dedication to appearances the keeps it from benefiting from the potential regeneration offered by characters like Agustín and Polo. When they leave, Rosalía’s conduct reveals how appearances can become an all-consuming passion.


10. Engels points to the relative autonomy of the superstructural regions of politics, law, and ideology. With respect to ideology, he comments: “The people who deal with [ideology] belong in their turn to special spheres in the division of labor and appear to themselves to be working in an independent field. And in so far as they form an independent group within the social division of labor, in so far do their productions, including their errors react back as an influence upon the whole development of society, even on its economic development. But all the same they themselves remain under the dominating influence of economic development” (letter to Conrad Schmidt, October 27, 1890, included in *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* [New York: International, 1947] pp. 3-8).

11. Goldmann (op. cit. chapter “Nouveau roman et réalité”) has indicated how this is true of even the most “unrealistic” fiction, such as the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute.

12. Even if one is writing against a particular tradition, for example Cortázar in *Rayuela*.


   En 1864 los síntomas de crisis inminente entemecen el horizonte del mundo de los negocios. La guerra civil norteamericana ha paralizado las importaciones de algodón, que alcanzan en 1864 el nivel mínimo absoluto para el período de 1850-1900 (índice 29.35). Este proceso crea un desasosiego persistente en los medios textil catalanes, al que se añadirá muy pronto el de los demás núcleos industriales: siderúrgicos, ferroviarios, etc. En efecto, la crisis hace su aparición en los medios internacionales a fines de 1865 y se desata en 1866.

   Estas circunstancias económicas explican el éxito del pronunciamiento contra el trono de Isabel II en 1868. El país necesitaba un nuevo equipo ministerial que le sacara de apuros y lo halló en el gobierno provisional de 1868.


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*Tres tristes tigres*, or the Treacherous Play on Carnival

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It is often a given consensus that there is, structurally, a consistency between the message of a work of art, and its form, which describe sets of relationships between a system and a process of meanings. These relationships relate to the dialectical interaction between a text and its context. These manifest themselves through the means of a particular structural organization, in both individual works, and a group of works emerging from a specific social system and within a determined period of time.

*Tres tristes tigres* (or TTT), presents a particular system of textual organization which can be described as a transmutating quality of artistic forms operating at the level of the narrative process. The text is characterized by a constant potential of formal transformations which distorts the structural homogeneity of the novel; a process of dislocation and fragmentation of the textual architecture (*architexture*) into inter-dependent segments.

This narrative disjuncture, however, must not be confused with the monologic “stream of consciousness”, or pre-speech level. Rather, TTT is an attempt to invalidate this particular homophonous mode of literary expression by using language pirouettes and playing against one another various explicit “voices”. The process is idiosyncratic to the specific narration, as if the text would attempt to modify itself by its own structural means. This results in the intentional auto-destruction of predetermined meaning, and finally the novel is deprived of its vital content and becomes an artistic game, a purely formal experiment. The narrative discourse is simultaneously and constantly opened and closed in a kind of active paralysis, through which the form and the message of the novel seem to be on a collision course.
In normal circumstances, one should be able to relate to, and be concerned with, both the meaning and the aesthetics of a work of art. But those conventional methods of literary criticism which assert the undistinguishable factor fondo forma no longer enable the reader to deal ideologically with fiction such as TTT. Criticism is a theoretical activity whose function precisely is to make conscious the system which, in order to acquire universality—that is, to satisfy the role that society wants it to play—must remain unconscious. The critic must look for other methodological means than those which attempt merely to “translate” and “understand” formal complexities in order to describe its meaning and message.

With respect to many examples of contemporary fiction—and not exclusively Spanish American—which present such textual complexities, the theoretical contentions of Mikhail Bakhtin prove valuable, especially those concerned with a tradition of carnivalesque literature, the rupture of homophony, and the emergence of a polyphonic form in the novel.

But it must immediately be stressed that there are no critical studies which examine TTT in such a way. The reason for this is really quite simple: Bakhtin’s theories have been assumed to presuppose, always, a fundamental socio-ideological subversion on the part of the artist whose artwork, consciously or unconsciously, falls within the tradition of literary carnivalesque. And this critical attitude, both that which is conveyed by Bakhtin’s theories themselves and by their current interpretations, conforms to the “undissociable” Form Message formula.

Furthermore, it must be added here, the critical difficulties of applying the practice of literary carnivalesque to TTT in particular have in fact been discussed. There appears no overt relationships between the presupposed subversive specificity of this artistic praxis and TTT’s conservative ideology. The problem however is far more complex, because TTT presents a textual organization which perhaps is best defined in terms of an explicitly formal carnivalesque architecture.

The central argument of this study is that the notion of carnivalesque does not always express ipso facto an ideological subversion. On the contrary, and especially in its polyphonic aspect, this notion sometimes only mediates an impossibility to subvert, and or deliberately refutes the existence of subversive forces and elements in reality. It may imply also an aesthetic prise de position which, artistically, reacts to such textual conventions expressing adherence to otherwise obsolete subversive contentions. In such cases, the artistic representation consists of formal violations which, in some contemporary novels, result in structural, and therefore perhaps only apparent subversion, by means of “innovative” and open-ended qualities. The process of actual criticism thus becomes difficult and often treacherous with respect to ideological evaluations of such works.

Hence the need for a revision of critical methods in the light of certain contemporary (here specifically) Spanish American novels, especially in order to discriminate clearly between artworks which reconcile formal open-ended qualities with progressive ideology, and those which negate authentic social protest while presenting similar “open” aesthetic modes. With respect to TTT, this is a warranted need to specify critically the ways in which a text presents subversive and artistically “innovative” appearances, and yet is ideologically regressive or at least static, in the sense of affirming a status quo.

Ultimately, my methodological hypothesis would be that the specificities of this problem can be evaluated only in extra-literary terms—social, historical, biographical, and the like.

