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**LITERATURE AND POPULAR CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA
THE *CRÓNICA* AS AN INTERMEDIATE URBAN FORM**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the department of
Sociology and Anthropology, University of Glasgow.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the contemporary significance of the urban *crónica*, a widespread genre of literary journalism in Latin America, in Mexico City (Mexico) and Guayaquil (Ecuador) as an intermediate genre between high and low culture. It is my opinion that sociological approximations to the modern cultural field, while appropriately accounting for the nature of the cultural divisions between literature and mass culture, have not provided a satisfactory account of the area of overlap that exists between the two and of the nature of the cultural practices that are situated within it. The *crónica*, a genre which in the last decades of the 20th century acquired a new social prominence as a record of everyday life in the city and as a place where marginalised and neglected social actors and practices could be represented, offers a privileged terrain in which these kinds of cultural relations can be explored. This thesis examines the contemporary significance of the *crónica* in the press of Mexico City and Guayaquil. It focuses on the relation to and representation of mass culture and social movements in the *crónica* as central thematic lines of the genre, and analyses the particular trajectories of two authors, Emiliano Pérez Cruz, from Mexico City, and Jorge Martillo, from Guayaquil. It also devotes particular attention to the analysis of cultural reception and the way specific *crónicas* are read and related to the everyday lives and experiences of readers, thus questioning generalised assumptions about legitimate taste which affirm its disconnection and distance from practical concerns and the strict separation between art and life.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the central lines of inquiry in the sociology of culture has been the theorisation of cultural divisions in capitalist society. The separation of the sphere of culture from that of politics and religion, to which it had been subordinated and which dictated the form and content of its products, and the creation of an autonomous field of cultural production has as its precondition an indirect dependence on the market. However, one of the central consequences of the autonomisation of the cultural sphere and of the commodification of culture is the divide between high and low culture, which structures the cultural field in its modern form. On the one hand, autonomous high art asserts the primacy of the cultural field's own autonomous instance of consecration and its distance from the world of economic relations; on the other hand, mass culture, the entertainment industry, is the form that cultural organisation according to the market principle takes. This 'great divide' has given origin to differentiated systems of production and of consumption of cultural goods, which Bourdieu has conceptualised in the notions of a restricted field, which is organised around literary and artistic prestige, and an expanded field, in which economic relations (commercial success) prevail. This division find an echo in the whole set of organised predispositions and responses that are mobilised in reception: cultural taste is similarly divided into legitimate taste and popular taste, which dictate a differentiated appreciation of cultural goods that is dependent on social class and educational capital.

However, from different perspectives, the degree of overlap between high and low culture has also been emphasised. On the one hand, borrowings, citations and influences are a recurrent practice in the history of both high art and mass culture. Thus, on the side of high art, some Modernist authors have recurrently sought sources of expression in low forms, such as Picasso in caricature as well as in African art. Mass culture is in turn often based on the appropriation and reformulation of the formal discoveries of high art, which thus become disseminated in the market as *kitsch*. On the other hand, the history of the high and low division is also one of perpetually changing margins and one in which formerly popular forms and genres, such as jazz or the thriller, can become canonised and incorporated into the corpus of legitimate culture.

In Latin America, specific historical developments and structural characteristics have influenced the social dynamics of the cultural field. The high/ low division has been reinforced by a further division between autochthonous, oral, popular cultures and Western, written, learned cultures. This has determined, on the one hand, the elitist character of legitimate culture and its limited wider social significance; on the other hand, it has characterised a long history of cultural dependency, in which literary and artistic movements were heavily influenced by Western models. It is not until the second half of the 20th century that an autonomous cultural field can be said to have existed in Latin America, with national networks for the production and distribution of cultural goods. With the spread of education, significant progressive enlargements of the sphere of legitimate culture have taken place, and members of a new radicalised intelligentsia from middle class origins, in an attempt to overcome cultural dependency and define Latin American cultural identities, have appealed to the popular cultural traditions of the continent and incorporated their forms as important elements in their narratives. At the same time, mass culture has penetrated throughout, disseminating images and practices to wide publics in which some popular and indigenous cultural traditions are reconfigured in new forms.

It is within the space of overlapping of cultural traditions underlined above that this study of the *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil must be situated. The *crónica* is a genre of literary journalism of special relevance in Latin America. Since its origins in the historiographical tradition as a chronological account of past events, it has been a vehicle through which the everyday history of its societies has been recorded and documented. Today, it occupies an important position in the newspapers as a space in which a wide variety of urban phenomena can be explored. *Crónicas* describe and interpret life in the city as well as its popular cultural traditions, documenting urban diversity and helping readers find their way in an increasingly fragmented and contradictory urban environment where many traditions coexist. *Crónicas* share the ephemeral and fragmentary character of the other news items that are published in the newspaper, but also confer a stylised look upon reality that goes beyond the transitory and circumstantial nature of the news. Written by intellectuals who often enjoy a recognised position in the field of restricted production, the *crónica* has been the vehicle through which they have been able to overcome the isolation of

the written word and its distance from the majority of the population that is characteristic of Latin American societies, and engage with large audiences.

In this context, the *crónica* must be considered as an intermediate genre, which is neither fully part of legitimate culture nor entirely belongs to the tradition of popular or mass culture. It occupies an in-between space, defining in this way an area of overlap of cultural traditions that goes far beyond mere borrowings and mutual influences, within which cultural producers and consumers move fluidly between the restricted and expanded fields, the high and low divide, permanently crossing cultural boundaries. A sociological study of the *crónica* will identify, by virtue of this intermediate nature of the genre, the main dynamics of this traditionally neglected space of overlap between cultural spheres.

In addition, the contemporary social relevance of the *crónica* is also related to one further aspect: the *crónica* is a product of, and expresses in its form, contemporary Latin American social and cultural reality, which is marked, on the one hand, by the articulation of new voices and practices from marginalised groups and, on the other, by a far-reaching process of hybridisation of cultural forms. In part influenced by North-American New Journalism, which questioned prevailing ideas about journalistic objectivity and introduced key literary techniques to news reporting, the *crónica* emerged in its contemporary form at the end of the 1960s as a privileged means through which the plurality and diversity of urban life could be narrated. Its focus on everyday life and ordinary events turned the *crónica* into a medium through which the voices of marginalised social actors could be expressed and the emergent democratic movements from below represented, offering testimonies of popular struggles narrated in the voices of their main participants. In addition, the *crónica* inventorised a whole series of neglected but very extensive popular cultural traditions, from song to television programmes, charting their significance in the urban context.

In Latin America, a fully constituted autonomous cultural field did not exist until the 1960s, with the enormous spread of the mass communications media and the linking of the majority of the population to national networks for the circulation of cultural goods. The *crónica*, as a genre of popular literature which incorporates mass cultural forms and language, speaking to a large audience of the immediate social and cultural realities that characterise urban life, expresses in its hybrid nature the kind of cultural combinations and contradictions which have marked this moment in Latin American culture.

In spite of its long history and its prominence in Latin American cultural life, very few critical studies on the *crónica* exist. There has been a limited number of publications on the *crónica* of the late 19th and early 20th centuries¹, focusing on figures such as Ruben Darío, José Martí, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and others, and on the significance of the genre in Latin American early modernity. A significant absence of critical attention towards the contemporary *crónica* contrasts with its flourishing during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and with the high number of publications of books of *crónica* especially during the last two decades, as well as the international prominence gained by some writers such as Carlos Monsiváis (México), Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá (Puerto Rico) and Pedro Lemebel (Chile). To this day, the significance of the *crónica* as an everyday urban genre, its presence and role in the press, and its reception by vast heterogeneous audiences remain uncharted territories.

This thesis offers a study of the contemporary *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil. Both cities possess a long standing tradition in *crónica* writing which goes back to colonial times, a tradition that has been preserved and renewed over time until the present day. In addition, in both cities the *crónica* has acquired in the last decades a special cultural significance as a means through which the nature of the city could be explored. In Mexico City, the *crónica* became a privileged medium through which people's struggles, starting with the student movement of 1968, could be documented and the diversity of forms of urban life represented, speaking to and attracting wide audiences that demanded newer, more democratic forms of news reporting. In Guayaquil, the *crónica* remained a relatively marginal genre but has been significant in providing a poetics of everyday life and in interpreting city life. In both cities, writers of *crónica* of high stature have appeared, and their work has been anthologised and collected in books, thus gaining a permanence beyond the transitory nature of the press.

This study deals with aspects related to the production, circulation and reception of *crónicas*, dedicating a special attention to the latter, an area that has been largely neglected in the sociology of culture. Most part of its empirical investigation is based on an extended period of fieldwork in Mexico City and Guayaquil, during which a selection of texts appearing in the cities' press was made and a number of interviews were conducted with both writers and readers of *crónicas*. In analysing

¹ Among the most significant of these are González (1983), Ramos (1989), Rotker (1992) and the critical anthology by Jiménez and de la Campa (1976).

reception, in addition to considering sociological factors of taste and habits of cultural consumption, special attention has been given to actual reading practices, to the way specific *crónicas* are read in concrete situations and their contents interpreted in relation to readers' experiences of the world.

The *crónica* exists both as a transitory item of the news on everyday reality and as a more permanent, literary account of city life, and it is only through a consideration of both forms that a complete picture of its cultural significance as an account of everyday history can be obtained. Thus, this investigation examines both the texts that appear daily in the cities' press as well as the *crónicas* which have acquired literary permanence in books and anthologies; the diversity of sketches and points of view on urban matters that fill the pages of the newspapers as well as the trajectories of established writers of *crónica*, who have produced a consistent vision of the cities they inhabit through time. It contains a general account of the forms and role of the *crónica* in two Latin American cities, but has also sought to dedicate a considerable amount of space to the discussion of particular texts, and to provide detailed readings of *crónicas* as well as accounts of the production of specific writers.

It has been asserted above that the *crónica* often records a marginal reality, bringing to the fore aspects of city life that have tended to be ignored and articulating discourses from disempowered social groups. This work discusses in detail accounts of life in a peripheral shanty town, as portrayed by Emiliano Pérez Cruz, and Jorge Martillo's interpretation of the marginal life and popular culture of Guayaquil. It also devotes some attention to the *crónica* as a report of emergent social movements in Mexico City and to its relationship with and representation of mass culture (especially in the work of Carlos Monsiváis). The *crónica* has also offered a space for the exploration of other forms of social marginality. Of special significance is the specific situation of women and the analysis of prevailing gender roles, which has been central in the work of important Mexican female authors such as Elena Poniatowska, Cristina Pacheco, Guadalupe Loaeza and Josefina Estrada, but which falls beyond the limited scope of this work².

This thesis has been concerned exclusively with the written *crónica*, thus excluding other forms that are also of cultural significance, in particular radio

² For a discussion of this dimension in the *crónicas* of Cristina Pacheco and Elena Poniatowska see Nadeau (1999) and Egan (1997). Shaw (1999) discusses the literary journalism of Guadalupe Loaeza and Cristina Pacheco, and that of Elena Poniatowska is explored in Jorgensen (1994) and Perilli (1996).

crónicas and the comic strip. The latter is especially important in the Mexican context and fulfils a role in discussing everyday reality and public events in the press that is not dissimilar to that of the *crónica*. In addition, only the more elaborate *crónica* as a form of literary journalism has been considered, thus excluding the *crónica roja* or crime story, a journalistic genre of enormous success in Latin America, which has recently started to be recuperated and anthologised³.

This thesis offers a sociological analysis of the *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil as an intermediate form of the contact zone between high and low culture, discussing both its production and reception, and focusing on specific narratives and their relationship to the social reality from which they emerge. Chapter 1 examines the sociological debate about high and low culture as well as the basic structure and characteristics of the modern cultural field. It discusses the historical development of the cultural field in Latin America and explores its specific nature. It also analyses contemporary theories of cultural hybridity, through which intermediate genres such as the *crónica* and their cultural and social contexts can be understood.

Chapter 2 centres on the *crónica* as a hybrid genre of the contact zone between high and low culture, offering a general definition of the genre as well as an historical overview of its main forms and an analysis of its contemporary significance in Mexico City and Guayaquil.

Chapter 3 illuminates the role and features of the *crónica* in the press of Mexico City and Guayaquil. It is based on a selection of the texts appearing in the most important media of the cities' press, discussing the kinds of texts published in relation to the vision of city life they offer. It also provides detailed readings of six texts which have been chosen to represent the types of *crónicas* that are currently being published in Mexico City and Guayaquil. These are also the texts upon which the reception analysis of focus groups is based.

Chapter 4 is the result of a series of interviews conducted with the most significant writers of *crónica* of Mexico City and Guayaquil. Through their views, it identifies central aspects relating to the production of *crónicas*, it discusses the authors' positions as writers and/ or journalists and their conceptions of the genre of the *crónica*.

³ Monsiváis included two crime stories as well as two comic strips in his anthology of the *crónica A ustedes les consta (You'd better believe it!, 1980)*. Recent anthologies of *nota roja* or crime story in

Chapters 5 and 6 follow the trajectories of two established writers of *crónica*. Chapter 5 explores the *crónicas* of Emiliano Pérez Cruz, which describe life in a shanty town at the periphery of Mexico City. Chapter 6 analyses the *crónicas* of Jorge Martillo, through which the author has produced an interpretation of the character of the city of Guayaquil and of its popular culture.

Chapters 7 and 8 are dedicated to the reception of *crónicas*. In chapter 7 some key theoretical perspectives regarding reception are presented and the relationship between *crónica* reading practices and general cultural consumption and literary taste is empirically analysed. This chapter is based on a questionnaire on habits of cultural consumption and *crónica* reading practices in Mexico City and on semi-structured interviews conducted among the readers of *crónica* who participated in the focus groups sessions that are analysed in chapter 8. Chapter 8 focuses exclusively on the way *crónicas* are read and how they are related to the everyday life and experiences of readers. It describes and analyses in detail the reading sessions that took place with selected focus groups in Mexico City and in Guayaquil. The texts read and discussed in these focus group sessions are the six *crónicas* analysed in chapter 3.

The English translations of quotations from *crónicas*, interviews and other secondary sources are mine, except for the six texts that are analysed in chapter 3, which have been translated by Mike Gonzalez (these *crónicas* and their translations have been included in Appendix 4).

Mexico include Arellano (1992), with an extensive introduction by Carlos Monsiváis, and García and Solís (1999).

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The terms popular, mass and high culture have been the object of continued theoretical interest, recently renewed in the wake of recent claims concerning the blurring or at least the reconfiguration of traditional cultural boundaries, and with the contemporary problematisation of the literary canon. Different perspectives on the nature and characteristics of these concepts and traditions have affected the way cultural forms are approached and how the cultural divide between high and low is conceived. On the other hand, in Latin America, specific structural factors have influenced the development of the cultural field and its present configuration. In addition, the coexistence of very different cultural traditions, including indigenous, black and rural cultures, which have subsisted with a relatively high degree of autonomy, have determined that cultural combinations, confrontations and struggles can take autochthonous, sometimes paradoxical forms. This chapter will focus on how cultural distinctions and specifically popular culture have been conceived. It will examine the processes that led to the constitution of an autonomous cultural field and follow its specific historical development in Latin America. It will also discuss in some detail theories of cultural heterogeneity, which have attempted to offer a way of conceptualising the diversity of Latin American culture.

1. Visions of popular and mass culture

“The history of popular culture is not simply an antiquarian collecting and cataloguing of nostalgia artifacts; it is the history of the social relations between the industries producing cheap commodities for mass entertainment and recreation, the symbolic forms and practices, both traditional and newly-invented, of working class communities, and the attempts by the dominant culture to police and reform the culture of the ‘lower classes’.”

Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents*

When discussing visions of popular and mass culture, one faces some initial conceptual ambiguities. Both terms have been used to describe the cultural relations,

practices and products that do not belong to and are excluded from high or legitimate culture. Notions of the popular and of popular culture tend to express a more positive view of those cultural artefacts that are not only consumed by the working classes, but that form an organic part of their traditions, of their world vision and of their way of life. Conceptions around the term of mass culture tend to reflect more a view of culture as determined from above. There is also a temporal dimension to be taken into account: while popular cultures have existed throughout history in various folk traditions – for example, in the carnival tradition in the Middle Ages –, mass culture is a relatively new phenomenon which signals the new organisation of culture under capitalism. As such, it has existed since the middle of the 19th century, when vast markets for cultural goods were created and their industrial production with a view to mass consumption by large sections of the population was established. It is this epoch, when a market for the production and circulation of cultural goods is established and the modern division between high or legitimate culture and low, mass or popular culture is delineated, to which the following visions of popular culture predominantly refer.

The most influential condemnation of mass culture, which determined all subsequent, more positive reappraisals of its role, is that of Adorno. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, coauthored with Max Horkheimer, a critique of the Enlightenment roots of what the authors called the ‘collapse of bourgeois civilisation’ was undertaken. In the book, a chapter was devoted to mass culture, baptised the ‘culture industry’, where its unequivocal denunciation as the transposition of art into the sphere of consumption was formulated. Following Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry provides its consumers with standardised products in which ready made effects predominate and are designed to evoke a predetermined response from the public. Cultural consumers are transformed into passive receptors and left with no alternative but to endlessly consume the ever-same degraded cultural products which can only offer a broken promise of happiness:

“The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises. The promissory note which... it draws on pleasure is endlessly prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be satisfied with the menu. In front of the appetite

stimulated by all those brilliant names and images there is finally set no more than a commendation of the depressing everyday world it sought to escape.” (1996: 139)

Cultural consumers, although reduced to passivity, are fully aware of the trick that mass culture carries out at their expense. In an increasingly authoritarian society where individuality is sacrificed to the dictates of the market and freedom is replaced by conformism and passive obedience, they have no alternative but to consume the products that the culture industry imposes upon them, even if they “see through them”. The culture industry plays in this development a significant role: it is the commodification of culture or the elimination of the separation between art and life, the absorption of art into the sphere of entertainment, which destroys art’s power to question society, to work in the interests of human freedom. Only aesthetic distance and the purposelessness of art guaranteed its subversive, critical role in capitalist society; with its elimination in a lucrative industry in which, as Adorno and Horkheimer remark, the movies become like life, the promise of art is abandoned.

However, art’s critical role, its capacity to transcend an oppressive social order, was bought at the expense of its elitist distance from the everyday world, expressing a paradox of which the culture industry is also a manifestation. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the cultural contradictions of capitalism that give origin to the culture industry and to the very separation between bourgeois art and mass culture are powerfully expressed:

“The purity of bourgeois art, which hypostasized itself as a world of freedom in contrast to what was happening in the material world, was from the beginning bought with the exclusion of the lower classes – with whose cause, the real universality, art keeps faith precisely by its freedom from the ends of the false universality. Serious art has been withheld from those for whom the hardship and oppression of life make a mockery of seriousness, and who must be glad if they can use time not spent at the production line just to keep going. Light art has been the shadow of autonomous art. It is the social bad conscience of serious art. The truth which the latter necessarily lacked because of its social premises gives the other the semblance of legitimacy. The division itself is the truth...” (1996: 135)

One of the main strengths of this view is the consideration of the dialectical interrelation between high and low culture, between autonomous art, which finds its highest expression in 20th century Modernism, and mass culture. Moreover, an

analysis of the culture industry becomes, viewed in this light, an exploration of the mechanisms and consequences of the commodification of cultural products. Commodification and its resulting cultural standardisation are not limited to the realm of popular culture, but are an integral part of the culture industry understood in its widest sense, which also comprises the commodified products of high art. Indeed, Adorno's fullest analysis of the processes of cultural standardisation is found in his earlier essay 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' (1938), where he discusses the constitutional changes of musical products that are a consequence of fetishisation, and its effects on musical reception. These changes affect both light music and its 'serious' counterpart, and their consequences are described by Adorno as follows:

"The delight in the moment and the gay façade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of that whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society." (2001: 32)

Moreover, it is the tradition of great music, the technique of late romanticism and especially of Wagner, that is a precursor of this process of disintegration of the whole into disconnected parts that impress themselves on the listeners through climaxes and repetitions (2001: 41). For Adorno, fetishism in music goes hand in hand with the regression of listening, in which receivers "listen atomistically and dissociate what they hear", and "fluctuate between comprehensive forgetting and sudden dives into recognition" (2001: 46). Regressive listening is listening at an infantile stage, a capitulation of the individual in the face of all the powerful forces of cultural production and advertising.

The rigid nature of Adorno's views on popular culture, which reduced cultural consumers to absolute passivity, has been attacked by many critics, who have often failed to realise that beyond a mere analysis of the character and role of mass culture, these views expressed the author's diagnosis of the age in which humanism came to an end. However, it is true that his perspective, which ultimately reflects Adorno's belief in the sole legitimacy of autonomous bourgeois art and in the mode of individual distanced contemplation that it prescribes for its reception, ruled out any

positive analysis of the content of popular cultural products and an understanding of what they actually offered to their consumers. Other authors, on the contrary, valued mass culture in a more positive light; indeed Adorno's critique of the disappearance of aesthetic distance was in part a response to Benjamin's vision of the revolutionary potential of the new means of technical reproduction like the cinema, which made possible a collective reception of cultural products by bringing them closer to the people, and at the same time, in Benjamin's terms, distracting them.

Further, the specific content of mass cultural products, the space for resistance to official culture they offer, and the cultural power embedded in them have been underlined by Gramsci and Bakhtin, and by their more recent followers. What follows is a summary examination of the main issues that these approaches have raised.

A common feature of all such positions is the attention they give to the particular forms that popular cultural products adopt and a conviction that only a close analysis of those forms can reveal the mechanisms through which these products gain allegiance. It is thus stated that the success of mass or popular cultural products can be explained because they fulfil particular needs or serve to feed specific illusions. Thus, Jameson has stressed that mass cultural products possess a utopian content. In this, he continues Bloch's exploration of utopian thought or, in his words, the thought about the not-yet-conscious, the not-yet-realised, which is present in any cultural form. For Bloch, the utopian anticipatory character of day dreams was materialised in art: art made visible that which is objectively possible, thus contributing to a widening of the social world (1977: 82). However, there existed also regressive night dreams in which the contradictions of the social world and of human desire were clothed in pre-logical images. Jameson views mass culture "not as empty distraction or 'mere' false consciousness, but rather as transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies which must then have some presence in the mass cultural text in order to be 'managed' or repressed" (1979: 140). This utopian content of cultural products is common to both high and low culture, though the way they are treated differs:

"Both modernism and mass culture entertain relations of repression with the fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies and fantasies of disaster, which are their raw material; only where modernism tends to handle this material by producing compensatory structures of various kinds, mass culture represses them by the

narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony.” (1979: 141)

Therefore, for Jameson, mass cultural products serve an ideological function and an utopian fantasy at the same time, and he aims to complement Adorno’s analysis of the former with an account of how the latter is represented, of how ‘social and political anxieties’ are expressed in the cultural text. It is Jameson’s belief that all cultural forms under capitalism are equally dissociated from group praxis, which prevents the production of authentic cultural products or of a truly political art, understood as “that living and authentic culture of which we have virtually lost the memory “ (1979: 140). But cultural products can offer compensatory images of this lost collectivity. Thus, as his analysis of *The Godfather* shows, the patriarchal and authoritarian family of the past offers in the film an image of social reintegration in an atomised society.

Gramsci focused, in the sketches on popular literature in his *Prison Notebooks*, on the popularity of the French serial novels of the middle of the 19th century in the Italy of the 1920s and 1930s, relating it to the absence of a national-popular literature:

“What is the meaning of the fact that the Italian people prefer to read foreign writers? It means that they *undergo* the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals, that they feel more closely related to foreign intellectuals than to ‘domestic’ ones, that there is no national intellectual and moral bloc, either hierarchical or, still less, egalitarian. The intellectuals do not come from the people, even if by accident some of them have origins among the people. They do not feel tied to them (...), they do not know and sense their needs, aspirations and feelings. In relation to the people, they are something detached, without foundation, a caste and not an articulation with organic functions of the people themselves.” (1985: 209)

The needs, aspirations and feelings of the people are what, according to Gramsci, popular culture responds to and is tied to. Indeed, that is why commercial literature must not be disregarded in the history of culture: “...it has enormous value... because the success of a work of commercial literature indicates (and it is often the only indication available) the ‘philosophy of the age’, that is, the mass of feelings and conceptions of the world predominant among the ‘silent’ majority.” (1985: 348). The serial novel expresses the “fantasizing of the common people” and is “a real way of day-dreaming” (1985: 349). In this sense, a popular cultural product can be analysed

as a 'popular encyclopedia' (1985: 351); it reveals the ideas and beliefs of vast social strata.

Further, for Gramsci there is no fundamental opposition between high and popular culture, and figures who, like Shakespeare, have been successful among the masses, show that "one can be a great artist and 'popular' at the same time" (1985: 365). On the other hand, some literary authors often borrow from the "degraded" forms of popular literature, and this "shows how certain cultural currents (moral interests and motives, sensibilities, ideologies, etc.) can have a double expression: the merely mechanical one of a sensational intrigue (Sue and others) and a 'lyrical' one (Balzac, Dostoyevsky, and in part Victor Hugo)" (1985: 374-5).

Gramsci's followers have tended to emphasise the sphere for autonomy from and, by implication, resistance to official culture embedded in popular culture. Michael Denning has analysed the dime novel of North-American popular literature of the 19th century in this light. Thus, while he sees dime novels as a contested cultural terrain and asserts that they "can be understood neither as forms of deception, manipulation, and social control, nor as expressions of a genuine people's culture, opposing and resisting the dominant culture" (1998: 3), he also affirms that:

"Against both the capitalist reorganisation of the crafts and... 'middle-class' representations of the American social order, American workers attempted to maintain the vision of a republic of producers, of a cooperative commonwealth, and of the autonomous, independent mechanic. In doing so, they created a working class culture. This culture, often termed a 'producers', 'populist', or 'plebian' culture, was different from and antagonistic to that dominant culture (which was in the process of naming itself 'middle-class'), but it was neither an internally unified, anthropological whole, nor completely independent of the culture of the dominant classes." (1998: 57-8)

In this vision, Denning is not only indebted to Gramsci, but also to Bakhtin, who in his book on medieval popular culture asserted the view that, "in the Middle Ages folk humor existed and developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness" (1984: 71).

Folk humour and laughter formed part of a powerful popular cultural tradition that was centred around the carnival celebrations, and provided a space in which an

alternative practice and world vision to that of official culture prevailed and developed. Bakhtin has powerfully described the carnival tradition as inaugurating a “world turned upside down”, in which, through derisive laughter and a deep-rooted grotesque realism, the world order was mocked and everything was degraded to the material, bodily level of existence. Carnival was a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order”, in which all hierarchies, norms, privileges and prohibitions were suspended. Through its celebration of material existence and of renewal and change, its assertion of freedom, universality and collective unity, it affirmed the “people’s immortal, indestructible character”, and offered a utopian vision of a better future in which the oppression of the past was left behind. As such, carnival:

“...expresses the people’s hopes of a happier future, of a more just social and economic order, of a new truth. The gay aspect of the feast presented this happier future of a general material affluence, equality, and freedom... Thus, the medieval feast had, as it were, two faces of Janus. Its official, ecclesiastical face was turned to the past and sanctioned the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal.” (1984: 81)

This popular cultural tradition of festive laughter, Bakhtin points out, would invade in the Renaissance the realm of high culture with the literature of Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare, lending its liberating energies to the impulse of a new era.

Viewed in this light, popular culture appears as the site of resistance to the dominant culture, to which it is permanently related in a struggle that takes place in and over culture. In this light, Hall has pointed out that a history of popular culture can be written only from a consideration of its relationship with the institutions of the dominant culture. It is only from the exercise of cultural power, from the “...continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture...” (1981: 233) that the popular cultural tradition, as a site of resistance to that dominant culture, can be understood. Consequently, “there is no separate, autonomous, ‘authentic’ layer of

working-class culture to be found. Many of the most immediate forms of popular recreation... are saturated by popular imperialism." (1981: 229).

It is necessary to keep this contradictory character in mind and not to view popular culture solely as a form of resistance to legitimate culture, if the danger of unproblematically treating it as the latter's one sided opposite is to be avoided. Jameson's assertion of the need to engage in both ideological critique and the analysis of the utopian fantasies offered by mass culture, as well as Gramsci's insistence on the "particular illusions" that popular cultural products offer to their consumers, recognise this basic ambiguity.

2. The development of the cultural field: Europe and Latin America

Parallel to the emergence of widespread markets for cultural goods and the spread of culture for the masses in capitalist modernity is the phenomenon of the autonomisation of the cultural field, which took place around the middle of the 19th century, determining the character that the production and consumption of culture assumes in contemporary capitalist society and the very divide between high and low culture. In order to understand the latter, it is thus necessary to examine the specific social processes that led to the emergence of an autonomous cultural field.

In *The Rules of Art* (1992) Pierre Bourdieu traced the origins of the development of an autonomous literary field to the social space occupied by Baudelaire and Flaubert and to the "heroic times" of their struggles for independence. However, he also delineated two structural factors that determined and conditioned this process of autonomisation. On the one hand, an industrial expansion had given rise to a new stratum of the bourgeoisie, uncultured and with a preference for the novel form, which through salons and political institutions could exercise direct dominance and control over the cultural field. On the other hand, an unprecedented expansion of the market for cultural goods was mirrored in the development of the press, and went together with the emergence of a new generation of young writers from middle or working class origins and from the provinces, who came to constitute a new proletarian intelligentsia. They rejected official art and bourgeois values, invented realism, and adopted a bohemian lifestyle, coexisting with the representatives of an earlier bohemia of romantic dandies.

According to Bourdieu, the literary and artistic field was constituted in opposition to this bourgeois world of nouveaux riches without culture that attempted to control it. But in its cultivation of the ideology of *l'art pour l'art*, it also asserted its distance from politics and from the new strata of lower class intellectuals who, through realism, sought to continue the tradition of social art. Thus, it is from the positions of writers like Baudelaire and Flaubert, based on a double negation of bourgeois, commercial art and of social art, that the new canon of legitimacy for an autonomous cultural field emerged. Followers of the art for art's sake position defended a cult of form, and constituted a pure aesthetic based on its distance from any ethical link, mirrored in the indifference of the new figure of the modern artist, who is totally and exclusively dedicated to his specific task. Baudelaire's and Flaubert's systematic attitude of rupture with aesthetic and social conventions and, at the same time of total and absolute dedication to their art, which becomes a form of priesthood, are its founding instances.

It is from this symbolic revolution through which artists refuse to respond to the demands of the public that, according to Bourdieu, the negation of the market emerges. Thus, he has characterised the autonomous cultural field as an "economic world in reverse", which relates to an heteronomous (economic) principle, in the form of success, and to an autonomous principle of recognition and consecration, which takes the form of literary or artistic prestige. The greater autonomy becomes, the more that the heteronomous principle of the market is reversed: the field of restricted production, where producers create for other producers, possesses the greatest cultural prestige and is separate from the field of large-scale production, which is symbolically excluded and discredited.

Bourdieu's characterisation of the field of cultural production is very perceptive of its internal divisions between the restricted field and the field of large-scale production, between avant-garde art and bourgeois art, and of the different strategies of position-taking of its agents and the various instances and procedures of consecration. But Bourdieu has remained silent about other cultural combinations, which are minimised in his scheme of the field in which all cultural forms are allocated their particular, separate spaces according to degrees of economic success and symbolic consecration (in the 19th century French cultural field, bourgeois theatre figures on the side of success and poetry on the side of consecration, while the novel form occupies an intermediate position).

In particular, Bourdieu has chosen to ignore the position of cultural producers who are obliged to constantly jump between the restricted sphere and the sphere of large-scale production, acting in both of them simultaneously so that they can dedicate their life to their art and, at the same time, make a living. He has seen artistic revolutions as belonging to “those hybrid and unclassifiable beings whose aristocratic dispositions...underpin a profound ‘impatience with limits’, social but also aesthetic limits” (1996: 111), and has accordingly focused on the autonomy of individuals who, like Flaubert, possessed their own inherited means of subsistence. But this position is a minority one, and most writers need to obtain some kind of material benefit from their work. Nor are the members of what Bourdieu calls the proletarian intelligentsia, who usually sell their products for a living in the sphere of large scale production, obliged to abstain from intervening in the realm of pure art. In practice, the barrier between the spheres of restricted and large-scale production, so neatly separated by Bourdieu, is a permeable one which cultural producers can jump. Thus, writers without their own means of subsistence have often sought secondary occupations, especially in the area of journalism. They have traditionally enjoyed a privileged presence in magazines, cultural supplements and newspapers as reporters and commentators. The significance of this phenomenon is still more remarkable in Latin America where, due to the limitations of the book market, the possibility of making a living from writing literature has been extremely restricted¹.

On the other hand, the Latin American cultural field shows specific characteristics that are related to the cultural heterogeneity that resulted from colonialism and later historical developments and to particular historical conditions that have determined its constitution. The first dimension – cultural heterogeneity – and the most significant attempts to theorise it will be the focus of the next section, while the specific development of the cultural field in Latin America will be analysed below.

The importance of written culture in Latin America, the institutions of which formed a strong, isolated *lettered city* in the centre of the baroque city, its link with the administrative colonial power and its elitist character have been convincingly demonstrated by Rama:

¹ This is the position, as will be shown later on, of many of the poets who belonged to Latin America’s aestheticist literary current of *modernismo*, who enjoyed the most consecrated positions in the restricted field as writers of poetry while working at the same time as *cronistas* and reporters for the press.

"Through the order of signs, whose property is to be organized into laws, classifications, hierarchical, distributions, the *lettered city* articulated its relations with Power. It served it with laws, regulations, proclamations, decrees, propaganda and through the ideologization designed to sustain and legitimate it. It was obvious that the *lettered city* reinforced the majesty of Power, although it could also be said that Power governed the operations of the intellectuals, inspiring its principles of concentration, elitism and hierarchicalization. Above all, it inspired its distance from the rest of society. It was the distance between the rigid written word and the fluid spoken word that made the *lettered city* a *written city* limited to a small minority." (1984: 41)

Independence did not challenge the status of the *lettered city*, which merely came to service the new *caudillos* retaining its traditional power. It is the processes of cultural modernisation, which Rama situates at the end of the 19th century, starting around 1870, that would come to change this state of affairs. The new laws of common education and the progressive transformation of the university widened the lettered circuits, incorporating a new social sector into the written word. Education, journalism and diplomacy appeared as new professional activities for intellectuals, in addition to the traditional activities in administration, public institutions and politics, and the written word became a means of upward social mobility. Rama sees in these processes the timid appearance of a certain degree of autonomy, of less direct dependence on the political power, which intellectuals could exercise in the newspapers or in teaching activities. The press is, according to Rama, the greatest of the widening instances of the *lettered city*, and the direct beneficiary of the laws of common education at the beginning of the 20th century. Accordingly, the end of the 19th century saw the appearance and spread of the important newspapers, such as *La Prensa* (1869) and *La Nación* (1870) in Argentina, and *El Imparcial* (1896) in Mexico.

According to Rama, a new public emerged around the turn of the century, first in the theatre, which from 1890 took a popular direction, and in dance music, which stylised material with origins in the popular and often rural traditions, the national *feuilleton* and popular novels and around the newly created publishing houses. The 1920s saw a further boom in the production and circulation of magazines, weeklies and popular collections of literature. This provided the first autonomous channel of

communication between a still very reduced number of cultural producers and their consumers.

In his work on the Argentinean cultural field, which is the first to develop significantly on the continent and stands in a marked opposition to most other countries, Jorge B. Rivera has similarly pointed out how in the last two decades of the 19th century the figure of the professional writer started to take form, while a new culture industry with a defined public was constituted. Thus, after 1880 a naturalistic novel (150 titles appeared between 1889 and 1899) was consumed by new readers recruited from the urban middle classes, who were also the main consumers of the literary journals and magazines that appeared after 1890 (the most important of which was *Caras y Caretas*, created in 1898, which combined new forms including caricature and comics, *crónicas*, current affairs, short stories and poems, sports information, entertainment and publicity). However, editions paid for by their own authors were in those days the prevalent form of publishing in a still very limited literary market:

“Publishing posed no problems for men with a personal fortune, like Angel de Estrada or Obligado himself, or for those financed by wealthy patrons, like Dario’s *Los raros* and *Prosas Profanas*, or some improvised entrepreneurs who recognized the existence of a devoted, tangible public, demonstrated in the notable success of the novels of Eduardo Gutiérrez and some naturalist novels of the time. The majority of writers, in general terms, most frequently used the context of press and magazines, and only more occasionally of publication with all the sacrifices and delays that that involved.” (1998: 28)

The figure of the professional writer was consolidated in the period from 1900 to 1930, with the establishment of popular and classical collections of literature like ‘Biblioteca de la Nación’ (initiated in 1901) and ‘Biblioteca Argentina’ (created in 1915), of new popular magazines, of cultural magazines and of illustrated weekly supplements to the newspapers, and the boom of the *feuilleton* (see Rivera, 1998: 37 for a classification of the production of serial literature in Argentina) and other forms of popular literature. Thus, by the first decades of the 20th century, there existed a dichotomy between what Rivera calls the writer-inheritor, who possessed a personal fortune and produced an aestheticising discourse for a restricted public, and the

'professional' writer. Horacio Quiroga is a significant representative of the latter group:

"Quiroga would be the vigorous narrator, accessible and readable, who risked the mass publication runs of the magazines and ultimately the fierce judgment of readers, the thousands of anonymous beings (no longer 'twin souls') who read *Caras y caretas*, *Fray Mocho*, *Papel y Tinta*, *El cuento ilustrado*, *La novela semanal*, *P.B.T.*, *El Hogar*, etc." (1998: 45)

Like Quiroga, a whole range of writers and artists explored the new possibilities opened by the mass media. Rivera enumerates the following types: writers of drama, writers of short stories for magazines, illustrators, *cronistas* of social customs, poets and tango musicians.

But this transformation was a very partial one, and even around the 1920s Latin America did not possess any of the basic features that were the preconditions for the full emergence of an autonomous field of cultural production. García Canclini has identified the inherent social contradictions which determined the constitution of the modern cultural field in Latin America as follows:

"The expansion of education brought with it the creation of an artistic and literary market, which made possible the professionalization of some artists and writers. The struggles of the liberals of the late 19th century and the positivists of the early 20th century, which culminated in the University Reform of 1918, beginning in Argentina and then spreading to other countries, produced a secular, democratic university earlier than in many European societies. But the constitution of these autonomous fields of science and the humanities came face to face with the illiteracy of half the population and with pre-modern economic structures and political practices." (1990: 72)

The existing gulf between a tiny intellectual elite that operated within the tradition of Western culture, and the masses had not been bridged. On the one hand, high illiteracy rates, which were well over 50% in most countries (see statistical tables in Appendix 1) and the predominance of an oral culture amongst the majority of the population imposed a limit on the circulation of printed matter. On the other, the Westernised intellectual elite ignored the richness of popular cultures, denied their legitimacy, and sought to impose their civilising rule among them. Thus, Ortiz has shown how for Brazilian intellectuals popular cultural forms, and especially those

associated with black culture, "represented the dark side of society, to be resisted in the name of a modernity that did not yet exist" (2000: 130). Accordingly, the 1890 penal code criminalised the art of healing, magic and shamanism, popular beliefs were seen as a factor in mental illness, Afro-Brazilian cults were repressed, and carnival celebrations restricted.

From the 1930s, a more autonomous system of cultural production started to be organised in which for the first time middle class sectors constituted a cultural market in their own right, with an increased circulation of cultural goods in urban centres. Political and ideological factors played in this an important role, as a new sector of the intelligentsia from middle class origins that had emerged from the process of modernisation had recently come to the fore in what Rama has called the era of revolutions, which was inaugurated in 1911 with the Mexican revolution. The intellectuals who belonged to this new generation were populist and nationalist, and the new formula of popular education and nationalism became synonymous, in this period, with the concept of Latin American democracy (Rama, 1984: 142), while a major modification of the *lettered city* took place:

"...from the small circle of intellectuals who, with the support of those in power designed government policies and cultural policies in its own image, which in the end was the image of Power, we move to a mixed, transitional stage in which those intellectuals join with the members of an elite coming from a middle sector who, although they bring with them an enlightened world view, are also strongly affected by democratic currents. At times they support, from an aristocratic perspective, the rights of the people (Lugones for example), so that instead of supporting the policies of Power, they aspire to persuading the Power to accept and put into effect social and cultural policies that embrace the new social forces. This will bring us finally to the action of collective democratic instruments (like the new political parties) who implement from positions of power a more democratic, populist and nationalist culture..." (Rama, 1984: 154)

In Mexico, a new era of state patronage of the arts was opened when in 1921 José Vasconcelos entered the Ministry of Education and implemented a nationalist cultural programme. In Peru, the 1920s saw the emergence of the *indigenista* movement, which offered the first recognition of and debate on the 'Indian question'. In the visual arts, the Mexican muralists offered an integrative vision of Indian culture and imagery, while in literature the regionalist novel, which reinterpreted forgotten

rural and indigenous traditions, found a new readership that had not existed for the *modernistas*.

Mestizaje, which proclaimed the integration of the country's heterogeneous cultures in a unitary national culture, but also supposed their loss of autonomy and ultimately their disappearance, became the cultural goal of populist governments (see section 3 below for a fuller analysis of the concept). The mixing of races, which in Vasconcelos' view gave origin to a new powerful cosmic race, was generally accepted, in contrast to earlier attempts at whitening the race through the promotion of European immigration, as a distinctive feature of national identity.

Through populism, which has been described as Latin America's most distinctive creation in the 20th century, the 'masses' were for the first time incorporated into the social and cultural life of the nation (Martín Barbero, 1994: 87). It is in this context that a new recognition and acceptance of popular cultures took place, while efforts were undertaken to resemanticise them and to incorporate them into the national culture, which was also redefined in a more integrative light. Thus, as Ortiz has shown, the urban-industrial society which emerged after the Revolution of 1930 in Brazil succeeded in integrating some sectors which had previously been marginalised, and carnival, football and *umbanda* ceased to be cultural expressions linked to defined social groups and became integrated into the context of society as a whole. For example, this author examines how a form like samba was musically reworked and adapted for an urban public:

"The music which sung of *malandragem* was now seen as an incentive to indolence and laziness, precisely at the time when the Estado Novo was promoting a work ethic compatible with the process of industrialisation occurring in Brazil. Hence the direct intervention of the State in censoring songs and replacing them with others that extolled the virtues of work and toil. There was therefore an external and internal selection (made by composers), distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' in popular forms of expression. However, in spite of this disciplining movement (in Foucauldian terms), or rather, on account of it, a set of practices previously excluded from society acquired a positive connotation." (2000: 133)

The state, as in Mexico, played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of popular cultural forms, and samba, football and carnival were promoted to new symbols of Brazilianness.

In this process of cultural unification and of communication between the *caudillos* and the masses, the mass media -- cinema in some countries and especially radio -- played a pivotal role, producing an everyday lived experience of the nation (Martín Barbero, 1994: 88). Radio had been introduced in the 1920s in most Latin American countries. According to Fox, in the face of an extremely limited press which was consumed by a relatively small, elite audience (with the exception of Argentina), radio must be considered the first truly mass medium of the continent:

“Whereas Argentina, for example, had a flourishing newspaper and publishing industry in 1930, Venezuela had only four capital-city newspapers: *La Religión* (1890), *El Universal* (1909), *El Heraldo* (1922), *La Esfera* (1927). As late as 1935, 90 per cent of the Venezuelan population was illiterate, a situation shared by other, poorer countries of Central and South America. By the Second World War, far less than half of the inhabitants of most Latin American countries could read. Illiteracy slowed the spread of books, newspapers and magazines, just as the lack of electricity and dispersed rural populations in most countries until well after the war slowed the growth of mass audiences for films.” (Fox, 1995: 521)

By the end of the 1930s amateur stations had been replaced by commercial radio networks and radio was well established in most important cities of Latin America. From its beginnings, radio broadcast popular music, recitation, football matches and, from 1931, radio theatre, its main form par excellence (Martín Barbero, 1997: 183). It expanded rapidly and became, at the end of the 1930s, the main vehicle for the growth of the popular music industry, while radio stations were also beginning to compete seriously with newspapers as news and advertising media (Fox, 1995: 527-8). During the 1940s and 1950s there was an increasing penetration of foreign capital and foreign recorded music and radio programmes, especially from the U.S. On the other hand, governments started to make use of the medium to maintain power and to spread nationalist and populist values: the most important cases are Getulio Vargas (1937-1945) in Brazil and Perón in mid 1940s Argentina.

This period also saw the establishment of a popular mass press, with the appearance and consolidation of a new style of journalism or yellow press. *Crítica* (1913) was the pioneer in Argentina, breaking with the “serious” tone of the press and introducing more entertaining, freer forms of communication with its public. *Los Tiempos* (1922) initiated the new journalism in Chile, which *Las Noticias Gráficas*

(1944) and *Clarín* (1954) would continue and consolidate. In all of these newspapers, there is a turn towards the sensationalism of the crime story or *crónica roja*, and an approximation to the forms of popular speech (Barbero, 1997: 189-193; Rivera, 1998: 74-78).

The period from 1930 to 1955 is characterised by Rivera, with regard to the Argentinean cultural field, as that of boom in the culture industry, which in this country met the huge international success of its publishing industry, after the collapse of the Spanish publishing industry during the Spanish Civil War. Thus, especially from 1940, Argentinean book production started to dominate not only the internal market in Argentina, but also the previously inaccessible Spanish market, and the newly appearing markets of Mexico City, Santiago, Lima, Bogota, Havana, Montevideo, Rio, Caracas, etc. Argentinean cinema, comic and informative magazines, and musical production associated with the tango underwent a similar development. This growth would continue until the 1950s, with a progressive decline of both cinema and the publishing industry, which was accelerated by the recuperation of the Spanish publishing industry and the growth of Mexican publishing (1998: 95-96). This period also saw the expansion of the radio network which, together with cinema, offered new opportunities and means of expression to writers. However, as Rivera remarks, in spite of this extraordinary development of the market, of the favourable reception that national authors enjoyed, and of state support in the form of prizes and subsidies, at the end of the 1940s Argentinean writers still had difficulties in finding a publisher, and it was practically impossible to find authors who could live exclusively from their books.

