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How to Do Things With Utopias: Stories, Memory and Resistance in Paraguay

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“En la suela de los zapatos está la verdad de la historia.”

[The truth of history is found on the soles of shoes]

J. Consiglio, *Hospital Posadas*

“Truer in the sense of poetic or emotional truth.”

J. M. Coetzee and A. Kurtz, *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy*

“C’est agir en vaincus: (...) ne pas voir l’espace — fût-il interstitiel, intermittent, nomade, (...) — des ouvertures, des possibles, des lueurs, des malgré tout.”

[It means acting like the defeated; (...) not seeing the space — whether it be interstitial, intermittent, nomadic, (...) — within the openings, what is possible, the flashes, the *nevertheless*, the *in-spite-of-everythings*.]

G. Didi-Huberman, *La survivance des lucioles*¹

The West has an abundant literature on the subject of utopias. These exercises have traditionally concentrated on what was called “utopian thought” and “literary utopias”, a genre of writing with its own conventions and rules. Actual cases of utopias that were set up at some point in contemporary history seem to have generated less interest, possibly because the very definition of utopia — as a “no-place” or an “ideal-place” — appears to preclude any project carried to completion, which, for that very reason, would cease to be utopian. How to do things with utopias is a proposal that is developed at length in *En primera persona: Testimonios desde la utopía*,² an analysis of the limitations that the literary genre imposed on the representation and circulation of the memory of utopian/dystopian experiments, and which calls for new forms of writing and representation.

A clotted memory

Paraguay is a country that is unknown in Mediterranean Europe. Hemmed in by Brazil, Argentina and Bolivia, little is known of its existence or its history. Whereas the imaginaries of the other nations bordering it are associated with emblematic objects and historical events (*caipirinha* and slavery; *mate* and the last military dictatorship; *coca* and the first indigenous government of Evo Morales) or are linked to more or less stock scenes associated with music and dance (the samba and the bossa nova; the tango and the Andean flute), nothing seems to represent Paraguay on the European side of the ocean. Perhaps the two most significant landmark historical events associated with the country are the Jesuit Indian settlements (popularized by Hollywood) and the harsh dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner.

Nevertheless, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were quite prolific in historical events in Paraguay. Not just dramatic ones, like the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870) or the Chaco War (1932–1935), to cite two episodes of major importance for the population; it was also the setting for alternative social projects. In spite of being marginalized — or perhaps because of it — Paraguay proved to be fertile ground for religious and political utopias and the occasional dystopian experiment. These included anarchist and theosophical colonies, Mennonite and Hutterite communities, socialist enclaves and even a racist Aryan colony founded by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, the sister of the famous German philosopher. These were veritable social, political and economic laboratories on the margins of the State and the market with a clear vocation for communitarianism and self-management.

From the end of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth, at the same time as a new political order was being organized throughout Latin America, utopian communities proliferated in a number of countries in the area. In Paraguay, the government's "racial whitening" policies offered incentives (in the shape of land grants, tax reductions, religious and linguistic freedom, autonomy in education and security, exemption from military service) that led immigrant contingents to consider the country as a place to settle. The Paraguayan authorities looked upon the members of these groups — mostly European — as disciplined, dedicated workers who were going to "infect" the local population with their industriousness, and make a crucial contribution to launching the economy of the nation. For the newcomers — quite a few of them, political exiles — Paraguay was that empty fertile space where they could build a better society.

However, none of these goals was realized. The arrival of immigrants with alternative projects did not provide the kind of stimulus that the "fathers of the nation" desired, while the founding of self-managing colonies did not extend any further than their own symbolic, physical limits, and most of them had very little impact on the local populations. Stranger still was the complete absence of contact between these communities;³ as if they had become prisoners of the very metaphor that had given rise to them, these political and religious utopias remained islands in the national landscape for decades; and what was even worse, the memory of them fared no better. In a country not known for its writing, a good deal has been written about the utopias in Paraguay. But in spite of the abundant bibliography on each of these experiments (articles, monographs, web pages, documentaries and other audio-visual devices), memory of them — the copious accounts of their experiences — has failed to circulate and the image of these ventures that has become consolidated is of failed, non-repeat-



able experiments. Little or nothing of that enormous symbolic capital appears in the form of tradition, trace or reference in the new social movements or in the discourse of progressive organizations. They are known to have existed, but the memory of them has not been inscribed within the framework of alternative social models, but portrayed rather as experiences of foreign settlers doomed to failure. It is not uncommon to hear that these ventures were “cosas de gringos” (gringo affairs), a statement accompanied by the twofold sentiment of envy (of what others had or have) and impotence (for what they will never have because they are Paraguayans).

But how do we explain and understand the fate that the memory of these experiments suffered? In the first place, political historiography must accept its share of responsibility. Concerned in recent decades about the creation of the State and building citizenship, it neglected those other phenomena that ran parallel to the organization of the liberal order, by stressing — more by omission than commission — that they were expendable. The questioning of the role of the State that accompanied the neoliberal wave unleashed in Latin America as a whole in the 1990s drove historians to dig deeper into the past to recreate the different institutional genealogies, although they forgot about or scorned these other forms of collective organization. In the second place, the utopian/dystopian character of these ventures also worked against them. The very notion of utopia as an unworkable project, or a venture that sooner or later would degenerate into its opposite, dystopia, hampered the transmission of these memories.⁴

And, last but not least, and this is the subject of the present chapter, it is likely that if, despite the relative abundance of stories about these utopian experiences, the memory of those experiments has not been passed down, perhaps there is something about the form or the narrative structure of those stories that hindered or contributed to their failure. It would be a question, then, of failed or faulty transmission that prevented some experiences of the past from becoming part of the knowledge of the present.

