

The Failure of Consuelo's Designs: Carlos Fuentes and *Trompe l'Oeil* Modernity

Este artículo estudia las tensiones entre los elementos barrocos y los elementos góticos en Aura (1962) de Carlos Fuentes. Estableciendo conexiones entre esta novela y La región más transparente (1958), el ensayo argumenta que en Aura Fuentes radicaliza la teatralidad de las formas barrocas y las góticas para señalar sus límites. Con el uso de la segunda persona singular, la novela desarrolla un concepto de modernidad que no se subordina a los modelos políticos existentes, un modelo parecido al arte anti-teatral en su variante pastoral estudiado por Michael Fried.

Palabras clave: Carlos Fuentes, lo barroco, lo gótico, la antiteatralidad, la autonomía literaria

The present study examines the tensions between Baroque and Gothic elements in Carlos Fuentes' Aura (1962). Analyzing unstudied connections between La región más transparente (1958) and Aura, the essay argues that Fuentes radicalizes the theatricality of Baroque and Gothic forms in his novel in order to signal their limits. With his use of the second person singular to narrate the novel, he seeks to develop a new concept of modernity, one that would not be subordinated to already existing political models. This concept of literary form parallels the pastoral conception of antitheatrical art studied by Michael Fried.

Keywords: Carlos Fuentes, Baroque, Gothic, antitheatricality, literary autonomy

This article will develop a novel take on what has become a classic debate about Carlos Fuentes' fiction: its relationship to the Baroque and the Gothic literary traditions in Latin America. These aesthetic approaches and their tropes have long been central to understanding Latin American art and literature, and they have become all the more salient as scholars have approached the region's mid twentieth-century literary production in an effort to refine concepts such as magical realism, the fantastic and the particularities of Latin American postmodernism.¹ In the lengthy critical bibliography on these matters, Fuentes' work has often been cited as a key

example of both the Baroque and the Gothic. This is not surprising given that these modes are strikingly similar. However, despite these similarities, scholarship on the Baroque and the Gothic has often developed in parallel rather than explicitly engaging their points of contact. The few scholars who do address the relationship between these traditions often do so by mentioning one in an effort to dispel the other, a dynamic that is clearly evident in scholarship on Fuentes. Reindert Dhondt, for example, notes that Fuentes is an author with an “explicit and self-conscious identification with the Baroque” (“Between” 259), and laments that “Fuentes has frequently been placed in the tradition of the fantastic and Gothic novels” (“Ekphrastic” 77) rather than recovered as a “Baroque artist [who makes] visible or present what is in reality invisible or absent” (87).² For Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat, however, it is precisely this supposedly Baroque tendency that makes Fuentes one of “the most Gothic of all major Latin American writers” (297) noting that “the emphasis ... on making the invisible visible ... [is included in] Gothic theory” (306 n16) and asserting that “for all practical purposes we can substitute Gothic for Baroque” (308).³ Are these terms in fact interchangeable, duplicate critical vocabularies?⁴ Or should we claim Fuentes, or particular works he wrote, for one category or the other?

The difficulty in reconciling the relationship between these tendencies in Fuentes’ work is perhaps best demonstrated in a text like *Aura* (1962). As Jean Franco observed as early as 1976, only a “dull reader” would fail to note that the novel “discloses the familiar paraphernalia of the Gothic novel [and a] bricolage of romantic remnants and old Vincent Price movies” (269). Yet Fuentes himself would hyperbolically assert just five years later in an essay detailing how he wrote the text that the Baroque Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo “is the true author of *Aura*” (“How I Wrote” 925). How should we read Fuentes’ work: as adapting the Anglo-American Gothic tradition to the Mexican context or as continuing the longstanding Baroque tradition in Latin American cultural production? In what sense is deciding this question consequential?

In this essay, I argue not only that *Aura* reveals that the Baroque and the Gothic are not interchangeable but also, and more importantly, that by interrogating the tensions produced by their (sometimes subtle) differences we can achieve a better understanding of Fuentes’ engagement with and critique of the particular configurations of competing Cold War modernities (capitalism and socialism) during the 1960s when the novel was written. More specifically, I argue that Fuentes turns to the Baroque and the Gothic in *Aura* as one step in a career-long narrative project of establishing modernity as a particular relationship between art, politics

and economics, one in which, despite its complete immersion within existing political and economic models, art could nevertheless avoid being subservient to political or economic demands and instead structure an alternative project through a resolution of tensions internal to itself.

As Maarten van Delden notes in his indispensable *Carlos Fuentes, Mexico, and Modernity* (1998), Fuentes “simultaneously tried to occupy [two positions] in the literary and intellectual field of his time” (84): one oriented toward making particular kinds of objects – “the experimental novelist” (84) – and the other oriented toward constructing particular kinds of communities – “the engaged intellectual” (84). While Fuentes considered these two projects parallel, he also considered them separate, as he noted in a 1962 interview: “I think the creative writer should be creative when he is ... a novelist or poet, and should be political when he is a political writer. The point is not to mix the two things” (qtd. in Van Delden 117). Van Delden links this position to Fuentes’ development of an evolving concept of modernity that seeks to escape the competing existing models of “modern societies – both East and West – [that] demand their artists be ‘priests and acolytes of the cult of the external ... either to sing ‘the glories of work’ (East) or to sing ‘the glories of products’ (West)’” (101). The artwork should not be subordinated to the existing political order but rather should “serve ... literature” itself (qtd. in Van Delden 118) by responding to the internal needs of the creative work rather than the requirement to “[defend] a cause” (qtd. in Van Delden 117) external to it. This task, of course, is complicated by the fact that Fuentes is writing in “the moment in time in Latin America when the literary work comes to be viewed once and for all as a commodity” (Ruiz Basto qtd. in Van Delden 221n10). In other words, Fuentes writes *Aura* precisely in the moment (the late 1950s and early 1960s) when the novel is governed by the “cult of the external.” While this dilemma takes on a particularly important role as Fuentes explores “la llamada crisis internacional de la novela” (*La nueva novela* 17) in which the Spanish American novelist must find a way to avoid his fate as “el último héroe del mundo burgués” (Fuentes, *La nueva novela* 17), his turn to a simultaneous engagement with the Baroque and the Gothic in the pages of *Aura* must be read in the same context: his exploration of the tension between art objects and their role in creating political communities and the political valences of what I will describe below as the problem of theatricality in art.⁵

To this end, I will begin by analyzing the emergence of these issues in Fuentes’ first novel *La región más transparente* (1958), which, I argue, can be read as a first draft of *Aura*, though one that is divested of a specific engagement with the Baroque and the Gothic. These connections enable

me to read Fuentes' turn to the ghostly double in *Aura* as a re-articulation of the tensions between art, politics and economics elaborated in his earlier novel. While these ghostly presences in *Aura* are typically read as evidence of Fuentes' preference for the Gothic, I will demonstrate how their function in making an absent past present reveals Fuentes' engagement with Baroque visual art in general and *trompe l'oeil* in particular. As we will see, *Aura* signals the limits of Baroque strategies of representation, a revelation that not only gives rise to the events that transpire in the novel but also leads Fuentes to engage with the Gothic tradition of the counterfeit. Connecting the differing dynamics of the Baroque's *trompe l'oeil*, which is premised on the work interacting with a particular kind of viewer, and the Gothic's counterfeit, which is premised on enabling any viewer to see a particular kind of object, I suggest that these differing explorations of the relationship between the work and the viewer in *Aura* lay bare Fuentes' own anxieties about State or conservative capture of the new or revolutionary art he sought to produce. Wanting to produce a work that neither orients itself toward the catechism of a cause (Baroque *trompe l'oeil*), nor caters to commodity production (Gothic counterfeit), Fuentes seeks to craft an alternate path in *Aura* that will not reduce the novel to the demands of these readers.

