming and reconciling in modernist form the mismatches of the social process rather than stressing the dissonances. It is worth noting that, in the 1981 essay, despite having incorporated the mentioned negative diagnosis, Rama did not substantially modify his defense of a balanced path of literary technification. However, his hesitations when referring to the alternative, *strident*, path of artistic technification seem to point toward a formal possibility that, as we will argue in the next section, opens new ways of thinking about Latin American New Narrative beyond the orthodoxies of the model of formation.

Summarizing: we have argued that Ángel Rama and Antonio Candido established categories that are necessary for an understanding of what Latin American New Narrative was, and what it stood for, as a literary movement. It was, in our view, a peripheral variant of late modernism that thrived within a collective formation project, that, during the post-1945 period, was intertwined with developmentalist illusions that had national as well as regional content. We believe that this literary movement can be understood as basically sustained by two important social-historical assumptions: (1) a connection between the principle of aesthetic autonomy and the project of political and economic autonomy (national and regional); (2) a connection between artistic technification and the developmentalist project that, initiated in a naïve and optimistic "operative model", would gain, in its confrontation with local material and local social experience, a political dimension that resists mere application of up-to-date techniques.

A Dissonant Approach to Latin American New Narrative

The pertinence of the conciliatory requirement in the formation's classic line of thought presupposed a process of modernization that was both positive and viable on the grounds that it could create higher levels of social integration and organicity. However, as we already mentioned, the historical process went through a different route, thus forcing a change of diagnosis (a diagnosis which Rama shared to some extent). To describe how this occurred, we will focus our analysis specifically on the change of assumptions brought about in Latin America by military dictatorships, mainly after the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil. In his classic text, "Cultura e Política, 1964-1969."³⁴ Originally published in 1970, Roberto Schwarz argued that the autonomous development cycle of the sixties was over and had come to an "imperialist integration . . . which modernized the country's economy for its own ends" and thus this new period of "modernization, once liberating and national, took the form of submission" (87). Furthermore, the meaning of the year 1964 would not only be national, but regional: "In 1964, the military regime was established in Brazil to buttress the capital and the continent against communism" (71).³⁵

This fundamental fact shifted the meaning of national progress to the right, draining the possibilities of autonomous formation and promoting a new sort of national development submissive to imperialism and deprived of its original integrative sense (the ultimate example being Pinochet's Chile, which, from the seventies on, turned out to be a neoliberal laboratory for the "Chicago boys"). Amid the onset of this new cycle, the widespread social disintegration that followed the Latin American coups increased significantly in the seventies and eighties, which, in the realm of literature, spawned work from new theorists.

In this new scenario, suggesting a dialectical movement of conservation and breakthrough following the model originally proposed by Candido, Roberto Schwarz wrote, at the turn of the millennium, that the idea of formation,

which is also an ideal, lost its meaning, disqualified by the course of history. The nation won't be formed, its parts will become detached from one another, the "advanced" sector of Brazilian society has already been integrated into the most modern dynamic of the international order and will leave the rest by the wayside.³⁶ (57)

Nonetheless, the few elements of modernization that were formed—in the areas of culture and literature—could then be "used in the market of cultural differences or even in tourism" (57). After all, they were illusions that "it would

be better to abandon” “for the sake of realism” (57).³⁷

Such considerations about the dead ends of formation also have a retrospective value: the New Narrative and its theorists were investing in an unfeasible project. And although Candido and Rama had accounted for the possibility of the failure of autonomous modernization, thus hesitating to advocate it as if it were inevitable, neither considerably changed his general aesthetic position on the matter, and thus they both continued to focus on the conciliatory assumptions of the formative project. Today, in contrast, for a theory of late modernism, such reflection comes across as narrow, requiring a revision to face the new historical moment.

On this question, it is important to say that, despite having realized the consequences that the shift of diagnosis could have for literary criticism, Schwarz himself has not elaborated a systematic way to reappraise the late modernist novels written in Brazil during the fifties and sixties. Instead, after identifying the contradictions of an innocent technification in the Brazilian movement “tropicalismo,” he turned at length to the mature work of Machado de Assis in search of a dissonant and caustic formal model better tuned to grasp and illuminate the complexities of Brazilian (and Latin American) failed modernization and formation.³⁸ He would later place emphasis on narratives from the eighties and nineties—such as *O nome do bispo* (1985), by Zulmira Ribeiro Tavares or *Estorvo* (1991) by Chico Buarque—which were published after the idea of formation tout court had already been discarded.

