Hegelian Tales in the Caribbean: Production, Expression, and History in the Articulation of the Atlantic Subject

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High Tide

In 1997 students in the Romance Studies Department at Georgetown University organized a conference under the provocative title: "Is the Caribbean Post-Colonial, Is the Post-Colonial Caribbean?"[1] What they meant, I believe, is that the Caribbean was always Post-Colonial, even in the heyday of Colonial expansion. The paradox dissolves if we situate, as Anthony Appiah suggested some time ago, the Post-Colonial in a certain relationship to the Post-Modern.[2] This is exactly what Homi Bhabha does in *The Location of Culture* when he asserts that:

> the encounters and negotiations of differential meanings and values within 'colonial' textuality, its governmental discourses and cultural practices, have anticipated, *avant la lettre*, many of the problematics of signification and judgment that have become current in contemporary theory—aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to 'totalizing' concepts, to name but a few. (173)

Today we know that something got distorted in the imperial voyage through which Western reason was deployed in the rest of the world. In this essay I discuss the thwarted cultural translation of modernity across the Atlantic and how this process affected the

cultural self-understanding of the Caribbean. I will frame my argument by referring to the Hegelian theme of the Subject insofar as this particular concept condenses and articulates the ideology of modernity as a Eurocentric drive for world domination. According to Hegel the subject is not just the juridical form of the liberal subject (the individual), the romantic subject of emotions (expressive subject) or the socio-historical determination of subjectivity (subject position). It is a subject that sees its soul reflected in the movement of the world and the destination of History as well. This possibility of the subject is the one we find precluded in the Caribbean first by the experience of the plantation and by the endemic sense of a later Colonial/Post-Colonial continuity.

My exposition is organized around three headings whose separation, as it will become clear, is only a matter of analytic convenience: the Subject as production, the Subject as expression, and the Subject as History. These three aspects of the Subject are constitutive of the Hegelian conception of modernity. For Hegel a subject only comes into its own through production, that is, through the transformation of one's environment. This act of production is already an expression in and of itself, but also the foundation of one's sovereignty, the basis of any further expression. Finally, as the subject an individual is superseded by the movement of the real, the subject comes to be inscribed (and expressed) in the highest realm of History. I confront these premises with the cultural production of a group of writers and intellectuals from the region that first received the impact of trans-Atlantic relationships: the Caribbean. The writers and intellectuals in question are Edouard Glissant, Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Alejo Carpentier, Lydia Cabrera and George Lamming.

General Conditions: Culture

At the center of every "culture" there is an act of "cultivation" (Williams 11-20). This "pastoral" etymology ties a quasi-transcendental concept (Culture) to a privilege of sedentarism which, in turn, connects the values of culture to territories and roots. Culture is linked to the act of breaking up the ground for cultivation and, in the end, according to the same mechanism of equivalencies, to writing, memory and identity. However, as Franz Kafka reminds us in *The Penal Colony*, writing is also related to pain and even to torture. This second genealogy of culture/cultivation is discussed in great detail by Nietzsche in his account of the birth of conscience in the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Perhaps both genealogies, the image of "culture" as cultivation and the frightful account of mnemonic torture, should be upheld if our subject is the Caribbean. Not only was the Caribbean "created" by and for an act of cultivation (the establishment of the plantation economy) but its early modern existence was based on the most terrible and abject of uprootings (slave traffic) as well.

The cultivation of memory and the end of memory and cultivation is the subject of this essay. It is assumed that every memory is the memory of a production. But, we know too that something has been lost in the travel/translation of these ideas ("memory," "production," "cultivation,") from Europe to America. It is more than a matter of chance that twice was Latin America born from an image of shipwreck: first as Ariel, then as Caliban. The way in which that historical loss happened is dis-

similar and yet concomitant to that other forgetting, to that *other*, also trans-Atlantic, colonial trip: the voyage of the ships packed with slaves.

The generations of black slaves who killed themselves in the hopes that their finally freed souls would go back to Africa could not avail themselves of the strategy so wonderfully performed in *The Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy of tracing memories on the surface of the sea. For them the sea bore no scars. The Atlantic was without history then. It was a mirror-like blue extension on which History traveled, as Hegel said, from East to West. "The History of the World travels from East to West," wrote Hegel, punctuating History, World, East and West with capital letters to indicate that they do not have a deictic but an absolute value. He continues: "Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning" (*Philosophy* 103). There is nothing terribly imperialist in Hegel's gesture since, as he makes explicit in the very first sentence of his text, he is not writing a "positive" history of the world but a "Philosophical" one (*Philosophy* 1). These observations notwithstanding, Hegel, or rather Hegelianism, casts a large shadow on the New World's consciousness of itself .