In the final section of the essay, I argue that Fuentes' famous use of the second person singular in this novel can be understood as that alternate path. Fuentes attempts to surpass the limits of both theatrical modes he takes as his models (the Baroque and the Gothic) by creating a narrative that seems to include the reader but reveals the necessity of his or her exclusion. Utilizing Michael Fried's account of visual strategies to detheatricalize an artwork's relationship to its beholder, it is possible to read *Aura* as one attempt to move beyond the *trompe l'oeil* dynamics and the "cult of the external" that Fuentes rejects. Through this new understanding of the second person singular, made possible by reading *Aura* with *La región más transparente*, the largely ignored political valences of *Aura* become clear and enable us to develop a clearer understanding of Fuentes' efforts to overcome the *trompe l'oeil* modernities of his era through aesthetic and narrative innovation.

Aura tells the story of Felipe Montero, a former exchange student at Paris's Sorbonne who, at the novel's outset in early 1960s Mexico City, works as a part-time history teacher and aspires to write his *magnum opus*: a totalizing narrative of the conquest of America. Felipe is lured to a crumbling colonial mansion by a newspaper advertisement placed by the ageing and aristocratic Consuelo Llorente who seeks a young, French-speaking historian to translate a series of diaries written by her deceased

husband, a conservative Mexican general exiled to France in 1867 after the defeat of Mexico's Second Empire (1864-67). Over the course of the novel, Aura, first presented as Consuelo's niece but in reality the ghostly projection Consuelo conjures of her youthful self, seduces Felipe into fulfilling his contract. At the same time, this seduction produces a fantastical transformation of Felipe into the General, and the novel ends with a vanished Aura and Felipe/General Llorente embracing Consuelo in their marital bed.

Critics have long drawn attention to the fact that the appearance of these doubles at Donceles 815 makes visible to the reader what has been "buried" or made invisible by the new residential and commercial developments that were built "alrededor de la casa" (30) during the boom years of the "Mexican Miracle" (1940-1970).⁶ Yet what remains less clear is what precisely should emerge with General Llorente and Aura. Indeed, if Consuelo seeks to recover her youth by conjuring Aura and to reincarnate her husband by hiring Felipe, her motivations for doing so remain seemingly obscure despite the vast scholarship on this novel. What is at the heart of the personal and social relations Consuelo so desperately wishes to recover? What exactly does Consuelo want?

The force of this question begins to become clear when we recognize that Consuelo's desires replicate those of doña Lorenza de Ovando an elderly Porfirian aristocrat who appears in Fuentes' first novel *La región más transparente* (1958). Indeed, several of Consuelo's descriptions of her situation in *Aura* are almost verbatim transcriptions of the sections of his earlier novel featuring doña Lorenza. Like Consuelo, doña Lorenza returns from exile in France to her rundown family mansion, *la Casa de Hamburgo*, in post-Revolutionary Mexico City. Faced with her family's financial ruin, she also finds that the old Porfirian social order has disappeared amid the revolutionary transformations of Mexican society. For example, in the place of elegant colonial mansions she finds "[una] pastelería," "[un] centro social español" and "una tienda de modas," and in place of a landed aristocracy she finds her friends working as "contadores públicos y comerciantes, agentes viajeros y oficinistas de cuarta, y al que bien le va, profesor de historia" and her nieces working in "una tienda de blusas y [pasando] el día detrás de un mostrador" (99-100). Doña Lorenza flatly refuses this new post-Revolutionary market socialization, but she is left with no choice but to engage with the continued fragmentation and decimation of an older form of aristocratic socialization outside the market. With only "los restos de [su] fortuna" (101), doña Lorenza is forced to engage in destroying that order herself: "la casa se fue fraccionando: primero, el jardín, para que construyeran unos libaneses sus

apartamentos; luego la caballeriza, para unos abarrotes; por último, la fachada de la casa, los salones, la planta baja, para una tienda de modas. Cuatro piezas, es todo lo que les queda ... Ya el sol no les llegaba" (*Región* 100).

This storyline lays out the situation Consuelo faces in *Aura*. Like the colonial mansions in doña Lorenza's neighborhood that have become "pastelerías," "centros sociales" or "tiendas de modas," those buildings in Consuelo's neighborhood are repurposed as "talleres de reparación, relojerías, tiendas de zapatos y expendios de aguas frescas" (*Aura* 9). Just as doña Lorenza resists the market order but is nevertheless integrated through the partial sale of her mansion, Consuelo also confronts the market pressures faced by the former aristocracy: "Han construido alrededor de nosotras, nos han quitado la luz. Han querido obligarme a vender" (26); "en esta casa no hay jardín. Perdimos el jardín cuando construyeron alrededor de la casa" (30). While both novels are structured by the desires of ageing aristocrats to return to the cultural origins of their social order, these origins seem to be strikingly different: doña Lorenza desires a return to Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, which inherited and carried forward the liberal projects of the Reform period that forced the conservative Llorentes into exile in France. Indeed, while Consuelo's situation remains more or less unchanged by the relationship her "niece" Aura develops with Felipe Montero, doña Lorenza's situation is resolved through the relationship her beautiful young niece, Pimpinela, develops with the aspiring young writer Rodrigo Pola.

Indeed, the younger de Ovando's connections in the new social order created by the PRI allows her to secure for herself a marriage to Rodrigo, who had fully abandoned his dream of writing a "gran poema" in favor of writing "diez argumentos [cinemáticos] taquilleros" (462) that are structured only by the requirements of Technicolor, the desires of female audiences, the demands of religious audiences, the rigors of censorship, the language in his contract and other market concerns (*Región* 333-38). While this decision to sign a contract that would determine the form his writing would take generates enough wealth that allowed him to enter Pimpinela's aristocratic social circles, he regrets his abandonment of the literary, which functioned, in a certain sense, as the apotheosis of his failed search for an authentic self that underscores the novel: "lo que yo soy ... se quedó solo" (462). As Van Delden notes, "Rodrigo's pursuit of a total freedom from all external constraints," that is, his pursuit of a self that is autonomous from socialization in the market, "eventually ... [leads to] an unconditional surrender to society's norms of success" (21), a complete heteronomy through his pursuit of capital and commodities. As he

recognizes towards the novel's end, his decision to construct himself through the production of art commodities for the growing market of Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema eliminates his imagined autonomous realm, one that could have been occupied by the self and its apotheosis in the literary "gran poema." He is left, then, either with the option for self-actualization and socialization in the market and its world of commodities – "investing life with value simply through the agency of free individual choice" (Van Delden 26) – or in a "return to the cultural origins of Mexico" (26), which, to doña Lorenza's delight and his own lament, he restores by helping her, "reconstruir su pinche casa de Hamburgo [donde se da] el gusto de correr a los judíos y a los gachupines y volver a recibir las momias que quiera" (461-62). While, as Van Delden affirms, "the plot of *La región* offers no clear resolution" (26) to this problem, we can understand *Aura* as a progression of Fuentes' reflection on it.

