

# The Crisis of Culture in the Hispanic Space

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**Abstract:** *The three essays analysed here depart from the same crisis of 'high culture'. They are the expression of the dynamics exerted by the Latin-American literary field in the era of globalization, where the tensions specific to the field – the struggle for success, intergenerational conflict, preservation of artistic autonomy – are added to the external ones created by the field of power that withholds the instruments of circulation and consolidation of the works. Mario Vargas Llosa's book, La civilización del espectáculo (The Civilization of the Spectacle, 2012), is a manifest for the defence of 'high culture', as it was perceived in other times (specifically, in the 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century); Daniel Tabarovsky's essay, La literatura de izquierda (Leftist Literature, 2010), highlights the paradoxes of a post-Avant-garde literature; finally, Roberto Bolaño's essays, included in El gaucho insufrible (The Insufferable Gaucho, 2003), signal the aporia where one can find both 'high' and 'massified culture' at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

**Key words:** *Boom generation, identity, magic realism, democratization of culture, civilization of the spectacle, leftist literature, cosmopolitanism*

As opposed to other cultural spaces, the emergence of a new field called 'Cultural Studies' in Latin America did not represent a rupture from the approach to the cultural phenomenon practiced here since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The wealthy production of topical essays, initiated by Andrés Bello and developed by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Martí, José Enrique Rodó, Pedro Enriquez Ureña, and Adolfo Reyes, opened a number of thematic directions which still stand today in the context of critical thinking as practiced on this continent: the national and continental issue, the binomials of rural/urban, tradition/modernity, memory/identity, the role of the intellectual in articulating discourse, as well as social, cultural and political practices.<sup>1</sup> Actually, the bearings of Latin American writers and thinkers is connected less to their belonging to the cultural space in which they formed themselves, while globalization brings to the foreground completely different issues than those which concerned the intellectuals of the 60s Boom. If one of the main points of their convergence is linked to the place of Latin American culture within Western culture and if a significant part of the textual production from this space has been enlivened by what Carlos Fuentes named 'the counter-conquest of Latin America'<sup>2</sup>, today's writers seem to renounce national and continental

delineations in order to become part of the global culture. However, this is a post-national global culture, apparently marked by crisis.

Two questions surface: does a crisis of culture really exist? Do we still have a clearly delineated Hispanic space on the globalized literary map? With regard to the first question, the answer is variable, even if one of the three essays that we will discuss here, the one penned by Vargas Llosa, proclaims the current crisis as undoubtable. With regard to the second question, the answer is more firm: the tendency of current important writers who create their works in Spanish is that of continuing a process which began in the 60s and 70s, when the international success of the Latin American Boom proved that precisely the most cosmopolitan of writers, the ones who frequently lived outside of their native countries and where often attacked for this reason, have managed to eradicate the complex of cultural 'marginality', 'provinciality' and 'minority' which has marked these literatures until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In Latin America, one often speaks of a 'post-national' literature<sup>3</sup>, while the struggles to affirm national or continental 'identity', which represented a meeting point for Boom writers, were forgotten once two essential facts were understood: 1) postcolonial studies practiced in the American style, which aim to retrieve the 'identity' eradicated by colonialists, are improper for a space where there is no African or Asian 'colonialism', given that the countries from this space have not been colonies for a few centuries (or they have never been so)<sup>4</sup>; 2) the ideological struggles, which extensively abused, even manipulatively, the concept of 'identity', have subsided and their place has been taken by an apparent consensus regarding the terms of service with the market of symbolic goods operates in a democratic regime.

Even 'identity', in its literary 'particularity' labelled once as 'magic realism', has been marked as representing the Third World writers' assumption of a degrading role of buffoons who encourage the tendencies of evading through exoticism and extravagance manifested by the public from developed countries. What may be considered as symptomatic is that writers from the so-called post-Boom generation, immune to the attractions of the commercial, have a very critical attitude towards writers such as Isabel Allende, Zoé Valdés, Luis Sepúlveda, Laura Esquivel, Ángeles Mastretta etc., who have accepted to fuel the editorial market with works infused with a hint of magic realism that does not destabilize the habits of reception towards Latin American literature.<sup>5</sup> Another symptomatic aspect can be found in the tendency towards cosmopolitanism manifested by important writers from the post-Boom generation, who formed groups with ironic names such as *McOndo* or *crack* and who either situate their novels in countries and time frames very different from the ones often employed by their masters<sup>6</sup>, or who revisit their vital environments by highlighting the transformations brought upon by pop culture, the generalization of the American lifestyle, the postmodern dissolution of 'identity' markers.<sup>7</sup> Globalized culture no longer takes into account a nationality, as humorously noted by Jorge Volpi; it represents nothing more than an anecdotic note on the back cover of the book.<sup>8</sup> But it seems that this globalized culture has entered a crisis, or so it is vehemently proclaimed by countless voices of the most honourable sort, such as Mario Vargas Llosa.