In the same text, *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel makes scattered, although by no means unsubstantial, references to the very medium through which America is separated from any essential role in History:

> America is divided into two parts, which are indeed connected by an Isthmus, but which forms only an external, material bond of union. The Old World, on the contrary, which lies opposite to America, and is separated from it by the Atlantic Ocean, has its continuity interrupted by a deep inlet—the Mediterranean Sea. The three Continents that compose it have an essential relation to each other, and constitute a totality. Their peculiar feature is that they lie round this Sea [...] for rivers and seas are not to be regarded as disjoining, but as uniting. (*Philosophy* 87)

Hegel's conception of History is geographical, in as much as his geography is also historical. For that reason while the Mediterranean Sea *links* Europe, Asia and the North of Africa, the Atlantic only "*separates*" America from Europe. In other words, the Atlantic cannot occupy the third position in the Hegelian system, that is, the position of medium, the place of inscription of the contradictions, the very surface of the ontological *Aufhebung*. In spite of being a region of passage, nothing actually comes to pass on the Atlantic. This does not mean that Hegel does not concern himself with the Americas. Since History travels from East to West, as Hegel said, America, being West of Europe, is the future. Like many of his contemporaries, Hegel foresees the role of world domination that America (he means *only* U.S.) will be called upon to play. However, Hegel adds that this futuricity is completely insubstantial because, having reached Europe, History has already reached its end. (North) American domination will come at a time when the historical development of the West is already completed and *Americans* (north and south*)* will have nothing to add to it.

The unimportant role played by the New World in the constitution of this historical totality is compounded by two other observations, which, while not impinging directly upon America, came nevertheless to affect the continent's self-understanding in the wake of its definitive integration into

the world system. The first one is related to the concept of the Subject of self-consciousness:

> Here rises the outward physical Sun, and in the West it sinks down: here consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a noble brilliance. (*Philosophy* 103)

The second element is what Hegel names History or God.

> the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals presents, is […] the realization of Spirit […] what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not 'without God,' but is essentially His Work. (*Philosophy* 457)

Subject/History/God, Onto-theology in a word, is a dream against which a vast array of cultures—always already caught up in the web of universal Hegelian concepts—have to measure their own dreams. In what follows I want to show how this system of Hegelian concepts (so ubiquitous in any narrative of modernity) took three specific forms (the Subject as Production, as Expression and as History) and how a variety of Caribbean writers dealt with the constraints of this system.

Subject as Production

In Hegel's view the Slave comes to know the Master out of the very fear that the Master inspires in him. Since the Slave is forced to work for the Master, the Slave is also aware of the possibility of transforming the world through his actions. In this fashion, the Slave exercises what Hegel deems the most dreadful power, the one that relates human activity to the end of all activity: the power of negating. It is through negation (which in Hegel takes the form of "work" and "production") that the slave overcomes the master and dissolves the dialectic that created him.[3]

To be a subject means, according to Hegel, to be a subject of production. Yet, the Caribbean, as a brutal scene of production, cannot be said to be the site of the emergence, properly speaking, of any subject. It has been pointed out many times, most recently in an essay by Susan Buck-Morss, that, while Hegel and hegemonic European culture did not pay any attention to the actual lives of slaves in the plantation economy of the Caribbean, it was the work of real, not figurative slaves, that brought about the primitive accumulation of capital allowing for the expansion of European bourgeois cultural patterns. In other words, what made History possible—the consummation of a world-image that, in expressing itself, expressed the inner rationality governing its movement—was simultaneously the element left out of History and out of any possible expression.