Thus, having identified the change in scenario, Schwarz suggested a corresponding change of orientation concerning artistic form and critical discourse. In relation to what we have called Latin American New Narrative, it would be possible to start from Schwarz’s ambivalent diagnosis of the formative process, studying not the conciliatory orientation but rather the dissonant structure of the literary works themselves. After all, in this case of peripheral late modernism, the inorganic tendencies which Rama and Candido highlighted as a starting point to be overcome, didn’t become more controllable or less lacerating, but rather intensified to the point of inducing a terminal crisis for the New Narrative.

This breaking point appears at the highest intensity in a work like *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (1971) by José María Arguedas, written at the beginning of the sixties. Raising to extreme limits features of the “strident” line which Rama has noted in the first works of Vargas Llosa, Arguedas’s last novel reveals the dead ends of the conciliatory notion of formation. In this work, the author intended to narrate the process of modernization of the Peruvian seaside which, in a few decades, stimulated by North American investments, would become the biggest fishing industry in the world by the seventies. The novelist’s idea, which was loyal to his literary project, was to have two characters of mythical folklore—the fox from above (from the indigenous pre-modern *si-*

erra) and the fox from below (which had come from the seaside and witnessed the modernization)—as a narrative frame. However, the narrated content itself seems to overwhelm the possibility of narrating, exploding the autonomous form, which shatters into autobiographical diaries of the writer telling about his own painful process of depression and suicide. At the same time, the diaries dramatize, as a counterpoint to the fictional chapters, the impossibility of finding formal solutions to narrate the heterogeneous and inorganic development of the region. When defending the hypothesis of an ultimate rupture by Arguedas with the assumptions of what we have called late modernism, the British critic Jean Franco sees the writer's posthumous novel as a dead end for the principle of aesthetic autonomy: "Clearly the autonomy of the literary text on which the modernist project had been based and within which national projects had been contained was by now irreparably damaged" (11).³⁹

Paying attention to this heterogeneous and inorganic tendency of autonomous modernization, which radically explodes from the sixties on, it seems important to rethink the function of the principle of narrative's autonomy. Narrative, from this point of view, would not be a balanced and conciliatory element, as Candido and Rama thought, but rather a formal model capable—at least during the cycle of democratic national development—of containing dualist struggles which would become increasingly lacerating. In this case, a theory of late modernism focused on the other side of the formative process would be able to reconsider the modernist form in light of its capacity to scan the contradictions of the period's historical subject matter. From this perspective, the New Narrative, placed in the literary formation, would be seen from an angle of incomplete formation; that is, as a group of works which, even when they reach a high level of coherence and formal balance, demonstrate through their plot and other formal mechanisms the impossibility of modern autonomous subjects and communities.⁴⁰

Within this critical perspective, it would be possible to rethink the case of works such as *El astillero* (1962) and *Cien años de soledad* (1967), taken by Rama as paradigms of high formal coherence and aesthetic autonomy. In Onetti's novel, for instance, the complex elaboration of historical subject matter—the stagnation of modernization projects in the region of the Río de la Plata (Uruguay and Argentina)—displaces the problem of artistic techniques to a secondary plane. Nevertheless, frustrated socioeconomic technification becomes the main theme of the plot: a huge shipyard with a glorious past is kept running by the main character Larsen – the manager – who willingly ignores the fact that the company has gone bankrupt. The "regular" functioning of the modern structure of the shipyard, then, becomes a cynical fiction which the novel's hero, the workers, and the population of the town keep alive so that they don't have to admit the ultimate end of their illusions in a modernizing cycle which, in the narrative, has already ended. Thus, the shipyard workers com-

pensate for the non-existence of wages by selling the shipyard's old-fashioned machinery to Russians – who were also, by that time, beginning to lose ground in the technological race led by the West. That is, formally speaking, the novel is modern, fully achieved and consistent; however, the plot's content goes in the opposite direction. Here, with no formal stridency, the modernist work of Onetti reveals a tough internal contradiction clearly linked to the dead ends of local formation and modernization.