Nevertheless, in spite of the growth of the Argentinean culture industry, which was at that time the most advanced in Latin America, the spread of a market for cultural goods remained largely limited in most Latin American countries. Thus, Ortiz observes that:

“In the Brazil of the 1930s and 1940s there was no ‘mass’ culture which could compete with the legitimacy of traditional popular culture. At this time, in spite of the advent of radio and the press, one still cannot speak of the presence of ‘culture industries’, and there was no system for the nation-wide dissemination of cultural goods.” (2000: 134)

The predominance of traditional culture, as Brunner has noted, is determined by the economic backwardness and the limited character of audiences that characterised the region: by 1950 61% of Latin America's population was rural and 50% illiterate, 57% had primary education, 7% secondary education, and there were only 250.000 students, or the equivalent of less than 2% of that age group, in higher education (1994: 56-7).

It is not until the second half of the 20th century that a firm process of socio-economic modernisation occurred, which Canclini relates to the following structural changes that took place between 1950 and 1970: firstly, a sustained and diversified economic development; secondly, the consolidation and expansion of the urban growth that had been initiated in the 1940s; thirdly, the expansion of the market for cultural goods, partly due to a higher urban concentration, but especially as a consequence of the rapid growth of schooling at all levels and the reduction of illiteracy to 10 to 15% in most countries; fourthly, the introduction of new communications technologies, especially television; and fifthly, radical political movements (1990: 81-82).

In this period, the first real expansion in the sphere of high culture occurred and a market for literature and art was consolidated. Several capitals saw the creation of their first museums of modern art (Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 1948, Buenos Aires in 1956, Bogota in 1962 and Mexico City in 1964) and the appearance of numerous art galleries and a private art market (García Canclini, 1990: 82-83). This, together with the growth of secondary and higher education, contributed to the professionalisation of cultural production, and writers and artists who could not live from their works, who were still the majority, found employment in education and journalism, where the autonomy of their occupation was recognised.

In the realm of literature, this is the period in which what has come to be known as the boom of Latin American literature, took place. For Rama, who situates the boom roughly between 1964 and 1972, this notion designates the rich literary production of the continent and the incorporation of publicity and market techniques into the publishing industry. The boom consolidated the cultural publishing houses that had emerged especially since the 1940s, and further expanded the market to sectors that had never been previously touched by the book, a fact which moves Rama to announce that "we have passed from a market of literary consumption for the elites to one for the masses" (1985: 297). He also speaks, in this context, of the

professionalisation of the writer, and of the concomitant substitution of the writer-artist for the writer-intellectual, who is no longer limited to his or her role as a literary creator, but who develops an articulate intellectual discourse on the life of the times, thus renovating the traditional role of the 'man of letters' in a modern context.

In the Argentinean publishing industry, the impact of the boom of Latin American literature was translated into a new period of growth especially in the years 1962-1968 (Rivera 1998: 134). The Argentinean local market now assumed vital importance and its formidable expansion was the motor of this new growth, after the loss of external markets. During this period, a new orientation towards national authors predominated, and new authors were discovered while older ones, like Leopoldo Marechal, Julio Cortázar and Jorge Luis Borges, who had previously enjoyed a very limited readership, were 'rediscovered'. The appearance of a new, much wider public for literature is shown in the histories of the editions of these rediscovered books. Thus, for example, the first edition in 1951 of Julio Cortázar's *Bestiario* [*Bestiary*], took over 10 years to sell its 3,000 print run, but sold in 1964 an equal amount of its second edition in less than a year, reached a third and a fourth edition in 1965, and a year later sold out in a few months the 5,000 copies of its fifth edition, to which a sixth and a seventh were added in 1967 and 1968 respectively (Rivera, 1998: 139).

To explain this expansion both Rama and Rivera have pointed to the appearance of a new public for literature, which was generated by a demographic increase, urban growth, industrialisation and the extension of primary and secondary education, with a recent relative broadening of the university. An important sector of this public was young (between 20 and 30 years of age) and had middle class origins, while the spread of radical political movements such as *castrismo* also played a significant role. In addition, both authors underline the intensification of the links between writers and the mass media, which mediated between authors and their public: the mass media played a crucial role in the expansion of the literary market familiarising readers and potential readers with writers, who became the centre of attention of non-specialist magazines, weeklies and supplements, and of radio and television interviews.

However, the truly revolutionary expansion of the cultural market occurred through the unprecedented growth of mass culture, especially television, from the 1960s onwards. Commercial television developed rapidly in countries like Mexico,

where the state supported the private television industry with little regulation and where by 1959 there existed 20 television channels throughout the country which imported equipment and programmes from the U.S. (Fox, 1995: 534-5). The situation was originally different in countries like Brazil, where television grew slowly and was considered an urban-based, elite and economically weak medium under considerable foreign influence, and Colombia, where it remained until 1963 publicly owned under the military dictatorship of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (Fox, 1995: 534, 537). However, a move towards the extension of wide commercial TV networks and the formation of powerful media systems, the increased role of television at all social levels and a growth of autonomous production of television entertainment (with the Latin American soap operas or *telenovelas* as the main protagonist) and news is perceptible in the region especially from the 1960s.

Ortiz has signalled 1964 as the year that marks the beginning of the reorganisation of the cultural scene in Brazil. After the military coup, a process of authoritarian modernisation was started and the arrival of a 'second industrial revolution' led to a major expansion in the production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods, which culminated in the consolidation of great media conglomerates like TV Globo. He illustrates the dimensions of the change with an account of the spread of television: until the mid 1960s television had a regional character and the low purchasing power of the majority of the population, together with the high price of sets, limited reception to a relatively small group of people. The situation changed radically in the 1960s, in part because of the active role of the State in promoting telecommunications policy. In 1970 television was already reaching 56% of the population; by the 1980s 16 million sets reached 73% of homes, and the habit of watching television had spread to all social classes (Ortiz, 2000: 134-36).

Similar developments occurred in other Latin American countries, and television became, by the 1980s, a universal medium throughout the region. Thus, in Venezuela, by 1963 one quarter, and in 1968 almost a half of all homes had a television set (Fox, 1995: 538). In Chile, according to Brunner and Catalán, nearly 95% of homes possessed a television set by 1983 (1987:19), and in Mexico 87.1% of homes had a colour television set in 1993 (González and Chávez, 1996: 100) (see also appendix 1, table 6, for statistics on television broadcasting receivers).

The major consequence of this particular development of the cultural field in Latin America is that the majority of the population became integrated in popular

urban culture not through the written word as in Europe, where the massive spread of the press and popular literature had occurred in the middle of the 19th century, but through the new communications technologies of the 20th century, and especially television. Rowe and Schelling have expressed this fact as follows:

“...the major move towards homogenization – that is, the disappearance of cultural divisions – has occurred not, as in Europe, through literacy, schooling and the press, but through the culture industry and the electronic media, and predominantly during the past three decades... As well as deterritorializing symbols and memory – that is, detaching them from a particular location in space and time – the mass media have brought about a process of hybridization whereby cultural signs flow across social, ethnic and nation-state boundaries, and the notion of high culture as a separate sphere becomes impossible.” (1991: 196)

The written word still plays a relatively minor role in most Latin American countries, as can be seen from the circulation figures of its most important newspapers, which rarely exceed 100,000 copies, and from the print run of books, which is usually below 3,000 and most often just 1,000. At the same time, new forms of continuity are established between traditional oral cultures and the new mass media². The notion of hybridisation expresses the fluid relationship between the heterogeneous cultures that form part of Latin American societies. The next section is dedicated to attempts at theorising this relationship.

3. Approaches to cultural heterogeneity

“In a continent where 70% of the population lives in cities, largely formed by recent migrants who still maintain peasant beliefs and habits, and where, conversely, capitalist economic relations, electronic culture and sometimes tourism are everyday presences for those who still live in rural areas, the traditional and the modern can no longer be conceived as independent entities. If both hegemonic cultures and popular cultures are now *hybrid cultures*, in that sense we cannot deny that we live in a postmodern epoch, a time of bricolage where diverse epochs and cultures that were previously distant intersect. The task of the researcher cannot be to choose between tradition and modernity.

² Jesús Martín Barbero has stressed the importance of the combination of different cultural traditions, which he has conceptualised as ‘mediations’, and examined some of these continuities between various popular cultural forms and new mass media genres (1997).

Rather it is to understand why we in Latin America are this mixture of heterogeneous memories and truncated innovations.”

Néstor García Canclini, ‘Los estudios culturales de los 80 a los 90’

Jean Franco has examined arguments that assert a “crisis of the popular” in Latin American cultural theory, and makes the following observation:

““The popular” was formerly an index of Latin American difference, a difference that was measured by *distance* from the metropolis by the class who were closest to the metropolis and as the foundation for nationhood (the independent *gaucho*, the “authentic” rural population). But, equally, popular culture served as an index of “underdevelopment” (it was pre-Enlightenment, preliterate) – of tradition as opposed to progress, backwardness as opposed to modernity – “malandragement” [trickery], “choteo” [mockery], “relajo” [lack of discipline] as opposed to a work ethic.” (1999: 209)

This clearly delineated notion of the popular in the Latin American context – which reveals a dimension that is absent from the European context in that the popular has also been conceived as an index of comparison and measurement of indigenous traditions with and against the Western world – has recently been profoundly questioned and reformulated by notions of hybridity, through which the cultural practices that occupy a space of “in-betweenness” are emphasised. To understand the specific cultural dynamics of Latin American societies and the way they affect traditional cultural concepts and relationships such as that between high and low, it is necessary to turn to conceptualisations of cultural heterogeneity.

Cultural heterogeneity refers not simply to the fact that there exist a variety of different cultural traditions, but rather to a cultural dynamics that is determined by an “especially eccentric, schizoid mode of production and participation of these cultures in the international market” (Martín Barbero, 1994: 107), by a “sort of regional postmodernism *avant la lettre* which is nevertheless fully constitutive of our modernity” and that results in “segmented and differential participation in an international market of messages that “penetrates” the local cultural framework from all sides and in unexpected ways” (Brunner, 1992: 103, 104). This implies that attempts at describing the cultural dynamics of the continent, rather than merely engaging with cultural diversity, have also had to produce conceptualisations of what

has been termed peripheral modernity (Sarlo, 1988; Brunner, 1992) or heterogeneous modernity (Martín Barbero, 1994).

Attempts at theorising cultural heterogeneity aim to offer the tools for dealing with its forms irrespective of specific cultural differences, although they will invariably be influenced by the kind of concrete cultural formations they depart from. Thus, there is a clear division, which will be analysed in detail below, between theories that stress a high degree of articulation of different cultural traditions (with concepts like hybridity, syncretism and *transculturation*), and theories that privilege the degree of polarisation between cultures (which thus tend to speak more in terms of the dominant and the dominated traditions, or use the Gramscian terms of the hegemonic and the subaltern, and point to the phenomenon of diglossia and the existence of heterogeneous and alternative literatures). Despite their claims to universality, in the Latin American context the first type of theories will apply more to situations where a high degree of mixture and of intermediate cultures exist, i.e. in zones where a strong *mestizo* culture developed (Mexico, Brazil), while the second set of theories describes more directly a situation of confrontation between highly heterogeneous cultures, like that which occurs in the Andean region (Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia).

The need to conceptualise cultural heterogeneity could not emerge before a certain degree of cultural contact between different cultural formations had been acknowledged. In colonial times, despite the growing numbers of *mestizos*, individuals of mixed blood, the social and cultural barriers within a divided society remained firm. This was also the case at the beginning of Independence in the early 19th century in most countries, where the dominant class of colonial rulers was simply replaced by a creole elite and the social structures were not altered significantly. García Canclini situates the emergence of a concern for cultural contact during the expansion of capitalism at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th (1982). Two concepts of cultural contact between heterogeneous traditions made then their early appearance in Latin America: *mestizaje* and *acculturation*. *Mestizaje* was applied to the culture of that growing social group which was neither white nor Indian, the *mestizo*, that had been formed in colonial society as the outcome of the mixture between the white coloniser and the Indian colonised, the meaning of which was here reformulated to embody the values of the newly independent nations. Thus, the mixing of races and cultures became, in the 1920s and 1930s, the symbol of

a new, *mestizo* culture, as in revolutionary Mexico or in Gilberto Freyre's Brazil. *Acculturation* is a term that stems from the late 19th century anthropological debate about the destruction of native American cultures in their contact with the dominant culture. These early approaches, with their respective different stresses on mixture and dominance, lie at the root of contemporary approaches to cultural heterogeneity, to which we now turn.

From *mestizaje* to cultural hybridity

The heavy ideological weight of the term *mestizaje*, which promoted the positive view of a new mixed culture of the Latin American independent nations, has found a contemporary correlate in the concept of hybridity, which, through postcolonial theory and the revaluation of *differance*, has given a political inflection to postmodernism. Furthermore, hybridity can be considered a modern, more elaborated outcome of the principles that gave origin to the notion of *mestizaje*. Both terms derive from the language of racial discourse, and are in this way linked to previous notions of contamination, failure or regression, which have been retrospectively positively revalued. As Papastergiadis points out, hybridity has shadowed every organic theory of identity, serving primarily as a metaphor for the negative consequences of the transgression of racial boundaries (1995: 9-10).

The difference between *mestizaje* and hybridity is found in the manner in which these terms have expressed this common or mixed cultural space. *Mestizaje* came to signify a happy union of heterogeneous elements, and although it allowed a certain degree of mobility and agency, it eliminated any notions of domination. In many cases, the aim of the *mestizo* nation, understood as the result of a *fusion* of cultures and not of their coexistence, came to be equated in practice with the aims of the dominant class. It actively promoted, especially through education, the assimilation of indigenous communities and their integration into the national culture, implying the disappearance of their distinctive linguistic and cultural traits³. Hybridity, while maintaining the positive view of a mixed culture, attempts to offer a corrective for the rigidity which came to be the mark of *mestizaje*: it is a more mobile

³ Thus, for example, Stavenhagen has shown how the post-revolutionary Mexican state has consistently promoted monolingual primary education exclusively in Spanish, in spite of growing demands from the indigenous communities for bicultural education (1984: 307-8).

concept (especially in its postcolonial derivations where it has become synonymous with the non-fixity of cultural identity) and it allows a greater space for agency, i.e. for the active refashioning of cultural practices by particular social actors.

The concept of hybridity has underpinned the work of two authors who, coming from very different theoretical backgrounds, have greatly influenced the terms in which cultural heterogeneity has been thought of: Homi K. Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini.

For Bhabha, the recognition of culture's hybridity is one aspect of the disappearance of grand narratives in a wider, postmodern context. Thus, a mobile and highly flexible "in-between space", which is always in a state of flux and which is produced in the articulation of cultural differences, replaces older narratives of pure subjectivities. Moreover, this 'contact zone' becomes, in Bhabha's view, the privileged area of culture: "... it is the 'inter'-the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture." (1994:38-9). Processes of translation and negotiation become paramount in a conception of culture that stresses the active side in the subjective construction of meanings, and thus the perpetual movement of cultural referents.

Hybridity functions, in Bhabha's theory, on different planes. While it is, on the one hand, the term that describes the articulation of cultural difference, in the sense we have been using it in this context, it also becomes, on the other hand, the means to effect a key move in theory itself, which becomes both an instrument of hybridisation (through translation and negotiation of various cultural instances) and is itself hybridised. In Bhabha's own words, theory becomes "the negotiation of contradictory instances that open up hybrid sites" or:

"The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave..., but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very form of our recognition of the moment of politics." (1994: 25).

It might seem difficult to see the applicability of the concept understood in these terms, which determine a mostly discursive notion of hybridity and also a highly

theoretical one. Bhabha himself points at a possible use in his study of hybridity as the erosion of the master's language using the notion of mimicry, or the ironical compromise at which the civilising mission of the West arrives in the actual colonial context. Thus, mimicry appears both as a *resemblance* and as a *menace*, through which the notion of the Other as 'almost the same but not quite' effects a disruption of colonial discourse. Bhabha illustrates this with Charles Grant's 'Observations on the state of society among the Asiatic subjects of Great Britain' (1792), in which the author argues for a '*partial*' diffusion of Christianity among the Indians, thus mocking his moral project (1994: 86-7). Similarly, the phenomenon of mimicry can also be followed in colonial revalorisations of the social and cultural role of Caliban, which from Rodó's *Ariel* to Fernández Retamar's *Calibán* abound in Latin American cultural thought. Bhabha's notion of mimicry, in accordance with other postmodern accounts of the social world, breaks with former views about *dependent* colonial relations (Fanon) in that it asserts that behind their mask there is no real face, no identity or presence. What becomes here paramount is the *menace* that the double vision of mimicry contains for colonial discourse, the authority of which it disrupts through the disclosure of its profound ambivalence.

A more sociological conception of cultural hybridity is found in García Canclini's work, where the ways in which cultural hybridity manifests itself at the level of cultural structures and institutions in Latin American societies has empirically been analysed. Thus, the aim of *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo* [*Popular Cultures in Capitalism*, 1982] is to show how capitalism has expanded in Latin America not through the elimination of traditional popular cultures, but through their appropriation and restructuration. In the book, García Canclini examines the changing meanings of crafts and *fiestas* in Mexican society, elements of traditions whose hybrid character is determined by the combination of their ethnic or historical aspects (they stem from pre-Columbian societies) and of their economic aspects (their insertion in a capitalist economy).

García Canclini highly emphasizes the need, on the one hand, to consider cultural objects as embedded in wider practices and, on the other, to approach from different perspectives (both economic and anthropological) the function and meaning of cultural products. In this way, for example, the author shows how the social and cultural meaning of crafts has been reformulated through the hegemonic culture in the context of the creation of a capitalist market for their circulation. On the one hand, a

fragmentation of practices has taken place. From objects for self consumption, which were produced and consumed within an indigenous community for practical and ritual purposes, crafts have become objects which are produced by the communities in their subsistence economies, are then sold in an urban market, and are finally consumed by tourists according to their own cultural and aesthetic values. On the other hand, crafts acquire new meanings in a process which unifies them as "the typical" through the abolition of differences (1982: 90-96). Despite the material continuity of the object, the social and cultural practices in which it is embedded have changed dramatically. In this context, the question the author poses is: "Are they still crafts?"

García Canclini has used the term *multitemporal heterogeneity* to refer to the fact that modernisation did not replace, in many cases, the traditional with the modern, but rather incorporated the traditional in new ways (1990: 72). His conception of cultural hybridity expresses above all this interconnection and interpenetration of social and cultural practices in the intersection of different historical temporalities (indigenous traditions, the Catholic colonial Hispanic tradition and the modernising trends). While it provides a good account of this kind of process at the level of social structure, it leaves nevertheless a very limited margin for active cultural reformulation on the part of individuals and groups. And this is the reason why the creative role of dominated cultures in adapting to new conditions is also minimised. Rama's notion of *transculturation*, which will now be analysed, can be considered as a corrective of this aspect of García Canclini's views.

From acculturation to *transculturation*

The term acculturation, as pointed out above, began to be used in the anthropological debate in the context of capitalist expansion to designate the destruction of traditional cultures through the penetration and influence of the dominant cultures. In 1940, Fernando Ortiz proposed its substitution by the more precise term of *transculturation*, which, according to the author, designated not only the acquisition of a culture (as indicated by the term acculturation), but also the loss of a preceding culture (which could be conceived as a partial *deculturation*), and the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which pointed to an element of *neoculturation* (Ortiz, quoted in Rama, 1985a: 33).

As Rama points out, the term *transculturation* reveals a resistance to the view of traditional culture as a merely passive recipient of the modernising influence received through both the modernising national capitals and the foreign metropolises. However, this author also emphasizes that Ortiz's model does not allow the necessary space for the consideration of criteria of selectivity and invention, i.e. for cultural agency, which play an important role in this process. Thus, Rama further stresses the active element of the dominated culture's role in cultural creation opened up with the idea of *transculturation*. Following his views, selection is not only applied to the "foreign" culture, but especially to the culture that is going to experience the destruction of many of its contents. In this way, there is a selective task of salvation of tradition, which is as important as the effective innovation that is also taking place in this process.

Rama has applied this notion of *transculturation* to the analysis of some key Latin American writers of the 1950s and 1960s, who overcame in their work the divide between popular culture and the authors' own culture, characteristic of the regionalist writing of the 1920s, through the use of modernist literary techniques (Roa Bastos, Rulfo, Arguedas...). Their *transculturing* action is analysed by Rama in terms of language, of literary structures and of world view. Thus, for example, the distance between the characters' language and the author's own language, which had previously determined the characters' use of "bad", ungrammatical Spanish and the appearance of glossaries that translated indigenous terms to a literary readership, is overcome through an approximation to American speech, or through the creation of an artificial literary language that can convey the qualities of indigenous languages (Arguedas, Roa Bastos). At the level of literary structures, the use of modernist devices is combined with the influence of popular and oral traditions (as for example in García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*], where a historical plane of events coexists with the magical conceptions that characters have of these events). Finally, at the level of world view, the new irrationalism that spread at the beginning of the 20th century and that became paramount in the literary avantgarde, facilitated the recuperation of elements of other cultural traditions, the most important of which is, according to Rama, the new vision of myth, which now became a valid category through which to interpret Latin American culture.

On cultural domination

A variety of perspectives have placed the emphasis less on the mixing of different cultures than on the consequences of cultural domination. In this latter perspective, a very different view of cultural heterogeneity emerges, one which, above all, stresses phenomena of cultural polarisation

Among the approaches that have focused on the cultural consequences of colonialism the pioneering and unclassifiable work of Franz Fanon stands out. He examined the difficulties for the formation of a national consciousness in the context of the struggle for independence in Africa (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963), and the profound self alienation which pervaded individual consciousness under the effects of colonialism (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967). While the impact of *The Wretched of the Earth* has been enormous, from the end of the 1980s onwards, in a context of the end of the struggles for national liberation and a move away from what has been called Three Worlds Theory and its underlying nationalism (see Ahmad, 1994), critical attention has increasingly focussed on *Black Skin...*, where the psychopathological aspects of colonialism from the point of view of black subjectivity are portrayed. Thus, Bhabha celebrates what he considers to be this book's rejection of master narratives and realist perspectives and the historicisation of the colonial subject in the heterogeneous assemblage of texts of history, literature, science and myth.

Nevertheless, the two books can be seen as complementing each other in their identification of the different faces of cultural colonisation. While *Black Skin...* focuses on the recognition of the deepest forms of colonisation of the psyche, *The Wretched of the Earth* establishes a parallel case identifying the colonised intellectuals who are able to shake off the colonial culture in which they had been formed and which had turned them into foreigners only through the discovery of the people and their customs. Thus, Fanon maintains in *The Wretched of the Earth* that:

"In underdeveloped countries the occult sphere is a sphere belonging to the community which is entirely under magical jurisdiction. By entangling myself in this inextricable network where actions are repeated with crystalline inevitability, I find the everlasting world which belongs to me, and the perennality which is thereby affirmed of the world belonging to us." (1967: 43).

This is expressed in very similar terms to those which are used in *Black Skin...*, where the paramount concern is to find a possibility of existence for the black person beyond the dilemma "turn white or disappear", created by colonial domination. This is only possible through a process of disalienation, or the recognition of the social conditions which have turned the black person into "an object in the midst of other objects" (1968: 109).

A similar kind of struggle is involved in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's plea for the abolition of the English Department in African universities and for its substitution by a wide literary education which would include in addition to Swahili, European and modern African literatures, the oral tradition (1995). Further, Ngugi has analysed the kind of division that takes place when, as in the case of African societies under colonial regimes, the language of formal education is dissociated from the language of daily life in the community. An unresolved paradox is involved in the fact that African intellectuals had to turn to English, or French, as the vehicle for the encounter with their cultures, a problem which was also emphasised by Fanon, when he pointed to the intermediate stage of the process of the native writer's return to the people:

"...since the native is not a part of his people, since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only. Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies." (1967: 179)

Ngugi has strongly argued for the need to move away, in writing, from the languages in which the intellectuals have been educated during colonialism, and for a return to the native languages (he himself started writing in Gikuyu after having published some novels in English). His views on African literatures written in the language of the coloniser are emphatic: "What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages" (1986: 27).

In this sense, hybridity appears as a negative, deviant phenomenon and, especially, as a temporary one only, which is bound to disappear when the most

blatant signs of colonial cultural domination start to fade away. What characterises this kind of cultural configuration is the enormous divide that exists between different traditions, and the structural limitation for the growth of a national reading public. In Latin America we can find a similar type of situation in areas with strong indigenous cultures, which live with relatively little contact with the dominant culture. This would be the case especially of the Andean region, and of some areas of Mexico and Guatemala.

Heterogeneous literatures

Cultural polarisation and confrontation can become part of the inner structure of literary works themselves, and it is perhaps Cornejo Polar's concept of heterogeneous literatures that best expresses this phenomenon. The author departs from a situation of convergence of all literary instances within the same socio-cultural formation, which he illustrates with particular authors of Peruvian and Chilean prose fiction (Sebastián Salazar Bondy, Julio Ramón Ribeyro, José Donoso, Jorge Edwards) where certain perspectives of the urban middle classes are portrayed, employing precisely the modernising tendencies that belong to this social group, to be consumed by a public of the same class.

It must be noted that this conception of homogeneity does not exclude the possibility of cultural hybridisation within it in the way it has been examined above. What distinguishes this notion of homogeneity is the fact that the whole process of production, circulation and consumption takes place within a single social class or cultural group; in Cornejo's words "...it is, it could be argued, a society that speaks to itself." (1982: 73).

In the case of heterogeneous literatures the social context in which cultural practices are embedded appears fragmented and characterised by a zone of ambiguity and conflict. There is generally a divide between a mode of representation which derives from hegemonic aesthetic conventions and the referent of the text, or the world that it wants to represent. Rama's notion of *transculturation* was focused on this existing divide within the production of literary texts, but here the scope is much wider; it comprises issues concerning cultural markets and the reading public and its expectations as well. Cornejo has given the example of the colonial chronicles as a model of heterogeneous literatures: they are characterised by the desire to reveal an

unknown world to a metropolitan reader who comes from a completely different social and cultural universe. This determines that:

“In the chronicles, heterogeneity generates an unequal relationship between their system of production and consumption, on the one hand, and the referent, on the other, conferring a significant primacy on the first and obscuring the latter under the force of the interpretation that is superimposed on it. On the formal plane, this inequality means that the referent is still not able to impose its modes of expression and has to endure a formalisation that is not its own and that is more or less distorting.” (1982:76)

Nevertheless, a different kind of distortion due to the action of the referent on the formalising devices soon appears in cases of heterodox chronicles such as that of Guamán Poma, where the author breaks the formal structure of the genre to open it up for a second language which is nearer to its referent. Thus, Cornejo Polar concludes, the chronicles can serve as a model for heterogeneous literatures because they point to the two most important alternatives: either the subordination of the referent to external devices, as is the usual rule or, in some exceptional cases, the capacity of this referent to modify the formal order of the chronicles (1982:77). Also especially significant in Cornejo’s analysis is his insistence on the fact that heterogeneous texts produce not only a representation of their particular referent, but also a literary reproduction of the structures and conflicts of their fragmented societies (1982:85).

This understanding of heterogeneous literatures proves very useful at the moment of analysing literatures that belong, to a greater or lesser degree, to this cultural contact zone which is marked by conflict. Cornejo himself has applied it to an analysis of the literary movement of *indigenismo*, which portrayed for the first time Indian communities through the realist novel form (written by members of the white elite, and particularly from the urban middle classes of provincial origin), identifying its central structural contradiction: “...the Indian universe seems narratable only in so far as it is interfered with – almost always attacked – from the outside. In its coherence or in its inner conflicts, that universe is alien to *indigenismo*” (1982: 98). This interference (the conquest) introduces a break in temporal continuity creating a *before* and an *after*, thus obliging *indigenismo* to adopt the notion of a happy or better past. The paradox here is that neither does this past belong to the material of the novel, nor is its restoration (or a profound social transformation) an option within the

ideological universe of *indigenismo* (1982: 100). Trapped between the denunciation of the injustices of the oppressor and a nostalgic desire for the preservation of a mythical world, the *indigenista* novel is thus condemned to tragically repeat the contradiction that affects Peruvian society:

"...the multisocial and multicultural operation of the *indigenista* novel... is what prevents the *indigenista* narrative from imagining history in a non-traumatic manner, as an inevitable break-up, but from this also stems its representation or reproduction of the really divided nature of Peruvian reality." (1982: 106-7)

Alternative written literatures and the notion of dialogisation

Martín Lienhard situates the origins of Latin American literature at the opposition between orality and writing and the domination effected through the written word as a primordial part of the colonisation process:

"The destruction of the old system, based on the equilibrated articulation between the classificatory word and the living word, and the arbitrary imposition of a new system in which the absolute predominance of "divine" European writing confines the diabolic old "writings" to illegality, marginalising at the same time oral communication, will constitute the background in which "Latin American" literature emerges." (1991:26)

He refers to Cornejo's identification of heterogeneous literatures, which can be traced from the conquest onwards, but further stresses the historical continuity of these traditions, which he calls alternative literatures. His aim in the book *La voz y su huella* [*The Voice and its Trace*, 1991] is consequently to write the "other history" of Latin American literature, in which the importance of the European tradition is relativised, the significance of oral literatures revealed, and the existence of another written literature, related to the marginalised sectors of society, identified (1991: xiii).

Alternative written literatures are only a small part -and indeed a doubly marginal one, being themselves a marginal tradition within marginalised or subaltern societies- of a much wider universe of oral practices, which have been, following Lienhard, the predominant cultural form of the continent. While these are enormously diverse and dispersed, alternative written literature is a more accessible object of study, bearing witness at the same time to the existence of a rich and antagonistic

contact zone. In this context, one kind of situation which is emphasised by Lienhard is that of diglossia, or the unequal coexistence of two cultural systems which belong to different cultural worlds, the written language and orality; the first possesses a high prestige and is the predominant form, and the second is of low prestige and occupies a marginal position (the typical example of a diglossic situation is that of the Indian chronicles, addressed to the hegemonic European elites). It is important to note that there is no synthesis here, only borrowings, and that dual systems of cultural production and reception persist. The texts that belong to the tradition of alternative written literature will all experience, to a greater or lesser degree, this diglossic situation or "double determination" in their midst. They become split, as it were, into two different instances: one which corresponds, in Lienhard's terms, to the "deposit of oral memory", a collective instance to which the "knowledge" contained in the text belongs, and another that corresponds to the "owner of writing", to the official author of the text, who controls the production of meaning (1991:127).

In this context, Bakhtin's studies of the dialogisation of the novel can serve as a good analytical tool for the identification of the interplay of the heterogeneous components in Latin American hybrid literary forms. In his study of Dostoevsky's poetics, Bakhtin distinguished between the direct, object oriented word, the represented or objectivised word (as in the direct speech of characters), and the double-voiced word, or the word oriented towards another person's word. It is to the latter that the author devoted his attention, analysing how it was articulated in Dostoevsky's works. For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky was the creator of a new kind of novel, the polyphonic novel, related to ancient democratic and plural forms that belonged to the carnival tradition. The polyphonic novel, through the use of the double-voiced word, allows the confrontation of different voices on an equal plane, eliminating at the same time the privileged position of the author, whose field of vision becomes now the hero's field of vision. As a special type of double-voiced word, Bakhtin refers to heteroglossia, which is incorporated into the novel as "another's speech in another's language", serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech:

"... serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all

the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they -as it were- know about each other (...); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other." (1994: 324)

Hybridity refers thus, in Bakhtin's view, to the ways in which language can be double-voiced and, in literature, it points to the transformation of the novel form through dialogue: "... the novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (1994: 361).

In this view, as in Lienhard's analysis of diglossia which is broadly based upon it, the interplay of different languages or cultural traditions which do not fuse is stressed, although there is here less space left for notions of domination of one language over the other. In effect, Bakhtin's emphasis is rather on the influence of dialogisation, the setting of one word against another in familiar terms, for the debunking of authority, which is closely related to the utopian and liberating effects of the carnival attitude to the world, as examined above in section 1.

Bakhtin refers to the persistence of a variety of self-enclosed social worlds at the arrival of capitalism in Russia as a precondition for the multilevelled character of the polyphonic novel. There thus seems to be a link between the coexistence of different cultural traditions or, in Bakhtin's terms, a situation of heteroglossia, and the tendency to the inner dialogisation of the novel, through which these traditions are confronted and played off against each other.

In the Latin American context, a move similar to that effected by Dostoevsky in the polyphonic novel could be found in the work of the authors that Rama has designated as the "transculturators" (see above). Indeed, in the work of Rulfo, Arguedas and others, the confrontation of diverse voices becomes paramount, while the ordering consciousness of the author, which had previously structured the novel's heterogeneous elements under a single, linear structure, loses its former privileges.

The *crónica* can be considered as a privileged terrain in which the heterogeneous traditions and the contradictions that shape the cultural field in Latin America are expressed, as a site in which crossings and fluid interaction between mass culture, popular culture and high culture, stressed by García Canclini's notion of hybridisation and by Martín Barbero's concept of mediation, take place. As a genre

that uses the formal devices of journalism and circulates through the channels of mass communication of the press, it manifests a significant degree of closeness to the everyday life of the society it describes. Yet, at the same time, it is written by intellectuals, very often writers in the restricted cultural sphere, who occupy a special, very individualised position in the press. In addition, *crónicas* often have a degree of formal elaboration that differentiates them from other pieces of the news and survive, beyond their initial appearance in the newspapers, in books and anthologies that are collected at a later stage, transcending the realm of the everyday to become literature.

The *crónica* is thus a genre that falls exactly in that in-between space that exists between high and low culture, between urban mass culture and literature. It also incorporates this dimension into its very *raison d'être*, becoming a medium through which diverse popular cultures and traditions, as well as the experience of everyday existence in the city, are narrated and expressed from within.

This association of *crónica* with the realm of popular culture and the reality of everyday life has determined the subordinate position the genre has occupied within the institution of literature, and the absence of critical attention to a genre which has a long standing tradition in most Latin American countries. To this day, studies that focus on specific authors of *crónica* are few, and there exists no monograph on the significance of the genre as a whole.

The *crónica* is also significant in one further aspect. In Latin America, the second half of the 20th century has witnessed a radical social transformation and the late constitution of a modern field for the production and circulation of cultural goods. Brunner has expressed the momentous consequences of this as follows:

“The traditional cultural configuration that Angel Rama once called the “lettered city”, bastion of a few intellectuals, lecturers, literati, artists and bureaucrats who served power and “high culture”, has been definitely burst by the masses, as they progressively gained access to education, television and urban communications.” (1994: 72-3)

The changes and new cultural encounters that this has produced are enormous. The *crónica* expresses this historical moment and is, as a hybrid genre through which a different kind of intellectual has learned to relate to new mass audiences in a transformed city, determined by it in its constitution.

Because of its special position in a cultural crossroads where different traditions intersect, the *crónica* can serve as a terrain in which the relationship between high and low is analysed. The following chapter will explore the *crónica* as a hybrid genre from the contact zone, tracing its main historical forms and its contemporary significance in Mexico City and Guayaquil.

CHAPTER 2

THE *CRÓNICA*: A HYBRID GENRE FROM THE CONTACT ZONE

This chapter explores the urban *crónica* as a point of convergence between popular culture and literature. Two distinct factors determine the *crónica* in this way. Firstly, the hybrid nature of the genre, which occupies an intermediate position between journalism and literature, or between mass culture and high culture. This aspect of the *crónica*, and the particularities of its position between the journalistic and the literary discourses, will be discussed in the first section of the chapter, with reference to a general characterisation of the *crónica* and to the emergence of modern journalism and urban mass culture. Secondly, the urban *crónica* can be defined as a genre that assumes as its object the expression of popular and mass culture and of everyday life in the city. Section 3 will discuss the *crónica*'s present trends in this light, with special reference to Mexico City and Guayaquil. In addition, the *crónica* has a long standing tradition in Latin America, which goes back to the *crónicas de Indias* as the first foundational texts of its literature. Section 2 examines this tradition, with special attention to major historical continuities.

1. General characterisation of the *crónica*

The term *crónica* or chronicle (from the Greek *chronos*: time) referred originally to the narration of historical events in chronological order, and identifies a genre of historiographic writing that goes back to the 3rd and 4th centuries and reached its height during the 12th and 13th centuries in various European countries.

The *crónica* is today, in the first place, a journalistic genre in the sense that it is a text written to appear in a newspaper or magazine. It has been defined as "an interpretative and evaluative report of contemporary news facts where something is narrated and judged at the same time" (G. Martín, quoted in Estébanz, 1996: 824). From a different point of view, which takes into account the present production of urban *crónicas* in Latin America and their use of literary devices, the *crónica* "is the explanation, the narration of an event in the order in which it took place. It is characterised by the fact that it contains not only information but also the author's

impressions. This genre is used to recreate the atmosphere in which a given event has taken place..." (Leñero and Marín, 1986: 43).

The two definitions coincide in identifying both the narrative and the interpretative aspects as characteristic of the *crónica*, although there exists between them a marked difference in emphasis. The first definition insists on the fact that the *crónica* interprets and judges the event it narrates; so that it appears as a journalistic genre whose main function is to transmit to its reader an interpretation of the news. The second, more literary definition, on the other hand, emphasises the *crónica* as *narration*, as the "timely, ordered and detailed account of events of collective interest", which is mainly concerned in narrating *how* an event happened (1986: 155), i.e. in recreating a scene. In addition, Estébanez has pointed out that to keep in mind the *crónica's* origins as a narration of historical facts serves to emphasise the importance of the acts of *narrating* and *describing* in the genre (1996: 824).

A definition that explicitly considers the *crónica* not as journalism but as literature in the first place is that given by Monsiváis, for whom the *crónica* is "... the *literary* reconstruction of figures or events, a genre in which the formal intention predominates over informative urgencies." He goes on to stress the *crónica's* subjective nature and adds that "in the *crónica*, the literary game uses at will the first person or freely narrates the events as seen and lived from the perspective of a different subjectivity" (1993: 13).

For Monsiváis, the formal intention of the *crónica*, which gives it its literary qualities, can be contrasted with its informative aspect, through which it is linked to journalism. The *crónica* comes thus to occupy a space conceived in terms of confluence and even opposition of two differentiated discourses: a referential, journalistic one, in which texts inform about events and are dependent upon a reality that is external to them, and a literary one, in which texts become constituted as units of meaning that are independent from reality.

In addition, the mode of production of the *crónica* is also determined by this heterogeneous space of confluence of discourses: the *crónica*, which has been defined as "literature under pressure", is a text written on demand for the mass media and is subject to the technical limitations of space, language and time characteristic of these media – in opposition to a properly literary text, which is constituted as such through the affirmation of complete freedom and distance from the world. Its production is for the market and often a means of living for its author; yet, it also affirms itself as

literature and offers a reflexive and stylised look at reality, for which there is a place in the journalistic medium.

The perceived contradictions between the journalistic and the literary aspects in the *crónica* derive from the constitution of the literary institution as an autonomous sphere, separate from an everyday reality in which exchange value is sovereign. The *crónica*, as a journalistic genre which is anchored in the commodified world from which writers attempt to differentiate themselves, is determined by this opposition and expresses it in its form.

In his characterisation of the *fait divers*, a wide category of journalistic texts which focus upon and narrate the everyday occurrences in the city and to which the *crónica* is structurally and historically related, Barthes pointed to another reason beyond the ambiguous dichotomy between formal stylisation and information that constituted this kind of writing as literature:

“Aleatory causality, organised coincidence – it is at the junction of these two movements that the *fait-divers* is constituted: both ultimately refer to an ambiguous zone where the event is experienced as a sign whose content is nonetheless uncertain. We are thus in a world not of meaning, but of signification, which is probably the status of literature, a formal order in which meaning is both posited and frustrated: and it is true that the *fait-divers* is literature, even if this literature is reputed to be bad.” (1972: 194)

It is thus the kind of operation that the *fait divers* effects, its engagement with an indeterminate zone that is characterised by the movement between meaning and form, signifier and signified (signification), rather than by a given content, a signified (meaning), which constitutes it as literature. This is also the reason why the *fait divers*, like the *crónica*, presents problems of definition, and has tended to be classified simply as “the unorganized discard of news” (1972: 185). Further, Barthes also identified a significant structural feature of the *fait-divers* which links it to specific literary forms:

“...the *fait-divers*...is total news, or more precisely immanent; it contains all its knowledge in itself; no need to know anything about the world in order to consume a *fait-divers*; it refers formally to nothing but itself...on the level of reading, everything is given within the *fait-divers*; its circumstances, its causes, its past, its outcome; without duration and without context, it constitutes an immediate, total being which refers, formally at least, to nothing

implicit; in this it is related to the short story and the tale, and no longer to the novel. It is its immanence which defines the *fait-divers*.” (1972: 186)

Immanence, which also marks the *fait divers* as literature, distinguishing it from the context of the news that refer to a reality that is always outside them, is also a feature of the fragmentary nature of the genre, which is related not only to the short story and the tale, but also to the snapshot and the essay as anti-systematic forms. Thus, Lukács pointed out that “the essay has to create from within itself all the preconditions for the effectiveness and validity of its vision” (1974: 11), while further specifying its particular relationship to the world of lived experience, which can also be applied to the *crónica*:

“...the essay always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past; hence it is part of the nature of the essay that it does not create new things from an empty nothingness but only orders those which were once alive.” (1974: 10)

For Adorno, the essay, an in-between form that is neither art nor science, asserts the significance of the partial against the total, causing “the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature”:

“It thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over. An unequivocal logical order deceives us about the antagonistic nature of what that order is imposed upon. Discontinuity is essential to the essay; its subject matter is always a conflict brought to a standstill.” (1991: 16)

Fragmentation and discontinuity are the characteristic features of urban modernity, which found its most accurate expression in the newspaper and in the new genres which, in 19th century France, came to represent everyday experience in the city. The origins of the modern mass press are generally situated at a specific date: 1836, when Emile de Girardin and his former colleague Armand Dutacq founded the dailies *La Presse* and *Le Siècle* respectively, which sold at a subscription price of half the amount of that charged by established newspapers, and incorporated advertising as a source of revenue (Schwartz, 1998; de la Motte, 1999; Adamowicz 1999). However, the greatest emblem of the popular press, initiator of the tradition of the

“presse à sensation”, and for some the “true” beginning of the mass press (Adamowicz, 1999), became *Le Petit Journal*, founded in 1863, which could be bought by the issue at kiosks and from street criers, and reached a circulation of one million in 1886 (Schwartz, 1998: 28-9).

Until then, newspapers had been based on opinion, expressing the views of specific political factions. The new mass newspapers radically altered this state of affairs, moving away from opinion towards the conception of an information-based, neutral and objective daily, and asserting a newly developed autonomy from political affairs. In this context, De la Motte has equated this development of the mass press to that of aestheticism, identifying the autonomy from ethical and political discourse to which both aspired as formally identical:

“Gautier’s aesthetic privileges an art that serves no didactic or political purpose and whose impassive, unemotional devotion to form and craftsmanship (Barthes’s “fétiche de la forme travaillée”) is the aesthetic Other of Girardin’s professed vision of a colorless newspaper serving no master but the “objective truth” in the service of social progress. Indeed, Girardin’s self-effacing, colorless newspaper undergoes a curious transformation in its effort to avoid becoming –as were the traditional papers– an extension or representation of something beyond itself, and the text of the paper is, perhaps unexpectedly, splendidly autonomous. Its purely referential project –presenting the news– is ultimately self-referential, for in doing away with a known political “color” that would filter or mediate information in order to promote a political agenda, it is presented *for its own sake*, as a commodity to be consumed along with the other “articles” listed in the advertising section on the paper’s final page or pages.” (1999: 153)

The turn away of the newspapers from politics determined that a new emphasis was placed on local matters and that “daily life” became their main source of material. Indeed, as Cohen has argued, the very category of the everyday is a product of modernity (1995: 228). The mass newspapers asserted the everyday city life as their central theme, becoming “a mirror that reflected the broadest possible spectrum of contemporary life” (Schwartz, 1998: 32) and “the most versatile guide to the huge and ever changing inventory of the industrial city” (Frietsche, 1996: 16).

Two genres came to represent the everyday in the characteristically fragmented form of the newspapers: the *roman-feuilleton* and the *fait divers*. Adamowitch has shown how the success of the mass press was directly linked to the

popularity of the *roman-feuilleton* or serial novel, for which, since the publication of Balzac's *La Vieille Fille* in Girardin's *La Presse* in 1836, newspapers competed to attract readers (1999: 160-3). The *roman-feuilleton*, which reached a peak in 1842 with the publication of Sue's immensely successful *Mystères de Paris* in *Le Journal des Débats*, proved to be a highly adaptable and permeable genre, representing the topography of the city and incorporating the matter of current affairs into its story-lines. It showed a significant degree of similarity to the other genre that represented the everyday in the mass press, the *fait divers*:

"...at root, the *roman-feuilleton* and the *fait divers* refer back to the same aesthetic. The anecdote, the *fait divers*, like the *roman-feuilleton*, transform the private banality of the everyday with a full, significant and remarkable time. There is a great deal of homogeneity between the themes of the *roman-feuilleton* and the *fait divers*; the adventures and misadventures of the great, crimes, the ravages caused by passion, sublime loyalties, return and revenge, woman kidnapped by a monster, etc. And each is inspired by the other at every turn." (Queffélec, 1989: 29)

The *fait divers* was a short sketch that represented all kinds of contemporary real-life situations, exceptional events that happened to the ordinary inhabitants of the city, and would reach its most spectacular form in the crime *fait divers*, the bloody stories that filled the pages of *Le Petit Journal* and its descendants. In this context, Schwartz has pointed to its contribution to what she has called "sensationalisation of the everyday":

"The *fait divers* constructed a new kind of public life by thrusting ordinary people...onto a vast stage for inspection by the "universalized" eye of the newspaper reader. The *fait divers* indicated that all life, no matter how banal, could be rendered spectacular through sensational narrative. In addition, the *fait divers*' precise location in contemporary and ordinary Paris meant that readers could identify with the narrative. At any moment they might find themselves the subject of a notorious *fait divers*." (1998: 39)

This "sensationalisation of the everyday" was paralleled by the sensationalisation of commercial entertainment, which has been illustrated by Ben Singer (1995) in his account of turn-of-the-century U.S. newspapers and their "commercialisation of the thrill" as an expression of society's fixation on the sensory

shocks of modernity, which would culminate in the early “cinema of attractions” and its “aesthetics of astonishment”.