Production and expression reinforce each other to the point that it seems almost impossible to think the one without the other. Yet what we see in the Caribbean is a fracture between the two. To use a formula: production without expression and (as we will see in the next section) expression without production. Everything is related, of course, to property. The Master/Slave dialectic was the *grand roman* of the European bourgeoisie, because that bourgeoisie was already the owner of the means of production. Being a subject of production, the bourgeoisie could become, in the same movement, the Subject of a conscience. For the real slaves and their heirs, it was never a

matter of appropriating the means of production. Slavery does not produce a reification that can be subsumed in a movement of appropriation. In the aftermath of Haitian independence, the plantation system was not appropriated, but destroyed.[4]

Although production and memory belong to the same series, the Caribbean was witness to a process in which the product was forgetting. Such production of forgetting is not a metaphysical determination. It can be traced, as the Cuban historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals demonstrates, to the complex history of slavery in the Caribbean. Published in 1978, Moreno Fraginal's *El ingenio* remains in my opinion unsurpassed as an account of the history of slave production and subjective destitution. Moreno Fraginals insists that the historical and conscious aim of the plantation economy was to sever the production of the environment from the production of subjectivity. Recording, memory, traces: any form of slave expression was inimical to the plantation system.[5] For Moreno Fraginals the ideology of European instrumental reason inherited from the Enlightenment, when adopted in Cuba, produced an institution whose "human management procedures [...] were a case study in social teratology" (7, all quotes henceforth are my translation).

In the land of sugar production, expression was almost obliterated from the beginning. The language taught to the slave consisted of only 56 words, the two most complex expressions being : "right and left, which were called machete-hand and scrawl-hand, respectively" (Moreno Fraginals 8). Language was understood unidimensionally. The basic linguistic skills were those needed to comply with the overseer's orders and any activity suspected of having a communicational or expressive role was the object of ferocious persecution. Moreno Fraginals notices, however, that the Spanish policy towards the cultural expression of slaves never achieved the rigidity of the British and American system. He states that the Slave Consolidation Act of 1826-27

> prohibited any kind of public or private form of religious worshiping and white people who let their slaves play drums or any other instrument were severely punished. (9)

The persecution of memory indicates the necessary impasse of the plantation society: it could not reproduce itself. It has to start, so to speak, always anew. In this society the legitimization of the conditions of production was not only at odds with the concept of Culture—which is to a large extent nothing but a machine for the reproduction of the conditions of production—but was also severed from the biological or natural cycle of reproduction. The sexual question was perhaps one of the most dramatic issues confronting the hostages of the sugar industry. Towards 1790, nearly 90% of the slaves were men. Moreno Fraginals notices that sexual crimes were widespread and it was forbidden to leave a dead female slave alone in the company of other slaves.

When the slave trade was condemned by England in the early nineteenth century, the reproduction of slavery became a priority and fueled the arrival of female slaves into the island. Insofar as this event marks the beginning of the question of *criollismo* in Cuba, it produced a major impact on the future development of Cuban culture in the long run. Yet reproduction was still not guaranteed because slave resistance included abortion and suicide as powerful

weapons. The other side of that story of barbarism was, in truly Benjaminian terms, a monument of civilization. If the trans-Atlantic ever achieved a frantic dimension of travel, exchange, and communication—in this case between Europe and Cuba—it was in the heyday of the sugar boom. However, even those in power were always haunted by the impossibilities of production and the anxieties of reproduction. The work of the Cuban-Spanish writer Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is a case in point. Both her *Autobiogafía* and her novel *Sab* problematize the issue of reproduction, to the point that one may say that instead of being "foundational romances" as Doris Sommer would have it, they are narratives of barrenness.

The abolition of slavery, the end of colonialism, and the rise of modern nation states or more modern forms of colonial domination did not dissolve the problem of the barrenness of production. The issue of production resurfaces once and again in the writings of the Martiniquean Edouard Glissant. In his *Caribbean Discourse,* references to production as the lacking element preventing a full sovereignty—in every sense of the word—are widespread. The argument is economic at its core: "The 'economic' status of Martinique will be fixed according to this progression: *barter-pseudoproduction-exchange*" (40). Later Glissant refers to the "total absence of direct or self-generated investment" as a "form of dispossession" (44). In the Hegelian system, property or possession is the exterior form of freedom. In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant goes as far as to speak of Martinique as a culture of dispossession. Considering dispossession to be the most abject and lethal poison to enter the body of the community, Glissant concludes: "no other community, perhaps, in the world is as alienated as our own, as threatened with extinction" (46).