Consuelo, like doña Lorenza, wants to reclaim the first floor of her neighborhood – marked by the rise of vulgar, popular commerce represented by the "nomenclaturas ... superpuestas [y] confundidas" (9) dotting the facades of re-purposed colonial mansions – in favor of the order of the second floor where she maintains control and the modern market and its forms of socialization have little influence: "allí nada cambia. Las sinfonías no perturban ... las baratijas expuestas no adornan ese segundo rostro de los edificios. Unidad del tezontlé, los nichos de santos trancos coronados de palomas [y] la piedra labrada de barroco mexicano" (10). However, with no heirs like Pimpinela who could secure the aristocratic family name and the reconstruction of her "pinche casa" with the capital and commodities that circulate thanks to Rodrigo, Consuelo is left only with the obsessive conjuring of her youth and the fear of her own demise: "no me quedan muchos años por delante, señor Montero" (13).

It is in the context of this imminent and final destruction that she, like doña Lorenza, decides to enter the space of the market: "viol[é] la costumbre de toda una vida [al] colocar [el] anuncio en el periódico" (13). This decision, which places her in the world of commerce, also inserts the novel into the traditional Gothic frame: the invitation of the lodger (Felipe Montero) to inhabit a haunted mansion. While scholars have analyzed extensively Fuentes' engagement with the Gothic tradition in this novel, what is common to nearly all reflections of this sort is an emphasis on the proliferation of ghostly doubles as the centerpiece of Consuelo's project of recovery. While critics often assert that these uncanny *Doppelgängers* function to innovate the Gothic genre, it is important to note that reading only the novel's Gothic elements cannot reveal the nature of "la costumbre

de toda una vida” that Consuelo seeks to protect and that the Gothic structure violates. This custom seeks to reclaim for the present “[el] barroco mexicano” (10) through a strategy of ghostly doublings of the past.

Indeed, the Gothic and the uncanny are not the only models for understanding the novel’s ghostly doubles. As Lois Parkinson Zamora points out in her study *The Inordinate Eye* (2004), the double is also a central trope of Baroque visual art and its hagiographic tradition of corporal suffering in which “[saints’] prescribed attributes [were] endlessly repeated along with scenes of their life and death” (182). This tradition re-emerged most famously in post-revolutionary Mexico through Frida Kahlo’s serial self-portraits: “[these] self-repetitions, her variations on the theme of the single self, have the effect of suggesting a hallucinatory multiplicity of timeless selves ... [that is a] combination of [Baroque] religious portraiture and its nineteenth-century extension in popular [photographic] portraiture” (182-83; 199). As Parkinson Zamora demonstrates, these works parallel the Baroque *retablo* (altarpiece) tradition of depicting the bodily pain of martyred saints and virgins exemplified, for example, by the “archetypical Baroque martyr” Saint Sebastian (173), the mutilated martyrs Agatha and Lucy or the silently suffering *la Dolorosa*. These works, Parkinson Zamora argues, can be understood as examples of “the process of metonymic displacement typical of the Baroque” (186). Through a strategy of “association accumulation, and diffusion” (186) of variations on the same theme, they bring into view an “indeterminate or absent whole” (187), which is always incomplete, enabling new variations to be continually added to it. It is precisely in this tradition of Baroque doubling that we can place Fuentes’ novel: Aura is one of Consuelo’s many repeated efforts at self-portraiture, a “hallucinatory” attempt at creating a “timeless self.” This is confirmed not only by the nineteenth-century photographic portraits of Consuelo in the General’s archive that Felipe recognizes as Aura towards the end of the novel, but also by preceding moments in which he describes Aura with visual imagery paralleling the Baroque martyrs and saints Parkinson Zamora studies.

Early on during Felipe’s stay in the mansion, he finds Consuelo praying in her small chapel, which has at its center a *retablo de devociones* filled with images of martyrs and suffering saints which include, among others, “Cristo, María, San Sebastián, Santa Lucía, ... [y] la Dolorosa” (24-45), all of them exemplars of the Baroque. These visual works are produced in a context that assumed “the separation of the image from what it represents” (Parkinson Zamora 172), and therefore create a dynamic relationship between artwork and beholder that is theatrical in nature.

These images of an exemplary moment of corporeal suffering address the beholder (Consuelo in this case) and invite her to develop an “emotional union [with] the sacred” (Gisbert in Parkinson Zamora 178) by recreating subjectively (i.e. making present) in her own mind and on her own body the union between the mortal and the divine. Felipe overhears something paralleling this imaginative union as he sees Consuelo – entranced in “el placer de la devoción” (25) – collapse in pain and ecstasy before her altar: “¡llega, Ciudad de Dios; suena trompeta de Gabriel; ¡ay, pero cómo tarda en morir el mundo!’ [Consuelo] se golpeará el pecho hasta derrumbarse, frente a las imágenes y las veladoras, con un acceso de tos . . . mientras lágrimas involuntarias corren por las mejillas transparentes” (25).

It is in this context that we must understand Felipe’s observation that Aura functions as one of the devotional images populating Consuelo’s Baroque *retablo*: “Sabes, al cerrar de nuevo el folio, que por eso vive Aura en esta casa: para perpetuar la ilusión de juventud y belleza de la pobre anciana enloquecida. Aura, encerrada como un espejo, como un icono más de ese muro religioso ...” (39). While he first sees Aura as a living monument to vanity, what Felipe recognizes by integrating her into Consuelo’s corpus of devotional images is the metaphysical orientation of Aura’s presence in the house. Like the contemplation of the images in her *retablo* that make visible the exemplary moment when the historical, earth-bound human and the eternal divine exist in fullness, so too does the contemplation of Aura function as a metaphysical fiction that Consuelo continually recreates in order to produce the “illusion” of unity between her body and the “absent whole” that Aura’s “juventud y belleza” represent: the promise and plenitude of an exemplary moment located in the past.

What Felipe does not realize (but the reader of the novel does) when he estimates that Aura “no podía tener más de veinte años” (45) is that Consuelo chooses as the exemplary moment of Aura’s “juventud y belleza” the same moment that is captured in the photographic portrait of her 24-year-old self that Felipe finds stored away in the General’s archive. This photograph not coincidentally is dated 1876, a year that marks the beginning of the Porfiriato and more fully connects Consuelo’s situation with doña Lorenza’s. Given these connections, it is possible to argue that for Fuentes, the remnants of the Porfirian elite living in post-Revolutionary Mexico can be seen as a repetition of the dead and defeated nineteenth-century conservatism championed by the Llorentes. For Consuelo, however, the Baroque strategy of creating a “timeless self” through repetition is, more simply, central to her survival: “nunca he podido mantener [a Aura] a mi lado más de tres días” (59). Aura only survives if

the beholder makes present a past moment of fullness by imaginatively recreating again and again in and on her own body Aura's "prescribed attributes:" "los ojos verdes" (38) that equally captivate the General and Felipe and make it clear that Aura functions via this Baroque tradition of devotional doubling and its "metonymic displacement" (186) in Parkinson Zamora's words. This point is reinforced by the narration of Felipe's first glimpse of Aura: "son unos hermosos ojos verdes idénticos a todos los ojos verdes que has conocido o podrás conocer. Sin embargo, no te engañas: esos ojos fluyen, se transforman, como si te ofrecieran un paisaje que sólo tú puedes adivinar y desear" (17).