## I

The essay titled *The Civilization of the Spectacle*, written by the Nobel Prize-winning Spanish-Peruvian author, which appeared in the spring of 2010 at the most important publishing house from the Hispanic world, Alfaguara, became, without surprise, the bestselling book of April and May 2010 in Spain and Mexico. The topic of the book is far from being common, entering the vast lament-infused production regarding the disasters provoked by the democratization of culture and the loss of markers that would make the difference between ‘high culture’ and ‘mass culture’. The thesis is expressed clearly and repeatedly: the necessity of promoting ‘high culture’ to the effect of countering the gangrene of frivolity which has grasped all the manifestations of current life, from politics to sexuality, transforming the Western world into a ‘civilization of the spectacle’. Who is to be blamed for this? Intellectuals, mass media, secularization, the Internet, but especially the delegitimation, starting with the 1968 revolts, of an elite that, until that moment, had managed to guide the masses on the right path *i.e.* to democracy and to respect for human rights. With a touching melancholy, Vargas Llosa states that in a distant past culture used to be ‘a compass, a guide that allowed people to orientate themselves in the thicket of knowledge without losing their bearings, keeping their priorities clear when changing trajectories, along with the difference between what is important and what is not, between the main path and useless deviations.’<sup>9</sup> Now, however, ‘in the era of specialization and the collapse of culture, hierarchies have disappeared into an amorphous mishmash [...] where the slightest possibility of discerning, with a minimal level of objectivity, what is beautiful in art and what is not, is cancelled.’<sup>10</sup> The mere reference to the cultural wars fought between the Academics and the Impressionists is enough to question such a statement. Moreover, Vargas Llosa’s elitist and past-ridden position is open to be challenged from all sides, while attempting an overview of the blatant contradictions generated by such a discourse would not only be boring, but it would also be inevitably mischievous.

A few incongruences are worthy of being mentioned because they highlight an ambiguous placement within the field of culture; to a fighter against political authoritarianism – exerted by Castro, Chávez, Fujimori – defending an authoritarianism at a cultural level does not seem contradictory because it is based, as he suggests, on solid values, linked only to talent and not to class and power.

A second serious issue is related to the valuation of ideological struggle; according to Vargas Llosa, who truly shifted towards the Right in a moment when the *intelligentsia* was animated by Leftist ideals, it seems that an attitude as the one manifested by the 60s and 70s youth, ‘capable of sacrificing their lives for an ideal’, be it an erroneous one, such as the Communist Revolution, is preferable to the current state of endless distraction from ‘the civilization of the spectacle’. Praising, for a good reason, ‘the Arab spring’, the writer continues on a moralizing tone: ‘With regard to what is happening there, let us ask ourselves: How many western teenagers would be willing to face martyrdom for democratic culture today? [...] The answer is prompt:] Very few, for the simple reason that the democratic and liberal society, even though bringing the highest quality of life

level in history, has most significantly reduced social violence, exploitation and discrimination; instead of provoking enthusiastic adhesions, it has most frequently triggered boredom and contempt, even a systematic hostility to its beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup> The absence of attacks to democracy in western societies during the last decades makes it difficult to decide if Vargas Llosa's hypothesis is justified; however, the swift cessation of Jorg Heider's ascension in Austria in 2000 and the rallies organized in Hungary, Romania, and even in Russia, in 2011-2012, when antidemocratic tendencies have emerged in the politics conducted in these countries, make such a supposition seem void. The shift support, which frequently came from the part of citizens, and not from the state, that Europeans have given to the fighters from the Arab countries (such as providing Internet access, something that Vargas Llosa labels as the main factor of barbarization) shows that the ideal of democracy is far from fading due to the radical trivialization of culture.

