

## Exhuming Labor: Alienation and Rural Affiliation in Spanish Migrant Poetry

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With “exhuming labor,” my title tries to convey multiple meanings. Exhumation is most often understood as the action of unearthing something, usually a corpse. “Exhuming” as a participle emphasizes the labor, the waged, time- and energy-consuming physicality of such a task, only allegorically identified with immaterial labor. As a gerund, “exhuming labor” also means unearthing the history of an all-too-willfully forgotten practice, labor, often agricultural, in Spain’s political economy, left behind by the success story of Spanish urban modernization. Unearthing what has been physically and emotionally buried deep down can be quite a strenuous task. The object of each of those three actions—a literal exhumation, the labor of exhuming, the exhumation of labor—is a fraught one: it wouldn’t be surprising if, for those familiar with Spanish history, reading about “exhuming labor” summoned images of Francoist repression, unmarked graves, and migration.

Migration is, of course, a socioeconomic issue, but also a symbolic, identitary one: in Spain, it recalls past instances of economy, which also go to the heart of the master narrative of progress and modernization of the economic, the political, and the cultural. It is both a demographic reality resulting from the crisis and a cultural problem in the wake of an identity crisis within Spanish accounts of its own modernity, which traditionally identified it with a unitary nation-state and a middle-class sense of the “good life.” In the writing of poets Fruela Fernández and Lara Dopazo Ruibal, it compounds a shared affective disposition toward the rural that points to alternative understandings and practices of modernity vying to emerge. By deploying insights from affect theory, I hope to more accurately describe how the Spanish migrant poets’ experience abroad must be understood within the context of neoliberal “cruel optimism” (Berlant) and its collapse in two books published in 2016. For them, the experience of the “global city” (Sassen) is one dominated by alienation, a negative emotion that may nonetheless open up alternative possibilities for organizing social action along spatial, socioeconomic, and aesthetic lines. Whereas Dopazo Ruibal’s *ovella* (‘sheep’) removes itself emotionally from the urban transnational environment and its promises through contact with the animal, Fernández’s *Una paz europea* (‘A European Peace’) traces its own genealogy toward a history of laboring bodies. Attending to alienation as emotion allows us to understand it not as an entirely passive experience but as an active removal from a narrative that enforces the hegemony of urban, global modernity and modernization.

## Bodies without a Country: Against the Cosmopolitan Hypothesis

Both *Una paz europea ovella* contemplate the body as a site of mediation of the social, the economic, and the affective in the context of a professional stay abroad, in England and Mexico City, respectively. For Fernández, menial work is associated both with an often-racialized migrant body and with a transnational familial genealogy traversed by the rural. In Dopazo Ruibal, it is metonymic identification between poetic voice and animal body that constitutes a refuge and the ability to escape from the monstrous urban space of the global city. They are stylistically different, if both reject realistic, figurative representation. *Paz*'s language is both fragmentary and concise, juxtaposing hypotactic metaphors, blank spaces on the page, and excerpts of conversations in Spanish, French, and Asturian. Dopazo Ruibal's *ovella* is a narrative meditation by way of metaphors—language flows without punctuation and constantly apostrophizes the eponymous animal (an *ovella*, the eponymous sheep). Both books bear to a different degree the inscription of co- and extra-official Iberian languages, Asturian and Galician. The poems and their emotional displays express and negotiate discomfort with the global city.

Dopazo Ruibal's book begins thus: "que sintas / que esteas comigo, ovella / aqui / canda min" (13)<sup>1</sup> 'for you to feel / that you're next to me, sheep / here / with me.'<sup>2</sup> In the book's opening lines, *ovella* (no word is capitalized in the book) is spoken to and spoken of, almost always without an article or possessive adjective (not "the sheep" or "my sheep")—the common noun becomes a proper name, or, in other words, the common, non-individuated name is the name that is proper to the animal that the poetic speaker is attached to emotionally and physically. This emphasis on subjectivity and identity formation through language is consistent with an impressionistic rendition of the unnamed foreign city, plausibly inspired by Dopazo Ruibal's stay in Mexico City. It is the book that describes it as "monstrous": "as estacións de cidade monstro / (percorrer a cidade / dun lado a outro pra gastar o tempo / baixo terra)" (41) 'the stations of Monster City / (traversing the city / running around killing time / underground).' The book hammers away at the metaphor (24, 31, 41), possibly playing with Mexico's capital syntagmatic toponym: Mexico City / Cidade Monstro (or even "Cida-de" Monstro, echoing the Spanish "Ciudad de México"). The city impresses itself upon the speaker's body, polluting it, fragmenting it, reifying it, abstracting it. Parts of strangers' bodies are personified in threatening ways, with long fingers, eyes that look for the speaker, feet that await her (18). Her body is estranged as well. Her hands, rather than the means of production, are a blunt product of labor:

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<sup>1</sup> There is an amphibology to "canda" that we cannot dismiss: it can convey proximity, company, but also simultaneity.