The same could be said about *Cien años de soledad* – a novel of impressive technical coherence, which borrows narrative procedures from Borges, but tells the story of the frustrated modernization process of Macondo. After a series of interrupted projects and civil wars and after a period of bloody imperialist exploitation by a transnational rural company, the fictional universe of García Márquez ends up isolated until the coming of a deadly hurricane which destroys the town while its last character is eaten alive by ants. As in Onetti's novel, the modernist work tells a story of historical defeat.

To read Latin American late modernism from the standpoint of dissonance (whether emphasizing the contradiction between achieved modernist form and a content that keeps referring to disastrous modernization, as in Onetti and García Márquez, or emphasizing formal stridency, as in Vargas Llosa and Arguedas) is, perhaps, better tuned to contemporary minds well aware of the shortcomings and failures of local (and global) modernist projects. A close reading of the best works of the New Narrative, a reading sensitive to their contradictions and formal dissonance, reveals that these authors were far from naïve about the illusions of modernization.

Conclusion

The reappraisal of Latin American New Narrative, from the standpoint of dissonance, could count as an intervention, among others, for a renewed discussion on the category of autonomy, whose possible survival or transformation, seems to be a key critical issue of our contemporaneity. It could also, in this sense, contribute to renewing interest in Latin American novels of the 1950s and 1960s that registered an important period in the history of the continent and, currently, seem relegated to a place of less prestige among critics, who understand them sometimes in terms of a technical developmentalism that History has undermined, sometimes in terms of concepts that contribute to confusing the debate (such as “magical realism,” among others).

Like few other places, Latin America has writers whose claims to literary autonomy have revealed interesting tensions for understanding a complex and conflicting historical process of global and local modernization. Renewing the discussion about this process (both literary and historical) may perhaps allow new understandings of Latin American New Narrative as a fascinating and

contradictory case of late modernism, in a context in which concepts such as “development” and “modernization” already seem anachronistic, and in which contemporary critics and writers of different orientations tend to discard the notion of autonomy altogether, without fully understanding its complexities and the critical contents it was able to express during our crucial developmental period.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of the arguments developed in this article was published in Portuguese in *Revista Garrafa* 17, no.48 (2019). <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/garrafa/article/view/30771>. The authors translated this article for *FORMA*, making minor alterations to the original essay.

² Antonio Candido, *Formação da Literatura Brasileira. (Momentos decisivos)* (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro Sobre Azul, 2013).

³ Antonio Candido, *O olhar crítico de Ángel Rama, Recortes* (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro Sobre Azul, 2004), 164. “dos raros homens insubstituíveis, porque sem eles as coisas não se farão tão bem como se fariam com eles.”

⁴ See: Idelber Avelar, *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵ See: Josefina Ludmer, “Literaturas postautónomas,” *CiberLetras: Revista de Crítica Literaria y de Cultura* 17 (2007); and Josefina Ludmer, *Aquí América Latina. Una especulación* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2010).

⁶ Candido, *Formação*, 25. “estudar a formação da literatura brasileira como síntese de tendências universalistas e particularistas.”

⁷ Candido, *Formação*, 25. “sistema literário;” “um conjunto de produtores literários, mais ou menos conscientes do seu papel;” “conjunto de receptores, formando os diferentes tipos de público;” “mecanismo transmissor (de modo geral, uma linguagem, traduzida em estilos), que liga uns a outros.”

⁸ Candido, *Formação*, 25. “Quando a atividade dos escritores de um dado período se integra em tal sistema, ocorre outro elemento decisivo: a formação da continuidade literária, - espécie de transmissão da tocha entre corredores, que assegura no tempo o movimento conjunto, definindo os lineamentos de um todo.”