The mass newspapers, and in particular the newly popularised genres of literary journalism, offered a celebration of the city as a spectacle and, at the same time, provided their readers with a basic orientation in a rapidly changing and expanding city. They achieved this by recording and fixing the history of the everyday in fragments. As contemporary Parisian writer Charles Virmaître exclaimed: “future historians of Paris will only need the *fait divers* recounted day by day in the newspaper to write the history of the customs of the capital” (quoted in Schwartz, 1998: 34). At the end of the 20th century in Latin America, the role of the *crónica*, descendant of the *fait divers*, and of the crime *fait divers* in its sensational variation of the *crónica roja* or crime story, will be perceived in very similar terms.

For a clarification of the distinctive literary and journalistic elements that make up the *crónica*, it is useful to consider how the genre has been conceptualised in the context of the formation of an autonomous literary field in Latin America. As seen in chapter I, this process was initiated at the end of the 19th century, and was marked by the emergence of the intellectual who was obliged to work for the market, usually the press. Intellectual life was dominated at the time by the current known as *modernismo*, a movement influenced by European Parnassianism and Symbolism. In response to a crisis linked to the emergence of modernity and the progressive dissolution of traditional society, and the particular contradictory forms this took in Latin American societies, *modernismo* sought refuge from the realities of capitalist society in a celebration of fantasy, and was characterised by a persistent cosmopolitanism and exoticism. Many of its main figures, especially poets like Rubén Darío, José Martí, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Julián del Casal and Amado Nervo, among others, wrote *crónicas* for the most important newspapers of the region. In the context of the emergent professionalisation of literature in Latin America, the *crónica* thus became literary journalism’s most outstanding and innovative genre, cultivated by its most renowned poets, who gave to their texts a highly lyrical content, beyond their apparently factual tone¹.

¹ José Olivio Jiménez has traced this development in the context of the professionalisation of literature and the emergence of modern journalism (1987).

The vision developed by Julio Ramos of the constitutive nature of the message that, in this context, the intellectual produced for the press needs to be quoted at length:

“To be able to speak in the newspaper, the man of letters adjusts himself to its demands: he informs, and even assumes the information as a privileged object of his thinking. But in informing he *over-writes*: he writes over the newspaper, which he continually reads, in an act of palimpsest, let’s say, that projects a highly emphatic verbal work that the news –the read object- did not have. The *crónica*, then, as an exercise of *overwriting*, highly stylised, in Martí, is a journalistic form and a literary one at the same time. It is a heterogeneous though not heteronomous site of discourse: the stylisation... presupposes a literary subject, an authority, a highly specified ‘look’. It concerns a specified look which does not have its own space and is subjected, limited by the other authorities that (in struggle) converge in the *crónica*. From there that the *crónica* formally represents and even thematises both the operation of a literary subject (stylisation) and the limits of its autonomy (information).” (1989: 110-1)

To analyse the literary aspect of the *crónica* in terms of overwriting allows us to perceive the constant oscillation of the genre between the two spheres that constitute it. Thus, following Ramos, Rotker points out that Martí’s *crónicas* do not withdraw the reader from the reality dimension, but introduce to this plane of reality a mode of perception that mythologises it without losing its referential balance. And it is this that turns the *crónica* into literature, transforming the text into a work which survives even when it has lost its informative value as an item of current affairs (Rotker, 1992: 165). Many of the texts we read today as fiction were, at the time of their writing, journalistic *crónicas* (Gutiérrez Nájera’s ‘La novela del tranvía’ (‘Novel of the tramway’) and his many other vignettes which described life in Mexico City, or most of the production of the Ecuadorian José Antonio Campos, for example) and have preserved their relevance once their temporary link to an immediate referent has been lost.

However, the interpretative scheme that conceives the *crónica* as overwriting, if appropriate for the concrete analysis of the *crónica modernista* that emerges in a context of formation of the literary and journalistic discourses, proves to be insufficient to examine the *crónica* of the present. It is not possible to consider today’s urban *crónica* simply as the stylisation of the news exercised by a writer who

occupies a position in the restricted field of literary production. Some of the *crónicas* of the present emerge from a real transgression of traditional genres that has taken place in a society that has experienced a certain democratisation of culture and a noticeable widening of the social class from which intellectuals are constituted. Carlos Monsiváis asks himself: "Who, having the opportunity to produce short stories or novels, writes journalism?" (1992:15). Even if we consider the *crónica* as a minor genre, distanced from the prestige that literature confers, there exist today intellectuals who have chosen it as a means to express the events of everyday life in a new form. Among them we find Monsiváis, whose production has always been centred on the genre of the *crónica* as a means to interpret city life, or Elena Poniatowska, who with her focus on marginalised groups has produced a fusion of genres (literature, oral history and journalism) creating a space for the representation of their voices. The formal quality of present day *crónicas* is not something added to the news, a mere act of overwriting (although it is true that many *crónicas* emerge as overwriting of the journalistic fact, giving commentaries and recreating an already existing news event) but is inextricably related to this purpose of finding a new space for the representation of heterogeneous social groups and their discursive practices. Therefore, the *crónica* will be treated here as an intermediate genre, which is highly flexible and mobile, that cannot simply be classified as journalism or literature but is the two things at the same time, a product of a changeable and adjustable balance of the heterogeneous elements that constitute it.

It is important to keep in mind and to firmly underline the fact that the *crónica* is a non-fixed and non-fixable genre, a genre in movement, which lives in a perpetual renewal of forms and contents. This can be related to its condition of marginality, which must be understood in two different ways. Firstly, at the institutional level, the *crónica* is a genre that has not crystallised in an established tradition within the literary institution² but has retained its proximity to life, its character as a non-canonised form of writing. Secondly, at a level of contents, the *crónica* has often been the only suitable genre to express and describe from within the most varied conditions of social and political marginality: the emergence of oppositional movements, the gay scene, the everyday life of the most deprived sectors of society, extreme forms of urban violence, and the popular culture of subordinate social groups. This sense of

² The prevailing silence about the *crónicas* of the *modernista* writers, who are today appreciated and have a literary reputation almost exclusively based on their poetry, is illustrative of that fact.

mobility of the *crónica*, in connection with the flux of the reality it portrays, has been well expressed by Rossana Reguillo:

“The *crónica* aims to understand movement, a permanent flux, as an epochal feature: people, goods and discourses that not only reshape the spatial horizon of our societies, but point, above all, to the constant migration of meaning. Meaning in flight that escapes from the traditional places, that breaks the “legitimate” narratives, that increases the dispute for the guiding representations. (...) A new order is prefigured and in the conflict over its construction the narratives that attempt to understand this itinerant, fugitive meaning become visible...” (2000: 23)

The *crónica*, the “life history of a changing reality” as one *cronista* stated (Jorge Martillo, personal interview), can thus be considered as the “travelling” genre of the transitory. Its proximity to the marginal and the changeable is made possible by its own qualities of marginality and mobility, by its relationship with that which is unfixed, and these qualities are in turn determined by the volatile character of its subject matter, by the fleeting life it attempts to portray. In this context, Pedro Lemebel, referring to the marginality of the transvestite, gives a characterisation that can serve, at the same time, to point to the ambiguous nature of the *crónica* itself:

“Getting round binary genders, slipping out of the sepia family portrait and above all evading the watchfulness of discourse, taking advantage of its intervals and silences, in-between and half way, recycling an orality of detritus as an excretive alchemy that demarcates its romance in sphincteral enjoyment. I hold to the disturbance of this aroma to appear in all my difference.” (2000: 124)³

Despite its inherent diversity and changeability, it is possible to point to various general features, often interrelated, that allow for a basic characterisation of contemporary *crónicas*, while not attempting to seek out unifying marks of a genre that cannot be reduced to a strict formal norm:

³ “Vadando los géneros binarios, escurriéndose de la postal sepia de la familia y sobre todo escamoteando la vigilancia del discurso; más bien aprovechando sus intervalos y silencios; entremedio y a medias, reciclando una oralidad del detritus como alquimia excretora que demarca en el goce esfinteral su crónica rosa. Me atengo a la perturbación de este aroma para comparecer con mi diferencia.”

- (i) The *crónica* deals with real events and characters that have a certain quality of immediacy and presentness (it also possesses, however, a space for the creation of fictional characters and events, usually related to an identifiable reality).
- (ii) The *crónica* often offers a recreation of the atmosphere and characters related to the event it narrates; it has a descriptive intention.
- (iii) The *crónica* narrativises and fictionalises in various degrees the real events it portrays, producing an ambiguity between reality and fiction, or between the perceived opposition of information and imagination. Some *crónicas* can be read, thanks to the literary techniques they use to reconstruct actions and scenes, as fiction. At the same time, these techniques allow the author to reconstruct, imagine and recreate the empty spaces that exist in the story that is being narrated to transmit it to the readers in all its integrity.
- (iv) The central position of the author – the *cronista* – in his or her writing. *Crónicas* are often narrations of the experiences of the *cronista* written as first person accounts. In other cases, and more generally, the *crónica* is a subjective narration of events, often from a character's point of view.
- (v) The *crónica* possesses a style. It is a text with stylistic singularity through which the *cronista* addresses the reader with his or her own recognisable voice.
- (vi) There is a strong presence of orality in the *crónica*, both when it reproduces in a direct way the spoken language of the street in the words of its characters, and in the narrator's own language, which is a non-literary language, close to spoken language. It can be argued that the *crónica* is, generally, a highly dialogised form, in which the narrator's voice is constantly being eroded by the voices of its characters.
- (vii) *Crónicas* finish but have no end. They portray a reality that continues existing when the *crónica* has come to an end and have, as a consequence of this fact, a certain character of indeterminacy.⁴

⁴ This character of indetermination, together with the fact that the *crónica* has a chronological order, is what, following Hayden White, who analyses annals and chronicles as forms of historical representation, makes these forms fail as a real stories, which cannot capture the full narrativity of events: "The chronicle... often seems to wish to tell a story, aspires to narrativity, but typically fails to achieve it. More specifically, the chronicle usually is marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure. It does not so much conclude as simply terminate. It starts out to tell a story but breaks off *in media res*,

2. The *crónica* in history

Historiography and the *crónica de Indias*

The chronicle was in its origins a historiographic genre from Antiquity and the Middle Ages in which events were narrated in chronological order. A particular type of this historiographic tradition is the *crónica de Indias*, texts from the 16th and 17th centuries which described the encounter of the Europeans with the new territories and the process of conquest and colonisation of America. Those are the works that initiated the Latin American literary tradition, and the new reality they portray in its turn renewed the medieval genre of the chronicle.

Walter Mignolo distinguishes in the written work that focuses on American themes between three different kinds of texts: letters, *relaciones* and chronicles. The letters describe events in detail and tend to respond to a more documentary purpose than to a strictly textual one; they are more communications than narrations. Both Columbus and Cortés wrote about their experiences in this form. The direct meaning of the term *relación* is that of narration or report. It responded to a demand from the Crown to provide information about the new territories, and became progressively officialised until it was finally fixed in standard questionnaires. Finally, the word chronicle identifies a work with a more ambitious programme, with formal concerns and usually written by men of letters (although the context of the conquest of America is an exception to this and we find significant accounts written by soldiers) (Mignolo, 1982). However, many histories of Latin American literature⁵ tend to consider all these kinds of texts under the general rubric of *crónicas de Indias*, as historical writings that explore the nature of the new reality and narrate the experiences of the conquistadores.

The 16th century is the richest in number and quality of texts. Among them, Columbus' diaries and letters, in which the new landscape and its inhabitants were apprehended for the first time; Father Bartolomé de las Casas' *Historia de las Indias* [*History of the Indies*], published only in 1875, and the controversial *Brevísima*

in the chronicler's own present; it leaves things unresolved, or rather, it leaves them unresolved in a storylike way." (1987: 5).

⁵ See for example Anderson Imbert (1986); Bellini (1990); Goic (1988). What follows is based on these, as well as on Mignolo's account.

relación de la destrucción de las Indias [Brief History of the Destruction of the Indies, 1552], where the “apostle of the Indians” narrated all the horrors of the conquest; Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* [Summary of the Natural History of the Indies, 1526] and *Historia general y natural de las Indias* [General and Natural History of the Indies, 1535 and 1557], where the first official *cronista* of the Indies (appointed by the king Charles the V in 1533) described the natural world of America and its wonders.

The 16th century is also rich in historical accounts of the conquest written by men who participated in it and who set down the events they witnessed. Those are generally shorter accounts from soldiers or adventurers, written in the style of the Renaissance and celebrating individual deeds. Cortés’ letters (written between 1519 and 1526), in which the author narrated and justified his actions in the conquest of México to the king, inaugurate this tradition. Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote, in response to Gómara’s celebration of Cortés’ heroic deeds in *Historia general de las Indias y conquista de México* [General History of the Indies and Conquest of Mexico, 1552], a “popular” chronicle, the *Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España* [True History of the Conquest of New Spain] (published in 1632), where he emphasised the heroism of the anonymous soldiers who fought with Cortés and made various references to contemporary popular literature (novels of chivalry and romances). There is also the moving account of the adventures of Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, a soldier who took part in the failed expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez to Florida and lived among the Indians for ten years; he narrated that part of his life in the *Naufraios* [Shipwrecks, 1542].

Missionaries studied indigenous cultures and produced a valuable corpus of scientific literature. Among them, Fray Toribio de Benavente, known as Motolinía, wrote *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* [History of the Indians of New Spain, 1541], a description of the religion and social customs of the Aztecs, and Father José Acosta produced the *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* [Natural and Moral History of the Indies, 1590]. A major work in this tradition is the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* [General History of the Things of New Spain] (written in Nahuatl in 1569, later translated into Spanish), by the Franciscan monk Bernardino de Sahagún, who collected the data from many indigenous informants in a scientific way, and also rescued and transcribed the Nahuatl oral literary tradition.

In the 17th century, particular histories of specific regions predominate to the detriment of the general histories of the 16th century. Following Mignolo, historiographic writing, which was undergoing a process of codification as part of the consolidation of the discipline, responded to two general trends: concentration on human history on the one hand, and more emphasis on the narrative aspects on the other (1982: 96). Rhetoric would continue to be the basis of historiographic discourse until the 18th century, when it was finally excluded in favour of the veracity of data. From this period came, among others, the *Conquista y descubrimiento del Nuevo Reino de Granada* [*Conquest and Discovery of the New Kingdom of Granada*] and the *Histórica relación del Reino de Chile* [*Historic Account of the Kingdom of Chile*], written by Father Alonso de Ovalle, and Antonio de Solís' *Historia de la Conquista de México* [*History of the Conquest of Mexico*].

The *crónica* has also been used by Indian and *mestizo* writers to describe their world and the encounter with the Western conqueror. Among native accounts are Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's *Historia de los Chichimecas* [*History of the Chichimeca Peoples*], Diego Muñoz Camargo's *Historia de Tlaxcala* [*History of Tlaxcala*] and Hernando de Alvarado Tezozómoc's *Historia Mexicana* [*Mexican History*]. Two texts of special significance are the *Comentarios reales* [*Royal Commentaries*, 1609 and 1617], written by the *mestizo* Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, a history of Inca civilisation (volume 1) and of the conquest (volume 2) of great literary value; and Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala's *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno* [*New Chronicle and Good Government*] (written between 1584 and 1612 and only published in 1938), a long letter written in a Spanish that shows traces of the Quechua language, accompanied by numerous drawings and addressed to the Emperor. In it, the author traces the history and usages of indigenous peoples, narrates the conquest and the abuses of the Spaniards and argues for necessary reforms in the colonial system.

The diverse texts that make up the tradition known as *crónica de Indias* all bring the means of writing into play in order to imagine, explore and appropriate a new reality through metaphors that widen a language in which many of those realities could as yet find no place. Sixteenth century texts transmit very clearly the sense of wonder at the unknown world and the effort to name its reality and to make it comprehensible to the Western eye, usually with comparisons with Spain and the use of superlatives.

Historiography was characterised at the time by the breadth conferred on historical discourse. History was in the first place a narration⁶, and there existed a close proximity between historical narration and fiction, between legend and history. According to Pupo-Walker, the historian, influenced by Renaissance thinking, developed an interdisciplinary perspective the effect of which depended, to a great extent, on the quality of the text and on the persuasive abilities of the narrator (1986: 32). Moreover, the *crónicas de Indias* further contributed to enriching historical discourse by introducing the element of direct observation of reality and by widening the narrative scope of history. The narration of the personal experiences of soldiers and captains who had no training in the writing of history gave it a new freshness and liveliness, and the novelty of the reality they portrayed easily allowed for the presence of fantasy and imagination.

The *crónica de Indias*, like present day *crónicas*, is a highly heterogeneous text⁷ where reality and fantasy are inextricably intermingled. It is a hybrid text once recognised as historic and read today as literary, which is characterised by its marked fictionalisation of reality and by its subjectivity. Its author, as witness of the events and as the instance that orders the discourse, filters its various sources and is the ultimate authority of the narration, occupies in it a central position. In addition, and very significantly, these early texts, which were very often letters and reports explicitly addressed to another, inaugurated from the very beginning the *crónica's* notably dialogic tradition.

The costumbrista sketch

“In all countries *costumbrista* vignettes present difficulties, because those social *crónicas*, subject to the analysis of all intellects, those life portraits of the common life that can be assessed with a single glance, by comparing them with the original, require from their authors meticulous and profound observation of the country in which they write, a delicate touch to present the truth in its most favourable and seductive aspect, and a shrewd, energetic and fair judgement that allows them to

⁶ Mignolo points to the close connection between language and historiography and the identification of history as narration, and also to its implication: that only countries that possess written alphabets can write history. See Mignolo (1986).

⁷ Mercedes Serna identifies legends, myths and beliefs from Antiquity, as well as indigenous, medieval and Renaissance myths, hagiographic narrations and chivalry novels as some of the heterogeneous elements it incorporates (2000: 62).

exercise independently and skilfully the arduous task of the censor.”

Guillermo Prieto, *Cuadros de costumbres*

The *crónica* reappeared in the 19th century in the *costumbrista* sketch as a privileged instrument to visualise and order the national reality. Benedict Anderson pointed at the essential role of literature, which established links between the characters of an imaginary community, in imagining the nation (1983). In Latin America, the newspapers and especially the *crónica* helped to materialise it by spreading images of its most typical and idiosyncratic social types and by describing the little customs and habits which make up a national character. This was particularly needed at a time marked by social and political upheaval, in which the new nations that had emerged from the wars of independence were under the threat of territorial fragmentation and foreign intervention, and social and political life were characterised by high levels of instability and authoritarianism.

This was the time when the rationalising urban norm was being imposed upon the countryside – identified as barbarous – and the intellectual, the man of letters, reaffirmed his preponderant social position as the brain of this civilising project⁸. The newspaper, the tribune from which the ideology of the nation was spread, was the main means of orientation of public opinion, exclusively formed by a minority educated elite.

The *crónica costumbrista* can be linked, through the Spanish *costumbrista* tradition, to a kind of literature that proliferated in France in the 19th century in direct relationship with the modern urban experience: panoramic literature. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson explored the explosion of panoramic literature and traced its development in 19th century post-revolutionary Paris, focusing especially on the literary guidebook as a collection of heterogeneous sketches which described Parisian life and habits (1994). She has shown how since Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* (1781), through *Paris, ou les livres des cent-et-un* (1831-34), to *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* (1840-2) the task of providing direction in a rapidly changing urban environment became more and more difficult and progressively fragmented. Another kind of panoramic literature, especially fashionable in the early 1840s, were the popular physiologies or sketches of urban character, sold as pamphlets in the streets,

which investigated the social types that could be encountered in the city. Benjamin viewed physiologies, the figures of which he described as “harmless and of perfect bonhomie”, as a kind of compensatory and comforting literature through which the disturbing experience of the modern city could be attenuated (1992: 35-40). Publications like *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* inspired works like *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* (1843) and through them a number of regional variations in many Latin American countries, such as *Los cubanos pintados por sí mismos* (1852) and *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos* (1855) (Pupo-Walker, 1996: 493).

The *costumbrista* sketch, known as *cuadro de costumbres*, had as its object to fix and show the life and the characters of the nation, as well as that of establishing the legitimacy of a regional language. The *crónica* showed a special attention to detail and focused primarily on the unimportant and often unperceived local characters and uscs, becoming a sketch of everyday life. It was thus primarily a descriptive text built around an often insignificant anecdote. In this sense, Pupo-Walker states: “The *costumbrista*’s narrative generally exhibits a content so predictable that it turns writing into ritual” (1996: 492), thus identifying the main limitations of the genre.

The moral intention of the *crónica costumbrista*, overtly present in many of its texts in the form of direct digressions of the author, responded to its objective of affirming what was perceived as a desirable national character in a context of cultural dependency, as has been expressed by Monsiváis:

“In the transition from a colonial mentality to the independent one... a small collectivity, uncertain of its attainments, uncertain in its nationalism, sees in the *crónica* the bright mirror of its transformations and fixations.

To write is to inhabit. For a long period the exhaustive detail of the *cronistas* served a central objective: to contribute to the creation of the nation by describing it and, if possible, by moralising it.” (1993: 26)

The *costumbrista* sketch proved to be a versatile textual space where political discourses could enter and blend with literary creation, often in a satirical form, often by adopting an openly didactic tone. This was facilitated by the heterogeneous nature

³ For a detailed account of this process of assertion of city over country and unification of the nation see Rama (1984).

of its textual components, marked by the presence of journalistic sources as well as of literary ones.

On the other hand, Pupo-Walker has pointed to the connection between the *costumbrista* sketch and the taxonomic and classificatory objectives of the newly emerging social sciences in the 19th century, and in particular of positivism, a current that enjoyed an enthusiastic reception and a lasting influence in many Latin American countries (1996: 499-503). This relationship has also been identified in the European context, with particular reference to the epistemological project of panoramic literature as one of 'panoptic representation', by means of description and classification, of the phenomena of daily life (Cohen, 1995: 231).

The *costumbrista* sketch showed an influence of Romanticism in its preference for regional characters and traditions, but also in its renewed historical consciousness, and especially its appreciation of colonial history. Many Latin American *costumbristas* returned to the historiographic texts of the colonial chronicles and recreated and fantasised on the events narrated by those early *cronistas*. A particular form of the *costumbrista* sketch, and one in which this rewriting of the colonial past was very important, is the *tradición*, created by the most significant representative of short *costumbrista* narrative, the Peruvian Ricardo Palma (1833-1919). The *tradición* was a historical tale interspersed with commentaries from its author, which also incorporated elements from the (often only apparent) oral tradition and had an overtly conversational and spontaneous tone. It was a Latin American version of the diverse forms of historicist literature that Romanticism made fashionable in Scotland, France and Spain, with Walter Scott and Chateaubriand, but especially Spanish *costumbristas* such as Larra and Mesonero Romanos as its models (Oviedo, 1987: 259).

The main exponent of the *costumbrista* sketch in Mexico is Guillermo Prieto (1818-1897) who, in his *cuadros de costumbres*, or sketches of national life, provided a wide picture of his contemporary society, elaborating a 'life portrait of the common life' and creating a true gallery of characters and of popular habits. In Ecuador, of special significance is the work of José Antonio Campos (1868-1939), who produced highly popular journalistic texts that showed in a direct and vivid way the life, habits and skills of the Coastal peasants, recreating popular culture and speech, and anticipating in many ways the writing of the realist school from Guayaquil that would focus in the 1930s on the life of peasants and workers.

The *crónica modernista*

In Rotker's view, the *crónica modernista* which flourished at the end of the 19th century had as its most immediate antecedents the *costumbrista* sketch and the French journalistic *chronique* from the middle of the 19th century, a site of varieties and curious events. Thus Rotker states that: "the *crónica* comes from journalism, from literature and philology, to introduce itself into the market as a sort of *archaeology of the present* that is devoted to the little facts and whose main interest is not to inform but to entertain" (1992: 106).

The *crónica modernista* came to acquire a privileged role in newspapers that were in a process of modernisation. Its study is essential to understand a period that is characterised by the differentiation of spheres (the process of autonomisation of the cultural field) and of discourses (formation of the journalistic discourse). To analyse the *crónica* within this context is the objective of the works of Ramos (1989) and Rotker (1992), especially of the first, who dedicates one chapter of his book to the constitution of the journalistic and literary discourses and another to the urban *crónica*. What follows is primarily based on these studies.

By the end of the 19th century, the main cities of Latin America were undergoing a process of growth and modernisation, an incipient market for cultural goods began to emerge, and writers became producers who sold their goods to what was practically the sole protagonist of this market: the newspaper. At the same time, the newspaper was experiencing a profound transformation, related to wider social developments and especially to the emergence of the private and the public spheres as separate from the State (Habermas, 1992).

For Ramos, who studied the evolution of the Argentinean paper *La Nación* at the end of the century, the process of the constitution of the modern newspaper involved two aspects. On the one hand, technological modernisation, its key moment being the use of the telegraph for the transmission of news from 1877, which allowed an almost immediate coverage of the events. On the other hand, a broad process of rationalisation and specification of functions, through which the newspaper became linked to information (and no longer opinion) and to commercial advertisement.

In this context, a new kind of *crónica* proliferated in the newspaper while the older *costumbrista* vignette of local colour disappeared: this was the *crónica* designed

as a showcase of modern life, produced for an educated reader who sought to become familiar with foreign modernity (Ramos, 1989: 93-100). It was a highly stylised text that was close to the travel story. On the other hand, the *crónica modernista* developed in direct contrast to the new genre which embodied the virtues of the journalistic discourse par excellence: the news report, which appeared initially linked in its form to the telegraphic transmission of news, and which came to symbolise the new objectivity on which the newspaper prided itself. Colombi has described the paradox that marks the position of the artistic, elegant and stylised *crónica* of *modernismo* in the context of modern journalism as follows:

“The *crónica* is ‘frivolous’ because it is written on the surface of events, the speed of the news does not admit a break, it is necessary to write quickly the fleeting profile for which the *cronista* needs to be a “living cinema”, an immobile traveller who sees the effervescence of the present from a train window. The anguish of the news, which is many-sided, disordered, quick, makes any delay impossible; the *cronista* runs in slow motion against the altered syntax of urban life.” (1997: 219)

The *crónica* eventually lost its battle with the news report and acquired progressively the marginal but significant role in the newspaper that it has occupied until the present day, becoming a text that does not discuss politics or current affairs, but focuses on the minutiae of everyday life.

The *crónica* as a mirror of modernity is the central argument of the chapter that Ramos devotes to the *crónica* in relation to urban experience at the end of the 19th century, with an approach that is deeply influenced by Benjamin’s vision of the Paris of the arcades. In his work on the origins of modernity in 19th century Paris, Benjamin had stressed the role of the writer who “goes to the marketplace as a *flâneur*, supposedly to take a look at it, but in reality to find a buyer” (1992: 34), a marginal figure who nevertheless abandoned himself in the crowd and the world of commodities, succumbing to alienation, and “whose way of living still bestowed a conciliatory gleam over the growing destitution of men in the great city” (1992: 170). The writers of physiologies (see above) represented par excellence this benevolent gaze on the modern city of the *flâneur* turned journalist. Similarly, for Ramos, the modernity sought and portrayed by the *crónica* is that of commodity fetishism, of the phantasmagoria of the big city, in which an endless flux of consumer goods seduces

the *cronista* turned into a *flâneur*. Thus, the *crónica* becomes, in the decade of the 1890s, "...a guide to the progressively more refined and complex market of luxury and of cultural goods, contributing to the crystallisation of a rhetoric of consumption and of advertising" (1989: 113).

Moreover, even the stylisation that is so characteristic of the *crónica modernista*, the feature through which it affirms its will to be literature, to distinguish itself from the world of everyday life, responds, according to Ramos, to the same process of reification: "...commodity fetishism is represented as aesthetic experience. The shop replaces the museum as the institution of beauty, and stylisation – remarkable in the work on the language- operates as a function of the consumerist epiphany" (1989: 116). Paradoxically, in this way the market reabsorbs the writers, who attempted to distance themselves from it through stylisation or the assertion of the values of a field that constituted itself as such by proclaiming its autonomy from the market. Ramos acutely shows the true dimension and meaning of this process:

"Literature – in the same criticism of modernisation that is a consequence of its will to autonomy – is reincorporated into the field of power as a decorative mechanism of modern "ugliness", especially urban ugliness: the *modernista* writer as make-up man, covering the dangerous face of the city." (1989: 117)

This conception of the *cronista* as make-up man to the city points to the social function of the *crónica modernista*. The *cronista* has now ceased to be a moral agent who contributes with his writing to the recognition of the true idiosyncratic features of the nation and is in a certain way above ordinary society and capable of emitting his judgement about it. Under the equalising effects of the commodity, *cronistas* have become immersed in the society they celebrate, taking part, as *flâneurs*, in its spectacles and rituals of consumption. The *crónica* serves, in this context, as an instrument the mission of which is the reaffirmation of a specific experience of an emerging modernity. The need for such reaffirmation arises when the city (and the mass that is born with its modernity) becomes menacing and disturbing, and takes the form not only of decoration and obliteration of the other but, more vastly, of the recontextualisation of a problematic and fragmented urban space. Here, it is worth quoting Ramos at length:

“Although modernisation demolished the traditional systems of representation, causing social tensions, at the same time it promoted the production of resolving images of those contradictions; it even promoted a discourse of crisis and intensified the memory of a certain past. To represent the city, to represent, that is, *the unrepresentable* of the city, was not a mere exercise of register or documentation of the change, of the flux constituted by the city. To represent the city was a means of dominating it, of reterritorialising it, not always from outside power. Just as Haussmann in Paris, or Alvear and Limantour in Buenos Aires and Mexico demolished and *at the same time* reorganised the urban spaces in function of a spectacular monumentalism, the cultural industry (in the newspaper) could find in the new literati agents for the production of images that reorganised those discourses that the city – and the newspaper itself, in another of its facets – dismantled.” (1989: 123)

The *crónica modernista* thus appears as a medium that rearticulates the fragments of the modernising city and that makes it possible to imagine and to visualise a community that has already ceased to exist.

In Mexico, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, poet and *cronista*, is the greatest representative of *modernismo* and one of the country’s most renowned *cronistas*. His language and style turned the *crónica* into a refined artistic game, into a poetic fragment that filled the newspaper with the most exquisite metaphors, while at the same time his incessant journalistic activity (he lived exclusively from journalism, publishing 5 or 6 *crónicas* a week, often similar versions of a story which appeared in different newspapers) became the model of a new kind of cultural producer.

New Journalism: An antecedent of the contemporary *crónica*

The New Journalism, which radically changed the face of North American journalism in the 1960s with its emphasis on subjectivity and the formal quality of the text, anticipated the emergence of the modern Latin American *crónica*, and exercised a direct influence on many *cronistas*, both on their themes and techniques. In this sense, it is a forerunner of the urban *crónica* of the present.

The new journalism emerged in the 1960s, partly marked by its enthusiastic promotion by Tom Wolfe, who identified a series of common procedures in the journalistic work of authors such as Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Gay Talese and Wolfe himself (Wolfe, 1975). Basically, new journalism questioned the established notions of informative objectivity, introducing the inwardness of the reporter and his

or her relationship with the events and people described as an important element of the news report, and used literary techniques to create a reality effect in its texts, transgressing or erasing in this way the existing boundaries between literature and journalism. A similar development took place within the literary institution with the production of non fiction novels, in which journalistic techniques were widely used towards literary ends.

For Hollowell, the introduction of a subjective dimension in the narration of news derives from a new critical consciousness of the act of journalistic communication:

“The new journalist’s stance is often openly critical of the powerful interests that control the dissemination of the news. By revealing his personal biases, the new journalist strives for a higher kind of “objectivity”. He attempts to explode the myth that any report can be objective by freely admitting his own prejudices.” (1977:22)

Wolfe identified as central narrative techniques in new journalism: (i) a scene-by scene construction of the story, (ii) the full register of dialogue, (iii) the use of a third-person point of view, or the portrayal of a scene through the eyes of particular characters (he also calls this the ‘downstage voice’), and (iv) the recording of “status details”, or those aspects of the lifestyle of the character that help to add psychological depth and context (1975: 46-7). To these Hollowell adds: (v) the use of interior monologue, and (vi) composite characterisation, or the “telescoping of character traits and anecdotes drawn from a number of sources into a single representative sketch”, and also points to the widespread use of other literary techniques such as flashbacks and inverted chronology (1977: 25-6).

The main advantage of these techniques is that they allow for the reconstruction of the informative fact as it *could* have happened and also add a certain psychological depth to characters. They are also key elements of the urban *crónica*, especially those that refer to the reconstruction of the dramatic scene, to the use of dialogue, and to the use of a point of view that is situated within a character. All this points to the constitution of forms in which the boundaries between literature and journalism vanish, where, in Monsiváis’ words, “accuracy as the primary source of fantasy” is affirmed (1992: 21).

Wolfe, for whom journalism has come to fill the gap left by the disappearance of the realist novel, thus becoming the new expression of society's manners and morals, has insisted on its literary significance, comparing its situation before the 1960s with the uncanonised status of the novel before the middle of the 19th century. The originality and creativity of the way in which new journalism has approached the act of reporting and writing of news exercised an influence on many Latin American *cronistas*. In addition, some of the themes addressed by new journalism, which has portrayed a reality of marginal social groups ignored by their middle class readers (the new subcultures of the young, centred on rock and drugs, for example) or the constitution of social and political movements (from the civil rights movement to the demonstrations against the Vietnam war), have also had a wide echo in the *crónica*.

3. The urban *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil: Present trends

The urban *crónica* could be characterised, initially and in a general way, as a narration of contemporary history, a narration of everyday history (Rotker, 1992: 111). It is a space where the most insignificant and also the most diverse facts of everyday existence can find a place. In this sense, the *crónica* is a portrait of the everyday life of the city.

Two distinct intentions can be identified in the *crónica*. The first of these is the *crónica's* special interest in a past that is in the process of disappearing and being forgotten, with the main objective being to rescue it and relate it to the present of urban life. The *cronista* often assumes the role of archaeologist to discover and narrate the origins and development of today's city and also to save from oblivion those elements that have been condemned to disappear by modern life. In this sense, the *crónica's* connection with the historiographic tradition still exists and has been turned into one of the constitutive elements of today's *crónica*.⁹ This is visible in

⁹ History is still the main element in a different kind of *crónica* that is of lesser significance in the present context and that will only appear marginally in this work: the *crónica* that is part of the 'official' tradition, represented by the institution of *cronista vitalicio de la ciudad*, held usually by prominent men of letters whose main objective is to transmit the memorable events and local traditions from the past and to preserve local memory. In Mexico City, the institution of *cronista de la ciudad* was transformed and enlarged in 1984 with the creation of the Consejo de la Crónica, recognising that the city could no longer be comprehended by a single *cronista*. In Guayaquil, the *cronista vitalicio* is Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel. In addition, there exists also a journalistic tradition of historical portraits of local customs and architecture, of singular places and habits, represented in Mexico City by *cronistas* such as Ángeles González Gamio and Alberto Barranco Chavarría, and in Guayaquil by Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel.

cronistas who situate themselves as followers and innovators of the historical tradition, such as Jorge Martillo in Guayaquil or Fabrizio Mejía Madrid, in Mexico City.

The second intention refers to the fact that the everyday life the *cronista* seeks to portray is, above all, that which manifests itself outside the social spheres sanctioned by legitimate taste: the language of the street, drinking-places, ephemeral television stars, the lyrics of romantic singers, the sanctuaries of middle class consumption, bohemians, the popular characters of the city streets... The urban *crónica* also shows the processes of impoverishment of the deprived areas of the city, the struggle for survival, the realities of unemployment and underemployment. And, of course, all those elements that are the hidden side of official politics and culture: the corruption of government officials, conventional, middle class taste, the cynicism of public individuals, the hypocrisy of social conventions. Moreover, the *crónica* does not judge the realities it portrays from a distance, does not imply a superiority of vision, but, as John Kraniuskas (1997) has characterised it, its position is one of critical proximity. *Crónicas* are not critiques of false consciousness but rather pieces that express solidarity with the marginalised sectors of society and value their survival strategies and culture.

The *crónica* could thus be defined, in its widest sense, as a report from unofficial culture, a space in which the culture that has been excluded from institutions, all the myriad forms of life that have not yet crystallised into a fixed cultural pattern, can find a place. The *crónica* is also, significantly, a space for the self-interpretation of these phenomena from below. It responds to "the will of registering everything so that time and the readers can discriminate" (Monsiváis, 1987b) and offers an initial attempt at understanding and expressing the significance of the most varied phenomena of everyday life in the city.

The *crónicas* collected in volumes such as *Días de guardar* [*Days to Remember*, 1970] and *Amor perdido* [*Lost Love*, 1977] by Carlos Monsiváis, *Función de medianoche* [*Midnight Show*, 1981] and *Un chavo bien helado* [*A Cool Youth*, 1990] by José Joaquín Blanco, or in collective editions such as *El fin de la nostalgia* [*The End of Nostalgia*, 1992] and issue 150 of magazine *Nexus* (June 1990), include the most diverse themes, from the purity of language, wrestling, football, the songs of popular singers like José José, Agustín Lara and Juan Gabriel, popular cinema and underground culture, to ironic portraits of the Mexican bourgeoisie and of the

politicians. In these books, *crónicas* are “essays of everyday literature” (as the subtitle of *Función de medianoche* indicates) that seek to document a marginal and hidden reality, the vitality of which explodes from below and penetrates the whole of society.

The constitution of the *crónica* as a privileged genre to represent the city has seen a parallel consolidation of the *cronista* as interpreter of city life. Frisby has stressed the contemporary relevance of Benjamin’s *flâneur* and shown the importance of a positive characterisation of this figure as producer of texts. The *flâneur*, who “possesses the capacity for reading the signs of the crowded impressions of the metropolis” (2001: 37), acquires a new significance in the figures of the detective and the journalist, and both embody an active task of investigating and deciphering urban forms¹⁰. The *cronistas* of the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of this kind of *flâneur* in Latin American cities. By virtue of their practical knowledge of the city on the one hand, and of their close relationship with a mass readership on the other, they have acquired a special social prominence and become recognised as privileged cultural mediators with a distinguished role in other media such as radio and television.

It is possible to distinguish between three main areas of interest or thematic trends in the *crónica* which will be here examined separately: the representation of the diversity of urban life; poverty, social marginality and social movements; and popular and mass culture.

The representation of the diversity of urban life

The *crónica* is an eminently urban genre. Although it can serve to portray events in rural settings (such as for example the Zapatista guerrilla in some *crónicas* of Hermann Bellinghausen and Juan Villoro, or the Mexican Revolution, in Martín Guzmán’s masterly account *El águila y la serpiente* [*The Eagle and the Snake*, 1928], it is closely linked to the experience of the modern city and to its urban readership. The term urban *crónica* attempts to express this relationship allowing for a very broad

¹⁰ The similarity between the detective and the journalist has been observed by Rolf Lindner, who asserts: “The job of the reporter is to look for, track down and hunt out pieces of news; just as the detective is seen as a ‘blood hound’, so the reporter is seen as a ‘news hound’. The similarities between detective and reporter go even further: just as the actual investigative activity is preceded by observation, so the stage prior to journalistic investigation is termed ‘nosing around’ (1996: 15-6)

thematic scope (even specific kinds of *crónicas*, such as those that focus on sports or politics, share an urban setting as permanent background).

Moreover, it could be argued that the *crónica*, by virtue of its very form and structure, is a privileged medium through which the ephemeral, multifaceted and fragmented character of modern urban experience can best be represented. In this light, Fritzsche stressed how in Berlin at the end of the 19th century “newspapers threw open their front-page windows to life on the boulevards in ways that books did not; the brief style and rapid succession of articles more nearly fit urban rhythms” (1996: 40). In particular, the *feuilleton* or *fait divers* proved to be the form that was best suited to represent the myriad fleeting forms of urban daily life:

“The *feuilleton*, like the other serious, trivial, and merely curious stories on the newspaper page, served up an excess of details. For the most part, the *feuilleton* writer observed, rather than explained. Just a short sketch, two or three thousand words at most, without any pretensions to analysis and conclusion, the *feuilleton* was an ideal form for recounting the pointillist splendor of the industrial city. By focusing on singular or astonishing details or coincidental events the writer had noticed because they disrupted expectations, the *feuilleton* demonstrated that things were not always in place or properly understood. Producing a spectacle of surprise, *feuilletonists* pleaded the case for the confusion of meaning. They surpassed novelists in their ability to represent the city as an accumulation of co-incidents, in which grand designs and compositions were elusive or merely provisional and in which meanings were ever contested and undermined.” (1996: 44)

These observations on the German *fait divers* apply directly to a kind of *crónica* that proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, in which everyday life in the city and the description of its peoples and topography became a central motif. These *crónicas* are the inheritors of the *costumbrista* sketch discussed above, and sometimes establish a direct link with the more institutionalised *crónica* as exercised by the official *cronista* of the city, which tends to be a history of places and local customs. In this topographic and taxonomic vein, we find some of Poniatowska’s *crónicas*¹¹, where she tries to map a city that is disappearing under the influence of modernisation, but also a significant part of the texts published in newspapers during the ‘boom’ of the *crónica* in the 1980s in Mexico, which focus on the idiosyncratic, anecdotal or

curious aspects of the everyday life of the city and also on the ways of life of the marginalised¹². In Guayaquil, Fernando Artieda has similarly approached the popular culture and character of the city in its most idiosyncratic aspects. The descriptive nature of these *crónicas* contrasts with the predominantly interpretative objectives of hybrid forms like the *crónica*-essay, through which authors like Monsiváis and Blanco have expressed their vision of contemporary city life.

Some of these texts show a celebratory and carnivalistic tone in addressing a newly discovered plurality and in registering city life in its myriad forms. Their impulse is similar to that of the *costumbrista* sketch. However, the intention is now not to moralise about habits, but to acknowledge the city's diversity and to guide their (largely middle class) readers through an urban landscape in which they can no longer find their way. It is an attempt to directly address and respond to present day alienation and fragmentation in an urban context in which people of very diverse social and geographical origins coexist.

However, the impact of this kind of *crónica* is similar to that of 19th century Parisian guidebooks, in which, as Parkhurst (1994) has pointed out, collective authorship prevented the formulation of a single definitive point of view, and of Berlin's physiologies which, according to Fritzsche, "did not construct an authoritative map to the city; they fashioned its impressionistic surface" (1996: 94). Further, the limitations identified above for the *costumbrista* sketch also apply here: in many cases *cronistas* feel obliged to direct their attention to the most superficial and insignificant aspects of daily life, a factor which helps to explain why many of these *crónicas* soon become dated. In addition, the final character of these texts can often be conciliatory, and real difference explained away through its aesthetisation or even through its depiction as folkloric or picturesque. This is a type of text that might sometimes accommodate to the newspapers' demand for entertaining notes containing local colour for easy consumption, a danger that is always present for the *crónica* as a genre.

¹¹ See for example 'El último guajolote' ('The last turkey'), in *Luz y luna, las lunetas* [Light, moon, the little moons] (1994: 9-35), and the volume *Todo empezó en domingo* [Everything began on Sunday] (1997), which describes Sunday walks through the city in the 1950s.

¹² See for example the *crónicas* published in the collective volumes *El fin de la nostalgia* (1992) and, more recently, *Érase una vez en el D.F.* [Once upon a time in Mexico City, 1999]. Hermann Bellinghausen and Manuel Blanco produced sketches of everyday life. Ignacio Trejo wrote about the

The *crónica* as register of social movements from below

One of the trends of the *crónica*, from the 1970s until today, but of special significance during the 1980s, is the will to represent or give a voice to the marginalised social groups and to document the emergence of collective social movements. This is of special significance in Mexico, where the student movement of 1968 and the earthquake of 1985 were linked to the flourishing of the genre. A Mexico that had never been visible before, that of the urban poor, of misery and unemployment, began to appear in the *crónica*. And this is the main difference between today's urban *crónica* and the *crónica modernista*: the life that the *crónica* portrays, and the *crónica* itself, have lost the glamour and the elegance that were conferred on them by the reificatory look of the *modernista* writer. The city where modernity showed its face with rituals of luxury and consumption, where an image of community that gave sense to its fragments could still be constructed, has ceased to exist. It has been transformed into a colossal city where chaos predominates, into the space of uncontrolled growth, of violence and of social struggle. Nor is the *cronista* a cultural gourmet who writes to give a touch of distinction to a privileged educated class and to guide its members through consumption and good taste. The *cronistas* belong, in many cases, to an impoverished middle class, their formation is determined by street culture as well as by recognised cultural institutions, and their references are inevitably hybrid and mixed.

The *crónica*, the reemergence of which in the last 30 years in Mexico is closely related to the appearance of a civil movement of protest and of a critical press, starts to turn its face to the marginal and the emergent, to the masses and the destitute, and everyday life is now defined as the everyday struggle of this marginalised class:

"Everyday life in the capitalist city is the unending struggle against the available versions of the State and of capital: crisis of urban services (housing, transport, cultural and social, educational and health supplies), green spaces destroyed by speculation and ignorance, contamination, depersonalisation, degraded and degrading forms of human relationship." (Monsiváis, 1987c: 114)

colonia Roma, a middle class area. *Cronistas* like Emiliano Pérez Cruz (Nezahualcóyotl), Armando Ramírez (Tepito) and Josefina Estrada focused on the life of the lower classes.

The book of *crónicas* that best reflects this progressive development of the *crónica* as a form that makes its own and expresses the struggles and popular mobilisations in the city is Carlos Monsiváis' *Entrada libre. Crónicas de una sociedad que se organiza* [*Entry Free. Chronicles of a society that is beginning to organize*, 1987], which describes the formation of social movements from below during the 80s (the inhabitants' response to the 1985 earthquake; the explosion of a gas plant in San Juanico; the opposition to the PRI in the Indian village of Juchitán; the organisations in the popular barrios; the teachers' strikes of 1981 and 1986; the student movement of 1987, among others), as "significant fragments of free entry to history or to the present".

