Manuel Puig and the Uncomfortable Latin American Narrative

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I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

This thesis approaches the work of Manuel Puig regarding the critical relationship that the Argentine author accounted for and established with the natural and cultural landscape of the *pampas*. Firstly, this ‘uncomfortable’ relationship serves the purpose of placing Puig’s work within the history of Latin American narrative as a crucial turning point that unveils literary and cultural rigidities of the region. Regarding the imbrication between cinema and literature it emphasises, Puig’s work would constitute a rupture with a certain canonical Latin American narrative by means of both an effective and affective political relationship set between bodies and mediascapes. I chiefly discuss and critically revisit the framework elaborated by Cuban critic Roberto González Echevarría on Latin American narrative, as well as the historical debate on culture/identity opened by D. F. Sarmiento from the nineteenth century onwards. Secondly, Puig’s ‘uncomfortable’ relationship makes it possible to address both literary and cinematic works that underline their own discontent with traditional narratives, thus raising relevant issues of territory, landscape, the national/transnational and language/translation, and, in so doing, supporting the idea of an ‘uncomfortable Latin American narrative.’ The work of Colombian Andrés Caicedo and Chilean Alberto Fuguet as well as specific films of the Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai and the Argentine Lucrecia Martel are analysed. I use the general theoretical framework and my own analysis of Puig, together with the corresponding theoretical complements, in order to approach the above mentioned authors’ respective works.
Introduction

‘Vivir en un pueblo de la Pampa seca no era la condición ideal para quien se sentía incómodo con la realidad del lugar que le había tocado en suerte’ (Puig 1985a, p. 7), writes the Argentine novelist Manuel Puig (1932-1990) at the beginning of a text that is key to understanding both his life and work. An article published and drawn upon in lectures on different occasions, even in different versions (Puig 1985a; 2001; 2012; Romero 2006), its central idea was also conveyed by Puig in several interviews. Despite slight variations, in each version the Argentine author refers to a crucial, albeit often disappointing, transit: from the *pampas* to Buenos Aires, from Argentina to Rome (Cinecittà), from cinema to literature. Variations notwithstanding, each version maintains that opening sentence; this seems to underline a striking discontent directly connected to the place where he was born.

This is the departure point of this thesis, which is devoted both to the work of Manuel Puig and other four authors and filmmakers whose works can be seen to partake of a discontent I venture to call, following Puig’s account, the uncomfortable Latin American narrative.

What is at work in Puig’s article? How does it allow us to understand both his work and the work of other authors? How do Puig’s transits resemble and at the same time destabilise foundational Latin American configurations? We need to disentangle what this ‘uncomfortable position’ consists of, to examine Puig’s ‘bad feeling’ toward the landscape of the *pampas*. More specifically, we need to track its consequences which, as we shall see, might be found both within his work, as part of its production process, and even as part of the process through which Puig becomes writer, as his own account shows us. As is known, Puig’s overlapped fields —cinema and literature— emerge from the very outset and this thesis assumes that intersection as fundamental as we need to figure out how the link between these fields has been generated. I am not referring, however, to a sheer matter of insertion, that is, to issues of the extent cinema is present in literary works. Rather, both Puig’s life and work help us to examine this affiliation not just as a blending of fields, but, rather, as particular spaces of confluence and as critical junctures reflective of Puig’s uncomfortable position with regard to Latin American literature and culture. If Puig’s work can be seen as an ‘uncomfortable narrative,’ it is because of this very set of restricted and

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quite ideological spaces Puig successively faces: the Italian neorealism rules he encounters in Rome as a cinema student at Cinecittà, the Argentine literary/cultural context on the verge of his literary debut and the canon of Latin American literature itself at that time. These spaces constitute literary and cultural landscapes, and, as I shall argue, Puig summarises them under a significant label: the dry pampas.

From this perspective, Puig’s work constitutes a privileged precedent. It enables us to understand other works/texts —either cinematic or literary— which have attempted to challenge canonical modes of representation, and in some cases even the very idea of something restrictively called ‘Latin American.’ The filmmakers and authors addressed here can be placed in conjunction with Puig’s work, as they deal with analogous overlaps as well as with similar restrictive spaces, though raising important discontents of their own. In that sense, however, Puig’s work by no means constitutes a definitive source for the authors/directors chosen, the explicit influence some of them have acknowledged notwithstanding. Their works do not replicate Puig’s position, albeit they can be related to it, that is, to their own respective critical positions within their respective literary/cinematic realms. While Alberto Fuguet’s work can be seen as influenced directly by Puig, it deals however with both cultural and linguistic landscapes strongly linked to Fuguet’s own transnational background. The work of Colombian Andrés Caicedo appears practically in parallel to Puig’s, early detaching from celebrated Latin American literature produced from the 1960s on (with the Boom generation and the context of magical realism). In a similar way, while it is possible to address the traces that Puig’s work has left upon Wong Kar-wai’s aesthetic, a film such as Happy Together (1997) raises questions (for example, in relation to hybridity and transnationalism) beyond the scope of this influence. Lucrecia Martel’s La ciénaga (2001), for its part, depicts uncomfortable bodies surrounded by a landscape just opposite to Puig’s dry pampas. What matters here, therefore, is not so much the influence as the discontent itself, which might be considered, as we shall see in the end, as prominently political.

In an article in part devoted to explain the link between cinema and literature, the first sentence Puig writes is neither related to the literary nor to the cinematic, but to the geographical. Yet it corresponds not to an allegory resorted to in order to explain something else, for Puig’s complaint has concrete coordinates. The Argentine author goes on explaining how far his provincial village was from other points of reference (Buenos Aires, the sea, the mountains), and also how he believed there was a sort of comforting oasis located in that arid town where he grew up: ‘en la pantalla del cine del pueblo se
proyectaba una realidad paralela. ¿Realidad? Durante muchos años así lo creí’ (Puig 1985a, p. 7). In fact, Puig’s work reproduces this geographical isolation, in that most of its characters suffer the rigours of harsh settings. Consequently, they look for other point of references (films, songs), so that more pleasant landscapes enter the narration through parallel realities. However, this analysis would not suffice if it did not consider that those settings become a replica of a particular zone, the pampas, a landscape defined in literary, cultural and political terms at least a century ago before Puig ‘suffers’ it. The set of pleasant landscapes brought in by Puig’s characters can certainly be discussed, as we shall see, in a similar fashion as well. What is important, therefore, is not only to understand the strictly literary elements of this geographical discontent, but also to examine how both a rejected space and substitute landscapes constitute, respectively, a criticism and a response within a broader frame. This frame, of course, should include the history of Latin American literature —which to a large extent, as we shall see, constitutes the history of a landscape—as well as the overlapping cultural/political Latin American debate—which precisely involves a discussion on the rejection of the pampas.

To properly arrange all this, what we need first is a theory of Latin American narrative. Here I draw on and critically discuss Roberto González Echevarría’s Myth and Archive. A theory of Latin American Narrative (1990), a work useful as it defines different moments of mediation. Latin American narrative would be a history of how it has been subsequently mediated by other discourses (science, anthropology) (González Echevarría 1990). Locating Puig’s work within this scheme allows us to figure out what would be both its place in it and the contribution of a work often celebrated by critics as well as by recent generations of authors, as a decisive turning point (Fresán 2004; Paz-Soldán and Castillo 2001; Speranza 2000). In Chapter 1, I argue that Puig, first and foremost, disrupts a traditional regime of representation, his work detaching thus from a set of narratives (costumbrismo, Boom, magical realism) persistently subjected to a landscape regarded as original, unique, and defined as such at least a century ago. Puig’s work, instead, introduces mediascapes, configuring an unexpected, and as we shall see, quite effective—and indeed affective—political relationship between these substitute images and its characters-spectators.

Secondly, it is crucial to define the terms of the Latin American debate. Here Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s work is doubtless the key entrance as it precisely opens the discussion, setting up the set of well known binarisms (civilisation/barbarism, city/pampas). What interests me here, however, is not to lay Puig’s work under the binary scheme; rather,
to show how Sarmiento’s work constitutes an Argentine and Latin American tradition that Puig both deals with and works from. It is not just a matter of how Puig disobeys certain cultural boundaries, but how these boundaries constrain both Puig’s work and life, therefore, how Puig manages to destabilise Sarmiento’s tradition. For our starting point is, above all, an autobiographical story about transits — and not just about oppositions — from province to city, from the *pampas* to Buenos Aires, from Argentina to Europe: ‘En Buenos Aires no existía la realidad del placer. […] Tardé muy poco tiempo en descubrir que tampoco en Roma […] existía esa ansiada realidad paralela’ (Puig 1985a, p. 7). Thus, in Chapter 2 I argue that even though Puig’s work unfolds within Sarmiento’s tradition (rejecting the *pampas*), it detaches from it to the extent that Puig feels, unlike Sarmiento, as uncomfortable in the *pampas* as at the city or at European metropolitan centres. Here the geographical aspect shows its cultural implications and its tight imbrication with those restricted realms Puig experiences and, as we shall examine, with relevant transnational and linguistic displacements involved.

This set of elements define the thesis’s first two chapters, providing a general context for the following two ones in my analysis of the works of Martel, Wong, Caicedo, and Fuguet. Unlike the first two ones, both Chapter 3, which focuses separately on Alberto Fuguet’s and Andrés Caicedo’s work, and Chapter 4, which approaches Wong Kar-wai’s and Lucrecia Martel’s oeuvre in consecutive sections, tend to address specific works. This is at least for a couple of reasons. First, in addressing specific works, this thesis achieves an important counterbalance to previous chapters, which are centred exclusively on Puig’s work critically regarding Puig’s years before his literary debut. Second, I consider that the work/films analysed stand out, respectively, as the most pertinent to be linked to the matters this thesis focuses upon.

Additional theoretical definitions will be offered throughout. Considering that what is at stake is, basically, the refusal of a determined landscape, it is relevant to regard those other substitute sceneries which, in most of Puig’s novels, seem to soften the sternness in every setting. Unlike the representation of nature that, as we shall see in Chapter 1, has historically dominated Latin American literature, Puig’s work images of nature constitute unrooted fragments provided mainly by the cinematic imagination (mediascapes). However, these fetishised depictions taken mainly from the Hollywood archive — especially tropical/Caribbean iconic images — are by no means neutral; they become an effective means of resisting those strenuous spaces Puig’s characters often endure. This leads us to the problem of how nature is represented. If Puig’s work decompresses a certain
overpresence of nature in Latin American narrative, as I argue in Chapter 1, it is worth understanding how this relationship is restated, how natural landscapes can take on other forms and roles. For this purpose, we need a helpful theory of the representation of nature. Nils Lindahl’s *Mediating Nature* (2006) offers us a suitable approach that is important to define beforehand.

Lindahl distinguishes three discourses of nature. First, the naturalist discourse, wherein nature is defined through a traditional distinction, ‘premised on a separation between the human and non-human nature, between nature and culture’ (2006, p. 18). The second one, the culturalist discourse, considers nature as culturally defined, nature is constructed as a (meta-)discourse itself, a result of seventeenth-century Western philosophy (ibid.). The third discourse, the postmodern one, regards nature not as an objective non-human reality, and not as a discursive apparatus either. Nature, instead, constitutes a hybridism beyond the culture-nature separation, involving ‘mutually imbricating elements, some of which are “other than human” or “more than human,” and whose proverbial “sum” is something other than the “parts”’ (ibid., p. 21). However, for Lindahl these discourses do not suffice, as his analysis focuses not only on the nature of nature, but specially on mass-mediated nature. The difficulty arises when, despite the synthetic postmodern approach, Lindahl needs to figure out how nature has been something taught, learned, referred to, or massively reproduced, that is, something with a significant degree of autonomy from human experience. Thus, drawing on Charles Pierce’s linguistics, Lindahl develops a perspective comprising three interrelated categories. Firstly, the nature of firstness, nature as pure virtuality and possibility: ‘The metaphors of Eden used repeatedly to describe such a nature are appropriate in so far as they emphasize the promised and promising nature of the context’ (p. 26). Secondly, nature as secondness, where it becomes ‘a matter of action and reactions’ (ibid.), of causalities and physical efforts which force an experience, nature ‘of the ant that bites explorers, of an oil palm nut that falls into a river’ (p. 27). Finally, the nature of thirdness, whereby nature becomes signs and ‘all the media by means of which nature might be represented, and/or might be made to present itself: nature re/presented’ (ibid.). These categories, however, never appear as pure, as every representation partakes of each category: ‘what varies is the “emphasis” or significance of each of these elements’ (ibid., p. 28). Moreover, as a representation field, what is primarily at work in any literary/cinematic representation is nature as thirdness. Nevertheless, in

2 As we shall see, these discourses are tacitly present in González Echevarría’s theory when it characterises different mediations Latin American narrative would have drawn from.
Puig’s work this basic thirdness is additionally emphasised by images of nature brought in through the mass-mediatic, which in turn, as we shall examine, often remarks nature as firstness, that is, as idealised, untouched realms. Lindahl’s categories, thus, provide this thesis with a conceptualisation at hand each time our text deals with the ways in which nature has been represented, helping us to understand different emphases made within the works analysed.

Since our point of departure constitutes a sort of biographical account, what matters in this thesis, as well, is the transit of a body. For it is Puig’s body that is both producing a literary work and becoming a writer. Puig’s geographical complaint, in that sense, implies not only literary/cultural elements, but bodily ones too. Puig’s uncomfortable position is not a mere abstraction, as the several actions of concrete displacement derived from the refusal of his birthplace landscape demonstrate. Puig turns his back on the pampas to enter daily into a building, the cinema theatre of that provincial town called General Villegas. Later, he hopeful moves to Buenos Aires where he nevertheless finds ‘variaciones del machismo desaforado de la Pampa’ (Puig 1985a, p. 7). In Rome, his next station, as a cinema student Puig encounters a new stringent authority in the dogmatism of Italian neorealism. As we shall see, years later, and while writing his first novel during the 1960s, Puig not only enters progressively into the rigidities of a literature riddled with historical/cultural atavisms, but he is plunged, at the same time, into an intense task as a translator (subtitler), as well as into a telling experience of transportation. Puig’s body, therefore, can be considered as an element of analysis that sheds light on the process of a budding writer who is forging his place within Latin American literature. Furthermore, the body also constitutes a decisive element in order to weigh up the set of works/films addressed, for what I call the uncomfortable Latin American narrative crucially involves uncomfortable bodies-characters at odds with their respective surroundings. Throughout the four chapters, thus, the body is understood following the conceptualisation Gilles Deleuze reconsiders on Spinoza, that is, the body defined as ‘the capacity for affecting and being affected’ (Deleuze 2005, p. 59). Here the word body does not amount only to human body, for it ‘can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity’ (ibid., p. 61). Since body is defined as a capacity, it is worth considering what this capacity consists of. What is central is the affect a body either experiences or causes to experience. Affect, in that sense, involves what any body is capable of: ‘you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement’ (p. 60). Affects so regarded, do not amount to subjective
emotions but to ‘pure “possibles”’ that are linked to a complex series of highly specific terms, such as “sensation,” “becoming,” “force,” “lines of flight,” and “deteritorialization”’ (Brinkema 2014, p. 24). Even though Deleuze’s perspective has become key to the so-called Affect Turn in humanities, I want to make it clear that I do not follow any Deleuzian approach on affects, as I concur with the critiques made on them (Leys 2011; Brinkema 2014). This thesis keeps Deleuze’s conceptualisation sticking to its definitions rather than partaking of the excesses of its interpreters.

Last but not least, a couple of concepts (already present in this Introduction) will be regularly used. Mediascape is understood as the set of representations of the world generated by media, that is, as those ‘large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes [available] to viewers throughout the world’ (Appadurai 1996, p. 35). Another important notion, a sort of current token for understanding the phenomenon of contemporaneity, is found in the transnational. Here, however, it takes on a specific meaning, regarding something crucial but ‘under-theorised in transnational studies; namely, that transnationality is a geographical term, centrally concerned with reconfigurations in relations with place, landscape and space’ (Jackson, Crang and Dwyer 2004, p. 4). The transnational, then, is not a concept necessarily opposed to the national; rather, it implies the ‘dialectical relations of the grounded and flighty, the settled and the flowing, the sticky and the smooth’ (ibid., p. 8).

The four chapters may be now briefly summarised. Chapter 1 elucidates what the place of Puig’s work within the history of Latin American narrative is, how it detaches itself from works produced through a mediation originated in the nineteenth century, and how it manages to introduce both an effective and affective sense of the political. Chapter 2 shows how Puig becomes a writer dealing with, and beset by, a series of cultural, linguistic and ideological foundational constraints, historically defined by deeply rooted binarisms, and how the Argentine author finds his way out of them. Chapter 3 shows how Alberto Fuguet displays a narrative overtly devoted to resist the traditional canon of Latin American literature (the Boom, magical realism), which is coherent with his particular transnational background, whereby linguistic questions become key to reconfiguring the literary/cultural landscape of the region. Subsequently, I address Andrés Caicedo’s ¡Que viva la música! (1977) as the urban motion of a female body besieged in a Latin American city, though constantly affected by local, foreign and hybrid mediascapes. Chapter 4 approaches Lucrecia Martel’s La ciénaga and Wong Kar-wai’s Happy Together. I regard Wong’s film as a non-Latin American cinematic text that questions the legitimacy of the national,
reconsidering traditional cinematic depictions of Latin American nature through foreign bodies in search of a landscape no longer unreachable. Martel’s *La ciénaga*, finally, is addressed as a cinematic representation which — thanks to her commitment to literary artifices — manages to critically reinvent the Latin American landscape, emancipating it from traditional narratives (*costumbrismo*/magical realism), in a way that nature becomes just a body among other bodies, both human and non-human, affecting each other.
1. The Unrooted Landscape of the Spectator

1.1 Mediascapes Against Uncomfortable Settings.

To understand the complex implications of Manuel Puig’s ‘geographical complaint,’ we should start by paying close attention to his work itself, for Puig’s adverse landscape is also that of his characters. Already in his early English-written screenplays, Puig’s characters long for more pleasant surroundings:

Cora: The places you want to visit…

David: Ah! The Caribbean first of all, and the Pacific islands after.

(Puig 1996, p. 36)

Later, Cora tells her adolescent nephew about her trips: ‘I can show you what I brought from Trinidad too: books with pictures, coral, birds of paradise feathers’ (ibid.). Ball Cancelled (1958) is set in a sort of Yorkshire country house, and this scene finishes when Cora offers David a tour of the manor woods, though he is still immersed in his tropical daydream. Waiting for a utopian opportunity to see Tobago, David reproduces Puig’s longings for more pleasant landscapes living in his birthplace General Villegas, ‘aquel pueblo de la pampa seca [dry pampas] donde pasé mi infancia’ (Roffé 1998, p. 61).

Yet from his first novel on, Puig’s characters do not resign themselves to harsh realities, finding their own strategy for overcoming unfavourable environments. In La traición de Rita Hayworth (1968), Mita’s interior monologue mixes memories with everyday life events in the arid village of Coronel Vallejos, managing to counteract charmless surroundings:

estar recorriendo un bosque, en una carroza, los bosques de Viena, cuando empiezan a despertarse los pájaros de la mañana y se levanta el sol detrás de la enramada que deja pasar pocos rayos […] ¿Cómo serán los árboles de los famosos bosques de Viena? Un poco de pasto verde gracias a las lluvias de este año en Vallejos

(Puig 1979, pp. 137-138)

Mita’s consciousness melts images drawn from a film with her own desires, though as readers we are not told whether there is any film involved. Puig gives us clues, however,
and it is possible to figure it out later: ‘¿Hacia dónde huir? el cochero sugiere los bosques de Viena y bajo la lluvia torrencial se alejan de la ciudad’ (p. 249). Here Mitas’s son Toto writes a school composition on The Great Waltz (1938), a film that portrays the life of the composer Johann Strauss II. This is precisely the film Mita has evoked earlier, and the scene Toto describes corresponds to ‘el momento climático del film, cuando se alcanza la armonía absoluta entre amor y naturaleza’ (Campos 1985, p. 80). Despite being a black and white film, Mita endows both the woods and the sunlight filtering through leaves with colour, ‘los rayos de luz amarilla clara casi blanca por entre las ramas de hojas verde oscuro’ (Puig 1979, p. 138). As it is possible to verify, Mita does not mimic the film. The image derives from the film, but the colour emanates from her; she needs somehow to embellish her surroundings, for ‘[l]a exuberancia de los bosques contrasta con la naturaleza desmedrada de Coronel Vallejos’ (Campos 1985, p. 80).

A similar ‘dry context’ characterises the surroundings of a sanatorium in Cosquín, that isolated place from where Etchepare, the protagonist of Puig’s Boquitas pintadas (1969), writes a letter to the devoted Nené: ‘acá es todo secó y no crece nada, ni llullos,3 ni plantas, que ataje el sol’ (Puig 1980, p. 107). Remembering past times while living unhappily married in Buenos Aires, Nené often listens the radio programme ‘Tango versus bolero,’ a round of musical styles. There, the lyrics of a bolero compare a tormented love affair with a tropical landscape: ‘como el barco pesquero que vuelve a su rada si las tormentas del mar Caribe no lo aniquilan’ (ibid., p. 16). Instead of emerging from a film, in this episode of BP,4 the landscape derives from a song, though the method is similar. The image described is not provided by the setting of the novel, but it is taken from elsewhere as a result of a mediation. Both types of landscapes, the woods and especially the Caribbean tropics, will be repeated throughout Puig’s work as images often emanated from its characters’ recollections.