<sup>2</sup> All translations from Spanish, Galician, and Asturian are mine, unless otherwise noted.

“as mans / vanse debuxando coma quen talla na madeira / cun coitelo que non está afiado” (29) ‘hands / get drawn as someone carving wood / with a dull knife.’ Focus on fragments of the body is either a sort of self-deindividuation or a strategy to avoid emotional connection with the urban Other: “Miras os cotenos sen rostro / ... mentres / preguntes ao home de vermello” (29) ‘You look at [your] faceless knuckles / ... as / you ask the man in red.’

Dopazo portrays a subjective experience of disconnectedness, dispossession, or objectification of one’s own body, and so does Fernández. He more explicitly designates the same economic relations that determine migration as the culprit of this process. Fernández’s speaker casually mentions euros and pounds lying next to each other, near his body, in his pocket: “Ahora traigo euros / mezclados con las libras” (16) ‘Now, I’m carrying euros / mixed up with pounds.’ The crisp image summarizes an uncomfortable experience of transnational mobility. Even money, as an empty signifier, fails to reconcile both worlds smoothly. In *Paz*, economic distress is at once the origin and the end of all dreams of cosmopolitanism. The speaker’s is a “cuerpo / sin país” (14) “nationless / body”, tantamount neither to the optimism of boundless cosmopolitan mobility, nor to the deeply vulnerable condition of the refugee, a sort of unbearable lightness of citizenship of the global precariat. That is what the book’s title, *A European Peace*—not quite global (parochially European), still transnational (neither bound to the local nor to the national)—is aiming at. Not unironically, Fernández renders Kant’s famous “Cosmopolitan peace” in verse: “No es posible la paz / mientras que algún estado / pueda adquirir / a otro por herencia, / cambio, / compra / o donación” (17) “No peace can come / should a state come under / the dominion of another state / by inheritance, / exchange, / purchase, / or gift” (adapting Mary J. Gregor’s translation, 318), as he quotes Kant’s admonishing caveat. The Enlightened transnational, globalist, modern project reveals a complicated relationship with the actual European Union that is the condition of possibility of the speaker’s mobility. The market enables international mobility but at the same time undermines the claims at the core of cosmopolitanism. The abstraction of a body, translated into capital, is not coextensive with the enforcement of Kantian abstract-normative ideals of peace and justice. A transnational European articulation, the kind of means by which Kant may have wanted to bring about universal peace, ended up contributing, against the wishes of the philosopher, to an imperial *Pax*: “Y aun así hay paz mientras nos heredan, nos cambian, nos compran” (17) ‘Even so, there just so happens to be peace as they inherit us, exchange us, purchase us.’

These books recognizably tackle a specific social debate: the flight of human capital or brain drain. Between 2008 and 2010, the number of young Spaniards looking for employment abroad doubled in size (Mañana). With as many as 40% of young people holding a university degree, high unemployment

rates made many of them choose migration over underemployment. The issue has been widely covered in the press, to such an extent that a popular comedy film series takes its inspiration and title from the phenomenon, usually referred to as “fuga de cerebros” ‘brain drain.’ This serves the interests of a web of interdependent global cities that requires highly specialized migrants with cross-cultural knowledge and/or skills (Sassen 78). The development of the global city’s transnational network of agents, sites, regulations, and economies extracts human resources from the very demographic and geographic (nonurban) reservoirs that it helps devalue. A neoliberal narrative brushes off and individualizes the problem and even holds the migrant responsible for her migration. As phrased by José Ignacio Wert, Secretary of Education in 2012, “no es malo que un ciudadano se forme durante unos años y adquiera experiencia fuera.... Si tiene la vocación y las ganas es positivo” (“Wert niega”), ‘it isn’t so bad that a citizen learns and gains experience in the outside world for a few years.... If he has the inclination and the strength, it’s positive.’ Underlying Wert’s claims, there is the notion that a citizen is co-extensive with her own commodification: her skills, experience, expertise, time, but also her affective energies and dispositions, are to be understood as “human capital.” Human capital aims at (self-)reification: it takes a person’s time, energy, or affects as commodities, resources to be optimized in order to enhance the person’s exchange value. For Wert, transnational labor becomes a matter of personal-rational choice framed in a positive light. This narrative of the so-called flight of human capital relies on a profoundly individualized understanding of the problem. It celebrates the ability of a generation to become entrepreneurs of the self. Migration is dressed up as a risky, yet voluntary, investment in the human capital that each person is presumed to have. It becomes one among many practices that neoliberalized the job market:

prácticas no remuneradas para titulados, el crecimiento de postgrados y todo tipo de cursos de especialización (muchos de los cuales ofrecen también prácticas no remuneradas como principal atractivo), la extensión de la flexibilidad (trabajo por proyectos, horarios cambiantes, etc.) en el seno de “malos” empleos, todo ello para conseguir algo de experiencia laboral, etc. (Santos Ortega and Muñoz Rodríguez 22)

Unpaid internships for newly minted graduates, the increase in postgraduate studies and all kinds of specialization programs (many of which also offer unpaid internships as their main appeal), increasing flexibility (project-based work, changing schedules, etc.) amidst “bad” jobs, all to access a bit of job experience, etc.