The *cronista* of the present attempts to assume a role of critical witness and to become the voice of the marginalised. In this sense, Carlos Monsiváis, as recognised unofficial *cronista* of the city (Poniatowska, 1999: 44), states:

"A task of *crónica* and reportage that cannot be postponed: to give a voice to the traditionally proscribed and silenced sectors, to all kinds of minorities or majorities that cannot find a place or a representation in the mass media... It is about giving a voice to the marginalised and the dispossessed, opposing and destroying the idea of the news as a commodity, refusing the assimilation and ideological recuperation of the dominant class, questioning the prejudices and the sectarian and sexist limitations of the militant left and of the declared left, specifying the combative elements of popular culture that can be recuperated, perceiving the journalistic task as a whole where, let's say, the tape recorder only plays a subordinate role." (1993: 76)

There emerges, in this way, a new kind of critical journalism that assimilates the lesson of North American new journalism (the denunciation of a false and simplistic objectivity) and gives it a new turn: the acceptance of the prevalence of the journalist or the *cronista*'s subjective stance is turned into an active commitment on the side of the oppressed groups of society. The task of the *cronista* becomes to show their lives and to make their voices heard.

In this context, Elena Poniatowska is also a significant figure. In novels, but also in *crónicas* such as those compiled in the books *Fuerte es el silencio* [*Silence is powerful*, 1980] and *Luz, luna, las lunetas* [*Light and Moon*, 1994], and books of *testimonio* like *La noche de Tlatelolco* [*The night of Tlatelolco*, 1971] and *Nada, nadie* [*Nothing, noone*, 1988] she has, through the wide and free use of literary and

journalistic techniques (the interview being the most important of them), produced a hybrid discourse that goes beyond traditional genre distinctions. Her texts, where in many cases the voice of the narrator disappears to give free play to the direct voices of the witnesses and actors of the narrated events, create a polyphony of voices and contribute to the questioning of the authority of the writer. The *cronista* becomes here a mere instrument for the communication of the message, rather than an interpreter of the narrated events.

The features of the *crónica* as a genre, its openness to the use of journalistic techniques such as the interview and to literary techniques such as those Hollowell called 'composite characterisation', or the expression of a collective feeling drawn from a diversity of sources within a single representative character (see above), and the fact that it is a genre that does not presuppose an ultimate source of authority in the narrator, have allowed the *crónica* to become the voice of the voiceless.

On the other hand, this proximity to movements from below must be seen in the context of a society that is characterised by high inequality and low levels of institutional democracy. The *crónica* has been one of the manifestations of the pressure for democratisation, a product of the opening of a marginal sector of the press to more democratic practices and one of the means through which the old hegemony has started to be broken.

The *crónica* and mass culture

The *crónica* can also be considered in its relationship to the growing influence of mass culture, as both its product and a particular response to it. Two aspects must be emphasised here. In the first place, the *crónica* is a mass cultural genre, although it also affirms a certain stylisation and a literary look upon reality. The form of the *crónica* is determined by the medium in which it appears, initially the newspaper; it is a text written under pressure, within limits of space and time, which must address a recognisable reality; it has a communicative purpose and uses mass cultural techniques, such as the interview and the montage of voices. On the other hand, the *crónica* often assumes mass culture in its most diverse forms as one of its main themes. It manifests a descriptive, but also an interpretative intention focused upon the everyday images that shape modern life, and in attempting to assess and understand their meaning is also reflecting upon itself, producing a self-interpretation.

The impact of the culture industry on everyday life is, together with the emergence of social movements, a central theme in the work of Carlos Monsiváis, present at all the stages of his trajectory. Monsiváis has moreover privileged a particular, hybrid form of the *crónica*, the *crónica*-essay, which inherits from the social sciences a greater interpretative intention, as a means to portray and analyse the forms and impact of mass culture. In many of his books of collected *crónicas* we find analysis of mass cultural forms, with a marked preference for mixed forms and for the appropriation of the traditional by the media, especially TV. This was already an important concern in Monsiváis first book of *crónicas*, *Días de guardar* (1970), where the author reproduced some *crónicas* of concerts and his 'Essay on camp in México', and in *Amor perdido* (1977), which described the culture of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Monsiváis's latest collections of *crónicas* focus almost exclusively on mass culture: *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* [*Scenes of modesty and lust*, 1988], a kind of map of Mexican spectacle, and *Los rituales del caos* [*The rituals of chaos*, 1995], which offers a general critical view of urban mass culture, consumption and taste in Mexico City, including some texts on mass popular religion¹³.

It is possible to identify a general underlying interpretative vision of popular and mass culture in Monsiváis' work that has significantly changed over time. Generally, the *cronista* has especially focused on the relationship between mass culture and national culture. Nevertheless, Monsiváis' vision and the portrait he paints of Mexican cultural life have clearly been reformulated from the 1970s, when the author offered ironical portraits of the various forms of manipulated popular culture (especially the melodramatic images spread by radio, cinema and later television), to the late 1980s, when we find a more carnivalised treatment of the diverse uses people make of available mass cultural images.

According to Mudrovcic, Monsiváis' vision of urban popular culture goes from State nationalism, or what Monsiváis perceives as a single cultural identity imposed from above, to a national culture that emanates from below. At the beginning of the line traced by Monsiváis is the legacy of National Unity, which subordinates the national to the State, the solemnity of which is transformed by the *cronista* into Camp:

¹³ See the *crónicas* 'La hora de la tradición', ('Tradition hour', pp 39-52), 'La hora de las convicciones alternativas', ('The hour of alternative beliefs', pp. 72-92), 'Protagonista: El Niño Fidencio', ('Protagonist: Niño Fidencio', pp. 97-108), in *Los rituales del caos*.

"Far from joking with innocent games, the *crónicas* from this period openly fight against the discourse of the State and as soon as they mockingly point to a public lie, they politicise the trivialising look and use it as a critical method of recognition. This is why, in Monsiváis, camp is not only an aesthetic or sportive way out, but rather an ethical exercise of liberation." (1998: 33)

In Mudrovcic's view, the student movement functions as a historical turning point, focusing on a new popular nationalism that does not emanate from the State. This is what Mudrovcic sees as the development from camp into kitsch, which can be illustrated in Monsiváis' conception of *cursilería* as the genuine National Unity in *Escenas de pudor y liviandad* (1988). In this book, social *crónica* and the *crónica* of spectacles are used to portray the "small history of 20th century Mexico", the ways and beliefs of a society that "never becomes fully modern".

The progressive line that takes the *cronista* to a view of cultural plurality from below culminates in his last book of *crónicas*, *Los rituales del caos*, the title of which refers to this unfixable and mobile character of mass cultural forms:

"Genuine entertainment escapes control, it does not believe in the blessings of consumption, it does not imagine behind each show the consecrated altars to order. Genuine entertainment (irony, humour, *relajo*) is the most tangible proof that, in spite of everything, some rituals of chaos can also be a liberating force." (1996: 16)¹⁴

Finally, the *crónica* has also been a privileged space to express underground cultures and the subcultures of the young. Through this genre, a new generation of writers and journalists have taken up the pen. For Juan Villoro, who is among them and whose first book of "imaginary *crónicas*" was a fictional recreation of the world of Mexican rock¹⁵:

"Those of us who grew up between the avalanche of mass culture and the culture of secrecy and the confessional find in the *crónica* our personal border, the recipe for mixing the public and the private. What was said under the breath, the stories condemned to oblivion or to the

¹⁴ "La diversión genuina escapa a los controles, descrece de las bendiciones del consumo, no imagina detrás de cada show los altares consagrados al orden. La diversión genuina (ironía, humor, relajo) es la demostración más tangible de que, pese a todo, algunos de los rituales del caos pueden ser también una fuerza liberadora."

vague survival of rumour, found their place of residence. The illegals of the new Mexican journalism fasten the transient, turn the beam on to new characters and places, invert the terms of truth (the only hypothesis that can be rejected: the official one)." (1997:82)

The *crónica*, which he has described as the "wild genre of the end of the century", represents for Villoro this peculiar and original literary response to mass culture through which a new generation has openly questioned a society marked by political and cultural conformism and authoritarianism, thus renovating the genre's significance in representing the pluralism and diversity of today's urban culture.

¹⁵ *Tiempo transcurrido*, 1986.

CHAPTER 3

THE CITY IN FRAGMENTS: THE *CRÓNICA* IN THE PRESS OF MEXICO CITY AND GUAYAQUIL

1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to describe the presence and role of the *crónica* in the daily press of Mexico City and Guayaquil, as well as to examine the specific features of particular texts. To this purpose, a selection of the *crónicas* appearing in the main newspapers and magazines of both cities during two months has been made. The complete lists of texts as well as their quantitative analysis are reproduced in appendices 2 and 3.

This analysis is based on what has been termed urban *crónica*, understood in its broadest sense as a genre that can embrace any theme that forms part of the life of the city, including political *crónicas* and *crónicas* of sporting events. The *crónica* is an extremely versatile genre that can take many forms. The conception of the *crónica* employed to make the selections has been very wide and goes beyond what is strictly literary *crónica* to include some simpler texts that are primarily journalistic and thus unlikely to be compiled in books, but that share some features with the more literary texts, like a certain degree of fictionalisation of the narrated events and the highlighting of the central position of the author.

This last point is related to a major difficulty that appears when the *crónica* is considered in what is its original context, the written press, where a clear distinction between the literary *crónica* and other journalistic texts fades. In book collections of *crónicas*, these have been separated from the context of current news and have undergone a process of selection and correction. Their meaning and form change, and they are read in a different way. Every *crónica* reinforces the others to form a loose but coherent whole, a body of texts that have an enduring literary value that is independent from the medium in which they first appeared. In the newspaper, these qualities of unity and of permanence disappear. *Crónicas* are just pieces in a highly heterogeneous whole where many different items on a wide variety of subjects coexist, and in which the main features are fragmentation and transience. In this

context, it is sometimes difficult to trace a strict line between what is merely journalistic, what perishes with the day, and what is not.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that *crónicas* are 'literature under pressure': they are subject to the limitations of space and time and, in many cases, of theme and form that the medium in which they appear imposes upon them. They are directed to a specific readership, whom they address by virtue of a certain shared knowledge of the situation with a recognisable language. In all these aspects, *crónicas* are certainly different from and opposed to literary texts, which are characterised by their absolute freedom from the world and the lack of external rules and impositions.

To better understand the kind of choice that a distinction between more literary and more journalistic texts implies, it can be useful to visualise a sort of continuum of texts which, at one end would have literature, the most stylised *crónica* that is totally independent from the journalistic context of information and current news, and, at the other end, an exclusively journalistic, informative *crónica*, which is merely a detailed exposition of a news event in chronological order. Clearly, this work is not concerned with the strictly journalistic text, but where the line is drawn along this continuum is, to a certain extent, arbitrary.

The *crónica* coexists in the press with, and distinguishes itself from, other journalistic genres. With respect to the reportage, the *crónica* offers a subjective view of the narrated events in a way that the reportage, more linked to the factual and to the need to inform, cannot give. The *crónica* has in common with the article of opinion and the column its subjective character and the prominent role of its author, and there exists an area of overlap between them (as will seen, many of the selected *crónicas* belong to weekly columns). In contrast to the article of opinion, the purpose of the *crónica* is not to communicate to the reader the author's vision on a particular matter in a direct way, but rather to recreate it. In personal columns, the author possesses the freedom to reflect on particular topics of his or her interest, to explore internal moods and to recreate personal memories. The *crónica*, by contrast, must be related to an external reality, to particular events in the world.

The main criteria for selecting texts result from the general characterisation of the *crónica* traced in chapter 2, with special emphasis on three particular elements. Firstly, on the formal, literary elaboration and the presence of a distinguishable voice and style of the *cronista*. Secondly, on subjectivity, whether in the direct expression of the opinions of the *cronista* or in the recreation of events from the point of view of

a specific character. Thirdly, on fictionalisation or the reconstruction of actions and scenes through literary techniques.

Following these criteria, specific texts rather than authors have been selected. As a consequence, in many instances, some texts from an author appear in the selection while others do not. In Mexico, this is the case, for example, of Guadalupe Loaeza, many of whose texts were articles of opinion and have been left out; of Guillermo Ochoa, whose contributions to his column have not been incorporated when they were recreations of personal experiences and feelings or when they were closer to the article of opinion; and of Jaime Avilés, the majority of whose political *crónicas* have not been selected because they were strictly informative. In Ecuador, this is the case especially of Simón Espinosa, whose texts have been left out when they were strictly articles of opinion.

In addition, several instances of border-line cases have been included in the selection. Two essentially journalistic *crónicas* of concerts in Mexico City, which by the very nature of the genre combine description and interpretation have been included. This is also the case of the historical and architectural sketches of Angeles González Gamio, which tend to be informative reconstructions of the past rather than creative accounts. Several primarily journalistic *crónicas* published in Guayaquil's newspapers that recreate the situation of social and economic crisis, describing particular scenes of life in the city, have also been included. A further border-line case is Espinosa's weekly contribution to the newspaper *Hoy*, between the article of opinion and the *crónica*.

2. A brief note on the character of the Mexican and Ecuadorian Press

The Latin American press can generally be characterised by its low social impact and significance, especially when compared with radio and television. Thus, following UNESCO figures for 1996, the average circulation of newspapers for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean was 101 per thousand inhabitants. There were in that year 1,309 dailies registered for the whole region (see Appendix 1, tables 2, 3 and 4 for figures of specific countries from 1950 to the present). In addition, according to an analysis from CIESPAL, the region is characterised by a predominance of local publications rather than national ones, which in 1990 accounted for only 12.1% of the total number (López Arjona, 1993: 17-23).

Mexico is the second country in Latin America with the greatest number of newspapers after Brazil, with 295 or 22.5% of the total in circulation. The figures for circulation are 9,030,000 or 97 per thousand inhabitants, thus slightly below the regional average of 101. However, it must be noted that 1996 is the first year in which a previous trend that situated Mexico clearly above the average circulation in the region is reversed: consider for example the figures for 1990, with 135 dailies per thousand inhabitants in Mexico, as compared to an average of 82 for the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 1999). Mexican newspapers are generally characterised by their local coverage: following figures published by CIESPAL, in 1990 91.2% of the newspapers were local, 2.9% regional and 5.9% or 16 national, all of them published in the capital (1993: 129-30).

With over 30 daily publications of highly varying significance and coverage, Mexico City is characterised by a high number of publications with a relatively low number of readers. In fact, few of these newspapers have an influential presence in social affairs and a significant readership, and many of them are kept alive through their links to political fractions and through government advertising. A second feature of the Mexican scene is the profound variation in impact that some of the media undergo. This is the case of *Excélsior*, a newspaper founded in 1917 which from being one of the leading dailies in the 1970s has been relegated to a position of almost total insignificance. It is also the case of *Unomásuno*, a more recent publication, founded in 1977, which became very important in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but gradually lost its readership after the creation of *La Jornada* in 1984. Attempts to control the media by various political fractions are not external to these changes of fortune.

Figures for circulation of specific newspapers are scarce and unreliable, as they are provided by the editors themselves and, for commercial purposes, are well above the real numbers. Trejo Delarbre estimates that real figures seldom reach the limit of 100,000, a figure that only the tabloid *La Prensa*, or the Sunday edition of *El Universal* attain (1990).¹

¹ Up to date declared figures are: *La Afición*, 85,000; *El Día*, 50,000; *Diario de México*, 76,000; *Esto*, 400,200; *Excélsior*, 200,000; *El Financiero*, 135,000; *El Herald de México*, 209,600; *La Jornada* 106,471 (100,924 on Sundays); *Novedades* 42,990 (43,536 on Sundays); *Ovaciones*, 130,000 and evening circulation of 100,000; *La Prensa*, 208,147 (172,465 on Sundays); *Reforma*, 115,000; *El Sol de México*, 76,000; *El Universal*, 170,356 (181,615 on Sundays); *Unomásuno*, 40,000; *Proceso*, 98,784; *Siempre!*, 100,000. *South America, Central America and the Caribbean 2000*, 8th edition, London: Europa Publications Limited, 2000.

The most significant newspapers in terms of prestige and readership are at present *La Jornada*, with a left wing university level and student public, *Reforma* (created in 1994), directed to the upper middle classes, with large social and business sections and numerous supplements, and the traditional daily *El Universal* (founded in 1916).

UNESCO's figures for Ecuador for 1996 are the following: there were a total of 29 newspapers in the country, with an estimated circulation of 820,000, or 70 per thousand inhabitants. CIESPAL's figures are considerably different: in 1990, there were 36 newspapers with an estimated circulation of 55 per 1000 inhabitants. Most of those were regional, with 7 papers with national coverage and 10 local papers (1993: 51-80)².

Guayaquil has seven dailies, four of which circulate nationally: *El Universo*, *El Telégrafo*, *Expreso*, *El Extra*. *El Universo* is the most widely read newspaper in Guayaquil, with an edition of 160.000 (200.000 on Sundays), and *El Comercio* is the most read in Quito, with an edition of 100.000 (and 140.000 on Sundays). Following Gómez Iturralde, *El Extra*, a sensationalist tabloid is, with an edition of 350.000, the most widely read on a national level and, in Guayaquil and Quito, only second to *El Universo* and *El Comercio*. *El Telégrafo* has an edition of 26.000, *Expreso* of 75.000 and *Hoy* (from Quito) of 56.600 (62.700 on Sundays) (*Directorio de medios en Ecuador*, 1990; Gómez Iturralde, 1998). Again, as in the case of Mexico, these figures refer to declared numbers, and real figures are significantly lower than these specified here.

Ecuadorian newspapers can be characterised by their relative poverty when compared to Mexican ones. No newspaper has more than 50 pages. Following data of CIESPAL, the newspapers with the highest number of pages are *El Universo* with 42, and *El Comercio* with an average of 40 (1993: 74-76). In addition to this, there is a scarcity of feature articles, and cultural sections are often limited to a single page, which contains mostly informative notes.

Finally, the present situation of the country, its deep economic, political and social crisis, also has an impact on the press, both in terms of production, as increasing costs force editors to reduce the size and quality of the newspapers even

² UNESCO's figures for 1990 are 25 dailies with an average estimated circulation of 80 per thousand inhabitants.

further, and in terms of consumption, as lower middle class and working class people can no longer afford to pay for goods such as newspapers that are not strictly essential

3. The *crónica* in the press of Mexico City

As has been shown in the quantitative analysis of the *crónicas* from the press of Mexico City reproduced in appendix 2, there are significant differences in the kind of *crónicas* that appear in the various newspapers and magazines, what issues they offer for reflection to the reader and how they relate to the context of current news and to life in the city. What follows is a brief summary of the particular trends of every newspaper and a more general outline of the kind of issues that are brought forth by the *crónicas* in the press of Mexico City.

Reforma publishes *crónicas* which, as a whole, reflect primarily on the qualities of city life and especially on its past. Most of them appear in the cultural section and are thus explicitly offered as literary journalism to readers. Their authors have great freedom to write on a theme of their choice with their own personal style, and sometimes they are also given large spaces in prominent places of the newspaper.

In *La Jornada*, a wide variety of contemporary themes are approached, and the *crónica* also serves as a vehicle to portray everyday and current events that take place in the areas of politics, sports and city spectacles. Cultural sections are here also a privileged place for a good part of the *crónicas*, which thus tend to be of a literary kind. The image that emerges from the whole of the *crónicas* published in *La Jornada* is markedly different from that of *Reforma*. Here, the depiction is of a present day city, where characters from working class sectors often play the main roles (as in Cristina Pacheco's and Hermann Bellinghausen's texts). *La Jornada* is the newspaper in which by far most *crónicas* appear, and also where they are accorded their most important role, not just as elements of embellishment and distinction, as in *Reforma*, but primarily as a means to describe events and experiences from all areas of urban life.

El Universal publishes the lowest number of *crónicas*. It offers a peculiar combination, as *crónicas* generally have here a less significant role but, on the other hand, very good quality *crónicas* from first rate *cronistas* (Carlos Monsiváis and Juan Villoro) are published. Further, its cultural pages are of an inferior quality than those of the newspapers mentioned above. The role of the *crónica* is less global, not

comprising as many varied aspects of city life as in the other newspapers, especially in those that refer to the city's past. *Crónicas* that depict scenes of everyday life tend to focus on poverty and forms of survival of the working classes.

Finally, *crónicas* published in the magazines *Proceso*, *Milenio* and *Nexos* are generally characterised by their longer length. There is in these media the possibility of discussing wide ranging social and political issues of the present that cannot easily find a place in the context of the newspaper.

In Mexico City everything can be the object of a *crónica*. Despite Monsiváis' complaints about its relegation to a second rate role³, the *crónica* has retained a considerable degree of importance as the vehicle through which a whole variety of issues are expressed in newspapers and magazines on a daily basis. There is a prominent place for them in many of the major sections of the newspapers, and *cronistas* are well known and popular amongst readers. They possess a relative freedom from constraints on form and content that few other journalists enjoy, although they are often subjected to strict limitations of space.

The *crónica* has retained from the tradition established by the *costumbrista* sketch a preference for detail and for the significant fragment of city life. Today, the more traditional vignettes of city characters and ways of life coexist with accounts of personal urban explorations of middle class *cronistas*, like those of Fabrizio Mejía and Sergio González. In them, a highly individualised and subjective portrayal of life in the city is offered. The city is also the object of remembrance of the old days and of the urban landscapes from childhood (Sealtiel Alatriscie) and of the *cronista's* reflective gaze and ironic remarks on its contradictory nature and ways of life (Juan Villoro).

The historical *crónica* that typically recreates the past of particular areas and its customs also has an important presence in today's newspapers, which bring this established tradition to a mass readership. Angeles González Gamio, who is secretary of the *Consejo de la Crónica*, the organisation that represents the role previously exercised by the official *cronista* of the city, and Alberto Barranco Chavarría, among others, contribute to its dissemination, recreating the architectural and lived past of popular areas of the city.

³ Monsiváis points out that the *crónica* occupies "an important but marginal place" and that its boom during the 1970s and 1980s is long gone. This decrease in the importance of the *crónica* is, according to Monsiváis, linked to the limited space it receives in the newspaper and to an overall lesser

But there is also the type of *crónica* that focuses primarily on the city's inhabitants, their daily routines and ways of life. This trend might be today less significant than it was two decades ago, when newspapers like *Unomásuno* and later *La Jornada* actively promoted the inventory of the everyday life of the city's inhabitants, and *cronistas* like José Joaquín Blanco, Emiliano Pérez Cruz, Josefina Estrada, Ignacio Trejo Fuentes and others engaged in the register of particular areas and people. Today, if the initial impulse of this trend may already have waned, a significant number of its instances still remain. Thus, a variety of classes are represented in the *crónica*, from the working class that plays the main role in Cristina Pacheco's imaginary stories, to Guadalupe Loaeza's portrayal of the social ways of the dominant sectors.

From these diverse portrayals an ambiguous city emerges that is both threatening and comforting, a site of individual and collective memories but also the protagonist of the *cronista*'s nightmares and fears, and an essentially fragmentary and unknowable place where a sense of community has been lost. A city that is undergoing a process of constant growth, where old neighbourhoods vanish and intrusive motorways suddenly appear; a place that escapes the ordering gaze of the *cronista* as interpreter and confronts him or her with the insecurity of the unfinished, the improvised and the ever changing. This is also connected, in turn, as Monsiváis has pointed out, to a tendency to move away from a *crónica* of impulse towards what he calls a note of colour, a brief *crónica* of sensations or picturesque sketch (private interview, see also next chapter, section 4), which also renders city life more and more opaque to understanding. The role of the *cronista* as interpreter, which is connected to the *crónica*'s relationship to the social sciences as tool of analysis of social reality (Reguillo 2000: 24-25), tends to recede into the background but is still retained by *cronistas* like Carlos Monsiváis himself and Juan Villoro, who produce reflective texts in which they explicitly try to ascertain the meaning of some of the city's most varied and peculiar phenomena.

Peter Fritzsche, in his analysis of the representation of Berlin in turn-of-the-century newspapers, noted the preference for the liminal zones of a city that was undergoing rapid growth and, at the same time, the avoidance of specific angles which

significance and understanding of literary practices in the press (personal interview).

portrayed more directly the material dimensions of the industrial city. He stated, with respect to the favoured angles of vision in early 20th century Berlin:

“The fugitive city was a distinctively modernist topos, and the fugitive appearances of the city were heightened by the highly selective vantages that artists and writers favoured. Casual browsers followed their noses but kept arriving at particular points of circulation: the tenement courtyard (but rarely tenement apartments themselves); the periphery where the city collided with the countryside (but not beyond); turbulent zones of transition in the city center (but not the built-up districts where most people lived); the garish shopping arcades (but not plainer commercial avenues); dancehalls (but not ordinary working-class cafés); twilight (but not midday). Interstitial areas such as these choreographed urban collisions and urban juxtapositions, brought all manner of opposites together, and thereby presented an “always changing, always colorful picture.”” (1996: 246-47)

In Mexico City a similar selective vision could be traced. While there have been *cronistas* from working-class origins who have portrayed the everyday life of the marginal areas they come from – Armando Ramírez in Tepito and Emiliano Pérez Cruz in Nezahualcóyotl are the most significant – the predominant trend in the *crónica* has been to focus on selected parts of the city centre and on traditional middle and working-class neighbourhoods. Rarely, for example, are the industrial working-class areas of the North of the city depicted in texts which in fact remain largely focused on only the geographical core of a city that has extended itself by huge proportions. The periphery is largely ignored, while the special concern with limits and boundaries, as emphasised by Fritzsche, is here in fact transported to the city centre, which becomes the focus of constant reappraisals as the site where the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, the marginal and the chaotic meet.

Since the re-emergence of the *crónica* in the late 1960s the realm of politics, understood in its widest sense, has been one of its privileged focuses. The *crónica* portrayed the emergence of urban masses – the newly discovered civil society – in accounts of demonstrations and strikes, self-help organisations and ordinary people’s reactions to natural disasters such as the earthquake of 1985. At the same time, it derided the exercise of politics from above, offering satirical portraits of politicians and political events and scrutinising and openly criticising official truths. This tradition has remained strong until today. Monsiváis still has a prominent presence in various media, and his political parables as well as his more direct montages of

politicians' speeches (in his weekly column in newspaper *La Jornada* 'Por mi madre, bohemios'; 'For my mother, bohemians') are a very significant part of the political *crónicas* appearing in the press at the present. In addition, the existence of political conflict and the mobilisation of people can very rapidly generate the production and publication of *crónicas*⁴. On the other hand, the *crónica* is also used today as a means to make traditional political comment more attractive and familiar to readers, through a combination of opinion with a more distended tone and with a wider thematic scope, as in Guadalupe Loaeza's column.

Finally, the *crónica* mixes by its very nature the high with the low, the literary with the journalistic and has thus also proven especially appropriate to give more elaborate accounts of the most popular sports events. Sports *crónicas* appearing at present in the Mexican press are not merely well written, detailed accounts of football matches or bullfights, but also deliberately bring literary and other wider cultural references to the world of sports (as in the texts of Juan Villoro and José Cueli).

4. The *crónica* in the press of Guayaquil

As examined in the selection of texts presented and analysed in appendix 3, the present role of the *crónica* in the press of Guayaquil can be generally characterised by the very limited significance of this form and also by a gradual process of squeezing out the special qualities that the genre brings to the context of the news. The *crónica* as a genre of literary journalism in which the author's style and creativity can flourish and are combined with a communicative, factual content about any aspect of urban life has practically disappeared from today's newspapers in Guayaquil. Most of the selected texts are short accounts closely related to current events in the political sphere, in which the space for creative elaboration and literary exercise is limited both in terms of length and of the primarily interpretative function they fulfil in the context of the newspaper. Most of these texts are not very likely to be gathered in future publications as their value is primarily circumstantial, and would not have been selected if a more narrow conception of the *crónica* as a literary genre had been employed.

⁴ This can be, for example, illustrated by the texts that appeared in all the major newspapers the day after the mass demonstration of 9th of February 2000 against the government's repression of the student strike at the National University.

The role of *crónicas* in the different newspapers is extremely limited. *El Universo*, by far Guayaquil's most important newspaper and one in which historical and literary *crónicas* had been allowed to proliferate in the past, still offers some spaces for *crónicas* today, but curtails at the same time their most characteristic features by subjecting them to strict limitations of length, form and theme. Jorge Martillo used to publish in this both urban and travel *crónicas*. At the time of the selection, his collaboration had been limited to the production of shorter texts of an intermediate nature between the literary travel *crónica* and the tourist article, which make a poor comparison to his earlier contributions, gathered and published in the book *Viajando por los pueblos costeros* [*Travelling Through Coastal Villages*, 1991]. In this way, travel *crónicas*, a major legacy from the *modernista* tradition that had been renewed and reinforced during the 1980s by *cronistas* such as Pablo Cuví⁵ and Martillo himself, who documented and recreated their travels and experiences throughout Ecuador in a literary way, is today being drained of its essence and made subservient to the interests of tourism.

Political *crónicas*, both in *El Universo* (where Francisco Febres Cordero writes) and in Quito's daily *Hoy* (where Iván Ulchur and Simón Espinosa make their contributions), are exclusively short sketches from the section of Editorial Comment, the role of which is mainly limited to providing interpretations of recent news events.

Images of the city, especially those offered by *Expreso*, a newspaper of less significance but one that explicitly emphasises and is rich in local news, are also limited to the journalistic and circumstantial, lacking more enduring literary qualities. Moreover, and equally important, the aspects of the city *crónicas* depict are extremely narrow and confined to the theme of scenes of the crisis. At present, newspapers circulating in Guayaquil do not provide any accounts of popular places or areas, particular characters or habits, the way of life of specific social sectors of the population or the everyday experience of the *cronista* in the city.

In addition, there is nothing being published at present on the history of urban practices and the past of the city, which strikes one as very odd when Guayaquil's important and popular tradition of historical *crónicas* is taken into account. Guayaquil is a city that prides itself on its long line of official *cronistas* that since the early days of the colony have been collecting the little facts and curious turns of history. Rodolfo

⁵ Cuví's travel *crónicas* are gathered in the volumes *En los ojos de mi gente* [*In the Eyes of my People*, 1988] and *Viajes por la Costa* [*Travels Through the Coast*, 1996].

Pérez Pimentel, present official *cronista* of the city, renovated this tradition by bringing it to the newspaper⁶, but his contributions to the press ended and he has not been followed by others.

Finally, the falling significance accorded to the *crónica* in the press in Guayaquil at the present, must be related to the lack of literary journalism in general and to the few cultural spaces available in newspapers and their restricted informative nature. Only monthlies of the kind of *Diners* and now *Cash* have attempted to fill this gap, offering to their readers a diversity of cultural and feature articles by authors who are often renowned writers.

5. A reading of a selection of *crónicas* appearing in the press of Mexico City and Guayaquil

This section contains a close reading and commentary on six *crónicas*, three from Mexico City and three from Guayaquil (see appendix 4 for a reproduction of the texts, both in Spanish and in their English translations). The texts have been selected to represent a degree of the existing variety and the most significant kinds of *crónica* that are currently being published in the two cities. These are also the *crónicas* that have been used in the focus group sessions with readers, which are analysed in chapter 8.

Carlos Monsiváis, 'Dramas de la vida irreal' ('Dramas in an unreal life'), *El Universal*, 5th September 1999.

The *crónica* belongs to Carlos Monsiváis' weekly space in the section dedicated to national politics of newspaper *El Universal*, where the author commented on diverse issues of the national reality using a variety of forms, ranging from the article of opinion to sketches or tales of imaginary situations.

The text, entitled 'Dramas de la vida irreal' ('Dramas in an unreal life') has the structure of a short story, with a beginning, a developing thread and a clear end, and

⁶ He published in the Sunday supplement of newspaper *El Universo*, between 1968 and 1971, a variety of historical accounts on the city which were later gathered in the popular three volume collection *El Ecuador profundo* [*Deep Ecuador*, 1988], now out of print. He also contributed, during the 1980s, to the newspapers *El Universo*, *Telégrafo* and *Expreso* with biographical accounts of significant figures of Guayaquilean society, and other collaborations, including a heraldry section called 'El Ecuador social'.

possesses full meaning in itself, independently from the immediate reality on which it comments. It tells the story of A4, a successful presenter of a comical television programme who has an academic past in the political sciences. When he is asked to interview the candidates to the presidential election in his show, he envisages the opportunity of using his knowledge of political science and of making an impact at last. He designs an ambitious questionnaire for the candidates, but is finally shocked and frustrated when he realises that they only seek to communicate with the wide public through the most gratuitous jokes and ridiculous appearance, celebrating stupidity and spectacle. He finally accepts that present day politics is a comic affair, buries his previous ambitions and becomes a state secretary for the newly elected President.

The story is narrated in the third person by a flexible and adaptable narrator who moves freely between a rather intellectual tone (there are allusions to several thinkers like Isaiah Berlin, Sartre and Alain Touraine) and a more popular language that incorporates common forms of spoken and regional language, especially at the semantic level (for example, words like *cincuentón* and *chance*). The voices of the characters that appear in the frequent dialogues abundantly use popular refrains, expressions and vocabulary, sometimes derived from Mexican urban slang. This starts with the words of the owner of the television channel, who tells A4 he has a “proyecto fregonsísimo” (fantastically funny project) and adds:

“There have been proper surveys and superficial surveys but they’re all coming to the same conclusion – that nobody tunes in to intellectual debates. It’s like no one cares, that mothers and families don’t give a toss. And so it occurred to me that...”⁷

Later, one of the candidates tells A4 that he is not interested in his questionnaire but in appealing to the public, and in doing this, popular language plays a key role:

“Listen pal – I don’t fall for your tricks. That stuff’s so uncool. People want an image of someone they can trust, of a candidate like them, someone who swears, someone who hangs on to his youth for dear life, someone who’s up for whatever’s going down.”⁸

⁷ “Se han hecho estudios concienzudos y estudios superficiales y los dos coinciden en que la gente ni se asoma a las entrevistas de tono intelectual. Como que esa onda no es onda de nadie, como que esa rola los aburre a madres. Y he pensado, fíjate que verbo tan *chido*, he pensado que...”

One of the most salient features of popular speech as explored by Monsiváis is what is known in Mexico as *albur* (a sort of swearword), which has been approached by Octavio Paz as an instance of the Mexican attitude of reservation and distance and defined as “the verbal combat made out of obscene allusions with double meaning that is so widely practised in Mexico City” (1993: 175). For Monsiváis, the *albur* is a means to escape a sexually repressive society and, more importantly, has been rescued by Mexican mass culture as a form of popular wit the endless repetition of which could replace development of plot (1988: 306). This empty use of jokes with double meaning is what the text portrays on the part of the political candidates. Thus, the first candidate’s answer to A4’s question on the limitations of the present State is “Lend me your sister, will you, tonight or any night”⁹, and then “From the front or from the back, I’ll get you in the sack”¹⁰.

On the other hand, and on a more general level, the text mimics and offers a parodical use of the language and tone of melodrama, already announced in the title (*‘Dramas in an unreal life’*), which completely permeates the style in which events are narrated. Thus, we are introduced to the main character’s ambitions through the pompous language of feelings:

“He loved the theory of the state above all things, and he stayed up until all hours reading... But life, with its tendency to indiscipline and its resistance to scientific explanation, took him in the direction of comedy, and to make a living he ended up as a presenter on a children’s TV show. Something happened then; the world clocked on to Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (...) and success relentlessly pursued him. His ratings went up day by day; A4 as they started calling him became a comic for grown ups and success was handed to him on a plate.”¹¹

The author introduces a satirical element to this sentimental tone through bizarre associations like that of love with the theory of the State and through

⁸ “Mira mano, ni me asomé a tus jaladas. Esta es otra época, galán. Lo que hoy se requiere es dar una imagen de confianza, de que el candidato es como todos, que alburca, que quiere ser joven a la de güevo, que no le sacatea al parche.”

⁹ “Me prestas a tu hermana, de noche o en la mañana”.

¹⁰ “De frente y de perfil, te trueno el quintonil”.

¹¹ “Amaba a la teoría del Estado sobre todas las cosas, y le robaba tiempo al sueño leyendo... Pero la vida, indisciplinada y nada científica, lo condujo por el camino de la comicidad, y para sobrevivir entró de animador a un programa infantil. Algo pasó, el mundo hizo *click* con Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (...) y el éxito lo persiguió sin tregua. Día a día el *rating* aumentaba; A4, como le decían al presentarlo, pasó a ser cómico para adultos y el triunfo se le entregó.”

expressions such as “life...took him in the direction of comedy”¹², which is here meant literally (the character is a comic) but gives, at the same time, an ironic tone to the whole.

This parody of melodrama is part of the author’s critique of mass media, to which the ambiguous title also alludes: ‘Dramas in an *unreal life*’ refers to the unreal or falsified world the media presents as life as well as to the fictional character of the story. Mass media is the veiled but ever-present protagonist of the text, to which style and form are permanently pointing, but is also the object of a more direct critique, presented through the words of the owner of the television channel A4 works for:

“... it occurred to me that the thing to do would be to put politics into comedy programmes like yours, with clowns and girls in bikinis and jokes as old as Donald Duck. That makes people feel at home and they’ll relax and take in whatever message you want to send them.”¹³

The author’s attack on the mass media is inextricably linked to his bitter satire of Mexican political life and its figures. Before we are confronted with the appalling reality of the political candidates turned into bad clowns, we are told that A4’s dream was to abandon his banal life as king of television and to devote himself to “the business of defining exactly why some people win the elections and others just falsified ballots”¹⁴. Later, when it is proposed that he make the programme with the candidates, his dream is reformulated in the more pragmatic one of collaborating with the government, once his analytical talent has become known. And at the end we find an ironic reversal of A4s expectations:

“In desperation, A4 resigned from his role as a high level political scientist, acknowledged that politics today is a variety of comedy, memorised 6144 swearwords that he collected in two local snooker halls, let his hair grow and wore a pony tail and never touched a book again. One of his interviewees became President of the republic and today A4 lives at the Ministry of Interior.”¹⁵

¹² “la vida...lo condujo por el camino de la comicidad”

¹³ “... he pensado que la política para ser vista debe entrar en programas cómicos del tipo del tuyo, lleno de payasos y chavas con bikini y chistes de la edad del pato Donald. Eso le da confianza a la plebe y entonces sí se chutan el mensaje y lo que les pongas.”

¹⁴ “la causa de precisar con detalle el por qué unos ganan las elecciones y otros nomás cometen fraude”.

¹⁵ “Desesperado, A4 renunció a ser politólogo de altura, aceptó que la política actual es una variante de los programas cómicos, memorizó 6144 alburas que le prepararon nomás para él en dos billares, se dejó el pelo largo (con trenza) y no volvió a tocar un libro. Uno de sus entrevistados ganó la Presidencia de la República y hoy A4 despacha en la Secretaría de Gobernación.”

Present day politics as a variant of comical programmes is the core of Monsiváis' critique of political life in its relationship to mass culture and the media. Television has become the centre of modern politics. As two of the candidates express: "television is the oracle of our day... and if you're not there you're nowhere"¹⁶, and "a TV interview was the highest honour a politician could be offered"¹⁷. But this, in its turn, has transformed political campaigns into spectacles, requiring, for instance, rehearsals and choreographers.

This is the portrait of a world turned upside down, in which a comedian is in love with political theory while, at the same time, political candidates have become comical figures. The contrast offered by the figure of the comedian, his intelligence and interest in political science, can only help to sharpen the tragic dimension (note that the title introduced the text as a drama) of the depicted reality, functioning also as its implicit critique and as an image of what politics should really be about.

These are the elements that an attentive reading reveals. However, the virtue of this *crónica* is that it also possesses a different, parallel dimension that is not easily perceived if one is not familiar with the context in which it is written. Far from merely being an imaginative and fictional satire of Mexican politics, the text is very directly commenting on recent events in Mexico's political life. It was published in the context of the campaign for the July 2000 presidential election and the appearance of its pre-candidates and candidates in a comical television programme called *Otro rollo* [*Another Story*], with popular presenter Adal Ramones, whose name A4 directly evokes (Adal Ramones's surname is the plural of a common first name in Spanish, and A4 has no surname but four first names, all of which start with A). Similarly, the television owner, who has the idea of making the programme, could be associated with Emilio Azcárraga, president of Televisa, where *Otro rollo* was broadcast. The text is further interspersed with comments that refer to concrete aspects of Mexican politics, like the recent scandal of the murder of Paco Stanley.

The *crónica* thus possesses a temporal dimension determined by the particular immediate context of Mexican politics. Its allusions are designed to be easily recognised by readers who have a knowledge of Mexico's ordinary political culture, and its enjoyment derives in part from the ability to relate the author's satire to

¹⁶ "la televisión... es el ágora de nuestro tiempo, y lo que allí no pasa ya estuvo que nomás no pasó"

¹⁷ "asistir a una entrevista televisada era el más alto honor en la carrera de un político"

particular aspects of a concrete reality. It does not only offer a parody of political life, but is also an ironic commentary on the current context and on the most recent political events, a dimension that must necessarily be taken into account if its full meaning and significance are to be understood.

Fabrizio Mejía Madrid, 'Instantáneas de una ciudad bajo la lluvia' ('Snapshots of a city in the rain'), *Reforma*, 25th October 1999.

This *crónica* appeared in the cultural section of newspaper *Reforma*. It consists of an introduction and ten sketches or scenes, which, as the title suggests, function as a series of photographs of the city that have in common and are linked together by the rain that appears in all of them.

The introduction presents the theme of the rain and initiates the lyrical tone that will mark the text as a whole. It also introduces the temporal movement between past and present, which is the main feature of the development of the text. Thus, the opening line states: "Every time it rains, Mexico City returns to its primitive origins: its streets become canals again, its squares revert to lakes"¹⁸.

This reference to the city's past and origins, to the canals of the Aztec city Tenochtitlan, which was built upon a lake and is a symbol of an ecological equilibrium that was broken by the colonial city constructed by the conquistadors, is linked to the notion of an alternative, more authentic city. Thus, the text continues: "In the lagoons we see reflected the inverted image of the city, as if another, more authentic city existed under the surface – a sort of muddy alter ego"¹⁹.

The introduction finishes stating that today's city "is the replacement for another imagined city buried in the emptiness beneath this one"²⁰. The dreamt city is this 'muddy alter ego', in which a utopian view of the future and the past as a Golden Age are united. The actually existing city, in which floods are recurrent, is a "replacement", permanently indebted to its inhabitants, but is at the same time linked, through rain and the swamps that are formed in a flood, to the more authentic alternative city of dreams.

¹⁸ "Cada vez que llueve, la Ciudad de México regresa a sus orígenes remotos: sus calles vuelven a ser canales; sus plazas, lagos."

¹⁹ "En las lagunas vemos el reflejo invertido de la ciudad, como si debajo existiera otra, más verdadera, su doble pantanoso."

²⁰ "Es la ciudad sustituta de otra soñada, que se hunde en la nada bajo ella."

The use of the first person plural in the introduction indicates a common experience of Mexico City that is shared between the author and his public. Some of the subsequent sketches are narrated in the first person singular and in the present tense and represent the narrator's personal journey through the city (sketches 1, 7, 8, 10). These are interspersed with other sketches in which the first person plural returns (sketches 4 and 5), and with other, more impersonal sketches that are narrations of historical facts or of myths related to the city (sketches 2, 3, 6, 9). The author has thus sought to mix a private, subjective experience of the city (his own), with the shared experience of a community (the inhabitants of Mexico City).

The personal histories of the city are marked by a sense of mystery and strangeness that pervades them. The first sketch illustrates that "the rainy city both challenges and confirms Marx's words". On the one hand, it shows that human kind does not control nature, as Carla, who is walking with the narrator, states. On the other, a Porsche that passes by soaks them while some children are playing with the water and speaking Nahuatl just behind them. In vignette seven the narrator tells us that when he acquired his telephone line, he used to get calls destined to a woman called Ingeniera Azucena Triana. They finally seemed to have stopped, but the day before the phone woke him up and when he picked it up he heard a man telling Azucena he had divorced and they could finally get married. In vignette eight, Carla and the narrator perceive from a taxi at night the fleeting image, distorted by the rain, of a woman's body that is partially hanging out of the window from the car next to theirs. The taxi driver says it is a party, while Carla insists it is a kidnapping. In sketch ten, the narrator is with some friends in a brothel, but all the women's attention goes to a man who is shaking a handful of dollar notes and who refuses them all saying "you're not her, you're someone else". The final line is: "Noone understand what's going on, but we can't bring ourselves to leave. It's raining outside, and we haven't enough cash to pay the bill"²¹.

It is through the incomprehensible, present in each one of these vignettes, that the author gains some kind of contact with the submerged city, while identifying at the same time some traits that characterise the actually existing city. He has portrayed, in this way, the marked class differences and the indigenous component of Mexico City (sketch 1), its violence (sketch 8; it is very likely that the reader will agree with

²¹ "Nadie entiende la escena, pero no podemos huir. Afuera llueve y no tenemos para pagar la cuenta."

Carla in taking the mysterious scene as a kidnapping), and the brothel as an idiosyncratic element of its night life. In relation to this reality, the author assumes the position of accidental spectator. The *cronista's* experience of the city is thus characterised by fortuitous contact with strangers, whose fragmentary lives he can no longer attempt to understand, nor even fill with the pages of his own imagination²².

The sketches that are narrated in the first person plural form are situated in specific places, well-known to Mexico City's inhabitants (División del Norte, one of the main avenues of the city, and an underground station). Sketch four is a poetical account of one of the many stories that are hidden in the city's streets and walls. It starts with a metaphor: "The dried animals in the tile shops of Avenida División del Norte are our tabernacle"²³. The animals used to be in a disco where, in a night of flooding, the water provoked an accident, and tell "the prehistory of the suburbs of the city". Sketch five combines the more distanced tone of historical fact (it tells of the discovery of a figure of the virgin of Guadalupe in an underground station which was constructed with the juxtaposition of a geological layer which contained fossils) with a final line written in first person plural: "So when some future archaeologist investigates us, he will probably put the Aztecs at an earlier date than the fossils"²⁴. These sketches narrate the little history, portraying aspects of the city that are not likely to be recorded by historians and which are the exclusive province of the *cronista*, who adopts as his task the preservation of the apparently insignificant elements that tell about the life of a community.