What is important to see is that these characters’ ability underscores what Puig’s novels often lack: descriptions of lush natural landscapes as part of their settings. Such ‘lushness’ always arises from a mediator (Kunz 1994) which is usually a film appropriated, filtered and transformed by the characters’ own perspective. At the same time, the moment when images of nature arise is often the moment of a pleasant evasion, whereby the characters’ imagination demands, so to speak, natural resources for overcoming an uneasy context. The settings in Puig’s novels tend to be dry and enclosed, though always filled and

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3 The right spelling is ‘yuyos,’ as Puig characterises Etchepare’s letters ridden with orthographic errors.
4 Boquitas pintadas. From now on this is abbreviated as BP.
nurtured by the imaginative motion of characters that seem to crave for a dose of vegetation.

In *The Buenos Aires Affair* (1973), Puig moves from provincial villages to more metropolitan spaces. However, *TBA*\(^5\) shows Buenos Aires emerging as a harsh city that might even be seen as a duplication of the *pampas* described by Mita and Etchepare, just a sophisticated version of Coronel Vallejos. This appears clear when Gladys, the female protagonist, utters strong feelings related to Leo Druscovich, an art critic who is also a murderer: ‘Y avanzan los vagones de tren por la pampa, Leo vuelve a su prisión de cemento, tráfico, incesantes señales luminosas y vanidad’ (Puig 1982, p. 111). While *TBA* can be deemed as Puig’s most urban novel, its characters do not leave these iconic images of nature aside. As Kunz (1994) has analysed, in *TBA* Gladys’s erotic fantasies flow freely through a tropical daydream where ‘la evocación voluntaria del trópico está ligada directamente al sexo’ (p. 150). Additionally, it is worth noting that *TBA*’s chapters are always introduced with a dialogue taken from a film. These brief excerpts, which function as epigraphs, are not exempt of Edenic landscapes (Chapter II, Chapter XII). Here, once again, natural landscapes are not part of the setting of the novel, but just enter the narrative from pre-existent, already processed images, such as when Gladys answers an imaginary interviewer about a perfume bottle advertisement, envisaging its label full of tropical depictions (Puig 1982).

Images of nature in Puig’s work are not descriptions of a concretely located space. If any vivid landscape appears, it does so incidentally, often as a parenthesis opened in the midst of an enclosed ambiance. Since they do not constitute settings, the presence of these images is always occasional. Rather than finished spaces, they constitute remnants, clippings, pieces recollected from elsewhere. They cannot, and do not, dominate the narrative, though they appear with accuracy, meticulously placed and minutely arranged, as though they were the necessary humidity for dry, harsh settings, the *pampas* (*LTRH, BP*) or a besieged city (*TBA*).

From the multiple voices, letters, monologues, and narrative techniques, all that variety of literary resources that Puig showed since his beginnings (*LTRH, BP, TBA*), to the more economical two-voice plot of Valentín and Molina locked up in a jail —and indeed in a dialogue— in *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), harsh spaces constitute the locations Puig prefers his characters to perform in. The action of Larry and Ramírez in *Maldición*

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\(^5\) *The Buenos Aires Affair*. From now on this is abbreviated as *TBA*. 

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eterna a quien lea estas páginas (1980) unfolds in a scarcely described city, wherein an endless and stifling dialogue (Rama 1998) takes place. Even in Pubis angelical (1979), Ana’s isolation in a hospital room might be seen, once again, as a ‘confined space’ (Corbatta 1999) that only gets air through Ana’s own projections and oneiric visions. These limited spaces constitute the condition for Puig’s characters to envision mediascapes.

In EBMA⁶, mediascapes come out of films Molina narrates to Valentín. Jacques Tourneur’s Cat People (1942) is narrated first: ‘bosques oscuros, donde viven las fieras que en invierno se enloquecen de hambre y tienen que bajar a las aldeas, a matar’ (Puig 1976, p. 11). Although its atmosphere is one of suspense, Tourneur’s film does not show ‘dark woods.’ However, Molina —like Mita adding colour to the Vienna woods— articulates his narrative by distorting the original film. Yet this distortion is always an appropriation made by a biased memory. Victor Burgin (2004) has described a remembered film well: ‘Each [scene] echoes the other, increasingly merges with the other, and I experience a kind of fascinated incomprehension before the hybrid object they have become’ (p. 59). What Burgin describes is precisely Puig’s characters operation. Beyond the specific effects that Molina’s misnarration generates, what Puig describes through him is an experience related to how we can narrate, to what extent our discourse is reliable in order to evoke what we have seen, read or heard, and to what extent our discourse is eminently and necessarily distorted, that is, unfaithful to any ‘original.’

The second film narrated by Molina shows this process well, in that it directly constitutes a hybrid invention, engendered by a mix of plots taken from both Nazi, pre-Third Reich and Hollywood films (Manzi 2003; Puig 2001), a romantic story, the affair between ‘Leni y el oficial’ (Puig 1976, p. 79). Molina thus makes room, within that Argentine prison shared with the guerrillero Valentín, for bringing in mediascapes: ‘Es un muelle tropical, un muelle de una isla, y lo único que se oye es el vaivén de las olas, que lo simula la orquesta con maracas’ (ibid.). In this case, the landscape even derives not from the film setting but from a stage decoration that Molina describes as shown in the film: ‘detrás de las palmeras se ve la luna llena bordada en lentejuelas que se refleja en el mar hecho de una tela sedosa’ (ibid.). As Kunz (1994) rightly observes, Molina’s tropical view ‘es algo fabricado, “fingido”, “hecho”, sea de cartón, papel plateado o tela, sea de fotogramas alineados en una cinta de celuloide’ (p. 154), that is, nature as thirdness, a representation that in turn emphasises its Edenic quality —nature as firstness. The

⁶ El beso de la mujer araña. From now on this is abbreviated as EBMA.
artificiality, however, fills the role properly, invigorating the narration as well as the characters’ limited perspective as a result of the constricting space (the prison) that the characters inhabit. In the fourth movie narrated, mediascapes returns persistently: ‘una chica de Nueva York toma el barco a una isla del Caribe donde la espera el novio para casarse’ (Puig 1976, pp. 163-164). Here the reference comes from Jacques Tourneur’s I Walked with a Zombie (1943), a black and white film set in a Caribbean island, its plot and details once again exaggerated by Molina: ‘entre las palmeras, y es una isla preciosa con montañitas bajas, y es ahí que están los bananales’ (ibid., p. 164). Against the confinement, Molina finds ways of broadening the sight, getting this peculiar land(e)scape — both for him and for his cellmate— by opening this sort of ‘window-screen’ (Block De Behar 1991).

Fragments of the tropics appear also in Puig’s next novel Pubis angelical (1979): ‘Se asomó a su balcón enrejado y exponentes típicos de flora subtropical —bananero, palmera, ibisco, buganvilla— le ofrecieron profusión de diseño y color’ (Puig 1985b, p. 128). The character alluded to in this excerpt is Ama, an actress who is an oneiric projection of Ana. Ana, the main character, has in turn another double, an agent/prostitute impersonally called W218 who wanders throughout a science fiction story set in a post-catastrophe world. As Corbatta explains, Ana is split ‘into both an actress from the thirties who can be identified with Hedy Lamarr and an entity called W218 in the Ice Age’ (1991, p. 597). Through W218’s perspective, we know that the actress (Ama) is part of the past, namely that she lived in the pre-catastrophe world. Interestingly enough, W218’s epoch is defined in geographical terms:

Y el Supremo Gobierno había prohibido la difusión de material geográfico prepolar, no quería que los ciudadanos se sumergiesen en la nostalgia y frustración consiguientes, así como las tierras tropicales y demás habían sido sumergidas por los hielos semiderrretidos.

(Puig 1985b, p. 159)

While the tropics characterised the pre-Ice age, the current Ice age has come about as a result of severe environmental shifts. Currently submerged in melted ice, the tropics are forbidden as long as its representations might be spread as subversive geographical material. This passage is telling as regards what we have been analysing so far, for is it not Puig’s work precisely a ‘diffuser’ of this ‘geographical material,’ that is, of images of
nature drawn from mediascapes deemed, especially at the time Puig writes, as illegitimate sources for the literary (Hollywood, B-class films judged as vulgar, dismissed mass/popular culture)? As Gladys in TBA says: ‘La obra era ésa, reunir objetos despreciados’ (Puig 1982, p. 108). W218’s deserted epoch, another version of the dry _pampas_, amounts to the different contexts Puig will successively face, literary and cultural landscapes as ‘dry’ (ideologically charged, authoritarian) as his birthplace. Thus, it is this ‘literary solution’ Puig unfolds throughout his work which W218’s government has banned, that is, these second-hand, artificial tropics taken ‘directamente del repertorio mediático’ (Speranza 2000, p. 60).

Later, W218 looks for the address of LKJS, an undercover agent of an enemy government. W218 gives directions to a taxi driver, explaining that she needs to find a house nearby an evergreen tree. However, the driver explains that trees no longer exist there, and W218 promptly realises that the situation in LKJS’s country is not as promising as the male agent had described to her:

Tan borrados están los árboles de nuestra frágil memoria, que hasta hay un barrio nuevo donde las calles tienen todas nombres de Sendero de los Pinos, o Alameda de los Alerces, o Callejón de los Sauces, para que el pueblo no los olvide.

(Puig 1985b, p. 207)

Under a futurist disguise, Puig emphasises another harsh landscape in which nature becomes accessible only through its artificial evocation (street signs). However, Puig’s work does not intend to mourn any extinct ‘original nature,’ let alone to recover it; rather, it makes use of the possibilities available under such restricted conditions. Puig’s work includes images of nature only as something represented beforehand, as landscapes already processed (thirdness), unrooted or with ‘flying roots’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), that is, transnational and deterritorialised representations characterised by an Edenic quality (firstness), and drawn from the set of images that mediascapes provide.

Puig’s strategy has, then, a twofold aim. On the one hand, it recovers expressions from the past (old films, music) in order to generate a work manifestly linked with the popular, an aspect broadly addressed by criticism (Puig 2001). On the other hand, the main

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7 I address these contexts in Chapter 2.
argument pursued here so far, it seeks to insert mediascapes, idyllic images of nature (firstness) silhouetted against uncomfortable settings. However, this incorporation, as we highlighted in the Introduction, cannot be understood as an isolated literary operation. This aspect offers a significant clue to figure out why Puig’s work becomes a turning point within a Latin American narrative that, on the brink of Puig’s emergence in the late 1960s, was still enclosed, even if it sounds paradoxical, in a vast restricted space.

1.2 Crisis of Latin American Nature: From Humboldt’s Views to Puig’s Vistas.
Puig’s images of nature cannot be regarded just as the naive introduction of a literary topic. Traditionally, the inclusion of idyllic landscapes in Western literature is called the presence of locus amoenus (Curtius 1953). Puig’s mediascapes, however, situate our analysis into a more complex set of relations. They should be addressed within the context of Latin American narrative, a realm where nature has historically meant an essential presence. As Carlos Fuentes points out:


(2011, p. 16)

Yet those explorations Fuentes refers to do not constitute a haphazard phenomenon. The abovementioned works were all published during the twentieth century, and this centrality of nature would not be directly linked to the first explorers’ legacy but to a specific assimilation that occurred later. According to González Echevarría, during the nineteenth century the presence of nature in Latin American narrative has an unmistakable source: ‘science, and more specifically the scientific consciousness that expresses itself in the language of travellers who journeyed across the Continent, writing about its nature and about themselves’ (1990, p. 11). The influence of naturalistic accounts would last until the twentieth century and as a result Latin American narrative would draw heavily on
representations of nature provided by nineteenth-century scientific travellers, ‘who should rightly be considered the second discoverers of the New World’ (ibid., p. 96). These accounts cannot be regarded, however, merely as objective descriptions, for they also have value as literary works. As such, they meant a key source for modelling a nascent literature: ‘a promiscuous complicity between literature and scientific reportage that made it relatively easy for Latin American writers to assimilate these narratives’ (ibid.). Certainly, it is this literary efficacy that enables the process of absorption, Latin American narrative thus being actively moulded by these seminal depictions, stirring ‘this pilgrimage in search of Latin American historical uniqueness through the textual mediation of European science’ (ibid.). In that sense, it is possible to recognise that the main ‘mediator text’ in this process belongs to German traveller Alexander von Humboldt, who ‘sought to reinvent popular imaginings of América, and through América, of the planet itself’ (Pratt 1992, p. 119). As Pratt remarks, Humboldt’s depictions have an outstandingly moving energy. They constitute a representation of South American nature as secondness, ‘powered by life forces many of which are invisible to the human eye; a nature that dwarfs humans, commands their being, arouses their passions, defies their powers of perceptions’ (ibid., p. 120). Hence Humboldt’s work cannot be solely regarded as a cold record but as having further literary value. Humboldt’s travelogues, therefore, involve not only the ‘conceptual grid of nineteenth-century science’ (González Echevarría 1990, p. 12); they also entail an aesthetic depiction, a representation of South American landscapes filtered through remarkable literary abilities. In Humboldt’s stunning travelogues Latin American writers thus found a crucial antecedent for carrying out their own literary works.

For González Echevarría this influence can be delimited: ‘This particular mediation prevails until the crisis of the 1920s and the so-called novela de la tierra or telluric novels’ (1990, p. 12). Yet telluric novels would mean the phase of transit toward another kind of mediation: ‘anthropology. Now the promise of knowledge is to be found in a scientific discourse whose object is not the nature but essentially language and myth’ (ibid., pp. 12-13). For the Cuban critic, therefore, traditional elements addressed by anthropology replace the prominent role of nature. Under this scheme, the turning point would be Rómulo Gallegos’s Doña Bárbara (1929), in which ‘Latin American fiction is no longer determined by the naturalists’ conception of nature, but by myths of cultural beginnings’ (p. 143). Certainly, the influence of anthropological discourse seems undeniable, and González Echevarría provides several examples of how close Latin American writers were to a discipline that became ‘a given within and against which much of Latin American narrative
is written in the twentieth century’ (p. 155). What González Echevarría underscores is the well known insistence of Latin American novels in their search for primal myths and historical roots. Hence the adjective culturalista, often used to describe an important amount of works.

The distinction between these two different mediations —scientific-naturalist accounts and anthropology— allows González Echevarría to introduce his concept of ‘archival fictions,’ a category that, interestingly enough, cannot be understood outside of anthropological-mediation: ‘a literature that aspires to have a function similar to that of myth in primitive societies and that in fact imitates the forms of myth as provided by anthropological discourse’ (p. 174). However, the difference between archival fictions and narratives mediated by anthropology turns out to be unclear. More so when González Echevarría remarks that ‘[a]rchival fictions are narratives that still attempt to find the cipher of Latin American culture and identity, hence they fall within the mediation provided by anthropological discourse’ (p. 173). The distinctive element of archival fictions only becomes clearer when its author considers Alejo Carpentier’s work. If Gallego’s Doña Bárbara means a shift in the focus —from the prevalence of naturalist representations to the willingness to construct myths— Carpentier’s Los pasos perdidos (1953) would embody archival fictions’ paramount text:

a book in which all the important narrative modalities in Latin America, up to the time when it was published, are contained and analysed as in a kind of active memory; it is a repository of narrative possibilities, some obsolete, others leading up to García Márquez.

(González Echevarría 1990, p. 3)

Archival fictions would imply, therefore, a wide inventory of ways of narrating, a powerful set of knowledge. In fact, it is precisely power along with knowledge of what the so-called archival fictions seem to interweave: ‘The Archive’s capacity, its totalization, is an emblem of its power. The Archive contains all knowledge’ (p. 181). In that sense, archival fictions would constitute a sort of management of the history of Latin American literature, and this management would be embodied by a quite specific group of Latin American authors, that is, by those authors usually considered either as part of the so-called Boom or committed to a real maravilloso aesthetic. In fact, for González Echevarría the authors included in archival fictions are well known: ‘[Critics] are right in noticing the totalizing tendency, but

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they attribute it to the novel of the *boom*, when it is present since *Los pasos perdidos*’ (p. 182).

However, this set of authors and their works cannot completely eschew the presence of nature, they cannot get rid of that ‘secondness’ mediated by travelogues. As González Echevarría acknowledges: ‘It is the hegemonic model in Latin American narrative until the 1920s and appears as a strong vestige in archival fictions from *Los pasos perdidos* to *Cien años de soledad* and *Yo el Supremo*’ (p. 103). The problem is that this ‘strong vestige’ is considerably ‘strong.’ Although the presence of nature is not an element resisted by the authors González Echevarría focuses on, its very presence clearly exceeds the transition from one mediation (travelogues) to the other (anthropology). In fact, those natural landscapes absorbed by nineteenth-century Latin American writers still manage to constitute the settings of novels produced during the early second half of the twentieth century. This can be seen, for instance, in the undeniable importance that nature has in Alejo Carpentier’s definition of both the *real maravilloso* and Latin American *barroco*: ‘el enrevesamiento y la complejidad de su naturaleza y su vegetación’ (Carpentier 2002, p. 352). This complexity is even explicitly reflected in Carpentier’s *Los pasos perdidos*, in that its main character must deal with a thick rainforest, crossing the ‘gran teatro de la selva’ (Carpentier 2006, p. 282). Another example is provided by Miguel Ángel Asturias’s work, wherein descriptions of nature become crucial for building a myth of the tropics (Pailler 2003). Ostensibly grounded in concrete Caribbean landscapes, Asturias’s work delivers a clear example of how the anthropological mediation fails in leaving the very core of travelogues behind, which is its naturalistic legacy. In that sense, we even might suggest that these two mediations that González Echevarría appeals to, correspond not to any other thing but to those particular ‘discourses of nature’ that a scholar such as Lindahl (2006) identifies (see Introduction), showing how nature has been historically defined, either from a naturalist (travelogues) or from a culturalist (anthropology) discourse. Thus seen, the history of Latin American narrative would not be, as González Echevarría proposes, a transit from one mediation (archive) to another. Rather, it would be the account of how Latin American narrative has consecutively transformed, first and foremost, its way of representing nature.

Even though the Boom authors represent, to some extent, a shift, there is still an atavistic element, the pursuit of language/myth notwithstanding. In this regard, Carlos

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Fuentes’s first novel *La región más transparente*\(^9\) constitutes a symbolic case in point. It is one of the Boom’s most representative works, whose title is taken from an account on Mexico by Humboldt (Humboldt 1993). Even the explicit presence of Humboldt in *Cien años de soledad* is described by González Echevarría (1990). Thus, while the Cuban critic sees the anthropological mediation as a turning point, we should argue, instead, that a line of continuity exists that is based on the active presence of a ‘Latin American’ nature—a representation—originally mediated during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the narratives mediated by ethnology would be just a sophisticated twentieth-century version of the explorers’ accounts on exotic regions. The relationship between nature and the novel is doubtlessly modified by Gallegos’s work, though this hardly cancels out nature’s leading role: ‘el sostén primario de las novelas de Gallegos es la naturaleza’ (Fuentes 2011, p. 91). When Boom authors emerge during the 1960s, they tried to leave behind, almost programmatically, the *culturalista/criollista* novel. As Doris Sommer notes, ‘they told us categorically and repeatedly how little there was worth reading in earlier Latin American fiction’ (1993, p. 1). Nevertheless, as I uphold, nature remains as an ineluctable, constitutive element. Despite the anthropological mediation, what Boom narratives inevitably, and evidently, share with the (supposedly) old-fashioned narrative is this invasive presence of natural landscapes as settings wherein characters and actions take place. Boom/real *maravilloso* authors seem not to have ever detached from this presence, a presence as crucial as it is in the very works they were trying to surmount. Fuentes had early made a diagnosis of Latin American narrative that could well be seen as the summary of the unassailable impact of nineteenth-century travelogues:

“¡Se los tragó la selva!”, dice la frase final de *La Vorágine* de José Eustasio Rivera. […] podría ser el comentario a un largo siglo de novelas latinoamericanas: se los tragó la montaña, se los tragó la pampa, se los tragó la mina, se los tragó el río. (1969, p. 9)

Fuentes’s list, comprising different South American landscapes,\(^{10}\) is rather similar to that of Humboldt well summarised by Pratt:


Three images in particular, all canonized by Humboldt’s *Views* […] superabundant tropical forests (the Amazon and the Orinoco), snow-capped mountains (the Andean Cordillera and the volcanos of Mexico), and vast interior plains (the Venezuelan llanos and the Argentine pampas)

(Pratt 1992, p. 125)

In fact, Manuel Puig was born surrounded precisely by one of these ‘views.’

However, his work does not seem devoured by it. On the contrary, Puig turns his back on the *pampas* because it is a dry place, it even lacks a landscape as he often describes: ‘the total absence of landscape — no trees, no rain, only this grass that grows by itself which is excellent for cattle, but not people’ (Freedman 1980, p. 19). Puig’s work has practically no descriptions of the *pampas* but, as we have seen, it does contain mediascapes as a way out of harsh settings, a reproduction of the adversity Puig faces being a child as well as his longing for other landscapes: ‘yo siempre cuento la cuestión esta de la ausencia de paisaje en la pampa. Para mí siempre la máxima aspiración era la de vivir en el trópico’ (Puig 2001, p. 624). Indeed, Puig lives in a tropical environment between 1980 and 1989 in Rio de Janeiro (Levine 2000; Corbatta 1999), where he writes his last two novels. Interestingly, in both *Sangre de amor correspondido* (1982) and *Cae la noche tropical* (1988) those iconic tropical images tend to decline, for here the settings are already the tropics, though in neither of these works natural landscapes appear as protagonists to the extent that we often see in a *real maravilloso* novel (or in archival fictions for that matter). There is no need for including any ‘firstness,’ therefore — and this is key — there is no need for mediascapes. As Puig himself remarks: ‘por primera vez dichos protagonistas resultan ajenos a las influencias de las culturas populares, de los *mass media*’ (Romero 2006, p. 283). The tropics constitute the scenario (Kunz 1994), though Puig does not fall into special descriptions, for ‘los brasileños en general, poseen allá […] su propio paisaje incomparable, las colinas y el mar’ (Romero 2006, p. 292).