Even when migration is addressed as an undesirable outcome of the crisis, public

discourse reduces it to a melodrama of personal suffering and frustration. Often, the assumption is that, unlike “normal” (unqualified, racialized) migrants, educated Spaniards deserve better. But meritocratic fantasies and ideological identifications with European (i.e., Eurocentric, postcolonial, capitalist) modernity crumbled in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. As Antonio Santos Ortega and David Muñoz Rodríguez explain, the remnants of such a narrative rely, for their legitimation, on a “cosmopolitan hypothesis,” which assumes a generational proclivity toward global professional mobility. The cosmopolitan hypothesis is the claim that transnational, mobile youth respond not to economic demands or rational choice, but to a sensibility: a particular affective disposition is ingrained in Spanish youth, orienting them toward transnational encounters, new languages, etc. This interpretation frames this disposition as a moral good with practical advantages (as opposed to a parochial attachment to the nation, backward localism...). It is both a narrative explanation of material border-crossing phenomena and an ideological demand aimed at signaling the modernity of the nation. Op-eds, essays, programs founded upon the cosmopolitan hypothesis abound. Take the following text, commissioned by the center-right think tank *Fundación Encuentro* ‘Encounter Foundation’:

Una de las características principales de la civilización del siglo XXI es, sin duda, esta movilidad y este intercambio de poblaciones, para la cual conceptos como emigración e inmigración pueden ser ya muy estrechos. La casi totalidad del planeta Tierra se ha convertido en un único territorio, mejor o peor comunicado, en el que las personas, en particular las personas jóvenes, se desplazan con mayor o menor rapidez, cambian de residencia y se instalan con creciente facilidad en un nuevo territorio para desarrollar un proyecto de vida propio. (Aguinaga)<sup>3</sup>

One of the main characteristics of a 21st-century world is, surely, the mobility and exchangeability of populations. For this world, concepts like emigration and immigration are too narrow. The near totality of planet Earth is more or less connected, just one land in which people, especially young people, move around more or less quickly, move in and out with more and more ease in a new place to develop their own life project.

Although I do not deny the existence of the kind of proclivity posited by the cosmopolitan hypothesis, I do question its explanatory power when it comes to migration, and would suggest that this proclivity existed as part of a larger “cruel optimism” of Spanish culture and that we operate now under its partial collapse. Coined by Lauren Berlant, “cruel optimism” is the identification of an

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<sup>3</sup> See also Santos Ortega and Muñoz Rodríguez (11-17).

individual or a society with a narrative of the happy life that, in practice, becomes the impediment to its realization: “a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way” (Berlant 2). The very ideals of (neoliberal) cosmopolitan mobility rely on and necessitate the economic structures leading to high unemployment, the dismantling of social safety nets, and the migration of all kinds of workers: neoliberal “growth” at the expense of the alienation of labor, the production of gendered and racialized vulnerability, and ecologically unsustainable extractivism were already a crisis (Pérez Orozco). Dopazo Ruibal and Fernández denounce the reifying-alienating impact of such narrative, as they distance themselves from any allegiance to a “cosmopolitan hypothesis.” In Fruela Fernández’s words: “Pasamos años preparando el exilio, / negociándolo, / asumiendo su lógica / europea” (24) ‘We spent years preparing our exile, / bargaining with it, / obeying its European / rationale.’ Exiles, among whom Fernández counts himself in speaking from a collective “we,” were first met with a set of external ideas identified with modernity and globalization, which they then interiorized. Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal pinpoint that narrative of modernization as a source of alienation and strive to move away from it by affiliating themselves with the rural.

#### Cosmopolitan Alienation and Rural Affiliation: Space and Affect

*Paz* and *ovella* both make the same move: first, they pose the global city as a site of alienation; second, they designate the retreat to the rural as its opposite and supplement. Reaching for a rural genealogy and its metonymies happens as the poetic speakers engage with the numbness of urban existence. Each of those two instances is experienced within and mediated by a complex constellation of interrelated emotions. The dominant emotion in the city is alienation, expressed partly, but not exclusively in the fragmentation (*ovella*) and abstraction (*Paz*) of the poetic speakers’ bodies. Not only do these emotions psychologically characterize the authors’ semi-fictional personas, but in doing so they point to an encounter between them and the world. Emotions appear precisely at the threshold of interior and exterior: “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects” (Ahmed 10). In other words, emotions don’t go from inside to outside: they are not something that the individual “has” and that she may or may not express. Neither do they go from the outside in: emotions don’t preexist, impact, or transfer to the individual from the outside, objective world.