⁹ It is possible to understand the project of formation as a moment of enlightenment and critic towards a local experience of dualism. This is, for instance, the line of thought developed by Brazilian philosopher Paulo Arantes in his work *Sentimento da dialética na experiência intelectual brasileira: Dialética e dualidade segundo Antonio Candido e Roberto Schwarz*. Arantes points out that theories that were unable to go beyond dualism worked as ideologies specific to the dependent context: “dualism . . . Before an economic model, a sociological category or a historical interpretation key, dualism was the expression of a collective experience. Let us say the sense of oppositions is part of the same experience, in which ‘dualism,’ in its strict meaning, was an ideological transcription based on appearance” (22-23). “o dualismo . . . antes de se tornar modelo econômico, tipologia sociológica ou chave de interpretação histórica, foi sobretudo expressão de uma experiência coletiva. Digamos que o senso dos con-

trários é parte desta mesma experiência, da qual o ‘dualismo’, em sua acepção estrita, foi transcrição ideológica bem fundada na aparência” (22-23). See: Paulo Arantes, *Sentimento da dialética na experiência intelectual brasileira. Dialética e dualidade segundo Antonio Candido e Roberto Schwarz* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1992).

¹⁰ See: Ángel Rama, “Los procesos de transculturación en la narrativa latinoamericana,” *La novela en América Latina. Panoramas 1920-1980* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2008).

¹¹ In his seminal work *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Ortiz stated: “We understand that the term transculturation expresses better the different phases of the transitive process from one culture to another, because this does not only consist of acquiring a culture, which is what the Anglo-American acculturation term indicates, but the process necessarily implies the loss or rootlessness of a preceding culture, what could be termed a partial deculturation, and, in addition, means the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena that could be called neoculturation” (90). “Entendemos que el vocablo *transculturación* expresa mejor las diferentes fases del proceso transitivo de una cultura a otra, porque éste no consiste solamente en adquirir una cultura, que es lo que en rigor indica la voz angloamericana *aculturación*, sino que el proceso implica también necesariamente la pérdida o desarraigo de una cultura precedente, lo que pudiera decirse una parcial *desculturación*, y, además, significa la consiguiente creación de nuevos fenómenos culturales que pudieran denominarse *neoculturación*” (90). See: Fernando Ortíz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983).

¹² Rama, “Los procesos de transculturación,” 231. “o retroceder y morir o morir ya.”

¹³ Rama, “Los procesos de transculturación,” 243. “el diálogo entre el regionalista y el modernista, se entabla a través de una estructura semiconsolidada: la del sistema literario latinoamericano, entendido como un campo de integración y mediación, con una funcionalidad capaz de autorregulación en un margen considerable.”

¹⁴ Rama, “Los procesos de transculturación,” 237. “En el área lingüística brasileña, la obra monumental de João Guimarães Rosa representa la perfeccionada elaboración de las aportaciones dialectales, elevadas a unidades de una estructuración que es *minuciosamente regida por principios de composición artística*.” “Si hay visible renuncia a lenguas y dialectos regionales, hay simultáneamente un esfuerzo de recuperarlos dentro del discurso literario”; “En este nivel, la contribución original de los transculturadores consiste en la unificación lingüística del texto literario, respondiendo a *los principios de unificación artística* pero utilizando en substitución de una lengua compuesta y aprendida, la suya propia.”

¹⁵ “Internal coherence,” “total integrity of the composition,” are some of the words used by Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz in his work *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo: Machado de Assis* to refer to the high level of formal autonomy reached by Flaubert and lately transmitted to modernist tradition. The statements of Schwarz

may help to clarify the logic of the strict autonomy principle conquered by Latin American New Narrative: “The force goes from the author or from the ideas to the internal coherence, whose densification, total if possible, once transformed into aesthetic object, gives way to a novel written with the care of poetry” (182); “The total integrity of composition, with no sacrifice of the daily matter, becomes part of the aesthetic hit also as the privileged object of critical reflection” (183). “A força caucionadora passa do autor ou das ideias para a consistência interna, cujo adensamento, total na medida do possível, transformado em objetivo estético, leva ao romance escrito com os cuidados da poesia”; “A integridade total da composição, sem sacrifício da parte de acaso na matéria cotidiana, passa a ser penhor do acerto estético e o objeto privilegiado da reflexão crítica” (183). See: *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo: Machado de Assis* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2012).

¹⁶ See: Antonio Candido, *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento: A educação pela noite* (Rio de Janeiro: Ouro Sobre Azul, 2011), 195. “superregionalismo.”

¹⁷ Candido, *Literatura e subdesenvolvimento*, 196. “consciência dilacerada do subdesenvolvimento;” “espécie nova de literatura, que ainda se articula de modo transfigurador com o próprio material daquilo que um dia foi o nativismo.”