Why is "pseudo-production," or the lack of "self-generated investment" so dreadful? Because, as Glissant explains, "the destruction of all productive capacity aggravates the impulse toward imitation" (45). Already in Glissant the absence of production opens itself to another question: the question of expression, whose antagonistic counterpart is mimesis. The language of production keeps haunting Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*: "I have argued elsewhere that a national language is the one in which a people produces" (102):

> in Martinique today the Creole language is one in which we no longer produce anything. And a language in which a people no longer produce is a language in agony; (187)
>
> Our aim is to forge for ourselves . . . a form of expression through which we could consciously face our ambiguities. (168)

Ultimately, the subject of production only becomes a subject if he/she is able to express himself/herself.

Subject as Expression

In his impressive exegesis of the time and culture determining Hegel's production, Charles Taylor points out that "expression" was the code word through which a whole epoch marked its disagreement with the mechanist assumptions of the Enlightenment (3-50). In order to grasp the real dimension of the question of expression, it is necessary to bear in mind that Hegelian philosophy, and to a great extent modern philosophy as a whole, is a philosophy of

reflection. In this tradition "expression" is not an element that comes from an inside completely severed and differentiated from the outside world (as the romantic version of "expression" would have it) but rather the product of a constant and meaningful transaction between the subject and his/her environment. Karl Marx took this Hegelian lead when he asserted that it was through work that man becomes human. Man expresses himself through his work and when stripped of his product, man is not just exploited but, more importantly, alienated.[6] If "expression" is always a relationship to the world, and thus also to history, how can a culture of dispossession find its expression? Is it possible to have expression at all beyond the wall of reflection? In the previous section I summarized the problem of production in the Caribbean as "production without expression," here I want to ask: Is an expression beyond production, or an unproductive expressiveness, possible?

The above questions are not the same. The question of the expression of a subject of dispossession leads to the modern development of the *Testimonio* in Latin American literature. The question of an expression beyond production leads to a different region that I will explore briefly in what follows.

The unproductive and dispersive poetics of Caribbean expression are two of the most pervasive traits in the poetics of the area. The concept of "relation" in Glissant underscores this search for an unproductive relation to expression. It is perhaps a stroke of luck that one of its most refined instances comes in what appears to be a counterpoint to a quote by Hegel introduced at the beginning of this essay:

> The Caribbean, as far as I am concerned, may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly, one of the explosive regions where it seems to be gathering strength.
>
> This has always been a place of encounter and connivance and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent. Compared to the Mediterranean, which is an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates (in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin antiquity and later in the emergence of Islam, imposing the thought of the One), the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts. (*Poetics* 33)

A poetics of diffraction would no longer be a poetics of unity or accumulation. Its trace is difficult but not impossible to follow in Caribbean productions.

Something of the order of "diffraction" is present in *Ecué-Yamba-O: novela Afro-Cubana,* the novel of Alejo Carpentier published in 1933. At the time, the Latin American mainland had embarked in the feverish construction of an equation between production and subjectivity as novels such as *Doña Bárbara* (1929) by Rómulo Gallegos and *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1940) by Ciro Alegría exemplify. Yet, in the context of the Caribbean, Carpentier takes the issue of an antiproductive expression as a starting point for his novel. It is not that production is absent in the novel. The main point is that Carpentier eulogizes everything that was considered unproductive; everything that, in the prose of the nineteenth century, hindered the march of the nation towards modernization.[7] With this novel Carpentier thought to depart from a metaphysics of production and enter, half blind, into a terrain that, accord-

ing to James Clifford, was just opening or beginning to open in the practice of French ethnographic writing: excess, expenditure, transgression (117-51). At the heart of the project was Bataille's idea that culture is marked by transgression and excess as much as by memory and production. "Expenditure" as a movement outside the symbolic economy of modernity became, even if rarely acknowledged as such, one of the most pervasive poetics of the Caribbean.

Alejo Carpentier began to write *Ecué-Yamba-O* around 1927, roughly ten years after Fernando Ortiz condemned the practice of sorcery among the black population in his *Hampa Afrocubana: los negros brujos*. While Ortiz denounced sorcery as undermining social and national progress—an opinion he would reverse dramatically later on—Carpentier embarked on a celebration of the cultural autonomy of black Cubans. Although *Ecué-Yamba-O* stands out as one of the first serious attempts to give expression to a world of values alien and even antagonistic to the developmentalist discourse of modernity, the novel is marred by many and notorious shortcomings. Carpentier surrendered easily to the temptation of giving a fixed and problematic representation to the element of negativity in his novel—the black population. Menegildo Cué, Carpentier's antiproductive hero, is described in a rhetoric that the contemporary Latin Americanist would consider, at the very least, naïve:

> Lacking any class consciousness, Menegildo had, instead, a total consciousness of his being. He was able to feel himself, full, hard, covering his own skin without spaces in between, with that essential reality that excludes any metaphysical questioning. (43)

It is no doubt telling that Carpentier uses the word metaphysics to name everything that stands opposed to Menegildo, because the very plenitude that he reads in his character is perhaps the epitome of metaphysical pretensions. With his desire to truly "represent" the black population, Carpentier brought the anti-productive energy of the black world to a stand still.[8]

The fetishistic representation of Menegildo Cué points to a passage in the second modality that the issue of expression took in the Caribbean: from expression beyond production to the expression of the subjects of dispossession. In the case of Republican Cuba, we can trace the beginnings of this concern to the work of anthropologist Fernando Ortiz.[9] The concept of "transculturation" may very well be read as addressing the intersection of expression and dispossession. Two disciples of Ortiz took this task to a sort of completion: Miguel Barnet, who popularized *Testimonio* as a literary genre with the publication of *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (1967), and Lydia Cabrera, who compiled and wrote extensively on Afro-Cuban narratives. In this section I discuss the most overlooked and interesting of both figures, Lydia Cabrera.

Of interest here is the ethnographic (or rather anti-ethnographic) book she published in 1954: *El Monte: Igbo, finda, ewe orisha, vititi nfinda*. The first feature that strikes the reader of *El Monte* is a deliberate effort to be ascientific, an abandonment of authority in the text's rapport with its Other. This ascientific stand announces a movement towards what constitutes the maximum possible objectivity according to Lydia Cabrera.[10] The dissolution of ethnographic authority is marked above all by the problematic status of the authorial voice in the

book. While reading Cabrera's text, it is extremely difficult to differentiate between the voice of the narrator and the ethnographic testimony. A proud Cabrera comments:

> The only value of this book [...] consists in the very direct part that the blacks themselves have taken in its production. They are the true authors. (10)

This renunciation of ethnographic authority turns *El Monte* into the most serious forerunner of contemporary *testimonio*—the ambitious post-modern project of subaltern expression in Latin American literature. What makes Lydia Cabrera's contribution meaningful to this genealogy is the desarticulation of ethnographic discourse operating at the core of her book. Writing in 1954, Cabrera already knows that auto-ethnography is necessarily at odds with a process of "expression," which takes as its departing point the representative dimension of the nation-state. In other words, if the time of the nation is, in Benedict Anderson's terms, the "homogeneous empty time of simultaneity," the differential time provided by the discourse of ethnography always runs the risk of being perceived as a form of internal colonialism.[11] After all, for most of the twentieth century, ethnography has been the strategy under which the West as Subject accommodates the differential subjectivization of peripheral peoples. After Lydia Cabrera, although the mediation of the ethnographer remains unavoidable, the ethnographic deconstruction of ethnography takes a turn that it has not yet renounced.

The notion of production itself has been transformed by this turn. If in *Hampa Afro-Cubana*, Fernando Ortiz, still trapped in the developmentalist discourse of modernity, was unable to reinscribe black sorcery in any meaningful context, in *El Monte,* Cuban culture as a whole is reinscribed by the secret practices of the black population.[12] Cabrera subjects the issue of representation—taken so seriously by Carpentier in *Ecué-Yamba-O*—to a playful game of substitutions that takes the concept of transculturation to new heights. *El monte* recounts the story of a governor of the island, the general Martínez Campos, "*de grata memoria*," who ends up competing with a saint for the position of protector of pregnant women. The story goes as follows: there was a woman who had trouble delivering her child. The black midwife ordered a picture of San Ramón Non Nato to be brought to help in the labor process, however, somebody:

> brought, by mistake, a picture of the general instead of the picture of the saint. As soon as they put the picture on her womb she was able to deliver the baby. Once the moment of anguish had passed the mistake was discovered but the people considered, with obvious good judgment, that in view of such an excellent and quick result Martínez Campos was evidently as good as San Ramón Non Nato for such occasions. Then the picture of the governor made a good career as Santo Deliverer for many years. (43)

This scene, which is tied to a figure of a woman (as later the very history of *Testimonio* will be) is not as much a scene of production as it is a scene of labor. The scene centers around the question of representation (the picture of General González Blanco) but entails, unlike Carpentier's, the ruin of representation. In Carpentier the possibility of another production was can-

celled out by a fetishistic representation. In Cabrera's work, representation is undermined by an articulatory, anti-representational drive, in which labor appears opposed to the social conditions of production. Since the governor is no longer a figure of State but a Holy Deliverer, the interpelative function the portrait was supposed to perform breaks down here.