In a marginal note, González Echevarría states that there would be a Latin American novel not defined

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1 Of course, ‘Humboldt’s *Views*’ in the quote above, refers to canonical texts written by Alexander von Humboldt (see Pratt, op. cit., pp. 111-143). I paraphrase the term ‘view,’ only to refer to this influential set of South American landscapes produced, according to Pratt, by the work of the German naturalist.
by the nostalgia of origins or by the longing for uniqueness and identity. Only Sarduy, Manuel Puig, the remaining Boom authors García Márquez, Vargas Llosa and very few others appear to be writing this kind of fiction.

(1990, p. 221)

Undoubtedly Puig’s work cancels out the nostalgia of origins. This way, that narrative that used to bestow high relevance to nature, a process initiated in the nineteenth century and, as I have argued, still relevant to the 1960s, is severely undermined. However, this is less clear in the case of the other aforementioned authors. For instance, Severo Sarduy’s work does not seem to accomplish the type of autonomy we discuss here. More so when González Echevarría describes Sarduy’s life and work as directly linked to the anthropological discourse (ibid.). As to García Márquez and Vargas Llosa, it is known, albeit perhaps with not enough visibility, that their works suffered a significant turn after the publishing of Puig’s first two novels. In 1986, the critic Enrique Giordano already analysed Puig’s work in terms of its ‘decisiva influencia que su obra ha tenido en otros autores’ (Echavarren and Giordano 1986, p. 27). In addressing BP, Giordano also remarked on the outstanding difference between Puig’s work and those works which followed Puig’s innovations, such as Vargas Llosa’s *La tía Julia y el escribidor* (1977), García Márquez’s *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981), Donoso’s *La misteriosa desaparición de la marquesita de Loria* (1980), and ‘otras obras que han intentado seguir el camino de Puig’ (ibid., p. 28). Vargas Llosa’s literary debt to Puig, in particular, seems unquestionable also in other works such as *Historia de Mayta* (1984) (Levine 2000) and *El hablador* (1987) (Alcalá 1991), the severe verdict the Peruvian has held on Puig’s work (Vargas Llosa 2000) notwithstanding.

What is more relevant, however, is that González Echevarría’s assertion should consider Puig’s work as a decisive turning point outside of which the history of Latin American narrative, post-archival fictions, cannot be envisioned. This is because both the question of ‘origins’ and ‘uniqueness’ have no other source than the perennial reliance on a natural landscape once vividly and foundationally depicted by travelogues. The idea of a narrative beyond this mediation has been significantly opened by Puig’s work as long as it is detached from an atavistic imagining determined by Humboldt’s ‘views’. The less ‘abundant’ of these views, the *pampas*, is openly rejected by Puig, who in turn finds in mediascapes those untouched natures (firstness), pleasant artificial landscapes that lack in any harsh environment (metropolis, hospitals, jails, ‘Ice-age’). Having reached this point, we need to clarify what these very set of images consist of, and how they manage to
become effective in spite of its unrooted, fetishised feature. In other words, how Puig’s uncomfortable narrative assures its political efficacy.

1.3 The Political Nature of the Body-Spectator.
Instead of becoming an author who depicts the emptiness of the pampas, Puig fills the emptiness with the profuse though transient vegetation seen on the screen. The epoch in which Puig becomes a moviegoer corresponds to the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, and almost all films referred to decades later throughout his novels belong to this period: ‘the plusher the sets, the better. The others [non-American films] reminded me too much of what was going on in small towns’ (Freedman 1980, p. 19). American films during those decades mean films produced by Hollywood’s great studios (MGM, RKO), those witnesses of the rising of Hollywood stars, both the American and European actresses/actors who Puig was to admire (Levine 2000). This period also coincides with a specific cultural process Puig as a child experiences: ‘la implantación de la modernidad a través del cine, que entre los años treintas y cuarentas destruye el orden monótono y el cúmulo de las reiteraciones’ (Monsiváis 2000, p. 34). In a crucial sense, this Latin American modernisation via Hollywood films is, as it were, not entirely American, for Hollywood at that time ‘presented both “the real world” (New York, Chicago, London, Paris) and a romanticised paradise, a comforting universe of familiar faces’ (Levine 2000, p. 29). In fact, Hollywood undergoes a shift that has repercussions both on the screen as well as on Latin American audiences (Monsiváis 2000). From the 1930s onwards, Hollywood studios broaden their traditional aesthetic, exploring new possibilities, offering a range of nonwhite characterizations throughout the 1930s, from the “Latin Lover” roles of Ramon Novarro and Charles Boyer to the Latin, Asian, and South Seas beauties played by stars like Dolores del Rio, Lupe Velez, Dorothy Lamour, and Hedy Lamarr.

(Berry 2000, p. 110-111)

Hollywood, then, during the period that Puig plunges daily into General Villegas’s theatre, offers Latin American audiences an involvement with both Latin characterisations and visual exoticism, being precisely on these Hollywood new guidelines that Puig’s main preferences become grounded. For instance, both Lamarr and French Latin type Charles
Boyer star in *Algiers* (1938), a film often referred to by Puig (*BP, TBA, PA*). Dorothy Lamour, quoted in *TBA* using a dialogue Puig takes from the film *The Jungle Princess* (1936), is an actress who ‘became synonymous with the tropical look in subsequent films’ (ibid., pp. 120-121).

For Puig, this new tendency becomes a way of accessing an archive of images which otherwise he could have never unfolded. As Suzanne Jill Levine explains, Hollywood’s exploitation of exoticism would be reflected in film characters, settings and plots: ‘Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America as an exotic other world, a place of tropical exuberance’ (2000, p. 30). It is here, therefore, where Puig finds his main references: an exoticism that Hollywood gives back in cinematic form to a Latin American audience, fetishised landscapes generated out of the procedures involved in a process of film (re)production. Images drawn from South America, Indochina, Algiers, and so forth, not so much defined by their territorial or national authenticity (origin) as for the elements that can properly, if artificially, accomplish the exotic aim. As long as settings fit, there is no concern about authenticity, for, as Walter Benjamin famously claimed, ‘[t]he presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity’ (1968, p. 220), and cinema precisely liquidates such an original, thereby the question about authenticity ‘makes no sense’ (ibid., p. 224).

Puig endows his work with a slight exotic mood introducing deterritorialised, transnational mediascapes in the same way as Hollywood did from the 1930s on. Puig’s narrative does not give relevance to any ‘original’ landscape but to enclosed spaces which often have a momentary paradisiacal solace. Hence Puig’s work does not become exotic as most archival fictions do, in that Puig’s *partial* views cannot be anchored: they arise from an archive without ‘original.’ Detached from a traditional pattern, Puig draws mainly on his ‘vistas,’ as Puig colloquially calls films (Puig 2005). As we have seen, the importance given to these images become crucial. Puig’s characters are in and out, mediascapes locating them in an in-between zone which, in turn, constitutes the threshold that allows them a sort of liberation. How can these mediascapes achieve such an operation? How can these Hollywood ‘processed’ landscapes trigger such effects?

Since they represent nature as firstness, these images emerge as a ‘powerful sense of virtuality’ (Lindahl 2006, p. 26), that is, nature as possibility, as a real promise: ‘far from being virtual in the traditional sense of the word, promises are, precisely by virtue of being virtual, very real’ (ibid.). At the same time, this firstness becomes ‘feeling,’ and feeling here amounts to nothing else but to the ability of nature to affect, the ability for bringing
about ‘the “momentlessness” of the “timelessness” of “absolute” feeling’ (ibid.). There is a strong and, at the same time, subtle capacity in Puig’s vistas. On the one hand, we have virtuality, the possibility for events to take place, for Puig’s characters not only to remember/distort films, but to bring in virtual geographies (Rodaway 1994), ‘desubstantalised’ places (Urry 2005) as opposed to rigid spaces. In that sense, characters become film-landscapes themselves, bodies upon which a projection occurs. On the other hand, these vistas do not constitute utopian aspirations, but effective natures affecting human bodies, which in turn loosen inflexible spaces, weakening quite authoritarian landscapes. From then on, everything can happen, any virtuality can occur: a woman can heal both her body and her inner landscape (PA, LTRH); a female visual artist, whose work lacks a theoretical basis, disrupts an inflexible artistic field (TBA); a macho guerrillero opens to homosexual intercourse/a ‘queer’ body commits to the revolutionary struggle (EBMA). In other words, this ‘firstness’ in Puig becomes political, for here we realise that mediascapes do not necessarily mean a sedative intended to subdue the masses. To remember/distort a film involves a capacity: ‘It is in this power of associating and dissociating that the emancipation of the spectator consists — that is to say, the emancipation of each of us as spectator’ (Rancière 2009, p. 17). Puig’s characters embody, if par excellence, this emancipation Jacques Rancière proposes. As spectators, moreover, they do not constitute passive recipients of contents which later become actions, for there are always multiple ‘starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories’ (ibid.). The spectator is by no means an ignorant vessel who receives knowledge for transforming/understanding the world as it could have been originally intended by artists, for there is no exact separation between who performs and who watches, who writes and who reads, and so forth; that is to say, there is no gap between art on the one hand, and the unaware masses on the other. The problem is that Hollywood and its transnational images have often been conceived as mass entertainment, devoid of any enlightening intention. Even in this case, we cannot anticipate the effects of a spectacle regardless of the ‘quality’ of the spectacle itself, for emancipation here implies ‘the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body’ (ibid., p. 19). What is more, we cannot anticipate its affects, for this is, as it were, the right of any spectator, the virtuality of any body: ‘She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place’ (ibid., p. 13).
If Puig’s work becomes political, it is because it emancipates its characters as bodies-spectators, upon which other coordinates trigger new modes of existence from modes already at work (Deleuze 2005). The absence of landscape, thus, is unexpectedly subverted by images of nature borrowed from a more accessible form of spectacle: ‘A mí me interesa el espectáculo [...] Trato de escribir de una manera que repita un poco esas condiciones. El cine es inmediatamente accesible’ (Puig and Sosnowski 1973, p. 72). When Puig turns his attention away from the pampas, therefore, he not only replaces his uncomfortable original surroundings for film landscapes; he also deterritorialises himself, as his characters later recompose their respective ‘pampas.’ However, as the account of his transits tells us, Puig finds several other landscapes —literary and cultural realms— as harsh as the one he firstly flees from, other restrictions and constraints to which we now must turn our attention.
2. The Uncomfortable Landscape of Binarisms

2.1 From Sarmiento to Puig: Rejecting the *pampas* and Coming Back.

Puig’s rejection of the *pampas* means not only the refusal of a specific geography, for it is not purely that ‘dryness’ or ‘absence of landscape’ that Puig rejects. It also means a critical view of the realms Puig successively sees and experiences as highly dominated by ideological constraints. When he finishes *LTRH* during his first season in New York (1963-1967), the vicissitudes his manuscript passes through before being published (1968) grants the Argentine author an awareness of the literary field he is arriving at, and to which he does not conceal his distress:

Having just read “horrible Carlos Fuentes, *Where the Air Is Clear*, exalted by the critics,” Manuel exclaimed he couldn’t understand where he fit in “between Air France, Latino-Americanitis, Argentinitis.” What he was writing had “nothing to do with what seems to be acceptable.”

(Levine 2000, p. 182)

Here we see how Puig despises works appraised as the best produced by Latin American authors up to the late sixties. During 1966, Puig intensely reads Latin American novels, acquainting himself with a yet unfamiliar field, his personal writings showing several examples of a categorical critical judgment. Most of the works Puig dismisses are those that Carlos Barral, ‘Boom’ Spanish editor, has included in his catalogue at that time: ‘lecturas hispanoamericanas recomendadas por Barral y que son BOSTA [dung], […] basta que alguien sea marxista para que goce de su aprobación incondicional’ (Puig 2006, p. 225).

Puig’s complaint is thus raised against obsolete literary procedures, a critique also directed to the ideological climate of the moment. Yet this excerpt also shows us a sort of diagnosis, both of Puig himself as a budding writer and of the cultural context he is at that time plunged into, tightened among culturally charged zones which share the mark of national identities: Air France (the company Puig works for in New York), Latin America (the origin of the novels he dismisses), and Argentina. What Puig makes is a strongly labeled description adding an unequivocal suffix: Latin Americanitis, Argentinitis. ‘Itis,’ here, summarises his discontent. The books Puig reads are, so to speak, ‘sick with identity.’ These narratives, at that time becoming the authentic trade mark of Latin American culture,
are being reconsidered by the canon of central cultures, though they just accomplish a project long ago wrought by nineteenth-century intellectuals.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet Puig is haunted by this ‘disease’ inasmuch as he situates himself as ill-fitted. In that sense, the place of Puig might be regarded as an uncomfortable one in-between (Pauls 2012), that is, as a place in conflict with less porous zones, rigid contexts (Latin American literature/culture, Argentine tradition) which demand clear ‘definitions.’ The chief question here might be formulated in this way: How is Puig’s work shaped by this ‘in-between’ zone? Puig articulates his work not from every well-delineated cultural location, but from the space of the differences between them, which, as we shall see, affect and shape both the author and his work. This unsettling space, ultimately, is what will lead Puig to forge a narrative ‘beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities’ (Bhabha 1995, p. 2).

In criticising literary works saturated by the quest for cultural identity, Puig calls into question a tradition, and a Latin American intellectual debate, fashioned precisely within the Argentine cultural/literary context. As is known, the cornerstone of this debate is Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s legacy. Sarmiento’s \textit{Facundo o civilización y barbarie} (1845), a foundational text (Piglia 1998; Pratt 1992) characterised by its unclassifiable form (González Echevarría 1990; Sommer 1993), sets the quandary for an incipient nation-state: ‘ser o no ser salvaje’ (Sarmiento 1993, p. 12). A text-weapon used to attack Juan Manuel de Rosas’s dictatorship (Swanson 2003), \textit{Facundo} emphasises the figure of the violent gaucho, ‘a barbaric product of the land who, Sarmiento knows, is at the contradictory core of Argentinian, and by extension, Latin American culture’ (González Echevarría 1990, p. 99). Facundo, in Sarmiento’s view, inhabits an untamed empty geography, representative of Argentina’s authentic illness: ‘El mal que aqueja a la República Argentina es la extensión: el desierto la rodea por todas partes’ (Sarmiento 1993, p. 23). This description even refers us back to the first Spanish conquerors, those who contemplated ‘una “América” que no era tropical ni subtropical’ (Floria and García Belsunce 1988, p. 12), leaving on them the lasting impression of an infinite space that centuries later would become a geo-political problem to be solved (Montaldo 1994). \textit{Facundo}, thus, represents a project for codifying that ‘emptiness,’ for making a reality known, though it is still not arranged within a legitimate frame. What Sarmiento does is to organise a vaguely assumed set of information (the gaucho’s life, his traits, his surroundings), rendering it reliable knowledge. In other

\textsuperscript{12} For instance, what Andrés Bello’s project, according to Graciela Montaldo, was aimed at: ‘insertar a las jóvenes repúblicas en lo mejor de la tradición occidental legitimando su lugar en ella y creando las condiciones simbólicas para lograr un reconocimiento’ (Montaldo 1994, p. 13).
words, what Sarmiento manages to establish is an imagining of that otherness that putatively dwells beyond the borders of civilisation. Sarmiento finds a conception of the Other to establish both a cultural and concrete distance, but especially to begin forging the ideology he advocates for. If Sarmiento is the lettered man, then Facundo means the ignorant barbarian who is being officially classified/defined. Here the spatial definition is crucial, as Piglia suggests, and it constitutes the step for mutual recognition: ‘La barbarie es la metáfora de una concepción espacial de la cultura: del otro lado de la frontera están ellos, para conocerlos hay que entrar […] trasladarse imaginariamente’ (1998, p. 25). Out of this established binarism —civilisation/barbarism— begins a tradition which will permanently feed a Latin American cultural/literary barbarism by the need for definitions, for ‘anxiety of identity is […] an unresolved dilemma for much Latin American thought and culture up to this day, since the same tension between Latin Americanism and outside influence remains’ (Swanson 2004, p. 79).

Sarmiento’s work ensures its efficacy using a source regarded as measure of legitimate knowledge: the European legacy. To be civilised amounts to partaking of that background, to handle the right texts, to speak its languages. In fact, Facundo is constructed through a complex scaffolding of erudite quotes drawn from travellers, naturalists (a Humboldt’s epigraph opens its first chapter), and philosophers; that is, a whole system of reference ‘barbarians’ cannot make out. This knowledge is only attainable within metropolitan margins. Therefore Buenos Aires, in this scheme, becomes the exact contrast to the stagnant province. At the same time, if European metropoles correlate to Sarmiento’s idealisation of cities, a European civilisation’s enemy can usefully apply to the pamizados’s context too: the Orient. As authors have suggested (Altamirano and Sarlo 1997; Ramos 1988), Sarmiento would be directly working with the Orientalist archive analysed by Edward Said in his seminal Orientalism (1978). Sarmiento often compares the gauchol/pamphas with Orientals and Oriental lands depicted by Western authors who have historically dealt with Orient ‘authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it’ (Said 1995, p. 3). If Europeans have already defined their ‘barbarians,’ Sarmiento, similarly, entitles himself to establish an equivalent to what it is to be civilised.

Out of this logic, a whole set of binarisms (civilisation/barbarism, city/province-pamphas, European/Oriental) is reproduced. From Sarmiento’s work on, Latin America will be constantly attempting to ‘define’ a pathway to follow. In that sense, Latin American literature cannot avoid Sarmiento’s scheme. The identity quest, from regionalist novels to magical realism, as Swanson (2003) reminds us, has never ceased to be paramount, ‘a
central element today in much conspicuously modern (or even postmodern) fiction, as it was the central element nearly a hundred years ago’ (p. 79).

Yet, as we have seen, it seems that Puig early on detected this phenomenon during the 1960s. What Puig was perhaps not totally aware of is that his diagnosis meant a critical approach not only to a set of narratives, but also to its underlying ideology particularly. The identity obsession corresponds not to a transitory trend but to the very core of Latin American cultural/literary foundation fashioned a century ago. While Sarmiento’s work was aimed at showing the ‘right’ political/cultural route, a century later those acclaimed narratives would not offer a different view insofar as they still engage with analogous purposes:

a variation on the reading of Magical Realism is that its function is also to encourage Latin Americans to see through obfuscatory versions of their own history and identity (another kind of myth or magic) and see the reality, to assert an authentically Latin American consciousness not based on slavish adherence to foreign models. (Ibid., p. 80)

Although this attitude that Swanson observes, might be considered as a critique of Sarmiento’s idealisation of European culture, it just opens a new recommendation: the pursuing of something ‘authentically’ Latin American. The foreign here involves what is menacing for the regional, and this stance is precisely what Puig calls ‘Latino-Americanitis.’ If for Sarmiento barbarians appear beyond metropolitan borders, now the menacing otherness begins at Latin American national/regional frontiers.

Yet Puig’s work seems to share elements with Sarmiento’s. In Recuerdos de provincia (1850) Sarmiento writes: ‘En Argel me ha sorprendido la semejanza de fisonomía del gaucho argentino y del árabe’ (Sarmiento 1991, p. 36). We have mentioned the relevance that a film such as Algiers (1938) takes on in some of Puig’s novels, for Puig draws on an archive (Hollywood) that indeed comprises pieces of Orientalism. However, while Sarmiento needs the erudite culture, Puig replaces those ‘civilised’ references with ‘fragments’ extracted either from Hollywood or tango/bolero lyrics. In short: in Puig the grid is no longer erudite but popular, and it is from the cancellation of this foundational erudite archive that, in this respect, Puig’s work should be contemplated. For after a century

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13 See Chapter 1.
the Orientalist archive includes a new format (mediascapes) that Puig shrewdly takes advantage of. If in Sarmiento’s work, as Piglia states, the writer appears as the ‘civilizadora y sus textos son el escenario donde circulan y se exhiben las lecturas extranjeras’ (1980, p. 16), Puig’s work comprises transnational images which, at the time Puig writes, are closer to elements deemed as vulgar, popular, if part of a ‘barbarian,’ low-culture side. This parallel demonstrates that, rather than to categorise it using adjectives at hand, Puig’s work should be regarded, first and foremost, as a critical dialogue with the cultural/literary tradition that precedes it.