Spain’s specific (“glocal,” if you will) variation of the cosmopolitan hypothesis is one compounded by the symbolism of Europe, turned metonymy of

modernity and progress and as a site of libidinal identification, as outside of Spain, or, at least, having Spain as its exception (Martín-Estudillo). The current attitude of that generation toward this process of ideological formation is a meaningful one: “Y nos llegó / *sin emoción*, / con el pasmo seco / del que reconoce un nombre en una esquela” (24, my emphasis) ‘And it came, / *without emotion*, / with the sudden shock / of recognizing a name in an obituary.’ There is no shortage of emotions, affective attachments, and identifications in either book. How is the experience of receiving and incorporating the cosmopolitan hypothesis, one that indeed strives for affective identification, one “without emotion”? In fact, emotionlessness points us to a peculiar emotion, heavily associated with urban sites and modernization processes. Alienation lies at the encounter of the migrant’s body and the global city. While firmly grounded in philosophical and economic thought, Karl Marx’s concept of alienation permeates public discourse as a complex set of affective problems with a common ground. This was a possibility implicit in Marx’s own delineation of the concept in the *Grundrisse*, in which the de-realization of objects characteristic of alienation is experienced as the loss of a feeling of attachment. When it comes to waged, commodified, unfree, divided labor, the worker “does not feel content, but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself” (39). It was this emotional aspect of alienation that translated to popular culture. Industrial-urban places were indeed taken to be conducive to this sort of de-socializing emotional detachment, rather than as an economic or ontological problem, which is what Marx envisioned. Eva Illouz summarizes thus what most people understand by “alienation”: “modernity and capitalism were alienating in the sense that they created a form of emotional numbness which separated people from one another, from their community, and from their own deep selves” (Illouz 1). She relies on Georg Simmel, one of the most articulate commenters of Marx’s alienation in regard to its emotional impact. In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel draws a distinction between an objective culture and a subjective one. In creating large, modern, sophisticated societies, the fabric of the common is weakened. Division of labor prevents the objects of the common world that mediate our relations from being invested with emotional meaning, and so our social relations, increasingly abstracted, are devoid of emotional content (Simmel 497-98, Illouz 111, Arditì).

To this description, I would like to add two ideas. The first one follows Sarah Ahmed in taking emotions not as private evaluations, but as phenomena of social interaction and mobilization: paradoxically, when named, alienation undoes itself—by this, I mean that if alienation is taken to mean a decrease in emotional intensity, noting and verifying alienation awakens emotions previously numbed and de-intensified: feelings such as frustration or discomfort have alienation and

its presumed culprits as their target. Insofar as alienation has to do with emotions and the lack thereof, alienation as emotion is always a meta-emotion.<sup>4</sup> From the standpoint of the transnational, we could add a second idea: in situations of forced economic migration, alienation is the result of intersecting sets of detachments or separations. The alienation of the migrant worker isn't just the emotional separation from objects of labor and from other nearby human beings, as described by Marx and Simmel. In Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal, physical separation from an original, local source of identity compounds such emotion. The separation from the place of provenance (often accompanied by other separations: from speakers of one's native language, cultural practices, etc.) is determined in turn by a world system in which the concentration of capital and labor is located in metropolitan centers. Alienation in the big city interrupts the semi-peripheral subject's identification with the cosmopolitan hypothesis: the European fantasy (Fernández's "preparation of our exile") crumbles, and poetry registers the end of any sort of generational optimism regarding transnational mobility as a social good in the face of the evidence of its harmful encounter. But in naming urban alienation, Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal must carve an outside. Alienation from a master narrative of Spanish modernity, one that aligns History, globalization, modernity, and cosmopolitan urban sites, allows for the estrangement of that narrative, albeit not "without emotion."<sup>5</sup>

Alienation as separation from the world and from one's own affective intensity points to this double displacement. It is a reaction to a psychological, economic, and social state of affairs, but its impact has as its consequence a change of attitude in the self and, therefore, in its impact on such state of affairs. "Emotions involve . . . affective forms of reorientation" (Ahmed *Cultural* 8). Alienation transforms the subject's affective attachment to space and its associated political economies. The poems register the speakers' pulling away from urban sites and being pulled toward rural ones: spatial experience is traversed by an unsettling out-of-jointedness. Emotions and the sites they have as their correlate don't necessarily coincide in time and space (most obviously in nostalgia); nor are bodies coextensive with the self. It is not nearness, but distance, that summons emotion, nor is the body a self-identical objective

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<sup>4</sup> Because I am interested in emotions as a site of negotiation between bodies and (political but not only political) meaning making, I do not follow in this essay a strict distinction between "affect" and "emotion" (and "feeling" and "sentiment"). For the merits of and obstacles to such a distinction, see Wetherell and Labanyi.