TTT is primarily a series of formal manipulations by which the object of the artistic representation becomes the creative process of organizing the structure of the text. Contextually speaking, this object is the nocturnal socio-cultural life in Havana at the end of Fulgencio Batista’s dictatorship.

The “Prólogo” sets the scene for the whole novel on at least two different levels of the text. First, it reflects artistically the overwhelming North American presence in all Cuban activities of the time. The master of ceremonies achieves this by shifting constantly between Spanish and English. At the linguistic level, this narrative process renders dynamically explicit an ambivalent quality to the discourse. Second and more significant, some of the spectators of this show reappear later on in TTT as specific characters—such as Mr. Campbell, Vivian Smith Corona Alvarez del Real, and Códac.

The carnivalesque mood of the novel is established immediately: carnival is precisely the social event by which men do not merely contemplate a spectacle but actively participate in it. In effect, the totality of TTT is a kind of literary activation of what begins as a cabaret show:

Y ahora . . . and now . . . señoras y señores . . . Ladies and gentlemen . . .
publico que sabe lo que es bueno . . . Discriminatory public . . . Sin traducción . . . Without translation . . . Sin más palabras que vuestras
The principle of carnivalesque perception of the world is one of Mikhail Bakhtin's fundamental aesthetic premises. According to the Soviet theoretician, the authentic carnivalesque manifestations in the Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and through the Renaissance until the middle of the seventeenth century, enabled men to relate popular feasting with the superior goals of human existence—for example, resurrection and the notions of renewal. Carnival enabled them to participate in a "second", non-official life; one which is ruled by

the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (à l'envers [the French translation added in the original], or of the "turnabout", of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out". 14

In contrast to the extreme hierarchization of feudal society, the carnivalesque perception of the world temporarily fused the utopian ideal with reality. It perceived it as a mundus inversus, with the specific view of abolishing social distances between men. The absence of footlights separating the stage from the audience abolished the notion of theatrical performance in the carnival; actors and spectators became one, destroying the reality of rigid social hierarchies of everyday life.

Bakhtin adds elsewhere that

carnivalization made possible the creation of the open structure of the great dialog [original spelling] and allowed people's social interaction to be carried over into the sphere of the spirit and the intellect, which had always been primarily the sphere of a single, unified monological consciousness or of a unified and indivisible spirit, whose development took place within its own limits (as in Romanticism). 12

This dialogue-like motion between the two fundamental and polarized perceptions of the world entails a generating ambivalent dynamism for the literary text, causing a rupture of the unity of homophonic thought in the artistic creation and at the level of the artistic representation. In terms of genre poetica, Bakhtin roots the modern novel not in the epic tradition but in the menipic form of late Antiquity. Cervantes' Don Quijote thus would constitute

all at once a culmination, a turning-point and a stepping-stone in the history of Western fiction. Historically speaking, a menipic tradition would therefore run a diachronic parallel to a kind of residual epic mode, of which James Joyce's Ulysses would be its modern and ultimate expression.

From a technical point of view, the literary formulation of carnivalesque perception is the written transposition of carnival:

[carnival] is amenable to a certain transposition into the language of artistic images (i.e. the language of literature), which is related to it by its concretely sensuous nature. We call the transposition of carnival into the language of literature the carnivalization of literature. 13

Analogously, TTT is this transposition, a verbalization of the nocturnal spectacle announced in the "Prólogo"; TTT is a carnivalesque representation of the Tropicana Show.

A first approach to the practice of literary carnivalization in TTT is through the ambiguous character Floren Cassális. Cassális is really an "absence" in the text; he only affirms himself on tapes on which are recorded his writings—under the pseudonym of Bustrófedon. What makes him fundamentally important in the novel is that he functions as a kind of guru. The other four main characters find in him a spiritual master; Códec—the-photographer, Arsenio Cué—the actor, Silvestre—the writer-journalist, and Silvio Ribot—the artist, alias Eribó.

An examination of Bustrófedon will throw light on the ensemble of the characters. Bustrófedon himself has a "carnivalesque" polyvalent nature:

¿Quién es Bustrófedon? ¿Quién fue quién será quién es Bustrófedon? ¿E? Pensar en él es como pensar en la gallina de los huevos de oro, en una adivinanza sin respuesta, en la espiral. El era Bustrófedon para todos y todo para Bustrófedon era él [parodical deformation of the threeusketeers' motto "One for all and all for one"]. Lo único que sé es que me llamaba a veces Bustrófetón o Bustróforcedemon o Bustróforenique, depende, dependiendo y Silvestre era Bustrófenzis o Bustrófélo o Bustrófetegrald y Florentino Cazalis fue Bustrófloren mucho antes de que se cambiara el nombre... (207)

The name of Bustrófedon emerges transformed in the formal space of the word by means of modified additions to the prefix "Bustr-". This example is important in terms of the differences between authentic carnivalesque perception of the world and its modern or contemporary aspect. Bakhtin stresses that the negative and formal parody of modern times has nothing to do with the original carnivalesque parody. 14 In TTT's example, the predetermined meaning of the original name "Bustrófedon" is
negated successively with each new conception of the world. While the purely formal carnivalesque ambiguity remains, the essence of this fundamental ambivalence is lost in the process.

The novel’s sections called “Rompecabeza” and “La muerte de Trotsky referida por varios escritores cubanos, años después”, are further examples of this ambivalent formalization in relation to Bustrófeden. They are structuralizations of his polyvalent nature: Bustrófeden’s characterization comes to be an analogy of the structuring processes of the novel.

In “Rompecabeza”, the word is subjected to a series of linguistic acrobacies; these are verbal divagations about its “plurivocality”, of its phonetic and semantic associations. The chaotic enumerations of “Alicia en el País de las Maravillas” is a trans-literary voyage from Lewis Carroll to José Martí by means of the word’s formal plasticity, projecting a literary and a cultural amalgam which says it all and at the same time says nothing.