Nevertheless, we cannot consider the achievement of Puig’s work as merely a replacement at the level of archives either. Puig’s operation is still more complex, though again oddly similar to that of Sarmiento. What Puig radically accomplishes is related to the destabilising of the dichotomous world Sarmiento has carved out. In fact, Puig himself has ‘suffered’ the binarisms, and this constitutes, to a good extent, what his autobiographical story untiringly refers to, accounting the transit from that harsh village to Buenos Aires, and later, to European centres. Just as Sarmiento, Puig is uncomfortable with the pampas insofar as it signifies an unpleasant place, perhaps as barbarian as Sarmiento regarded it, exemplified by its emptiness as well as by its patriarchal violence. During the 1930s, however, this disenchanting land offered a sort of oasis: a building inside which there was both a theatre and a library (Levine 2000). Puig, at least in this site, and probably thanks to the very process of modernisation Sarmiento had once projected, can enjoy a piece of the ‘spectacular’ civilised world. In Facundo, we must observe here, the city is haunted by a deserted environment: ‘El desierto la circunda a más o menos distancia: las cerca, las opime; la naturaleza salvaje las reduce a unos estrechos oasis de civilización, enclavados en un llano inculto’ (Sarmiento 1993, p. 29, italics mine). This view is analogous to General Villegas’s context, for in the middle of nowhere cinema becomes a synecdoche of the city for Puig. Yet when he keenly moves to Buenos Aires, he does not find there any promised land. A century later, the city for Puig appears as a rather aggressive place, an environment already experienced in the province. Later, his account tells us that it is Europe now that has become his next stop, but is not this route similar to that of Sarmiento? As Sarmiento worships European culture, so Puig is keen on it at this stage. What Puig finds there, nevertheless, is a world once again split into opposite terms. In fact, the

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14 I am thinking here in terms such as pop, camp or kitsch, notwithstanding the relevance these concepts certainly have. An excellent work, for instance, that focuses on Puig’s work regarding the context of Pop Art, is Graciela Speranza’s Manuel Puig, Después del fin de la literatura (2000).
encounter between Puig and Europe occurs in an ideologically charged climate, the postwar period (1956), whose tensions are reproduced, in this case, within Italian neorealism guidelines, a cinema ‘diametralmente opuesto al cine de Hollywood, y por lo tanto se le debía oponer en todo’ (Puig 2012, p. 124). Puig’s preferences are not well received in the ‘world of cinema.’ What Puig had enjoyed as his pleasant cinematic world is now despised by the unbending concept of a socially committed cinema. As a cinema student, Puig lacks sophistication, for what is acceptable in Rome lies at the antipodes: ‘Se condenaba a Hollywood como frívolo y reaccionario, primera premisa; segunda premisa, Hollywood sabía narrar; corolario, saber narrar era reaccionario’ (ibid., p. 125). However, as Puig tells us, Cesare Zavattini’s neorealist principles promptly decay, its manifest social aims quickly falling into elitist schemes: ‘la clase trabajadora, que en Italia tenía pasión por el cine y podía pagar una entrada, no entendía ese cine que aparentemente le estaba dirigido’ (p. 128). What else might this failure of Italian neorealism that Puig glimpses mean, but the failure of the ‘binary culture’ that he has been part of since the pampas’ times? For what Puig seems to experience in Rome is the disclosure of a world constantly managed by authoritarian voices of command. We are acquainted, at this point, with the realms where Puig finds those voices (the patriarchal pampas, Buenos Aires, Zavattini’s dogmatic rules). In a way, what Puig finally manages to figure out, at this stage, is the presence of the dry pampas in every ‘landscape’ experienced so far. It is true that Puig seems to agree with Sarmiento (as to the dismissing of the pampas), but relying either on metropolitan or European values does not appear feasible. Unlike Sarmiento, Puig finds the pampas in every traditionally assumed opposite: the metropolis, the lettered culture. Even though Puig, in his beginnings, performs a similar operation, opposing it against adverse realities, he soon realises that the ‘world of cinema’ cannot redeem any of those uncomfortable landscapes, for this world has turned out to be as harsh—as authoritarian—as the world he has fled from. Since the world of cinema can be no longer posed there as a sort of barricade against the authoritarianism of the pampas, Puig’s failure in this ‘world’ must turn into a ‘literary return’ to a landscape —and to a language, as we shall see— originally (and historically) refused.

Puig’s first novel flows out of the writing of a failed screenplay. Following friends’ advice, Puig writes in Spanish about a familiar subject theme. In outlining characters set in his birthplace, General Villegas, one of them overflows the screenplay format, surpassing the limit of pages, thus overrunning an imagination so far obstinately devoted to depict—in English— only ‘Yorkshire landscapes’ (Entrevista a Manuel Puig 1977). Interestingly
enough, Puig’s literature begins with an Auntie’s monologue expressing banalities from the very pampas. In other words, Puig’s work begins with this return to a rejected scenery. The pampas are no longer resisted but harboured. In fact, for the first time Puig feels content: ‘me podía expresar. Y lo principal, expresarme con toda comodidad’ (ibid.). How can that conjunction of boredom, dryness and authoritarianism serve now the writing of Puig’s first novel? As we mentioned, LTRH arises out of a transgression of the screenplay structure; at the same time, it emerges out of the trespassing of a sort of self-imposed frontier wrought long ago, the (cultural, historical) boundary that once had authorised him to turn his back on the pampas. For was not this primal attitude towards that Argentine landscape a reproduction of an attitude Sarmiento had once established? Since his work involves a delimitation, Sarmiento represents a voice of command, too, an authorised voice defining in turn authorised geographies. One that functions to dismiss the harsh landscape, to put it aside. But if Sarmiento has organised this negation, he has done so paying keen attention to what he has sought to negate. Here we face the core of Argentine literary tradition, founded since Sarmiento onwards on a particular type of paradoxical discourse, which of course is not at all alien to Puig.

2.2. The Hybrid Task of Unveiling a Hybrid Monster.
In opposing that ‘world of cinema’ to every harsh reality, what Puig had reproduced was nothing but Sarmiento’s binary logic, whereby ‘civilised values’ resist those despotic gaucho surroundings featured by ‘la preponderancia del más fuerte, la autoridad sin límites y sin responsabilidad de los que mandan’ (Sarmiento 1993, p. 27). When Puig refers to the moment his vocation for cinema is revealed as false (Roffé 1998), he realises that he can no longer consider the ‘world of cinema’ as something to counteract adversities insofar as the harshness can be present even in this idealised world itself. Puig evinces the failure of Sarmiento’s project, since the violence of the pampas can be present precisely in those models admired by Sarmiento (city, Europe). Thus, Puig’s strategy now is to pay attention to that historically negated reality, and this operation constitutes the beginning of Puig’s relationship with the novelistic genre.

Nevertheless, Sarmiento had already paid special attention to this menacing world. If his Facundo achieves efficacy falling back on a system of erudite knowledge, it strongly resorts, as well, as Piglia (1998) suggests, to a fictional efficiency. In other words, the task Sarmiento undertakes would have been incomplete, falling back only on contents provided
by European culture, for it is just through its fictional ability that Facundo can represent the otherness: ‘La literatura no excluye al bárbaro, lo ficcionaliza’ (Piglia 1998, p. 25). Sarmiento approaches his object of study closely ‘with fascination and repulsion’ (González Echevarría 1990, p. 99), and this disposition is at the base of the enthusiastic effect his text conveys. In this fashion, the gaucho and his elusive surroundings can be vividly depicted, assuring foundational effectiveness, for the refused reality must be tantalisingly presented both to move it closer and to set it aside. Facundo, a text that struggles between the responsibilities of power and the aesthetic commitments of fiction (Piglia 1998), becomes thus that unclassifiable text, wherein all genres and voices fit: letters, biography, surveys, historical accounts, everyday life vignettes, oral narratives. For Sarmiento, to portray and to set up a split reality means to resort to all kind of registers, erudite but at the same time a range of narrative ones (Ramos 1988). This implies, on the one hand, a political aim, but on the other, as Sarmiento himself states, a literary one, being this twofold ambition part of what Ramos calls ‘los lugares tan híbridos de la escritura latinoamericana anterior al [18]80’ (1988, p. 568). Sarmiento does not make just a passive compilation of references. Rather, his work becomes an active appropriation, even a rewriting of European knowledge, ‘traduciendo el espíritu europeo al espíritu americano’ (Sarmiento 1991, p. 200).

One of the broadly addressed characteristics of Puig’s work corresponds to its simultaneous incorporation of different genres, abolishing boundaries between high and low culture. Clearly, Puig shares with Sarmiento the wager for a hybrid form, the juxtaposition and interplay of voices, quotes, epigraphs. How can Puig’s work display such an operation, a similar form to that of Sarmiento’s, given that, as I argue, Puig would be destabilising that which Sarmiento had founded? It is as though, within an extremely rich literary tradition —as the Argentine-Río de la Plata tradition indeed is— Puig would not have followed his immediate Argentine predecessors but rather followed the founder of their tradition. This might have a fundamental logic: Argentine narrative has successively been subjected to Sarmiento’s schema: ‘Mansilla, Hernández, Lugones, Güiraldes, Borges: todos sostienen la extraña dialéctica de orden y caos, variando las definiciones y las formas que asignan a esos valores opuestos’ (Balderston 1986, p. 57). This is precisely the ‘Argentinitis’ that Puig diagnoses: an overburdened zone, a trapped cultural space (similar to those his characters are set in). In that sense, Sarmiento constitutes just a first link of a chain. Puig’s work deals with this literary tradition insofar as Sarmiento’s view has survived within it. From the reassessment of the gaucho figure (José Hernández) and the
avowal of a national sense of identity in times of foreign immigration (Ricardo Güiraldes), to its ambiguous replacement with analogous figures within modern contexts (Borges’s *compadrito*) (Sarlo 2006), Sarmiento’s model has not waned. I am not suggesting, however, that Puig deliberately re-works Sarmiento’s *Facundo* in order to rectify it, for this is precisely what Argentine literature seems to have successively attempted. Instead, Puig’s work shows the scope of Sarmiento’s scheme, for what Puig needs is to listen to the ‘voices of despotism,’ though not as Sarmiento once did it in pursuing a national foundation. If *Facundo* has effectively imagined a community (Anderson 2006), Puig now focuses on that community so arranged, in General Villegas and Buenos Aires, also enacting exiled voices in Mexico (PA), United States (*Maldición eterna*), and Brazil (*Cae la noche tropical*), in order to show its ideological and cultural constraints, the marks of the national imagining which have been, as we have seen, the constraints of Puig himself. It is not a matter of paying literal attention to the *gaucho*, but rather to a community in which inherited uncomfortable meanings configure its quotidian transactions. An erudite voice of command (Sarmiento) once condemned but conjointly admitted—even appraised—an authoritarian/vulgar voice (*gaucho*), so that these overlapped voices (double violence) (Link 1995) have ineluctably shaped Argentine culture. Puig’s work is made of these voices its characters embody, for it is through them that the national community has become imagined. If Puig resorts to a hybrid mechanism, therefore, he does it because it is the adequate form—the novel—he finds for depicting a reality strongly based on a double gaze.

Since Puig and Sarmiento partake of it, hybridism should not be understood as Puig’s work crucial aspect. What would be so disruptive in a work that makes quite a similar operation to that of a work written a century ago? Certainly, both constitute, so to speak, writers in the border, and in that sense their hybridism constitutes not an original accomplishment but just a structural need of their literary endeavours. In that sense, Puig’s hybridism should be deemed with regard to what Bakhtin (1981) sees as the main characteristic of the novelistic genre: ‘an intentional and conscious hybrid, one artistically organized, and not an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages’ (p. 366). Oddly enough, Sarmiento’s *Facundo* fits in this definition too. Even though it would be evidently inappropriate to deem *Facundo* a novel, its historical context of production enables us to weigh it within a literary frame. As we said, Sarmiento has literary interests, and *Facundo* can be considered as a foundational ‘fiction’ (Sommer 1993). The impure mixture of social languages is its backbone, a conjunction of two worlds. Sarmiento attempts the bridging of
two cultural realms for arranging the chaotic twofold linguistic consciousness of a community: ‘Oír al otro, su voz confusa, para tejer la continuidad, el “paso de una época a otra”’ (Ramos 1988, p. 560). Literature, at that time, constituted a sort of go-between straddling the immediate disorganised post-colonial scenario and the idea of a modern state. Civilisation and barbarism coexist, and literature must articulate them through a representative discourse, hence the pertinence of the possibilities the novel offers, ‘bringing different languages in contact with one another’ (Bakhtin 1981, p. 361). A century later, Puig takes a similar pathway, incorporating ‘all the social and ideological voices of its era […] the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia’ (ibid., p. 411). It is from this viewpoint that Puig’s hybridism should be understood. Puig’s characters embody a liminal territory wherein the frontier is posed for updating the conflict of languages (high/low culture), so becoming ‘criaturas mixtas, emblemas del mestizaje y la indeterminación’ (Pauls 2012, p. 57). In that sense, both Sarmiento and Puig, in their respective contexts, experience that locus of in-between we suggested earlier, their works implying responses to liminal contexts of production. What is, ultimately, the difference between them? It seems that Sarmiento is demanded, in a critical historical stage, by two ways of being Argentine: on the one hand, the Argentine who resists the foreign influence (the gaucho); on the other, the Argentine who learns the enlightened European lessons, accepting the foreign influx as something doubtless beneficial. Sarmiento handles these opposite positions. Between them a frontier is set, generating that hybrid monster, ‘el monstruo híbrido que se ha llamado Héroe del Desierto [Facundo], porque ha sabido despoblar, en efecto, a su patria’ (Sarmiento 1991, p. 122). This way Sarmiento resolves the dilemma, and this constitutes his objective as a ‘translator of spirits.’ Puig, for his part, struggles with the excesses of both Latin American and Argentine quest for identity, excesses opened precisely by Sarmiento. While Sarmiento attempts to establish the terms of what the national should be, a century later Puig shows the scope of that political/literary voice of command. However, Puig’s in-betweenness can be characterised by a third moment that represents a concrete as well as an unstable place of writing, broadening and inverting Sarmiento’s terms: Puig’s body in translation.

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15 Although that ‘hybrid monster’ is less the gaucho Facundo than Sarmiento’s Facundo, the text itself and its effective ideological construction.
2.3 A Subtitler’s Body in Transnational/Translation Zones.

A third relevant space Puig is significantly involved with in his beginnings he calls ‘Air-France.’ What does this third term mean among ‘Latino-Americanitis’ and ‘Argentinitis’? It means Puig’s way to earn a living from 1963 to 1967 (Entrevista a Manuel Puig 1977). Puig finishes LTRHI in New York, a novel begun in Rome in 1962 as a result of a writing that overflows the screenplay structure. After leaving Europe and staying for a brief time in Buenos Aires, Puig moves to the United States, where he soon gets the adequate job for accomplishing his literary aims and satisfying his no less relevant ‘wanderlust’: ‘trabajo de intérprete, sólo cinco horas por día […] después de un tiempo 90% de rebaja en cualquier pasaje […] para volar a cualquier punto, playas! Caribe!’ (Puig 2006, p. 40). As we can see, in New York Puig is contracted as interpreter due to his language abilities. However, the relationship between Puig and foreign languages does not begin here. I shall return to this aspect soon. Meanwhile, we must emphasise that ‘Air-France’ is relevant insofar as Puig is writing, correcting, finishing the manuscript of his first novel immersed into what Marc Augé has called ‘non-places,’ that is, ‘a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity’ (2008, p. 63). Non-places comprise spaces and facilities mainly linked to experiences of mobility and transportation: ‘The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves’ (ibid., p. 28). Since non-places constitute an experience of the crisis of a traditional idea of identity, I would like to argue that this is what Puig strongly experiences while going through the writing of his first novel. Puig trespasses the frontier of a genre as well as the boundary of a tight relationship with cinema, as everyday life in New York unbinds another crucial cultural landscape. Between 1963 and 1967, Puig becomes a regular commuter on New York’s subway: ‘es una especie de electroshock el subte aquí, muy bochincheró y con una vibración que te desacomoda las suturas del cráneo’ (Puig 2006, p. 27). The subway here constitutes a bodily way of experiencing the culture. For Puig the subway goes too fast, and the vibrations are received as a jolting that seems to disjoint the cranium. What might be seen as a mere anecdotal detail takes on other dimensions regarding Puig’s process of writing. Given his working commitments, Puig daily travels from his apartment to Idlewild (JFK International Airport), the experience of this ‘electroshock’ being repeatedly recorded in his letters: ‘Bueno, perdón por la letra, estoy en el subte!!! El electroshock!!!!’ (ibid., p. 32); ‘Estoy terminando la carta en el electroshock (subte)’ (p. 34); ‘Estoy en pleno electroshock, es decir en el subte’ (p. 37);
‘Voy electroshockeado rumbo a Manhattan’ (p. 246). Puig, however, had described his writing process in a similar fashion years before: ‘tres horas por tarde le dedico al escrito, […] estoy tan acostumbrado a ese electroshock diario que si me falta quedo con lunas negras. La droga’ (Puig 2005, p. 355). Here the metaphor at work is simply psychiatric. Writing is a way of resisting depressing moods, and the writing of LTRH’s first chapters is experienced, so to speak, as an electroconvulsive addiction. Even though what Puig mainly writes into the subway seems to be letters, and, years before in Europe, the writing defined as ‘electroshock’ corresponds to the time he devotes to his manuscript, what I want to illustrate is that, living in New York at that time, Puig plunges himself into a quotidian relationship with dislocating effects generated by transiting through non-places never experienced before. It is not only possible to experiment the electroshock by means of writing but also by ‘means of transport.’ The electroshock turns into something frequent, being this state of everyday discontinuity Puig is affected by, a phenomenon that can even disarray, as it were, the writing form. Puig generates his first novel from these states of quotidian interruption. This ‘electroconvulsive therapy’ that the subway offers him represents the shifting, unstable condition of Puig’s contemporaneity, its quotidian intensities. What does this have to do with a Latin American literature written from stable, anthropological places, whereby identity still constitutes a pre-condition? As an aesthetic manoeuvre it represents Puig’s veiled critique against a narrative in a state of stillness. When Puig apologises for his distorted handwriting in a letter, he is in turn giving an account of a new longitude his body experiences, that is, a new ‘set of relations of speed and slowness, of motion and rest’ (Deleuze 2005, p. 61), which becomes part of a significant redefinition: mobility, distortion of the perspective, new velocities experienced. Thus, Puig verifies something only intuited years before in quite an emotional way: ‘Confío mucho en el clima espiritual de New York para reponerme de todas las desilusiones de estos tiempos italianos’ (Puig 2005, p. 347). However, it is both Puig’s body and writing which experiences the impingement of this stimulating context, in that Puig’s work begins with a novel written in, and affected by transits and means of transport. The manuscript of LTRH, begun in Rome, soon travels to South America: ‘En el barco voy a pasar en limpio y corregir, todo lo que pueda para llegar con algo listo para mostrar en Buenos Aires’ (Puig 2005, p. 352). Later, it moves to the United States, and once there the manuscript makes daily travels to the airport, where Puig shows his progress to a workmate and receives comical comments. Puig, in fact, takes advantage of free time to write: ‘Estoy en Air France que es el lugar más indicado para escribir porque es donde no tengo nada que hacer’
Working on his first novel, Puig’s writing appears strongly linked to these successive non-places. International airports, as Augé (2008) suggests, constitute the paradigmatic example of a type of space where it is possible to experience a flexible sense of identity.

During this period, Puig becomes an Air-France frequent passenger. According to his correspondence, between 1963 and 1967 Puig travels both to different American states and different countries (Jamaica, Japan, Hong-Kong, Peru, Marrakech and India, among others). In 1965, for instance, Puig gives an account of his days in Tahiti: ‘En Tahiti, días después de estar allá, con toda calma, leí por orden la novela’ (Puig 2006, p. 149). If during his season in Europe (Rome-Paris-London, 1956-1962) Puig had already been in constant displacement, crossing throughout and spending weeks in Russia, Sweden or Turkey, working for an airline gives him an inexhaustible opportunity of almost free flights to any geographical point. This travel propensity cannot be dismissed regarding Puig’s work. If his characters are able ‘to appropriate partially other modes of existence’ (Echavarren 1991, p. 582), it is strongly due to Puig’s particular immersion into these transnational ‘unrooted routes’ (Clifford 1997). Puig’s characters collect particles from films or songs, taken from any cultural level, from any geographical/cultural milieu. Better yet, they are constructed from this interplay of distorted collections/recollections, of this back-and-forth dynamic that renders them ‘into something else: the air of a time and a place, the aura of a period’ (Echavarren 1991, p. 582). Puig builds himself as a novelist in permanent mobility, and in spite of not becoming a traditional travel writer, he manages, as Augé characterises travel, to assemble a ‘fictional relationship between gaze and landscape’ (2008, pp. 69-70). We should say at this stage: between gaze and mediascapes. Now can we better understand the ability of Puig’s characters-spectators to erase the limits imposed by enclosed settings. Even in his works set in Mexico, New York, and Rio de Janeiro, Puig puts his characters in quite restricted situations. However, these exiled, migrant characters constitute voices that permanently discuss the adequacy of national borders, either represented by languages or by spaces they inhabit. As Larkosh states, Puig’s work ‘reaffirms the extent to which the border is continually on the move’ (2006, p. 298).

Yet at the same time, as I mentioned earlier, Air France constitutes a workplace that Puig has become part of because of his proficiency in languages: ‘he knew the four languages required’ (Levine 2000, pp. 152-153), namely Spanish, English, French and Italian. In this regard, Puig himself stresses this decisive ability:
The ‘languages of cinema’ become a way out of the rejected landscape, and soon his sort of polyglotism provides Puig with a way of survival. Between 1956 and 1962, Puig gives Italian and Spanish private lessons, works as a sporadic translator of dialogues, and takes casual jobs as multilingual clerk. For instance, during 1957 (Paris) Puig can ‘practicar el francés […] Es la oficina de una Editorial chiquita’ (Puig 2005, p. 100). A couple of weeks later, he moves to another job: ‘responder la correspondencia en inglés, italiano y español de una casa mayorista’ (ibid., p. 103). As Logie and Romero observe, ‘los idiomas extranjeros son un medio de salir de Argentina, de mirarse en aquella orlded que significa el cosmopolitismo norteamericano/europeo’ (2008, p. 3). Having allowed him to flee Argentine landscapes, the ‘languages of cinema’ contribute also to keep Puig detached from the language, as he calls it, of ‘underdevelopment.’ This is the reason behind his early English-written screenplays, for how could Puig write in a non-cinema’s language, so to speak, in a sub-language (Spanish)?