What else could we say about the aristocratism of the writer with regard to religion? To the few and chosen, as himself, religion does not say anything, but for the masses that have not reached such a high moral attitude which would enable them to find their reservoir of spiritual life in the great culture, religion is very useful.<sup>12</sup>

And a last example: one of the characteristics of the civilization of the spectacle is, according to Vargas Llosa, the disappearance of the intellectual as an opinion leader in public debates, as his place has been taken by some of the most grotesque media figures (in place of Unamuno or Ortega, one can find Oprah Winfrey, for example<sup>13</sup>). On the other hand, postmodern intellectuals, from Foucault, Derrida, De Man, to Baudrillard and Lipovetsky, are annihilated in a solemn indictment, not only on the basis of the hermeticism of style that led to the rupture between 'specialists' and the public interested in literature or philosophy, but especially because they have ridden the social space with concepts that are not only false, but pernicious: the Derridean concept of self-reflexivity of language is repelling to a talented practitioner of realism such as Vargas Llosa, while the denunciation of the proliferation of 'simulacra' by Jean Baudrillard is seen as a dangerous opening of Pandora's box that led to the current cult of the image in the detriment of written culture. By breaking the connection with the cultivated audience, and entering a complacent connection with intellectual artifices and with the sophistic dimension, the postmodern intellectuals are put against the wall: 'nobody has contributed so significantly to blurring our understanding of what is truly happening in the world, not even media scams, as have certain intellectual theories that, just like the wise from one of the beautiful phantasies coined by Borges, have embroidered the speculative game and the dreams of fiction into life.'<sup>14</sup>

It is undoubtable that Vargas Llosa's essay has been read and debated upon frequently because it bears the signature of the Nobel Prize laureate. The book is interesting only in that we get to reread the admirable writer, even though we get to see him in a displeasing position, as he joins the ranks of the ones, as noted by a Catalan writer, whose 'domestic apocalypse has blocked the means of practical and rational remedy for the derivations of the old and the new'.<sup>15</sup> Or, as remarked without emphasis by Jean-Marie Schaeffer, 'the recurrent conflict that began with the 19<sup>th</sup> century between

the 'high' and the 'massified' art is nothing but the effect of European societies passing towards a more egalitarian social structure as the one that gave birth to classical art. This is why it is somewhat paradoxical that many of the defenders of social equality mourn the pretended 'decadence' of taste or its 'massification'.<sup>16</sup>

## II

If Vargas Llosa's banal lamentations are listened, it is only because he has gathered a cultural capital that brings him dividends whatever he may write and because the topic of cultural decadence is still a 'catchy' one. Daniel Tabarovsky, a less famous Argentine writer, published at a 'niche' publishing house, Periférica, in 2010, an essay titled *Leftist Literature*<sup>17</sup>. It is a somewhat more interesting text, even though its ideas can ultimately be brought to an attempt to resuscitate an Avant-garde attitude, with the particularity that it is conducted from the very midst of the lack of confidence in the Avant-garde. It is a manifesto for a literature outside literature, for a writer without an audience, for an understanding of writing as an exercise in guaranteed failure, in total loneliness, in endless crisis. 'Leftist' literature is actually an anarchistic literature: ,where there is a canon, you must destroy it, no matter what the canon is. [But] it is not about the exchange of paradigms, but the destruction of the idea of paradigm itself'.<sup>18</sup> It is a literature that refuses both poles of consecration signalled by Tabarovsky – the academy and the public square. Then, what is the place of leftist writers? Their place is nowhere: ,This writer is alone, far from the past, outside of the present, without a future. Without an audience, he can no longer aspire to change the world, for the world is no longer his place'.<sup>19</sup> But is there really a literature that cannot be transformed into a merchandise as the one produced by the market, and which does not become a 'work' in the academic sense of the word? The answer seems to be yes, as Tabarovsky lists a series of titles from current Argentinean literature, but he repeatedly signals that one cannot speak of a group or a new generation, but that simply one must speak of the members of an ,inoperative community'. Does such a community exist? It seems to be a self-contradictory crowd: ,those who are linked to the literature of the inoperative community form the community of those without a community'.<sup>20</sup>

The paradoxes of this type proliferate in a book that, frankly, is not devoid of a hint of reason. The writer is cultivated, he has taken postmodern theories seriously, he has read Derrida and Deleuze and is not wrong in his remarks on the total lack of interest for preserving the autonomy of art<sup>21</sup>, which had been, according to Pierre Bourdieu's narration from *The Rules of Art*, the supreme achievement of modern artists: 'With the exception of revolutionary situations, it is always disappointing when literature incarnates the same ideals that society does', as per the Argentine writer.<sup>22</sup> His pleading for continued experimentalism in literature, but from a standpoint that refuses experimentalism as a purpose in itself and as a criteria of value in art, can lead only to an assumed plummet into paradox. He is right when he observes the tendency of returning to a 19<sup>th</sup> century realism, the inclination towards equating literature with a sort

of civic education, the lack of effort to comprehend the implosion of the Avant-garde and the earthquake provoked by the great moderns.<sup>23</sup>