The sketches of the city's history are greatly varied and include legend and myth, the distant and the recent past. The mythical dimension is the focus of vignettes two and six. The first narrates the finding of a statue of Tlaloc, Aztec god of rain, in 1882. In 1965 the authorities decide to take it away and exhibit it in the Museum of Anthropology, but they encounter resistance from the population. Finally, when the army intervenes and the statue is removed, rain breaks out, inspiring García Márquez, who is stuck in the flooded streets, to write a novel about a place in which it would rain for years (a reference to Macondo in *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years*

²² This can be contrasted with Gutiérrez Nájera's portraits of encounters with strangers at the beginning of the century, in which he invented the story of the lives of characters he did not know. See for example the *crónica* 'La novela del tranvía', published in the collection *Cuentos frágiles* [*Fragile Stories*, 1883]; also published in Monsiváis' anthology *A ustedes les consta* (1980).

²³ "Los animales disecados en las tiendas de azulejos por toda la Avenida División del Norte son nuestra Arca."

²⁴ "Así, cuando un arqueólogo del futuro nos estudie, fechará a los aztecas antes que a los crustáceos."

of Solitude]). Sketch six describes the celebrations of Tlaloc, in which the “tlalocs”, which represent the drops of rain, dance. On the other hand, sketch three evokes Bacon’s account of America as the lost continent in *The New Atlantis* and relates it to the historical flood of Mexico City in 1629, in which many thousands died. Sketch nine comments on Alec Guinness’ visit in 1955, with official *cronista* of the city Salvador Novo, to the Latin American Tower, the most emblematic modern building of Mexico City, on a rainy day. In these vignettes, insignificant, everyday stories, the *cronista*’s realm, are mixed and integrated with evocations of History and of legend, both symbolically and literally, as in sketch two, in which myth mobilises the population. Through its shifting temporal perspective the text illuminates some disparate aspects of the actually existing city in which its past, its myths and its utopian double are present as traces.

The constant swaying of the scenes in the temporal dimension between past and present is related to a similar oscillation in the spatial dimension between street and interior, between the public and the personal. Historical vignettes either do not have a specific spatial location or take place in public, recognisable spots of the city, like the sketches that address readers in the first person plural. The vignettes that describe personal situations of the narrator are set in an undefined street (sketch 1), a street of the Miramontes area (sketch 8), and in the ambiguously private places of a home that is intruded by a mysterious call addressed to someone else (sketch 7), and the brothel (sketch 10).

This *crónica* is characterised by its heterogeneous nature. One of its most salient features is the combination of a literary approach with other techniques that reveal the influence of mass culture, such as the presentation of the story through scenes of a cinematic quality. On the other hand, the text is a fusion of a very personal, contemporary vision and experience of the city with a long existing tradition of *crónica* that resorts to history and legend, uniting the portrait of contemporary everyday life in the city with an account of its historical past.

The text possesses a great degree of autonomy from the reality of the newspaper; it tells a different, parallel story, which is not dependent in its meaning upon the context of current events. Nevertheless, it also wants to affirm a sense of immediacy and presentness, which is achieved through the use of the present tense in the vignettes that focus on the personal experiences of the narrator. Moreover, towards the end, in sketch 7, we find the only reference to the text’s exact temporal

setting when the author states that the telephone rang *yesterday* night. Here the text becomes explicitly related to the newspaper and the reader's temporal context. On the other hand, the connection of this *crónica* with the informative context of the newspaper is rather an indirect one: the text appeared some days after a great flood had occurred, which deeply hit some parts of the South and the East of the country.

Roberto Zamarripa, 'Agitan gran panal' ('The bees pour out of the hive'), *Reforma*, 10th February 2000.

This *crónica* appeared in the section dedicated to the city news of newspaper *Reforma*, and is about a demonstration that took place on the previous day. Students, trade unionists, members of various associations and individuals marched in protest against the government repression of the student strike at the National University (UNAM): on the previous weekend, university installations had been taken over by the federal police and over 700 students detained under charges which included terrorism and plundering. The text, which follows the model of the journalistic *crónica* as an interpretative and informative piece where something is narrated and judged at the same time, is thus directly linked to the context of current news, and its immediate object is to give an account of the demonstration.

The *crónica* is narrated almost exclusively in the present tense, giving a sense of contemporaneity with the described events, which the author directly observes. It is divided into three parts. The first introduces some basic facts about the demonstration (it tells us it is the biggest since 1988, which fills the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square, twice) as well as its festive character, and describes the appearance of the students that are taking part in it. It combines narration in the present tense to situate the reader in the context of the demonstration, with an overall view of its development written in the past form, and functions as a sort of general presentation and summary of the event, to which the rest of the text only adds more specific information. The second part of the text follows the path of the demonstration and describes in some detail the people who are marching alongside the students. The third, focuses on the rallies that take place in the Zócalo and finishes with the description of some leaders of the PRD (the centre-left opposition party) who are at the end of the march.

The *crónica*'s title – 'The bees pour out of the hive' – is ambiguous and introduces a metaphor that will be taken up and further elaborated in the text: the

comparison of the multitude of the demonstration to angry bees. It contrasts with the introductory sentence, which is informative and aimed at situating the reader in the context of the events: "It was the entry of the police into the University City and the faculties of UNAM that once again brought on to the streets of the city those to whom the Government owed a social debt"²⁵.

However, this contrasts with the first line of the main text, which states, "Considering it was a funeral, everyone seems very cheerful"²⁶, setting the tone that will predominate throughout the *crónica*. The first paragraph introduces this idea, which is central in the whole text, of the festive nature of the demonstration, comparing it to the angry and serious tone of the historical student marches of 1968: "Thousands of parents are being forced to run, dance, sing, chant slogans in a mambo rhythm and shout the things they used to say in anger to a marching beat. 'Free the political prisoners'"²⁷.

The author returns to the idea that people "were going to a funeral and having a wild time"²⁸ in paragraph three, and concludes this first part with the following statement: "This is a good time 'terrorism'. There they go, shouting like anyone would at that age 'Freedom, freedom, freedom'"²⁹. Terrorism was the charge some of the detained student leaders faced from the Mexican authorities; the author, while ironising and dismissing it, is also making a clear statement of the lack of depth and political motif of the event.

The vision of the festive character of the demonstration, which is described as a "dancing dragon joyfully jumping by"³⁰, will again be repeated several times in the second part of the text (in paragraphs 3, 5 and 6) and in the final section. It is clearly the leitmotiv of the narrative, and also the basis for the critical view that is exposed from its beginning and which becomes more and more clear during the course of the text. We soon realise that the comparison with the events of 1968, already introduced at the start, sets the measure against which the shortcomings of the present

²⁵ "La entrada de la Policía a la Ciudad Universitaria y las escuelas de la UNAM fue detonante para que una vez más, las calles de la ciudad fueran tomadas por aquellos con quienes el Gobierno tiene una deuda social."

²⁶ "Para ser velorio andan muy contentos."

²⁷ "Miles de padres de las manos de sus hijos son obligados a correr, a bailar, a cantar, a decir leperadas a ritmo de mambo, y a gritar lo que antaño dijeron por las mismas calles en tono de enojo y ahora lanzan en son de batucada: '¡presos políticos, libertad!'".

²⁸ "Iban a un sepelio y se divertieron como enanos"

²⁹ "Un "terrorismo" demasiado pachanguero. Allá van, con un grito que a esa edad cualquiera vuela:

¡Libertad, libertad, libertad!"

³⁰ "dragón danzante que pasa con su jolgorio"

demonstration can be exposed. Thus, as would have been expected if the demonstration had had a seriously vindictory tone, the author complains that: "Noone is shouting 'compañero Alejandro Echavarría, presente, now and forever'; there are no placards demanding 'Liberty for El Mosh'"³¹.

The students are accordingly portrayed as "a mass of poor kids wearing football shirts"³². Some are described in the following terms, stressing once more the absence of any clear unified political view as a motif for the protest:

"They're wearing baggy trousers, long skirts, rasta hats, coloured hair, earrings even on their tongues, darks in the dark, black on black, purple lips, clouds of dope from the Enep Aragón crew, dancers, runners, shouters, smilers. The point is to be different, to be non-conformist, not to be tied down..."³³

The slogans shouted during the demonstration, an important element in a *crónica* that wants to portray street life and colloquial speech closely, are widely described and quoted in parts two and three of the text, and further illustrate the carnivalistic and festive characterisation of the event. Thus, the first paragraph of part two notices that youngsters paint on the windows of a Spanish clothes shop "Zedillo + Aznar – fascists", and also mentions President Zedillo and National University rector Juan Ramón de la Fuente as the most abused persons. Another slogan is "not a single vote for the PRI!", which the narrator doubts they will actually practise. Part three introduces more slogans, comparing again the movement of 1968 with the present climate, and stressing the profound difference of tone and intentions and of political maturity:

"'You're not alone, you're not alone' the parents shout, from the roadside, and the chants are taken up on the pavements 'Freedom for political prisoners', which once they shouted foaming at the mouth, but now they chant to the rhythm of the drum and they dance to demand their prisoners, still wet behind the cars, are freed."³⁴

³¹ "Nadie grita algo así como 'compañero Alejandro Echavarría, presente, ahora y siempre' o carteles que dijeran: 'Libertad para el Mosh'."

³² "una masa de muchachos empobrecidos vestidos con camisetas de equipos de fútbol"

³³ "...van con pantalones holgados, faldas largas, boinas rasta, pelos de colores, aretes hasta en la lengua, darks entre los darks, negro que te quiero negro, labios morados, un homazo de mota por el contingente de la Enep Aragón, bailarines, correlores, gritones, sonrientes. El asunto es ser diferente, inconforme, inatrapable..."

³⁴ "No están solos, no están solos", gritan los padres, se clama desde las vallas y aquellos refrescan consignas y a "presos políticos libertad", que antes se gritaba con espuma por la boca, ahora le ponen

At the beginning of part two, the metaphor of the title is taken up in the following sentence: "Now they're really hitting the honeypot"³⁵, which significantly does not specify a subject. This serves to introduce an enumeration of the heterogeneous groups that are taking part in the demonstration, marked by a highly satirical tone which makes the author point out that, for example, electrical workers can be recognised through their big bellies.

A second reference to the title is found at the end of the list of these diverse groups. This time it gives more concrete information about the causes of the uproar: "The truncheons of the Federal preventive Police stir up a hornets nest"³⁶. This metaphor will again be taken up at the end of the text, as its concluding line, linking it in this way to the title: "They stirred up the hive and the bees they thought half dead buzzed but didn't sting. They spread a little honey though, to sweeten a left that had become just a little bitter"³⁷.

The views of the author about the demonstration, which are an inherent part of a *crónica* that is conceived as both descriptive and interpretative in its intention, are expressed through this kind of ironical evaluative statement. They are present throughout the text, in the vision the author offers of every single aspect of events, and are also emphasised in the form of general evaluations at the end of part one and in this concluding line.

Somewhat paradoxically, the subtlety used to express this satirical view contrasts with the relatively plain structure of the contents of the text, based on the continued repetition of three basic ideas: the festive nature of the event, its comparison with the "serious" marches of 1968, and the notion that demonstrators are angry bees from a stirred hive.

It is clear that the author is examining the events from a very critical point of view. In addition to his questioning of the festive character of the demonstration, he does not elaborate on the specific reasons that have set people to the streets, and gives a view of the march as fairly chaotic and of the leadership as improvised, denying any real impact. At particular points, he makes very disparaging remarks of the whole

ritmo de batucada y se zangolotean para pedir que salgan sus presos de acá."

³⁵ "Ahora sí que le dieron de palazos al gran panal"

³⁶ "Con la macana de la Policía Federal Preventiva agitaron el avispero."

³⁷ "Agitaron el panal y las abejas que creían zánganos zumbaron pero no picaron. Regaron algo de miel para endulzar a una izquierda un tanto amargada."

event like, for example, when he celebrates the detention of a student who was participating in a television debate a few days before, bitterly attacking once more the cheerful and uninhibited attitude of the demonstrators:

“They’re the ones who won’t serve me beer’, ‘Police, d’you hear me, give it up’, ‘Don’t watch tele, read’, ‘We’ll get Ramon out of the Rectory’ They shout it all swinging their hips, banging the drums, ringing their bells... that’s why they keep them off TV Azteca’s news bulletins.”³⁸

However, what is characteristic of the way the author’s views and opinions are expressed is the satirical distance and the irony that serve as vehicles to present them, which are a distinctive element of the *crónica* as a genre. In this way, the author is making particular statements and affirming a personal vision without renouncing his position as a critical, independent commentator, situated somewhere above the events, who does not subordinate his freedom to a particular cause. It is this element of distance from the narrated events through irony, as well as the descriptive element, which gives the *crónica* its character as such and distinguishes it from the article of opinion.

Jorge Martillo, ‘La Guayaquil Inn’ (‘The Guayaquil Inn’), *El Universo*, 19th January 1997.

This *crónica* appeared in the Sunday supplement of newspaper *El Universo*. It is a story within a story, told by El Conde, a bohemian wanderer in the city, to the narrator. El Conde arrives on a Saturday afternoon at the narrator’s house. After a while, he begins to tell about the woman he met in a pub, called the Guayaquil Inn, whom he describes as the sphinx of the city. He finally leaves, ordering the narrator to write this story down.

The text is divided into three main parts through the use of subtitles. In the first part El Conde appears and starts drinking beer. In the second, entitled ‘When the evening dies’, El Conde puts on salsa music and prepares to tell his story, which

³⁸ “¡Esos son, esos son, los que no me sirven ron! ¡Policía escucha, avienta la cachucha! ¡no veas tele. mejor lee! ¡leer es poder! ¡Sacaremos a Ramón de Rectoría! Así se la llevan a tamborazos, con cencerros, moviendo la cadera... pues con razón los corren de los programas de TV Azteca.”

unfolds in the third, main part, called 'In the Garay district', the area of Guayaquil where it takes place.

The whole text, which is in its form similar to a short story, with a beginning, a development and an end, is not related to current news. It deploys a literary language and possesses a strong degree of fictionalisation and of independence from the context of the newspaper; it can stand fully in its own right without losing any of its meaning. The ambiguity between reality and fiction which results from this is already tackled in the first line, which serves as an introduction:

"How can I write this chronicle without making it sound like one more fiction? That was the question I've been asking myself since El Conde told me the story. The best thing would be to find the free end of the thread and just let the rest unravel."³⁹

The narrator is explicitly indicating thereby that he wants his story to be read as a *crónica*, i.e. as something that really happened, as a portrayal of events in real life, while reflecting, at the same time, upon the art of telling.

Features like the location of the narrated events in a specific place, the outline of a recognisable urban topography, and the description of the environment in which the characters live serve to strengthen the reality dimension of the text and to evoke a known urban landscape. Thus, while El Conde is talking to the narrator: "The evening baker passed by, whistling, slowly, on his old bike. It was Saturday and the streets were almost deserted; they were bathed in the gold of the whirls of dying sunlight."⁴⁰

We are told that Conde went "in to one of those bars across the road"⁴¹. The pub he visits in the Garay district, a poor working-class area near to the city centre, is a traditional local bar (*salón*, *cantina*, as this kind of establishments are known), and is described as follows:

"There's a good jukebox, there was the usual smell of sour beer that always sticks to the walls of these places and the waitresses, hiding their sadness behind their rouge. I drank and listened to some old *guarachas* by Sonora Matancera and Daniel Santos."⁴²

³⁹ "Cómo podré escribir esta *crónica* sin que parezca una ficción más?. es mi pregunta desde que El Conde me contó la historia. Lo mejor será buscar la punta inicial del hilo y desmadejar el resto."

⁴⁰ "El panadero de la tarde pasó silbando, lento, a lomo de su vieja bicicleta. Era sábado y las calles estaban casi desiertas y doradas por las virutas del sol que cala. De cuando en cuando llegaban gritos de distantes jugadores de indor en su último partido."

⁴¹ "a una cantina de las del frente"

⁴² "El salón tenía una buena rockola, el típico olor de cerveza rancia tatuado en sus paredes y las

The reference to the music is significant, as it situates us in the sphere of some of Guayaquil's old pubs where the popular salsa music of the 1960s and 1970s is all that is heard. It continues a narrative line started at the beginning of the text, where we are told that the narrator is listening to Janis Joplin's *Bye, bye baby* when El Conde appears. The latter dismisses this as an old hippie song and puts on a record of Adalberto Álvarez. The lyrics of the song, called 'Reflexiones mías' ('My Reflections'), are quoted twice: "You educated people, you'll have to forgive me/ I'm just one more imperfect man"⁴³, and "Reflections bring back the wounds/ Learning in the school of life"⁴⁴, as El Conde's story is just about to begin, thus contrasting the education provided by the experience of life and the formal education of the university graduates (the *licenciados*).

While he is drinking in the pub, El Conde is joined by a bar girl, who says her name is Guayaquil Inn: "Guayaquil Inn they call me, and to tell you the truth I've forgotten my real name – not that it matters anyway"⁴⁵. The woman, who is invited to share El Conde's beer, is presented in a harsh and dramatic way as a character that shows the signs and embodies the kind of life one leads in Guayaquil's slums:

"She was dark-skinned and she'd been beautiful once, but the scars that a full life had left were the most obvious thing about her, marked on her skin. Her body tried to be straight and arrogant, but defeat dragged it down towards the floor, a floor covered in sawdust and spit."⁴⁶

El Conde suddenly realises that he is drinking with the city herself: "...I looked at that face full of wrinkles and covered in rouge and I realised I was sharing a table with the sphinx of the city..."⁴⁷. He compares her to the sphinx of Thebes, who set riddles for the people, devouring those who could not solve them, and he also wonders whether he is contemplating the visible or the hidden side of the city.

meseras escondían su tristeza en máscaras de colorete. Bebí, escuché viejas guarachas de la Sonora Matancera y Daniel Santos."

⁴³ "Discúlpeme señores licenciados/ pero yo soy un imperfecto más"

⁴⁴ "Reflexiones con sus heridas/ Aprendiendo de la escuela de la vida"

⁴⁵ "*La Guayaquil Inn*, así me dicen, así me llaman porque hasta mi verdadero nombre lo he olvidado y para lo que me importa."

⁴⁶ "Era una chola con rasgos de antigua belleza, pero eran más evidentes en su piel, las cicatrices que regala una vida agitada. Su cuerpo quería mostrarse altivo, pero la derrota lo halaba hacia la lona, hacia el suelo de aserrín y escupitajos."

⁴⁷ "...veía ese rostro de arrugas y colorete y sentía que estaba compartiendo mi mesa con la esfinge de la ciudad..."

The woman who is thus made to personify the city has wrinkles and a painted face; shows signs of decay but also traces of former beauty. She is arrogant and shabby, pointing in this way at the contradictory nature of a city that is the thriving commercial and economic centre of the country and the character of which is marked by violence and segregation, by uncontrolled growth and by the introduction of Western and North-American lifestyles and the parallel survival of local uses and culture. In his personification, the author roots the city's identity in this contradictory character and in its popular culture and marginal areas, describing old traditional pubs and focusing on the figures of the bohemian and the whore.

Guayaquil Inn is a dark-skinned *mestizo*, and represents the social composition of the lower social strata, the majority of the inhabitants of Guayaquil (the term *chola* which identifies her racial origins in the text, indicates a mixture between indigenous, black and white that is common among the inhabitants of the Ecuadorian coastal areas, and often has a pejorative connotation). Her name speaks of a direct connection with the city itself, but also implies a strange and somehow ironic turn, suggesting the cultural and economic influence of North America.

When El Conde, the city's eternal lover, finished off the beer he had been sharing with Guayaquil Inn "it tasted foul, like the muddy water of the lake"⁴⁸, thus pointing again with a strong image to the city's decay and corrupting nature. The city is also associated with death and myth, as is first hinted at by the comparison with the sphinx, and stated explicitly at the end of the text, when El Conde disappears into the night and the narrator concludes the story with a reflexive line: "At that moment I thought that my beer would just leave an aftertaste of death and of myth, because I knew that El Conde had gone down to seek out the riddle of Guayaquil Inn"⁴⁹.

The purpose of the text is to portray a personal experience and vision of the city, more than to tell a story. Not very much happens, and the few narrated events are not important as such, except to the extent that they allow a reflection on the nature of the city. The subject of the story is the city itself, which surrounds the characters as an ever present background and becomes the central character in the personification of Guayaquil Inn. However, we are finally confronted once more (as in *crónica 2*, from Mexico City) with the mysterious and essentially unknowable character of the city.

⁴⁸ "me supo a agua con gusarapos y lodo podrido del estero"

⁴⁹ "En ese momento presentí que mi cerveza iba a regalarme un sabor a muerte y mito, porque estaba seguro que El Conde iba al encuentro de los enigmas de la Guayaquil Inn."

As we have seen, the author emphasises particular aspects of the city's topography and offers a view of its identity as related to the lower racially mixed social classes and to its popular culture. This portrayal is achieved through the combination of references, images and lexis from both popular and high culture. Thus, Janis Joplin (intellectual music in Guayaquil) is confronted with salsa music, and a whore from a local pub is described with reference to Greek myth. In addition, the whole setting of the story, with the distant voices of the people who are playing football in the nearby streets, suggests the traditional atmosphere of the popular areas of the city.

The events are narrated in a highly literary and poetic language, which is characterised by the abundant use of rhetorical figures such as the simile and the metaphor, although there are also signs of spoken language (the story is *told* by one character to another) and popular vocabulary ('tufo', 'refri', 'chuchaqui'). In this respect, the use of metaphor itself is illustrative of the author's strategy of mixing a literary, very stylised expression with images of the low and the marginal. Thus, the moments and atmospheres of drinking are described through images like "para matar al chuchaqui que torturaba su garganta con puñados de ceniza" ("to kill the hangover that was chucking handfuls of ash down his throat") and "la botella verde quedó vacía y solo coronada por un destello de marea espumosa" ("the green bottle was empty but for a little foam at the neck"), in the narrator's house; or, in the pub, where El Conde is sitting by a "mesa sembrada de botellas" ("table full of bottles") and listening to "las canciones que vomitaba la rockola" ("the noise from the jukebox").

The command to write his story down, which El Conde gives to the narrator at the end, is significant. It comes as the reversal of the command to speak, given by the narrator to El Conde at the end of part two, and points to the specific relationship between the two characters. El Conde has been presented throughout the text as a bohemian figure of low social extraction: when he first appears on scene, the narrator notices "his characteristic stink" of alcohol⁵⁰, we are also told that he is from the working class area of Garay, which is also the place he wanders at night. He is a marginal figure, who has given up love and accepted his lonely fate ("I even thought back to the times when I still had hopes that someone might turn up to occupy my heart"⁵¹). In relation to the narrator, the intellectual who listens to Janis Joplin, he

⁵⁰ "su característico tufo etílico"

⁵¹ "rememoré tiempos en que aún tenía algunas esperanzas de inquilinas en mi pecho"

represents popular culture and lived experience. In fact, the two characters are a result of a splitting of the figure of the *cronista*, which comprises both El Conde, the bohemian wanderer who witnesses and rescues the stories of city life, and the narrator, the intellectual who writes them down. These two fictional characters are aspects of what the *cronista* Jorge Martillo himself is, a writer and a poet, and a wanderer in the city, popularly known by his friends as El Conde.

Iván Ulchur Collazos, 'El coronel no tiene quién lo siga' ('Nobody follows the colonel'), Hoy, 29th January 2000.

This text appeared in the section of political comment of newspaper *Hoy*, in which the author has a weekly column. It is about the failed coup of 21st of January 2000, when indigenous peoples and sectors of the military overthrew president Jamil Mahuad and temporarily seized power. In the text, the main developments of that day are commented upon using the device of setting them within a fictionalised context: a narrator explains the events to a character called Rosamunda Sintapujos, an Ecuadorian emigrant who lives in the USA.

The text is narrated primarily in the present tense and the past tense is introduced in the characters' explanations about the coup. It combines an omniscient narrator, who situates the characters, with the dialogues of Rosamunda and a first person character, who narrates the political events of the day. Its first paragraph already shows the main features that characterise the text as a whole: its satirical and playful tone, the use of spoken, regional language, the abundant presence of games with idiomatic expressions. At the same time, it explicitly situates the reader in the day of the events:

"Just as our kinswoman Rosamunda Sintapujos, who had spent from 8 in the morning to 12 o'clock at night of Friday the 21st of January getting ready to board the plane back to her little backwoods town of Berea Kentucky, in the good old u s of a, she began to realise as she sat on the departure lounge that her little country, with its melancholy little songs, was falling apart before her very eyes. My little compatriots, my little acrobats, my little clowns! she thinks, and then felt bad for thinking of her own homeland that way."⁵²

⁵² "Nomás la comadrita Rosamunda Sintapujos quien, desde las 8 de la mañana del viernes 21 de enero hasta las 12 pm, se dispone a tomar el avión de regreso a su pueblito arrebolado, allí en Berea, Kentucky, en los unaited estáticos cuando ¡juáquetel!, desde la sala de embarque empieza a ver que su

To this first ironically dismissive view of events and of Ecuador as a country of “little clowns” a second, deeper reflection, follows about the fate of countries like Ecuador, which, in Rosamunda’s opinion, fit into the stereotype of “banana republics”: “all she could think was well yes, there’s no getting away from it, things are going downhill fast in our country right back to where it all started, all loose ends and loose cannons, all privates out of uniform and colonels out of their minds...”⁵³. Where it all started are the military dictatorships of the past that introduce the theme of the present coup, which is the central matter of the text.

To this second paragraph follows the dialogue, when Rosamunda phones to Ecuador to find out what happened on the day before. She says: “Is that Macondo? Hey what’s up? What’s going down? What’s Jamil the big wheel saying now? No way it can happen, no way there’s noone to follow the colonel!”⁵⁴. ‘Nobody follows the colonel’ – a reference to García Marquez’s novel *Nobody Writes to the Colonel*, reinforced by the comparison of Ecuador to Macondo, from *One hundred Years of Solitude* – is the title of the text, and refers to one of the main actors in the coup, colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, and his isolation once the armed forces have finally retired their support. Lucio Gutiérrez participated, together with Antonio Vargas, the leader of the federation of Indian organisations, and magistrate Solórzano, in the ephemeral triumvirate that was established as Junta of National Salvation.

In the text then events are narrated in some detail by the first person character to Rosamunda. Thus, she is told how colonel Lucio Gutiérrez “took the lid off the pot and found that all there was was a few naïve Indian compatriots, an ex PM called Smellhimsweet, come from somewhere or other with a yearning for a sash...”⁵⁵, and then proclaimed the break with the democratic regime. An explanation follows of the reasons for the coup and its failure which, paradoxically, contrasts with what has been said before about the importance of colonel Lucio Gutiérrez’s initiative and emphasises the Indians’ central role in the event:

desunaited paisito de pasillos melancólicos se le viene abajo. ¡Paisetes, payasetes! –piensa y se remuerde por juzgar así a su ciclito lleno de estrellas.”

⁵³ “no puede dejar de pensar en que pues sí, no tenemos solución y que las cosas en nuestros territorios regresan lastimosamente a sus lugares comunes de antes, repletas de cabos sueltos y coronelitos desamarrados...”

⁵⁴ “¿Allá Macondo? ¿What is up? ¿Cómo así, mismo ca? ¿Que dizque Jamil ya no mil? ¿Cómo es posible? ¿Que dizque el coronel no tiene quién lo siga?”

⁵⁵ “destapó la olla podrida y comprobó que no había más que unos ingenuos compañeros indígenas, un ex-magistrado Su-olor-sano, traído de no se sabe dónde con unos apetitos constantinos por ceñirse la

"The fact of the matter is that the Indians got up very early to set the cat among the pigeons, and they'd decided to take power from the bourgeoisie with the weapons of the proletariat and set up a people's parliament... And then they bumped into two colonels who expressed solidarity..."⁵⁶

The coup failed when general Mendoza, who had taken colonel Lucio Gutiérrez' place in the triumvirate "...took the hero's role and left the triumvirate every now and then..."⁵⁷, and the dialogue ends with a statement of the narrator's general judgement of the events: "So a kind of Charlie Chaplin coup with lots of custard pies and the indian brothers and sisters cheated out of their legitimate claim to recognition"⁵⁸.

The story also has a fictional closure, in which a final reference to the literary work of García Márquez is made: "Then my kinswoman remembered how García Márquez's novel ends and shouted 'Shiiiiit' – 'Mierda'"⁵⁹.

Generally, it is this final tone of inevitability and doom that prevails in the narrator's distant and disillusioned view of events, which have been characterised as a joke, with a first reference to a country of "little clowns" and a second one to the "Charlie Chaplin coup". The overthrown government is alluded to only in passing, with a reference to its last remains, surrounded with "opportunistic rust". The colonels are presented as well-intentioned (romantic, sympathising with the Indians) but aloof. The most dismissive remark is for the representative of white civil society, magistrate Solórzano, while a comment of distant sympathy is made towards the Indians, seen here as the losers, who "either they rose or they went on breathing the foul air"⁶⁰, and who have a "legitimate claim to recognition". They are referred to as the representatives of collective utopias, in contrast with the "cyber solitudes" of the other social sectors.

banda..."

⁵⁶ "El asunto fue que los indígenas se levantaron muy temprano a revolver el avispero y a querer tomarse el poder burgués con las proletarias armas de los parlamentos populares... Entonces se toparon con dos solidarios coroneles..."

⁵⁷ "...se robó la película de héroe al retirarse del triunfo a ratos..."

⁵⁸ "Total, un estado de golpe chapulinesco con escenarios tras bambalinas, y unos compañeros indígenas burlados en su legítimo deseo de redención."

⁵⁹ "Entonces la comadrita recordó el final de la novelita de G. Márquez y se sintió explícita al gritar: - Mierda!"

⁶⁰ "O se levantaban o se quedaban roncando la pudrición"

The text can only be fully understood and enjoyed by readers who are already familiar with what is described, and able to relate its direct references to concrete characters and events. Its main purpose is not to inform or to describe, but to interpret and comment about an event that is already known to readers (and it appears accordingly in the section of political comment of the newspaper).

However, the strategy chosen by the author to do this is not that of the straightforward article of opinion; the text is intended as a *crónica*. First of all, events are situated within a fictionalised context, which allows the author to discuss them in an indirect way through the dialogue of his characters. The first person narrator embodies the author's opinion and reflections, while the migrant Rosamunda serves as a pretext for the narration. There is a clear beginning and also a fictional closure, which give the text a certain degree of independence from the real events on which it comments.

Second, in reality, it is not merely opinion or interpretation that is important, but the whole reconstruction of events in itself, and the way in which it is done through humour and the use of spoken language, word games, and literary references, i.e., the text and its formal qualities itself. The characters and their speech are made to represent common people of the street, to speak more directly to readers who are familiar with the phenomenon of migration and with this underlying attitude of powerlessness and ironical pessimism towards their country, which the text also shares. The recurrent literary references to García Márquez are not accidental: the most well known representative of what has been called magical realism is here invoked to characterise a real situation so paradoxical that it could be extracted from one of his novels. One of the most distinctive features of the text is also its constant playfulness with words, in expressions like "cabizbunda y meditabaja", "cabos sueltos y coronelitos desamarrados", "demo gracias jamilianas" (referring to the democratic government of president Jamil Mahuad), "pasónada" ("asonada"), "triunfi a ratos" ("triumvirato"); and also in the comical transformation of first names, like "iunaited estáticos", "Lucidito" Gutiérrez, "Su-olor-sano", which introduce an element of distance and laughter into the gravity of events.

This playfulness and irony can finally be related to the author's consciousness of the constructed and subjective nature of the text, which is explicitly pointed at in the narrator's reference to his "inmarcial versión" or "non-military version" (meant here as an objective, impartial version, but playing with the meaning of the word

martial, which substitutes partial and refers to the role of the military in the coup) when the narration of the events is about to start.

BAM, 'Esta caridad es con escopeta' ('Your charity or your life'), *Expreso*, 6th February 2000.

This text appeared in the section dedicated to city news of newspaper *Expreso*. It is a journalistic *crónica* that tells how a band of young men intimidate the passengers of a bus to obtain money. The text was surrounded by several testimonies about people who make their living through begging in public transport and by a short note on the development of different kinds of beggars with a generalised increase of poverty.

Its title and introductory sentence ("On the buses, intimidation has turned into a mini-industry. It's just a different kind of highway robbery"⁶¹) are strictly journalistic and informative, and point to the existence of a new style of robbing users of public transport. Then, the text starts in the classical manner of the *crónica*, both in terms of its reference to a specific time and its use of the present tense (which will be maintained during the whole narration) and in terms of its colourful description of the scene in which events take place. These initial sentences, at the same time, situate the reader in the urban context of the city of Guayaquil:

"18:45. Night falls on the busy port of Guayaquil.

The heat is suffocating, while on the loudspeakers of a half-empty number 14 bus Aladino's voice echoes noisily. He's singing the rock tune 'Promote me, make me your husband':"⁶²

To which follows a quotation of the lyrics of the mentioned song. Then, the text describes how five black youths get on the bus and start looking, with their "bloodshot eyes" in an intimidating way at the passengers. At this point, the language and tone of the text sensibly change and become much more straightforward and strictly

⁶¹ "En el interior de los colectivos se ha instalado la intimidación como negocio. Es un nuevo estilo de asaltar a los usuarios del transporte"

⁶² "18:45. Cae la noche sobre el bullanguero puerto de Guayaquil.

El calor sofoca, mientras en los estruendosos parlantes de un selectivo semivacío de la línea 14 retumba la voz de Aladino. Interpreta el tema rocolero "Ascíndeme a marido"."

journalistic, devoid of any unfamiliar images or ideas, and resorting to common vocabulary and syntax to describe the passengers' nervous reactions to the situation.

The menaces of the youths, who are quoted in direct speech several times, follow, together with a description of how the fruit they bear is collected. The band then demands to be left when the bus reaches street Pedro P. Gómez. Once they get off the bus everything quickly returns back to normality, to the atmosphere described at the beginning of the narration, signalling thus the end of the story:

“The passengers stare accusingly at the driver, but they breathe a sigh of relief. He puts on his favourite song again, and once again it's the voice of Aladino that crackles over the loudspeakers. ‘If you really love me come and sleep with me’.”⁶³

The beginning and the end of the story, which are thus in direct relation with each other, are the only moments that clearly reveal the signs of a literary intention in the composition of the text, giving a sort of fictional closure and a frame to the narrated events. Otherwise, there is no intended stylisation or experimentation with the meaning of words and no imaginative play with point of view, which adopts the fixed position of an omniscient narrator who describes the situation, as it were, from the outside; as observer but not as participant. The text intends to narrate the situation in a realistic, straightforward manner; it wants to make readers relate directly to the events it portrays, also reinforcing its reality effect through the specific mention of the time of the day and the exact streets where events take place.

The text further includes both description and commentary; it offers not just a portrayal of events, but also points to their interpretation in a particular direction. In sentences like “his face is full of a kind of hate you're not supposed to feel when you're not even twenty yet”⁶⁴, the author thus adopts a position that is characteristic of the *cronista*, who leads readers through events with concrete remarks that express opinion and indicate how reality is to be interpreted.

On the other hand, the narrator also brings to the text widespread ideas and prejudices in an indirect way in the manner of addressing the subject matter. There is, for example, a reference to “the pretty student from the Catholic University”, a private

⁶³ “Los usuarios miran acusadores al chofer, pero respiran aliviados. Este repite su canción favorita, y en los ruidosos parlantes del bus vuelve a escucharse la voz de Aladino cantando: “... Si en verdad me quieres ven duermeme conmigo...”

⁶⁴ “Su rostro habla de un odio que no se concibe cuando aún no se llega a los 20 años.”

institution. Also, the members of the band are more than once referred to as blacks, in sentences like: "A frightened girl gapes at the youngest black man"⁶⁵.

In fact, the racial dimension of the story is significant in the text. It is already indicated at the beginning, when "five young black men have jumped on to the bus". The menacing effect they have on the people seems to be linked to the colour of their skin, as well as the mention to their stinking armpits, through which the author unquestioningly transmits the common beliefs of a racially stratified society. This racial element is also explicitly highlighted by the author, who quotes one of the youths and comments on his words as follows: "'You know what, it gets right up my nose when these sons of... look down their noses at us black people!' The boy at the back spits the words, with a deep and endless rage, at the faces of the passengers"⁶⁶.

The direct presentation of popular speech (in expressions like "ponte mosca ñaño", "push a bit harder, mate") is another feature that adds realism to the narration as well as a certain closeness to everyday city life. The words used by the youths to address the passengers, in which this popular speech is enacted, are the only instances that interrupt the narrator's voice, although they are clearly subordinated to it (they appear in the form of distinctive, closed off quotations) in what is essentially constructed as a monological text.

In addition to the above mentioned features, which constitute this *crónica* as a primarily journalistic text rather than as a literary one, there must be added a final element: only the initials and not the name of the author appear, thus pointing to the relatively little significance of authorship in the journalistic context.

However, the text does possess a fictional, not strictly journalistic dimension in that its function is to offer a recreation of a situation that can be encountered in the city streets. It is not a report of an event that actually happened, but an account of a typified situation that falls within the realm of the possible (or indeed of the very common in a time of crisis), which is in fact that of fiction. It belongs to a series of articles that appeared periodically in the Ecuadorian newspapers, and specifically in the press of Guayaquil, during the studied period, which focused on the deep social and economic crisis that the country was undergoing through the description of various of its symptoms which could be observed in the streets of the city.

⁶⁵ "Asustada, una niña observa al negro más joven."

⁶⁶ "¿Sabes ñaño? ¡Me da rabia cuando estos hijue... miran mal a los negros! La frase es como un escupitajo lanzado con infinita y profunda ira..."

6. Conclusion

This chapter has described how in Mexico City the *crónica* is a significant genre that expresses and reflects on a wide variety of areas related to life in the city and to the public sphere, from political satires to sports and the portrayal of specific habits, social types and places. Here, the *crónica* can be considered, as several *cronistas* point out, as a mirror of city life. In Guayaquil, the *crónicas* appearing in the press today are much more limited, both in numbers and in the kind of issues they cover. In this city, whole areas of everyday life and existence are excluded from the *crónica*'s gaze. As in Mexico City, in Guayaquil the *crónica* has also been significant in the past as a tool for visualising city life, but today this role has been drastically reduced.

The variety and importance of the genre in Mexico City and its relative poverty in Guayaquil is also expressed in the quality and nature of texts. In Mexico City, almost half the *crónicas* are published in cultural sections, where they occupy a privileged space as literary texts that are generally distinguished from the current news. In Ecuador, over half the *crónicas* come from the section of Comment, where they are often reduced to little ironical sketches of the national political situation, the objective of which is primarily to interpret and comment upon news events, and not their literary representation. Moreover, some of these texts are not the result of a formal intention to write *crónicas* on the part of the author.

Existing variations must be related to the different quality of the press in both cities. The press of Mexico City, although still vulnerable to some of the earlier limitations that resulted from the direct control exercised by an authoritarian political regime (for example, there is still an important lack of investigative journalism) is today of a good quality and offers space for the critical appraisal of national developments and for more formally elaborated, higher quality texts. In Guayaquil, the press is strictly limited to its informative contents, and offers no space for literary journalism. A powerful tradition of the *crónica* also exists, but it has been increasingly marginalised in a press where narrow commercial concerns have taken the upper hand.

A detailed analysis of specific texts has shown the particular ways in which the *crónica* fulfils its double role, on the one hand, in relation to and as a commentary on current events and the news, and, on the other hand, as a stylised, literary text that

is preserved through time, retaining its relevance and meaning beyond the ephemeral context of the newspaper.

CHAPTER 4

WRITING THE CITY: THE VIEWS OF THE *CRONISTAS*

1. Introduction

This chapter is based on a series of long open ended interviews with *cronistas* that took place from February to June 2000 and addressed diverse aspects of the production of the *crónicas*, the authors' relationship with the journalistic medium in which they work, and their perception of the genre and of their own work as journalists/writers (see appendix 5 for a model of the questionnaire). A total of twenty *cronistas* were interviewed: José Cueli, Josefina Estrada, Sergio González Rodríguez, Ángeles González Gamio, Guadalupe Loaeza, Fabrizio Mejía Madrid, Carlos Monsiváis, Emiliano Pérez Cruz, Elena Poniatowska, Humberto Ríos Navarrete, Ignacio Trejo Fuentes, Juan Villoro, from Mexico City; and Fernando Artieda, Pablo Cuvi, Ricardo Chacón, Simón Espinosa, Francisco Febres Cordero, Jorge Martillo, Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel, Iván Ulchur, from Guayaquil and Quito.

A first set of questions was designed to establish the authors' trajectories as *cronistas*. A second set of questions inquired into the relationship between the production of *crónicas* and the authors' other literary projects. It included questions on whether *cronistas* also write fiction, whether they see themselves as writers or as journalists and whether *crónica* writing is conceived as a professional activity, i.e. exercised primarily to obtain monetary reward, or not. A third group of questions was related to the specific cultural politics and techniques deployed in the writing of *crónicas* (what authors want to express, important elements in the text, conventions followed, sources, limits imposed by the newspaper), and to the views *cronistas* have of their readers (for whom they write, what they think readers look for in their *crónicas*, what kind of contact they have with their public). Fourthly, the *cronistas'* views on the relationship between radio and television and the written *crónica*, as well as their own role in these media, was explored. Fifthly, authors were asked to give a definition of the *crónica* and to outline the significance and social role of the *cronista* in their societies. A sixth set of questions concerned the influence on them of other

cronistas and writers in general. A final set of questions addressed authors' social and educational backgrounds and their general political views.

This selection of authors has sought to include especially the most significant contemporary *cronistas*, people who were regularly publishing their *crónicas* in the press at the time of the investigation, but also some *cronistas* who had been publishing especially during the previous decade. In Mexico, of those interviewed, José Cueli, Guadalupe Loaeza, Humberto Ríos, Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Monsiváis¹, Sergio González, Fabrizio Mejía, Juan Villoro and Ángeles González Gamio were publishing their texts in the main newspapers (*La Jornada*, *Reforma*, *El Universal*). Ignacio Trejo and Josefina Estrada had published *crónica* in the 1980s. Emiliano Pérez Cruz was no longer writing *crónica* but his work from the 1980s and early 1990s is of lasting significance. I would also have liked to be able to interview Jaime Avilés, who publishes political *crónicas* in *La Jornada*, Alberto Barranco Chavarría, who writes *crónica* about the city's past in *Reforma*, José Joaquín Blanco, whose *crónicas* from the 1980s have become compulsory references, Cristina Pacheco, who has written extensively on the everyday life of the urban poor, and Hermann Bellinghausen, who has produced urban *crónica* and is now also writing the *crónica* of the events in Chiapas and the zapatista movement. However, these authors were unavailable to me in my period of fieldwork. In Ecuador, all the authors interviewed except Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel, official *cronista* of the city whose *crónicas* appeared in the newspaper *El Universo* during the 1980s, were publishing in the press at the time of the investigation.

2. *Cronistas*: Writers or journalists?

2.1. The *cronistas*' position in the newspaper

The first thing to be noticed when examining *cronistas*' personal trajectories and views is the variety of attitudes and ways of inhabiting the overlapping space between the literary and the journalistic dimensions of the *crónica*. This variety starts

¹ The interview with Monsiváis was shorter than the others and focused mainly on the author's general views about the *crónica*, a genre that he has not only always produced but also anthologised. Thus, while questions about the role of mass media and about the most important elements in the *crónica* and the limitations from the newspaper were retained, others that referred, for example, to conventions and sources or to literary influences were eliminated.

with the kinds of *crónica* written, which range from the traditional historical *crónicas* of Pérez Pimentel and González Gamio to the sports *crónicas* of Chacón, Villoro (football) and Cueli (bullfights). Both Poniatowska and Monsiváis have written widely about social movements from below and are now writing political *crónicas* in the sections of the newspaper dedicated to local politics. Loeza is at present writing a personal column with some elements of *crónica* in the editorial section, and the Ecuadorians Febres Cordero, Ulichur and Espinosa also write editorial columns. Many *cronistas* register everyday life in the city, from those who depart from and renovate the historical tradition, incorporating it into their portrayals of contemporary life, like Mejía and Martillo, to the vignettes offered by Trejo or the evocations of Artieda, and the depictions of working class life written by Pérez Cruz. Ríos offers very descriptive accounts of everyday city life, while Villoro writes about and interprets the most varied cultural and social aspects of the city.

This diversity is echoed in the *cronistas*' educational and social backgrounds. Most of them have university education in a variety of areas within the social sciences and the humanities. A significant exception were the female *cronistas*; of the four interviewed in Mexico, only two had university education. Only Emiliano Pérez Cruz, Ignacio Trejo and Josefina Estrada did their university degrees in journalism. Most *cronistas* have middle class or upper middle class origins. Exceptions are Pérez Cruz, Ríos, Estrada, Martillo and Chacón, who had working class or peasant (Ríos) origins and were upwardly mobile through education (with exception of the last, who only has primary education). There is a significant correspondence between working class origins and the sort of *crónica* written by Emiliano Pérez Cruz (*cronista* of Nezahualcóyotl) and Josefina Estrada (who focuses on the everyday life of ordinary working class women). There is a further correspondence between Guadalupe Loeza's upper-middle class position and her residence in the exclusive area of Polanco, and the portrayal in her *crónicas* of the Mexican upper class. There is also a link between González Gamio and Pérez Pimentel's upper-middle class origins and the kind of historical *crónica* they write, traditionally considered a honorary activity of the intellectual elite. Poniatowska, by contrast, has radically departed from her upper class origins in her portrayals of social movements of protest and of the urban poor.

Cronistas' trajectories in the press are illustrative of the paths the flourishing of the genre has taken during the last twenty years and show a surprising similarity. In

Mexico, the line goes from the cultural supplement of *Siempre!*, *La cultura en México*, to *Unomásuno* and its cultural supplement *Sábado* in the early 1980s, and then to *La Jornada* or, more recently, *Reforma*. Other significant points of confluence of *cronistas*: *Punto* in the 1980s (Loacza, Mejía, Pérez Cruz) and *El Universal*, where Villoro and Monsiváis were publishing at the time of the investigation. In Guayaquil, its biggest newspaper, *El Universo*, and the magazine *Diners*, have been the spaces in which contemporary *crónicas* have developed.