Nevertheless, Puig certainly resumes that dismissed Spanish. When visiting Spain, Puig realises that the Spanish from Spain, contrasting with his Spanish (argentino), sounds vivid, for people from Spain have ‘un idioma, ¿y yo?, ¿mi español qué es?, ¿mi castellano qué es? Empezando nunca lo había aceptado porque era el lenguaje de los problemas’ (Entrevista a Manuel Puig 1977). If cinema once had represented a piece of spectacular civilisation in a provincial town, the ‘languages of cinema’ Puig studies can be regarded as ‘languages of civilisation,’ opposed to the ‘barbarian’ Argentine-Spanish language. Here I want to return briefly to Sarmiento, since Sarmiento is acquainted with the same languages Puig does, these being also a key element in his work (Piglia 1980). Sarmiento’s Recuerdos de provincia recounts how Sarmiento learns French, English, and Italian (Sarmiento 1991). In that sense, Puig’s ‘languages of cinema’ are not too far from the languages which, a century before, Sarmiento turns to in order to ‘translate the European spirit,’ as we have seen he aimed at, to the local one. In short, Puig’s ‘languages of cinema’ amount to Sarmiento’s ‘languages of civilisation.’ Puig certainly attempts to eschew the pampas
through them, but in doing so he stands within Sarmiento’s civilised education boundaries. Language proficiency has not detached Puig from foundational atavisms. Because the local Spanish reminds him of the violence of a landscape he rejects, Puig seeks other *land(e)scapes* in the allegedly more pleasant languages spoken in the theatre. Therefore, while it is true that due to these foreign tongues he reaches the ‘civilised’ world (metropolis, Europe, the United States), what is most important is to figure out how Puig returns to the rejected landscape and, consequently, to that ‘underdeveloped’ language. For just restating his relationship with the despised language/landscape of ‘troubles,’ Puig can become a novelist.

The screenplay *La tajada*, written in 1960 though unpublished until 1996, represents a first turning point in what appears as a conflictive relationship between Puig and his native tongue, as it is Puig’s first work written in Spanish. To *La tajada* follows Puig’s attempt of writing a work set in General Villegas, a new screenplay that finally becomes a novel. At this time, Puig is in Rome still looking for a relevant opportunity in cinema. Yet what Puig obtains, once again, are translation jobs, though of a particular type. Between 1961 and 1962 Puig undertakes intense work as a subtitler, an activity he sporadically carried out years before, though not with the regularity of this last period.\(^{16}\) Thus, the moment Puig is writing what ultimately becomes his literary debut, coincides with subtitling activity, mainly Italian films translated into Spanish. However, to say ‘translated’ is inaccurate, and far more precise would be to insist on the concept of subtitling, as it involves a particular field within translation studies, its main characteristic being the conveying of dialogues (Hillman 2011; Chiaro 2009). It seems especially relevant to consider Puig’s work, and particularly Puig’s return to Spanish, by framing it within an activity in which dialogues are central. Working as subtitler, Puig has to write in the target language, that is, at that time, in fearsome Spanish: ‘Yo no tenía experiencia literaria y, más aún, le temía al idioma español, porque después de tantos años de vivir en países de otra lengua tenía olvidada la gramática’ (Ávila 1975, p. 60). We might say, thus, that his forgotten Spanish is progressively recovered writing dialogues. In fact, masterly crafted dialogues constitute a personal mark of Puig’s novels, which often consist of endless dialogues,\(^{17}\) a strategic structure for avoiding the traditional third person that Puig even sees

\(^{16}\) Puig subtitles films such as De Sica’s *Umberto D* (1952), Antonioni’s *La notte* (1961), and Pasolini’s *Accatone* (1962). From May 1961 to October 1962, Puig clocks up the subtitling of twenty-seven films.

\(^{17}\) As the beginning of *LTRH*, the entire *EBMA* and *Maldición eterna*, to name evident examples, demonstrate.
as a sort of authoritarian voice: ‘pues la tercera persona implica un tono seguro, un juicio sobre lo que se está reflejando’ (Entrevista a Manuel Puig 1977).

Lastly, it is worth considering that Puig, who started going to the theatre during the 1930s and 1940s, was part of the first Latin American generations to read subtitles, as subtitling is introduced as a solution to the arrival of talking films (Hillman 2011; Chiaro 2009; Egoyan and Balfour 2004). Subtitling and other techniques (dubbing) allow crossing barriers set by original languages. In fact, in his childhood what Puig listens to in the General Villegas theatre are foreign languages, though what he actually reads are Spanish subtitles. From Puig’s viewpoint, Spanish has appeared on the screen as a sub-language from the very outset, that is, perceptually and concretely located across the bottom of the screen, whereas spoken languages have always emanated from the top. As Hillman points out: ‘Subtitles of course encumber the screen […] a hierarchy of the senses is in operation, with the visual having clear primacy’ (2011, p. 384). Yet in Europe Puig does resort to Spanish, by becoming a dialogue-maker in a language which hitherto has resonated only as troubles. We might venture that if Puig finally transits from the screenplay to the novelistic genre, returning from ‘civilised culture’ and the ‘world of cinema’ to the pampas, he does so from subtitled Spanish, in that the language of the pampas for Puig has been always a sub-title, that is, a language deemed as having low-status, the tongue of subdesarrollo. Thus, what Puig articulates in his return to Spanish is not so much restoring a relationship as finding a way (that is, avoiding the third person) to make his native language show its internal contradictions, its foundational conflicts and split world drama (Sarmiento).

Summing up, ‘Air-France’ signifies an opposing force to that exerted by the excesses of both ‘Latino-Americanitis’ and ‘Argentinitis’. It means a writer’s body and a writing affected by transnational spaces, in contrast with a set of Latin American narratives chronically located on, and generated from, anthropological places (archival fictions). At the same time, it means a space where Puig is needed by his translingual ability, his mastery of the ‘languages of cinema,’ but also by his native Spanish, the language of the landscape he rejects. In order to become a novelist Puig must come back to that landscape, but especially to the forgotten, feared and resisted Spanish. Puig ‘orients himself in translation’: his body in perpetual mobility as well as in a constant process of translation; interpreting, subtitling, even later writing directly in foreign languages (Maldición eterna,

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18 We now understand Puig’s interest in all those literary/cinematic ‘languages’ traditionally regarded as ‘sub’ (detective novels, folletín, Sci-Fi, B-movies).
Puig’s work is fashioned from this dislocated zone, and this is part of its singular in-betweenness, his liminality: the threshold of a landscape/language Manuel Puig needed to translate and to deterritorialise in order to produce his own indeed uncomfortable narrative.

I have shown throughout these first two chapters how Puig’s work manages to achieve its distinctive place within Latin American narrative. The elements analysed and discussed thus far configure the basis to examine other literary/cinematic works as uncomfortable as Puig’s, each one dealing with its own ‘landscapes,’ and for that very reason, all of them coming to critically discuss and reconfigure the limits of the so-called Latin American narrative. To closely consider these significant cases will be my task throughout the following chapters.

19 Respectively written in English and Portuguese.
3. Moviegoers Dealing with the Languages of Cinema

3.1 Alberto Fuguet’s Missing Latin American Zone.
Since the publishing of *McOndo* (1996), Chilean author Alberto Fuguet has dealt with the prolonged effects of *McOndo*’s polemic prologue, deemed a sort of manifesto against Latin American magical realism. As is known, *McOndo* stemmed from a real episode that occurred at a writers’ workshop (University of Iowa). On noticing the presence of Latin American young writers, an American editor decides to produce an anthology. After reading three manuscripts, the editor dismisses two of them ‘por faltar al sagrado código del realismo mágico. El editor despacha la polémica arguyendo que esos textos “bien pudieron ser escritos en cualquier país del Primer Mundo”’ (Fuguet and Gómez 1996, p. 10). *McOndo*, consequently, was conceived of as a way to counteract the growing reification of Latin American narrative, that ‘estereotipo yanqui/europeo que tienen de nosotros’ (Hargrave and Smith Seminet 1998, p. 19), a reaction Fuguet explicitly linked with Puig’s work: ‘Puig es el padre de *McOndo*’ (ibid.). It is clear that through *McOndo* Fuguet sought a quite different portrait of Latin America: ‘En *McOndo* hay McDonald’s, computadores Mac y condominios’ (Fuguet and Gómez 1996, p. 15). Perhaps it is due to its polemic aura that Fuguet keeps a conflictive relationship with that anthology (Fuguet 2013). However, as several articles and interviews demonstrate, the Chilean author often uses his ‘trade mark,’ resorting to it in order to characterise writers that he considers he has affinity with. Having reedited that controversial prologue, the comment that follows epitomises Fuguet’s paradoxical attitude: ‘*McOndo* ganó […] este presente es *McOndo*’ (Fuguet 2013, p. 409). Indeed *McOndo* has become an important literary milestone, but it is equally important to observe that it represents a specific incident within an author’s work which has not ceased to deploy a consistent dissatisfaction within the framework of Latin American literature.

This first section of Chapter 3 shows how Fuguet’s work critically deals with similar matters to those raised by Puig’s. Mediascapes and its political efficacy, together with linguistic issues within a transnational context, allow us to regard Fuguet’s work not as a sheer isolated, rebel gesture against canonical narratives, but as the updating of a challenging critique of those ‘landscapes’ these narratives have traditionally, and effectively, configured.
For Alberto Fuguet (1964) Latin American literature means quite an uncomfortable realm. Fuguet was born in Chile, although he spent well part of his childhood in California, English being his first language, and his first readings not exactly Spanish written literature (Fuguet 2013). His transit from English to Spanish, however difficult, was at last fruitful:

mi madre no nos enseñó español para protegernos. Ella creía que íbamos a ser anglos y un buen anglo didn’t speak Spanish. No quería que sufríéramos el estigma de ser hispanos, chicanos, wet-backs. Time passes, things change. Ahora hablo español. Y también inglés. Pero el español no me avergüenza. Al revés: me coloca en un lugar privilegiado. (Fuguet 2013, p. 26)

This paragraph introduces Fuguet’s work well: the writing openly assuming a twofold affiliation, avoiding any stressed typography (e. g. italics) when English shows up. This phenomenon encapsulates the problems that Fuguet’s work often tackles, for the double link turns out to be a critical and indeed polemical element in the context of a literature historically framed by and mainly written in Spanish. Fuguet does not reject the presence of English —that English both derives from Californian and American culture: ‘mi lengua natal es el inglés y, a pesar que tengo mucho English en mi disco duro, el idioma por el cual opté es el español’ (ibid., p. 23). While Puig acknowledges the irrevocable presence of Hollywood within Latin American imaginings, Fuguet constructs a work harbouring the pervasive presence of American culture within the Latin American context: the transnationality of cinema, music and popular culture, the intrusion of multinational companies as well as the importing of its jargon (e. g. ‘shopping,’ ‘fast food,’ and so forth). This is the Latin American reality Fuguet claims: ‘More than magical, this place is weird. Magical realism reduces a much too complex situation and just makes it cute. Latin America is not cute’ (Fuguet 2001, p. 69).

Fuguet’s work coincides, it should be said, with the pronounced advent of neoliberalism in Chile as well as in the whole region. Scholars have considered this aspect both as a negative critique on as well as a virtue of his work. On the one hand, it has been said that, even though Fuguet’s literature can represent the region’s new socio-cultural complexity, the undeniable marginal side (indigenous people, poverty) is dismissed for not being part of Fuguet’s world. To exclusively represent his reality would link Fuguet to the ‘gobiernos neoliberales que venden al público doméstico y extranjero la imagen de una América Latina primermundista llena de malls, gente sana y bien vestida con una infinita
capacidad de consumo’ (Palaversich 2000, p. 58). Fuguet’s work, seen this way, would represent a failed depiction of the dense cultural tissue Latin America is made of, a limited portrait of people being an active part of globalisation, having broad access to goods from developed countries, thereby conveying a dubious sense of inclusiveness. On the other hand, scholars have lately seen the productivity of Fuguet’s acquaintance with the porosity between American and Latin American culture, noting that, as in Puig, ‘from popular perspectives, neoliberalism may entail neither an impoverishment of popular creativity nor a homogenisation of cultural identity, but something quite different’ (O’Bryen 2011, p. 163).

While its world is certainly not that of social bereavement, Fuguet’s work does not represent for that reason a cold celebration of social inequalities. To consider Latin America’s ‘weird’ face implies, first and foremost, an attempt at widening a framework that seems to have been hegemonised by a highly stereotyped narrative. In Por favor rebobinar (1998), for instance, Fuguet constructs a novel where mediascapes permeate as much its plot as its characters, whereby multiple interspersed voices give form to a polyphonic version of Chilean middle- and upper-class youth of the 1990s. The novel echoes procedures once utilised by Puig (Fuguet 2013), but what is more remarkable is the process by which ‘la contracultura utópica ha dado paso a la aceptación—a ratos incómoda—del momento neoliberal’ (Paz-Soldán 2002, p. 45). Fuguet’s novel, thus, does not negate new configurations of Chilean society, facing a stage in which the market has permeated to such extent that it seems there is a point of no return to any essential, let alone exotic, Latin America:

The market reforms all over Latin America had to reform us as well. How could they not? If the point of liberalization was to open the doors, a cultural and social flood had to pour in. And it did.

(Fuguet 2001, p. 71)

It seems to be, however, that this process had already started when Puig was in that provincial theatre watching Hollywood movies on a daily basis. The reality Fuguet depicts, thus, would be contiguous to that moment. For what Fuguet is upholding is how foreign culture shapes and transforms regional cultures, affecting them, establishing different relationships to those set and narrated by tradition: ‘La selva no es pura. Siempre América Latina ha sido un continente mezclado’ (Hargrave and Smith Seminet 1998, pp. 18-19).
Fuguet’s work, consequently, assumes the hybridisation, and it is from that premise that it is forged. Fuguet notices a deceptive effect of canonical narratives: ‘Viajando nos dimos cuenta que afuera el realismo mágico no sólo era una tendencia más, sino era la única tendencia que se espera de América Latina’ (ibid., p. 18). It is this expectation that Fuguet has pursued to expand upon or, more directly, to not meet. In fact, in the second anthology Fuguet produces —Se habla español. Voces latinas en USA (2000)— he insists on an unavoidable influence:

Estados Unidos —let’s face it— está en todas partes. […] ¿No aparece Hollywood todas las tardes en las marquesinas de nuestros cines (en el de Coronel Vallejos de Puig, o en una plaza desierta en Cartagena de Indias)?

(Paz-Soldán and Fuguet 2000, p. 14)

If Latin American narrative had once marked a profitable regional border whereby realism had to be necessarily ‘magical,’ Fuguet feels committed to blur this boundary, not only facing the new capitalist context, but also evincing how foreign influx has been there since long ago. Fuguet opts for a more dynamic and bidirectional relationship: ‘no se puede hablar de Latinoamérica sin incluir a los Estados Unidos. Y no se puede concebir a los Estados Unidos sin necesariamente pensar en América Latina’ (ibid., p. 19). This view also reminds us of the undeniable presence of Latin America in the United States, thereby of the difficulty of establishing any rigid boundary for a narrative labeled as ‘Latin American.’ From Fuguet’s perspective, Latin American narrative cannot be enclosed in any restraining niche. Hence the need of rejecting a literature still linked to regionalist isolation, stagnated in an exotic formula, ‘en lo contingente y en lo criollo. Han capitalizado el realismo mágico y eso de que América Latina es un continente misterioso’ (Fuguet 2013, p. 410).

It is in Fuguet’s Las películas de mi vida (2003) where the North-South/South-North problem is emphasised for the first time. Fuguet narrates the life of seismologist Beltrán Soler who, in travelling to Japan, deviates his route after a stop-over in Los Angeles, missing his flight and staying in California, the place where he has been raised. The novel is mainly played out through familial memories linked to those of movies Beltrán has watched both in Encino and Santiago during his childhood and adolescence (1966-1980). In an e-mail he sends, Beltrán makes a self-diagnosis that frames the novel’s chief concern: ‘Deabajo de mi español, parece que hay mucho inglés; debajo de mi adultez, sin duda que hay mucho niño’ (Fuguet 2003, p. 60). Beltrán here distinguishes two clearly
distinct spaces: English belongs to childhood, Spanish to adulthood. The North-South problem is, then, established in linguistic terms, Fuguet resisting ‘to simplify the nature of linguistic affection and affiliation’ (Riofrío 2013, p. 213). Soler’s parents are Chilean who had migrated to the United States in the sixties, though Soler’s mother had gone back to Chile to give birth to Beltrán. Years later, she comes back to the United States to join Soler’s father. Thus both Beltrán and his sister Manuela were raised in California until the whole family returns in 1973. ‘La idea de conocer América Latina y Chile me resultaba del todo exótica,’ Beltrán recalls, ‘mucho más fascinante que ir al parque Yellowstone o al Gran Cañón’ (Fuguet 2003, p. 163). Beltrán’s perspective as Chilean-born and brought up in America is the perspective of a child who has never seen Latin America before, and has only stereotyped references. Before arriving in Chile, Beltrán’s family stops over in Venezuela, and there Beltrán remembers an episode again linked to idiomatic gaps. The friends who receive Beltrán’s family speak English, ‘por lo que Venezuela se transformó en un país con subtítulos: daba lo mismo el idioma en que hablaban, yo igual comprendía lo que decían’ (Fuguet 2003, p. 177). This is an interesting definition: Venezuela as a subtitled country. Beltrán’s observation has at least a couple of connotations. Firstly, the character describes a Latin American country making a cinematic analogy, that is, Venezuela as a ‘foreign language film,’ though subtitled. Secondly, if in Venezuela English is not a complete ‘foreign’ language, then Latin America emerges as a not-too-exotic milieu. Beltrán can ‘read’ Venezuela, he can make out his first Latin American experience. By contrast, Chile in 1973 offers quite a different scenario: ‘En Santiago era muy poca la gente que era capaz de entender inglés y menos aún los que podían expresarse en mi idioma sin hacer el ridículo’ (Fuguet 2003, p. 177). Unlike Venezuela, English in Chile is not used currently, and Beltrán’s progressive advance from North to South seems to involve an equally progressive loss of the language he speaks. Chile is not a film with subtitles at all. To some extent, Fuguet describes Chile’s lack of bilingualism to underline the divergent reality Soler faces when arriving in Chile’s recently established dictatorship. For example, while his sister Manuela manages to qualify, Beltrán fails his admission to an upper-class mixed school due to his language issues: ‘No sabía español, me tensé, entré en un estado de mudez. Mi hermana, en cambio, que sabía el idioma menos que yo, los conquistó a todos y entró sin problemas’ (ibid., p. 191). As a result of his failure, Beltrán faces the tough reality of a private all-boys school: ‘hijos de militares y asesinos en potencia’ (p. 190). Beltrán’s lack of Spanish, thus, has a concrete consequence, that is, the access to the Chilean socio-cultural context: ‘Me decían “gringo culiado” y pronto capté que si no hablaba, si no les
respondía, eventualmente me iban a dejar tranquilo’ (ibid.). In a recently introduced authoritarian regime, Fuguet seems to suggest, what appears to be key for surviving is to avoid responding, not answering back in English, and not speaking with a flawed, accented Spanish.

This novel’s episode allows us to understand the process out of which Fuguet becomes a writer. ‘In this new language with its puzzling accents and weird letter ñ, I had an accent’ (Fuguet 2013, p. 27). The accent, in Chile, means an attached mark Fuguet must obliterate. Hence writing offers him a space without stigma, ‘no such thing as an accent. So I guess I became a writer not because I wanted to tell stories — I became one in order to survive’ (ibid.). It is this way that Fuguet manages to overcome an adverse context, by an effective erasure of English, or by means of a well-rounded assimilation of Spanish:

[I] did my best to erase the English from my head, heart and tongue. [...] I began to talk in perfect Chilean [...] I began to write, think and dream in what people down here call “the language of Cervantes”. (Ibid.)

Fuguet’s account cannot be but seen as a violent process of linguistic erasure to eradicate the fissures of a language which—rather than being eliminated—has been displaced. As Fuguet describes (in English), he does not regard himself as bilingual, being Spanish his predominant language: ‘I am a Spanish-language author and, more important, a Chilean. In the United States now, I have an accent’ (ibid.). When Fuguet (or Soler) moves from North to South, he moves also the defects of one language onto the other; the ‘accent’ moves from South to North. In that sense, we might suggest that, if Fuguet’s work hosts the American culture, it does so by means of a particular relationship with the languages at stake, a relationship, as we shall see soon, inevitably determined by quite personal definitions which reinforce the back-and-forth dynamics between two cultural milieus. It is as though, through this exchange, Fuguet had kept what he especially was fond of from this English link. For this very reason, it is Soler’s explanation of those school-yard, mean behavioural patterns that is worth further considering. Soler believes that this violence should be understood in the light of an unequal access to technology:

Al carecer de tecnología (nada de grabadoras para jugar al locutor de radio, nada de cámaras 8mm), la entretenición de los niños chilenos era intentar dejar impotentes o estériles a sus compañeros, impulsados quizás por la extraña
misión de lograr la desaparición de la especie, algo que, me imaginaba, les fue inculcado por sus padres, que se dedicaban justamente a eso.