... y me cordé de Alicia en el País de las Maravillas y se le dije al Bustoformidable y él se puso a recrear, a regalar: Alicia en el mar de villas.


Milhizia Milhindia Milindia Milinda Malanda Malasia Malecía Malícia Malinda Malisa Alisía Aluvia Aluvia Alevíla y marlisa y marbrilla y maldevilla y empezó a cantar tomando como pie forzado (forzudo) mi Fi Flaro y la evocación de Alicia y el mar y Martí y los zapaticos de Rosa, aquella canción que dice así con su ritmo tropical:

Laralaralara larararara
(afinando su guitarronca voz)... (209-10)

This proliferation is further specified as a rebellion against the logic of the word usually perceived as a discrete unity of information:

... como del gotán, que es el reverso del tango, derivó el barón que es lo contrario de una rumba y se burla al revés, con la cabeza en el piso y moviendo las rodillas en lugar de las caderas o decir sus Números (más después ver adelante) que son Américo Preucio y Harún al ‘Haschisch’ y Nebris y Antigropina la madre de Negrón y Duns Escrito y el Conde Orgazmo y Gregory La Cavía y el epidismo de Panamá y William Speakprick o Shapescare o Chaseapar y Fuckner y Scotch Fizgerald y Somersault Mom y Cleopatra y Carlomañiz y Alejandro el Glande y el gemel músico bizco Igor Straibsmov y Jean Paul Sastrey y Telseos Tomás de Quince y Gorges BriquaBraque y Vincent Bongo... (220)

Here, the artistic object is to destroy the stable or “official” meaning by ways of the transformational mechanisms of the carnivalesque perception—but always at a formal level. It is a

never-ending search to discover the various dimensions created by multiple but simultaneous perceptions of one thing: a word, a unique situation. This is the formalization of polyphonic “truths” in opposition to the One, to fallacious and monological “official Truth”.

Mikhail Bakhtin points out that, after the mid-seventeenth century, the various elements of carnivalesque existence, as expressed in literature, are transposed to a purely formal level of the artistic production. Though in an unclear manner. Bakhtin seems to suggest a historical link between literary carnivalization and the emergence of polyphony in the novel. Essentially, literary polyphony is the struggle against the “objectual” finalization (finalisation objective) of man, in which the principle of dialogue plays a determinant role by its “pluralizing” function. By consequence, the notion of polyphony appears to be a particular concept of artistic form, which is rooted in the carnivalesque perception of the world. This form manifests itself through the infinite transformational potential of its various structural components, components functionally not reducible to the monological semantics of a character, nor of the author in relation to “his” characters. Bakhtin stresses that the artistic goal of literary polyphony is to think (pensar), simultaneously, the various contents of the world by means of independent “voices” which do not fuse monologically but coexist and interact on equal basis, at the level of both the activity of artistic creation and the subsequent representational finished product or artwork.

Consider the following passage from TTT: the “juego del polígono” consists in several of the characters each considering the various graphic possibilities of a hexagon. The figure is perceived successively as a six-faced polygon as a solid mass with six faces as a hexahedron as a unidimensional cubic figure and finally as a three-dimensional cube (217).

Y [Silvestre] dijo que cuando el hexágono encontraba su dimensión perdida y suponíamos como lo hizo, podríamos nosotros encontrar la cuarta y la quinta y las demás dimensiones y pasear libremente entre ellas... y entrar en un cuadrado, parámosos sobre un punto, viajar del presente al futuro o al pasado o a otro más allá con abrir una puerta solamente... (218)

In this example, the polyphonic factor has formalized the carnivalesque elements by means of the polygonal image; polyphony has absorbed and rearticulated the dynamic ambivalence of the carnivalesque perception into a particular structural image.

This is exactly what Bustrófeden is searching for, and achieves, when he parodies the style of various Cuban writers through his
narrative segments on Trotsky. These are further transpositions of the grafico-verbal theory of the polygon, by which the monologic unity of Bustrófedon as a character is fragmented into several independent “voices”. If “Rompecabeza” is a literary parody at a linguistic and semantic level, in the sense that it uncovers the various dimensional possibilities of the “multivocal” word,”17 the narrations of “La muerte de Trotsky” are intertextual parodies at a thematic and stylistic level. Forging the signatures of the “true” authors, Bustrófedon provokes a dynamic dialogue in the space of Cuban literature. He inverts the official roles, ridicules his “fellow-writers” by parodically plagiarizing their writings, and throws them tumbling down from their official literary and intellectual pedestals.

Moreover, the temporal moment of Bustrófedon’s parodies results in a pulverization and a “pluralization” of the narrative singular present in the purest of carnivalesque tradition. It should be remembered, at this stage, that theoretically, this tradition à priori implies the angle of the artistic creation to be oriented towards the actuality of its representation.18 The present becomes ambivalent, polyvalent, and to extremes allows a “re-invention” of the past, as if to foretell it, and a “memory” of the future. In a carnivalesque perception of time, Bustrófedon’s polyphonic creative process renders dynamic and dialogic the present of his narrations.

The chapter “Los visitantes” also carries the principle of literary carnivalization as polyphonic practice. The protagonists here are Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, spectators in the “Prólogo” but actors in the carnivalesque existence of TTT. At the level of the artistic representation, however, “Los visitantes” consists of four different polyphonic “voices” which formalize the various ways of describing a unique incident. First, the voice of Mr. Campbell; then that of Mrs. Campbell correcting her husband’s version in relation to the “truth” of the incident; followed by the written, literal Spanish translation of Mr. Campbell’s narration (therefore, one supposes, originally in English); and finally the commentary-corrections of this last sequence. Each version actually negates the former, the last two specific “written” particularities further modifying the earlier two “oral” representations. Analogous to the function of modern polyphony, the totality of the four sequences results in the formal substitution of the unique and fallacious homophonical “Truth” of the incident described, sequences often contradictory to one another but functionally meaningful in relation to each other.