How to do things with utopias⁵

In Paraguay, the memory of the utopian/dystopian colonies has not surfaced in the present day. But, then, why should it have done? After all, is it not possible that if there is no echo of those experiences in the present, it is perhaps because they are not useful or have little to offer today? Why attempt to make it easier for society to appropriate other people’s experiences? Why refer to the aesthetic responsibilities of the narrators rather than to the truth of their stories as a fundamental element in transforming other people’s experiences into knowledge of one’s own? For what reason and to what end do we do things with utopias?

In the first place, utopias/dystopias — like other alternative historical processes — can offer *possibilities*. In a globalized world where homogeneity rules and difference is reduced to a format or a brand, historical accounts — those narratives that give an account of “what was” — can serve as spaces of alterity, places in which “the different” and “difference” can be intuited or represented, and utopian experiments — which arose as alternatives in the interstices of State power — turn out to be a clear and encouraging example, in this respect. To be able to incorporate that difference into one’s own imaginary, however, requires the ability to conceive of those transforma-



tions as possible, to think that there is nothing natural or irremediable in any historical situation, past or present. And that imagination that constructs new landscapes draws nourishment from different sources, one of which may be the historical account, the narration of scenarios that are no less luminous for being non-repeatable.⁶ The effectiveness of those historical accounts lies not so much in the fact that they are instruments of sociological engineering (which tell us how social life works and how we could alter it) as in their poetic potential to inspire (which clears the way to the imagining of other presents).⁷ If socio-political difference was possible in the past, why should it not be so in the present and the future? It is the discontinuity that difference (of utopias/dystopias in this case) opens up in our expectations of the past, which enables us to imagine that same disparity (other alternative forms of organization) in the present or the future. That historical imagination that wonders about other possibilities is a condition, although not the only one, of every transforming action.

Secondly, and following on from the previous argument, transformative actions require, besides the idea of possibility — change is possible — a certain conviction on the part of the subjects about their own capacity, because somebody may know that other worlds are possible but not consider that they are competent to take part in those changes. This is the case of public opinion in Paraguay, which usually considers successful utopian experiments, such as the Mennonite colonies, as instances that do not concern them or from which nothing can be learnt because “they are (the product) of another culture”. These are all formulas that seek to explain how other people triumph over natural and economic adversity, but at the same time, shut down any possibility of experimental appropriation for the locals. The complex processes of identification and identity intervene in this construction of qualified subjects, both individual and collective, and, in this transition, a leading role is played by transmission via stories, because these are what create identities. As Stuart Hall points out, identities “[...] are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past”.⁸ *Narratives enable identifications*, which is the key to actions that promote reasoned changes and help create imaginaries of resistance. Transmission is a human and social need; social and individual identities are not created from nothing, as something inaugural, but form a fabric, a weave made with the appropriation of some narrative threads from the past. As Jacques Hassoun points out, in all transmission of memory of the past, an attempt is made to reconcile what is received with desire.⁹ To put it another way, one takes from the weave of the past that which enables desire in the present to be recognized, sustained and relaunched. Thanks to this transmission, the past is symbolized, and assigned a value and a place, which enables some identifications to be made, certain features, certain threads, to be appropriated, which leads to the symbolization or resignification of the present. Lack of transmission in the present, or silence about the past, makes it difficult for subjects to take part in social life. The historical account, the story about the memory of utopias/dystopias may be the scenario, or point of departure from which to realize that passage, where that transmission can take place.

In the third and final place, if every transformative action requires the idea of possibility, and a subject or subjects convinced of their capacity to bring about change, it is also worth enquiring into the relationship between the two elements, because the transmission of memory is neither repetition, nor rupture, but elaboration. And in the process of elaboration, the dystopian possibility that lurks within any human project serves as a limit, and a warning. It is not a matter of “copying” (assuming such a thing

were possible) or of wanting to imitate the ways of life of utopian/dystopian communities of a hundred years ago. While there is a level of practice that can be reproduced (forms of cultivation, the governability strategies of certain communities such as the Hutterite-Bruderhof), nevertheless what is transmitted is not only information that aims at a sort of sociological engineering, but *inspiring images or emotions* that enable the subjects to identify themselves and recognize their desire. In transmission, what is at stake is not the truth of the facts, but the subjective truth of that which was important to those who preceded us (desire) and with which we can identify and use to empower ourselves in the present.

Hence enquiring about the reasons for the failed transmission of these alternative memories is not a trivial matter. It represents a major resource in the building of collective imaginaries of resistance and the creation of traditions (communitarian and self-managing) that are understood as “a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present.”¹⁰

The structure of the stories

We counted five colonies with an abundance of written or audio-visual material about each one of them, regularly present in the national media: anniversaries, distinctions, events, cultural activities. These colonies were: Nueva Germania [New Germany]; Puerto Bertoni / Colonia Guillermo Tell [Port Bertoni /William Tell Colony]; Nueva Australia [New Australia] / Cosme Colony; the Mennonite Colonies of the Paraguayan Chaco; and the Hutterite Colonies of Primavera. It is not ignorance of their existence or their history that has prevented their memory from being inscribed within the common imaginary, but rather the particular way in which these records have been worked into collective stories. The memory of those communities has undergone a process of depoliticization and the message that circulates does not account for their status as alternative projects to the State and the market, but their lack of continuity in time and their foreignness.

How can the “obliteration” of this enormous symbolic capital be explained? How can this be understood, particularly among the ranks of progressive social movements looking for references and traditions to appeal to? I have already pointed out the way in which the circulation of their memories was hampered by the fact that the experiments were regarded as utopias/dystopias, so clotting their transmission. But there was something else, and it might be supposed that that remainder must be inscribed somehow into the way that these experiences have been told whenever the histories of these communities have been transmitted in the form of stories. But what is that narrative structure like?