<sup>5</sup> F.W. Hegel uses *entfremden* ("to alienate") positively: people externalize their spirit into the world by making things. Ludwig Feuerbach and later Karl Marx introduce negative connotations: when externally forced to make things, people lose themselves (they are "alienated"). Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdung* ("estrangement") makes the familiar look strange and, in doing so, it increases attention and reveals the nature of persons, things, and practices that we take for granted. Relying on Bloch, I will point later to the relation between the two.

presence in the world, as it is traversed by economic relations: “mírales los gestos: / la torsión, / el ángulo / del cuello con el brazo....– / el dinero los forma, / los precisa, / pone el eje a su espacio” (15) ‘look at their gestures: / the twist, / the angle / of the neck and the arm.... – / money shapes them, / makes them precise, / puts an axis to their space.’ Money is a real abstraction precisely in that it *affects* material practices: it permeates them and becomes a source of mobilization, influence, mimetic desire, a disposition (Wetherell 1-5). But as migrants traverse national boundaries on the journey toward urban sites with higher rates of accumulation of capital, their travels are prone to disaffection, in a site that is unwelcoming of joy: “La alegría es un cultivo enclenque, / agarra mal en este suelo” (30) ‘Joy is a weakling crop, / it doesn’t take to this ground.’

The speaker of Dopazo Ruibal’s book, on the other hand, has the animal, *ovella*, to “extroject” the numbness: “mirei como che tremían as pernas, ovella / cando porfiabas en camiñar polas lousas frías do verán” (23) ‘I saw your legs tremble, sheep / as you kept on walking on the cold pavement of the summer.’ Maybe because, to a degree, the speaker hesitates to admit the emotional distress of migration and the failure of the cosmopolitan hypothesis, the book poses a sort of hypallactic structure, displacing and intervening in emotions in the relationship between the speaker and the addressee: it is “ovella,” not the speaker, that processes the emotions that the city arouses in the human subject. Projecting emotions onto the animal allows the speaker to disavow the feeling of being scared in the foreign town. It is “ovella” that cries, and the speaker assures her that everything will be alright (29). However, if the book wavers between denying and affirming fear, it ends up by resemanticizing the latter as a form of courage as the speaker redraws her relation to “Monster-City”: “volver non é fracasar dicir / teño medo e está ben” (42) ‘Coming back is not failing and saying / I’m scared and that’s fine.’ The cruel optimism of global modernity and the cosmopolitan hypothesis push her to deny her own feelings. If the transnational mobility of the young is taken to prove Spain’s insertion in global modernity, going back to the localness of one’s provenance is coded as personal and cultural failure. She has a hard time convincing even herself that an attachment to seemingly rational decisions that only produce unhappy results is undesirable. She needs reminding that “[c]oming back is not failing” and “it’s fine to be afraid.” Breaking away from rationality takes courage, a nerve in fact required to be able to “saír da cidade monstro como descontaminarse / sen tentar explicar / por que teimamos en ficar ali se non somos felices” (24) ‘leaving monster city as decontamination / no point to explain / why we insisted on living there if we weren’t happy.’

The importance of addressing the animal, then, can hardly be overstated. Early on in Dopazo Ruibal’s book, the representation of the self is conjoined with the animal: “cheguei á cidade de pedra coa miña ovella atada da man” (18) ‘I arrived in the city of stone with my sheep tied to my hand.’ This juxtaposition of

human and animal acts as sort of metonymic, natural, familial guardian in a foreign city. The farm animal in the megalopolis performs important emotional labor for the speaker. Emotional reorientation, the process of estranging the narratives of the good life that a subject is attached to, entails a moment of disorientation, both a feeling of uncertainty and an opportunity to reconfigure one's self-perception. As described by Ahmed, "[d]isorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. . . . The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action" (*Queer Phenomenology* 156). "ovella" is the steady and steadying point of reference: it functions as a transitional (non-)object that supports the precarious moral autonomy of a subject in the process of removing herself from the cosmopolitan hypothesis: "tomar decisiones propias decir / voz quero que tomes este ton / ollos / quero que sosteñades a man firme decir / volver non e fracasar decir / ter medo está ben" (42) 'making my own decisions saying / voice I want you to take this tone / eyes I want you to hold my steady hand saying / coming back is not failing and saying / I'm scared and that's fine.' Albeit by different means, Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal come to the same conclusion. They are dis-affected cosmopolitans in that the cosmopolitan hypothesis that may have once animated them fails to do so now; the idea of a "citizen of the world" that they may have once performed feels now numbing and constricting. In opposition to urban, transnational disaffection, they propose a cathected rural site, with which they strive to affiliate.

Edward Saïd describes in modernism "the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which I have been calling affiliation but which is also a new system" (19). Fernández's book does this by progressing toward the memory of the migration of previous generations, with direct reference to and representation of the poetic self's grandparents, but also by strategically deploying Asturian in the elders' voices: "sabes tú que nun soy de muchu charrar" (10) 'you know I'm not one for talking much.'<sup>6</sup> The book betrays a process of identification through trans-generational melancholy: it longs to identify with the grandparents' experience (more so than the parents'), and while it seems emotionally attuned to it (as far as the reader knows), there appears to be an insurmountable breach between the speaker and his elders. The binding affect is

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<sup>6</sup> *Asturianu* (also known as *Bable*, if defenders of normalizing its status prefer the former name) is not an official language of the Spanish nation-state. In Asturias, institutional gestures to protect it and "normalize" it (in the Catalan sense) have had no material support. In his later *La familia socialista* (*The Socialist Family*, 2018), Fruela Fernández includes Greek as one of the cathected languages.

disappointment with the process of affiliation, with the constitution of a people that can speak to and for the *pueblo* 'small town.' In that sense, Fernández and Dopazo's affiliation is constitutively flawed: the attempt at articulating a collective "we" that would conjoin the experience of the rural elders and the young educated migrant is what ends up signaling exclusion. The book's linguistic work is either philological (the other's word) or archeological, citational, assigned to the older generation. The collective historical consciousness is also a story of *déclassement* (the loss of one's class position) and separation from manual labor. As is always the case, there is no repetition without difference, and these differences and similarities are packed with emotions.