The authors' relationship to the newspapers in which they work is a significant factor of their position as *cronistas* within the press. Most maintain a relative freedom with respect to the newspapers or magazines in which they publish, having an agreement for a periodic contribution and being paid on the basis of their texts. An exception to this pattern are *cronistas* like Humberto Ríos Navarrete, Sergio González, Francisco Febres Cordero and Fernando Artieda, who work as full time journalists². In addition, a significant proportion of *cronistas* state that monetary returns are not the reason for writing *crónica*. This is the case for José Cueli, Fabrizio Mejía, Juan Villoro, Ángeles González Gamio, Ignacio Trejo Fuentes, Josefina Estrada, Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel and Iván Ulchur. An in-between position is that of Guadalupe Loaeza, Emiliano Pérez Cruz, Elena Poniatowska, Carlos Monsiváis, Jorge Martillo, Simón Espinosa and Pablo Cuvi, who write *crónicas* as a professional activity but have a flexible relationship with the newspapers as contributors.

Of the twenty *cronistas* interviewed, four also have a consistent career as writers of literature: Elena Poniatowska, Juan Villoro, Jorge Martillo and Fernando Artieda (the former two are novelists, the latter two poets). Twelve of them write fiction or have done so at one particular point. Another *cronista* (Febres Cordero) describes himself as a frustrated writer, who tried to write fiction but did not succeed, and only three have never attempted fiction (Pérez Pimentel, Espinosa and Chacón). Thus, all twelve Mexican *cronistas* interviewed write or have written fiction, while half of the eight Ecuadorian *cronistas* have done so.

From the first group of *cronistas*, who are also professional writers of fiction, only Villoro, for whom writing *crónicas* offers a break from the solitude of fiction, establishes a direct relationship between these two activities:

² Ricardo Chacón also used to work as a full time journalist before he retired.

"...an extraordinary incentive for the fiction writer when he writes *crónica* is the opportunity to get out into the sun, the opportunity to leave his desk, make contact with others and look for a story written by reality... Also the fact that others possess the truth of the stories: it is always the witnesses, who were there, who know or believe they know how an event happened. To investigate a story derived from the truths of others without having a prior notion of how to solve the plot seems to me very healthy to maintain alert the reflexes of writing."

On the other hand, he also notes:

"Critics often insist that I write *crónicas* that are more popular than my books of fiction. That's all right with me, because the *crónica* by definition must be understood in its moment, it fulfills a direct function with the reader and I think it is not there to puzzle, while the literature of fiction does offer something new, something suggestive, surprising, always bewildering readers a little."

Martillo conceives his activities as poet and as *cronista* as largely separate. For example, he notes his deployment of different literary conventions in the two genres: while he avoids the use of adjectives in poetry, he uses them profusely in his *crónicas*, where he writes with the clear intention of reaching a much wider, mass public. Nevertheless, he also grants that his *crónicas* can be recognised as texts written by a poet, especially because of his wide use of similes and metaphors.

Paradoxically, one of the views which most underlines the journalistic dimension of the *crónica* is that of Poniatowska, who strictly separates her work as novelist and her work as journalist (including her *crónicas*), which she does to earn a living. Thus, in the *crónica*, she tries to write something useful using the traditional devices of journalism (interviews, collection of official data, observation) and attempts to be as exact as possible. This view of the *crónica* is also determined by the kind of themes she approaches (poverty and social marginality) and by what she perceives as her duty in expressing the extreme circumstances she portrays:

"... what happens with poverty is that it is so hard that I prefer the *crónica*; I prefer to really reflect it rather than transform it. I believe there is no need to add anything at all. To put things as you see them, to hear people's voices is enough, and even more than enough. One

does not need to alter absolutely anything; in this case, a novelist is unnecessary in my opinion.”

Some of the *cronistas* who also write literature (but not as their main activity), when asked whether they see themselves as writers or as *cronistas* said as writers (Loacza, Mejía, Estrada, Cuvi). Others, significantly, pointed to a mixture of both. This was the case of Ignacio Trejo, Sergio González, Jorge Martillo and also of Iván Ulchur, who emphasised that he has always liked to exploit the territories in-between genres.

A second question on this issue was whether *cronistas* see themselves more as journalists or as writers in the specific context of writing *crónica*. Cueli, Loacza, Mejía, Estrada and Martillo regard themselves as writers. Martillo said, in this respect: “... I never considered myself a journalist. One of the almost religious bases of the journalist is to be objective and impartial. I say this doesn’t work with me: I can be neither objective nor impartial”. For Cueli, it is a matter of not having the necessary training to be a journalist (he says he couldn’t write reportage), whilst for Mejía it is directly related to the primacy of narration over information and to the fact that he makes up stories and ‘tells many lies’, i.e. has the freedom characteristic of a writer and is not tied to real events.

Humberto Ríos, Pérez Cruz and González Gamio see their activity as *cronistas* as a journalistic one. González Gamio points at the limitations of time and space that are characteristic of journalism. Pérez Cruz says he works with people and basically recreates what they tell him, and adds:

“Referring to whether I would be more a journalist than a *cronista*, I think the pleasure would be exercising a profession, which is that of the journalist, with an emphasis on a genre, that of the *crónica*, and more towards recreation rather than objective *crónica*, towards a greater participation of the writer, without necessarily taking away the role of the informer, of the interviewee, or information...”

Again, some – here many – *cronistas* did not go one way or the other, neither saw themselves exclusively as writers nor as journalists, but rather pointed to a mixture of both, identifying a common territory between genres in which they

inserted their activity as *cronistas*. This is the case, for example, of Juan Villoro, for whom one of the features of the *crónica* is to establish new links and combinations:

"I think one of the secrets of the *crónica* is to make unthought combinations between different areas of reality. If a football *cronista* has read the *Iliad*, knows certain military strategies, has read a little of mass culture or about the relation Canetti makes between the mass and power, he has different fields in which to combine this knowledge. Then, what happens on the pitch can have epic, mythological, religious, political echoes, depending on the instinct of the *cronista*."

Trejo said he wrote the *crónicas* for a newspaper using the language of a writer and that all his *crónicas* are real although they may seem inventions. A similar position is that of Febres Cordero, who said that journalism ties you to the facts, but the style is more literary. Sergio González pointed out that he is against establishing a clearcut distinction between journalism and literature, and Pablo Cuví said he had never covered news as journalists do. Iván Ulchur insisted on the fact that he works with the idea that there is no strict line between journalism and literature, although he pointed out that as a writer he plays with the techniques of fiction. Fernando Artieda said that what he does is literary journalism and Rodolfo Pérez noted that he now finds himself very remote from the newspapers, although he used to see himself as a journalist.

On the other hand, González Gamio made the comment that, in spite of being journalistic texts, her *crónicas* have been collected in books, thus identifying a more permanent dimension of her work. This is an aspect that was also pointed out by Elena Poniatowska, Sergio González, Jorge Martillo and Pablo Cuví when they wanted to highlight the fact that *crónica* writing is more than just a professional activity for economic returns.

In fact, if we look at compilations of *crónicas* in book form, the means by which these texts are cleaned of their most referential aspects and presented so as to acquire a more enduring and literary character, we find that most of the *cronistas* interviewed have published collections of their *crónicas* or have projects to do so. An exception to this is José Cuélli, who thinks that the only appropriate place for *crónicas* are the newspapers, and Humberto Ríos in Mexico, and Ricardo Chacón, Simón Espinosa (who thinks his column is too ephemeral), Iván Ulchur and Fernando

Artieda in Ecuador. Moreover, books of *crónicas* are a very significant part or even the most important part of *cronistas*' total number of publications, in cases like those of Carlos Monsiváis, Guadalupe Loaeza, Ángeles González, Emiliano Pérez Cruz, Francisco Febres Cordero and Pablo Cuvi. Elena Poniatowska, Juan Villoro and Jorge Martillo have also published several books of *crónica*, in addition to their fiction.

2.2. On some aspects of *crónica* writing

Significant elements in the *crónica*

If we consider what *cronistas* highlight as most important in the *crónica*, the artistic qualities of the genre are generally emphasised and most point to primarily formal elements, none of them directly related to the *crónica*'s referential or informative dimension. Only Poniatowska, who mentioned the journalistic elements of answering to the fundamental questions of how, why, when and where, making a logical story for the readers and trying to be as exact as possible, as well as Ríos, who discussed describing fact and atmosphere, focused exclusively on the journalistic, factual side.³

Guadalupe Loaeza and Sergio González referred to the language used. The first mentioned originality and honesty in writing, while the second insisted on the need for developing a specific focus to the story. Mejía pointed to the importance of the way of telling the story as well, particularly from what voice and what moment in time, aspects which are intimately related to point of view, i.e. to the presence and position of the narrator. Point of view was also emphasised by Monsiváis and taken up by Villoro as a central ethical question of revealing what the position of the *cronista* is. Villoro also mentioned the use of the downstage voice and the combination of the clarity of journalism with the introspection or subjectivity of literature. In relation to the former he stated:

³ Ríos provided a detailed description of the way he writes his *crónicas*: "I'm in the underground and start describing children, men, poor people, the smell of the underground, of the coach in which I am. Then I get out and outside there is a December atmosphere of total consumerism, with people almost dragging bags of gifts. I start asking, for example, in the Iron Palace, about prices, and to make deliberate comparisons... How the atmosphere changes, how the smell changes. I'm not actually comparing, only putting it there. And it is the readers who are going to be surprised, who are going to take their own conclusions."

“... I really believe in what Tom Wolfe says about the downstage voice, which is like the multiple chorus of our society, equivalent in a way to the Greek chorus. That is, events happen twice: as pure anecdote and as representations in the minds of the witnesses. The one is as important as the other. To reflect in the *crónica* not only what happened but how it was perceived by its multiple witnesses is to give something of this sensation of the Greek chorus, of contemporary public opinion. This seems important to me, especially in the case of collective events in which many people participate.”

Pérez Cruz identified narration, description and dialogue as basic elements and also referred to the question of point of view: who narrates and from where. For him, portraying character, atmosphere, habits, and the social and political context of a story is sometimes more important than the data.

Three *cronistas*, Angeles González, Jorge Martillo and Francisco Febres, talked about finding a subject that interests the reader. González added that even if the theme is trivial one must make it attractive through the way it is narrated, and Martillo said that one should develop the story using literary techniques. This element of finding a theme indicates the creative nature of *crónica* writing and its distance from the mere covering of news, where theme is always given.

Ignacio Trejo and Pablo Cuvi both pointed to the interesting literary issue of verisimilitude (in contrast to Poniatowska's mention of the importance of exactness and Loaeza's emphasis on honesty, related to journalistic notions of accuracy and objectivity). The first highlighted authenticity and said that things must seem true although they may be odd, that readers must be convinced of what the *cronista* is telling them, while the second said that it is important to make the truth seem true. The significance of this aspect and the ambiguity of the *crónica* in this respect was already identified by Tom Wolfe when he stated that, as a consequence of the literary techniques used by the writers of new journalism to recreate events, readers thought they were making dialogue up (1975). Cuvi has this in mind when he states that when one is playing in this liminal zone between reality and literature readers start thinking that the narrated events are not true. In addition, Cuvi also identified the *cronista's* style and point of view as important aspects.

In Iván Ulchur's opinion, the most important aspect is to exploit the unusual details that go unnoticed by those who have to write referentially and to use them in a more literary way. Estrada pointed to the stylistic elements of narrative agility and

colour. Artieda referred to the emotional impact of the event on the *cronista*, while for Cueli it is important to go beyond his own initial intentions, and Chacón said it is the human part of sport that he considers to be the most significant when he writes *crónica*.

Stylistic conventions

When asked whether they follow conventions in the writing of their texts, some *cronistas* pointed to literary structures and techniques. Juan Villoro said he likes noisy *crónicas* with multiple strong voices and a narrator who portrays the scene visually and comments upon it. He also noticed that he keeps his distance as a *cronista* from the events he narrates through irony. Pérez Cruz said he has a certain personal style determined especially by his use of point of view (usually his *crónicas* are narrated in the first person or through the combination of the first person with an omniscient narrator). Martillo talked about a basic structure of his *crónicas*, following the literary conventions that prevail in the writing of short stories: having a good title, starting with a good first sentence, and developing a story line with an end that is related to its beginning. A similar concern for the relationship between start and end was expressed by Febres Cordero, who also stated he follows no conventions and does not have a formula, and by Loaeza. Cuvi said he tries to introduce literary elements within the basic structure of narrating a trip (specific to the travel *crónica* he writes) and also to rescue colloquial language.

Colloquial language is also an important element in González Gamio's view, which is related to a rather different, lighter and more playful conception of the genre. Thus, she also said that she tries to find an attractive, sympathetic title and to write her texts in a simple language and with some humour to avoid solemnity. In the same light, Trejo seeks to make his *crónicas* entertaining and give them a playful tone. Espinosa and Ulchur both work against a prevailing trend of making editorial articles dry and academic; Espinosa through style, the use of popular anecdotes and simplicity in writing, and Ulchur through a clear structure based upon short, telegraphic sentences, the expression of a moral view at the end, and through word games and humour.

Mejía noted that he follows no conventions but decides how he is going to tell a story by putting himself in the place of the reader, the day and the newspaper he

writes in. Pérez Pimentel, referring to his formal qualities as a writer, said he knows he is not a genius but that he has some spark. Cueli, Poniatowska and Artieda answered that they follow no conventions and/or talked about instinct and spontaneity.

Sources

In relation to the sources authors use for writing their *crónicas*, they can be divided into two groups: on the one hand, those who largely base their writing on other texts (in its widest sense, including literature but also any kind of written information, especially from the press) and, on the other, those who rather tend to refer to experiential, observational or journalistic (interviews, official data) sources. In the first group we find Villoro (who uses abundantly all kinds of written sources), Cueli (who talked only about literary sources), González Gamio (who makes extensive use of historians' accounts and old *cronistas'* texts but also of her observations and daily experiences in the city centre), Pérez Pimentel, Febres Cordero (who said he is obsessed with the news), Ulchur and Artieda. Amongst the second are Mejía (who primarily goes to places and talks to people), Pérez Cruz (who describes what he sees, what family members tell him and the conversations he overhears in the street and in public transport), Poniatowska (who uses interviews, official data and observation), Sergio González (who refers to accounts of witnesses, official and other versions of events), and Humberto Ríos.

A third category of *cronistas* would be that formed by authors who explicitly refer to both kinds of sources. For example, Martillo made the following statement:

"Most *crónicas* are lived, walked. There are first hand sources because I like to be in the street, to meet people. But, obviously, I am a reader. I always try to include not only things I've read, but also music. And especially references to the *cronistas*. Ecuadorian and Latin American and North-American *cronistas*, the new journalism... Also various kinds of literature. Those are the learned sources. The other sources are those from the street, first hand accounts, from the newspaper or from magazines. Everything that came into my hands could become a *crónica*; things I found in the flea-market, letters... Anything can prompt you to write a piece."

Pablo Cuví, who uses the greatest and most varied information possible to write his travel *crónicas*, including television, newspapers, books and conversations with people, would also fall into this category.

Limitations of the journalistic medium

When asked whether they experience limitations determined by the journalistic medium in which they work, most *cronistas* said they have enjoyed a great freedom to follow the line of work they have chosen, or mention only the usual limits of space and time (although Villoro remarked that he has had more time to write his *crónicas* than is the usual in journalism). This points to the degree of relative freedom that *cronistas* enjoy in a medium in which their work is recognised as creative journalism, and is not subject to the same kind of demands as predominantly informative reporting. It is thus possible to argue that most *cronistas* experience a privileged position when compared to the journalists who cover news. This advantage may also be due to the fact that very few *cronistas* work full time in newspapers (although even Ríos, González or Febres Cordero, who do, expressed the great degree of freedom they enjoy), and as columnists are better able to negotiate the general conditions of their contributions.

Fabrizio Mejía explained the title of his book of *crónicas*, *Pequeños actos de desobediencia civil* [*Small Acts of Civil Disobedience*, 1996] in the following way, thus indicating an element of defiance and playfulness with external limitations in the very nature of the *crónica*:

“It refers to two things. To the fact that, when you write *crónicas* for the newspaper, to be published in less than five or six days, you permanently have a pressure from everybody not to say anything, not to tell... But it is small because the space you have is a few bytes, two and a half pages or three at most... It is a small space but you can make a lot of trouble and everybody gets upset in the end.”

Some *cronistas* pointed at censorship as a limitation from the newspaper. This was the case of Elena Poniatowska (who said *all* newspapers exercise censorship) and Simón Espinosa. It is not strange that a *cronista* like Poniatowska should have experienced continued censorship as her *crónicas* have tended to portray the struggles

of oppositional and insurrectionary movements from below, and have addressed the silenced aspects of social and political repression in a direct way. Another *cronista*, Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel, left the newspapers he was writing in on several occasions when he received pressures to make his texts shorter or when he was told how to write them, and finally decided to stop writing for the press altogether.

The *cronista* who was a clear exception to the overall pattern of opinions about this subject was Emiliano Pérez Cruz, who talked widely about distinct kinds of limitations he suffered from the medium in which his texts were published. The first kind of limits he mentioned is associated with theme: he was soon labelled as 'the voice of the poor', identified with the use of a specific language, and thus expected to fulfil certain expectations. Secondly, he referred to problems deriving from his use of popular language: the presence of a strong and direct (also politicised) language from below has been seen as potentially disruptive in the newspapers. He also talked about direct censorship when the language he used in *La garrapata*, a magazine of satirical political commentary, was attacked by government agents, together with the popular comics by Rius. Thirdly, Pérez Cruz pointed to a more general limitation deriving from the interests of particular newspapers and the general social context at a particular moment, and the increasing marginalisation of the views from below in a press dominated by neoliberal orientations:

"*Unomásuno* had a period with Huberto Batis when the *crónica* was promoted and in which they gave us a lot of freedom to write. Many of the *crónicas* I wrote with the greatest freedom were with Huberto Batis in *Unomásuno*. But now, with the new editorial board of *Unomásuno*, with Manuel Alonso as owner, the big interests, big capital, the party in power, etc., it is obvious that they are not going to allow *crónicas* that go against the supposed benevolences of neoliberalism... I don't think that if one arrives and fills their page talking with the peasant or with the man with a stall at Balderas, or with the indigenous people who are here at Balderas and can tell us their points of view about neoliberalism, it would be quite so pleasant, especially if one transmits it in their own voices, which are very coarse voices, spoken from the heart."

Monsiváis also expanded on the general limitations to what he sees as a very marginalised genre in a medium that is predominantly orientated towards 'hard' news of facts:

“There is a serious problem of space in publications, and the *crónica* is given three or four pages, which is excessively limiting. By contrast, this is not the case with reportage. It is knowing what’s happening about Colosio’s murder or the murders in Tijuana that attracts readers, and it attracts journalists who, because of their education at schools of communication, have no literary formation or artistic purposes.”

He thus sees a permanent lack of space for the *crónica*, which becomes reduced to a picturesque note or to a sketch of sensations. He also said that newspapers do not ask him for *crónicas*, but for articles or essays, and that editors believe the *crónica* to be *costumbrismo* or social commentary.

The kind of structural limitations that arise from a certain historical and social context is widely felt in Ecuador. Following Artieda, there is no place in the Ecuadorian press for literary journalism, because it is orientated towards profit. He said that there used to be a greater space and more time to read, but that at present educated readers go directly to books, while cultural sections in the press have become strictly informative. Martillo also spoke about a diminishing space in the press for the *crónica*, thought to be too intellectual, which affected his work directly:

“In the end it was very difficult to find a space for the *crónica* in *El Universo* because journalism in Ecuador has really changed a lot, it has become more and more like Miami. There are no possibilities for what one might call new journalism, literary journalism. There is no space. This tendency is dying.”

He also pointed, in a similar way as Pérez Cruz had done, to the pressures exerted to conform to a certain style originally developed in his first *crónicas*, and not to evolve freely following his creative interests.

Images of the reader

Cronistas' images of their readers varied very widely. *Cronistas* like Monsiváis, Pérez Cruz, González Gamio, Estrada, Febres Cordero and Ulchur pointed to no specific conception of their potential readers, and other *cronistas* like Cueli, Villoro, Martillo and Artieda said they wrote for the general reader. But many *cronistas* did have a clear idea of the readers they expected to have and often tried to put themselves in their place: Loaeza (women and young people), Mejía (had a very

specific image which depended on the newspaper he was writing in), Trejo (young people in secondary education or university), Poniatowska (left wing public of the lower middle class and women), González Rodríguez (identified *Reforma*'s reader as middle aged, with university education and an interest in politics and literature), Chacón (he said that in spite of his success amongst the upper classes he writes for the 'people'), Pérez Pimentel (students at secondary and university levels), Espinosa (who said the opinion articles are read by bureaucrats, and this is the reader he expects), Cuvi (middle and upper middle class, intellectual, urban readers from Quito, more or less what he is himself).

Cronistas identify a variety of concerns when asked what they think readers look for in their texts. For Cueli it is primarily emotions, while in Mejía's opinion readers want to laugh, and for Estrada readers seek to have a good time. Cuvi referred to both knowledge and entertainment as basic motivations. Loaeza thinks amusement is the main reason, together with a certain identification with the *cronista*'s style:

"I think amusement, because I have always used humour a lot. Amusement, information... Readers, especially of the newspaper *Reforma*, have their own convictions, but I don't think they are very educated readers, like those of *La Jornada*, who are more university people, more academic, more politicised. *Reforma* readers are more middle class, not too well-informed. I think they like me writing in this uninhibited form, that I don't take myself seriously. It appeals to them that when I don't understand I say 'I don't understand'. There is a great identification, because there are many readers who don't understand."

Form is also important in Villoro's opinion, who emphasised the *cronista*'s personal style, the way *crónicas* are written rather than their information. This aspect was also stressed by Artieda, who said readers look for the poetic element in his *crónicas*, rather than for their informative content.

Pérez Cruz sees curiosity as determining readers' interest in his *crónicas* and thinks they like his ironic, corrosive tone. He added:

"Now I notice it especially when I go to the provinces or when there is a presentation of any of my books -- I meet long-term fans; even, and maybe it's not a good thing, many people who remember me from *La garrapata*. Because the penetration of a sort of proletarian humour into a political publication, narrating proletarian situations in a language from within, was very unusual. Maybe this was a letter of introduction that worked."

Martillo seeks an identification with a reader who also knows the characters and places he describes:

"I write in the first person and seek readers that identify with me... They also know Guayaquil, have seen its characters, watched the setting moon, seen the flea-market, the cemetery... but they don't write about it; I do. I am like a translator."

In González Gamio's view, readers look for a recuperation of something dear they have forgotten or have not even known, and a revaluation of the city in its gentle, beautiful aspect. According to Trejo, readers value details, they like his focus on things that appear so insignificant and can recognise the characters he portrays. Poniatowska said she has always been identified with Monsiváis because they have both covered the same themes (the killings of Tlatelolco, land seizures, the 1985 earthquake).

González Rodríguez, who said he is amongst the ten most read authors in *Reforma*, made the following observation about his readers:

"We must not forget... that they are educated people and obviously they are not going to accept just anything, but are expecting from you, as a writer, something extra, an added value to what they could read in any other newspaper or in any other communication medium. So, they are always expecting something different, something that is not the usual, something interesting..."

Febres Cordero also emphasized that readers valued a different way of approaching things, a different angle, as well as his irreverence in treating solemn and transcendental events. For Chacón, readers look for the human part of sport in his texts. Espinosa also said that some readers want humanism, while others, especially Ecuadorians living abroad, like the form he follows of writing to an imaginary correspondent.

Generally, it should be noted that *cronistas* tend to refer to a certain closeness with their readers that goes far beyond that of ordinary journalists and even columnists. This level of proximity is sometimes sought in the form of identification of the reader with the narrated events (Martillo) or with the tone (Loeza) or style (Villoro or Artieda). In other cases, it is the portrayal of a specific social reality that

especially speaks readers who already possess a previous knowledge of it or who can recognise themselves in it in some form (Martillo, Pérez Cruz, Trejo, González Gamio, Poniatowska).

Literary influences

In relation to the *cronistas'* literary influences, several aspects were discussed, including influences from other *cronistas*, whether authors knew foreign *cronistas*, new journalism, and other writers in general.

When asked about influences from other *cronistas*, most Mexican authors pointed to other contemporary Mexican *cronistas*, especially to Monsiváis (Mejía, Villoro, Ríos, Pérez Cruz, Trejo). In the case of Ecuadorian *cronistas*, the authors and genres named were very diverse: Martillo and Artieda mentioned other Ecuadorian *cronistas* (Martillo also mentioned the realist literature of the generation of the 1930s in Ecuador), while Espinosa said he does not read many *crónicas*; Febres Cordero pointed to the tradition of the 19th century realist novel and to the journalism of García Márquez and Larra, and Cuvi to the tradition of new journalism and authors who generally mixed journalism and literature. Many *cronistas* pointed to García Márquez as an influence, whether as a *cronista* or as a writer (Ríos, Loeza, Pérez Cruz, Estrada, Martillo, Cuvi, Ulchur). Ríos and Estrada referred to 19th century Mexican *cronistas*, while González Gamio pointed to Cortés, Bernal Díaz and Cervantes de Salazar, and Pérez Pimentel to Palma's *Tradiciones* (see chapter 2, section 2) and to Luis Alberto Sánchez.

Some *cronistas* mentioned authors linked to new journalism like Wolfe, Mailer or Capote (Ríos, Mejía, Villoro, Pérez Cruz, Cuclí, Martillo, Cuvi). Others responded positively when explicitly asked whether they had experienced the influence of new journalism (Cuclí, Loeza, Ríos, Febres Cordero). Estrada, González Rodríguez, Espinosa and Ulchur said new journalism had not influenced their work, while Poniatowska insisted that, although many have pointed to the links of her writing to new journalism, she has not read its texts.

When asked about their knowledge of foreign *cronistas*, several authors pointed to newspapers like *El País* (Cuclí) or to some of its columnists, like Rosa Montero (Estrada), *L'Express* (Loeza), the Argentinean cultural newspaper *Página 12* (Espinosa), the *New York Times* (Poniatowska). The latter also pointed to the

tradition of *récits de vie* (Studs Terkel, Miguel Barnet and Oscar Lewis), and Martillo mentioned Eduardo Galeano.

Regarding influences from writers in general, answers included the names of Faulkner (Cueli, Pérez Cruz, Estrada), Steinbeck (Pérez Cruz), Hemingway (Estrada, Cuvi, Ulchur), Ellroy (González Rodríguez), Carver (Ulchur), Fonseca (Martillo) Vargas Llosa (Estrada), Cortázar (Mejía, Cuvi, Artieda), Borges (Mejía, Cuvi), Onetti (Martillo, Cuvi). There were also several references to writers who have produced non-fiction or have also been journalists like Walraff, Enzensberger and Kapucinski (Pérez Cruz), and to genres like true crime (González Rodríguez, who also pointed to *crónica roja*). Martillo also referred to the *maudit* poets, Kavafis and Anglosaxon poetry as literary influences, and Artieda mentioned Neruda and Vallejo.

Thus, generally, *cronistas*' references oscillate freely between the fields of journalism and literature, making mixed references to realism and other novels, to the writers of the Latin American literary boom, to journalists, and also to intermediate genres such as non-fiction novels, *récits de vie* or accounts of historical events.

2.3. The *cronistas*' variable position between journalism and literature

Following this descriptive account of *cronistas*' responses, it is possible to distinguish between different ways in which they perceive their work as journalists or writers. Humberto Ríos, Elena Poniatowska, Emiliano Pérez Cruz and Sergio González consistently see writing *crónicas* as a journalistic activity, marked by the formal conventions, sources of information, and requirements of truthfulness and exactness characteristic of journalism. This is also the case, to a lesser extent, of Guadalupe Loaeza and Francisco Febres Cordero. On the other hand, *cronistas* like Fabrizio Mejía, Juan Villoro, Jorge Martillo and Fernando Artieda responded more to a characterisation of the *cronista* as primarily a writer, asserting a greater freedom with respect to the formal and informative requirements of journalism.

Significantly, some authors have tended to situate themselves between journalism and literature, viewing their work as a mixture of both and defending an in-between space at the interstices of traditional genres. This was the case of *cronistas* like Trejo, Cuvi and Ulchur, who at several points of the interview, and especially when they were asked whether they conceived of their work as journalistic or as literary, pointed to this intermediate position.

In addition, these diverse perceptions of the genre between literature and journalism are reinforced by the definitions of the *crónica* given by some authors, which explicitly refer to its formal nature as a combination of both. Thus, for Fabrizio Mejía, who is more on the literary side, the *crónica* is “the art of the fact or the art of the datum. The emphasis is on the art, on the way it is told. But what you tell must also be of some interest.” Similarly, Villoro defines the *crónica* as the

“combination of the factual means of journalism and the subjectivity of literature, attempting to produce a closed story, that is, not an item of news that must continue to be investigated, not an episode extracted from reality, not a piece of life, but a rounded story that ends with a precise meaning”.

Ignacio Trejo also combined both elements in his definition, moving more towards an emphasis on the journalistic aspects of the genre, a position also shared by a *cronista* like Pérez Cruz. For the former the *crónica* is: “the narrative more or less in chronological order of a true event with the support of the tools of literary language. For me, the *crónica* is on the exact boundary between journalism and fiction; it feeds on both possibilities”. In addition, to clarify the *crónicas*’ mixed composition, he had earlier pointed out:

“Remember that the *crónica* has as its premise the departure from real, verifiable events... in contrast to the short story... But it also has the advantage of dressing itself in the clothes of fiction. There comes a moment in which they are confused and you don’t know if what you are reading is fiction, an invention, a short story, or if it really existed...”

All this can be opposed to a definition that emphasises the *crónica* as journalism, such as Febres Cordero’s, who sees the *crónica* as:

“a narration of a specific event in a more extended way than mere news reporting. The *crónica* allows you to intervene as a narrator, as a witness, allows you to have other points of view about that same event, allows you to gather other versions. It is a more complete universe, more complex than the news, which is nevertheless the closest to reality, the most reliable. The *crónica*, the reportage, is freer, looser.”

Or to Estrada's, for whom "the *crónica* is the most literary of genres [she is referring to journalistic genres]. It is the fact told chronologically and must reflect reality... without allowing sociological, political or editorial commentary..."

Or, finally, to Ríos vision that the *crónica* is "the description of facts" and must avoid the author's commentaries, and to his opinion that only some literary elements can be used in journalistic *crónicas*, where the communicative function must predominate over a formal concern:

"journalism is closely related to literature; a thin line separates them, which is reality. But you take elements from literature; elements like rhythm. Not metaphors, because in journalism one must not exaggerate in the use of metaphors or images. In journalism it is the facts; you must not confuse people..."

3. Radio, television and the *crónica*

Generally, *cronistas* have a prominent public presence and are known by the people specifically as such, i.e. as individuals who observe, register and interpret everyday life and events in the press. An extreme case of this is that of Monsiváis, the only *cronista* who, according to Villoro, has come to alter the events he witnesses with his mere presence. Other authors, without being as famous as Monsiváis or as well known figures as Poniatowska and Loaeza, are also publicly identified as *cronistas* by their readership or by the communities to which they belong. This is especially the case of Pérez Cruz, Trejo, Martillo and Cuvi. This public profile they enjoy comes in part from their privileged position in the press as writers of *crónica*, as authors who have a personal style and offer formally elaborated texts, but also from their practice of going into the streets and talking to the people in search of stories to write. On the other hand, their presence and role in radio and television is also a reason for their high public profile.

Loaeza, Villoro, Pérez Cruz, González Gamio, Trejo, Poniatowska, González Rodríguez and Chacón have worked in radio, most of them extensively in their own radio programmes, engaged in what can in some cases be considered as a kind of radio *crónicas*. Thus, for example, Pérez Cruz made radio interviews applying some of the techniques he also uses in written *crónicas* (eliminating his questions through editing and constructing an uninterrupted storyline) in which working class people

offered testimonies that acquired, in this way, the richness of literary accounts. Cueli, Loaeza, Cuvi and Artieda have worked in television programmes, while Mejía, Villoro, Pérez Cruz, González Gamio and Martillo have written television scripts.

In relation to the role of radio and television in registering everyday life and its consequences for the written *crónica*, many authors point to the immediacy and directness of radio and television in covering events and giving information. Some point to the creative potential of radio (Loaeza), or to its high standards (Villoro, who stresses the freedom in this medium and also its high technical level), its prominent role in Mexican society and in its democratic process (González Rodríguez, see below). By contrast, the low quality of television as a highly commercial medium leaves no space for the *crónica*, as Villoro, Trejo, González Rodríguez and Artieda emphasise.

Generally, the advantage of the written media, and especially the *crónica*, is seen to be the opportunity of being more reflective thanks to length and time (González Gamio), stylistic qualities (González Rodríguez) and the opportunity to investigate and analyse (González Rodríguez, Monsiváis), greater depth (Febres Cordero) and permanence (Estrada). Both Ríos and Ulchur mention the significance of the *crónica* and its special role as a means of exploring details that have gone unperceived by others.

A closer look at the space of interrelation that emerges between radio and television and the written *crónica* and the specific forms this interrelation takes can reveal interesting combinations. Monsiváis, who has made referentiality to other media and to mass culture one of the favourite features in his texts, thinks that the *crónica* benefits from them:

“They enrich it, because what radio or television does not give you is perspective, distance, the horizon of understanding. And you do have access to the elements that necessarily enliven or correct the *crónica*. Of course, it is a useless competition, because in Mexico 91% of the population have television sets and I don't think even 1% reads *crónicas*. In a sense, that marginality, what could be the autism of the written word, gives you the understanding of what is being lived from a perspective that would be meaningless in the electronic media.”

To illustrate his point, he talked about the importance of making a *crónica* about *Cristina*, the enormously successful talk show which addresses a whole series

of issues long considered taboo, thus becoming “the avantgarde of moral change in Latin American societies”. *Cristina*:

“speaks naturally about issues that weren’t even mentioned before. It gives voice to the guilty silence, and that is fantastic. And to make a *crónica* about *Cristina* allows me to see the way in which that is changing and allows me a reflection, of whatever quality, that I wouldn’t find in the electronic media themselves.”

On the other hand, Fabrizio Mejía points to the very significant role mass cultural elements play in the *crónica*, analysing their interrelationship in the following way:

“They have an effect on it I would say in two ways. One, on narrative forms. If you are trying to compete with radio and television from the words of a *crónica* you must use formulas to make things understandable very quickly and attract the public’s attention in the first two lines, because otherwise they won’t read you. People are very used to scenes, for example. I do this a lot, I make scenes, because it is a very good way not of competing but of taking the best elements that cinema or television have to offer... But on the other hand you are never going to be able to compete in information: *crónicas* compete with television with their voice, their point of view. And sometimes it is very difficult.”

Mejía sees this becoming more and more difficult in a context where television starts to incorporate creative and originally challenging points of view, as in Canal 40, where an open and critical position is manifested and new possibilities of the medium are being tried out. He gives the example of the visual *crónicas* that were broadcast daily in a programme called ‘Los días de la elección’ (‘Election Days’) on the 1997 local election.

But Mejía’s opinions and enthusiasm about the possibilities of television are not shared by other *cronistas*, who see it largely as a medium with an unrealised potential at the service of capital and political power. Thus, for Pérez Cruz, “...the media have a technical potential that can be very useful. It would be necessary that the media opened up, which as of now we do not see happening in Mexico”.

Following Villoro, radio is a stimulus for written journalism, as many of those who write started doing so first on the radio. This does not happen with television, which is primarily conceived as a business:

"There isn't the least stimulus. There is no opportunity to write interesting scripts for television in Mexico, in part because there is still a very strong censorship and in part because people's cretinism allows a lot of money to be made with a very low quality of programmes."

González Rodríguez has a similar opinion of the nature of Mexican television, a medium which he says is closely connected to the structure of power and is exclusively orientated towards profit:

"Television is a very paralysed medium in Mexico. It is very basic and turns on two or three premises; basically entertainment, amusement, profit, the values of spectacle, and, as a result, doesn't accept experimentation nor a search for alternatives in its programming."

He notices, on the other hand, that the *crónica* has emerged in the press and also in photography (he points to its importance and development since the creation of *La Jornada* in 1984) and the radio. The latter, in his opinion, pioneered the new democratic opening of the Mexican media in the 1970s and 1980s through procedures like the open telephone line, where "people made their complaints and at the same time urban life was presented simultaneously as it was taking place".

González also points to a present crisis of the written press, to its marginality in a cultural context dominated by television and to the difficulty of newspapers, traditionally a medium of the elite, in reaching a wide public. In his view:

"...journalism must work around the notion of exclusiveness, of investigation, around the quality of its products. But sadly in Mexico the press... seeks to imitate the scheme of communicative media like television, that is, they want to present it more visually, to make its newspapers light products in the category of spectacle, of entertainment, and they don't realise that they are losing its best qualities, that is, precisely depth, investigation, exclusivity..."

Other *cronistas* have also commented on the impact of the informative role of radio and television on the newspaper, particularly on the influence of the visual element in the press (Febres Cordero) and on the decreasing readership for newspapers (Ulchur). In Cuvi's opinion, the *crónica* has lost some weight and

novelty, becoming addressed to a smaller, more literary public. He is here especially referring to travel *crónicas*, the genre he has most produced:

“...in the 1980s, if you wanted to know about these places in the country, my *crónicas* were more important than in the 1990s, when there was this television programme and other programmes that started to cover these things. And... as those were easier, more popular, more accessible, then the written *crónica* became a little more limited, I wouldn't say to an elite, but to a public that likes the written word or literature.”

For Cueli, the newspaper can acquire a new importance by becoming specialised and orientated to publics who share specific interests, and Espinosa sees its future in offering something different that other media cannot give, like long reports and *crónicas*, with greater detail and analysis.

4. Conceptions of the *crónica*

Cronistas express very varied conceptions of what a *crónica* is and should be. A series of questions related to their project as *cronistas* and to their general views on the genre and on the role of the *cronista* reveal these consistently different models for the *crónica*.

The *crónica* is generally a multilayered register of everyday life in the city, although the emphasis can vary significantly, from the city as landscape and organism, even sometimes as a character, the topography of the city, its streets and its peoples, their habits and beliefs, to a closer focus on specific sections of its population. In addition, *crónicas* can also vary in their objectives and form, whether they respond to a literary or artistic intention or are seen primarily as entertainment, as sketches the main function of which is to provide some ‘colour’ and to break with the tone of ‘hard news’.

Before turning to the various existing views in this respect, it is useful to discuss Monsiváis' conception and evaluation of the *crónica*, which focuses on the genre on a more general level and which has also been a marked influence on many of the authors interviewed. In fact, *cronistas* often refer to him in order to distinguish their work from his (see for example Mejía's characterisation of different kinds of

crónica and his distance from what he terms the *crónica* of social movements, below) but assume the same basic structural principles for the *crónica*.

Monsiváis defined the *crónica* in 1980 as "... the literary reconstruction of figures or events, a genre in which the formal intention predominates over informative urgencies". Today, when he talks about the marginal role of literary practices in the press, he shows that he is maintaining his views on the *crónica* as a literary text. Thus, he characterises its place as follows:

"It is an important but marginal place. For some years and very especially since the *Zapatista* uprising and the murder of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the place of honour in the press has belonged to the investigative report. This is what is read, what is discussed, what is distributed. With a further difficulty: the level of understanding of literary practices in the written press has fallen. Things are read carelessly, and a literary *crónica* in its formal intention read with carelessness dies. The kind of reader that appreciated the prose or the perspicacity is not there any more. Things are read too quickly, the range of newspapers on offer is too big, the weight of the visual is extraordinary, and so the *crónica* has been situated in an important place but not in the first line of attention."

Monsiváis, who started writing *crónica* when he was 15, has moved freely between the genres of cultural and political *crónica*, *crónica* of spectacles, *crónica* of cultural changes and, more recently, also historical *crónica* (he is presently writing a *crónica* of 20th century Mexico). He says that when he started writing *crónica*: "I felt it was a genre I liked, it allowed me essay, narrative notes, description. It allowed me an incursion into literature". For him, *crónicas* not only demand an effort from the reader because of their formal elaboration, they are also a way to critically engage the present, and can be contrasted to more appealing genres which seek to fulfill other needs for their mass audiences:

"...one knows beforehand that one is speaking to a very restricted public, because what sells on a vast scale is the light novel, investigative reportage; the genres that serve to sweeten the use of time or to give the use of time a sense of concern for what is going on around us."

This distinction between diverse uses of texts is helpful because it can be applied, as Monsiváis does himself, to the role and presence different kinds of *crónica* have in the press. Thus, in a context which privileges the abundance of news to the

detriment of form, we can see the absolute marginality of what Monsiváis terms *crónica* of impulse, a text that speaks to readers with literary experience and which requires more space than is at present available (there is usually a maximum limit of four typed pages): “What you don’t find is *crónica* of impulse. Almost always you see little *crónicas* of sensations or picturesque notes”. As we will see below, this “picturesque sketch” is a form that is highly popular amongst some *cronistas*, whose texts offer entertaining vignettes of city life.

The *crónica* as a register and exploration of everyday life in the city

Fabrizio Mejía’s *crónicas*, which are for its author a way of “taking the pulse or the temperature of the city”⁴, are part of a more general purpose of registering city life. In relation to the role of the *cronista*, Mejía distinguished between different kinds of *crónica* and *cronistas*, from González Gamio’s “architectural” *crónica*, which is primarily a *crónica* of places, to the *crónica* of events, which in his view goes back to the accounts of conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo and comprises Monsiváis and Pacheco’s *crónicas* of social movements and struggles, becoming the social memory of the city. In addition, he states:

“All *cronistas* who come from the experience of 1968 are *cronistas* who don’t notice so much the places as the people, but the people seen as a crowd, as a happening that would necessarily have, following Monsiváis, a direction, which would be the perpetual establishment of the kingdom of democracy and happiness in the city.”

To this he contrasts a third kind of *crónica*, the portraits of everyday life he, among others, produces; a more individual sort of *crónica* in which the *cronista* expresses a personal register of a common situation. He compares this change of point of view from the *crónica* of crowds to the *crónica* of anonymous individuals to the evolution in painting from Diego Rivera’s murals to Cuevas’ self portraits:

⁴ This is a popular conception of the *crónica* in Mexico, as two other authors referred to it in very similar wording. José Cueli alluded to Ortega y Gasset saying “I’m going to the bullfights to take the pulse of the city”, while Guadalupe Loaeza defined the *crónica* as a “thermometer that measures the temperature of society”.

"It is not so much 'the crowd', 'the prisoners'. No; one, and not El Mosh⁵, either. In other words, not a leader but anyone, preferably a girl who is 16 in a young offenders' institution. It is like trying to break down an idea of Monsiváis that I like very much... that city movements are indeed massive. But they are necessarily also dispersions. There are so many interests at work, so many lives that are so varied, people come from so many strange experiences, that they are necessarily dispersed. So, I believe it is much more valid to do this depicting each one by one, even if we take longer, than in a crowd."

Sergio González sees the *crónica* as the ideal genre to portray city life. He refers to Zola's vision of the city as an organism and points out that the *crónica* should be measuring what is happening in the city every minute from different points of view. Like Mejía, he identifies a change of perspective in the Mexican *crónica* of the last decade:

"I think that nowadays *cronistas* are more interested in particular phenomena, less maximalist from the point of view of the *crónica* and less ideological, more linked with the particular and with the identification of concrete things that probably go no further than the sphere of habits and customs of a society, but that at the same time are expressing very precisely, with greater accuracy than the great narrative panoramas of the dispossessed, what is happening in reality. That is why we have more horizontal themes, even more everyday themes. We are no longer seeing the impact of a public figure like Pedro Infante on society, we are seeing the people that enter a place to listen to *boleros*..."

Juan Villoro's work can also be situated in the context of this increasing diversification of interests in the *crónica* of the 1990s and the renewed attention to other forms of the everyday that do not necessarily imply a specific political direction. He has moved with great freedom in the genre, writing from "imaginary *crónicas*" (in which he invents fictional situations in real contexts) on the impact of rock on his generation to interviews within the most diverse subjects, ranging from football (one of his specialities) to the interpretive *crónicas* of city life that have appeared weekly in his column 'Domingo Breve' ('Brief Sunday') in *La Jornada Semanal*, or to long *crónicas* about Chiapas or contemporary celebrities. His trajectory, he says, is opposite than that of most *cronistas*, as he has moved from being a writer in the first place to journalism. He explains his motivation for writing *crónica* as follows:

⁵ Student leader in the 1999-2000 strike.

“What I like is to depart from a reality to find an underground, hidden story that is there and that can only be told through the *crónica*. Reality occurs in a very vivid, baroque, abundant way, and does not ask permission of anyone to take place. It does not require verisimilitude: we believe it or we don’t. Especially in countries like Mexico, where reality is crazy. This tide of facts often prevents us from seeing the stories that are hidden there... This is for me the first stimulus. And the second: curiously, in coming into contact with this reality I get ideas, metaphors, words, opinions as a writer that I don’t have in any other way. It’s a great stylistic opportunity.”

Jorge Martillo has made the city of Guayaquil, its streets and topography, its popular characters, rituals and habits, the protagonist of many of his *crónicas*. He comments about what motivated him to write *crónica*:

“I realised that I had always been a very curious Guayaquilean. I liked walking in the streets, knowing places, characters. I think I have a good sense of observation... It is also a longing to devour the city, to make it mine, to write it, to portray it, to give it another life through writing.”

Martillo, who has also written travel *crónicas*, makes texts of his journeys through the city, rediscovering its diversity and character and linking them with a past that has left traces in today’s life. What he seeks to express is: “The magic that exists in everyday things. I would like people to love and hate the city. That when they read my *crónicas*, or any of my texts – I include in this literature as well – they don’t find it beautiful. I want to shake, to transform the reader, to propose other things.”

He defines the *crónica* as “a contemporary portrait of a changing reality” and states:

“I think the role of the *cronista*, at least in my view, is to rescue a very immediate story, a living story, and also to make literature. Those who have studied my *crónicas* state that I also have a commitment, an interest in the marginalised sectors, in some racial sectors. I believe I do, because I identify with that reality. After all, I come from a proletarian background, and I have also wanted to portray that reality, which is the one I know best.”