Five utopian/dystopian colonies and a variety of stories in different formats: political and religious communities that had features in common (despite their many differences), a collective ideal that transformed them into living communities and some form of communal property. There are written, photographic and audio-visual narratives of all of them. The choice of the corpus calls for two preliminary clarifications.¹¹ Firstly, some explanation is needed for the inclusion of a dystopia (Nueva Germania) among the set of utopian colonies; and secondly, why such disparate stories have been included in the same set. The five colonies can all be considered utopian projects in the traditional sense of the term, as proposals for creating “another

place” or “an ideal place.” They were all regarded as utopias by their founders and first colonists, and as dystopias by many of their members throughout their history. In the case of Nueva Germania, an instance of an Aryan racist colony, I find it difficult not to describe it as a dystopia from the start after the aberrations that that particular aspiration took in twentieth-century European history. Nonetheless, as far as this study is concerned, it is not so much the way in which their utopian or dystopian nature is defined that is of interest here — a task that is always complicated and partial — but their status as alternative projects to liberal order. It is their very alterity that justifies the inclusion of such disparate ventures in one and the same group. As for the diverse nature of the stories that form the corpus — written in different languages by authors from different disciplines — this is a virtue rather than an obstacle; in spite of these differences, we are able to talk of a common literary genre that would be imposed on the various disciplinary mandates, a sort of metanarrative that would condition the narrative structure of the stories about utopias/dystopias.

In all cases, the predominant literary genre is the travelogue, a mode of writing that can encompass quite diverse forms and in which a variety of discursive strategies intersect.¹² In the case that concerns us here, two elements have been included: the traveller and the route he took, in a three part movement in which they narrate the journey of the historical protagonists, incorporate the narrator’s encounter with that experience, and try to repeat this exercise with the reader, who accompanies the protagonist and the narrator on that journey.¹³ The stories about utopias/dystopias in Paraguay do not set out to describe what each community was like in an objective way — as a sociologist would, for example —, but are exercises in discovery of other forms of life organized from the standpoint of an autobiography. These are not “scientific” accounts as some sociological currents or other social disciplines might set out to be, but they are not autobiographical accounts in the strictest sense either, as in the case of an extraordinary individual retelling his adventures. The genre we are considering is in tension somewhere between these two extremes.

They all share some common features and one reaction that is repeated. What is surprising about this corpus is the type of emotion that the stories arouse: fascination. It is a very particular emotion, one triggered by something exceptional and non-repeatable that the protagonists in the colonies talked about in their relationship with nature,¹⁴ which is retold by the narrators of those experiences that others lived at first hand, and is then referred to by the literary critics or reviewers of those narratives.¹⁵ Here are some examples:

Works such as the great falls of Guayrá are not described; they are marvelled at. Scenes of nature inspire the poet: the Guayrá is one of those that leave him speechless (...) and the roar silences thunder, in the stunning solitude of the jungle — all of that stifles words, confounds reason and subjects the heart to the most diverse and mixed of feelings.¹⁶

The most fascinating of all to me was the unwritten story of New Germany, the racist colony Elisabeth helped to found in the middle of South America over a century ago.¹⁷

A sparkling idea, and its realization . . . yields vivid travel writing and information of a ghostly but fascinating sort.¹⁸

The book Mr Macintyre has written about Elisabeth Nietzsche is a fascinating, provocative and highly eccentric volume that is part biography, part travelogue, part detective story.¹⁹

I could reproduce other quotes in which the word “fascination” appears or where some characteristic typical of this emotion is described. And this is just as true of the protagonists of the utopian/dystopian experiences — Bertoni’s relationship with nature in the example given above — as of the ones who related those experiences second-hand — Macintyre on the Nueva Germania experiment — and of the critics — Steiner and Kakutani — who reviewed the accounts. As the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy indicates, *fascinación*, or fascination, is synonymous with delusion or hallucination; it also defines the word as “irresistible attraction”. Fascination is a singular passion, an irresistible attraction that blocks any possibility of exchange or appropriation, locks the stories in like clots of meaning. To feel fascinated is to be captivated, enraptured, absorbed by the object (Freud, 2006).

In theory, we do not know what produces fascination but we can certainly try to find something common to all the stories. It seems plausible to suggest that if they all produce fascination it is because they contain some similar ingredient. If there is a common effect it may be that there is a common cause. If we confine ourselves only to the content of the accounts, there is a constant in the narrative structure of all of them — that which is traditionally called “subject matter” or “argument” — and in the way that that content is organized. Regardless of the variety of detail in the actions or the number of characters that perform them, all these accounts have a common three-part structure that can be summed up as follows. The subject — individual or collective — the hero of the tale abandons the comforts of a modern city to set out on an adventure in an unknown country, represented by a mysterious nature — at times bountiful, at others terrifying — and succeeds, in spite of, or because of his suffering, in taming that savage nature and redeeming it for the good of humanity. His is a journey of no return, a one-way journey because even if he returns to his country of origin, he will no longer be the same, since he pays for his resolve with his life or his identity. In this drama, in which the subject/hero decides to exchange the comfort of the familiar for the unknown, there is a reward that he will never enjoy, a legacy that is passed down to all mortals: a fascinating intellectual work or significant moral values, the strength of someone who dared to go beyond what was known. But it also conceals a threat: the possibility that that legacy will be lost for ever, due to human apathy, neglect or indifference. It is a threat that the author(s) of the story/stories warn(s) about and seek(s) to invoke with narrations that are a way of making the hero return to his place of origin and so allow him to rest in peace.

All the accounts analysed share a constant three-part structure: *separation*; *initiation*; and *return*, somewhat similar to the folktales analysed by Vladimir Propp.²⁰ In spite of the differences between the stories, these three functions are common to all the texts. The protagonists set off leaving family and friends behind, and begin an adventure in territories unknown, where they arrive, more often than not, by chance rather than as a result of deliberate choice. This was the case of Bertoni who, having had his fill of the decadence of modern urban life, sought out that ideal place, first in the northwest of Argentina, then in the port that bears his name in Paraguay. Or the case of William Lane, who left Australia after the failure of the 1891 shearers’ strike, convinced that his socialist ideals could only be realized in some country in South America, first in Argentina, then in neighbouring Paraguay. Elisabeth Nietzsche, the

driving force behind Nueva Germania, would also leave her native country to follow her husband, Dr. Bernhard Förster and establish their project of racial purity in Paraguay, that *terra incognita*. Much the same can be said of the Hutterite, later Hutterian, Brethren of the Primavera Colonies who, in exile in Great Britain during the Second World War, sought refuge for their way of life and Anabaptist beliefs in Paraguay. Finally, the Mennonites also left several countries (Russia, Canada and Mexico) persecuted by the new laws of the States that were being constructed, to find safe haven in the “new paradise” of Chaco — a dense “spiny forest” — where they could live according to their religious and cultural traditions.