(Fuguet 2006, p. 190)

Soler’s explanation resorts to the centrality of mediascapes. Even though the character’s thesis is highly questionable, it is important to see how Fuguet, in a context of progressive assimilation, insists on media culture as something worth keeping. Fuguet, in that sense, rescues mediascapes regarding their ability to counteract, as it were, less creative environments. For Fuguet, I would venture, American culture means specific elements well summarised by those devices Beltrán remarks Chile lacks, and linked with quite a particular landscape, Fuguet’s lost English paradise, a paradigmatic zone, an imagining in itself: ‘So English remains there, far away, and yet close, untouched, unblemished – smelling of sprinklers, Slurpees, summer sweat and the aqua-blue chlorine of swimming pools that perfume the California night’ (Fuguet 2010, pp. 28-29). This constitutes a concrete, albeit no less fetishised, Edenic scene, a mediascape of pure firstness, similar to those Puig’s characters-spectators are often affected by, as we have previously seen.

Yet the somewhat idealised perspective Fuguet had held up to LPV20 as to American culture, suffers a turn in Missing (una investigación) (2009). There, Fuguet rewrites the North-South relationship, assembling fiction and non-fiction, a work based on a personal investigation undertaken to find his uncle Carlos. Lost since 1986, nobody knows the whereabouts of the black sheep of the family, Fuguet keeping a fond memory of him since his early years in California. Through nine chapters falling back once again upon different writing formats, Fuguet unfolds a work devoted to puzzle out Carlos’s disappearance as well as getting to Fuguet’s family core. In attempting to heal intimate wounds, Fuguet puts himself as a non-fictional character who tracks down both Carlos and Fuguet’s own family memories. In fact, the plot of the novel arises out of something unforeseen that ‘hizo colapsar “el libro de mi padre” y dio origen, “al libro de mi tío”: me reencontré —me reconcilié— con él [Fuguet’s father]’ (Fuguet 2009, pp. 44-45). While LPV gives an account of both his and his family’s geographical and cultural transit, in Missing Fuguet settles accounts with the paternal side, using the figure of a scapegoat, an uncle who appears as key for unraveling a whole painful familial episode.

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20 Las películas de mi vida. From now on this is abbreviated as LPV.
But when Fuguet finally finds Carlos (Chapter VI), it is the uncle’s voice, a lengthy account of a troublesome transnational biography that takes over the narration (Chapter VII, VIII, IX). Here, of course, Fuguet’s writing does not eschew phrases directly written in English. Although Carlos’s confessions flow mainly in Spanish, the now found uncle often answers his nephew’s questions in the language he daily negotiates with living in Denver. Nevertheless, Fuguet seems to intentionally manage these shifts, switching from Spanish to entire paragraphs in English when, for example, it comes to an intimacy Carlos prefers not to dig out: ‘Some things are private. I rather not go back to those times or feelings or actions, sorry’ (ibid., p. 148). Once again, what is functioning is Fuguet’s characteristic involvement with languages already elaborated in LPV. Languages are anchored to the affective memory of two separated stages and, accordingly, they deserve differential treatment. Thus, rather than expressing the linguistic code officially demanded by a specific geographical zone (North/South), in Fuguet’s work both English and Spanish are deterritorialised, becoming distinctive vehicles for expressing differentiated affective spaces. This split, as Fuguet states, has been determined by a transnational biography that redefines linguistic spaces regarding quite personal meanings: ‘It’s easier in general to be emotional en inglés. In English, you open your heart; in Spanish, you are taught early on to hide it’ (Fuguet 2010, p. 28). It is important to consider Fuguet’s own analysis on how languages are linked to different abilities of expression, for the presence of English and American culture does not mean either a whim or an exclusive matter of neoliberal intrusiveness. If Hollywood fulfills the enclosed environments in Puig’s work, in Fuguet both English and American culture seem to assist an acknowledged limited expression, expanding the territory to which a language has been naturally, originally confined.

Yet Carlos finally opens his intimacy up. Fuguet interweaves his uncle’s discourse using a Spanish that allows the presence of English when the latter emerges, though not necessarily with the text becoming a definitive ‘Spanglish’ (and not necessarily bilingual either). It is, rather, the personal way Fuguet crafts his double belonging, straddling two languages which he transfers (transfers his literary style) to the voice of his non-fictional uncle, a voice significantly immersed in the harshness of the (Latin) American south border experience (California, Arizona, New Mexico), though always finding analogies with Chilean contexts:

le dije a teresa:
let’s go somewhere, y ella entendió.
quizá entendía más inglés que yo,
se había criado quizás a metros de la frontera,
o todos sus clientes eran americanos,
sabía coquetear y negociar y fornicar
en inglés,
sabía lo que era un blowjob,
un cunt, a big fat cock,
cruzamos una puerta
con cortinas de plástico
como las de las carnicerías en santiago

(Fuguet 2009, p. 246)

Carlos’s voice is Fuguet’s. But if the story of Fuguet’s uncle is that of the missing one, it is so because of the transplanted experience Fuguet himself has passed through: ‘[The United States] arruinó a mi tío. […] el factor América tiene que ver […] Yo algo sé de transplantados. […] sé lo que no es tener un lugar en el mundo’ (ibid., p. 31). Fuguet’s uncle, therefore, mirrors Fuguet’s own in-betweeness. Fuguet’s work has been wrought out of this transnational milieu, Fuguet’s missing zone, a literary space forged out of the estrangement of a twofold cultural and linguistic attachment. Like Puig, Fuguet manages to achieve a literary hybridism, harbouring a language whose presence in Latin America, at this stage, seems inescapable. His work cannot resist American culture. It constitutes, at last and due to the very conflicts portrayed, a familiar language/background and the language/background of a family. But, above all, a language doubtless affectively linked to that other version of Latin America that Fuguet indeed belongs to, that zone he has advocated for since McOndo, a canonical space that Latin American narrative has, despite strong processes of uprootedness, obstinately resisted.

3.2 Andrés Caicedo: A Body’s Motion Crossing Latin American Districts.
Despite his brief biography, Colombian writer Andrés Caicedo (1951-1977) stands out not only as an author of an exceptional literary work, but also as the most relevant film critic Colombia has seen so far, with the posthumous Ojo al cine (1999) being key to Fuguet’s belated discovery of the Cali suicidal author. Even though the Fuguet-Caicedo link, epitomised by Fuguet’s production of Caicedo’s Mi cuerpo es una celda. Una
autobiografía (2008) has meant an important step forward toward its circulation. Caicedo’s work has not been necessarily dismissed, having been enthusiastically received by some critics since the early 1980s (Williams 1980; Rama 1982; Varanini 1998), though perhaps with a visibility that has not sufficed. This section addresses Caicedo’s work as a crucial example of a narrative that challenges traditional Latin American literature, unveiling its ideologically tinged, and territorially rooted constraints. Puig’s work analysed in precedent chapters allows us a better understanding of the conflictive relationship Caicedo establishes both with mediascapes and languages, and how these uncomfortable realms configure a narrative highly committed to the transnational. Caicedo’s ¡Que viva la música! (1977) embodies his concerns, and constitutes, ultimately, the focus of this approach.

One of the first questions that come up when we read it, is to what extent Caicedo’s work is indebted to Puig’s, since most of his narrative, especially his short stories written between 1969 and 1975, embeds cinematic elements. Puig, let’s remember, publishes LTRH in 1968, with the insertion of cinematic elements being evident at least up to PA (1979). The Colombian’s precocity seems to not have been any hindrance for generating a narrative highly imbued with cinema. Caicedo’s short stories written in 1969 (El espectador, Los mensajeros), reinforce the argument that this ‘presence of cinema’ constitutes not an operation original to Puig, and it cannot be remarked as Puig’s work main legacy.

Caicedo begins as a moviegoer during the 1960s, though he early experiences the effects of cinema through an oral account made by his sisters: ‘cuando salieron de ver la primera Drácula con Christopher Lee tuve que dormir con mis padres ante el pavor que me produjo el comentario de esa película’ (Caicedo 2007, p. 26). Caicedo’s first cinematic experience, when he was nine or ten years old, corresponds to a movie he did not watch. Puig, for his part (resembling Caicedo’s experience), goes to the theatre for the first time accompanied not by his mother, but by his father, and the movie they watched was The Bride of Frankenstein (1935) (Levine 2000). Both horror films and horror literature constitute important elements in Caicedo’s narrative as several of his stories demonstrate. Roger Corman’s films based on Poe’s stories, for instance, are often alluded:

una calavera del tamaño de la cara de Vincent Price llenaba la pantalla […]
lo mismo con la cara de Peter Lorre y de Debra Paget […] que bailó desnuda en El Tigre de Bengala (Caicedo 2008b, p. 157)
This excerpt also shows how close to some of Puig’s techniques are some of the texts written by Caicedo. We find here the guiltless presence of Hollywood films. Nevertheless, Caicedo does not incorporate only film culture, but also other mediascapes as key as cinema, such as rock and Salsa music. These incorporations are important, less for what they offer as novelty as for how they contribute to depict a Latin America that does not have much in common with the portraits made by those narratives that prevail at that time.

Caicedo, as Fuguet states, writes in Cali ‘mientras que por esos mismos días, un compatriota suyo insistía en narrar el pasado como si fuera todo un cuento de hadas’ (Caicedo 2008c, p. 263). Caicedo’s work was produced during an intense period of roughly a decade (1966-1977) (Caicedo 2008a), a period where, coincidently, García Márquez produced that archetypal archival fiction, according to González Echevarría (1990), aimed at setting up a definitive Latin American myth. In contrast, the young Caicedo already expressed certain incapacity of history for accounting the present (Caicedo 2008c), attempting instead to follow the unsteady movements of a youth highly engaged with more unstable landscapes.

Yet the relationship between Caicedo and mediascapes was far from being non-conflicting. In this regard, it is worth highlighting a couple of relevant episodes in Caicedo’s involvement with cinema. In 1973, Caicedo travels to the United States with the sole aim of ‘vender dos guiones de horror’ (Caicedo 2007, p. 28). Caicedo stays mainly in his sister’s home (Houston), where he finishes two screenplays he was determined to sell to Roger Corman in Hollywood. Unfortunately, Caicedo goes to Los Angeles but comes back unsuccessfully to Houston, soon returning to Colombia. He quickly realises that his failure constitutes a failure in the foreign language. This is particularly important as long as Caicedo begins to sketch his ¡Que viva la música! precisely in Los Angeles (Caicedo 2012). In a note written in 1975, Caicedo points out: ‘El idioma es también la gran traba, la gran angustia. Es la medida de cuán incompleto (como todo lo mío) fue el viaje a USA’ (Caicedo 2007, p. 73). This hard self-evaluation is telling as to how decisive the idiomatic barrier was. Since his screenplays are written in Spanish, Caicedo has to translate them to be read and assessed by film producers. In this task Caicedo was partially aided by his sister Rosario, though it did not suffice. After having received a rejection letter, Caicedo writes to Rosario from Los Angeles, complaining about a producer that did not even finish the reading of Caicedo’s screenplays due to its linguistic mistakes (Caicedo 2008a). Whether or not the reason behind the rejection was effectively a linguistic matter, what is clear is that Caicedo’s brief trip to the United States gave him awareness that access to
Hollywood was necessarily tied to a mastery of English. However, the main consequence of this failure —and here starts a second relevant episode— corresponds to the intense writing activity Caicedo develops from his return to Colombia onwards. Caicedo fails as a scriptwriter, but becomes an untiring film critic. In fact, in November of 1973, Caicedo organises the material for the first issue of Ojo al cine, the main space where Caicedo concentrates his cinematic concerns. Yet it is perhaps his utter devotion to cinema itself demonstrated in Ojo al cine what leads Caicedo to gradually develop a still more critical vision: ‘El hecho de que el cine esté peor cada día me afecta a mí en forma mucho más sentimental: yo casi estoy dispuesto a no escribir más crítica’ (Caicedo 2008c, p. 206). Caicedo soon experiences a process of disenchantment derived from quite a pessimistic view of what he saw as a crisis of cinema itself that he underscored in several occasions (Caicedo 2009). This view has consequences on his narrative, for while from 1969 to 1971 cinema has a strong presence within Caicedo’s short stories, within his ¡Que viva la música! it has ostensibly decreased.

The episodes described above allow us to observe that Caicedo’s relationship with cinema, overarching a brief but intense period, far from being comfortable, was a sort of tug-of-war. Hence the idea of Cinesífilis ['cinesyphilis'], a neologism through which Caicedo encompasses both his attraction to cinema and his tendency to regard it as a disease. In this frame, we should understand that cinema for Caicedo means a possibility of escaping Cali’s urban bourgeois life. This consideration is important since a good part of Caicedo’s narrative involves, like Puig’s, characters who experience some sort of confinement (Caicedo 2008b; 2008a). In 1973, Caicedo writes:

> En esa vida de la pequeña burguesía me gustaba pensar en que observando un film podía tener acceso a hechos recónditos de la vida real […] para eso no necesitaba más que dos movimientos: salir de la casa y sentarme en la butaca, callado, a ver. (Caicedo 2008c, pp. 105-106)

For Caicedo, cinema replaces Cali’s middle-class confinement. Although paradoxical, the way out of Cali’s bourgeoisie is achieved through an immersion: into the enclosed dimness of film projection. At the same time, watching a film can be even seen as a contemporary version of ‘contemplative practices,’ an idea especially relevant regarding Puig’s own relationship with cinema. After having watched a filling amount of films in the context of a film festival (Cartagena de Indias), Caicedo notably writes:
la vida contemplativa ya no es como la describieron los antiguos, en el campo, observando mañanas y atardeceres […] el ruido de los pájaros y la pureza de la sangre: la vida contemplativa del siglo XX se encuentra dentro de la atmósfera confortable de una sala de cine. Casi no tuve tiempo de ir al mar, por pasármela comiendo callado dentro de un fortísimo aire acondicionado.

(Caicedo 2008c, p.122)

This is perhaps one of Caicedo’s most acute observations: through cinema Caicedo turns his back on nature. It must be noted that, either in Cali or Cartagena, and unlike Puig, Caicedo is surrounded by a landscape ‘que combina cordilleras, playas, selvas y planicies’ (Caicedo 2008a, p. 13), perhaps the sort of environment Puig would have wished to be surrounded by during his childhood. However, both authors share this ‘turning away’ from the natural landscapes of their regions, preferring instead those ones showed on the screen.

What is at work here when two Latin American writers, one of them during the 1930s, the other three decades later, seek a landscape elsewhere than in natural surroundings themselves? In Puig, as we have seen, this rejection is based upon the absence of vegetation as well as upon a landscape that becomes a ‘figure’ —the dry pampas as an authoritarian geography. Nevertheless, and since Cali’s surroundings do include vegetation, the sheer absence of vegetation would not be enough to explain Caicedo’s position. What both authors share, therefore, is a critical relationship with the national territory and its constraints (middle-class, patriarchal order), followed by a phenomenon of replacement via mediascapes. In both cases, it is cinema that in the beginning allows a concrete escape from the land (class, nation), an effective land(escape). We have already seen how far this flight went for Puig. Now we see how Caicedo undertakes his own, for it is with the excuse of cinema, as when Puig travels to Rome, that Caicedo gets away, albeit without expectations accomplished, from the Valle del Cauca region. It is also working as a film critic that Caicedo, years later, travels to New York to cover film festivals (Caicedo 2008c). It is important to point out these concrete displacements, since it is cinema what fuels the respective movements, either from bourgeois domestic environments to the theatre, or from national territories to transnational ones (Hollywood, cinema world).

Yet the ‘escape’ in Caicedo’s work is not entirely resolved by cinema as ¡Que viva la música! demonstrates. Here we need to consider a figure Caicedo conceives as a result of his first trip to the United States that will allow us to understand the genesis of his last
work. In a letter to a friend, Caicedo explains that, in American literature, there is not ‘alusión directa y extensa al sitio donde se reside como algo permanente’ (Caicedo 2008c, p. 71). This characterisation constitutes, regardless of its accuracy, the seed for Caicedo’s view of Cali as a confined milieu, for the main conclusion drawn from this parallel Caicedo makes has to do with Latin America’s strong rootedness, a quality that in turn would enable a contrasting affective experience: ‘la gente en Latinoamérica siente mucho más, porque sabe […] que cuenta con todo el tiempo del mundo para desarrollar una tristeza’ (ibid.). Hence the dark vision of Cali that Caicedo develops after returning from abroad —Cali as a dungeon exerting an ingrained force: ‘Ciudad de mierda ésta, Calicalabozo, se está y se quiere ir, se va y se quiere estar’ (p. 134). This perspective, however, does not amount to a mere ‘rechazo climático, geográfico, ni mucho menos humano’ (Caicedo 2008b, p. 31) toward Cali. Rather, Caicedo here deals with something Latin American literature —which at that time was enjoying great success— is time and again appealing to: an ‘original’ landscape, regarded as unique and as a source of cultural identity. In 1975, Caicedo sets forth a project for a novel whose setting, for the first time, would not be Cali, whereby its character would elliptically wander through different settings (New York, Los Angeles, Cartagena): ‘el lector no sabría a ciencia cierta cuándo llegó allí, una facilidad de transporte que se encuentra solo en los sueños y en las películas’ (Caicedo 2007, p. 77, italics mine). This plan shows how Caicedo was trying to envisage a transnational narrative, in order to eschew the regional/national, and indeed bourgeois, precincts. Even though Caicedo never developed such a project, it is in ¡Que viva la música! where those drafted aims are actively played out.

If QVM constitutes Caicedo’s masterpiece, it is precisely because Caicedo unfolds in it the set of political, linguistic and cultural issues he has heavily coped with. The novel creates the voice of María del Carmen Huerta, a blonde young woman who relates an urban trip, the account of her own transformations revolving around Cali’s districts. Throughout this adventure, Marías’s body successively embodies different (culturally defined, ideologically charged) stances, being particularly affected by each one of them.

As has been mentioned, in QVM cinema practically does not appear. Having analysed Caicedo’s relationship with cinema, it is now possible to understand why María dismisses film culture in the first pages of the novel. Because of her hair, María has been compared with Lilian Gish, though she did not know Gish was an actress: ‘me la he venido

21 ¡Que viva la música! From now on this is abbreviated as QVM.
imaginando con miles de collares, cantando, rubia total, a una audiencia enloquecida’ (Caicedo 2012, p. 7). María is not a moviegoer. Instead, her imagining belongs to music. In that sense, since it has been experienced as something increasingly decadent and, earlier, as the site of an introspective confinement, Caicedo cannot use cinema as this female body’s gear. Consequently, QVM turns to music, particularly to Salsa, with María’s trip being a transit from a Cali youth immersed into rock culture to a linkage with a different, if more vital environment, ‘jóvenes que no estudian en el San Juan Berchmans, que no se encierran’ (Caicedo 2012, p. 92), a youth involved instead with rhythms sung in Spanish. However, this transit cannot be deemed, as we shall see soon, as a sheer leap from the Anglo-American to something more ‘Latino.’

Significantly, this urban trip begins when María interrupts her committed meetings with her male intellectual friends, who discuss Marx’s Capital:

> Yo lo que quiero es empezar a contar desde el primer día que falté a las reuniones, que haciendo cuentas lo veo también como mi entrada al mundo de la música, de los escuchas y del bailoteo. (Caicedo 2012, p. 8)

QVM is the story of an interruption, the account of bodily a/effects brought about by a decisive discontinuity. Yet we should figure out why it is so important for Caicedo to put the deviation from this Marxist group as the way María’s body can become a shifting experimentation field. Once again, it is through Caicedo’s unstable link with cinema that we can understand this situation. As a film critic, Caicedo experienced the paradoxical position of being attracted to Hollywood and, at the same time, of being pushed by the ideological demands of the early 1970s (Caicedo 2008a; 2007). Although Caicedo shared leftist ideas, his aesthetic preferences were often aside of his political’s. While Caicedo outlined perspectives for a politically committed Latin American cinema, ‘paralelamente escribía guiones de horror y westerns con el único propósito de venderlos en USA’ (Caicedo 2009, p. 23).

Nevertheless, in QVM María breaks her routine only to find another one, offered by the excesses of rock culture. Even though María’s breakaway, at first, is not absolute, it cannot be seen, as Williams (1980) does, as an unsolved ambiguous position of a character hesitating between popular culture (rock) and intellectual tasks. In fact, when María turns away from rock music, she attempts to resume her study group, claiming that ‘[h]ay que
sabotear el Rock para seguir vivos’ (Caicedo 2012, p. 101). However, when she requests a meeting to tell her intellectual friends this ‘revelation,’ they postpone the talk with María to the next Friday, though then neither part attends: ‘Yo, porque me enrumbê. Ellos, y esto sí me duele, porque me ignoraron, los teóricos’ (ibid.). From then on María is not ambiguous at all, and everything that is located in the northern districts (cinema, rock, Marx) is replaced by the vital engagement with Salsa shared by the youth from the southern zone of Cali. In that sense, María’s body trip is also a geographical transit that explicitly enacts known oppositions (North/South, rock/Salsa, bourgeoisie/lower class). The Marxist group fits in these dichotomies too as part of north/rock/educated class. In fact, when María comes into contact with Salsa music, the university and its late sixties political endeavours are rejected by María’s discourse, pleasantly alienated in Salsa lyrics (Caicedo 2012). Yet this body’s trip is not a sheer celebration of music either, but a more ambitious project. As we shall see, María goes from the ‘civilised’ pole (North) to reach a ‘barbarian’ extreme (South), a zone where an intellectual approach to Marx seems not to be the most efficient way of counteracting American ‘imperialist’ influxes. If when discovering Salsa María cries out ‘¡Abajo la penetración cultural yanky!!’ (ibid., p. 98, italics in original), she does it so because her body has achieved not only a linguistic disaffection (from English/rock) but, at the same time, an emotional one, represented by the end of her affair with American musician Leopoldo. This detachment will take on a more radical version when María meets Bárbaro, the most dissimilar character to María’s former English-speaking lover.