But is something proposed here? Yes, a utopia of abstraction in literature.<sup>24</sup> What would the objective of 'leftist' literature be? The impossible. More specifically? ,When this literature occurs, when it is achieved, it is impossible for us to know what happened (knowledge dissolves itself), confusion is installed (there are no parameters), meaning is erased (meaning is put between brackets).'<sup>25</sup> How would such a literature look like? It would be a literature that would question the possibility of narrating after ,the fracturing of the narrative' and ,the loss of narrative innocence'<sup>26</sup>, something which is not bad, but rather far from countering the current orientation of the public's taste towards stories with clear beginnings and endings. Is there really a crisis of literature? Tabarovsky clearly replies in the affirmative but he also adds that literature ,turns the crisis – the risk of extinction – into its reason of existence'.<sup>27</sup> The Argentinean writers also criticises the fact that the certain values of realism were proclaimed to counter the experimentalist excess and that ,serious' young writers, confronted with the transformation of the previous transgression into a norm, have adopted the following posture: ,Is the new canon on the brink of transforming itself into the norm? Then let us return to the pure and rough norm'.<sup>28</sup> Sadly, his own proposal implies reverting to a radical view on the autonomy of art, which seems to be willing, for the sake of preserving its purity, to renounce any referential dimensions and, just like some of its manifestations in the new avant-garde of the 60s, to break completely from society or to limit itself to endlessly assault it. Evidently, Tabarovsky acknowledges his dues to the Avant-garde, even though he is aware of its extinction. The difference is the following: ,The fact of leaving behind the Avant-garde appears to be unbearable. But what is truly unbearable is not the fact that the Avant-gardes have failed or that they have faded away or absorbed into the system, but the difficulty of being in the Avant-garde today. The condition of the Avant-garde consists in taking a possibility to the extreme. The condition of contemporary literature consists in taking its own impossibility to the extreme.'<sup>29</sup> The Avant-gardes have imposed anti-Humanism and this is the path chosen by leftist literature: ,Gombrowicz: 'As opposed to humanism, art is written with a lowercase letter.' Literature is a *low art*. It is no longer the pomp, the elation, the gentility, the meaning; on the contrary, this literature is a reptile: it crawls and injects its own venom, it is acid, it corrodes.'<sup>30</sup>

It seems that all the paths have been exhausted and the dissolution of the Avant-gardes has led to a moralizing posture that denounces their ravages, inviting to their 'oblivion' and a return to the old good times, when an enlightened elite did not fall into the traps of impostors, or to an installation of the Avant-garde into a shadow, where creativity is unimpeded, but remains free from any worldly servitude. Of course, both positions are related to a market of symbolic goods – the moralizing one, which condemns the mechanisms of promoting 'subculture', and the other, which expresses its contempt through the disapproval of making a pact with it. The contradictions are evident on both sides: Vargas Llosa takes up the slightly embarrassing position of a nostalgic, alluding to the fact that his fame on the market has been only a question of talent, and the role of



mass media has been void; Tabarovsky vehemently states that ,literature is opposed to the book' and, forgetting that he had just published a volume, degrades the writer concerned with the product of his writing to the rank of ,book producer'.<sup>31</sup>

### III

Still, the dilemma remains between accepting the mechanisms of the market, with the secret hope that, through criticism and rebuke, it will self-regulate, and the selfish withdrawal from this pestilential space. Roberto Bolaño, the last writer that we will discuss in this space, and probably the most pertinent contemporary Latin American writer, does not shy away from virulently attacking the superficiality of a ,civilization of the spectacle', but expresses clearly, in some of his wholly remarkable short stories, novels and essays, his suspicion towards the elitism of ,high culture'. Bolaño, an exemplary representative of the current Latin American cosmopolitanism, is ruthless towards successful writers, be they continuing practitioners of 'magic realism' in varying degrees, be they writers who were once worthy to be taken as models, but who have ended up media figures that have produced, in the last decades, extremely questionable texts, such as García Márquez and Vargas Llosa.