The fact that the cultural expression of the people is at odds with the state machine of cultural reproduction was something largely noticed and theorized in Latin America. The widely celebrated concept of "transculturation," first introduced by Fernando Ortiz and popularized later by Angel Rama, is an attempt to come to terms with this reality. Transculturation has always been a tool of expression. It points to the different ways in which peripheral cultures blend their particularities into the general flow of Western culture in such a way that their expressive power is not obliterated but sublated. To the extent that state representation and popular function remain inimical to each other, Cabrera's labor scene represents rather a non-homogenizing version of transculturation. I will only add that a version of transculturation in which not every element is recoverable in the general economy of the system of culture harbors a secret path back to the question of expenditure.

Subject as History

In an essay on the question of Post-Orientalist Histories, Gyan Prakash writes that "To ask how the 'third world' writes its own history appears [...]to be exceedingly naïve" (163). In addition to the many reasons mentioned by Prakash himself, it is the fact that History, as the reflection of the sovereign subject, can only be *Eurocentric* History. All the different cultures in the world are required to accommodate themselves to the progression of European History (Classic Antiquity-Middle Ages-Modernity). The historian of the periphery is forced to ask himself/herself what was going on in that region when in Europe History progressed according to its sovereign subject. In the most aberrant moments of the paradigm, Western historians have invited their third world counterparts to localize a *Chinese* Middle Age or a *Japanese* Classicism. Hegel outsmarts these clumsy solutions by leaving the non-Mediterranean world out of History.

America is not subject to such aberrations. Primarily because the historical existence of the continent coincides with its full incorporation into the historical time of the West. However, America pays for its late incorporation into the discourse of History either by being the subject of a lack (America did not have a Middle Age, for example) or worse, by the neat erasure of any local or contextual framework of meaning and its replacement by the European historical patterns and time-tables. This second possibility is the one masterfully depicted by the novelist from Barbados, George Lamming, in his first novel *In the Castle of my Skin.* In the 1983 prologue, Lamming explains that the world of his novel:

> is black, and it has a long history at once vital and complex. It is vital because it constitutes the base of labor on which the entire Caribbean society has rested; and it is complex because Plantation Slave Society (the point at which the modern Caribbean began) conspired to smash its ancestral African culture, and to

> bring about a total alienation of man the source of labor from man the human person.
>
> The result was a fractured consciousness, a deep split in its sensibility which now raised difficult problems of language and values. (xxxvii)

While the alienation of man as "the source of labor" (subject as production) from man as a "human person" (subject as expression) is tracked by Lamming to the plantation economy, the time of the novel recalls the impossibility of the subject in its relationship to History. There is in the novel a virtual obliteration of any past or historical record other than the British. For the characters of the novel, History is not a form of memory, but rather a discourse that hinders the access to memory. Barbados is called "little England," and, as the narrator explains, it is common wisdom around the villagers that "Big England had only to say the word and Little England followed [...]. Together they were mistresses of the sea" (37). When the question of memory is related to issues vital to the very survival of the black population, destitution is even stronger. One of the few characters in the novel that recalls the issue of slavery is an old working woman, but the children refuse to believe her story.[13] After consulting with the teacher, one of them concludes that "Thank God nobody in Barbados was ever a slave" (57). Besides, slavery is not mentioned in the school's lessons:

> they weren't told anything about that. They had read about the Battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror. That happened so many hundred years ago. And slavery was thousands of years before that. (58)