The commitment here is twofold. On the one hand, it is determined by the idea of rescuing a story that might otherwise be lost, forgotten or remain unperceived (similarly to Villoro's idea of finding hidden, underground stories that can only be unearthed by the *crónica*). On the other, it is orientated towards the lives and culture of the marginalised who, although not speaking directly through their own voices as in the *crónicas* of some authors like Pérez Cruz and Poniatowska (in Martillo there is a strong presence of the narrator) are the main subjects of the city he portrays.

A similar idea of the popular can be found in Artieda's *crónicas*, which he sees as literary pieces, made following a creative scheme. The author says he wants to portray in his texts what he lives daily, to be a witness of his time, focusing especially on things that are generally unnoticed. He defines the *crónica* as "the opportunity of poeticising about the most common things, of making poetry everyday and of making literature less elitist" and states on the role of the *cronista*:

"I think *cronistas* have lost some importance, because there haven't been any other journalistic trends to replace them. Before... the *crónica* served to disclose the detail forgotten by investigative texts of historical rigour. The *cronista* went to the archives and unravelled everyday things, conversations, private documents... Present day *cronistas* have suffered a literary plundering by the directors of the media, because they are no longer allowed to write literature; they want information... This is a very important loss. But the increase in the number of media allows some editorial consistency. One no longer has to wait until facts become history to be collected by historian *cronistas*, but *cronistas* go hand in hand with the facts, they are witnesses of their time. This is an achievement; I think it is something the *crónica* has gained."

The idea that *cronistas* offer a register of their time can be extended to include travel *crónicas* with reference to Cuví's intention of completing a map of Ecuador that would also include its handicrafts and traditional cuisine. He defines the *crónica*, specifically travel *crónicas*, as recounting a trip, with an emphasis on the literary and oral aspects, and adds that *crónicas* are an excellent way to reconstruct the everyday life of a city or an epoch. Cuví considers that the urban *cronista* must attempt to reflect and not to interpret reality, in parallel with Estrada and Ríos, who sees the *crónica* basically as a description of facts, and with González Rodríguez who, as will be seen below, is against giving the author a direct voice. Further, he also stresses oral narration as its basis, rescuing the figure of the storyteller in the black poet from

Esmeraldas (the *decimero*, as the cultivator of this popular genre of oral poetry is called) he captured in one of his *crónicas*.⁶

The *crónica* as a sketch of habits and sensations

The *crónica* can also look backwards, portraying the city's past in the tradition of the old *cronistas*. González Gamio's 'architectural *crónicas*', as Mejía puts it, are a special variant, where she focuses on a 'memory without people' to describe the history of the city's buildings, areas and sometimes popular habits. But her *crónicas*, on the other hand, also tend to be sketches of particular aspects of the city, rather than *explorations* in which the process of apprehension and interpretation of a complex reality is fundamentally approached as an artistic task. In this sense, the kind of *crónicas* examined in this group, tend to reflect a lighter conception of the genre, as fundamentally an item of entertainment and amusement. Most of the authors listed below emphasise clarity and accessibility, the use of humour and the need to make texts attractive to the reader as important qualities of the *crónica*.

González Gamio started writing her texts about the architectural treasures of the historical centre of the city when it was beginning to be restored, with the purpose of making known the riches of an area that had traditionally been undervalued. She said that personal opinion and subjectivity distinguish the *crónica* from other journalistic genres like the note or the reportage (in opposition to Cuví, Estrada or Ríos), highlighting its mixed composition, which includes history, literature (the short story), reportage and even interview, and the difficulty of giving a good definition that embraces these disparate elements. With respect to the role of the *cronista*, she pointed to the existence of *cronistas* from particular urban areas (the *cronistas delegacionales*, whose task is to describe local events and history) but also to the everyday *crónica* from the newspapers. She identified the *cronista's* traditional role as one of preservation of the historical memory of a place, particularly the traditions and local legends that are disappearing with modernity, and pointed to another possible ideal role as the defender of the cultural heritage.

Similarly, for Pérez Pimentel, official *cronista* of Guayaquil, the *crónica* is about recreating the past. He stresses that it is a conversational genre, pointing out that

⁶ 'Las increíbles aventuras de un negro decimero' ('The incredible adventures of a black balladeer'), *Viajes por la costa* (1996).

those who can talk well can also write (he is himself an example of an extraordinary oral narrator⁷) and discussing the historical significance of the oral practices that form the basis for the kind of *crónica* he produces:

“... the habit of talking has been lost in Ecuador. It was called *tertulia*, and when it was done in the streets *el mentidero*. There were streets where no decent lady passed through because she was undressed with everything that was known about her and about all her ancestors. *Mentideros* almost always functioned in pharmacies and in the undertaker’s; some benches were put out in front. They told the story of the family of anyone who passed by. This existed in Guayaquil until 1946, when the banana boom started and the city of 250,000 inhabitants started to rise to the two million and a half it has at present, in less than sixty years. But at that time, everybody knew each other.”

In his opinion, *cronistas* must reflect the agility that characterises a good interesting conversation: “I honestly think that *cronistas* in Ecuador must have a quick, soft and surprising genre, with humour to a certain extent. We must not aspire to great depth or things like that...”. Thus, he thinks that “the *crónica* is casual, fleeting” when compared with other genres like the biography, through which he has gone more deeply into the lives of historical figures of his country (he embarked on a monumental biographical dictionary of Ecuador of which he has already published 16 volumes).

In Pérez Pimentel’s view, historical *crónicas*, which had traditionally nothing to do with journalism and were the work of individuals who had their economic needs solved and occupied honorary positions as *cronistas*, are the genre of an elite:

“Within this kind of historical *crónicas* of the past... we are confined to an elitist medium. Because if the *crónica* leaves the elite and goes to the people it is transformed into something different to what we have traditionally maintained in this city, and I think in Quito as well. But Martillo is proving that a popular *crónica* exists. José Antonio Campos proved that the vernacular *crónica* exists.”

The conception of the *crónica* as a register of city life is important in the work of Guadalupe Loaeza, who started writing *crónicas* as “notes on the Mexican

⁷ Consider the following statement as an illustration of his vast memory and knowledge of the small history: “I can tell you the most intimate details about all my thirty two original ancestors – how much

bourgeoisie” in which she examined how this social class reacted to the economic crisis after 1982. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Loaeza sees the *crónica* as a genre of amusing entertainment, made up essentially of short sketches on a wide variety of themes and valuing especially its closeness to the reader and the possibility of using humour in her texts. She also characterised the *cronista*, like Pérez Pimentel, as a good observer and a chatty person and, significantly, as someone who takes less risks than an opinion journalist.

The conception of the *crónica* as a register and vignette of the little history and the small things that would normally go unperceived and/or unrecorded is important for Trejo, Estrada and Ríos. The three authors refer to the classical 19th century tradition of Mexican *crónica*: Trejo stresses the fact that those *cronistas* portrayed everyday life, Estrada that they reflected the society of their time, and Ríos said they discovered the *crónica*. These authors, who focus especially on the stories they encounter in their trajectories through the city, tend to write local *crónicas* of a descriptive nature: Trejo offers stories from Colonia Roma, where he lived for many years, Estrada focuses on the city centre, where she used to work, and Santa María de la Ribera and Tacubaya, where she has lived, and Ríos writes primarily about the city centre.

Ignacio Trejo said that he would like to transmit to the reader the common everyday stories we no longer perceive, a different way of looking at things. He sees the figure of the *cronista* as a very significant one: “*Cronistas* are important because they leave a record of things that other journalists and other genres don’t pay attention to. They give presence to people and situations that would normally go unperceived in her’s say ordinary journalism”.

For Estrada, who quotes Batis, the director of the supplement of *Unomásuno* in which she and many other *cronistas* published their urban *crónicas* in the 1980s, the *crónica* is a reflection of our days that can show the future reader how Mexican society was at a particular time. She says she likes to make the characters of the city speak in her *crónicas*, and stresses the elements of agility, colour and humour. She considers the *cronista* as an essential bridge for historians, sociologists and political scientists and reclaims the importance of narrating what may seem insignificant:

they weighed, what diseases they suffered from, the colour of their eyes, their weaknesses...”

"...contemporary people, as they have it so close, will think that it is a pleasant but unimportant thing. It isn't. To do this one must have, I insist, a very sharp eye".

The *crónica* as means of expression of the voice from below

Three *cronistas* have a view of the *crónica* primarily as a text which can be filled with the voices of the marginalised and used as an alternative version of events: Poniatowska, Pérez Cruz and González Rodríguez.

Elena Poniatowska said the *crónica* can help to make the voices from below heard and added: "I have been interested especially in going out from the world I know, which is the world of the well-off, and registering and knowing about experiences I would never have at the personal level if it wasn't through all these people". She defined the *crónica* as the narration of an event that has an impact upon us and that has to be as complete (and as exact) as possible, thus stressing the commitment of the *cronista* to portraying faithfully the reality she is describing.

For Pérez Cruz, the *crónica* is primarily a means of "giving voice to the insulted and humiliated of the country". He defined the *crónica* as "the possibility of talking with people, recreating their language and life situations and taking a great pleasure with the recreation through the written word", and pointed, in addition, to subjectivity and a greater participation of the reporter, and to the possibility of using literary techniques to the benefit of the journalistic text. Thus, he identified the genre with more than just a finished text, as a process of finding and registering the diverse voices from below. In addition, Pérez Cruz thinks the *cronista* should, first of all, be a researcher; he defends a *crónica* behind which there is investigation, a search for information, against a subjective *crónica* in which the part of its author is all important.

González Rodríguez, who is especially interested in the mixture of genres and in establishing a better fluidity between literature and journalism, finds in the *crónica* a creative challenge: "...because of its urgency, of the responsibility with respect to facts, of its novelty and the originality that one must give to the texts". He reveals a similar conception to those of Pérez Cruz and Poniatowska in relation to the role of the *cronista* as a researcher and as a constructor of a text made with other people's voices, and similarly defends a low profile for the *cronista* in the text itself:

“My role as a *cronista*...is in letting those who are directly implicated in the facts speak for themselves. And what one must do is make a montage so that they are expressing the atmospheres, and so that the phenomena, the voices, the anomalies, the contradictions of the facts themselves appear as I am putting them in order or disorder. It is a strategic task, it is a construction.”

He defines the *crónica* as a “sort of manifold narration where the facts and their perception by the narrator are balanced”, and sees the *cronista* as a sort of architect of the text that does not make a claim to know the truth. The truth is built here through the juxtaposition of many versions, while the *crónica* becomes a kind of polyphonic testimony of its time.

Following González, the strategic function of the *crónica* must also be viewed within a context characterised by the obscurity of information in Mexico, and especially of official sources. The *cronista*'s task becomes one of analysis and confrontation of sources, and the *crónica* emerges and acquires its special significance as a critical force against which the official version can be tested: “That is why the *crónica* is a very useful genre to tackle even themes that are hard to address, because we are using the voice of participants who are for example not recognised in the official version. The case of Chiapas is paradigmatic in this respect”. Moreover, the *crónica* “also allows a more generous approximation to the facts, especially in a country where the press has been in collusion, complicity or business with the public power, and especially in a society that has grown a lot in its democratic demands, in its demands for social participation”.

The reappearance of the *crónica* from the 1970s is related to this growth of democratic demands, in which it has played a key role: “That is why we have the great times of the *crónica*, because it has transmitted the participation of society, it has presented new actors, new voices, it has gathered all the effervescence that exists in diverse social sectors, especially the marginalised, and taken them to an important position within journalism.”

Villoro had a similar conception of the role of the *crónica* in Mexico in terms of its importance as a space where many events previously excluded from the press, like for example the student movement of 1968, could find an echo:

"In Mexico, I think the challenge... has been to bring onto the stage many figures that had never expressed themselves, that we didn't even know existed. This is what Mexican *cronistas* have done, sometimes picking some popular figure that was already fairly well known, but many times using anonymous informants. It is the story of Elena Poniatowska with her novel based on a real event *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío*; it is the story of many of the *crónicas* of Carlos Monsiváis about anonymous figures or somewhat forgotten figures of Mexican popular culture, or very important figures, like Agustín Lara, who had never been explored journalistically in depth... This has been the role of the *cronista*, a very important figure: to bring characters from the periphery to centre-stage."

To bring characters from the periphery to the centre-stage, after Monsiváis' notion of bringing "the marginal to the centre", could be said to define the general purpose of the different kinds of *crónica* portrayed, summing up various statements by Trejo, González Rodríguez, Martillo and many other *cronistas* who have made it their task to observe and register the myriad aspects of everyday urban life and culture.

5. Conclusion

Cronistas' occupy a privileged position in the press as writers of literary journalism, often enjoying an unusual degree of freedom to produce texts that are greatly popular and attract the biggest readership a writer can possess in Latin America. In addition, some *cronistas* occupy a position in the restricted field as recognised writers of literature, and many have at one point or another engaged in the writing of fiction. This flexibility and permanent contact between the expanded and the restricted fields is a significant feature of the nature of their position in the contemporary cultural field.

In spite of the popularity of the *crónica*, which through the press reaches readers that no other literary genre can attain, the written word still has a limited cultural impact in Latin America. However, *cronistas* have been particularly successful in establishing new productive links with radio and television, the truly mass media of the region. These have been twofold. On the one hand, *cronistas* have incorporated key elements from the mass media to their texts, and also produced an interpretation of the impact of these media through the written *crónica*. On the other,

they have often collaborated with television and especially radio, exploring new ways of documenting life in the city. Corona has stressed the significance of this alternative use of radio and television as a way to “rebuild social bridges through orality with “civil society” in its most inclusive sense”, thus overcoming the paradox that still condemns the written word in Latin American societies to a position of marginality (2001: 199).

Cronistas' proximity with the mass media is in part also a consequence of their popularity and social significance as interpreters of city life. Two different positions of particular importance can be highlighted in this context. First, some *cronistas* have played a significant role as local ethnographers, mixing heterogeneous traditions and genres which include the historical *crónica*, the *costumbrista* sketch, journalistic genres such as the interview, and traditions from the social sciences such as the essay and the *récits de vie* or life stories, to represent and interpret everyday life in the city. Second, the role of the *crónica* at the end of the 20th century has been linked, especially in Mexico, to the emergence of social movements from below. The *crónica*, as inheritor of new journalism's social commitment, has offered a means to record social struggles and represent the voices of marginalised social groups, thus becoming a historical document of their emergence. In both cases, the task of the *cronista* can be viewed as one of bringing the peripheral and the marginal into the centre-stage, through the recovery of insignificant, underground, marginal stories that serve to construct a new, more pluralistic vision of the city's everyday history.

CHAPTER 5

EMILIANO PÉREZ CRUZ:

THE *CRÓNICA* AS A TESTIMONY OF COLLECTIVE LIFE IN A PERIPHERAL COMMUNITY OF MEXICO CITY

1. Introduction: Pérez Cruz and the Mexican tradition in *crónica* writing

Mexico's tradition in *crónica* writing goes back to the great texts that narrate the first vision of American civilisation and the Spanish conquest: Hernán Cortés' *Cartas de Relación* [Letters], Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Verdadera historia de la conquista de la Nueva España* [The True History of the Conquest of Mexico], Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* [General History of the Things of New Spain]. This tradition, which combined historiography with a wider, more literary conception of writing and in which both important historical developments and small curiosities and habits could be recorded, was continued along the same lines through the 17th and 18th centuries (see chapter 2, section 2).

In the middle of the 19th century the journalistic *crónica* emerged in Latin America, modelled after the French *fait-divers*, and influenced by romanticism and *costumbrismo*, which popularised in Spain and Latin America literary sketches of social customs and practices. At the end of that century, the *crónica* reached a peak as a fully acknowledged literary genre with the current known as *modernismo*, a literary movement of Latin American scope, with figures of continental importance such as Rubén Darío and José Martí. In Mexico, *modernismo* was based around the journals *Revista Azul* and *Revista Moderna* and had one of its greatest figures: Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera who, influenced by the francophile tendencies that prevailed within the *modernista* movement, popularised the *crónica* with his prolific journalistic activity, transforming it into an highly stylised exercise of literary refinement.

During the 20th century, two figures acquired monumental significance as *cronistas* who portrayed the ways of life of Mexican society as a whole. Salvador Novo, official *cronista* from 1965, described Mexican life during six presidential periods – over three decades – in the various volumes entitled *La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de...* [Life in Mexico in the Presidential Period of...] (ranging

from Lázaro Cárdenas to Echeverría), and also registered the urban landscapes of the city centre in books like *Nueva grandeza mexicana* [*New Mexican Greatness*, 1946]. At the end of the 20th century, in the context of the tremendous growth and progressive fragmentation of the city, another *cronista* attempted to offer an interpretation of Mexican life, focusing especially on the significance of popular culture, and describing and analysing its most widespread forms: Carlos Monsiváis.

At the same time, the last three decades of the 20th century and, in quantitative terms, especially the 1980s, are characterised by an unprecedented flourishing of the *crónica*, which acquired in Mexico City a special significance as a privileged journalistic genre through which everyday life in the city is portrayed. This spread of the *crónica* is linked to the emergence of mass social movements (student movement of 1968, solidarity movements in response to the earthquake of 1985, etc.) and to a process of democratisation of the media (especially the press and the radio) which had traditionally been subjected to close state control. Thus, the *crónica* flourished in the midst of the independent press and its course can be followed in its development: from *Excélsior* to *La Jornada*, through the very significant period of *Unomásuno* and *Nexos* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Today, the *crónica* is an essential item in the most prestigious newspapers of Mexico City: *La Jornada*, *Reforma*, *El Universal*, and has also a significant presence in the political weeklies of greatest circulation: *Proceso* and *Milenio*.

The renewal of the *crónica* in the 1980s is also linked to the emergence of a new group of writers from working class or lower middle class origins. For the first time, they had gained access to an enlarged public pre-university education¹ and then went on to study journalism at UNAM, Mexico City's public university. At that time, journalistic and literary figures of the prior generation such as Manuel Buendía, Huberto Batis, Hugo Gutiérrez Vega and Gustavo Sainz were lecturing and promoting the *crónica* as a privileged literary and journalistic genre. First at the university and then in the thriving cultural supplements of the period (*La Cultura en México*, *Sábado*) these young journalists were encouraged to write their observations and experiences of everyday life in the city in a literary style.

Emiliano Pérez Cruz (born 1955) forms part of this new generation of journalists who had gained access to a recently enlarged public education system. A

¹ The creation of *Colegios de Ciencias y Humanidades*, which were added to the few existent centres of *Preparatoria* (education preliminary to university) is pivotal in this.

mestizo of working class origins, he lived from the age of two on the very margins of the city: the shanty town of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl. Through university and his initial years of journalistic activity he came into contact with Marxism and Structuralist theory, and with high culture (he worked for the cultural magazine *La Semana de Bellas Artes*, reviewing concerts, performances and exhibitions), but it is the experience of life in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl that has marked the whole character of his journalistic and literary production since those early years:

“While my fellow students were interviewing a classical ballet dancer, the painter Cuevas, or musician X, I interviewed a neighbourhood friend who was a drug addict and came from a dysfunctional family with problems of domestic violence. He told me all this in the first person, using the slang of the time, known as the language of *La Onda*. From this interview emerged the first text that catapulted me to a position among the best students, where I was discovered by first rate teachers.” (personal interview)

Pérez Cruz started working as a journalist in 1977 in *La Onda*, the cultural supplement of newspaper *Novedades*, publishing initially interviews, with which he soon started to experiment with form, in accordance with the new kind of journalistic practices which radically questioned the methods of traditional Mexican journalism:

“It seemed to me that interviews using questions and answers were limiting, as are those which stress personality with people who don’t have a particular personality..., there was no background or anything interesting to recreate; and it is here that I started allowing myself the luxury of experimenting with form, with the guidance of the teachers at the social and political science faculty at UNAM. To read literature was a must for anybody who wanted to be a journalist, especially if we wanted to transform the bad journalism which existed at that time. Corrupt and badly paid journalism existed because the standards and the training were bad; journalists who were aged around 50 or 60 used to talk about the university of life, rather than the academic university.” (personal interview)

Pérez Cruz published his first *crónicas* in 1979 in the weekly satirical political magazine *La Garrapata*, where his writings acquired full maturity and the characteristics that would come to dominate his production as a whole began to emerge. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Pérez Cruz has produced sketches of daily life in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, publishing in numerous city newspapers and cultural

supplements, and preserving his basic independence from the media in which he writes. He describes himself as a “francotirador” (“freelance hitman”), who has never been tied to any of the media he has worked for and who “works as a bureaucrat to pay for the pleasure of doing journalism” (personal interview).

One of the features of Pérez Cruz’s writing is the essential continuity it shows between different genres. His *crónicas* have the same sources and are similar in form to the texts that he has published as short stories in the volumes *Me matan si no trabajo, y si trabajo me matan* [*If I Don't Work They Kill Me and if I Work They Kill Me*, 1998] and *Si camino voy como los ciegos* [*When I Walk I Move Like a Blindman*, 1987], and also share a common atmosphere and language with his novel *Ladillas* [*Crabs*, 1994]. Many of the sketches he produces are recreations of the daily experiences of ordinary people of his community, which still retain their journalistic base in the interview and are either told in the first person or narrated with an abundance of dialogue.

Like Ramírez in the neighbourhood of Tepito in the north of the city², the main achievement of Pérez Cruz’s texts is to bring the deprived areas of the periphery of Mexico city to his readers from the point of view and with the voices of their inhabitants. The author defends “the *crónica* as a possibility of giving a voice to the insulted and humiliated of the country, in Dostoevski’s words”, as a means of portraying the marginal world in which he grew up and spent his adult life:

“Elias Canetti says in *The Conscience of Words* that only amongst the most marginal, wretched, abused beings can the human essence emerge. Thus, I am among the human essence, and have lived there all my life; I only need to look around. In journalism, it has helped me a lot ... what my sisters, who go to primary and to secondary school, tell me; what my son, who goes to nursery, tells me; and my wife who goes to the market and tells me all the gossip, about a dumb girl who was raped or about someone who screwed the local madwoman and got her pregnant.” (personal interview)

It is on these ordinary stories of poverty, marginality and survival, gathered from the various members of the community, that the narrative as a representation of the life of a collectivity is based.

² Ramírez has similarly portrayed the everyday life of marginal social groups from within and in the people’s own language. Among his extensive novelistic production stands out *Chin chin el teporocho*

Another important feature of Pérez Cruz' work is its special attention to popular language and speech. Pérez Cruz endeavours to reconstruct and literarily recreate a popular language from below, spoken by the characters he portrays in the first person without (or with a very limited) intervention of a mediating narrator; a vulgar, rude – even violent – language through which the official language can be subverted. In this context, he states:

“It is not taken into account that the language of those from below can be extremely politicised. Especially when one is also transmitting it through an intellectual filter. If one has read *Mythologies*, where Roland Barthes says that language is also a great distorter of reality and that one must not use a distorting language but a revealing one which exposes reality, then one consciously look for the statements of those people that can be revealing, and they can become extremely disturbing discourses.” (personal interview)

The use of a politicised language from below to discover and transmit marginal realities implies a creative and investigative action on the part of the writer, who is also attempting to rescue and liberate a language that can often be limited and repetitive, trapped in the endlessly repeated artifices of mass culture. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is the urban slang spoken by the adolescents who belong to youth gangs, to which Pérez Cruz has dedicated a book (see below, section 3 of this chapter). The process of liberating popular language and expressing with it the stories of the people is also one of empowerment of the speaking subjects, which the author, as transmitter of these voices, consciously undertakes. The recreation and reproduction of popular language and speech has remained central in Pérez Cruz's work throughout the years; its main forms and variations will be more closely analysed below.

2. The *crónica* and the picaresque tradition: *Borracho no vale*

Borracho no vale [*Drunken Talk Doesn't Count*, 1988] is Pérez Cruz first published book of *crónicas*. It collects the texts that appeared in the political satirical magazine *La Garrapata* in the period from 1979 to 1981, that is, practically, all Pérez Cruz's early *crónicas*. Written in the first person form, the *crónicas* or episodes which

(1985). The volume *Tepito* (1983) gathers urban *crónicas* of this peripheral working-class area, where

form the book narrate the experiences and wanderings through the city of the central character, a drunkard from Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl who survives by collecting and selling rubbish. Through the eyes of the drunken man, a gallery of characters and situations of marginal everyday urban life and survival appear, full of humour and satirical views on society.

The structure and contents of the book, its narration in the first-person form and the marginal atmospheres that are portrayed link it to the picaresque literary tradition that emerged in Spain in the 16th century, through which the life of marginal social groups in the newly formed urban centres were for the first time portrayed in literature. This link merits closer examination of the main structural features of the picaresque genre and a discussion of its repercussions and forms in Latin America, and specifically in Mexico. Finally, I will also be discussing the particular way in which *Borracho* enacts and transforms its basic principles.

Robert Alter defined the picaresque novel as follows:

“...the picaresque novel is a literary form that flourished in Spain in the latter part of the sixteenth and in the first decades of the seventeenth centuries; ...it spread soon after to France, England, Germany, Holland, and elsewhere; ...it is the adventurous story of a rogue’s life, usually told in the first person; ...its episodic account of wanderings, adversity and ingenious roleplaying incorporates a satiric view of society.” (1964: viii)

This definition comprises the most general traits of the genre, namely its first-person form and autobiographical point of view (which gives the narration its subjective and personal tone), its episodic structure, its atmosphere of roguery and delinquency and the element of social satire that is implicit in the narration. Generally, it has been stressed that what exclusively defines the genre, in its broadest understanding, is an atmosphere of marginality or delinquency (Guillén, 1971; Parker, 1967). From its earliest prototype in *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) we characteristically find the narration of the experiences of a young *pícaro* (rogue), separated from his family early on and shaped by the adverse circumstances in which he has to learn to survive, employing his wit to his own advantage in a hostile world. The resemblance with travel literature is manifest, as one of the main features that characterise the

the author comes from.

picaro's life is his extensive spatial mobility: from owner to owner, from city to city, the *picaro* narrates and satirises the social conditions he encounters along his way.

The fact that the story is narrated from the point of view of the *picaro* and in his own voice, gives another important feature of the genre, namely the theme of the confrontation of the individual with society, a particularly poignant form. The *picaro* often adopts, as Guillén has noted, a critical and philosophical tone to observe the ills of society and satirically expose them, while his life becomes fully conditioned by the impossibility of belonging to a social order that excludes him. The causes and circumstances of what for Guillén constitutes the central characteristic of the genre, "the radical solitude of the orphan as a child or young man; and his lasting but ambiguous estrangement from society, "reality", or established beliefs and ideologies" (1971: 95), can be explained in the following way:

"...hardship and bitter lesson conspire at every turn to shape the hero into an enemy of the social fabric, if not into an active foe. For the "unfortunate traveller" soon learns that there is no material survival outside society, and no real escape – no pastoral paradise – beyond it. Social role-playing is as ludicrous as it is indispensable. This is where the solution of "roguish" behaviour is preferred. Now a *picaro*, the hero chooses to compromise and live on the razor's edge between vagabondage and delinquency. He can, in short, *neither join nor actually reject his fellow men*. He becomes what I would like to call a "half-outsider"." (1971: 80)

The opposition of the realism of the picaresque tradition to contemporary "escapist" literature (the pastoral novel, chivalric literature) has also been noticed by Parker. A pastoral paradise of retreat outside society has ceased to exist and the *picaro*'s only choice is the marginality of the outsider; "to cut himself off from society while living within it" (Parker, 1967: 17). However, as Guillén very well notes, this marginality is ambiguous: the *picaro* is "a coward with a cause" who chooses not to comply, but also not to rebel and fight against an order which drives him to marginality. In Alter's words,

"...it never occurs to him to question the larger order of things. Though cast out into the world, and an outcast of society as well (in the sense that there is no place where he belongs in society), the picaroon is not a rebel – either against society, or against the traditional body of faith by which society explains the world order." (1964: 5)

The clearest example of this is Lázaro, whose advance in society depends on his hypocritical acceptance of its hierarchy: he becomes the husband of an archpriest's servant and lover, obtaining protection and a job as a town crier. As Beverley noted, "the problematic marginal hero ends up as the voice of the law and the market" (1987: 60). It is thus a feature of the picaresque genre that while finding its main motives in a playful critique, exposition and satire of social conventions, inequality and injustice, it nevertheless interrupts its critique by promoting a final acceptance of those very conditions it has shown to be wanting.

Furthermore, Guillén has seen the picaresque tradition as "an outlet for the expression of human alienation" (1971: 106) and indicated the conditions for its return especially in the second half of the 20th century:

"The picaresque would return during days of irony and discouragement – times less favourable than the nineteenth century to the plans of the bold individual. In the twentieth century, as in the Spain of Philip II and the Germany of the Thirty Years' War, the career of the rogue would once more disclose an awareness of civilisation as oppression." (1971: 105)

In a similar way, Beverley has noticed that "the picaresque is still a viable literary genre, offering today a form in which to give a voice to the victims of capitalism" (1987: 64). In fact, Beverley provides the means to view the picaresque tradition not just as an ahistorical expression of social oppression and human alienation, as Guillén's vision seems to imply, but to point to structural similarities between 16th century Spain and 20th century social conditions in Latin America. He has viewed *Lazarillo* as the novel of primitive accumulation signalling, as the first modern novel, the disappearance of traditional social forms as well as the new significance of urban life, but showing, at the same time, the limitations for the full development of a capitalist mode of production in Spain. Thus, in 16th century central Spain,

"The traditional forms of life have suddenly changed; in their place, a mobile society emerges, mercantile, urban, dominated by money. But, as Pierre Vilar pointed out, "the birth of capitalism demands that the beggar is transformed into a wage-labourer". And it is precisely this which does not happen in Spanish primitive accumulation, giving way to the social parasitism that the *pícaro* represents." (1987: 57)

The situation in Mexico City in the second half of the 20th century could be described in very similar terms. Since the 1940s, an increased rate of urban growth due to the accelerated pace of industrialisation and to rural migration to the city, determined the formation of large precarious urban settlements such as that of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, at the city's periphery. Thus, with continued rates of growth of about 5.5% since the 1940s, the population of Mexico City doubled every 12 or 13 years, reaching over 19 million in 1989. This was accompanied by the geographical expansion of the city, first in the Federal District, and later to the neighbouring Estado de Mexico (where Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl is situated), which from the 1940s started to substitute for the city centre, absorbing the population growth through processes of accelerated suburbanisation (Ward, 1991: 61, 65).

At the same time, capitalism on the periphery is characterised by an accentuated uneven development, which accounts for the relegation of large numbers of individuals to the margins of economic life and to a flourishing informal economy. A study has revealed that in 1987 almost 40% of Mexico City's workers were employed in the informal sector, which is characterised by low levels of capital investment and of productivity but also by a high degree of organisation (Ward, 1991: 50-1). Low wages and the absence of social protection are, for all those employed in the informal economy, the common denominator. Urban survival is thus, for the majority of the population of Mexico City, a daily matter of improvisation and adaptation to adverse circumstances.

On the other hand, the picaresque literary tradition has also had a significant presence in Latin America. Traces of the picaresque genre are perceivable in some of the early *crónicas* which described life in colonial society. Thus, Luis Leal points out that *pícaros* are already present in Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account of the history of Mexico, and highlights Maese Rodas as a precursor of Lizardi's Periquillo in the practice of medicine without license. In addition, the Indian *pícaro* makes an early appearance in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's account of Mexican society (1979: 1033-34). Casas de Faunce mentions *El Carnero* [*The Sheep*, 1636], a *crónica* by Juan Rodríguez Freire, *Los infortunios the Alonso Ramírez* [*The Misfortunes of Alonso Ramírez*, 1690], by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, and *El Lazarillo de ciegos caminantes* [*Blind Travellers' Guide*, 1773] by Santiago Carrió de la Vandra, as early representatives of the Latin American picaresque tradition (1979: 970). The

genre of the picaresque novel in Latin America is initiated by *El Periquillo Sarniento* (1816-1831), a founding classic of post-independence literature written by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, and continued by an extensive list of works which have been identified as belonging to the tradition³.

Furthermore, Luis Leal maintains that the Mexican picaresque has created a new character, a mixture of the Mexican *lépero*, a *mestizo* version of the *pícaro*, a thoroughly low human sort who does not even possess the wit of the latter, with the traditional figure of the *pícaro* (1979: 1036). He considers Pito Pérez, the central character of José Rubén Romero's novel *La vida inútil de Pito Pérez* [*The Useless Life of Pito Pérez*, 1938] as the archetype of the Mexican *pícaro* of the present, which unites both human types and introduces new original features to the picaresque tradition. As Romero's novel bears a direct connection to the character of Pérez Cruz's work, its main innovations will be discussed in some detail before its relationship with Pérez Cruz's *crónicas* is delineated.

La vida inútil de Pito Pérez deviates, in my view, in several significant ways from the classic texts of the Spanish picaresque tradition. Firstly, it is set in a rural context, the region of Michoacán, where the protagonist moves from village to village. It also explicitly portrays rural life as offering a refuge to the *pícaro*: "In these cities, poverty acquires tragic gestures, and the scoundrels like me cannot live decorously. Small villages, on the contrary, satisfy my taste, because in them man is confused with nature, or I confuse nature with man" (p. 59-60)⁴.

Secondly, the process of formation of the classical *pícaro* is inverted. In this novel, the mother of the *pícaro* is not a woman of low condition (as in *Lazarillo*) or a witch (as in Quevedo's *El Buscón*), but almost a saint, and her generosity is the first cause of the *pícaro*'s misfortune. In addition, the novel no longer focuses exclusively on the process of formation of the young *pícaro*, but portrays instead a mixture of recollections from youth with the wanderings of a mature man. What moves Pito Pérez, however, is not hunger, but the search for alcohol, a fact which is related to a very different attitude on the part of the *pícaro* and to his thoroughly politicised view of society: "I am a friend of truth, and if I get drunk it is only to feel encouraged to

³ For a list of the titles of novels identified with the picaresque tradition see Casas de Faunce (1979: 970-972).

⁴ "En estas ciudades la miseria adquiere gestos trágicos, y los sinvergüenzas, como yo, no pueden vivir decorosamente. En cambio, los pueblos chicos son de mi gusto, porque en ellos el hombre se confunde con la naturaleza, o yo confundo la naturaleza con el hombre." (p. 59-60)

proclaim it: you know that children and drunks... Add to this that I hate the privileged classes" (p. 15)⁵.

This marks a significant departure from the *picaro's* classical attitude of ironical acceptance of social conditions, which now becomes open criticism and painful rejection, driving the central character to an unequivocal position of absolute social marginality. This uncompromising critical attitude finds its expression in Pito's lonely death (which contrasts to Lazaro's final position of accommodation and hypocrisy), and especially in his testament, which is an open challenge to and condemnation of the society that has excluded him:

"I bequeath to Humanity all the wealth of my bitterness.

To the rich, who are thirsty for gold, I leave the shit of my life.

To the poor, for their cowardice, I leave my contempt, because they don't stand up and seize everything in an impulse of supreme justice. Despicable slaves of a church that preaches resignation to them and of a government that asks submissiveness from them without giving anything in return!...

Humanity, I know you; I have been one of your victims!...

I was a drunkard: a nobody! A standing truth: how foolish! And walking on the other side of the pavement, in front of me, Honesty showed its decency and Prudence its judgment. The dispute has been an unequal one, I understand; but from the courage of the humble one day an earthquake will emerge, and then nothing will be left standing.

Humanity! I will soon collect what you owe me!..." (pp. 182-185)⁶

This signals the end of the traditional ambiguity of the picaresque towards society's ways, of the contradiction of the "half-outsider" who neither belongs nor rebels. Furthermore, this new attitude of open social critique is built upon an explicit rejection of the accommodating nature of the picaresque, with references to some of

⁵ "Yo soy amigo de la verdad, y si me embriago es nada más que para sentirme con ánimos de decirla: ya sabe usted que los muchachos y los borrachos... Agregue usted a esto que odio las castas privilegiadas." (p. 15)

⁶ "Legó a la Humanidad todo el caudal de mi amargura.

Para los ricos, sedientos de oro, dejo la mierda de mi vida.

Para los pobres, por cobardes, mi desprecio, porque no se alzan y lo toman todo en un arranque de suprema justicia. ¡Miserables esclavos de una iglesia que les predica resignación y de un gobierno que les pide sumisión, sin darles nada en cambio!...

¡Humanidad, te conozco; he sido una de tus víctimas!...

Fui un borracho; ¡nadie! Una verdad en pie: ¡qué locura! Y caminando en la otra acera, en frente de mí, pascó la Honestidad su decoro y la Cordura su prudencia. El pleito ha sido desigual, lo comprendo; pero del coraje de los humildes surgirá un día el terremoto, y entonces, no quedará piedra sobre piedra.

¡Humanidad!, pronto cobraré lo que me debes!..." (pp. 182-185)

its historical exponents (Gil Blas and Periquillo). Thus Pito states to his listener/readers:

“Who has ever shown interest in me with an affectionate feeling? Even you, to whom I am telling my story, have you ever cared to know me, to study me with some indulgence? No, you want me to tell you adventures that make you laugh: my wanderings of Periquillo or my tricks of Gil Blas. But, have you noticed that my pranks are not cheerful? I am not a generous spirit, nor have I had a reckless youth of the kind that, in reaching maturity, returns to the right track and ends up preaching morality, while rocking their child’s cradle. No; I’ll be bad until the end, drunken until I die of alcohol congestion; envious of other people’s fortune, because I have never had any of my own; slanderous, because therein lies my revenge against those that despise me. I will make no effort whatsoever to reform myself. Only cowards offer amendment, or withdraw, and I will do neither of these things.” (p. 89)⁷

The *pícaro*, no longer a coward, proclaims his hatred and condemnation of an unjust society which reduces human beings to conditions of deprivation, and the picaresque becomes a genre of explicit social and political critique. It is this new type of *pícaro* with a social conscience and with a clear intent not to silence his critique which is also present in Pérez Cruz’s *crónicas*.

As a preliminary point before embarking on a discussion of Pérez Cruz’s work, through which the picaresque tradition is taken away from the novel to the terrain of journalism and the *crónica*, it is important to note that the *crónica* offers a very appropriate territory in which the picaresque can flourish. Indeed, the picaresque tradition has some key features that closely relate it to the genre of the *crónica*, making the latter especially apt to embody it. The episodic structure of the picaresque, which resembles the structure of any compilation of urban *crónicas*, has been pointed to above; picaresque novels are usually just a sum of highly differentiated and independent episodes in which different atmospheres and a vast gallery of social types

⁷ “¿Quién se ha interesado por mí con algún sentimiento afectuoso? Usted mismo, a quien estoy contando mi historia, ¿se ha preocupado por conocerme, por estudiarme con alguna indulgencia? No, usted quiere que yo le cuente aventuras que le hagan reír: mis andanzas de Periquillo o mis argucias de Gil Blas. Pero, ¿ya se fijó usted que mis travesuras no son regocijadas? Yo no soy de espíritu generoso, ni tuve una juventud atolondrada, de esas que al llegar a la madurez vuelven al buen camino y acaban predicando moralidad, mientras mecen la cuna del hijo. No, yo seré malo hasta el fin, borracho hasta morir congestionado por el alcohol; envidioso del bien ajeno, porque nunca he tenido bien propio; malediciente, porque en ello estriba mi venganza en contra de quienes me desprecian. Nada pondré de mi parte para corregirme. Solamente los cobardes ofrecen enmienda, o se retractan, y yo no haré ni una ni otra cosa.” (p. 89)

are portrayed. The central character, the *pícaro*, is the only connection between these different scenes. In addition, the geographical mobility of the *pícaro* finds a parallel in the mobility of *cronistas* through the city in search of scenes to describe in their texts. Reportage and accurate description of the most deprived urban reality has been a significant aim and objective in both traditions, in which, moreover, the point of view adopted is that of the marginal character who often speaks in the first person.

Like Pito Pérez, the anonymous drunkard who is the central character of Pérez Cruz's book is an alcoholic, and just as in Romero's novel, a direct connection between this fact and the element of social critique is established from the start. The very title of the compilation, *Borracho no vale*, is announcing that the opinions of a drunkard will not be taken seriously, as a strategy to escape from the censorship that prevailed in a still very authoritarian society. Furthermore, alcohol is also used as an element of explicit challenge to a hypocritical society, as an open and loud threat to the silent acceptance of society's ways. Thus, on the anniversary of the government killings of over 300 students in a demonstration on the 2nd of October 1968, the drunkard, parodying the national anthem, exclaims:

"... Mexicans at the cry of war, from here and at the loud roar of the cannon I demand for our dead comrades not a minute of silence, but a whole life of drinking militancy. Long live drunken happiness, death to bad government!" (p. 18)⁸

The poignant irony of responding in this way to social injustice is also expressed in the drunkard's reversal of Marx's call to the proletariat: "drinkers of all countries, do you follow, pass or begin?!" (p. 19)⁹.

However, the drunkard's unequivocal sympathy and solidarity with ordinary people's struggles is also shown at numerous points of the book, as is his condemnation of government policies and of political repression. Thus, during the parade of the day of the Revolution he poses the question: "Don't they feel ashamed talking about social justice when they repress miners, electricians, peasants, when

⁸ "...mexicanos al grito de guerra, que desde aquí y al sonoro rugir del cañón, pido por los compacuetes muertos no un minuto de silencio, sino toda una vida de militancia chupamara. ¡Viva la briagoberta alegría, muera el mal gobierno!" (p. 18)

⁹ "¡chupamara de todos los países, ¿siguen, pasan o comienzan?!" (p.19)

thousands of children die of hunger and many others sniff glue and smoke marihuana?" (p. 25)¹⁰.

Several demonstrations are portrayed in the book. One of them is a protest by the inhabitants of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl (described as "the crowd of hungry coyotes that live over here, where God never came, and if he did the dust didn't give him the chance to see what was lacking"¹¹) against the increase in the price of public transport, which ends up in an open battle (in the *crónica* '¡Esos de la Nezahualpillós!'; 'Those rascals from Neza'). Another is a demonstration of teachers at the building of the Ministry of Education in the city centre, which the drunkard encounters in his wanderings and decides to join:

"I joined the mob to see if they wouldn't notice me and pay me everything that life and the governments of the robberlution owe me. Bad luck: I'm fucked, but the teachers beat me hands down eating dry beans in the courtyard of the Ministry of Education, tacos filled with air, enchiladas with no tortilla, fresh water from the tap, etc." (p. 86)¹²

In this fragment can be perceived the stress, typical of the picaresque tradition, on the material level of existence, which is the common denominator of these diverse episodes of everyday life and survival in Mexico City. Spliced with humour, both in the language of the main character-narrator and in the life situations he encounters, it defines many of the scenes narrated in a characteristically picaresque manner. Thus, the *crónica* called 'De tres en bola' ('Three is a crowd') describes how the drunkard's intention to share a prostitute with the blind man Tobías ends up with both men being beaten up by the prostitute; or in 'Se cae primero' ('The first to fall') we see the drunkard being mugged, beaten up and robbed of his meagre belongings after falling into a ditch on a night of power cuts. Hunger leads the main character and two of his friends, in 'Los enmascarados justicieros' ('The masked fighters for justice'), towards the path of delinquency in the attempt to rob the passengers of a bus, which ends up in

¹⁰ "¿No les dará pena hablar de justicia social cuando reprimen a mineros, electricistas, campesinos, cuando miles de chavos se mueren de hambre y otros tantos le tupen al mento y a la mota?" (p. 25)

¹¹ "la flota de coyotes hambrientos que vivimos por acámbaro, donde no pasó Dios y si pasó, las tolvaneras no le dieron chance de vicentiar qué nos hacía falta", p. 54

¹² "Me metí en la bola a ver si me confundían y me pagaban todo lo que me debe la vida y los gobiernos de la robolución. Gacha la cucaracha, me caí: si yo ando jodido, los profes me la ganan comiendo tortas de frijoles baludos en el patio de la SEP, taquitos de aire, enchiladas sin tortilla, frescas aguas de la llave, etcétera." (p. 86)

more blows for the protagonists; and, in 'Con alma, vida y corazón' ('With soul, life and heart'), to collect human bones from the cemetery in order to sell them.

At the same time, the drunkard reveals the difficult lives of other members of the community to which he belongs, transforming the narrative into a sort of report of collective survival of the inhabitants of the shanty town of Nezahualcóyotl. There are the more dramatic stories of the boy who "eats fire" for a living ('¡Aguas con San Jorge!'; 'Waters with Saint George'); of the father who willingly slices through his own fingers to be able to buy Christmas presents for his extensive family with the money from the insurance ('El debut de quinceañas'; 'The debut of Fifteen nails'); of Lipa, who is raped by policemen ('Recordar es volver a gatear'; 'To remember is to seduce again'); or of Derriengao, illegal migrant to the US ('Un ombligo lleno de tierra'; 'A navel full of earth'). There are also the portrayals of the daily life and the struggle to make ends meet of other inhabitants of the community, such as ñoda Pancha, don Isauro, Bomberito and many others.