In all the cases analysed, the stories in which these experiences are related single out this first function or stage, and do so by using it to trigger the narration. They could have indicated other functions or made a different aspect the centre of the narration. There is nothing self-evident about selecting the move away from the country or place of origin as the initial element of the story. In Bertoni’s case, he could have used some other aspect as the organizing principle of the account, for example, the omnipresence of his mother (in a somewhat peculiar family structure), who abandoned her husband to accompany her son’s family to the “promised land”.

Likewise, the second stage — *initiation and difficult task* — is present in every one of the five cases studied. Separation gives rise to initiation, a new path to be taken and, in this new beginning, the protagonists will rely on the help of a supernatural being (God in the case of the religious colonies) or the collaboration of powerful entities (such as nature or an overarching ideology, in the case of the other communities). Nothing will be easy, the stories tell us, and the heroes are not going to achieve their objectives straightaway. They will pay a price, *no gains without pains*, and that price will be paid in the form of a difficult task. The supernatural beings that help and guide them, or the natural and political entities, which, without being supernatural, have enormous powers, put the heroes to the test and these tests mark a turning point in the story. The narrations about New Australia depict William Lane as obsessed with socialist ideals, intent on building a *Workingman’s Paradise*, and subjected to tests from which he did not emerge unscathed: having to accept the gulf between his ideals and human and social reality. The tales about the Port Bertoni / William Tell Colony speak of a hero naively confident in the powers of nature, an ambiguous nature: exceptionally fertile, but which will put him to the test more than once. The death of his little daughter, Inés, and the loss of his plant collection — the work of many months lost as the result of a flood in the first settlement in Missions — seem to be part of the price Bertoni had to pay to sustain his ideals. Something similar is recorded in the story about Nueva Germania. The ideal of a racially pure community was what drove the Förster-Nietzsches to Paraguay, and they would do their utmost, or at least try, in spite of the tests to which husband and wife were put: the accusations of the colonists, Bernhard Förster’s suicide in San Bernardino, and the desertion of the peasants. The Mennonites and Hutterites, who shared many distinguishing characteristics, relied — according to their accounts — on the help of God, who steered their lives but also placed a number of tests in their path towards achieving his kingdom on earth, namely, the death of hundreds of new arrivals from disease and malnutrition, the dreadful, extreme climatic conditions as well as the internal and leadership crises that threatened their survival.

Separation, initiation and return are the three functions common to all the accounts; the return stage does not necessarily have to be physical but it will always

be symbolic. Moisés Bertoni died in 1929, in Foz de Iguazú, and rests “en una plenitud misteriosa bajo este majestuoso árbol de ciprés” (in mysterious plenitude beneath this majestic cypress tree), as it states on the sign accompanying his grave (placed there by the Itaipú Hydroelectric Company) in the Port that bears his name. He never returned to the canton of his birth; nonetheless, the story arranged another kind of return for him, according to which his death — his return to nature — enables the gift of his legacy — his wisdom, his courage — to be bequeathed to the whole of humanity. The Mennonites did not return to their places of origin either (that place being much more difficult to determine given the centuries-old diaspora of the community); nevertheless, the stories that are told about them emphasise their symbolic return, namely, the attainment of their objectives, their ability to maintain their identity and traditions and, at the same time, achieve great economic success. The Hutterites of Paraguay moved on again in 1960, after what came to be known as the “Great Crisis”, which was basically a crisis of leadership. They left the Primavera colonies and settled in the state of New York. The stories of this event and the later development of the community also record this symbolic return and the legacy that it represented for the protagonists and the new members.

The stories of the colonies founded by William Lane and Elisabeth Nietzsche turn out to be rather different. Lane, in his time, was accused of being authoritarian and purist — which was what caused his departure from New Australia to found a parallel community, Cosme Colony — while Elisabeth Nietzsche was accused of having embezzled the funds of the colonists. Both returned (physically) to their places of origin, but the accounts seem to say that they did not succeed in passing the tests imposed by their ideologies, or the constraints of reality. Even so, such is the power and the force of this three-part narrative structure in the development of the story, that there is a sort of return and gift. Lane returned to his own country and the New Australia and Cosme Colony would end up being dissolved as socialist communities shortly afterwards, and their lands divided into lots and distributed among the settlers. The stories, however, insist on picking up on the legacy of their memory; it was a failure, but it was those first colonists and their socialist leader who laid the necessary foundations that enabled a figure like the anthropologist León Cadogan to be born and grow up in that community. Cadogan became a specialist in the Mbyá-Guaraní and Aché Indians, and was acknowledged by Claude Lévi-Strauss as the foremost authority on those cultures and a staunch defender of indigenous rights in Paraguay.²¹ The accounts acknowledge that Lane failed to the extent that he did not manage to keep the socialist colony going, but see the birth of Cadogan — who, during his lifetime, was more than critical of the extinct socialist project — as a pretext for the story to follow the three-part structure.