Within the context of examining the carnivalesque devices

Guillermo Cabrera Infante utilizes to upset and upheave the hierarchical norms of linguistic forms and literary image, the grotesque dehumanization of the character La Estrella19 must be mentioned. Although the problem of the grotesque itself implies a slightly different issue, it has to be tied in here.

According to Bakhtin, the authentic image of the grotesque, as it is manifest through the bodily images from Antiquity to the Renaissance, reflected “a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphoses”.20 Although the concept of the grotesque suffers a historical formalization, similar to that of the principle of carnivalization, it also expresses, at least throughout the Romantic period, the potentiality of a different world with another order and another way of life:

[The grotesque] leads men out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable. Born of folk humor, it always represents in one form or another, through these or other means, the return of Saturn’s golden age to earth — the living possibility of its return.21

The notion of renewal and return through the grotesque image must also be seen in relation to Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s nostalgia artística: “TTT demuestra que si algo haya en mi es una enorme nostalgia por estas vidas, por estas formas de vida que han desaparecido. Me refiero a una nostalgia artística.”22 In literary terms, this is what the Cuban writer calls the “lenguaje… de una suerte de eternidad verbal… TTT es o pretende ser una incursión en esta eternidad, una excursión al lenguaje”.23 This “verbal eternity” is precisely what is meant here, by the infinite transformational potential of a text which is generated by the particular dynamic quality of the polyphonic form of carnival.

This can be considered from various angles. Socio-historically, TTT nostalgically recreates one aspect of a specific society: the end of a decadent bourgeois system through the representation of the nocturnal way of life in the cabarets of pre-Castrist Havana. This is the “different order” which Cabrera Infante also attempts to revive through La Estrella. Her grotesque physical appearance is the artistic incarnation of this search for an eternal possibility of authentic renewal.

The protagonist of “Ella cantaba boleros”

...era una mulata enorme, gorda gorda, de brazos como muslos y de muslos que parecian dos troncos sosteniendo el tanque del agua que era su cuero... (63)… es asi que esta enorme enorme como un hippotamano y como ellos es anfibio... (83)... [La] Estrella es una fuerza de la naturaleza o mas que eso, un fenomeno cosmico. (81)24

As female personification of the excessive amplitude of many
South American metropoles—a frequent thematic characterization in modern Spanish American fiction—, La Estrella fuses with Havana. In her nocturnal abstruseness, she upsets the balance of the actors of TTT; they wander aimlessly in a labyrinth of cabarets, whose minotauresque centre is this amorphic singer of boleros. She incarnates the form of life for which Cabrera Infante feels a "real" artistic nostalgia; "ama a la Estrella. Por favor, ayudala a ser famosa, hazla llegar, libranos de ella. La adoraremos, como a los santos, misticamente, en el éxtasis del recuerdo." (85)

Her representation, however, is closer to a degeneration of the authentic grotesque image. Bakhtin stresses the ways in which the bourgeois conception of the world modify the concept of the grotesque. What remains of the dynamic bodily image "is nothing but a corpse, old age deprived of pregnancy, equal to itself alone... The lifeless and at times meaningless fragments of the mighty and deep stream of grotesque realism".

Textually, La Estrella suffers a similar kind of metamorphosis: Bustrófedon is her consequence at an intelectual and linguistic level—she is transposed to the formal level of language--; Bustrófedon verbalizes the search for a style which she represents for Códac. She is further reified in this style which wants to be as eternal as the play on words representing her, and which simultaneously projects all the carnivalizing practices in TTT to a level of the history of the novel:

nuestro tema eterno entonces, La Estrella, por supuesto, y con ella Bustrófido un anagrama (palabra que descompuso en una divisa. Amarg-Aña) con la frase Ávida ávida vida, que escrita en un encierro, en la serpiente que se come, en el anillo que es ancha es un circulo mágico que cifra y descifra la vida siempre que se empezara a leer una cualquiera de las tres palabras y era una rueda de la infortuna: ávida vida, ida, David, ávida vida, ida, dávida, dad, ad, di, de va: comenzando de nuevo, rodando y rodando y rodando hasta ir al Rastro del Holvindo desde donde podia contarnos su historia (oyentes del Alma de las Cosas); y que tambien y tan bien y tan(to) bien podia usarse con La Estrella porque la palabra-rueda, la frase, el anagrama de doce letras que con doce palabras:

era una estrella y

sonaban siempre a diva. (213-14)

Apart from the principal literary sources of TTT, Petronius' Satyricon, Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, even James Joyce's Ulysses, and without forgetting Rabelais perhaps, the novel can also be seen as a kind of carnivalesque "re-invention" of a past and contradictory epoch, in a parody of the romantic type of the cloak-and-dagger novel of adventures. More specifically here, les Trois mousquetaires by Alexandre Dumas. The "three trapped tigers" who are really four (as are the four musketeers) are engaged in an eternal search for the queen's jewel. This literary jewel is made form by Bustrófedon in the anagram achieved with the words "ávida, dávida": verbalization of the star which is La Estrella. She is this carnavalesque queen idolized in the cabarets, which are like cours des miracles through a grotesquely metamorphized, and carnivalesquely inverted, image of the royal hails of the Baroque Versailles.

In short, the polyphonic principle in the novel is actually mis en abyme in Bustrófedon. His name also means a particular way of writing: alternatively from left to right and from right to left; carnivalesque inversion of the act of writing. But the kind of literary language which Bustrófedon seeks in vain—and by inference, the language of the novel as a whole—is a mode which does not translate the (social) event by the word. The transposition to a verbal condition actually betrays the innate potential of transformation of the event or thing expressed: it results in the semantic "setting" within the word. The consequence is that the object of the artistic representation is converted into a unique subject. The latter ultimately becomes sufficient unto itself under the form of an experimental game—the structural components of the text are maintained in a state of "ouverture", in a constant formal process of de-re-construction, in a vain attempt to avoid the paralysis of the transformational potential. But at the same time, this "gamel" activity also destroys any continuity to the narrative discourse, a condition of fragmentation which can be described only in terms of active paralysis.