Here we see that Aura is not only individuated for Felipe – "un paisaje que sólo tú puedes ... desear" – but also that Felipe's experience of her is simultaneously integrated into an eternal whole that proliferates temporally to unify past, present and future: "son unos hermosos ojos verdes idénticos a todos los ojos verdes que has conocido o podrás conocer" (17).

This recognition answers our first question: Consuelo wants to recover her past social world through a particular kind of viewer, one who, like her husband, is capable of individuating for himself her repeated self-portraits. Consuelo, however, does not need Felipe to conjure or confirm Aura's existence. This is certainly confirmed by the last line of the novel: "Deja que recupere fuerzas y la haré regresar" (61). Nevertheless, she is insistent at the novel's end that he become an embedded part of the process: "la traeremos juntos" (61). If Felipe, like Consuelo, can endlessly reproduce Aura when she vanishes, why does she emphasize the fact that Felipe's arrival is a violation of her "costumbre?" If Felipe is not central to Aura's existence, why is the difference marked by his arrival so central to Aura's events? What does Consuelo want with Felipe?

The "essence of the Baroque," as Gilles Deleuze has pointed out, "entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather *realizing* something in illusion itself, or tying it to a spiritual *presence* that endows its spaces and fragments with a collective unity" (125). Part of the point of Felipe's presence in the house is to draw our attention to the fact that Consuelo has no choice but to fall out of illusion: "Nunca he podido mantener [a Aura] a mi lado más de tres días" (Fuentes 59). Consuelo can accumulate her conjurings of Aura in a "metonymic displacement" (Parkinson Zamora 186) that makes visible the "spiritual presence" of a past "unity" (Deleuze 125). Felipe, however, can see both the illusion (Aura) and its material support (Consuelo), and he demonstrates that Consuelo's Baroque strategies cannot disarticulate Aura from her relationship to Consuelo's corporeal, historical and temporal situation. In this way,

Felipe's presence in the mansion is central to making visible the collapsed relationship between material and illusion that led Consuelo to place the advertisement in the newspaper. Rather than emerging as the Baroque ideal that could permanently maintain illusion and create "una 'sustitución,' un simulacro del mundo" (Echeverría 2929), Aura is revealed by Felipe for what she really is: a mimetic representation of an absent past moment of fullness that cannot deny the material circumstances that separate representational past from the historical present of the beholder. Consuelo draws Felipe to the house to bring into relief a problem with which she is already well acquainted: her inability to negate her own historical situation.

This impossibility of making herself absent to make Aura present produces a dilemma central to the Baroque, one that William Egginton has called the problem of dissociationism, "the theatrical division of space into that of the spectator and that of representation" (58) that is "most evident" in the "technique of *trompe l'oeil*" (59). This visual device radicalizes the theatricality of Baroque portraits by converting the individual devotional experience into a collective one. It enables the depiction of images that seem to escape the frame to occupy not just the mind and body of the beholder but her surrounding space as well. *Trompe l'oeil* works create illusions that appear to negate their condition as art and demand to be received as if the depicted objects were actually those real "objects in the viewer's world" (Parkinson Zamora 249). Yet these illusions always maintain a precarious relationship with the materials that make their deceptions possible: there always remains a gap between the object imagined or seen through illusionistic representational devices and the mundane materials that have a causal relationship with those illusionary objects that the *trompe l'oeil* representation cannot negate. Indeed, the beholder need only reach out to touch the devotional object to realize that its "spiritual presence" is in reality an aesthetic fiction and a representational absence, rebellious materials that can never be made identical to the imagined illusion.

Though Felipe's presence in the house makes clear the fact of Consuelo's *trompe l'oeil* design, the failure to bridge the divide between the materials of mediation and the illusion they make possible is not the problem that Felipe is hired to solve. Indeed, for Baroque artists like Consuelo, as Severo Sarduy pointed out in another context, "the confirmation of failure does not imply [the need for a] modification of the project ... [Rather, the] obsessive repetition of a useless thing (given that it does not have access to the ideal entity of the artwork) is what determines the Baroque as *play*, in contrast to the determination of classical work as

labor" (288). As we have already begun to see with the discussion of the relationship between Aura and the devotional images in Consuelo's *retablo*, this separation between material and representation is central to the functioning of Baroque theatricality: the absent is made present and the invisible visible not through a literal unity of material and illusion but rather through the repeated process of substitution and recreation that takes place in the mind and on the body of a particular kind of beholder. What Consuelo seeks from Felipe in insisting he learn "el estilo de [su] esposo" (15) is a Baroque disposition. It is a commitment to recreating the theatrical illusion when the materials of construction reveal themselves.

This insistence on finding a particular kind of viewer is more than simply Consuelo's desire to reunite herself with her lost husband. It is a central component in her plan to recover the entirety of her lost aristocratic social world, which is represented and, most importantly, enabled by "la piedra labrada de barroco mexicano" (10) comprising the second floor façade of Donceles 815. As we have seen, Baroque representation functioned primarily by delaying contact with and contemplation of the materials of mediation through theatrical strategies that attempted to remove any possibility of seeing gaps between illusion and material reality. As Deleuze points out, the "folds" of Baroque "intermediality" were central to the success of this art, as the links and bridges between individual works connected out to the urban geography of the city to create a totalizing theatrical space of interconnected individual parts and fragments:

[T]he Baroque often confines painting to retables, but it does so because the painting exceeds its frame and is realized in polychrome marble sculpture; and sculpture goes beyond itself by being achieved in architecture ... an interlocking of frames of which each is exceeded by a matter that moves through it. This extensive unity of the arts forms a universal theater ... (Deleuze 123)

If Baroque mediation is premised on the "interlocking frames" of proliferating portraits and *trompe l'oeil* objects that flow into architecture and urban spaces to create a "universal theater" of "simulation," then theatrical fiction can only function if there is a community of beholders willing to suspend disbelief in their separation from the absent whole.

As Bolívar Echeverría points out, the Baroque created just such a community of believing beholders in the seventeenth century, one that formed the basis of dual conservative projects that took shape after the devastation and destruction of the Conquest: the evangelical project of the Jesuits and the political project of the *criollo* elite. These projects worked in

tension and in tandem as *criollos* sought to carry forward into the future Europe's monarchical and aristocratic past and Jesuits sought to orient the structure of urban economic activity toward the incorporation of rural indigenous populations into the modern, conservative, universal (Catholic) church. These forms of socialization were made possible by Baroque representation that continued to expand the "world theater" and its modes of substitution and simulation to produce what Echeverría calls Latin America's first modernity: "una propuesta específica de vivir *en y con* el capitalismo" (576-89) but one that understood that the marketplace and its social function to enrich the ambitious bourgeois individual would undermine the realization of these dual projects. Rather than individual accumulation in the market, the Jesuits (and the *criollo* elite they educated) eschewed the centrality of "[el] capital ... [y puso en su lugar] a la *ecclesia*, a la comunidad humana socializada en torno a la fe y la moral cristianas" (997).