The stories about Nueva Germania are even more eloquent. This was an experiment that is not in tune with present-day sensibilities. Elisabeth Nietzsche went back to Germany and decades later struck up an excellent relationship with the Nazi party and its leader. The narrative structure is imposed on the content to such an extent that the author of the story himself feels compelled to seek, and indeed finds, a kind of symbolic return and legacy, by stressing the dark side of the experiment, which would lead years later to concentration camps and gas chambers for millions of people. Nevertheless, his fascination is such that Elisabeth is seen as a woman of enormous energy, “of extraordinary courage, character [...] and *chutzpah*”.²² There is no doubt that the author of the account, Ben Macintyre, feels no sympathy for or has any

ideological affinity with Elisabeth Nietzsche and, yet, he cannot help being drawn to her and has to look for some reason (her fighting spirit, her capacity for transgressing limits in order to go beyond what is known) to justify his fascination. And he finds it in this lady's personal qualities, a sort of decontextualized personal legacy.

Apart from the three-part structure — so reminiscent of the folktales and fairy stories of oral folklore that Propp studied — there is another interesting ingredient: the binary oppositions that shore up the stories. I remember a newspaper feature that I read in Foz de Iguazú in 1991, which was when I first became aware of Port Bertoni. Its front-page headline said: “Bertoni: A *Museum* in the *Jungle*” and the title of the article: “A *Swiss Genius* in the Upper *Paraná River Jungle*”. These polarities, or binary oppositions, turn up in the majority of the titles of the works cited. By way of example, take *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay*, a work by Anne Whitehead, who plays with this opposition of a *paradise* that is found, but then mislaid or has gone astray (has become hell?), and a *tribe* of *white* Australians in Paraguay. *Strangers Become Neighbors* is the title of the book by Redekop about the relationship between the Mennonites and the indigenous peoples. Once again, oppositions: the *strange* versus the *familiar*. Macintyre's account of Nueva Germania, *Forgotten Fatherland*, recreates that duality with a title that alludes to the loss of memory (of the fatherland, the origin, the place of the father). One of the works by Baratti and Candolfi about Port Bertoni repeats this pattern: *Vida y obra del sabio Bertoni: Moisés Santiago Bertoni (1857–1929): un naturalista suizo en Paraguay* (The Life and Work of the Learned Bertoni: Moisés Santiago Bertoni (1857–1929): A Swiss Naturalist in Paraguay) reinforcing a twofold opposition. On the one hand, the one forged between his birthplace, *modern Switzerland*, and his new homeland, *unknown and wild Paraguay*; on the other, in this latter country, Bertoni's status as a *learned man*. All these oppositions are inherent in mythical tales — those tales about marvellous deeds and supernatural beings — whose structure was described by Levi-Strauss. Among these oppositions, the culture-nature opposition is the one that is characteristic of the myth of the hero, exactly as shown in the research of the mythographer Joseph Campbell, and also in that of Hugo Bauzá.²³ The hero is, more than anything, a transgressor; a being in permanent conflict between two worlds, a mediator between the civilized and the wild, between order and disorder; he is a being capable of going beyond the limits imposed on mere mortals.

The three-part narrative structure — the functions of Propp's fairy tales — and the binary oppositions are the two common elements that appear in every story about the utopian/dystopian communities in Paraguay. And these two constants seem to be associated with the fascination that was, as we saw, the prevailing emotion in the reception of the stories. We can say, then, that we are in the presence of mythical stories about heroic figures that follow the structure of fairy tales. But there is something else.

The paratexts

Those common elements of the narrative structure with the power to fascinate us — the three-part functions and binary oppositions — are not restricted to the accounts themselves but can also be observed in the paratexts, those visual elements that turn a story into a book.²⁴ In almost every case, the paratexts, those discourses of transition/transaction that serve as pragmatic devices anticipating the structure of the

book, seem to match each other. I refer here to the book covers, a sort of letter of introduction to the book, which draws in the reader and directs the type of reading or interpretation. The book covers of the cases studied here have characteristics in common. Exotic motifs predominate, whether they are photos or illustrations; jungles, Indians, and animals on the one hand, and modest buildings and white settlers on the other. The semantic oppositions that are so characteristic of the texts have also migrated to the covers, suggesting that we are not looking at academic books but at stories that are more like the fables or folk tales that Propp spoke about. Apart from the way the covers “exoticize” the text, an abundance of maps and photos in the paratexts is another common feature in all the accounts that serves to differentiate them from others.

The presence of maps is a constant and their inclusion does not seem to be due to any need to be informative. In most cases, the maps are generic, contribute no information whatsoever, or are so basic — such as Paraguay outlined on the continent as a whole — that they seem to be there for other purposes. If the studies were about a colony in Sheffield instead of being about Paraguay, nobody would include the outline of Great Britain on a map of Europe as a guide, unless the book was written for young children, when they would either include other types of map (showing the use of space, distribution of the population, communication networks) or would dispense with school maps altogether. However, in the works analysed, these simple maps appear, reinforcing the idea of remoteness, the uncharted place of the territories of utopia/dystopia. Hence, Paraguay appears inscribed as a place so remote that the mere representation of its outline is sufficient to give it substance, to make it emerge from the shadows. Remoteness and empty space; the outline of the country is marked and then the site where the colony settled, as if the colonists had arrived in *terra nula*, an empty uninhabited place, and, incidentally, naturally adopting that colonial perspective that makes the original peoples invisible.

All the works have a large number of photos, divided between historical photographs of the colonies, those showing the activities that were carried out in those enclaves, and other photographs — and they are always there — in which the author(s) of the story is/are seen decades later with the descendants of the settlers and posing at emblematic sites in the colonies. In principle, there is no reason to include this material, not even to support the story with pictures, unless the purpose is to guide the reading in some way. The inclusion of period photos looks like an attempt to anchor the story in the real world, a way of tying that “exoticized” tale — so close to the narrative structure of fairy tales — to “what really happened”. Reproducing these pictures and including the narrator in the scene form part of a strategy for increasing the mimetic capacity of the story; historical photographs in which the author of the story invariably appears indicating two time periods: the past and the present. This inscription bears the obvious meaning of authorization, branding, the “I was there” that constitutes the hallmark of scientific ethnography.