The attitude of the Chilean writer is still far from being only the reflex of a parricide or of an elitist vanity. He suggests that, in postmodernity, the problem is deeper. Does ,high culture', promoted since the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present, bring at least a form of happiness? Surely not, as it opens a Pandora's box from where the horror comes from, a horror that is still preferable to the daily boredom. Baudelaire's verse, 'An oasis of horror in a desert of boredom', is the most lucid diagnosis given to modern man, says Bolaño in one of the essays included in *The Insufferable Gaucho* (2003).<sup>32</sup> However, is the search of an individual happiness preferable, without confronting the abyss, the horror, illness, and death? Much less. Here is what he says when commenting a phrase by Victor Hugo from *Les Misérables*:

[...] Sinister people, malicious people know a sinister and malicious happiness. [...] The malicious people in question, with their malicious happiness [...] are [...] the perfect incarnations of evil and a certain *petit bourgeois* meanness or rather the meanness of those who aspire to join the *petit bourgeoisie*, they are also, at this point in history, thanks to technological progress, emblematic of the middle class in its entirety, or almost, be it left- or right-wing, educated or illiterate, corrupt or apparently upstanding.<sup>33</sup>

The duality seems unsolvable: on the one hand, the evil revealed by artists capable of dwelling in the heart of horror and the abyss does not only bring unhappiness to people, but it will extend in the form of a lethal illness that will destroy the species; on the other hand, the happiness promised by kitsch art, actively promoted on the editorial market, will transform society into an infamous mass that will avoid, through all its means, the perils of the abyss, in order to enjoy an atrocious happiness build on the basis of total indifference and the propensity towards fun and spectacle. The last phrase from

the last volume published by Bolaño during his lifetime illustrates the full pessimism of an author who is a witness to the seizure of art through the combined efforts of a vain and hedonistic audience, on the one hand, who demands its right to be represented in the pages of the bestsellers, and, on the other hand, an editorial market that promotes the accessible, readable, fully intelligible book:

And so let us do as García Márquez bids and read Alexandre Dumas. Let us follow the advice of Pérez Dragó or García Conte and read Pérez Reverte. The reader (and by the same token the publishing industry) will find salvation in the bestseller. Who would have thought? All that carrying on about Proust, all those hours spent examining pages of Joyce suspended on a wire, and the answer was there all along, in the bestseller. Ah, the bestseller. But we're lousy in bed and we'll probably put our foot in it again. Everything suggests that there is no way out of this.<sup>34</sup>

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An excellent overview of the works and authors that have configured the field of 'Latin American cultural studies' and what they have in common or how they differ from British or American cultural studies has been written by Ríos, Alicia. 'Los estudios Culturales y el estudio de la cultura en América Latina', in *Estudios y otras prácticas intelectuales latinoamericanas en cultura y poder*, ed. Daniel Mato. Caracas: CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2002. Web. < <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/cultura/rios.doc>>.
- <sup>2</sup> Fuentes, Carlos. *La nueva novela latinoamericana*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990 [1969]: 274-275.
- <sup>3</sup> See Castany Prado, Bernat. *Literatura Posnacional*. Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, Servicio de publicaciones, 2007, who proposes a taxonomy of the new multicentred literature: Reinaldo Arenas (democratic post-nationalism), Jorge Luis Borges (cosmopolite post-nationalism), Mario Vargas Llosa (neoliberal post-nationalism), Fernando Vallejo (nihilist post-nationalism), Juan José Saer or Cristina Peri Rossi (intercultural post-nationalism) and Manuel Puig or Jaime Bayly (media-infused postnationalism).
- <sup>4</sup> See Canclini, Nestor García. *La globalización imaginada*. Buenos Aires, Paidós, 1999. 83. The fact that there still is a vast critical literature on this topic does not infirm Canclini's thesis, but proves the inertia of an academic establishment that occupied a certain niche (of postcolonial Cultural Studies, in this case) which they cannot afford to lose.
- <sup>5</sup> The texts included in the anthology titled *Palabra de América* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2004) are revealing; here, the 'young' Latin American writers invited to the 2003 Meeting of Latin American Authors held in Seville support their unconditional dismissal of 'magic realism'. A few samples suffice: 'I define myself as a logical unrealist [...] Logical unrealism is opposed to magic realism. While magic realism proposes a reality constantly permeated by fantastical reflexes, my logical unrealism is based on a private unreality which, from time to time, is bombarded by chippings of order' (Rodrigo Fresán, p. 63); 'In any case, the Latin American Boom has offered to the great Spanish audience a set of formulas for reading a literature set in exotic spaces, governed by extravagant dictators and where the most abject filth permitted the existence of veritable black holes in the midst of reality. This is why Latin American literature specifically draws in two types of readers: those who seek magic realism and those who prefer a literature with revolutionary labels. [...] Many critics and academic experts defines 'Latin Americanness' according to national identity, social conflict, an indigenous Nemesis or threatened ecosystems, and, when they do not encounter these ingredients in a Mexican, Chilean or Argentinean novel, they scornfully refuse its Hispanic-American