This form of modernity emerging from Baroque modes of thought and representation underscored the political projects of Mexico's conservative *criollo* elite, an elite to which Consuelo and General Llorente belonged. This political project finds its aesthetic expression in the Baroque design of Consuelo's project. We can see Aura as a *trompe l'oeil* portrait emerging from Consuelo's *retablo*, one that also appears in "las ventanas ensombrecidas por largas cortinas verdosas" (10) as Felipe contemplates the second floor façade upon his arrival. In other words, it is clear that Consuelo's project of restoration is structured by a Baroque desire to flow and fold from chapel to façade to city to reclaim the "universal theater" in Deleuze's terms. Yet, it is also clear how that desire is frustrated by the transformations represented by the first floor. Indeed, like so many conservative *criollo* projects seeking to restore the aristocracy and monarchy throughout the nineteenth century, Consuelo's Baroque design cannot reclaim the city and its community socialized in the *ecclesia* because that community is consistently defeated by bourgeois-liberal political projects oriented towards socialization in a market that privileges individual capital accumulation. However, as mentioned earlier with the conjuring of Aura from the 1876 photograph, Consuelo sees in the Porfiriato a model for what Octavio Paz has called "[un] regreso del pasado" (141), one that could be exploited to her benefit in the post-Revolutionary present through Felipe's integration into her project.

Despite its championing of the market and its forms of socialization after a full defeat of conservatives in the mid-nineteenth century, the Porfiriato, through its adherence to positivism, created what Paz calls "una nueva justificación de las jerarquías sociales ... [Y]a no son la sangre, ni la

herencia, ni Dios, quienes explican las desigualdades, sino la Ciencia" (143). This new system of belief in the natural, racialized order prescribed by positivism created a hierarchical system in which everyone had a place. For Paz, this is precisely what connects the Porfiriato to the aristocratic past. Importantly, the replacement of the divine order with the natural order led to the State substituting itself for the mediational role previously held by the Church. The Jesuits and the *criollo* elite they educated found that, rather than the free market, it was the mediation of the Church, its clergy and its theatrical, devotional art forms that would produce a universal (though conservative) modernity. In a similar way, Porfirians, as historian Richard Weiner has noted, "[countered] basic tenets of classic liberalism ... [to stress instead] the collective, racial hierarchy and the state ... [N]ationalism, not a celebration of free markets, reigned" (4). To create this hierarchy, the Porfiriato, like the seventeenth-century Church before it, sought to produce a form of socialization that could create a community who could live "*en y con el capitalismo.*" However, while the seventeenth-century Church eschewed the market as a form of socialization, Porfirians championed "the market ... [which] symbolized harmony ... [and] was realized by ... unif[ying] the interests of the different 'entities' of the 'social organism'" (Weiner 32). This harmony and unity through market socialization, however, could only take place through processes of substitution and simulation mediated by the State given that Porfirians understood the market alone as "an impotent force to change the mores and practices of the populace" (42). The indigenous population and wealthy *hacendados* alike were viewed as "little-evolved racial group[s] ... who were relics from the age of conquest" (42), and the task of the Porfirian state was to mediate their harmonious integration into the "order and progress" of an evolving and modernizing national market.

Though the State replaced the Church in its mediational role, creating a universal national labor market rather than the anti-market universality of the Christian *ecclesia*, the Porfiriato nevertheless produced its community of beholders via processes paralleling the Baroque. Through a simulation (e.g. education programs, "free," though coerced, labor and enterprise) that enabled a substitution (metaphysical belonging to modern Mexico despite "unevolved" biological realities), viewers could ignore supposedly intransigent bodies making up the Porfirian national community to see the beautiful illusion of *belle époque* Mexico. But if Baroque *trompe l'oeil* was oriented towards an authentic attempt to create an anti-market modernity and an inclusive universality formed around the aristocracy and the church, the re-actualization of these theatrical forms in and for the market and against the church and aristocracy transforms the

Baroque logic of *trompe l'oeil* into the Porfiriato's inauthenticity in the market. For Porfirians, "relics from the age of conquest" (42) could never actually be modern but rather only function as if they were through state illusionism.

In this sense, the Porfiriato's *trompe l'oeil* modernity, or what Paz calls a simulation comprised of "mentira e inautenticidad" (145), parallels Jerrold Hogle's notion of the counterfeit in the literary Gothic tradition. As Hogle notes in his reading of Horace Walpole and Mary Shelley, the logic of the counterfeit is at the center of the operation of Gothic fiction, where the ancient (or unevolved) body appears and is accepted as modern or, alternatively, new bodies are possessed by ancient structures: "in a world of increasingly bourgeois 'free market' enterprise ... antiquated symbols ... [emerge as] commodifiable signifiers" ("Counterfeit" 190).

Having seen the defeat of their anti-market modernity and its socialization through the aristocracy and the Church, families like the Llorentes can only ever have their names (and their capital) repurposed for circulation in the emerging market economy. Because Aura is marked as a past that can never be recovered, she, like the Gothic ghosts Hogle analyzes, "can be reconceived [and] ... directed at a newer purpose and market" (Hogle, "Introduction" 16). However, while illusionism always maintains a precarious relationship with the materials that make it possible, the failure to delay contemplation of those materials function in strikingly different ways. On the one hand, as we saw earlier, the failure of the Baroque's *trompe l'oeil* marks the vitality of the simulation: it presents the opportunity for the beholder to manifest her beliefs, to expand the illusion in a new direction, to demonstrate that she forms part of the Christian *ecclesia* and so on. On the other hand, failure to delay contact with and contemplation of the "relics" that underscore Porfirian counterfeits would mark the collapse of simulation and a crisis in the market. To the extent that the State cannot eliminate and destroy the "ancient" bodies that imaginatively cross the bridge into modernity through State simulation in the labor market, the inauthentically modern must be taken as the real thing, "feudal relics" accepted as the modern bourgeoisie, through a process of constant labor.

The Baroque's *trompe l'oeil*, then, is premised on interacting with a particular kind of viewer who is willing, as Sarduy put it, to "play," or to recreate the illusion when the materials reveal themselves. The Gothic counterfeit functions differently. It maintains in view of a particular kind of object, one produced by a consistent labor that masks the materials that comprise it so that it can "'spread out' rootlessly in a market circulation" (Hogle, "Counterfeit" 190). When the counterfeit fails, however, it does not

provide an opportunity to reconstruct the illusion and reconnect it to the aristocratic community but rather to re-appropriate the materials that made it possible and direct them towards new purposes and a new social order. This dynamic is nowhere clearer than in Mexico during the Revolution, the experience that gave shape to the world depicted in *Aura*.