TTT is in fact a hermetically closed work with the illusion of "ouverture", not so dissimilar to Jorge Luis Borges' creative techniques. This "ouverture" is only a formal condition, an abstract formulation of a never-ending quest for signifieds of one absolutely meaningful signifier. In order to determine the reasons for this "absence", I will examine its nature first in terms of both contemporary criticism and literary history, and then in relation to some contextual factors.

Severo Sarduy's article "Barroco y neobarroco" reveals some interesting though debatable points which specifically relate to
that problem, while at the same time it projects Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories in the perspective of modern Spanish American fiction. Sarduy starts from the semiotic premise of a text’s condition of “sociability” (sociabilidad) — by which any text is constituted of the transformation potential of its heterogeneous components (that is, various kinds of social discourses), thus generating a variety of meanings to the text’s primary corpus. Then he defines the artistic process of the Baroque in terms of an artificialización with three basic mechanisms operating at the level of the sign (substitución, condensación and proliferación).

To this specific semiotic approach Sarduy brings the notions of literary carnivalization and of polyphony as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin. Hence, a technical parallel can be drawn between Sarduy’s interpretation of the intertext and intratext, and the concept of textual formalización generated by the carnivalization principle through polyphony. In short, Sarduy reduces the notion of textual “sociability” to the level of the sign.

These theoretical considerations having been established, it is then possible to conceive literary polyphony not only in its technical aspects, but also in terms of historical literary tendencies. In relation to monological modes, polyphony is analogous to the multiple transformational processes of the Baroque with respect to the “classical” norms. Sarduy seems to refer to this in terms of a kind of carnivalized Baroque, but what he persistently neglects to underline is the crucial role of polyphony. It is precisely this aesthetic condition which differentiates the Baroque text from the contemporary or Neo-baroque one. The baroque dialogic practice constitutes the vehicle by which the object of the artistic representation is defined. The carnivalesque mode is thus —as in Don Quijote— only a polyphonical potential, confering to the text its baroque multiplicity of points of views. On the other hand, the neobaroque praxis does not concern a mere technical tool but is the object itself, which attempts to be defined as the subject by a simultaneous process of construction and de-construction. While the Baroque can be described as a decentralization technique, by which the dialogic concept entails a multiple dialectical potential, Neobaroque here is characterized by the absence of dialectics — an acentralization process. The prefix “neo-” determines this fundamental difference: there is a shift of the transformational dynamics of baroque components to the level of the expressed form in Neobaroque. The integrity of the artistic object is shattered in the process. While it had acquired a potentially multiple meaning in the Baroque, the object is now either fragmented, in such a way that its various parts are meaningless by themselves, or simply abandoned in favor of empty ornamental artifices.

Seen in a different way, the notion of “multitextuality” — the textual condition in which is inscribed the notions of intertext and intratext,— is technically analogous to the explicitly structuralized Baroque processes of artificialization in the contemporary text. More important and much more dangerous, it allows the artist to recuperate and intentionally reduce the “sociability” of a textual artwork to its own formal limits.

The last theoretical points must be mentioned. First: as it has been mentioned at the beginning of this article, the neobaroque specificities are not variants of the monological “stream of consciousness”. The concept of polyphony modifies the current critical view of the Joycean characteristics, which are nonetheless manifest in many other modern and contemporary Spanish American fiction—the novels of Carlos Fuentes, for instance. And second, the structure of TTT must be differentiated from that of a collage. A collage implies a substantial (from “substrate”, “matter”) surcharge: it is caused by the superimposition of heterogeneous fragments which themselves are only parts of presupposed—textually not present—other wholes. The juxtaposition of these parts are what the narrative discourse consists of—Julio Cortazar’s Rayuela, for example. A collage can be described as a process of textual integration. The Neobaroque text of TTT, on the other hand, is characterized by an artificial (from “artifice”, ornament) surcharge, which is created by the fragmentation of its own particular whole. It implies the rupture of narrative homogeneity of the discursive totality, a process of dis-integration. The heterogeneous quality here is not genetic but generic: it is a consequence of fragmentation.

TTT is not only specified by the presence of fragments themselves, but also by what these fragments imply in terms of what is deliberately absent from the text: For example, the possible answer to Delia’s letter, the interlocutor to Beba’s monophonic telephone conversation, the supposed psychiatrist listening to the unamed patient. With respect to La Estrella, and another level of artistic representation, it must be remembered that she is only corporeal form and musical voice: the words of her boleros are never given textually. Moreover, what is perpetuated into posterity is not her external appearance nor even her voice, but a further abstraction of her being: her style: “La Estrella y su revolución musical y en esta continuación de su estilo que es algo que dura más que una persona o una voz…” (287). The final “presence” of her style ultimately means her “absence”; an abstraction and a
negation of her flesh-and-blood textual representation. Similarly, Bustrófondon negates what could have been texts really written by Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, José Martí, et al. His "oral" existence, also eventually annihilated, and his function within the novel, are a series of abstractions in relation to his "real" self, Floren Cassális. His verbal incarnation of La Estrella's style further becomes a purely subjective perception for Códic.