The closest the book comes to successful affiliation is in the recognition of bodily strain. Menial labor and rural space were inscribed in the grandparents' bodies, and so too was suffering. The speaker watches his grandfather work around the house: "La esquirla entró en el labio y aún avanza con la sangre, azulada. (En el monte no se entiende el camino. / Las curvas se pliegan y se estiran, a golpes.)" (11) 'The splinter entered his lips and still progresses in his blood, bluish. / (Up in the forest the road does not make sense. / Curves fold and stretch, one blow at a time).' Analogies, correlations between the land and the body abound. Both Asturias and the Northern (European?) urban site have affected the speaker's body, albeit differently: "Mi cuerpo / lo arruinó el clima" (12) 'My body / the weather ruined.' Family history repeats itself, but what seems like a story of filiation is interrupted by difference. Any comparison with the grandfather and his account of migration and labor is precisely that: a comparison between two distinct entities, as different as the landscape around them. Landscape is the *tertium quid* 'a third something' that is distinct, but related to the two terms of the comparison, replacing the rural with a foreign urban environment in which the very furnishing of a bedroom, supposedly a stronghold of bourgeois intimacy, signals discomfort: "Mi exilio y tu éxodo no caben en una cama de noventa" (13) 'My exile and your exodus don't fit in a single bed.' Space affects bodies; bodies affect spaces. The impact of the new landscape on his body coexists with a mimetic relation to the land: "La carne renta y se estría y se contrae / como la primera nieve y la segunda tierra / en la misma / tormenta rota por el viento" (41) 'Flesh profits and striates and contracts / like the first snow in the second ground / in the same / storm, broken by the wind.'

In Dopazo Ruibal's book, it is the sheep, a farm animal that bears affective intensity, that acts as the metonymic presence of the rural within the urban landscape, alongside the poetic speaker. By the end of the book, the reader realizes that the story (if it is a story) that the book tells is in the past, and "ovella" isn't there anymore. In accepting her emotions and deciding to leave "Monster City," the speaker now relies on the animal for consolation, as she once consoled the animal, resting her head against her fur. Tactility and proximity to the animal

compensate for the lack of futurity of alienated life in the Monster City: the book begins to end when the addressee, “ovella,” “is almost not there” (36) and when she finally leaves, words leave too, putting an end to the book (44). Her memory remains, though, metonymized in the memory of bodily contact, the touch of her fur. The ending is important because it counters hackneyed romantic clichés of a feminized regenerative or therapeutic (but also overbearing) nature. The loneliness of ovella stands as a queer rural signifier: a non-generative, non-mothering femininity: “[X]a non quedan / materias primas pra seguir creando / son esteril coma os tempos nos que vivo / son esteril e ergo a bandeira da mia esterilidade” (44)<sup>7</sup> ‘there are no more / natural resources to go on creating / I’m sterile like the times I live in / I’m sterile and I raise the flag of my sterility.’

In *Una paz europea* and *ovella*, rural acts of affiliation are the compensatory gesture that can break with transnational mobility as a site of affective identification. They are not a return to a bucolic depository of pleasant feelings. On the contrary, even when kinship appears to legitimate direct affiliative links to the rural, cultural difference requires that such a link is explicitly performed. Through the (symbolic) animal body and genealogy, Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal come up with attempts at affiliation with the symbolic suture of a subjective existence separate from their objective world, in Simmel’s terms, and loaded with feeling over an intensification of abstraction. Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal are paradigmatic but hardly unique examples of this double gesture.

### *Pueblo* Modernity: Exhuming an Alien History

Indeed, something must have changed significantly. Jesús Izquierdo and Luis Moreno-Caballud have described the deeply skewed ideological construction of the rural/urban divide in Spanish culture, intensified during the accelerated, real-estate-based growth that began in the 1960s. Whether viewed positively or negatively, the *pueblo*’s = difference in relation to normative accounts of modernity is founded upon its supposed ability to escape unscathed from the global city’s achievements. Spanish culture has defined its own modernity by antagonism toward the rural and a desire to overcome it as early as the work of Melchor Gaspar de Jovellanos, but it was post-Francoist Europeanism that definitively displaced “other possible alternative modernities that might have been constructed in dialogue with the heritage of the rural cultures of survival and popular working-class cultures” (Moreno Caballud 132). Teresa Vilarós has called this process “tecno-desruralización,” which through biopolitical

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<sup>7</sup> I do not know if there is any autobiographical subtext to this statement. In any case, the performance is one of defiant affirmation in the face of gender norms of fertility associated both with women and nature.

governmentality and forced mechanization prevents a life from, with, and for the land. The accelerated dispossession of rural common land, re-accumulation of land, and massive migration to the city were all lauded as civilizing, European, modern historical progress, which brought about emancipatory development (e.g., in attitudes toward gender and sexuality).