Paratexts also follow the three-part structure that we saw in the narrations: *separation*, *initiation*, and *return*. The maps and photographs exoticize, *separate* the object of the story and summon the reader to an unknown space, deliberately made strange. Exotic, but translatable; the past is brought up to date in a present that rests on the author’s point of view. Once the reader has been summoned, he may find in the reading of the text a form of *initiation* into knowledge, the possibility of understanding something that, in principle, is presented as alien. And just as the hero mediated

between two worlds, so the author — serving as a bridge — mediates between the alien and the familiar, transforming the strange into the readable, intelligible, making the reader *return* to the known.

Transmission

Everything seems to indicate that something about the narrative structure — shaped in a similar fashion to folktales — and the exoticizing paratexts have influenced the circulation of the stories about utopias/dystopias in a negative way; it is as if the most contemporary narrative versions of those experiments were dragged down by the genre markers associated with the literary utopias/dystopias; a genre close to the folktales and fairy stories of European folklore that structured the content by mythologizing it, heightening the aspects of those experiences that were exceptional and non-repeatable. If we accept this argument, it begs another question; in what other way could stories about utopias/dystopias be written that would enable those experiences to be actively and critically appropriated?

Let us reconsider some of the characteristics of the stories about utopias/dystopias in Paraguay. We saw that one of the markers of the way those stories were narrated was the inclusion of the author in the story, both in the narrative structure and the paratexts, which is what I shall call the *autobiographical character*. *Reflexivity and autobiography*: the inclusion of the author in the story is an interesting and necessary marker. This inclusion can make it easier for the memories of the communities to circulate, but it is not without its problems. In recent decades, it has been common to find an authorial presence in the social sciences. It occurs in some disciplines — like ethnography — more than others, but it is becoming increasingly common for the narrator to appear as one more character in the story, an attempt to debunk the positivist fallacy of the objectivity of the scientific account. Forming part of the narration that gives an account of a phenomenon is to uncover the inherently biased, perspective-laden nature of any interpretation. Thinking and giving an account of the position from which one is speaking (one among many) implies considering the relationship with that which is the object of study and analysis. The result is a shift from the idea of truth — my story represents what happened — to the idea of responsibility — my story is, at best, one of the possible, interested, partial views of what was observed, and for which I must answer. It is in this sense that the appearance of the autobiographical element as the marker of the stories of utopias/dystopias in Paraguay seems to me to be interesting.

However, instead of resolving the problem, the inclusion of the author in the scene simply creates other problems. The inclusion of the author in the story may make one think of a centred subject, with a fixed identity, master of his word, an autonomous, rational, unified subject, one of the great inventions — along with the subject/object split — of modernity. Feminists, poststructuralists and deconstructionists have all justifiably attacked this assumption. And I say justifiably because the debates about the crisis of the subject are political debates that concern our daily lives, and the possibility of thinking about alternative ways of life. After all, this modern subject — regarded as rational, self-centred and autonomous — is the cause and effect of modern forms of domination. Without going so far as to take up the most radical positions, in which the subject is a mere effect of discourse, how does one include oneself in the

story while accepting that all processes of identification are unstable and relational, and that the postmodern individual is being created and transformed in and through the story?

Let us recall what was said about the inscription of the subject in the stories about utopias/dystopias in Paraguay; this is a marker of authority, it is about the need to endow the narration with a certain realism threatened by the exoticization of the object. This authorial function and its anchorage are a long way from the relativist, perspectivist, decentred function that the inclusion of the postmodern individual seems to bring with it. Nevertheless, the idea of a journey, which runs through these stories as a metaphor, fits in with the idea of a narrator who is created and transformed in the course of the narration. It is a narrative journey from which one emerges at the end different from the way one was at the beginning, and can generate a similar effect in the reader. Hayden White and Roland Barthes have analysed an alternative mode of writing, applied to certain historical accounts and testimonies about traumatic memories, such as those of the Holocaust.²⁵ This is the so-called “middle voice”, a voice halfway between the active and the passive voice.²⁶ The subject is, at one and the same time, subject and object of the action. In the case that concerns us here, the employment of this pronominal form would mean starting from a premise that would be difficult for the empiricists to digest, namely, that when we narrate, we are not giving an account of something external to the story itself, but rather the story generates a relationship, an encounter, an exchange with that which we are studying. It is not a question of narrating a prior experience; the story is the experience.²⁷

The inscription of this type of *subject in process* ought to go for a choral, polyphonic story in which the author included in the account would show his other facets, his contradictions, his losses; in other words, a chorality that does not appeal to other voices, but other voices of *his own*, a plural-singular voice, because a story about an alternative experiment or about a utopian/dystopian colony is, ultimately, an encounter, an exchange, a friction between the person writing and the traces of past experiences. It would be as well, then, to think of how to inscribe oneself into an account of utopias/dystopias, how to demolish the fallacy of the centred subject without at the same time eliminating all possibility of thinking about another type of subject (or individual, if you prefer). A subject in process would be unable to transmit stable, finished knowledge; however, if there is no communicable knowledge, what might the relationship of the social actors — in other words, those subjects who are going to appropriate the alternative experiences of the past — be with the stories about the historical utopias/dystopias in Paraguay?