These are creative processes which express powerful and exclusively subjective perceptions of a world whose artistic object of representation is lost in the author's nostalgic memory. The *reality* of this object is negated in all instances. Consider Bustrófondon's search for the "only possible kind" of literature; grafittis scribbled on walls, "muros de los servicios públicos, lavatorios, retretes, inodoros o escusados" (257). Ideologically speaking, this kind of literature is nevertheless only an apparent attempt at a democratization of literature: "la otra literatura, hay que escribirla en el aire, queriendo decir que había que hacerlo hablando, digo yo, o si quieres alguna clase de posterioridad, decia [Bustrófondon], la grabas, así, y luego, la borras, así" (257). It is a literature whose only reality is that it is recorded on tapes, and which furthermore destroys or erases itself according to the juxtaposed voices:

La voz de Arsenio Quién en la realidad de la cinta o la parodia grita, claro, Mierda eso no es Guillén ni un carajo y se oye la voz de Silvestre, la voz de Rine Leal, fantasmal, al fondo, y mi propia voz que se superponen, pero la voz de Bustrófondon no se oye más y eso fue todo lo que escribió Bustrófondon si a esto se le puede llamar escribir. (256-57)

The ensemble of voices in this example, and that of TTT in general, do not make each of them equal to one another; rather, it is a cumulative process of negations, a successive appropriation of various presences and absences. Bustrófondon indulges in the same appropriative processes with the narrative sections on Trotsky: he subjectivizes the voices of specific Cuban writers in order to perform a parody of their respective styles. Due to the absence of "true" representations of their writings, these writers loose their own object of existence and are stylistically recuperated by Bustrófondon. This quality of *recuperation* defines the narrative process of the novel on the whole; the last two versions of the chapter "Los visitantes" recuperate the first two, for example, and "La Bachata" dialogically recuperates the rest of TTT as it comments and corrects certain details of the preceding segments.

This goes further than and at the same time is quite different from Umberto Eco's concept of *opera aperta*, by which "ouverture" essentially means a multiplicity of possible interpretations of a work. The kind of textual "ouverture", provoked by polyphony in TTT, entails a fragmented structure in which what was potentially subversive by and in forms, is perpetually, and willfully, negated in this process of re-deconstruction. In short, literary carnivalization in TTT cannot imply any kind of subversion, except that which is produced by a purely ornamental aesthetic *prise de position*. Rather, it mediates the socially absent, subversive condition on behalf of its author.

So far, I have attempted to exemplify the technical conditions of literary carnivalization, and some of the ways in which the structural form of TTT may be examined in terms of the subsequent contemporary implications of Bakhtin's theories. But I have intentionally omitted to discuss directly the debated aspect of Bakhtin's contentions (because it seems obviously irrelevant in relation to TTT): that the principle of carnival entails an artistic protest against precise socio-cultural conditions, whose hierarchical norms of everyday life by which a fragmented would view in reality is created and maintained. On the contrary, I suggest that, though using some of the means which historically enabled others to express a socio-cultural protest, Guillermo Cabrera Infante chooses to convey nothing else than a purely formal mediation of the social system he attempts to recreate. The masterly way in which he achieves this makes TTT precisely an important novel.

His interviews, concerning TTT and literature in general, confirm and further clarify the disjuncture of carnivalesque modes from any social subversive contentions in the novel. The Cuban writer declares the following:

Para mi la literatura es un juego, un juego complicado, mental y concreto a la vez, que actúa sobre un plano físico, la página y los diversos planos mentales de la memoria, la imaginación, el pensamiento, no muy lejano del ajedrez, pero sin las connotaciones de juego-ciencia que muchos se empeñan en otorgar al ajedrez, como una forma de diversión y de ensimismamiento a un tiempo. 31

Muchos se han asombrado cuando he dicho que me gustaría que el libro [TTT] se tomara como una gran broma escrita. Hay quienes tratan de ver extraños símbolos en los personajes y creen algunas situaciones simbólicas o proféticas. Esta simbolología postscriptum corre, por supuesto, a riesgo de esos lectores. Preferiría yo que todos consideren al libro solamente una broma que dura cerca de 500 páginas.32

He also emphasizes the fact that his stance towards literature is a "posición total y absolutamente estética. Yo como aliteratura... como un fenómeno primeramente y últimamente
literario. Cabrera Infante even further attempts to limit any objective critical work on TTT when he lays down his own criteria. He bluntly states —mistakenly, one may add—, that "la literatura debe exclusivamente tener que ver con la literatura. Cualquier otra preocupación es totalmente extra-literaria y por tanto, desde mi punto de vista actual, condenada al fracaso. Al menos en mi caso". Nonetheless, through the principle of carnivализation and by virtue of formal "literary analyses of one or two aspects of TTT, one can uncover an even more important "extra-literary" problem than that of an absence, of this alleged negation of ideological position. Rather —and with all due respect— there is a certain dishonesty to Cabrera Infante’s "pure" literary and aesthetic standpoint, because it is rooted in a personal socio-political act on his part. It is fundamentally important to remember that he actively identified early on with the socio-cultural changes proposed by the Cuban Revolution, but later he ideologically reversed himself. He left his country and now lives in Europe. Furthermore, the application of the carnivализating mechanisms to TTT help to show that subversion of formal or aesthetic appearances also discloses a potential non dit. While overtly and artistically sprawling all the visible and "innovative" aesthetic symptoms of "ouverture" into change, there is an intentionally (and textually) covert refusal to subvert ideologically the reality portrayed in the novel. The author’s ambivalence regarding the autobiographical nature of his novel must be stressed here, "en TTT, hay más autobiografía —esencial narración de la vida intima— de lo que el autor era entre 1961 y 1966, de lo que fue de 1953 a 1958 su vida externa". Significantly for the critic, the period of 1958 to 1961 is omitted; during this time surely crucial personal decisions were taken.