The linguistic conflict, as we see, is key to understand the issues Caicedo seeks to represent. María does not manage English. During the party where she meets Leopoldo, María and her friend Ricardito listen to a Rolling Stones’ song. María asks Ricardito to translate it: ‘toda esta gente sabe inglés. Míralos no más en qué comunión están. ¿Tú sabes la canción?’ (p. 45). Unlike María, Ricardito understands English, and he certainly translates the song, adapting and even improving the original version. To this action follows María’s desperate answer: ‘Si había mejorado la letra, entonces era que la había cambiado. ¡Oh, cómo me sentí de desamparada sin mi inglés!’ (ibid.). Ricardito’s improved translation raises a sense of deceit in María, followed by a feeling of distress. María’s distress listening to a musical style sung in a foreign language, is the beginning of the end for María’s engagement with a north/rock/bourgeois zone, and consequently, with any expression mediated by foreign languages, even including a necessarily translated text (Marx’s Capital) and cinema itself with all its subtitling machinery. María’s body suffers, therefore, of a kind of dizziness derived from Ricardito’s translation ‘side-a/effects,’ an
uncontrollable blind spot whose solution María will attempt to find resorting to other rhythms, districts, languages, classes.

Maria’s distress is none other than María’s need of being part of a milieu no longer limited by linguistic and national constraints. Her initial anti-Americanism is contingent, and María embodies a caricature, especially regarding her connection with those Marxist intellectuals who dismiss her. María, in QVM, is affected by—even she seems trapped in—a binary reality, though her encounter with Salsa is not so much a counterpoint to English or rock as the concrete possibility of dissolving opposite terms: English/Spanish, American/Latin American. Why does Salsa offer this possibility? Basically because it constitutes a transnational cultural product with Spanish lyrics. Caicedo, as Duchesne-Winter points out, ‘opone la impronta pan-latina, transnacional, de la salsa, a los ritmos propiamente regionales y nacionales todavía privilegiados en el Norte’ (2007, p. 23). It is clear that it is not the quest of a new regionalism, understood as resistance to imperialism, what is at stake. Salsa is not a rhythm originally produced in South America but in the United States, though it was extremely successful in some of its countries (Waxter 2002). As if Caicedo wrote that he could not reject a Western film just because of its American origin, he seems to incorporate Salsa as an example of a cultural product that takes over Cali’s lower classes, generating an unexpected sense of community, later even bridging ‘distinctions of race, ethnicity, and class to become a widespread emblem of urban popular identity’ (ibid., p. 239).

Yet the motion of María’s fluctuating body does not stop on dance floors. As we mentioned, the appearance of Bárbaro makes an inflection out of which María reaches her utter way out from an urban, civilised environment to experiment with the radicalism of a character that seems to be a symbol more than anything else: ‘Allá no nos faltará Salsa,’ Bárbaro offers, ‘ni los gringos comehongos, de los que […] soy experto bajador’ (Caicedo 2012, p. 143). Another version of Sarmiento’s gaucho, Bárbaro demonstrates all his aggressive commitment to that anti-Americanism we spoke of. María’s body in motion goes with him, as though being affected by this extreme perspective was necessary, too, to experience what is there, on that margin. Within QVM’s most baroque episode, Bábaro dies after having stabbed a gringo to death, a scene significantly set in a dry landscape. Bábaro’s death is described by the hallucinated narration of María, who meanwhile is sexually attracted to the female American’s partner, María Iata. Bábaro dies killed by a tree that ‘lo derrumbó y de un salto se sembró en su estómago […] se relajó en una forma total, murmurando ríos de delicia’ (ibid., p. 166). But what kills Bábaro is Bábaro’s own
horizon, his obstinate rootedness, wherein of course Bárbaro, as María describes, feels quite comfortable dying. His death amounts to his own excess: the regionalist-anthropological yoke that makes him see an enemy in any foreign influence. After this quite allegorical episode, both María’s and María Iata’s body meet in sexual intercourse while the arid landscape of sierras grow green again (firstness), cancelling out that inflexible rooted ‘tree [that] has implanted itself in our bodies, rigifying and stratifying even the sexes’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 18). Bárbaro’s death finishes up male vigilance, mountains becoming ‘tan mujeres, tan seguras’ (Caicedo 2012, p. 168). Here, music or films have yielded ground to the plentitude of a natural landscape that is no longer ‘dry,’ a revisited Latin American landscape that breaks away from its canonical depictions.

Summing up, Caicedo notably locates this female body as overcoming each male version found throughout Cali: the ideological intellectuals, a translator/transculturador, the American musician, the anti-American regionalist. What María crosses is a spectrum of Latin American perspectives, her body being consecutively affected and disaffected, enthused and disappointed. Unlike the foundational Jorge Isaacs’ María (Sommer 1993), Caicedo’s María does not die waiting for a man, surrounded by a lush landscape. Instead, she unmask each rigid male figure, reaching an unsettling place in Cali’s central red district, a location equally distant from the extremes (North/South). Caicedo’s narrative, thus, seems not to rely entirely on mediascapes, because of the solidarities mediascapes have come to hold with linguistic, national, class, and even sexual coninements. In disrupting binary regimes by falling back on a transnational figure (Salsa), Caicedo shows us the scope of those regimes, with this female body’s ability for transporting itself beyond cultural/linguistic barriers, and this way trespassing boundaries set by some rough, albeit quite traditional, Latin American districts.

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22 Even María falls for a creolist salsómano she later dismisses.
4. Two Cases of (Non-)Latin American Cinematic Landscapes

4.1 Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together: Falls of Transnational Unhappiness.*

Despite matters of nationality, Wong Kar-wai’s *Happy Together* (1997) can be perfectly considered as part of what I call the uncomfortable Latin American narrative. That Wong’s feature be not eligible as a ‘Latin American’ film means, above all, that it would not be accounted for by any history of, or volume on, Latin American cinema. There would be many reasons for this likely omission: the film’s director is not Latin American-born; the film’s spoken language is not Spanish (nor Portuguese). Despite these and other questionable reasons, Wong’s film does contain a significant depiction of the region. Even before any critical consideration on cinema and transnationality, what is important is that it is entirely possible to legitimately discuss the ‘Latin American’ through works that fall outside of what we customarily label as such. Fortunately, there have been at least a couple of relevant academic works that have not overlooked Wong’s film in this regard (Gruzinski 2002; Masiello 2001). Its inclusion here, however, contains a bias, that is, the acknowledged influence that Puig’s work has exerted upon Wong’s films. Even though it constitutes a significant aspect, I shall address Wong’s *Happy Together* mainly as a non-Latin American film that allows us to look critically at certain traditional cinematic representations of the region. What is at stake, once again, is a landscape, and how *Happy Together*’s characters, as human bodies in transit, are affected by its pursuit, this way contributing to the reconfiguration of both themselves and a recurring modes of representation.

Since they have come to light in the late 1980s, Wong Kar-wai’s films have been the object of permanent attention by scholars, addressed through quite different approaches which have gone from postmodernism and culturalism (Abbas 1997; Lee 2009; Brunette 2005) to consistent oppositions to those perspectives (Bettinson 2015). Having achieved global recognition, Wong is doubtless the most important Hong Kong film director (Best Director Cannes 1997). Wong’s *Happy Together* constitutes his sixth feature as well as his first big international success after *Chunking Express* (1995), and before the acclaimed *In the Mood for Love* (2000).

*Happy Together* is a film fundamentally played out in Buenos Aires, though there are significant scenes shot abroad (Taiwan, Hong Kong) as well as in other South American geographies (Iguazu Falls, Tierra del Fuego). It tells the story of Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung), a gay couple who travel from Hong Kong to Argentina
attempting to reinvent their relationship. Later appears Chang, a third male character who opens a storyline no less relevant. After opening shots of Hong Kong passports stamped with the Argentine border seal, soon the couple is shown on the road crossing Argentine flatlands, driving a wrecked car in search of Iguazu Falls. The quest fails while their relationship has an early breakup, and the film quickly finds its main setting. In Buenos Aires, each protagonist struggles to adapt himself to a new environment as an immigrant on his own. The plot is mainly commanded by Lai’s voice-over describing his complex affair with Ho. It is a relationship in its last stages, whose reiterative motto is that of ‘starting over,’ and whereby the unsatisfied desire of seeing the Falls serves as a backdrop for an uncertain affective bond. In fact, the key element within the scenario is the recurrent presence of a lamp printed with drawings of a couple standing and staring at the desired landscape. When the light is on, the lamp becomes the Falls, and both Lai and Ho appear in several shots staring at the waterfall printed over the combed surface with melancholy. While Lai works as a doorman in a tango bar, his former partner seems to be involved in a wild nightlife routine that only takes a break when Ho arrives at Lai’s room with his face and hands covered with blood. Lai looks after Ho, and now we see them living under the same roof. But while Ho tries to recover the closeness, Lai strictly keeps distances. Nonetheless, there is a new approach between them while Ho makes a full recovery, as the scenes where they appear learning tango or trying to reach the Falls again, albeit failing for the second time, seem to demonstrate. Lai hiding Ho’s passport adds just a further odd behaviour to characters constantly struggling to keep away from solitude in foreign lands. This sort of re-encounter is marked by a shift: from a film so far governed by the black and white to colour. Yet colour here does not mean the beginning of any happiness. Quite the contrary: from now on the film remarks the constant arguing of a couple engaged in a violent coexistence, Lai clearly embodying a rational pole, whereas Ho plays the troublemaking opposite. If they prolong their season in Argentina is only because they cannot afford to go back. Hence their precarious, unsettling situation as Eastern migrants deprived of any especial affective bond beyond its frantic relationship which ultimately, and despite the back-and-forth dynamic, will be completely dissolved, Lai returning to Hong Kong via Taipei (Chang’s home) and Ho staying in Buenos Aires.

This is succinctly the story told by Wong’s ‘Buenos Aires Affair,’ as a documentary on the making of Happy Together23 lets us know through shots of a clapperboard which

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indeed reads ‘B.A. Affair.’ As is known (Teo 2005; Tambling 2003), the provisional title of Wong’s film was not a coincidence. Wong knows Puig’s work well since the beginning of his career. As Stephen Teo points out (in a study on Wong’s oeuvre that goes as far as entitling many of its chapters paraphrasing Puig’s novels), Wong reads Puig’s *Boquetas pintadas* following the advice of his mentor Patrick Tam: ‘Wong has tried to “master the structure” of the novel by applying it to his movies’ (Teo 2005, p. 4). In considering his work as highly influenced by literature, Teo states that Wong would be the ‘Puig of Hong Kong cinema’ (ibid., p. 5). Wong, thus, might be regarded as a literary filmmaker, as long as his ‘literariness is a sensibility of telling stories in cinematic style’ (ibid., p. 3). Despite some excessive claims, I agree with Teo when he argues that the Puig-Wong link ‘alludes to the seminal nature of the author’s influence and the way that Wong has digested his style of storytelling’ (ibid., p. 5). There is, certainly, a Puig-like trait in many of Wong’s films, a management of the cinematic narrative which might be described as the ability to put different stories/characters in parallel, thereby telling a story from different perspectives and not, as Teo believes, because of sheer ‘non-linear, illogical narratives’ (ibid., p. 162). This can be observed even in Wong’s shooting technique: multiple takes from all possible angles for one scene, later allowing a montage drawn from several but always partial views (Bettinson 2015). *Happy Together*, according to Teo, was originally a plan for adapting Puig’s *The Buenos Aires Affair*. That was the reason why Wong and his crew decided to travel to Argentina, soon disposing of their original project, though ‘the movie continued to be known by the novel’s title’ (Teo 2005, p. 101).

I want to emphasise, in passing, that this ‘Latin link’ cannot be reduced to a mere literary influence, for it is part of a broader framework which includes Wong’s own transnational background, and all that ‘dense cross-cultural, cross-medial matrix’ (Ma 2009, p. 147) whereby the ‘Latin’ does not come exclusively mediated by Latin America. If Wong’s *In the Mood for Love*, for instance, includes Asian lovers dancing boleros, this element might derive either from Puig or from Hong Kong culture itself during the epoch portrayed (which indeed includes Hollywood films), along with its Filipino connection (Ma 2009; Teo 2005). As Wong himself once declared, having been born in Shanghai, he emigrates to Hong Kong as a child (Bettinson 2015), finding an adverse linguistic context there. However, he and his mother started, like Puig with his in the *pampas*, to go to the theatre: ‘we could see Hollywood films, Mandarin productions, local productions, European films’ (Brunette 2005, p. 133).
Wong’s obsession with Puig’s work can be seen as one of the main reasons that brings him into South American soil. Happy Together constitutes an assemblage between Wong’s cinematic perspective and some of Puig’s own preoccupations. Wong’s conflictive couple resembles both The Buenos Aires Affair and El beso de la mujer araña. In fact, both Lai and Ho are two Asians trapped not in a prison but in a Latin American metropolis, condemned to earn a living as in-need immigrants, and where the only escape available seems to be an elusive natural landscape which, from the confinement of their second floor room in barrio La Boca, is only reachable through an ersatz of that very landscape, a fetishised reproduction, a second-hand vista of both Latin American nature and happiness. There is no direct access to this firstness for these characters, though Wong reveals a magnificent view of the Iguazu Falls through a spectacular helicopter-shot. This is the first image that colourfully disrupts the hegemony of the barely interrupted black and white during the first quarter of the film. The Iguazu Falls appear again twice, in the last quarter, seen directly from Lai’s perspective (for Lai finally does see them by himself), and once again from high above, in a long sequence whose soundtrack now replaces Caetano Veloso’s Cucurrucucú Paloma by the no less melancholic accords of Astor Piazzolla’s Tango apasionado.

Why does this film give such a relevance to the landscape? According to Harper and Rayner (2010) there is an ‘inescapable truth that cinema has itself contributed to the imagining and definition of national landscapes and communities’ (p. 24). Landscapes within films are purportedly selected and ‘never neutral in intention or reception. Depicted landscapes are often symbolic, and frequently contribute to social formation’ (ibid., p. 16). If we read Happy Together, as have been often naturally done, tracking it down as a Hong Kong film, we will quickly concur with ideas of transnationality, Chinese diaspora, cross-cultural representation, which often emphasise ‘the elusiveness of Hong Kong’s cultural space’ (Siegel 2001, p. 80). However, what is relevant here is to underscore the landscape as defining a community other than that of Hong Kong. If, as Harper and Rayner state, ‘cinematic landscapes, are portrayals that connect filmmakers and audiences with an innate and primal sense of self and of the world’ (2010, p. 18), in the case of Happy Together this connection would occur not only between Wong’s film and an Asian audience. Wong’s film, as others such as Werner Herzog’s Aguirre, Wrath of God (1972) and Fitzcarraldo (1982), constitutes a portrait that makes this connection especially sensitive to the Latin American part. Furthermore, if soundtrack is ‘integral to cinematic landscapes’ (ibid., p.
19), in selecting artists such as Veloso or Piazzolla, Wong’s film becomes a privileged case in point.

The Iguazu Falls might be considered as one of the most transnational Latin American landscapes, located in the ‘confluence of the Iguazu and the Parana rivers’ (Tambling 2003, p. 41), conforming a tripartite border (Argentina-Brazil-Paraguay). As Tambling notes, the Iguazu Falls had already been depicted in Roland Joffé’s *The Mission* (1986). However, there as in Herzog’s films, the landscape shows up in a quite different way compared with Wong’s film. These films, Joffé’s and Herzog’s, constitute examples of a traditional cinematic representation of Latin American nature, whereby nature appears in a similar way as it does in those narratives addressed in Chapter 2, that is, as a pervasive force. In his famous ‘On Magic Realism in Films’ (1986), Frederic Jameson argued that

South American films (along with their European pastiche, as in some of those of Werner Herzog) frequently identify themselves by means of an opening “logo” meant to signify the immensity of the continent itself: a high-angle panoramic shot of the enormous sweep of jungle vegetation as it rises and falls into an illimitable horizon, (1990, p. 135)

Considering my analysis already done in former chapters, it is possible to figure out the literary antecedents of that ‘logo’ Jameson refers to. If Wong’s film, following Jameson’s rationale, can be deemed as a Hong Kong pastiche, we can nonetheless see how it interrupts the way nature has been represented in films such as Joffé’s or Herzog’s. For instance, in Herzog’s *Aguirre*, the landscape is as sublime as the conqueror’s action, whose desire of racial purity represents a civilising delirium (as extreme as Bárbaro’s behaviour in Caicedo’s *QVM*) ‘in which History will become the “opera” of Nature’ (Deleuze 1992, p. 184), a delusion of grandeur repeated in Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo*, where ‘the whole virgin forest becomes the temple of Verdi’s opera and Caruso’s voice’ (ibid.). In Herzog, the landscape is vast and extensive, generating an excessive utopian landscape as well as characters struggling with an environment they cannot master, an ungovernable nature of secondness, of demanding activity, showing us ‘the almost irrelevant dimensions of the human body with respect to nature, and to the landscape’s overall indifference to our presence’ (Prager 2010, p. 98).

In contrast, Wong’s film shows a type of moving sublimity (firstness) which appears only after its lampshade reproduction, and, at least at the beginning, exclusively in
the film spectators’ sight. It is not any ‘original’ Falls that matter to Wong’s characters. In fact, they start their quest because of this souvenir lamp, and not because of the landscape itself. Throughout the film, the Falls are replaced by its artificial copy (thirdness that in turn emphasises firstness), which is ever present inside the room, becoming the characters’ object of admiration and affective projection. The natural landscape, therefore, is not a symbol, as Brunette (2005) argues, of any utopia ‘forever unreachable in the real world’ (p. 74), for Lai finally reaches his pursued landscape (Iguazu Falls), as Lai’s Taiwanese friend Chang does as well, arriving at South America’s southernmost lighthouse (Ushuaia) where Lai has heard of heartbroken people can leave there their unhappiness behind.

Despite its grandiosity, the natural landscape becomes something less indifferent in Happy Together than in Herzog’s films or in Joffe’s The Mission (where what is again at stake is a wild nature being —culturally, spiritually— tamed). In Wong’s film the lampshade, as reducted nature, cannot be considered but as a concrete limited horizon for transnational bodies stagnated in a peculiar affective state, which in turn does not allow the meeting with any all-encompassing nature. As Molina and Valentín remembering films set in tropical mediascapes, Lai and Ho permanently reach the Falls looking at the lampshade, as though they were fathoming why the promise of Latin American exoticism, their trip and happiness together, has become neither so exotic nor so ‘Latin American.’ In fact, after being fired, Lai finds a new job in a Chinese restaurant, where he meets Chang, another Asian immigrant (Taiwanese), the only significant person he met in Buenos Aires. Ho, meanwhile, does not establish any durable relationship, only becoming involved in the violent nightlife. Rather than happy, this trip quickly becomes a harsh period in Latin America, a region represented as devoid of any preconceived pleasantness.

Yet, as I have emphasised, both Lai and Chang do meet their respective landscapes. In both cases, nature functions as ‘natural’ reliefs, alleviating the unhappy intimacy of these Asian in transit at the end, accomplishing thus that old legend about getting rid of the emotional burden. When Lai reaches the Falls, they finally appear from below, that is, from the perspective of Lai staring wet at the waterfalls, mimicking the lampshade drawing. Next, again an aerial shot that matches now Lai under the cascade rainfall. The natural landscape, thus, keeps its Edenic sublimity but it becomes reachable, even touristic, not utopian at all. It becomes reachable not only for locals/nationals, but for these deterritorialised bodies that wander through this urban-natural environment as through simply another station in the global world. The score reinforces this idea, in that both Caetano Veloso and Astor Piazzolla constitute paradigms of Latin American hybridism,
amalgams of popular and cult forms ‘donde ambas intenciones coexisten, y pueden ser entendidas y gozadas, en niveles diversos, por públicos distintos’ (García Canclini 2001, p. 326). If nature can be healing, the human body is not irrelevant to these landscapes. Let’s recall that both Lai and Ho have been sick in different moments, and Lai reaches the Falls as long as he achieves an emotional separation from Ho. Wong’s characters constitute bodies affected by both the artificial and natural landscape, by both the lamp and the waterfall itself. ‘I feel very sad,’ Lai tells us, ‘like there should be two of us standing here.’ In encountering the Falls, this body acknowledges an affective overflow, though as Sara Ahmed reminds us, ‘[u]nhappiness is not our endpoint. If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere’ (2010, p. 50). To reach the Falls is, thus, the definitive closing of Lai’s Hong Kong-Buenos Aires affair, and probably the ‘starting over,’ his possible Buenos Aires-Taipei affair with Chang, the open virtuality of these bodies’ next ‘line of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), their next possibility of deterritorialisation.

Wong’s Happy Together allows us to consider the ‘Latin American’ through transnational filters, sights, bodies. It is both a film that deterritorialises the region from the very outset, and a non-Latin American cinematic text which offers us back re-territorialised depictions. As I have shown, an author such as Puig has been key to an Asian filmmaker for carrying out his quite personal filmic aesthetic, and Wong’s film is as relevant as Caicedo’s work or Fuguet’s to understand the critical reconfiguration of a label that has become increasingly permeable. The examples of important filmmakers who, despite their nationalities, have insisted on traditional depictions, also demonstrate how effectively those canonical Latin American narratives have spread throughout the global spectre since the late sixties onwards. Wong’s film nuances this tradition and constitutes a genuine contribution to alternative modes of representation which remains uncomfortable with the recurrence of the regional/national and its accustomed landscapes.