Representation or evocation/friction: representation is the characteristic expression of the social sciences in modernity. Returning that knowledge of the past to presence is what historiography and other related disciplines have done for more than a century. But what aspect of historical experience — in this case utopias/dystopias — may be useful today? For after all, is not the knowledge that we can extract from the past firmly gripped between irrelevance and exceptionality? What I mean is, if there were some more or less specific knowledge derived from the utopian/dystopian historical experiences, it would be so general and so obvious that it would not require looking into specifically. Pointing out that utopian/dystopian colonies have problems maintaining themselves at some point during their history (problems of leadership, conflict of interests and so on) does not seem to be such a far-reaching conclusion that it would deserve our attention. Pointing out that religious communities seem to

last longer — because they have stricter rules — does not seem to be a great discovery either. An analysis of each particular case would enable us to reach more finely calibrated conclusions but what would be the point of such findings if their conditions of possibility cannot be repeated? What I mean by this is that what is general to all the communities is too obvious and what is peculiar to each one cannot be repeated. What then can be taken from those experiences that would be of use today? Representing — in other words, returning what was and what took place to presence — would mean accepting that there is some stability in the signification of events, which is questionable at the very least. Can we account for the significance of utopias/dystopias once and for all? But even if we were capable of doing so, what use would it have? “What was”, in its most diverse modalities, is over, but “that thing that was” contains one facet that has not really been explored: “what might have been and was not”. So, representation, based on the similitude or mimesis between the story and what happened, is replaced by another operation, evocation,²⁸ a movement founded on difference, on what did not take place. “What might have been” are those other possibilities that were discarded, or not possible because they belonged to other codes of signification and value.²⁹

If, as I have pointed out, “what was” is unstable, why should “what might have been and was not” be any more so? The intention is not to replace one representation with another, but to subvert the very idea of representation by means of friction. Friction is a kind of dialogue in which creation takes place, not appropriation. When there is friction between a reader and a text, this movement sparks images, ideas, scenarios, landscapes that were not there before. Friction indicates returning its many presents to the past, at the same time as it converts the present into historical material, relativizing it and putting it into perspective.³⁰

The irony of the story and binary oppositions: with a decentred subject who evokes and is in friction with the past, the resulting story ought to be quite different from the traditional one. This new subject, since it is constantly shifting, would opt for an ironic text that would mark the doubt in every assertion, reject single significations and suggest other possibilities. One of the most characteristic features of the narrations about utopias/dystopias in Paraguay were the binary oppositions, those formulas — together with other ingredients — that generate fascination and tend to perpetuate the legacy of the experiments as myths. How can that structure be altered? By introducing polyphony and chorality. Faced with the nature versus culture opposition, it is not a question of inverting the value of either of the two terms but of opening up play to other voices, in other words, changing the duality into multiplicity. This polarity that keeps appearing in contemporary stories could perhaps be altered and denatured if other voices are summoned, that of the Mbyá-Guaraní, for example, that are far from conceiving that relationship as a duality; introducing other codes of signification and value is to denature one’s own. The same could be said of the fate of the colonists, of that heroic version that the stories introduce. If those binary oppositions fracture, almost certainly, one of the most important ingredients of the myth of the hero as mediating between two worlds will collapse. Even at the risk of being cacophonous, it would be necessary to superimpose different stories about that fate (of the protagonists, the native witnesses, the contemporaries in their places of origin), to change the tempos and modes of narrating (the corollary of including other voices will be to deploy these different tempos and stories with different structures), to experiment ... with knowledge that is open, in process, which knows that it does not know and shows



its lack of knowledge. Experimenting and opening ourselves up to experimentation because:

If one can stop looking at the past and start listening to it, one might hear echoes of a new conversation; the task of the critic would be to lead speakers and listeners unaware of each other's existence to talk to one another. The job of the critic would be to maintain the ability to be surprised at how the conversation goes, and to communicate that sense of surprise to the other people, because a life infused with surprise is better than a life that is not.³¹

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 Jorge Consiglio, *Hospital Posadas* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia Editora, 2015), p. 55; J. M. Coetzee and Arabella Kurtz, *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychotherapy* (New York: Viking Random House, 2015), p. 11; George Didi-Huberman, *La survivance des lucioles* (Paris: Minuit, 2009), p. 36.
- 2 Marisa González de Oleaga, ed., *En primera persona. Testimonios desde la utopía* (Barcelona: NED/Gedisa, 2013).
- 3 There are two cases that show the almost complete indifference of these communities: the projected anarchist colony, William Tell, and the Cecilia colony on the one hand, and the Anabaptist colonies of Friesland and Primavera, on the other. In spite of their ideological and geographical proximity, contact was practically non-existent or very sporadic. See Danilo Baratti and Patricia Candolfi, *L'Arca di Mosè. Biografia epistolare de Mosè Bertoni* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 1994), pp. 39 and 44; Yaacov Oved, *The Witness of the Brothers: A History of the Bruderhof* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996), pp. 109 and 118.
- 4 Already in the nineteenth century, in the work of Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), so-called utopian socialism was discredited for advocating a model that was impossible to realize, and was described as a mere step along the road to formulating scientific socialism. Edward Forster, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Karl Popper, Aldous Huxley, George Orwell are only a small sample of the authors whose literary works and essays sealed the fate of the concept. If to this, we add that a significant number of these ventures did not last, the hypothesis of utopia as a daydream, or a project doomed to failure, was reinforced. A detailed development of the critiques of utopia can be found in Rafael Sánchez-Mateos, *De la ruina a la utopía: una constelación menor. Potencias estético-políticas de la infancia* (Unpublished PhD diss., Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2015), pp. 290–318. Daniel W. Hollis III, *Utopian Movements* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 1998), p. xv; Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-utopia in Modern Times* (London: Blackwell, 1991); Richard C. S. Trahair, *Utopias and Utopians* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. xii.
- 5 Both the title of this chapter and this epigraph are indebted to the classic work by John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).
- 6 Experiences are non-repeatable as such, although some repetition is necessary in the gesture of creating and constructing ways of life that represent alternatives to the hegemonic way. If this were not so, if there were not some repetition in the gesture we would not be talking about utopias and we would not be able to compare them. Repetition, however, does not mean copy but rather re-creation, in the sense of something new meeting the old. Jacques Derrida, “Firma, acontecimiento y contexto”, in *Márgenes de la filosofía* (Madrid: Cátedra,