At the level of everyday life a similar phantasmagoric structure confronts the local characters. A crucial scene in the novel concerns a school festivity commemorating the Queen's birthday. The head teacher delivers pennies among the students advising them that: "Queen Victoria was a wise queen, and she would have you spend it [the money] wisely" (35). After they receive the pennies, a group of boys meeting in the backyard speculates about whether it was possible or not to counterfeit them. What catches their interest most is the king's face stamped on the penny; and then most of the questions are derived from a single one: "How did the face get there?" (47). If it is a drawing, how could such an important person as the king find the time to sit while millions and millions of pennies were drawn? This question leads to the logical problem of one or hundreds of artists involved in the task. If it was just one, how did he manage to produce millions of pennies? If there were thousands of artists, how do you explain the remarkable resemblance from one coin to the other? At last one child comes up with an idea that seems like a solution: "One penny, that is the first penny ever made, was the real penny, and all the others were made by a kind of stamp" (48). But all the arguments for the stamp are dismissed by one boy who claims to know, from good authority, that the king was never seen. The other boys object: they have seen the king's face in the newspapers. The defender of the invisibility of the king replies: "That wasn't the king at all. It was the king's shadow" (49). But all this talk does not mean that the king does not exist:

> There was a real king, but he wasn't actually involved in all the things we saw. It was the shadow king all the time. The king was alone. (51)

The problem in this scene is not that political authority is lacking but the specific form of this lack. There is authority without any specific reference, which, if on the one hand opens that authority to an easy semiotic challenge, on the other leaves the boys in the uncomfortable situation of coming to terms with the "absent center of political ontology" in a rather brutal way. This phantasmatic presence of the source of political legitimization is compounded by an equally desempowering lack of a proper History. For the children it is far easier to point out the truthfulness or falsehood of British history rather than to discuss the existence or not of slavery in their own past.

Robbed of their history, the people are robbed also of a discourse able to work as a potential site for the constitution of a political force. Lacking any sense of independent history, the villagers also lack any sense of the political whatsoever. A character named simply "Old Woman" voices a popular opinion when she says, "I don't understan' full well what it mean by politics an' so on" (78). And when later in the novel a riot (dubbed "the fight" by the villagers) breaks the colonial peace of the island, there is no one in the whole village able to make sense of that episode in the language of politics: "They were trying to understand what the fighting really meant" (196). The book wants to give a picture of the destitution involved in a process of colonization while remaining faithful to the language of the oppressed and subaltern people. But the oppressed—as the previous examples show—are precisely those who are alienated from history, language and expression. Lamming's bold gesture is the attempt to come to terms with the all-powerful discourse of History in a novel written from a point of view that scarcely can identify the everyday conundrums of power.

Lamming's starting point may well be provided by Stuart Hall's suggestion that the struggle for decolonization should be understood as a problem of self-naming and self-representation. Alienated in another History, the colonial subject can never come into its own. To say that all identity is a fantasy or pertains to the level of the imaginary will not do the trick here. As Hall argues, any emancipatory movement involves the key "question of defining who the people are" (7). But how is this to be done if historical records can lead nowhere but to an assertion of the genealogy of the Empire? Many years after publishing his first novel, a resentful Lamming would write:

> Today I shudder to think how a country, so foreign to our own instinct, could have achieved the miracle of being called Mother. (xxxvii)

Is there any memory but the memory of domination? In the introduction to his novel, Lamming talks about a confrontation between the imposed norms of "White Power" and "the fragmented memory of the African masses" (xxxvii), which is also a confrontation between "White instruction and Black imagination" (xxxvii). Lamming knows that it is already too late in History to propose another more inclusive, more identitarian or democratic *History*. There is only one History; and for those of us who agree with Hegel, that history has already ended, which is good news, indeed. The only available and reasonable strategy seems to be to challenge the Empire of the Subject as production/expression/History. And if there are going to be Post-Orientalist histories (as proposed by Gyan Prakash), perhaps they will be histories that will not necessarily follow in the footsteps of the Sub-

ject of the West, and the West as Subject. Perhaps it will no longer be History. It will renounce, as Cabrera did, all objectivity in the name of a higher standard which can no longer tolerate the idea of having an "object."

Low Tide

If Bhabha is right and the colonial situation elaborated *avant la lettre* the problems of signification that would only come to haunt the central cultures themselves in the wake of the dissolution of the project of modernity, the unsubstantial role of America is, in a way, cancelled. The Caribbean knew of course of "ambivalence," (as in the non-ethnographic ethnography of Lydia Cabrera), "indeterminacy," (as in the possibility of a discourse of expenditure which would cancel reappropiation in reflection), "the question of discursive closure," (the impossibility of the King being the *point de capiton* of colonial semiosis in Lamming), "the threat to agency" (as in Glissant's dispersive poetics of relation), "the status of intentionality" (as the transculturated image of General González Blanco), "the challenge to 'totalizing' concepts" (the impossible history of impossible nations)... to name but a few.