As Fuentes points out, the PRI, like the Porfiriato, sought to “limita[r] y viola[r] [los] principios decimonónicos de libre empresa y *laissez faire*” (“Radiografía” 78) by creating a mediational system through which it could create the illusion of “la estabilidad y la unidad nacionales” (78): the Revolutionary state and the path it creates to the international market. However, while the aristocracy and the *hacendados* created a place for themselves within the structures of the Porfiriato, such was not the case in the post-Revolutionary years, as we have seen in the cases of doña Lorenza and Consuelo.

What Consuelo realizes is that she no longer lives in a moment in which her aristocratic community could be reconstructed. To ensure her survival, *Aura* must be converted from a *trompe l’oeil* illusion – which requires a particular community of beholders socialized outside the market – into a counterfeit – an illusion that through a constant process of labor could consistently adapt itself to new materials, new situations and new viewers in the market. This transformation, however, must take place without losing her aristocratic status by performing that labor herself. What she needs is not only a particular type of viewer – one who is willing to “play” – but also one who is willing to participate in that market (mediated by the PRI) to accumulate capital and profit. If the theatricality of Consuelo’s *trompe l’oeil* image of *Aura* successfully converts Felipe into a particular kind of viewer—the conservative, aristocratic General Llorente – his task is to convert *Aura* into a particular kind of object, one designed to meet the demands of the PRI and its market-socialized bourgeoisie. In other words, Felipe’s modification of Consuelo’s project parallels the design Walpole created when writing women in his Gothic fiction: *Aura* must emerge as a “commodity-object” (Hogle 181).⁷

In this way, the Baroque design and the Gothic re-design of *Aura* are fully comprehensible in the context of Consuelo’s project. This project has clear parallels to doña Lorenza’s efforts to reclaim the city for her conservative project for modernity. However, it certainly seems to confuse the relationship between those aesthetic modes and Fuentes’ own approach to literature. As we noted earlier, Fuentes sought to create literary works that were not subservient to political or economic demands and could not be reduced to their function in a “cult of the external” (Van Delden 101). But if *Aura* is to function as a “commodity-object” paralleling

the movie scripts Rodrigo produces for that same market, Felipe's aesthetic work can only be subordinated to the "performance of some nonaesthetic goal" (Van Delden 101). Indeed, as Nicholas Brown has recently noted, when an artwork functions purely as a commodity-object all "the concrete attributes that factor into [the object] are decided elsewhere, namely on the market." An obvious reaction would be the modernist affirmation of the autonomous literary work, but that position not only dovetails with Consuelo's political project, it is also a position Fuentes critiques in *Cambio de piel* (1967), the novel he publishes following *Aura*.

As Van Delden notes, characters like Javier (*Cambio de piel*'s protagonist) assert a "resistance to the reduction of art to the status of a commodity" (104) through a "theory of aesthetic autonomy" (102) that emerges as "a technique for controlling and mastering an unruly reality" (107). But as Van Delden also notes, Fuentes' aesthetic project must be contrasted with those of his writer-protagonists. Fuentes recognizes that the work of art cannot be disentangled from the messy chaos of market relations and that an ideally autonomous sphere is impossible in a market-oriented modernity. Instead of seeking an escape, Fuentes opts instead to create works "that on some level [embrace] the ... vulgarity of the modern world" (104), which manifests itself in the market. This embrace and cultivation of the commodity nature of the artwork, however, does not subordinate his novels to political or economic demands external to his aesthetic project. Indeed, what Fuentes seeks to produce is a form of literature that *appears* as a commodity (appears to adapt itself to every reader's demands) but in reality "serves ... literature" (Fuentes in Van Delden 118) (the internal needs of the work itself irrespective of the demands and desires of its readers). In searching for a form that could carry forward a non-market socialization (literature) through market means (the commodity), the literary model Fuentes cultivates parallels what Consuelo wants: a new version of *Aura* that could present a solution to the contrasting theatricalities of Baroque *trompe l'oeil* (creating a non-market socialization) and Gothic counterfeit (producing an ever-circulating commodity). Yet, if we can understand the tensions between the Baroque and Gothic in Consuelo's designs as a version of Fuentes' literary project more generally, how might we explain the fact that the literary form Fuentes imagines could simultaneously give rise both to Consuelo's conservative, aristocratic modernity and the modernity of the international left that Fuentes avidly supported during these years?⁸

To answer this question, it is important to recall the parallel between Felipe and Rodrigo Pola discussed earlier. Like Rodrigo, Felipe aspires to

write an autonomous, totalizing work. Possessing a desire to escape the market (to find an autonomous time and space “dedicado a [su] propia obra” (Fuentes, *Aura* 40)) by entering it (agreeing to produce in exchange for money a work with certain characteristics mandated by a contract), Felipe is marked by the same potentiality as Rodrigo. They both are able to produce Gothic counterfeits (or commodity objects) that these elderly aristocrats seek to mobilize in their projects of restoration. Unlike Rodrigo, however, who actually succeeds in restoring *la Casa de Hamburgo* as an anti-market right wing space from which doña Lorenza can “recibir a las momias” and “correr a los judíos” (Fuentes, *La región* 461-62) Felipe’s role in Consuelo’s redesign only ever remains a potentiality. Consuelo does not see her project come to fruition. Her restoration is set out as a hope for the future, a new version of *Aura* that could present a solution to the contrasting theatricalities of Baroque *trompe l’oeil* and Gothic counterfeit through the emergence in her commodity producer (Felipe) of a particular kind of viewer (General Llorente) oriented towards a non-market socialization. This result, however, takes an unexpected turn.

The General who returns through Felipe’s commodity production brings with him his vision for the future, one that, like doña Lorenza, is oriented towards conservative, anti-Semitic ends: “ve en el general Boulanger un rayo de esperanza, suspira por México, siente que en el caso Dreyfus el honor ... del ejército ha vuelto a imponerse” (55). The new *Aura* – to emerge from the dual desire for the autonomy of art and the heteronomy of the commodity – seems to produce a “return to cultural origins” (Van Delden 26), one that would repeat the pessimistic end of *La región* in which the revolutionary writer who must produce for the market also restores the anti-Semitism of earlier eras. However, by premising the potentiality of Felipe’s collaboration on the return of General Llorente as a specifically Boulangist viewer, Fuentes shifts *Aura* away from the pessimism of his earlier novel.

Boulanger, according to Ernesto Laclau, is a classic example of his model of populist reason: “a point of condensation of [an] equivalential chain [of unfulfilled desires]” (181). While anti-Semitic Bonapartists (like Felipe-cum-General Llorente) are included within Boulangism, so too are a number of other failed projects of the past: disaffected democrats, moderate monarchists and (fundamental for Fuentes) former Paris communards. Boulanger in his position “outside ... institutional choice” (181) provides a set of possibilities for these unfulfilled promises and provides a future potentiality that, like *Aura*, never materializes. In refusing to “[seize] the Elysée” and choosing to “merely *play* at being subversive” (181), Boulanger refuses to collapse his populist illusion into its

constituent materials and “construct a new differential/institutional order” (181). In functioning as an “empty signifier” (181), that is, as a counterfeit aristocrat and a counterfeit communard, Boulanger is an illusion that always appears to adapt itself to the demands of the viewer. Populism, like *trompe l’oeil*, then, is fully theatrical, and like *trompe l’oeil* it is also a temporally limited illusion: “the days of a regime which becomes unpopular beyond a certain point are numbered” (181).