- 1989), pp. 347–372 and by the same author, *Acts of Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
- 7 Michèle Petit, *El arte de la lectura en tiempos de crisis* (Mexico: Océano, 2009) and Greg Denning, *Readings/Writings* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1998).
 - 8 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation”, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema & Media* 36 (1989): p. 69.
 - 9 Jacques Hassoun, *Los contrabandistas de la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de La Flor, 1996), p. 29.
 - 10 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115.
 - 11 The following is a list of the colonies and the stories used: Nueva Germania (San Pedro), an Aryan racist colony founded in 1887 by Bernhard Förster and Elisabeth Nietzsche; descendants of the original colonists are still living in the colony; Ben Macintyre, *Forgotten Fatherland: The Search for Elisabeth Nietzsche* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993); Puerto Bertoni or Colonia Guillermo Tell (Alto Paraná), an anarchist colony project transformed into a family colony, founded in 1893 by the Swiss Moisés Bertoni; its last inhabitant died in 1929; Danilo Baratti and Patricia Candolfi, *L’Arca di Mosè. Biografía epistolare de Mosè Bertoni* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 1994), and by the same authors, *Vida y obra del sabio Bertoni, Moisés Santiago Bertoni (1857–1929). Un naturalista suizo en Paraguay* (Asunción: Helvetas, 1999); Colonia Nueva Australia and Cosme Colony (Caaguazú), a socialist colony founded in 1893; in May 1894, William Lane and other colonists broke away and founded Cosme Colony, seventy kilometres from the first settlement; Lane left the community in 1899, which continued until 1905; Gavin Souter, *A Peculiar People: William Lane’s Australian Utopians in Paraguay* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1991 [1968]); Anne Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaid: In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1997); Anabaptist Mennonite Colonies (Menno, Fernhein and Neuland in the Department of Boquerón, Chaco Paraguayo) founded in 1927, 1930, 1947 to the present day; Calvin Redekop, *Strangers Become Neighbors: Mennonite and Indigenous Relations in the Paraguayan Chaco* (Ontario: Herald Press, 1980); Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, *Up From the Rubble: The Epic Rescue of Thousands War-Ravaged Mennonite Refugees* (Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1991); the Hutterite Primavera Colonies (Caazapá), founded in 1945; in 1960, they moved to the United States; Yaacov Oved, *The Witness of the Brothers: A History of Bruderhof* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Bob and Shirley Wagoner, *Community in Paraguay: A Visit to the Brotherhood* (Farmington: Plough and Hutterian Brethren, 1991).
 - 12 The following are research studies of undeniable interest: Diana Salcines de Delás, *La literatura de viajes: una encrucijada de textos* (Unpublished PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1996); G. Percy Adams, *Travel Literature Through the Ages: An Anthology* (New York: Garland, 1988); Eric Leeds, *Shores of Discovery: How Expeditionaries Have Constructed the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995); John Needham, *The Departure Lounge: Travel and Literature in the Postmodern World* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1999); Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes, Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Christian Kupchik, “Elogio de la fuga. En busca de la identidad perdida”, unpublished manuscript, 2005.
 - 13 Northrop Frye, “The Journey as Metaphor”, in *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville–London: University Press of Virginia, 1990).
 - 14 Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder”, in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 42–56, defines *wonder* precisely, as a way of displaying an object so that it fascinates, and contrasts that with *resonance*, which has the power to evoke a much more productive reception.
 - 15 Frye, “The Journey as a Metaphor”.

- 16 Moisés Bertoni in Baratti and Candolfi, *L'Arca di Mosè*, p. 129. "Obras como el gran salto del Guayrá no se describen: se admiran. Las escenas de la naturaleza inspiran al poeta: el Guayrá es de aquellas que lo enmudecen (...) y el estruendo que enmudece al trueno, en la soledad imponente de la selva -todo aquello ahoga la palabra, confunde a la razón y somete al corazón a los más diversos y encontrados sentimientos."
- 17 Macintyre, *Forgotten Fatherland*, pp. xi–xii.
- 18 George Steiner, "Review of *Forgotten Fatherland* written by Ben Macintyre", *The New Yorker*, 19 October 1992, p. 122.
- 19 Michiko Kakutani, "Books of the Times; On the Trail of the Other Nietzsche", *The New York Times*, 16 October 1992.
- 20 Vladimir Propp, *Morfología del cuento* (Madrid: Akal, 1998).
- 21 Richard Arens, ed., *Genocide in Paraguay* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1976).
- 22 Macintyre, *Forgotten Fatherland*, p. xii.
- 23 Claude Levi-Strauss, "La estructura de los mitos", in *Antropología Estructural* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1995). Joseph Campbell, *El héroe de las mil caras: psicoanálisis del mito* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998) and Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *El poder del mito* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1988). Hugo F. Bauzá, *El mito del héroe. Morfología y semántica de la figura heroica* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998).
- 24 The paratextual elements are those "devices and conventions, both within and outside the book that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher and reader: titles, forewords, epigraphs and publishers' jacket copy are part of the public and private history of the book", in Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Threshold of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 25 Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth", in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, edited by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 37–53. Roland Barthes, "Escribir, ¿un verbo transitivo?", in *El susurro del lenguaje* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1994), pp. 23–34.
- 26 This is a formula characteristic of Greek, Sanskrit and Indo-Persian that was lost when the Greeks began to use a vocabulary associated with the idea of the will and began to think of the agent as the source of all action. Barthes, "Escribir, ¿un verbo transitivo?", pp. 23–33; White, "Historical Emplotment".
- 27 Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). We have an interesting corpus of experiments in this respect: Alun Munslow and Robert Rosenstone, eds., *Experiments in Rethinking History* (London: Routledge, 2004) and Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).
- 28 José Ramón San Miguel, "La evocación. Un análisis fenomenológico", *Catoblepas* 35 (Jan. 2005): 10.
- 29 Elizabeth D. Ermarth, "The Closed Space of Choice: A Manifesto on the Future of History", in *Manifestos for History*, edited by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alun Munslow (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 50–66.
- 30 Greg Denning, "Performing cross-culturally", in *Manifestos for History* eds. Jenkins et al.; Hayden White, "Afterword. Manifesto Time", in *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- 31 Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 23.