nature. Things being as they are, I have to admit now that Latin American literature seems improbable to me. Why must we be content with being from only one place when we can be from everywhere and nowhere at the same time? (Fernando Iwasaki 104). [My translation].

6 Such as the case of Nazi Germany in *Looking for Klingsor* by Jorge Volpi or *Amphytrion* by Ignacio Padilla, 3<sup>rd</sup> century Byzantium in *La soldadesca ebria del emperador* by Pablo Soler Frost, 90s Russia *Enciclopedia de una vida en Rusia* by José Manuel Prieto.

7 *La noche es virgen* by Jaime Bayly is a good illustration of this tendency, through the x-raying process of a town like Lima in the 90s, wholly different from what is reflected in the 60s atmosphere from Vargas Llosa's *Conversation in the Cathedral*.

8 *Palabra de América*. 221.

9 Vargas Llosa, Mario. *La civilización del espectáculo*. Madrid: Alfaguara, 2012: 70-71. [My translation].

10 Llosa 71. [My translation].

11 Llosa 143. [My translation].

12 See the chapter 'El opio del pueblo', Llosa 157-193.

13 Llosa 37.

14 Llosa 79.

15 García, Jordi. *Un intelectual melancólico. Un panfleto*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2011: 7. [My translation].

16 Schaeffer, Jean-Marie. *Adieu à l'esthétique*. Paris: PUF, 2000: 41. [My translation].

17 Tabarovsky, Daniel. *Literatura de izquierda*. Cáceres: Periférica, 2010.

18 Tabarovsky 39. [My translation].

19 Tabarovsky 108. [My translation].

20 Tabarovsky 27. [My translation].

21 For this purpose, he seems to promote a model of literature abstracted to the extreme, according to the model provided by visual arts: 'What I call abstraction is the elimination of the real. The elimination of the real leads to the thorough study of artistic autonomy. It implies the rupture with any mimetic dimension' (Tabarovsky 104). [My translation].

22 Tabarovsky 64. [My translation]

23 The classifications he makes are not without pertinence (Tabarovsky, 115-131), at least with more humour than Vargas Llosa, regarding the cultural hegemonic spaces: on the one hand, 'well written' literature, pleasing to read but not necessarily devoid of experimental ambitions and which adapts to the higher level of the population's instruction; on the other hand, the academic Avant-garde, which produces books that satisfy the most sophisticated university professors; lastly, the line of conservative essay-writing, which mourns the loss of bourgeois values.

24 Flaubert's lineage of the proclaimed 'leftist literature' and the last section of the book is an homage to Flaubert, but not to the restless 'artisan' or to the realist Flaubert celebrated by Vargas Llosa in *The Perpetual Orgy*. It is evidently about his utopia of 'the book about nothing'. Leftist literature announces itself as a 'system of exclusions' (Tabarovsky 81), devoid of time, space, characters etc.

25 Tabarovsky 69. [My translation].

26 Tabarovsky 91. [My translation].

27 Tabarovsky 62. [My translation].

28 Tabarovsky 47. [My translation].

29 Tabarovsky 101. [My translation].

30 Tabarovsky 102. [My translation].

31 Tabarovsky 99. [My translation].

32 'In that line alone there is more than enough. [...]. There is no more lucid diagnosis of the illness of modern humanity. To break out of ennui, to escape from boredom, all we have at our disposal—and it's not even automatically at our disposal, again we have to make an effort—is horror, in other words, evil. Either we live like zombies, like slaves fed on soma, or we become slave drivers, malignant individuals [...]' (Bolaño, Roberto. *The Insufferable Gaucho*. New York: New Directions Books, 2010, translated by Chris Andrews, Spanish edition published in Barcelona: Anagrama, 2003: 151).

33 Bolaño 142.

34 Bolaño 177.

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