If Consuelo’s evocation of her Boulangist husband is to connect the new Aura to this “rayo de esperanza” (Fuentes, *Aura* 55) through Felipe’s labor, Fuentes’ evocation of Boulanger is not a call to attach this illusion to an alternative set of materials: Fuentes does not use *Aura* to advocate for a “return to origins” (Van Delden 26) through the recreation of the Paris Commune in Mexico City. Rather, Fuentes aims for us to recognize the function and power of populism, which follows the same logic as the Baroque’s promised escape from the vulgarities of the actual into the sacred space of the illusion. This recognition should lead us to surpass the seduction of those escapist illusions by seeing that they are already fully immersed in already-existing political currents: counterfeits of the clear, simple, solutions of the past that cannot escape the existing order of commodity production. By linking the “new Aura” – the potential future – to a Boulangist viewer, Consuelo seeks to evoke the promise and power of theatricality to make the past present. For Fuentes, however, the evocation of Boulanger is a call to recognize the limits of a model that makes the past the future. As Laclau points out, “we can only speculate about what kind of institutional order would have resulted from a successful Boulanger coup, but . . . it could not have satisfied *all* of the heterogeneous forces that made up his coalition” (Laclau 181). The same also holds true for the promise of the “new Aura.” As in the model of *La región*, if the aristocrat gets what she wants, the bourgeois laborer remains unsatisfied. The point of the novel is not that Fuentes views Felipe as a model that he or we should imitate. Rather we should recognize that Felipe’s situation presents a problem that we must all overcome. *Aura* itself is Fuentes’ attempt to move beyond the limits set out by Consuelo and actualized by Felipe. Fuentes does not choose the Baroque by claiming Aura’s potentiality for a return to cultural origins outside the market. He also does not choose the Gothic by emptying out Aura’s connection to the past in order to claim her potentiality to produce a different future in the market. Fuentes instead explores the tensions between these tendencies within the world of the text by radicalizing their theatrical modes and their relationship to the reader who is external to it.

The most obvious form that this takes is his choice to narrate the novel in the second person singular: the “tú” that seemingly leads us to integrate ourselves into the text, the tú that supposedly identifies the reader as the solution to the problem. Many critics, most recently Pablo Baler and María Negroni, have suggested that the famous use of second person narration is purely theatrical, uniting protagonist, narrator and reader. However, though Fuentes is undeniably interested in these theatrical forms, what I have also attempted to show in my reading of the confluences and contrasts between *Aura* and *La región más transparente* is that Fuentes is not satisfied with *trompe l’oeil* and counterfeit in and of themselves. Fuentes does want what Consuelo wants: autonomy within the heteronomy of the market. But Fuentes’ aesthetic autonomy differs from Consuelo’s aristocratic autonomy.

To understand this difference, it is helpful to recall Jaime Alazraki’s reading of *Aura*, which long ago pointed out that the novel’s uncanny doubles, or what I have been calling Consuelo’s Baroque *trompe l’oeil* and Felipe’s Gothic counterfeit, do not possess the “function ... to terrify the reader” (95). Alazraki suggests that the use of “tú” responds instead to the “internal needs of the narrative” and serves as a “unifying element in *Aura*’s expressive system” (103). Alazraki continues:

[T]he second person allows Felipe to be the subject and the object of the narration at the same time, the narrator who tells his own story and the character whose will has been mortgaged by the narrator. The second person generates a distance ... [and] through that distance which the second person makes possible, he assumes the point of view of the reader, thus creating the illusion that the real narrator of the narrative is the reader. (Alazraki 104-05)

By producing the illusion that reader is inside the narrative, Fuentes opens a space in which the reader must engage with the “internal needs” of *Aura*’s “[unified] expressive system” (Alazraki 103), one that is, necessarily, separate from the reader. This fiction of separation enables the reader to see the system in which he or she resides as if he or she were separate from it, and in this sense, we can integrate *Aura* into the antitheatrical tradition studied by Michael Fried.

As Fried argues in his seminal book, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), artists seeking to re-establish for painting its “status as a major art” (105) created a “unified compositional structure” that was a “closed and sufficient system” by establishing “the fiction of the beholder’s nonexistence,” that is, by creating pictorial space defined by a fiction of separation, the fiction that there is no

beholder viewing or reading the scene (131-32). While Fried's account of art is most often associated with the technique of absorption, or the "dramatic conception" of antitheatricality, he also develops what he calls the "pastoral conception" of antitheatrical painting, which emerges from his reading of strategies endorsed by Diderot in his analysis of landscape paintings, "depictions of ruins" and other "lesser" or minor "genres" that establish the unity of the picture and its separation from the beholder through non-absorptive means (131). These paintings also separate themselves by producing the fiction that the beholder is removed "from in front of the painting," but this minor strategy does so by producing the "fiction of the beholder's physical presence within the painting, by virtue of an almost magical recreation of the effect of nature itself" (132). In other words, the beholder is required to engage the painting as a unified system through the fiction of his or her immersion in it, a system that is not subordinated to the reader's individual experiences or desires.

Fuentes' use of the second person functions as an antitheatrical technique. Indeed, he does not seek to replace the Baroque *trompe l'oeil* – which escapes its frame and functions as a component in a restored universal theater – with the Gothic's counterfeit commodity – which could escape the confines of "[la] devoción [al pasado]" and "ir afuera, al mundo" (Fuentes 51). Rather, *Aura* absorbs the reader into itself, creating the fiction that he or she is completely immersed in an illusion that is separated from a world that he or she in reality never leaves. In this sense, what seems purely theatrical – the novel's use of "tú" – functions instead to refuse literature's subordination to external reality – "afuera, el mundo" (51) – and captures the reader in an "almost magical" (Fried 132) encounter to hold him or her in a place of engagement with the novel's "[unified] expressive system" (Alazraki 103).

This "magical recreation" of reality that appears to include the beholder or, in our case, the reader is precisely what takes place in *Aura*. Alazraki puts it this way:

The second person [in *Aura*] ... produces the impression that the narrative takes place before our eyes, in a present that neither assumes any future nor needs to depend on a past ... [creating a] textual space [in which] the story achieves its narrative being [and] its poetic reality. (104-05)

By liberating the "textual space" from external influences – the mandates of the past and the requirements of the future – it liberates the "realm of literature" (105) to construct an autonomous "expressive system" (Alazraki 103) and achieve a "narrative being" and "poetic reality" (Alazraki 105) that

is not subordinate to the non-aesthetic ends of existing political models and their eschatologies. Instead, it makes visible a narrative image of the present. What Fuentes aims to do, then, is to choose neither Baroque modes of theatricality – which lead to a recreation or restoration of the past in the present – nor Gothic modes of theatricality – which lead to an emptying out of that past so that it can create an alternative future – but rather to lay bare the structure of potentiality itself, one that both includes us but, importantly, is also separated from us, is independent of us. Consuelo wants what she wants regardless of what the reader wants, and though her desires may seem obsolete, it is important to recognize that, for Fuentes, “images of the past ... were once the images of the future ... which we consign to a dead past only at the risk of having them reappear, one day, as a surprising, uncontrollable or unrecognizable future” (“Remember the Future” 344-45), an unrecognizable future that we may unwittingly find ourselves reproducing.