It is the question of travel and translation all over again. It is also the question of the "trans" in the "trans-Atlantic." Can we, should we, linger in that space *qua space*? Is that gesture possible at all? What is the "trans" in trans-Atlantic if not passage, vehicle of History or its shipwreck, inscription and forgetting of modernity? It is not certain that the meditation on the passage could give us an alternative modernity, an alternative history.

And yet our time has as its task to imagine an opening to another history, to another subject, and to another productivity, a history, a subject, and a production —capable of breaking with the very *recit* of a movement of History and the loss implied in every translation. As Bhabha would have it, the Post-Colonial and the Post-Modern coincide in the certainty that those markers of modernity (Production, Expression, History) have worn down much of their aura. If this is true of the whole of modernity, it has been true of the Caribbean for a good while. The Caribbean is a region in which production has been for two centuries, to say the least, problematic. Now, production itself is waning from the general horizon of our lives. Likewise, Expression and History retain traces more than actual contents of their original meaning. But phantoms do not walk away by themselves. They need to be exorcised, so to speak. For that reason the wearing down of Production, Expression and History does not turn Hegelianism into an antique: rather the opposite is true, we seem to live now in the perpetual night of a Hegelian end of History, which leaves us with the question of how to negate Hegelianism itself. The problem is that Hegel remains the master of all negations. Any attempt to negate the Hegelian tale always results in a deeper inscription in its logic. How to learn to negate otherwise? To that question Roland Barthes answered almost thirty years ago with words that I want to let reverberate here: "I shall look away, that will henceforth be my sole negation" (Barthes 3).

Notes

[1] The conference, held at Duke University between February 28th and March 2nd, 1997,

was organized by Doris Garraway and Marc Brudzinski.

[2] By Post-Modern, I understand here the undoing of those narratives critical to the establishment of the Western subject and the West as subject (Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?, 271) whose ground, in Derridean terms, is, antilogocentrism. For the reference to Anthony Appiah, see "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?".

[3] For the Master/Slave dialectic in Hegel see *Phenomenology of Spirit* (111-19). Frantz Fanon, who refers approvingly to the Hegelian dialectic of the Master and the Slave, saw the historical accounts of the end of slavery in America as produced by white men's awareness of the wrongdoings of slavery, a strategy for the perpetuation of white hegemony. See his remarks in the section "The Negro and Hegel" in *Black Skin, White Masks* (216-222).

[4] Hegel foresaw the possibility that a particular social constitution would separate work and production. The case in point was for him the period of terror in the French Revolution. Comenting on the section "Absolute Freedom and Terror" of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Judith Butler writes:

> Under conditions of state terror, no individual works, for no individual is able to externalize an object which carries his signature: consciousness has lost its capacity for mediated self-expression. (21)

[5] In his *Autobiografía* (the only one written in Spanish by a slave) José Francisco Manzano notices his master's obsessions with preventing and prohibiting him to speak or write.

[6] Edouard Glissant is painfully aware of this dialectic linking subjectivity, world, and production. He writes:

> The French Caribbean people did not relate even a mythical chronology of this land to their knowledge of this country, and so nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness. (*Caribbean* 63)

[7] The limit of capitalist tolerance for culture—as well as for everything else—is profit. It is not just chance that the basic assumption behind Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* was that traditional cultures were able to survive in the modern world to the extent that they were economically viable.

[8] A much more mature Carpentier (*Ecué-Yamba-O* was written at 23) will visit Haiti in 1943 and soon after will write *The Kingdom of this World* (1949).

[9] Although Fernando Ortiz's best-known work is *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, I think that the problem of the expression of the black population in Cuba traverses the ethnographer's whole work.

[10] In this sense Cabrera's analysis foreshadows the vast influence of Levinas in contemporary thinking and particularly his replacement of Ontology for Ethics. See Peperzak, Critchly and Bernasconi. In the Ethnographic realm, Cabrera's analysis also advances the discussion elaborated lately by Johannes Fabian and his concept of "denial of coevalness" (*Time and the Other*)

[11] Besides the discussion on "denial of coevalness" (see note above) Fabian also tackled the important issue of recognition ("Remembering").

[12] Cabrera writes: "It is impossible to understand Cuban people without an understanding of the black population" (9).

[13] Slavery ended in Barbados in 1838. For a brief history of slave revolts on the island see Hilary Beckles.

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