From the point of view of Cabrera Infante’s artistic objectives with TTT, he indicates that the nocturnal evil he recreated through Havana’s night, is una noche común, creo yo, a todos los mortales que han tenido la dicha de vivir en una gran ciudad cuando jóvenes y han sentido la curiosidad de viajar al centro de la vida antinatural y de conocer a los habitantes de ese otro mundo que para el hombre que trabaja y se acuesta temprano o para él que vive en el campo, es tan lejano o oculto como la otra cara de la luna." Such a Jungian and a-historical approach to the collective unconscious well explains Cabrera Infante’s "artistic nostalgia", and is consistent with his aesthetical standpoint, as well as with his assumption that his novel is a-political and "free". Nevertheless, as it appears in TTT, this is also only an appearance of freedom, even at a deeper level of the textual organization. According to Bakhtin, polyphony generates internal mutations. These formalize the concept of (dialogic) dynamic interaction between the evolutive and systematizing forces in the syntactic structure of the text. The "I" entails the omnipresence of a "YOU", linguistic transformational link par excellence, and is constituted in a collective "WE". Bakhtin himself conceptualizes these processes at the level of the narrative structure when he stresses the specifically active "multivocal" nature of the polyphonic word.

But as I have tried to demonstrate, each polyphonic element or voice in TTT is in fact determined by the other in the process of cumulative abstraction and recuperation. The relation between TTT’s voices is one of successive domination-subordination; it expresses the condition of seeing with the eyes of the other. This is far from the polyphonic, peaceful, collective coexistence of voices; here the process entails the dominant voice taking over and being taken over by another. This is not to be confused with the point of view: this "OTHER" (or JE D'AUTRUI) is not another form or aspect of the "ME" (MOI), and there is no dialectical interaction between the two. The polyphonic dialogic praxis which provokes the articulation of this "OTHER"’s voice —as with the character Floren Cassâis, the process of non-affirmation of the "I" or on the contrary, the assertion of the "I-OF-THE-OTHER"—, is the product of a situation which does not allow the autentic expression of the "ME" except in a fallacious and deceptive manner through this "I-OF-THE-OTHER". The latter subjectivizes and recuperates the initial and true "ME"; he is the dominant element which maintains the "ME" in a situation of expressive inactivity until there occurs a rupture of his homogeneity, of his particular entity. But once fragmented, the "ME" is then able to articulate himself, thereby submitting his wholeness to the domination of the "OTHER".

In such a way are the polyphonic form and the Neobaroque discourse perceived under a very different light. In short, the "concrete-I", subject to all individual discourses is systematically destroyed structurally by the assertion of the next "I-of-the-other"; this results in an infinite chain of dialogue-like practices. A formal negation of the dialectical "I" which thus prohibits himself any sui generis determination. The fundamental underlying principle of coexistence between polyphonical voices, supposedly equal in
importance and meaning, is shattered. The “other” appropriates himself of the creative potential of the “I” and determines his articulation: active paralysis. Polyphony assumes the function of a structural, purely formal “game for game”.

Cabrera Infante has deliberately sabotaged all possibilities of authentic ideological subversion within his text, and in doing so impairs any sine qua non interpretation of other contemporary carnivalizations. The particular polyphonic structure of his novel in fact betrays a potential message which, as a consequence, corresponds only to the specific “gamely” quality of textual fragmentation.

* * *

The attitude of “game as experiment” is an ambiguous activity, socially revealing because, if expressed in more direct terms, it is a typical artistic configuration related to the notion of alienation. Arnold Hauser points out that feeling alienated in this world, men are not resigned to remaining so; they wish to have an alienating and startling effect on others. Therefore, the artist not only chooses strange and startling subjects, but also tries to render the most ordinary things in a startling way. The purpose is not merely to surprise and unsettle, but also to state that it is impossible to feel at home among the things of this world or make friends with them.

There is little doubt that Guillermo Cabrera Infante is alienated in many respects —and tragically so, one may add. His novel is a literary carnivalization of a specific period of Cuban history. But at the same time, he cannot artistically come to terms with the socio-referential system which follows, and with which he had ideologically identified initially. TTT literally reflects this personal dichotomy, by expressing a social and cultural ambivalent condition through the quality of strangeness —provoked in the text by the carnivalesque form of polyphony and consequent distortions of most ordinary things. The alienated man creates an art which will point to the alienating reality and simultaneously attempt to condemn it. In the case of TTT however it is a desperate and vain, if not highly imaginative, attempt to overcome an impossible authentic self-expression and true artistic self-determination in the reality of its author.

This reality is contextually twofold in the case of TTT: the carnivalized particularities of the novel suggest not only some of the social conditions of the historical moment recreated in the text, but also those of the society in which TTT was written.

On the one hand, Cabrera Infante has indeed recreated the “open” mood towards the imminent socio-historical change in Cuba of the late Fifties, and the subsequent overthrow of Batista’s regime. The fragmented structure of the novel reflects (if only and exclusively in a formal way) the disintegration of a social system at the moment of being about to be radically transformed into another. “Absences” and non dits well describe the transitory aspect of the situation; of the confused present in crisis, with its lacks and excesses, as opposed to an agonizing past and an as-yet undefined future. This particular facet of the text is perhaps the most outstanding quality of TTT.

But on the other hand, if this novel does represent more of its author’s life between 1961 and 1966 than his conduct from 1953 to 1958 as Cabrera Infante suggests, then TTT also tells us a great deal about the society in which it was mostly conceived and finally published. In terms of the underlying ideology to the praxis of literary carnivalization, TTT seems to be mediating a just-as-impossible subversion in the society Cabrera Infante is living and writing in during the Sixties. This is achieved artistically by maintaining “absent” from the text any substantial ideological protest with respect to the pre-Revolutionary reality within the novel —except perhaps that which is expressed by the traditional choteo and otherwise quite harmless, humorous, verbose tickling. Many, and indeed varied, may be the historical (and/or arquetypal) means by which the Western societies of the late Sixties and Seventies must recognize themselves in TTT. After all, they have consistently and vociferously acclaimed the imaginative “open-ended” qualities of the novel during the past decade and more.