¹⁸ Ángel Rama, “Segunda Carta: Sobre o Primeiro Número da Revista Argumento,” *Literatura e Cultura na América Latina* (São Paulo: Edusp, 2001), 38. “Me produce cierto asombro comprobar como caminamos por sendas paralelas, que creo se deben a perspectivas críticas similares. Enteramente de acuerdo con la tesis que te conduce progresivamente del cambio hacia el 30 del país nuevo al país subdesarrollado y a una valoración que rescata el regionalismo en una nueva perspectiva que tú llamas superregionalismo. Eso mismo es lo que bajo el título de los transculturadores de la narrativa te proponía como uno de los temas del seminario en mi visita a São Paulo, de tal modo que es tu artículo el que puede servir de base al debate.”

¹⁹ See: Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2012), 139-210. In relation to the argument of our essay, here are some relevant excerpts referring to the critical project that Jameson had in mind: “the ideology of modernism and of the autonomy of art is the theory of that practice we have called late modernism or neo-modernism, the survival and transformation of more properly modernist creative impulses after World War II” (197); “I will have to characterize the ‘uneven development’ of the ideology of modernism itself, the varying national situations in which in equally various forms it arose, and the quite different national ideologues who developed such forms . . . considering the various aesthetics through which an ideology of modernism emerged in the various post-1945 nation-states, as well as the artistic climate of that late modernist practice to which they most immediately corresponded” (165).

²⁰ It should be noted that to consider Latin American New Narrative as a variant of late modernism, in Jameson’s sense, demands a two-sided approach: its singularity must be sought both in the literary production of its major authors (such as Juan Car-

los Onetti, Guimarães Rosa, García Márquez, Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes) and in the theoretical orientation given, during the period, by its major critics, that is, by figures like Ángel Rama and Antonio Candido. These would be the two faces, artistic and theoretical, of this peripheral variant of late modernism.

²¹ See: Ángel Rama, “La tecnificación narrativa,” *La novela en América Latina. Panoramas 1920-1980* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2008).

²² See: Ángel Rama, “Diez problemas para el novelista latinoamericano,” *La novela en América Latina. Panoramas 1920-1980* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2008).

²³ Rama, “Diez problemas,” 84. “un conjunto de invenciones técnicas que transforman la literatura, pero que a pesar de estar muy íntimamente unidas, en muchos casos, a pesar de la unidad esencial de la obra de arte, permiten traspasos curiosos y transformaciones aleccionantes.”

²⁴ Rama, “Diez problemas,” 84. “Últimamente hemos visto la invasión de estas formas en América Latina, en la joven generación de las grandes ciudades.”

²⁵ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 336. “Importar de allí (de Europa) lo que no tenemos—técnicos, oficio, seriedad—pero nada más que eso. Aplicar estas cualidades a nuestra realidad y confiar en que el resto nos será dado por añadidura. Claro que de toda esta descuidada crítica nada se relaciona con los escritores de izquierda que—por imperio de su nobleza, desinterés y modestia—han desdeñado los bizantinismos de estilo y de técnica” (336). This excerpt sheds light not only on the origins of literary technification but on the origins of Latin American New Narrative itself, understood as a late modernist movement correlative to the developmentalist period. Moving away from the kind of social realism that Communist Parties were defending in the 1930s and 1940s (Onetti refers to left wing writers who dismiss questions of style and technique), those authors searching for a New Narrative, of modernist orientation, would champion formal competence and technique. It should be noted how easily mastery of technique in the artistic field could stand for the development of forces of production in the national-economic realm.

²⁶ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 347. “modelo operativo técnico”. Rama offers the following definition: “the metropolis produced industrial advances and the marginal areas operated them in the service of their raw materials. As Onetti would say, the technique came from Europe, the raw material was ours. With the addition, it must be noted, that the product was destined for consumption exclusively in the local region exclusively, although aiming to enter the export circuit” (338). “las metrópolis producían los adelantos industriales y las zonas marginales los operaban al servicio de sus materias primas. Como diría Onetti, la técnica venía de Europa, la materia prima era nuestra. Con el agregado, que debe realizarse, de que el producto así se destinaba al consumo de la sociedad regional exclusivamente, aunque aspirando a entrar en el circuito exportador” (338).