That path to reappearance, as the novel makes clear, is linked to the contrasting modes of theatricality that it evokes. As Fuentes points out, however, the problem of theatricality must be solved rather than evaded, and the only solution to this problem, in his view, is to articulate the autonomous space of the literary as an engagement with the strange temporality of the potentiality of the present: “If we cannot have a future without a past, how are we to integrate that past into our future? The answer is: by giving both of them the time of the present” (“Remember” 345). While the mobilization of Baroque and Gothic modes in *Aura* is his strategy to engage what he has elsewhere called the “simultaneity of Mexican times” (in Van Delden 30), Fuentes’ refusal to subordinate his text to their external (theatrical) orientations by choosing neither keeps his text both open and autonomous. In other words, *Aura* makes present what is absent and visible what is invisible: the potentiality of the present.

As we saw at the outset of this article, what form that potentiality might take should be worked out politically rather than in the space of the literary, which should not be subordinated and cannot be reduced to external political projects and their eschatologies. At the same time, as Raymond Leslie Williams notes, “establishing distinctions between Fuentes the novelist and Fuentes the critic or theorist is not entirely appropriate, for he always writes as both a reader and a writer and, in general, is critical of precisely such narrow classifications” (232). Williams affirms what has been noted above, which is that Fuentes accepts the messy chaos of market relations and that an ideally autonomous sphere is impossible in a market-oriented modernity. The novel is inevitably an object in the world and its economy and the writer a participant in its

political struggles and its structures of labor. But what Fuentes does not accept is that this is all that he and his novels are. In attempting to solve the problem of theatricality by producing the fiction of an autonomous literary form, Fuentes seeks to liberate the potentiality of the present in both art and life from being sacrificed to the promise of the past or the mandates of the future.

Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne

NOTES

- 1 As Ruth Hill notes in *Sceptres and Sciences in the Spains*, the “Gothic idylls” that Boileau denounces in his *L’Art poetique* “communicates that those Mediterranean European authors whom one today associates with the Baroque did to the classicism of the Renaissance what the Visigoths had done to ‘Roman classicism’ in early medieval France” (12). We see the same rejection of Enlightenment reason with the emergence of the Anglo-American Gothic tradition (one Fuentes often cited as influence) as a subgenre of Romanticism. It is this link that makes the difference between Gothic and Baroque so difficult to parse. They form part of the same tradition, which leads some scholars to assert their interchangeability and others to privilege the Baroque over the Gothic as an Ur-aesthetic approach. However, as I will argue throughout, there is a difference in these traditions, and they are intimately linked with the political and economic realities present at the historical moment of their emergence.
- 2 Dhondt’s work contributes to a large body of scholarship in reading Fuentes’ work as exemplar of the Baroque tradition. While I cannot cover the extensive bibliography on Fuentes’ relationship to the Baroque in this article, works by the following scholars develop this issue extensively: Michael Abeyta, Samuel Arriarán, Linda Egan, Wendy Faris, and Djelal Kadir. Remarkably, despite many comments on the relationship between *Terra Nostra* and the work Felipe Montero aspires to write in *Aura*, the 1962 novella’s connection to the Baroque has largely evaded scholars until recently. Aside from a brief mention by González Echevarría (555-57) and Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup (24) who reference John Ochoa’s study of the ironized Baroque in *Cambio de piel*, the issue has remained unanalyzed until the recent publication of Dhondt’s book *Carlos Fuentes y el pensamiento barroco* (2015), which has a chapter dedicated to a reading of *Aura* as a Benjaminian Baroque allegory and a lengthy bibliography useful for tracking these arguments. Here he continues the reading of Fuentes as Baroque to the exclusion of the Gothic developed in

his earlier articles: “la interpretación de *Aura* como una alegoría barroca de la historia de México, fuertemente impregnada por la melancolía, echará una nueva luz sobre la paralización del tiempo y la carga histórica de la novela, a diferencia de la interpretación deshistorizada de *Aura* como un relato gótico o fantástico” (104). For Dhondt, a Gothic reading implies disconnecting the narrative from history. But as Genaro Pérez notes in his reading of the Gothic elements in *Aura*, the Anglo-American Gothic genre as we conceive of it today (and that inspired Fuentes) was born of the Industrial Revolution, and he notes that the historical context for *La región más transparente* and *Aura* parallels the rapid industrialization of late-eighteenth century Europe. While he does not pursue the connections between *La región* and *Aura* beyond mentioning the context for industrialization, his Gothic reading of the text is not de-historicized as Dhondt claims. At the same time, he does not pursue a fully contextualized historical reading as I do here. As I will point out throughout this essay, it is not that the Gothic is ahistorical while the Baroque is a fully historicized (allegorical) mode but rather that each aesthetic tradition pursues similar strategies of integrating history into the aesthetic object but with distinct results and goals. Fuentes borrows from each tradition to innovate the novel in what he understands as its moment of crisis, and he seeks to develop a work that pursues both political and aesthetic ends simultaneously while being reduced to neither.

- 3 Gothic studies of Fuentes’ fiction abound. While I cannot deal with each of their arguments individually here, I should note that articles by Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat, Pérez, Muñoz-Basols, Miguel Ángel Náter, Federico Patán and María del Mar Rodríguez study the issue. See especially Fuentes’ essay “Radiografía de una década: 1953-1963” (58).
- 4 See Kadir’s book for an analysis of each of these terms in Fuentes’ work. Kadir, however, does not interrogate the subtle differences between them nor does he develop arguments about *Aura*.
- 5 I take this term from Michael Fried’s extensive writing on this matter in French painting and contemporary photography. Fried’s work has been extended to a literary context by several scholars. See Walter Benn Michaels, Eugenio DiStefano y Emilio Sauri.
- 6 Scholars generally describe the Mexican Miracle as the legacy of Miguel Alemán’s policies of industrialization, liberalism and partnerships with foreign capital. This was accompanied by major demographic shifts (urbanization), repression of the independent labor movement, major architectural projects in the capital and increasing state participation in the market economy. See Fuentes’ own points of view in “Radiografía.” See also Genaro Pérez and Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat.

- 7 See Fuentes' description of Walpole's influence on his writing during this period in "Radiografía" (58). In the novel, we see the tension between the demand for Aura to emerge as a commodity and the difficulty of having her do so. Felipe attempts to replace thoughts of Aura, whom he describes as "lo otro, lo otro sin nombre, sin marca, sin consistencia racional" (50), with the common commodities that structured his daily bourgeois life: "contando los objetos del botiquín, los frascos y tubos murmuras los nombres ... [e] indicaciones de uso y contenido ... [y] marcas de fábrica ... [para] olvidar lo otro" (50).
- 8 It should also be noted that a number of scholars see in Consuelo's conjurings and Fuentes' narration an evocation of the indigenous past. See Frenk and García Gutiérrez article for a detailed analysis of the novel's references.

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