However, no cultural production can be extricated from the uneven development of the modernization processes within the Spanish state and a complicated dialogue of languages, nations and cultures. This is particularly notorious in the case of Galician culture, which can be understood as mobilized by the colonial tension between a rural site of emotional attachment and the ecological and human extractivism of urban development (Anderson 63), evident already in Rosalía de Castro symbolic foundation of Galician poetry. Galicia is to this day home to half the villages in the Spanish state, whereas it comprises 6% of the physical territory (Reimóndez 157). Late industrialization, a fragmented territory, and plain misrecognition have codified Galician culture as particularly rural both in Galician and (derisive) Spanish representations. Dopazo's writing stands in relation to, but diverges from, a Galician "rurban" tradition (Raimóndez 157-60). Other contemporaries such as Maria do Cebreiro and Luz Pichel have previously emphasized transnational displacements and affective identification with rural spaces. In that context, Dopazo's specificity is the removal of toponymical and biographical specificity: her poetic speaker inhabits neither do Cebreiro's Bangor nor Pichel's closed family home (Méndez 640; Anderson 65-66), but a non-place both in public and in private. Her surroundings materialize only in an affective atmosphere that the poetic speaker and her animal react to. Both in Galicia and in Asturias, Spanish language was associated with the city and progress, and Galician and Asturian became the language of the rural and the domestic, which inhibited literary production in those languages. Asturias experienced an earlier, if also fraught, identification with modernization in Spain: it became identified early on with mining extractivism. There is a rural-folklorist poetic tradition of rural Asturias, as exemplified in the work of Celso Amieva, interrupted by the Spanish Civil war. In the 70s, the *Surdimientu* 'emergence' cultural movement posed in Asturian, but also Spanish, a post-Arcadian examination of the rural as a wavering source of cultural identity (Prieto), most notably in the work of Xuan Bello and Berta Piñán. It would be a later generation, educated after Francoism, that could aspire to an education in Asturian, that could aspire to a normalized bilingual production (Martín López-Vega, José Luis Rendueles), but either the influence of poet Ángel González, the role as cultural agent of critic José Luis García Martín, or the sense of the need to "catch up" to Spanish poetry, incentivized an ironic, figurative poetry of "experience" deeply attached to cityscapes (Sánchez Torre, 95-98).

What is characteristic about Dopazo and Fernández, then, is not only the

sense of attachment to the rural, but the disavowal of narratives of urban modernization *in toto*, rather than for any particular locales, and the fact that this disavowal is a reaction to prior affective attachments to the city. Post-2008 culture, rather than turning this narrative on its head, simply does away with it and registers a nonidealized yet non-barbaric rural space. Saskia Sassen has explained how the rise of the global city, rather than revitalizing its environment, further impoverishes the nonurban periphery (73). In the realm of literary and film culture, rural space has become a site of renewed affective intensity for a generation born between 1975 and 1995, children of the *pelotazo*, if you will, the fast and reckless economic growth that followed incorporation in the EU.<sup>8</sup> Disappointment in urban modernity makes these young authors long for identification with a space that they are, with some exceptions, alien to—rather than leading them to articulate themselves as new, alienated subjects. In affiliating themselves with the countryside, they engage with their grandparents' generation, and their experience of menial labor, migration, and dictatorial repression. Since the 2008 crisis, Sergio del Molino's *La España vacía* ('The Empty Spain'), Jesús Carrasco's *Intemperie* ('Under the Open Sky'), Pilar Fraile's *Las ventajas de la vida en el campo* ('The Advantages of Living in the Country'), María Sánchez's *Cuaderno de campo* ('Country Journal'), and a specialized publisher, Pepitas de Calabaza, have overcome ready-made clichés about primordial ignorance, violence, backwardness, but also a pact of rural forgetting defined by leaving hunger, underdevelopment, and an autocolonized condition behind, erasing them.