This brings back to the surface the initial query about the fondo / forma equation. Ultimately, this is not so much a question of analyses of artistic formas of a text than it is a problem deep-rooted in the critical fondo. There is a danger which becomes manifest precisely when the critical energy succumbs to the problems caused by particular textual complexities, and succumbs as well to the imposed acrobatic mental gymnastics which are necessary for the analysis of such a text. With TTT, this appears to be a willful (on the part of Cabrera Infante), and a subtle diversion tactic which orients the critic towards aesthetic problematics. Especially in the view that, as we read TTT today in its final version, the novel has been purged of all previously intended socio-political content. Whether this be in order to comply officially to the Spanish publisher’s demands, or perhaps, quite differently, “welcoming” the rigors of Franquist censorship, is a matter of public conjecture.

In fact, the overall problem is of wider scope with economic
implications. It mainly relates to the specific ideology behind the
method of criticism used so as to satisfy the socio-political interests
underlying the ways in which TTT has been manipulated, and
circulated, on the international market of Spanish American
literature.

The too-frequent critical packaging of ideologically diverse
writers such as, for instance, Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima,
Severo Sarduy and Guillermo Cabrera Infante — not to mention
their different though often confused aesthetic characteristics—
can be dangerously misleading for the student of contemporary
literature. The problem becomes much graver when Cuban
residents and expatriates are bundled together for the sole purpose
of literary surveys. And it is even more confusing to envisage non-
discriminatroy listings of the so called novelas de lenguaje which
included Tres tristes tigres together with, for example, La traición
de Rita Hayworth, Terra Nostra, and Yo el Supremo.

In conclusion, and in view of TTT as an illustration of the
problematic raised, I propose the hypothetical need for a
re-evaluation and a subsequent reformulation of the
Form Message equation, at least with respect to contemporary
fiction. One of the means at the critic’s disposal today is Mikhail
Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalized literature. Though sometimes
ironically and after the necessary technical readjustments so as to
actualize the premises, it provides the reader with working ground
for ideological discernment.

Notes
1. This article is an expanded and slightly modified version of a paper, “Tres
   tristes tigres: Carnaval, polifonía y violencia,” which I read at the XIXth Congress
   of the Instituto Internacional de literatura iberoamericana (2a. sesión), Caracas,

2. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Tres tristes tigres (Barcelona: Ed. Seix Barral,
   1967). All quotations from this work will be indicated by the number of the
   corresponding page in parenthesis.

3. See Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Los

4. The title of the novel comes from a Cuban tongue-twister: “En el triple
   trapecio de Tripoli trabajaban trigonómetricamente tres tristes tigres trogloditas”.
   See Julio Ortega, Relato de la utopía. Notas sobre narrativa cubana de la
   Revolución (Barcelona: La Gaya Ciencia, 1973), p. 41.

5. Jean-Louis Baudry, “Écriture, fiction, ideologie,” Tel Quel, 31 (Autumn
   1967), pp. 16-17 (My translation in the text).

6. I refer to three of Mikhail Bakhtin’s works in particular: Rabelais and His
   World, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1968),
   and especially the “Introduction”, 1-58; Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, trans. by R.
   W. Rostel (U.S. Ardis, 1973); and one of his articles, “Épopee et roman: L’étude du
   roman — que- tion de méthodologie,” Recherches à la lumière du marxisme, 75
   Gallimard, 1978), should also be consulted.

7. Opinions expressed during the discussion following the reading of my paper
   in Caracas.

8. I use the term “mediation” in the sense explained by Raymond Williams in
   Keywords (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 172. I refer to
   both.
   1) “the dualist sense, of an activity which expresses, either indirectly or deviously
   and misleadingly (and thus often in a falsely reconciling way) a relationship
   between otherwise separated facts and actions and experiences”.
   2) “the formalist sense, of an activity which directly expresses otherwise
   unexpressed relations”.

9. Note the socio-cultural “marriage” of the girl’s paternal surname — the brand-
   name of the American typewriter — and her mother’s Hispanic maiden name. José
   Sanchez-Boudy also points out that Alvarez del Real was the name of an infamous
   police captain of Havana during Batista’s regime. See La nueva novela

10. Julio Ortega does mention TTT’s qualities of spectacle without however
    pursuing the matter and only referring to it as the novel’s “mecanismo de
    composición”. See Relato de la utopía, pp. 152-60.

11. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, p. 11.


13. Ibid., p. 100.

14. “Carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times.
The Treacherous Play on Carnival

association of this character with a non-conventional martian invasion (TTT, 161-62), it is a combination of both a (surrealist) modernist and a carnivalesque grotesque.


28. For reference on the "sociability" of the text, see the works of the Groupe M, and for example, Jacques Dubois's article "Code, texte et méta-texte," Littérature, 12 (December 1973), 3-11.

29. In a reference to the concept of postmodernism in Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional paradox (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), Linda Hutcheon gives a useful summary of Sarduy's arguments: [Severo Sarduy] has clearly shown that the origins of the techniques of what [John] Barth calls the "postmodernism" of, for instance, García Márquez, lie in the Spanish tradition of the baroque. What Sarduy calls contemporary neo-baroque uses the technical devices of the baroque... The changes in the present usage of these techniques is in intention: the baroque search for consonance is replaced by a willed neo-baroque lack of harmony and homogeneity which is literally and figuratively revolutionary in its transgression of contemporary literary and linguistic norms (p. 2).

30. A lobotomy is performed on Bustrópedon; see TTT, p. 222.


32. Ibid., p. 29.

33. In "Las fuentes de la narración", p. 50.

34. Ibid., p. 49.

35. Cabrera Infante insists that TTT is autobiographical. However, he adds that he regrets this statement because of the subsequent critical tendency to identify such or such a character with the author. See "Conversación sobre Tres tristes tigres", p. 33.

36. "La fuentes de la narración", p. 46.

37. "Conversación sobre Tres tristes tigres", p. 34.

38. Ibid., p. 30.


40. See Note No. 17.