4.2 Lucrecia Martel’s La ciénaga: Unsettling Bodies in a Latin American Soundscape.
Increasingly addressed by scholars focused on contemporary Latin American cinema, the work of Lucrecia Martel stands out not only for its audiovisual density but for its ability to play it out in ways that seem to resist traditional approaches. Her three features so far, La ciénaga (2001), La niña santa (2004), and La mujer sin cabeza (2008), have achieved international acclaim, Martel becoming the most notable filmmaker out of the so-called
Nuevo Cine Argentino generation, and whose singularity as a woman director seems to be related more to a complex cinematic proposal than to a plain ‘critique of patriarchy’s traditional gender roles and normative sexuality’ (Schroeder 2004, p. 95). This section approaches Martel’s *La ciénaga* as an example of a cinematic text that partakes of what I call the uncomfortable Latin American narrative. As Wong’s film, Martel’s *La ciénaga* can be thought of alongside Puig’s work in order to understand the dimensions of her cinematic language and ability in deploying a novel critique to the tradition, driving us to unsuspected ways of seeing both the audiovisual as well as the political (Page 2009; Russell 2008). My interest is, firstly, to show crucial literary links in Martel’s work. Embodied in a cinematic texture, this literary base would constitute a key analytic entrance into her aesthetic achievements. This link allows us, secondly, to explain how *La ciénaga* works as an audiovisual artifact, what the importance of its stylistic emphasis is (prominence of sound). These operations, finally, will show how the film manages to achieve a cinematic rewriting of Latin America where, once again, the depictions of landscape play a crucial role.

Martel’s film constitutes an unsettling portrait of two families which live in the Argentine Northwest, and whose routine mainly takes place both in a country house (called La Mandrágora) and in its nearby town called La ciénaga.24 The film starts with Mecha (Graciela Borges) and her absentminded husband Gregorio appearing near the house’s stagnant swimming pool along with friends who, resting in lawn chairs anarchically arranged, silently cope with an unbearable heat, barely awakening to refill their glasses with cheap red wine. The stifling weather of the province seems to beset that sort of upper-class haunted property, surrounded by tropical hills where Joaquín, the youngest son, runs through it hunting, armed with a rifle. Mecha listens gunshots from below, which become undistinguishable from the thunder announcing the impending storm, vaguely worrying about them since Joaquín lost an eye some time ago. Meanwhile, Mecha’s daughter Momi lies in a bed beside her dear Isabel, whispering thanks to God for having blessed her with the company of that indigenous-featured maid. Isabel sleeps as Mechás’s second adolescent daughter Vero does so in another room. José, the older son, shows up in later scenes, coming from Buenos Aires, informed of the domestic accident his mother suffers in the pool terrace: Mecha falls down while collecting the empty cups of those numbed guests, hurting her chest with pieces of broken glass under the rainstorm, a scene that soon justifies the appearance of Tali’s family. Tali and her husband Rafael live in La ciénaga (town)

24 A fictitious name for Salta, Martel’s birthplace.
itself, in a middle-class house with their four children. Tali’s little son Luchi gets his leg hurt, and Tali takes him to the clinic. There, she is told about Mecha’s accident and informed of the drunken state of her well-known friend. The coincidence of accidents allows the families of Tali and Mecha to resume their relationship that summer. Tali visits Mecha, who is in a half-convalescent, half-depressed state, framed by the suffocating heat and the domestic disturbances. Mecha’s and Tali’s children now share the season together, spending their time within the boundaries and surroundings of La Mandrágora, hunting, telling stories, bothering each other, but especially resting, trying to avoid the high temperatures near a town in carnival time, where in addition the news of a miraculous apparition of the Virgin is permanently broadcasted, a holy image that Momi tries to see by herself at the end, after Luchi’s death and the departure of her dear Isabel.

Since in La ciénaga every character matters, to summarise its plot constitutes a challenging task. Martel’s La ciénaga does not tell the story of somebody in particular, but it tells what is occurring to all its characters at once. It is precisely the ciénaga what occurs in the film, it is the ‘swamp’ the protagonist of the film, a sort of ‘intense life’ Martel wants us to look at. ‘Una ciénaga no es un pantano,’ the Argentine filmmaker explains, ‘es un lugar donde chilan una cantidad de bichos y pájaros y toda una vida pequeña. Son lugares intensos’ (Monteagudo 2001). To make this intensity or ‘small life’ appear, Martel needs not only to tell a story through images, but invoking a whole set of whispers, noises, creakings, buzzings, speeches and human voices, in quite a striking non-hierarchical array. This characteristic marks the emphasis Martel’s work gives to sound as equally or even more important than image, and not just as a technical complement. This emphasis, of course, has a tradition, and it is because of this tradition that Martel’s style might be related (and just related) to neorealism as Deleuze defines it, the ‘build up of purely optical situations (and sound ones, although there was no synchronized sound at the start of neorealism)’ (1989, p. 2). Deleuze considers neorealism as the event that puts in crisis the traditional sensory-motor link of what he calls action-image (American cinema, Western, melodrama). Under this model, ‘objects and settings already had a reality of their own, but it was a functional reality, strictly determined by the demands of the situation’ (ibid., p. 4). With the rise of neorealism, by contrast, both objects and settings gain a new autonomy that renders them relevant because of their own materiality: ‘not only the viewer but the protagonists invest the settings and the objects with their gaze, that they see and hear the things and the people, in order for action or passion to be born, erupting in a pre-existing daily life’ (ibid., italics mine). While situations in traditional realism unfold given actions
to be modified/adjusted, an optical-sound film establishes itself in what Deleuze calls the ‘any-space-whatever.’ In that sense, *La ciénaga* might be taken as an example of those ‘deconnected or emptied spaces’ (Deleuze 1992, p. 120), as its characters seem most of the time in a ‘state of strolling, of sauntering or of rambling which defined pure optical and sound situations’ (ibid., italics in original). In fact, *La ciénaga* compels us to be all ears to sound. As Martel emphasises: ‘Sound is also the only truly tactile dimension of the cinema. It is the only way in which the cinema physically touches the spectator’ (Guest 2009, p. 36). Under a regime that privileges sound, the oral (speeches, dialogues) attains not only the status of being a vehicle for contents, but mainly a locus where its sounds (and not its discourses) are constantly being gauged. Martel’s film, thus, is not assembled out of image: ‘Es el sonido el que te conduce. La imagen es un modo de esquivar algo que quiero escuchar y no ver’ (Oubiña 2007, p. 60).

Yet if the prominence of sound takes over the film, soon we realise how crucial the presence of the word becomes, not for figuring out actions of the plot itself, or links among characters, but for attending to a set of sounding words which become the concrete generator of events. The pure materiality of sound and how its performances bring about a particular image/effect is what interests Martel: ‘It doesn’t matter how real or true the facts are; the issue is how something that somebody says is transformed into something that will change the world’ (Guest 2009, p. 33). Hence the common perception of *La ciénaga* as fragmented, as a film of elliptical style, with its apparent lack of screenplay: it is the word in all its ‘oral ability,’ and the oral ability of a material world which becomes the film’s real protagonist, the actions at stake, and the components of the ‘intensity.’ The barking of a dog Luchi never sees and the evil story narrated by Vero (the African rat), constitute concrete examples, among several, of how this set of sounds (human and non-human) can be regarded, as we shall do, as bodies affecting other bodies, as bodies effecting and having consequences on other ones.

Because of its sonorous quality, it is the word, as in a literary fiction, what seems to stick elements together. ‘As if she had closed her eyes to remember the sound of her childhood’ (Russell 2008, p. 1). *La ciénaga* can be regarded as a filmic *Bildungsroman*, in that it is a film shot through the ears/sight and ‘the perceptive powers of the child’ (Podalsky 2010, p. 110). *La ciénaga*, in that sense, can be seen as Martel’s own version of *La traición de Rita Hayworth*: the commanding voice/sight disappears, yielding ground to the multiplicity of sounds of a banal though crucial everyday life. When Martel observes that the structure of her film ‘es igual a una conversación telefónica con mi mamá’ (Martel
2001), she emphasises the primacy of oral tradition, as when Puig often declared that the inspiration for his first work had sprung from recalling his Auntie’s voice. Moreover, and in a vein similar to that of Puig, Martel dismisses her main influences as derived from cinema: ‘no tengo ninguna relación de afecto con el cine. De hecho, me cuesta ir al cine’ (Oubiña 2007, p. 60). In fact, the source Martel often refers to is literary, a legacy from Martel’s grandmother, who used to tell scary and compelling versions of stories such as those written by ‘Horacio Quiroga, a Uruguayan-Argentine writer who wrote a very feverish and mad literature’ (Guest 2009, p. 32). This is a key element in Martel’s building of her cinematic artifacts: ‘Me siento más cerca de las tradiciones de narración oral que de la tradición del cine argentino’ (Oubiña 2007, p. 56). Martel’s gesture of detachment from the world of cinema is analogous to that of Puig when he, conversely, detaches from the literary to link himself to the cinematic. In this regard, Martel has expressed a telling connection: ‘[Puig] tiene una relación afectiva tremenda con las películas y, a la vez, una tensión enorme hacia lo conversacional. Ahí es el único momento en que siento afecto por el cine’ (ibid., p. 60).

Yet the oral tradition Martel refers to takes on an unusual complexity, for Martel’s films do not pursue storytelling: ‘A mí no me interesa contar historias. Pero sí me interesa percibir un proceso’ (ibid., pp. 68-69). In this respect, we should wonder if perhaps the banality of everyday life in La ciénaga has not been mediated by literary fiction (in its oral quality) rather than by any cinematic tradition such as neorealism. In any case, this affiliation to neorealism should be balanced with the interesting assertions made by Gonzalo Aguilar (2008), who suggests La ciénaga would be a case of what Deleuze calls naturalism (impulse-image), which is not in opposition to realism, but exhausts it by means of an internal relationship created between an artificial ‘originary’ world and a geographical historical milieu. While Aguilar focuses on some metaphorical productivity of the ‘swamp,’ I would suggest, using the same schema (naturalism), that the country house La Mandrágora might be seen as an ‘originary world’ in a state both of suspension and confinement (locked out, indeed, when Tali visits it for the first time) this way configuring its artificiality, and connected internally to the geographical milieu (the outer reality, that broadcast by television, La ciénaga/Salta, northern Argentina). ‘The originary world,’ Deleuze states, ‘has no existence independent of the geographical and historical milieu which serves as its medium’ (1992, p. 124). Nevertheless, the naturalism of the impulse-image, is not compatible with the so-called any-space-whatever opened by neorealism, for naturalism implies a world the ‘action-image remains powerless to represent […] and the
affection-image powerless to make it felt’ (ibid., p. 123, italics mine). Thus, although naturalism allows us to understand some aspects, it does not suffice for explaining what is crucial in La ciénaga, for Martel’s film assures to a good extent its ability for conveying an intensity, as we shall see, through what Deleuze explains as the realm of the affect-image, considered as “a system of emotions” which is more subtle and differentiated, less easy to identify, capable of inducing non-human affects’ (Deleuze 1986, p. 110).

Both Wong’s Happy Together and Martel’s La ciénaga give an important role to rooms and beds as well as to human bodies resting on them. However, La ciénaga is not so much a film about beds (Oubiña 2007) as a film about bodies. I have emphasised this earlier: not only human bodies but bodies of all kind. In Martel’s film, beds become bodies too, as sounds, noises or lawn chairs do. Everything is a body in Martel’s film, which amounts to say that everything is able to affect and to be affected. If a swamp, as Martel describes it, is a place ‘where a lot of bugs live and the leaves rot, but not all of humanity sinks in’ (Guest 2009, p. 35), it is a dynamic of mutual stimulation and erosion, and not the mere account of a fall, or a sinking, what is there to be conveyed. In other words, there is certain vitality Martel wants to set up beyond the often misconstrued sticky film title: the affects these bodies, human and non-human, cause each other, correspond to an immersion that does not amount to decaying:

Esa experiencia del estar inmerso, sumergido, es una idea clave del artificio de construcción de estas películas que he hecho. Que uno se inventa para poder pensar, en realidad para volver a pensar, o quizá para volver a ver o ver por primera vez. (Martel 2001, italics mine)

What does Martel attempt to show ‘for the first time’ in La ciénaga? In this respect, scholars often open their analyses with the striking scene of the dragged chairs and Mecha’s falling. I shall consider this scene soon, but before I would like to underscore that La ciénaga begins and finishes with a still of a rainforest taken from below (a child’s perspective). What Martel attempts to show is a landscape, a piece of Latin American landscape quite different from those showed by magical realist cinema Frederic Jameson once analysed. Rather than an establishing-shot of a vast nature, Martel’s first take is brief and limited, though efficient. It is an image/sound that frames the whole film. La ciénaga is here, the film seems to convey, these are its limits, and all that is occurring should occur between these ‘brackets’ of nature. To this take follows the one showing red peppers drying
(against the rainforest backdrop), which become an analogy of what is coming: human bodies by the pool, seated on lawn chairs which, after the noises Mecha makes with a glass of wine filled with ice cubes, are noisily dragged over the surface of the terrace floor. This way these inebriated lethargic human bodies attempt to find a less uncomfortable position. This scene is relevant insofar as through it Martel quickly gives her cinematic artifact another status, withdrawing it from any realistic perspective: ‘I wanted to start La ciénaga in an unreal way. If I hadn’t, everyone would try to see the film as a documentary or a story of customs and manner’ (Guest 2009, p. 36). Certainly, Martel rapidly squeezes out the status of the film, locating it on slippery ground, deterritorialising it, placing it now in the any-space-whatever, a country house hard to figure out its exact dimensions, a family whose exact relationships we barely decipher. However, the effect is only achievable against this backdrop set by the first take. The fictional resistance Martel introduces through this ‘remarkable soundscape’ (ibid.), turns its back on an image of nature which has presided over a good number of Latin American literary/cinematic texts. Therefore, what Martel destabilises in this scene is, above all, the status of traditional Latin American cinematic representation, its identity obsession, and its explicit political commitments. That—and such— is the force of La ciénaga’s first scene, and this is Martel’s own remarkable uncomfortable landscape. The lawn chairs being dragged and Mecha’s sounding glass embody an emancipation from any trace either of costumbrismo or magical realism: ‘Rechazo completamente esa idea [magical realism]. De hecho, creo que es fascista. Para mí la realidad es, por supuesto, una construcción en la que tenemos que creer pero que también podemos cambiar’ (Oubiña 2007, p. 78). The unreal way Martel takes unfolds the possibility of seeing again, or for the first time, that the presence of nature does not have to be abolished but restated. In that sense, La ciénaga cinematically rewrites the representation of Latin America, recovers it from the hands of costumbrismo/magical realism, giving it another breath, depicting a landscape that constantly becomes ‘an immersive soundscape’ (Beck 2015, p. 2).

As Dominique Russell well points out, the Argentina that emerges in La ciénaga is ‘surprisingly “Latin American”’ (2008, p. 3), and it is so because of the intelligent way Martel introduces both the natural setting and the situations there represented. There is a natural force in La ciénaga that subjugates bodies. If human bodies are permanently uncomfortable, attempting to reach better positions on mattresses and chairs, it is because the tropical Northwest Argentina’s summer exerts all its force over them. That’s the reason why these framing images (first and last takes) are so important for grasping the way
Martel’s affect-image achieves her political efficacy. As Laura Martins argues, in Martel’s film it is not about the recovering of ‘un pasado en tanto registro histórico o la exploración en la memoria como recuerdo de los hechos, sino en bucear en los registros del cuerpo’ (2011, p. 412). But we should insist: it is not only a matter of human bodies. In La ciénaga nature does not recede, does not stop being a force, but it constitutes just another body — among many— exerting its potentialities: the mud absorbing the cow, the heat harassing characters, the rainstorm washing Mecha’s torso, the buzz of insects, the squawk of birds. Yet while nature is affecting, other bodies sound with equal force: glasses, dishes and cups, the springs of mattresses, the joints of doors, the bathroom sip, the carnival drums, radios, televisions, telephones, and so forth. Martel’s soundscape, therefore, does not establish a boundary between nature and culture. Nature is juxtaposed to a material world of objects, and all this seems all-encompassed through the sound track: ‘with the sounds of the natural world made to sound as close as the clinking glasses’ (Russell 2008, p. 3).

It is in this overlapped landscape that the political emerges. While a provincial Latin American town enjoys a carnival which includes news of a holy apparition (costumbrismo-magical realism), there is an artificial, suspended world (impulse-image) in state of uneasiness with respect to its immediate surroundings (affect-image). In other words, a canonical Latin American landscape is resisted by enclosed fictive bodies (human and non-human) affecting each other: ‘Porque toda vez que con nuestros artilugios narrativos podamos poner en cuestionamiento la legitimidad de lo real, yo pienso que estamos en un camino político’ (Martel 2001). Thus, if what Martel pursues to destabilise in the first scene was the possibility, as she suggests, of a costumbrista interpretation, the legitimacy La ciénaga calls into question is none other than that of a Latin American cinema characterised by the supremacy of ‘sight’ as a way of building the representation. Under such a regime, nature can always be represented as vast and measureless. Puig’s work resolves this problem by using fetishised mediascapes, which however enable its confined characters a political possibility as emancipated spectators. This way Puig detaches his work from a narrative historically subjected to concrete territorial/national attributes, where characters often cannot resist an enveloping nature.

Martel resolves the problem otherwise: Latin American landscape (natural or cultural) is indeed a strong force, but just one among others. Placing nature as another body (or placing the costumes, the carnival, the everyday issues of class and race, the extremely magical-realist Virgin’s apparition), Martel detaches her cinema from a traditional regime. As we have seen, it is the prevalence of the handling of sound (a no less artificial process:
the managing of frequencies, equalisations) that replaces sight. Under a sound regime, there is no hierarchy but bodies plunged into a permanent affective process within the any-space-whatever. This is, finally, Martel’s La ciénaga affect-image and its political efficacy: ‘La mirada domina al mundo. [Instead] La escucha recibe el mundo’ (Martel 2001). In fact, as it has often been analysed, sight is being continually displaced in Martel’s film: Mecha uses sunglasses, Joaquín lacks an eye, Luchi does not see the dog, Momi does not see the Virgin. But more importantly: we do not see the film (its bewildering plot) as much as we can listen to it. This difference Martel establishes is crucial insofar as it defines sensorial positions which are, at the same time, politically committed ones. They define, ultimately, what kind of worlds will be represented: ‘female directors [...] do not owe their importance to a militant feminism. What is more important is the way they have produced innovations in this cinema of bodies’ (Deleuze 1989, p. 196). What Martel achieves is neither a picture of customs nor a metaphor of a decaying nation (the shot of the cow sinking often misconstrued as a symbol of Argentina), but an innovative cinema of bodies. Not so much as the relevance of their postures/attitudes (Martins 2011) as sounding forces mutually exerted, thereby canceling out possibilities of binary readings. If Martel’s film deconstructs Sarmiento’s tradition, as Lange-Churión (2012) suggests, it is not because her work portrays the weakening of Argentine ‘civilised’ and ‘white’ upper class; rather, because bodies and its sounds cannot be subjected to a territorial sight that attempts to rule the land (Sarmiento’s project). Taking advantage of the literary (oral tradition), Martel’s unsettling cinema harbours the ‘Latin American’ as sound in order to deterritorialise it. Martel demonstrates how politically effective a cinema detached from traditional commitments becomes, and how the pledging to a set of ‘sounding bodies’ ensembles, a Latin American portrait that is no longer a landscape but soundscape, that is, essentially, a place out of the control of any immediate commanding gaze.
Conclusion

What has been significantly implied throughout this thesis is a critique of a certain traditional way of representing. What I have called the uncomfortable Latin American narrative corresponds to a set of works, literary and cinematic, where that tradition is questioned. The work of Manuel Puig appears as seminal in this horizon. Puig makes a crucial inflection related both to a literary interruption of that tradition on the one hand, and to the linguistic and even bodily struggle, in the terms this thesis has proposed, with that tradition’s cultural and political roots on the other. For this tradition has been, if not still is, strong and effective exerting its set of enduring definitions, values and landscapes. Puig’s work disrupts a dominant representation which in turn has been decisive for the configuration of that we usually label as ‘Latin American.’ Puig lightens that label as traditionally understood, though this turn hardly implies a less complex scenario. On the contrary, the emergence of the transnational, the identity loosening, the mass-media nature, the translingual writing, the intensity of bodies, all these elements constitute, both in Puig and in the relevant works analysed, intertwined and overlapped characteristics of a reconfiguration of the ‘Latin American,’ which due to this very complexity no longer amounts to the strictly national or to exclusively regionalist/magical-realist events. This thesis has shown how culturally rooted and ideologically charged were for Puig the successive ‘dry pampas’ he faced, and how he envisages —as an emancipated spectator— a sort of unauthentic, substitute, artificial (non-)Latin American vista, perspective. This is not only to better bear the particular sternness of his birth place, but to deal with, as well as to unveil the inflexibilities of a whole foundational structure he and indeed his characters were quite a part of. To show how similar processes have characterised the works of writers such as Andrés Caicedo and Alberto Fuguet, who coped with their respective constraints as a result of their own contexts of production, has been the way this thesis has pursued to relate them to Puig’s turn. Including here films such as those by Lucrecia Martel and Wong Kar-wai has also enabled us to ponder the scope of a critical process of detachment which is by no means restrictive to the literary field, these cinematic texts being key examples of the refurbishing of the regional/national, as well as remarkable narratives that feel at odds with the constraints offered by an often naturally and uncritically assumed set of canonical representations. Of course, Puig and these authors do not exhaust the possibilities of counteracting the tradition, and this thesis only has limited itself to suggest what I have
considered a crucial point of departure. This thesis, nonetheless, hopes to have demonstrated both the force and productivity of such a beginning.
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