The authors of this rural turn reject the construction of the country and its associated economies as a site of isolation and a reservoir of premodern affect (be it positive or negative). Instead, they affiliate with agrarian sites as no less cathected, if differently so. If it is a melancholy space, it is not an ideal, bucolic landscape that is being mourned; it was only the authority of the urban intellectuals that imagined it as such. If it is a place of frustration and oppression, it is not due to the absence of the modernization processes that emancipate the citizen, but to the structural exclusion from emancipation while impoverished labor in small villages feeds the city. This renewed affective evaluation of the country entails and results from a similar process when it comes to the assessment of the city. In exhuming rural labor (and its asymmetrical relation with industrial labor), these authors exhume the strategic precarization through austerity measures and neoliberal market deregulation of contemporary capitalism; in exhuming the rural, Spanish culture strives to exhume the latent possibility of a decentralized modernity that doesn't grow at the expense of nature, but in concert

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<sup>8</sup> "Pelotazo" in other contexts, means either 'clearing' the soccer ball, kicking far away from one's own goal without much caring to build a durable play, or 'very basic mixed drink' particularly a cheap, very loaded one. In this context, though, it describes the quick accumulation of capital through real-estate speculation, or, at times, dubious means.

with it; in exhuming migration, it exhumes the generational discontent with what they now perceive as cruel optimism. Many of these authors could stand alongside Fruela Fernández and Lara Dopazo Ruibal in that they break with this unspoken pact and excavate the rural, flawed, yet very modern alternatives to urban expansion. What is particular to Fernández and Dopazo Ruibal is their relation of imaginary nonmembership in their (no less imaginary) local community (the city that they inhabit and feel detached from).

This particularity is central to poetry insofar as poetry denaturalizes a relation to language in bringing it to our attention. New experiences of migration belie the cosmopolitan hypothesis and trigger memories of a buried past of alienated labor. The exhuming subject is not met with libidinal identification with the exhumed, however. Fernández's adhesion to the migration of older generations is a fraught experience: "Tengo que imaginarlos / aunque algo falte" (38) 'I have to imagine them / although something's missing.' What is missing is a pathetic excess that the speaker can't quite identify with: "Tratáronlos más mal que dios, dice mi abuelo" (38) 'They treated them damn badly, my grandfather said.' Genealogical and communitarian mediation is interrupted, and the speaker's body is the sign of the potential failure of affiliation, as with the contemporary migrants that he would most avidly want to empathize with: "la mano que abre la nevera ... / no es la mano siria o libia o amputada" (41) 'this hand opening the fridge ... / is not Syrian or Lybian or maimed.' We could read this scene as one of frustration, but the separation is what allows for the performative gesture toward the rural and disidentification with a modern culture that plainly assumes itself to be coextensive with the city. These books are "[u]ntranslating machines [that] offer counter-*gifts* to the poison of global alienation" (Lezra 159). Galician as literary language adds a degree of separation in what may or may not be Mexico. Translation and self-translation are a further step into a Simmelian objectivation of the poetic speaker's alienating world in *ovella*. Common to *entfremdem* and *verfremden*, there is the lexeme *fremd*, 'foreign.' "Alienation, estrangement: the terms are bound together by the alien, the external" (Bloch 121). An embodied, estranged (alienated from itself) language blocks identification both with the rural origin and with the transnational urban destination. In other words, "broken" languages, accents, and proper names disrupt the cosmopolitan hypothesis of general, universal exchangeability of information and ideas. The women of his family, who migrated and came back decades before Fruela Fernández's poetic speaker did, had to change their names for the benefit of the very people who benefitted from their labor. María becomes "Marie" for the benefit of the local French lady who employs the grandmother and for the mother's schoolteacher. They live "con el nombre manso" (32) 'under a tame name,' animalized and racialized in, through, despite language (after all, only the migrant is bilingual in this scenario): "*vous parlez comme un petit noir*" (32) 'you talk like a little black

child.’ The obvious symptom of such untranslation is the accent, the mechanical inability of an untrained body to reproduce the sounds of the foreign language. It is through accents that the migrant estranges language, giving it new life, through the body, but it is also through accents that, in taking over a language, hers becomes an estranged body, the body of Marie, a stranger. In this sense, the body of the migrant and her transnational family was always-already a history of the crisis of productivity of the rural, and vice versa: the source of migration was largely rural, and the rural has been the great force behind people’s border crossings since it felt the impact of industrialization.

In the introduction to *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams described Cambridge as a place of transformation, of people and places and of their relation to each other. He admitted deep ambivalence about such power: the relation between the rural space I’ve been referring to and academic discourse is “not only of ideas and experiences, but of rent and power; a wider system” (7). In all kinds of schools, cultural centers, and journals, knowledge can be locally produced, but only if we can pay for it. Recently, the direction of Peninsular culture has wavered, reorienting itself toward one of its sources, and an important one at that. Will it be able to build new, heterogeneous identities and include a space that has been thought of and thought of itself as waning for two centuries? Will it successfully recognize itself in and have others assume it to be signified by words and icons, old and new, mobilizing new hegemonic articulations? If so, what words can we think of to utter its name, in what situations? Will we, moderns, cosmopolitans, intellectuals, in Spain and elsewhere, know how to hear it, and even allow it at times to speak (in) our name as well? Maybe it’s not about recognizing, thinking, knowing, or not at first. To conclude, and to quote Williams again, writing in Cambridge, hearing a dog bark, being interpellated by a place whose transformation he is involved in: “When there are questions to put, I have to push back my chair, look down at my papers, and feel the change” (8).

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