²⁷ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 340. “una modalidad del trabajo intelectual, propia del derecho común internacional;” “un tipo de privacidad o interioridad.”

²⁸ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 325. “forzados vínculos con la materia.”

²⁹ Rama, “Diez problemas,” 87. “Existe un *décalage* que un novelista debe saber salvar.”

³⁰ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 350. In relation to this argument, we find the following excerpts relevant: “the initial mismatch gives way to more balanced adjustments that reduce the imbalance” (350). “Initial fascinations with the technical devices opened the way to a utilization intertwined with the elaborated material” (348-349). “la inicial discordancia da paso a ajustes más equilibrados que disminuyen los desbalances;” “deslumbramientos iniciales con los recursos técnicos dieron paso a una utilización engarzada en la materia tratada.”

³¹ Rama, “La tecnificación,” 388. “Problemas de la Edad de Piedra y técnicas narrativas de la Era Electrónica entran en pugna en *La casa verde*, sin poder equilibrarse, y es eso lo que constituye lo específico de la invención de Vargas Llosa, la originalidad de su intento, a saber, la asunción del conflicto que se hace al nivel de la escritura. Dado que el plano en que coinciden problemas y técnicas es la lengua narrativa . . . su proyecto implica una modernización de la óptica que reconoce una realidad fijada, la que entonces aparece como un sistema de develación. De hecho, la escritura consigna una protesta.”

³² Rama, “La tecnificación,” 337. “oscurecieron la percepción de las limitaciones provenientes del marco dependiente en que actuaba el continente, el retraso de la economía latinoamericana y el vertiginoso avance que los centros imperiales cumplirían, a partir de niveles ya superiores, al desencadenarse la revolución tecnológica. Esta situó en otros niveles el desbalance, acrecentando en vez de disminuir, el poder de la estructurada economía mundial.”

³³ We limit ourselves to two important works that have presented this argument in a radical form. In the influential *Crítica à razão dualista* (1972), the Brazilian sociologist Francisco de Oliveira presented a critique of the developmentalist models and ideologies prevailing in circles of Brazilian intelligentsia during the post-1945 period. More recently, in *The Collapse of Modernization* (1991), the German Marxist Robert Kurz presented a catastrophic diagnosis according to which the whole late industrialization program of regions such as Latin America was structurally doomed to failure. See: Francisco de Oliveira, *Crítica à razão dualista* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2003) and Robert Kurz, *Der Kollaps der Modernisierung. Vom Zusammenbruch des Kasernensozialismus zur Krise der Weltökonomie* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1991).

³⁴ See: Roberto Schwarz, “Cultura e política, 1964-1969: Alguns esquemas,” *O pai de família e outros estudos* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008).

³⁵ Schwarz, “Cultura,” 71. “integração imperialista . . . que modernizou para os seus

propósitos a economia do país;” “a modernização, de libertadora e nacional passa a forma de submissão;” “Em 1964 instalou-se no Brasil o regime militar, a fim de garantir o capital e o continente contra o socialismo.”

³⁶ Roberto Schwarz, “Os sete fôlegos de um livro,” *Sequências brasileiras: Ensaios* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999). “que é também um ideal, perdeu o sentido, desqualificada pelo rumo da história. A nação não vai se formar, as suas partes vão se desligar umas das outras, o setor ‘avançado’ da sociedade brasileira já se integrou à dinâmica mais moderna da ordem internacional e deixará cair o resto” (57).

³⁷ Schwarz, “Os sete fôlegos,” 57. “ser utilizado no mercado das diferenças culturais, e até do turismo;” “a bem do realismo;” “melhor abandonar.”

³⁸ See Roberto Schwarz, *Ao vencedor as batatas. Forma literária e processo social nos inícios do romance brasileiro* (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades/Editora 34, 2012) and Schwarz, *Um mestre na periferia do capitalismo*.

³⁹ Jean Franco, *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ Readings of late modernism in the key of non-formation are rare, but there are some prominent cases. See: José Antonio Pasta, “O romance de Rosa. Temas do Grande Sertão e do Brasil,” *Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 55 (1999): 61; and Jean Franco, “The Black Angel of Lost Time,” *The Decline and Fall*, 138-58.