In contrast to the Spanish picaresque and following the line started by Romero's novel, Pérez Cruz's *pícaro* is a mature man and there is in the book no sense of growth or change through experience, nor any noticeable development or improvement of his situation. Furthermore, his origins, childhood and adolescence are totally unknown, and thus do not help to explain his present situation as an outcast from society. From the first sketch, he appears as a marginal but very human character with a fully formed social consciousness, while both his solitude and independence, but also his solidarity with the members of his community are stressed. Thus, the drunkard narrates, in one of the first *crónicas*, his visit to ñoda Pacha, an occasional lover who complains about loneliness and proposes that he come and live with her. The drunkard falls asleep and dreams about married life, in a perverse reversal of the middle-class ideal of family life, before returning to his solitary existence:

"When the dream was at its best, I started seeing myself married to ñoda Pancha, stoking her fire to earn myself a drink, working extra time at the rubbish dump to gather paper, bones, glass, looking for copper wire or pieces of aluminium by the kilo, to get a little money to pay the leader of the neighbourhood of squatters so that he didn't take Pancha's place away from her. On top of that, the missus at her age gets knocked-up, and there you are, a hairy kid starts growing up and joining in the fights against the cops that arrive to burn down all the shacks; he also sniffs glue and smokes dope and takes two or three bevvies, and is a conductor on a

bus because he doesn't want to sell chewing gum and newspapers in the underground, running from the cops because if they find him they keep the money from the sales. And in the International Year of the Kid he, at his 13 years of age, is already fucked-up by hunger and its blows and has already been banged-up in borstal..." (p. 22)¹³

A relative distance from his fellow men and women but, at the same time, a deep involvement with the situations and injustices he witnesses and narrates, characterise the position of the drunkard throughout the diverse episodes of the book, giving way to that particular duplicity that Alter identified as characteristic of the traditional picaresque hero:

"It is the distinctive nature of the picaresque hero to be an image of human solitude in the world and at the same time an image of human solidarity in the world. He travels alone and struggles alone, for he finds that he can rely only on himself... Yet he does not question the rightness of the more generous attitude towards others that is prescribed by Christianity... The picaresque hero in this way is a figure both detached from the society of men and possessing a profound sense of involvement in the human condition." (1964: 10)

It is this sense of profound involvement in the human condition that gives the drunkard his paradoxical position as a spokesman of his collectivity, turning his exclusion and marginality into an element of open social critique.

For the nameless drunkard of this book, as for Pito Pérez, there is no possible compromise, no hypocritical but convenient solution which allows him to find a certain comfortable social position. At the end of the book, he is significantly degraded, losing his noble distance and the dignity he still preserved as a collector and seller of rubbish and obliged to dance in fancy dress in the underground because he can no longer make a living.

A remarkable aspect of Pérez Cruz's book is the consistent exploration and recreation of popular language and speech. The first person narrative form is

¹³ "Cuando el sueño estaba deveritas en grande, comencé a verme casado con la ñoda Pancha, arizándole el fogón pa ganarme mi alipuz, yendo horas extras al basurero a juntar papel, gñesos, vidrio, buscando alambritos de cobre o cachos de aluminio pal kilo, y sacar una lamita pa darle su corta al líder de la coloña de parachutes pa que no le quite el jacal a la Pancha. De pilón, la ñoda a sus añejos, ya ni la fricga, quedaba pastelito y ¡motes! un chavito todo pelón y jiotudo empieza a crecer y a entrarle a los cates contra los tiras que llegaban a quemar el montón de jacales; también se lanzaba al chemo y al mento y a la canbis y dos que tres pomos por una morrita y de cobrador en un camión porque ya no le pasó vender chicles y piedrónicos en el metro, teniendo que burlar a los tiras que si lo apañan se quedan

empowered through the utilisation of popular and marginal language, and challenges dominant social discourses in a new way, subverting them from within and adding a strong element of humour and irony through playfulness with words and transvestism of speech. The driving force behind these linguistic explorations is the author's acute consciousness of the importance of language in revealing and discovering reality, and his consistent search for those annoying, dissonant discourses which help reveal the character of the world he portrays.

In all the *crónicas* that form part of this book, the drunkard offers his own particular vision of the world, unrestrained by any literary omniscient narrator who 'situates' and thus limits his voice. As a consequence of the absolute primacy of the first person narrative form, popular speech prevails over other codes as the discourse which structures the book as a whole.

It is worth looking in some detail at the linguistic operations through which this popular speech, described by the drunkard as "caliche texcocano" (saltpetre from Texcoco) (p.37), is formed. In the first place, there is the incorporation of regional vocabulary and expressions, which are used widely by members of all social groups. Terms like 'de pilón' (extra free) belong to this category. There is also the frequent use of diminutives and superlatives, although here it is explicitly exaggerated (in terms like 'chantequito', 'bolillitos', 'marranito', 'anteriorcita', 'tequilón', 'pepsicolota', 'chamarrotas'). Secondly, regional speech and pronunciation are reproduced in writing, in words like *pus* (pues), *güesos* (huesos), *ai* (ahí), *ora* (ahora), *pa* (para). This signals a departure from written language and accentuates the prevalence of oral speech in the narrative. Thirdly, there is an ample incorporation of vocabulary and expressions which originate in urban slang, or a language that would in Mexico be described as *naco* (vulgar, working class), in words such as *tatema* (head), *prángana* (poor), *chido* (nice), *la tiranía* (the police), *el tribilín* (prison), *qué purrún* (so what), *jetear* (to take a nap). Also within this category we find the inversion of syllables or letters in words: *fiorses* (señores), *ñoda* (doña). Especially interesting and creative is the playful transformation of words into neologisms that are similar in form, as in the following examples: *tamborín* (también), *ratón* (rato), *su servilleta* (su servidor), *vicentiar* (ver), *tocho* (todo), *calmex* (calma), *ai nos vidrios* (ahí nos vemos), *laredo* (lado), *feliciano* (feliz), *carátula* (cara), *ojales* (ojos), *helodia*

con la venta. Y en el Año Internacional del Bodoque él, a los trece años, ya estaba jodido por hambre y sus flexaxos y lo habían mandado al Tribilín para menores..." (p. 22)

(helada). The author also recreates and follows this principle of word games, which is an important feature of Mexican popular language in other expressions such as *robolución* (revolución), *amor eternamatic* (amor eterno).

This playful linguistic exploration is one of the most salient components of the narrative and provides many elements for the humour that is constantly deployed to portray the crude reality in which the characters move. At the same time, the consistent use and recreation of popular speech adds another dimension and a high level of complexity to the text, which incorporates heteroglossia in its midst compelling the reader to decipher a multilayered structure of meaning.

3. A collective (hi)story of everyday life in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl

Perez Cruz's second book of *crónicas*, *Pata de perro* [*Dog's Leg*, 1995] further develops the exploration of working class life that was initiated in the texts of *Borracho no vale*, whilst departing, at the same time, from some of the main features of the latter and, in particular, from those that directly link it with the tradition of the picaresque.

With reference to structure, *Pata de perro* breaks away from first-person narration by introducing an omniscient narrator. Moreover, the adoption of a third person narrative form is closely related to an important change in focus: although the title of the book, *Pata de perro*, refers to one of its central characters, the narrative is no longer centered on a single protagonist, but revolves around a group of youngsters and, by extension, around the whole people that form the community of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl. Their daily life and struggles appear now portrayed directly, through the use of abundant dialogue, and not through the eyes of an overarching character, as in the stories of *Borracho no vale*. The presence of an omniscient narrator facilitates the representation of the situations of a wide variety of characters, who become here the collective protagonist of the book. Popular speech still has an important presence in the text, but it is now channelled through the use of dialogue, through which we hear the voices of the characters, while the narrator adopts a flexible language that reveals a certain degree of proximity to his characters (through the use of regional and popular terms).

Pata de perro shares with *Borracho no vale* its episodic structure, as well as the fact that there is neither a sense of growth or change through experience (in the

case of Pata de perro or his gangmates), nor a sense of development of the narrative, which merely reproduces little and insignificant occurrences of everyday life. The only alterations to this basic structure take place at the very beginning of the book (where the stories of the foundation of the community are narrated), and at its end (where Pata de perro returns to Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl after having lived in the U.S. for two years and reaffirms his sense of belonging).

Pata de perro could be said to belong to the picaresque tradition only in the broadest sense, in so far as it portrays an atmosphere of marginality (see above for a broad definition of the picaresque), as it no longer possesses features which are essential for a stricter conception of the tradition, such as the first person narrative form and the presence of a single protagonist. This departure from the genre of the picaresque is related to a more radical separation from literary form and from literature in general. There is here less formal elaboration than in the former book, less investigation and playfulness with popular language, as well as a smaller separation of the narrative from everyday reality, which accounts for the sense of immediacy and insignificance that prevails in most of the stories, which could in fact be perceived as oral narrations that we might overhear in the market place or in the streets of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl. In many ways, this collection of *crónicas* is closer to a polyphonic *testimonio* of everyday life in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl than to a literary account of its reality, although it does not possess the historical significance that the genre of the *testimonio* generally seeks to affirm.

As pointed out above, the book begins with a series of *crónicas* that narrate the emergence of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, giving it an initial epic tone which is broken after the first few texts. These foundational texts situate the reader in the context of what Pérez Cruz has called 'the birth of a nation', alluding to the process of growth that was initiated in the 1940s by rural immigrants, and which would culminate in the consolidation of the world's largest shanty town¹⁴. Thus, in the first *crónica*, 'Preguntas a la mamá que cose' ('Questions to the mother who is sewing') Pata de perro asks his mother questions about his dad and the village where they used to live before they migrated to the big city. The second *crónica*, entitled 'Por la noche, las

¹⁴ Pérez Cruz has stated, in this context: "I've been lucky to have witnessed the birth of a nation, the nation of Nezahualcóyotl. This city formally and legally existed from 1963 as a municipality, and I grew up with it from its desert origins until now, inhabited by three-and-a-half million people. To have seen all that growth gives one many elements to write articles about or to turn them into literature." (personal interview).

avenidas' ('The Avenues at nighttime'), describes life in the streets of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl after work, when the people return to their neighbourhood and take to the streets, which thrive with numerous vendors and reveal a provincial character that has long disappeared from the neighbouring city, but which still survives in its periphery:

"Away from the Monsteropolis of the Federal District, a provincial atmosphere exists in the dirt roads; the flocks of children clinging to games from the Pre-television Era; groups of women gossiping while waiting for their husbands; couples rubbing their libidos in the dark; street footballers (...); playful and vicious dogs which frighten passers-by (and are stoned in return); shopkeepers who sell Legal Coffee or Cokes to wash down the dinner; the sweet potato and roasted banana seller, who announces himself by letting the children open the steam valve of his cart; and also (even if neither you nor Elena Poniatowska believes this), the milkman who still gathers his customers around his bicycle and jars by blowing his horn; the local lad pushing his tricycle and offering credit on bread from Acámbaro, cream and butter, peanuts from Salvatierra, Guanajuato; and the adventurous blanket vendor proclaiming the qualities of his blankets and bedspreads, double covers of pure wool (*yes, they stink of lamb flank*)."¹⁵

In the third *crónica*, 'Y la casa se hizo' ('And the house was built'), the elders of the community narrate the beginnings of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl to Pata de perro: how they arrived at a bare and swampy land, where not a single tree stood, almost forty years before; how they had to endure terrible sand storms, and how the first houses of 'La Neza' were built "a mano limpia" ("with bare hands") and with the solidarity of all its inhabitants:

However, the book is primarily centred on the everyday life and experiences of the inhabitants of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, which become its main focus from the fourth *crónica* onwards. Its protagonists are Pata de perro and his friends from the

¹⁵ "Fuera de ella, de la Monstruópolis deefaña, persiste un ambiente provinciano de calles sin pavimentar y parvadas de chiquillos aferrados a juegos infantiles de la Era Pretelevisiva y grupos de vecinas chismorreando mientras aguardan la llegada del marido, y parejitas frotándose la libido en lo oscuro y futbolistas cascaderos (...) y perros juguetones o neuras que pegan sustos a los transeúntes (y a las pedradas se atienen) o tenderos que despachan el sobre de café Legal o la CocaCola para bajar el bocado de la cena, y el señor de los camotes y plátanos asados que se anuncia dejando que los chamacos abran la válvula de vapor de su carrito; también (aunque ni usted ni Elenita Poniatowska lo crean), el lechero aún convoca hasta su bicicleta y sus botes a la clientela, a base de cornetazos, y empujando su triciclo el país ofrece en abonos pan de Acámbaro, crema y mantequilla, cacahuates de Salvatierra, Guanajuato, y un desperdigado y aventurero cobijero enumera las cualidades de filmas y cobertores, cobijas matrimoniales de pura lana (*sí, apestan a verija de borrego*)."

local urban gang, Roperón, Mamachido, Gorigori and Manuel, as well as other people who fight for their daily survival in the city's periphery.

Carlos Monsiváis, Mexico City's 'unofficial *cronista*' who has extensively examined and described a variety of popular cultural forms, made the following statement about life in working class communities:

"Free time can be repetitive or, allegedly, original. In a working class neighbourhood, it will tend to be divided between the alternatives of sex and the gang of friends, between desire and messing around, between dissatisfaction and living it up." (quoted as an epigraph by Pérez Cruz in *Si camino voy como los ciegos*).

It is as if Pérez Cruz wants to show in his texts what this statement really means on a practical level, to give concrete illustrations of it extracted from the daily lives of the inhabitants of Neza York, as the area is ironically called. Here, Pérez Cruz does not, as Monsiváis does, adopt the distance of the reporter or analyst to reflect on the significance of these cultural forms. His position is a very different one: he goes to – or, more accurately, comes from – inside the community and limits himself to transmitting the stories that emerge in it, episodes that he overhears in the streets or that people, neighbours and family, tell him. He does not offer an interpretation nor analyse their significance in a larger context, but merely produces an atmosphere into which these various narrations are set.

It is 'la banda' (the gang), a group of adolescent youths, who are chosen by the author to centrally embody and represent the character of the community, thus especially focusing on a further form of social marginality within marginality. Moreover, the role work plays in their lives is a very limited one. The main character, Pata de perro, who is 17, receives his nickname "because he wanders about like a lazy dog"¹⁶, and sells popular comics in the underground. Manuel is a street musician, and the occupation of the others is not clearly delineated. They are often referred to as *vagos* (the lazy ones) by the people of the community, and it is their free time, the time spent with the gang, drinking or walking the city streets, wandering around and chatting at street corners, that is strongly predominant.

Pérez Cruz's interest in Mexico City's urban gangs led him to write a long reportage, which was published as a book in 1994: *Noticias de los chavos banda*

¹⁶ "por andar de vago, de 'pata de perro'".

[*News From the Youth Gangs*]. In it he explores the phenomenon of urban gangs and their emergence in Mexico City from the 1970s, using reportage and interview techniques, but also deploying the flexibility in writing that the genre of the *crónica* allows. In addition, a prominent place is given to the voices and testimonies of the youths themselves, who narrate their experiences and state their views in the first person. The book offers an exploration of the lives of these marginal youths, their tastes and the geographies of their wanderings. It also contextualises the phenomenon of urban gangs and its significance in peripheral working class communities, in relation to the increase in urban poverty and marginality and the expansion of shanty towns during the 1970s.

The youths known as “los cuates de la esquina” (“the guys who hang about on the corner”) before they started to be stigmatised as “chavos banda” (“youth gangs”) (1994: 26), are the children of peasants who immigrated to these newly populated areas of the periphery of Mexico City, and find in the streets of the neighbourhood their main means of sociability:

“For the neighbourhood youths, the corners and the streets are fundamental. In them, youths socialise and learn to live together from childhood and early adolescence. In the streets football matches are organised and one watches the world go by as if waiting for it to see us.” (1994: 16)

The members of “la banda”, who occupy a central place in *Pata de perro*, similarly spend their time in street corners, drinking beer and chatting, sometimes running away from an abusive police, observing and talking with other members of their community. The latter also appear profusely, and their stories fill many of the *crónicas* of the book: El Viejo, who has become rich through the exploitation of the women in his family; El Güevo, who attempts without success to make a living in Cancun; La Cocona, who becomes Pata de perro’s girlfriend but is not allowed to join the gang; and many others who are addressed with an abundant variety of exotic nicknames, like Caguamo, Mococho, Guanaco, Maguila, Pollino, Watusi, Sinfoso, Ojolón, El Güil, Chavano, Ñoño, Mimos, Colucho, Pecos, Coquito, Tepocate, Chata...

A central recurring motif of the book is poverty and the denunciation of the poor living and working conditions of the inhabitants of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl.

Thus, Pata de perro's mother faints from hunger in 'Primeros auxilios para la jefa' ('Emergency care for my old dear'); the hardship of the Mexican working class family and its gendered forms is expressed in 'Supermadre contra superpadre' ('Supermother versus superfather'); 'La pepena de los tiempos' ('Scavenging of the times') shows Pata's family improvising occupations to get a little extra money; and 'Cántaro, Cantarín y Cantarito' ('Cantaro, Cantarin and Cantarito') describes the show of three children who work as clowns on public transport. In all these portrayals, daily life is often little more than a repetitive struggle for survival.

Spontaneous protest and even street violence against the authorities is shown in the *crónicas* 'A ver, digan que somos unos mentirosos' ('Call us liars if you dare'), '¿De donde venimos, a dónde vamos?' ('Where do we come from, where are we going?'), 'Ya no es como antes fue' ('It's not like it used to be'), and in 'La (otra) banda ambulante' ('The (other) street group'), where the inhabitants of Nezahualcóyotl attack the policemen who were going to fine a rural street band.

Another response to the economic pressure and the lack of opportunities is emigration to the United States "de mojados" (as "wetbacks"), an option which several of the men portrayed here take, and which is permanently present in the thoughts of Pata de perro. Eventually, Pata himself decides to emigrate and spends two years in the United States, trying to escape without success from the wheel that links him to poverty:

"Pata de perro wandered through California, he got banged-up; he penetrated the territory of the World's Policeman, they caught him and sent him to the prison at Del Río, Texas. He entered again through Tijuana and was an apprentice of everything, master of nothing. Anyway, he got some money and returned some days ago: he looked for the crowd, the group, the gang... In spite of everything, they were still there." ('Rolling along the Zócalo: The return of Pata de Perro')¹⁷

The last four *crónicas* of the book narrate Pata's return and his reunion with "la banda", and offer panoramic views of the city centre and its periphery through the eyes of Pata, who recuperates and revalues familiar scenes, colours and noises,

¹⁷ "Pata de perro vagó por California, lo echaron p'atrás; va de nucz: se internó al territorio del Gendarme del Mundo, lo apañaron y estuvo en el penal Del Río, Texas. Entró de nueva cuenta por Tijuana y la hizo de aprendiz de todo, oficial de nada. Como quicra, se hizo de algunos billetes y retornó hace unos cuantos días: buscó a la flota, los cuates, la banda... A pesar de todo, sobrevivían." ('Rolando por el Zócalo: El retorno de Pata de perro')

asserting a newly found sense of belonging. Thus, as Pata returns to Ciudad Nezahualc6yotl he sees that:

“Almost nothing has changed, but on the platforms... thousands of shoes are dragged making a *sh-sh-sh* towards the bus stop; broken, without polish, with worn down soles and heels, like the clothes of this stratum of Mexicans who are hit by the crisis and the policies of the IMF and the decline of the new revolutionary morality.” (‘I’ll never leave this place’)¹⁸

He goes out with his friends to the city centre, to spend the last of his meagre earnings while participating and rejoicing at the baroque feast that this populous area offers, with its abundance of street vendors who sell a myriad of different products for all needs and tastes:

“Quacks with their plasters for callouses, cream for athlete’s foot, potions to burn miser’s warts; here are artisans from Jamiltepec, masks from Ameyaltepec, Mazahuas selling their dolls made from cloth, and a fuck-lot of sweets: fudge, candy twists, coconut, sugared almonds, peanuts, pistachios, seeds, pears, peaches, mangoes with chilli; tatties and flour crackling, frozen fruit and orange juices on ice; cones, toffee, toasties with prickly pears, onions and coriander, tamales from Oaxaca, coffee to wash it all down, sweets made in the U.S., lemon ice-cream – “la *ñeve* de lim6n” –, strawberry and rice ice-cream...” (‘Rolling along the Z6calo: The return of Pata de Perro’)¹⁹

The book finishes in an epic tone, with Pata overlooking the streets from a bridge in Ciudad Nezahualc6yotl and proclaiming loudly under the rain:

“We musn’t beg any more, it’s our turn now, we have to steal it even if they crush us, even if our smells and our calloused hands and our courage to break their necks frighten them! Get mad, mad, imagine that this can be different, by our deeds and grace, by us the lowest of the

¹⁸ “Casi nada ha cambiado, s6lo que en los andenes... miles de zapatos que se arrastran haciendo *sha sha sha* rumbo al paradero de los camiones, est6n rotos, sin bolear, con tapas y tacones desgastados, lo mismo que la ropa de esta fracci6n de mexicanos azotados por la crisis y las pol6ticas del FMI y el ocaso de la nueva moral revolucionaria.” (‘Yo de aqu6 no me voy’)

¹⁹ “Merol6cos con sus parches para callos, pomadas para el pie de atleta, l6quido para quemar mesquinos con ese y no (l6stima) con zeta; por ac6, artesanos de Jamiltepec, m6scaras de Ameyaltepec, mazahuas expendiendo sus muñecas de trapo, y el chingatal de dulces: de leche, charamuscas, cocadas, garapiñados, cacahuates, pistaches, chitos, pepitas, tunas, duraznos, mangos y perones con chile; papas y chicharrones de harina, frutsis y naranjadas congeladas sobre tinas con hielo; palanquetas, sevillanas de cajeta, tostadas tlayudas con nopales, cebolla y cilantro; tamales oaxaqueños, caf6 de cafenauta para bajar bocado, dulces made in USA, nieves de lim6n, la *ñeve* de lim6n, de fresa y de arroz...” (‘Rolando por el Z6calo: El retorno de Pata de perro’)

low, who no longer want to be doormats that are spat and trod upon! Get the madness folks, but our madness, the one we choose and not the one they impose on us to make us walk smiling to the slaughterhouse.” (“Get mad, mad ones, get mad!”)²⁰

The people coming out of the underground station gather around him applauding his words, and the volume ends with a celebratory, promissory note, reaffirming both the revolutionary hopes of a (literary) narrator and, at the same time, the carnivalesque distortions that the voices from below introduce to his discourse:

“Pata de perro raised his arms to the sky, his face dripped delicious acid rain, he joyfully relished in the echo he got from the people who didn’t care about the wind and the dampness. He threw out more words and they celebrated it, they applauded him applauding themselves. Because he was one of the fucked addressing the fucked, without it being pre-staged, with the natural rain and the crowd, the people saying:

- Well said, love!

- Hey handsome, stop being a tart and give me a kiss!

- Long live meee, I live life!

- Simondor, mad ones, simondor: get mad! – was the answer of Pata de perro, the lazy one, the one with the music within.” (“Get mad, mad ones, get mad!”)²¹

4. Conclusion

Emiliano Pérez Cruz belongs to the generation of Mexican *cronistas* who in the 1980s started to use the *crónica* as a means to register the most varied aspects of everyday city life. Indeed, in those years the number of *crónicas* that portrayed the myriad scenes *cronistas* encountered in their varied urban trajectories rocketed,

²⁰ “¡Ya no hay que pedir, ora es la de nosotros, ora hay que arrebatarse aunque nos hagan fuchi, aunque les esparten nuestros aromas y nuestras manos callosas y nuestro valor para partirles la cara! ¡Pero pónganse locotes, locos; imaginense que esto puede ser de otra manera, pero por obra y gracia de Nos, los de hasta abajo, a los que ya no nos gusta el papel de alfombra, de pisoteables y escupibles! ¡A la loquera, maestros, pero la de Nos, la que nos guste y no la que nos han impuesto para que caminemos sonrientes al matadero!” (“¡Alóquense, locos, alóquense!”)

²¹ “Pata de perro levantaba los brazos al cielo, la cara le escurría de lluvia ácida pero sabrosa, se relamía gozoso del eco obtenido, de la raza a la que le valía el viento y la humedad; les asestaba más y más rollo, y se lo festejaban, le aplaudían aplaudiéndose a sí mismos. Porque era un jodido dirigiéndose a los jodidos, sin escenarios prefabricados, con la lluvia natural y la flota, la gente diciendo:

- ¡Así se habla, mi rey!

- ¡Papaaaá, papacilitooo: dame un beso y no seas puto!

- ¡Viva yooo, vivo: yooo!

- Simondor, locos, simondor: ¡alóquense batos! –se concretaba a responder el Pata de perro, el vago, el de la música por dentro.” (“¡Alóquense, locos, alóquense!”)

becoming the dominant form in most cultural supplements of Mexico City's newspapers. The idea behind this practice was that no experiences were unimportant and that *cronistas* were there to record them, thus rescuing them from being forgotten. Their task was to leave a collective testimony assembled with the pieces that together create the great picture of Mexican life.

Emiliano Pérez Cruz's singular contribution to this general trend of the period is his consistent and continued endeavour to portray working class life in the marginal urban area where he grew up and lived: Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl. Resorting to a wide variety of oral sources, Pérez Cruz used the *crónica* to register and express the everyday stories that shape community life as told by the protagonists themselves in their own voices, moving the *crónica*'s traditional focus on the city's historical centre to its periphery, to the fastest growing sectors where the marginalised urban masses, rarely represented in literature, inhabit.

In this respect, his project presents two areas of difficult tension. The first one is defined, on the one hand, by the author's intention to bear witness to an epoch, by his explicit aim of representing what he calls 'the birth of a nation', the foundation and growth of a community as he has witnessed it from his childhood. This contrasts, on the other hand, with his aim of debunking the grandiosity of dominant discourses, of which the prevalence of insignificant occurrences of daily life and the explicit perversion of the narrative through the dissonant voices of his characters are an expression. The second area of tension refers to the difficulties involved in the search for a literary expression of working class life. Thus, the author has made use of the picaresque tradition and of a situational humour related to it as a means of offering a literary representation of the lives of marginal sectors of society. However, he has also given an unusually ample space for the self-expression of a plurality of voices from below, which required minimalising any authorial intervention. Pérez Cruz himself effectively disappeared from his *crónicas* and in so doing he significantly departed from the prevailing tendency of the period to make *cronistas* the main protagonists in their texts. The adoption of a flexible form which could accommodate the heterogeneous voices that expressed the everyday life of a collectivity challenged notions of authorial preeminence and of literary permanence and, more generally, of the separation of literature from everyday life.

Pérez Cruz's *crónicas* make visible the reverse side of the growth and modernisation of the Latin American city in the second half of the 20th century: a

reality of poverty and social exclusion in which survival becomes the main accomplishment of those that live their lives at the very margins of the capitalist mode of production. His texts approach this reality from within, recreating the experiences of the people in their language and through their own voices, and asserting the richness of popular culture as the expression of a community's whole way of life.

CHAPTER 6

THE CITY BEHIND ITS MASK: THE VISION OF GUAYAQUIL IN JORGE MARTILLO'S *CRÓNICAS*

1. Introduction: Guayaquil and the *crónicas* of Jorge Martillo

Guayaquil is Ecuador's biggest city, its major port and economic centre. Situated on the Pacific coastline and once called the Pearl of the Pacific, the city was characterised in colonial times by its significance as a centre for shipbuilding. The cocoa trade, which was developed from the 18th century and was almost exclusively based in the city would become, after Independence, Ecuador's most important economic activity and determine Guayaquil's first expansion. Thus, from the 1830s and 1840s, Guayaquil became one of the major suppliers of cocoa to the world markets, and the figures reached their height by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. In the years from 1870 to 1920, cocoa accounted for two thirds of Ecuador's exports, and Guayaquil handled over 80% of the country's total exports (Pineo, 1996: 20). During this period, the city grew from 26,000 inhabitants (1877) to 100,000 in 1920 as the result of internal migration from the *sierra*, and an economic elite closely associated with overseas trade was formed and consolidated (Pineo, 1996; Rojas and Villavicencio, 1988: 181). The economic crisis of the 1920s, influenced by the falling prices of cocoa in the world market and the increasing competition from other producers, would have far-reaching consequences well into the 1930s and 1940s, although the city continued to grow steadily (by 1944 its population had doubled again, reaching 200,000 inhabitants) with increasing levels of urban poverty.

At the end of the 1940s the flourishing of the banana trade would give the city its second major expansion. Guayaquil's growth was accelerated, reaching 7.5% and over half a million inhabitants by 1962. The city underwent an uncontrolled geographical expansion and large shanty towns such as La Chala and Cristo del Consuelo emerged (Rojas and Villavicencio, 1988). Rojas and Villavicencio suggest that this period is characterised by growing social differences: a dominant class at its

height, a relative improvement of the middle sectors, a slow growth of the working-class and the very rapid growth of the under-employed and unemployed sectors.

From 1972 the oil industry changed the face of Ecuador, modernising the country, which became predominantly urban with the accelerated growth of both the large and smaller cities. Guayaquil's urban area expanded further and its population was 1,199,344 by 1982. The peripheral areas of Prosperina and Mapasingue were 'invaded' by growing numbers of the urban poor in the 1970s, Guasmo in 1976, and the area of Lomas de Mapasingue in 1979. It is calculated that in 1985 around 800,000 people inhabited the slums of Guayaquil (Godard: 1988: 29). The deep economic crisis that hit the country in 1982 did not stop Guayaquil's growth. The last census, of 1990, gives a figure of 1,508,444 inhabitants (projections estimate Guayaquil's population for 2000 at over two million).

Today, Guayaquil is characterised by its high level of social inequality and by its geographical fragmentation. From the 1930s, the economic elite began to move out of the city centre to exclusive areas in the North and the North West. The city centre has progressively turned into a slum, but has become in recent years the object of speculation and redevelopment, while a growing number of its former inhabitants have been pushed to the peripheral marshes of Guasmo, Isla Trinitaria and along the Estero Salado.

The colonial history of Guayaquil, like in other cities of the Spanish Empire, was documented in the past by *cronistas* in records that were kept for the Spanish crown. After Independence, this tradition continued, combining elements of history and of legend and fiction, partly influenced by romanticism and the historical tales or *tradiciones* of the Peruvian Ricardo Palma (see chapter 2). Thus, *cronistas* recreated the city's historical events (its foundation, the great fire of 1896, the invasions of pirates), as well as its traditions and popular customs, and in some cases their role was officially recognised by the council with the honorary title of official *cronista* of the city. Among others, and coming from different traditions, the following figures are of significance: Francisco Campos Coello (1841-1916), José Antonio Campos Maingon (1868-1939), Camilo Destruge Illingworth (1863-1929) (*cronista* emeritus of Guayaquil, 1926), Modesto Chávez Franco (1872-1952) (*cronista* of Guayaquil, 1931), José Gabriel Pino Roca (1875-1931), Carlos Saona Acebo (1878-1966), Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel (born 1939) (*cronista* of Guayaquil since 1978). Many of them – Campos Coello, Destruge, Pino Roca, Campos Maingon and Pérez Pimentel –

extensively published their articles, narratives and *crónicas* in newspapers like *El Telégrafo*, *El Nacional*, *El Universo*, *El Grito del Pueblo*, *El Imparcial*, *La Nación*, demonstrating the profound link between the *crónica* and journalism. In addition, books that collect *cronistas'* narratives of the city's history and its traditions from the past are a significant bibliographical source for today's *cronistas*. The most relevant today are, on the one hand, Campos Maingon's contemporary narratives and tales of peasant life and, on the other, Pino Roca's *Leyendas, tradiciones y páginas de la historia de Guayaquil* and Chávez Franco's *Crónicas del Guayaquil antiguo*, both of which were published in 1930 and have recently been fully reedited.

The trajectory and *crónicas* of Jorge Martillo must be viewed within this context and tradition of the historical *crónica* as a way of recording the city's past, a genre which he renovates, transforming it into a account of his personal experience and exploration of the life and popular culture of a city which he traverses, experiences and documents from within.

Jorge Martillo (born 1957), poet and *cronista*, started writing *crónicas* in 1985 for newspaper *Expreso* on Guayaquil's urban life, its popular places and characters. From 1987 to 2000 he wrote urban and travel *crónicas* for the city's biggest newspaper, *El Universo*. He has published two books of *crónicas*: *Viajando por pueblos costeros* [*Travelling Through Coastal Villages*, 1991] and *La bohemia en Guayaquil y otras historias* [*The Bohemia in Guayaquil and Other Stories*, 1999]. In addition, a third book of *crónicas*, *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos* [*Guayaquil of my Delirium*], remains unpublished. Chronologically, *La bohemia...* contains Martillo's oldest texts: urban *crónicas* written between 1987 and 1989. *Viajando...* gathers travel *crónicas* about the Ecuadorian coast written in 1990, and *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos* urban *crónicas* written in 1993-1994. Later *crónicas* – the author continued writing urban *crónicas* until 1998 and since 1999 has returned to the genre of travel *crónicas* – have not yet been collected in book form.

This chapter, which is mainly based on the books *La bohemia en Guayaquil* and *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos* and considers only the section dedicated to Guayaquil of his book of travel *crónicas* *Viajando por pueblos costeros*, will offer a thematic approach to the main motifs present in Martillo's portrayal of the city of Guayaquil, focusing on his depiction of the city's topography and popular culture and on the combination of elements from high and low.

However, as a preliminary, it is necessary to briefly characterise Martillo's work as a whole, its sources and general features, as well as to establish his trajectory as a *cronista*. Martillo's *crónicas* are marked by the combination of highly heterogeneous elements. On the one hand, they are a personal exploration, the product of his individual journey and experience of the city. In them, the *cronista* is speaking from a highly individualised point of view as a writer of literature, and particularly as a poet, using elements of reality as the source of literary expression. Thus, he explicitly defines himself as a writer and not a journalist when he writes *crónicas*, and states that making literature is a central goal in his texts: "I think that the role of the *cronista*, at least in my terms, is to rescue a very immediate story, a living story, and also to make literature" (personal interview). On the other hand, his *crónicas* are texts written with the intention of communicating to a wide public a vision and characterisation of his city, its culture, its people and its past, influenced by the tradition of the historical *crónica* and by journalism, from which the author incorporates techniques as well as extensive quotations and commentaries on the reality he portrays.

Various elements determine this dimension of Martillo's *crónicas* as individual, literary journeys through the city. Firstly, there is the highly stylised form in which they are written, with abundant use of tropes, metaphors and similes especially, and with recurring images of the city which function as a kind of leitmotif that makes the *cronista*'s style immediately recognisable to the reader (mostly images associated with night and the dark side of existence, but also images that describe Guayaquil's chaotic character as a tropical port). Secondly, images of everyday life are often transformed and interpreted in a literary way; there are highly stylised descriptions of everyday phenomena. Thirdly, there is an abundant use of literary quotations and references from the most varied authors of world literature and especially of poetry. These function in the texts mostly as a kind of parallel commentary on the reality that is being portrayed, and in some cases as sources for the description or explanation of phenomena in their own right (see for example the *crónica* 'Guayaquil en las páginas del Grupo de Guayaquil', 'Guayaquil in the pages of the Group of Guayaquil', 1999: 22-28; or Benedetti's quotes on football in the *crónica* 'Fútbol made in Ecuador y otras misceláneas', 'Football made in Ecuador and other miscellanea', 1999: 32). And fourthly, there are specific references to the *cronista* as a poet; sometimes the main character and observer of reality is addressed

as “the *cronista*” or “the poet”, at other times there are more precise references to the poet’s literary activity and even quotes from his poems.

On the other hand, Martillo’s *crónicas* must be situated within an established tradition of the genre and are influenced by both the historical *crónica* and journalism. From the first, Martillo defines his position as observer and his topographic intention to describe places and people, their history and features, and offer a detailed account of city life. He also uses historical sources abundantly to reconstruct a past that has in his *crónicas* a paramount importance, and quotes profusely from Guayaquil’s historical *cronistas*, especially Chávez Franco and Pino Roca. From journalism, Martillo has adopted various techniques that are central in his texts, especially the interview. In addition, he is also subject to the concrete limitations of time and space, and to the general constraints that working for a mass medium implies (certain limits on theme and style especially). The world of journalism also appears in his *crónicas* in the form of abundant quotes from and comments on the work of other *cronistas* and of writers of new journalism. In this respect, the author has often defended his lack of journalistic objectivity, inscribing his work in the tradition of new journalism or literary journalism. Thus, in an interview he stated: “At present the *cronista* cannot be merely a ‘witness’ and ‘certify’ a reality, a time. The *cronista* must be a main character and transform his time, his reality, transform it through his writing, his vision, his version of events and of people” (Semana, *Expreso*, 3/11/91). Commenting on this quote in a personal interview he added: “I never considered myself a journalist. One of the almost religious principles of the journalist is to be objective and impartial. This doesn’t go down well with me; I can be neither objective or impartial”. Finally, newspapers and their contents are often depicted in his *crónicas*, they constitute sources for some of his stories and are an important presence in the everyday lives of his characters (see below for a detailed examination of the role of the mass media in Martillo’s *crónicas*).

Martillo’s trajectory as a writer of urban *crónicas* could be broadly divided into three distinct moments that reveal significant differences of focus and themes, although there is also a marked continuity in style and form. A first moment, to which the book *La bohemia en Guayaquil* corresponds, is characterised by the predominance of the *cronistas*’ aim of providing a view of the most significant and idiosyncratic aspects of city life and of its popular culture. Here the role of the *cronista* is as cartographer, compiler and witness of events, as he transmits to the reader his

personal perception of what constitutes the character and nature of the city he inhabits. There is the intention of offering a portrayal and interpretation of a certain Guayaquil, in the words of the author, his aim is to “portray, in my style and from my point of view, the deep Guayaquil, the city and its authentic inhabitants without masks” (1999: 11). This topographical intention, the purpose of tracing a map of the popular culture and life of Guayaquil, is mirrored directly in the structure of the book *La bohemia en Guayaquil*, which has sections dedicated to Guayaquil’s history, to its famous characters and its distinctive figures, to popular places and habits, and *crónicas* on typical foods, on salsa dancing, on football, on traditional musicians, etc. However, the book also shows, in sections where personal and subjective experiences predominate like chapters 4 and 6, the intimate, existential tone that will acquire a greater predominance at a later stage.

Secondly, there is an intermediate period, illustrated by the travel *crónicas* included in the book *Viajando por pueblos costeros*, in which the *cronista* starts to widen the focus of his depiction of reality. These travel *crónicas* offer a double journey through the villages of the Ecuadorian coast from North to South and at the same time a spiritual, personal journey of the *cronista* into himself in search of forgetfulness and liberation from the ghosts of the past. There is in these texts a higher degree of fictionalisation and of dialogisation, through the incorporation of the voices of the characters the *cronista* interviews in the places he visits and of the legends that are part of their rich oral tradition.

The third moment, to which the book *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos* (identified below as *GD*) and Martillo’s later production belong, is characterised by a greater diversity of interests and of texts, which now range from lists of local idioms to fictional stories about anonymous inhabitants of the city. The overall intention no longer seems to be to offer a general map of Guayaquil and its culture from the *cronista*’s perspective, but to provide various fragmentary depictions of its many facets and moments, as they are encountered by the city’s inhabitants in their daily lives. The personal and private, the *cronista*’s and other people’s inner lives and concerns, gain here a new significance and become the focus of several *crónicas*. A strong fictionalisation marks many of the texts, a number of which resemble short stories in their structure and form. In particular, a significant element of this new tendency of fictionalisation of reality is the creation of literary characters, the most

important of whom is El Conde or the bohemian wanderer through the city, who become central figures in some of the *crónicas*.

2. Uncovering the city behind its mask

A recurrent image in Martillo's *crónicas* is the idea that Guayaquil is a woman who is wearing a mask and that the task of the *cronista* is to reveal the city's real face by showing its profound, hidden reality. Thus, the *cronista* states:

"Guayaquil is like those women who, covered in make up and perfume from some imported exotic paradise, wearing shiny dresses and standing on enormous heels look like gods from Olympus. But the hours go by and the make up smudges like a sad tear, sweat takes the place of scents and fragrances, wrinkles extinguish the spark of glamour, and ouch! blisters and corns torture the lady until she takes her shoes off. Appearances deceive, the masks fall and the other face of Guayaquil appears, the face that tourist postcards hide as if it were the dark side of the moon."¹

The use of the metaphor of the mask to allude to the difference between reality and its idealised portrayal is not new in the description of Latin American societies and, especially, of the Latin American city. In this context, Ángel Rama has pointed to the disparity between an ideal city conceived as "the dream of an order" and a rapidly changing and fragmented city, which increasingly threatened the hierarchical structures established by the elite and organised and maintained through a "lettered city" in the realm of signs. Thus, Rama noted that Latin American cities inverted the foundational process of European cities, affirming the primacy of the order of signs:

"Before being a reality of streets, houses and squares, which can only exist gradually in historical time, fully made cities emerged delivered by the intellectuals in the norms that theorised them, in the foundational acts that instituted them, in the maps that ideally designed them ..." (1984: 12)

¹ "Guayaquil es como esas mujeres que maquilladas a full, perfumadas por esencias de algún exótico paraíso de importación, ataviadas con vestidos de luces y trepadas en tacones de vértigo parecen diosas descendidas del Olimpo; pero pasan las horas y el maquillaje se chorrea como lágrima amarga, el sudor desplaza aromas y fragancias, las arrugas apagan los destellos del glamour, y ayayay ampollas y callos torturan a la damita hasta dejarla descalza. Es que las apariencias engañan, las máscaras caen y aparece la otra cara de Guayaquil, aquel rostro que postales turísticas ocultan como si fuese la cara oscura de la luna." (GD: "Postales de Guayaquil")

This determined, according to the author, that from their inception Latin American cities possessed a double life, on the one hand as a physical reality and on the other in the realm of signs. Rama's characterisation of the dual life of the Latin American city, the contrast between an ideal city and a real one that is negated by it, has been used by Resende to analyse Lima Barreto's *crónicas* of Rio de Janeiro at the beginning of the 20th century. Lima Barreto, an independent and marginal intellectual excluded from the circles of cultural power, assumed the role and task of an ethnographer in portraying a hidden city of workers and poor people so that "the peculiarity of the urban *crónica* of our author is that it provides a mirror in which the city sees itself, rather than a retouched photograph" (Resende, 1993: 110-11).

Just as Lima Barreto denounced the naivety of a celebratory view of progress that dreamed of Rio de Janeiro as a city of European character, Martillo has exposed the fallacies of the city which prides itself on being Ecuador's economic centre. For him, "the Guayaquil of the present is the chaotic and violent city, as multiple as the woman who continually changes her make-up, maybe trying to hide her misfortune" (1991: 163)². Chaos and violence are the other side of the city's progress, which has always been episodic, rapid and short lived. The *cronista* is only too aware of the extreme poverty of wide sectors of Guayaquil's population, a city which he has also described in the following terms: "Gutters that smell of boredom. Hidden paths that quickly disappear like the shadows of ghosts. Music in the heart of the corner. A child painted with shoe polish witnesses the feast of poverty" (1999: 95)³. But the hidden side covered by the city's mask of glamour is also the popular and traditional, the signs of an immediate past that is still alive in the city's present and that the *cronista* wants to recuperate in his texts.

In this context, Alicia Ortega has viewed Martillo's *crónicas* as a means to making familiar an unknown urban space through the recuperation of the memory of cultural territories that have been left at the margins of the modernising process (1999: 24, 74). Local memory, orality, marginal knowledge of forgotten histories, and the

² "La actual Guayaquil es la ciudad caótica y violenta, múltiple como mujer que continuamente cambia de maquillaje, tal vez queriendo ocultar su desgracia."

³ "Alcantarillas hediondas a tedio. Senderos ocultos deslizándose raudos como las sombras de los fantasmas. Música en el pecho de una esquina. Un niño pintado de betún asiste a la fiesta de la miseria."

everyday life and culture of the working classes are the content of the map of Guayaquil traced by Martillo's redeeming texts.

Crónica writing becomes the exercise through which the city's real face, the "deep Guayaquil... and its authentic characters without masks", is revealed and recovered from behind a veil of forgetfulness. The gaze of the *cronista* is thus focused, on the one hand, on the working class and marginal sectors of the city and, on the other, on the presence of a certain tradition, an element from the past, that marks the character of today's city. This latter factor determines the very particular temporal dimension of Martillos' *crónicas*, which contain a degree of nostalgia for the immediate past of the *cronista*'s childhood, the traces of which can still be found in the present. In this sense, the *cronista* explicitly conceives his texts as both records of a tradition that is in danger of disappearing and which he attempts to rescue, as well as literary recreations. His manifest aim is to "go against forgetting but also to create fantasy" (1999: 96).

The activity of writing *crónicas* demands a profound knowledge of city life, and the image of the *cronista* as a keen observer appears several times, especially in Martillo's later *crónicas*⁴. Observing is the *cronista*'s main activity and his main relationship with the city, which also takes the metaphorical form of devouring:

"This leisurely observation is an exercise in capturing things; it is to look and to see, to be actor and witness. It is to devour this city smeared with salt and river. It is devouring because if you don't devour her, she devours you." (GD: 'Observations of a man of leisure')⁵.

Observation can give way to more traditional portrayals of the urban 'fauna' in which the *cronista* gathers images and constructs highly descriptive vignettes of city life (*crónicas* like 'Conversaciones que se escuchan por ahí' ('Conversations overheard in the streets'), 'Una *crónica* de zoonidad' ('A *crónica* of zoonity'), 'De la fauna urbana entre nos' ('Of the urban fauna amongst us')). But, more interestingly, observation and apprehension of city life also give way to the author's recreation of atmospheres and fragmentary stories that originate in the private lives of the anonymous inhabitants of the city. These fragments acquire in the *crónicas* a sort of

⁴ The following reflections on the role of the *cronista* are mainly based on Martillo's latest, unpublished collection of *crónicas*, *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos*.

typicality that holds the key to the mystery of Guayaquil's character and collective life. In texts like '*Crónica púrpura del muchacho de los pies desnudos*' ('Purple *crónica* of the barefooted boy'), '*Un pretexto de película*' ('A film pretext') and '*De un lagartero a su amada*' ('From a street musician to his loved one'), among others, the *cronista* fictionalises and reinvents many personal and private stories, travelling "aboard other people's history" and producing *crónicas* which strongly resemble short stories.

Generally, the *cronista* underlines the experiential side of his knowledge of the city and of his texts. The stories he tells are seen, heard or lived. "The city speaks and you listen", is the metaphor through which his activity of compiling the material for his writing is evoked. Observation is the basis of his knowledge, and to truly know the city means the capacity to go beyond mere appearances, to tear away the mask and show the city's real face. The precondition for this is leisure, which is what makes the *cronista*'s activities of observation and reflection possible; leisure is what gives the close and intense relationship of the *cronista* with his city its particular character. Martillo has expressed all this in the following sentence: "Only we the idle observers know [the city], we occupy ourselves in knowing her, in taking off her make-up, the masks that hide her real face of a beautiful *chola*." (*GD*: 'Observations of a man of leisure')⁶.

On a different, more general plane, it can be argued that the *cronista*'s aim of removing the city's mask is associated with a conception of writing as a path towards a truer apprehension of and relationship with reality, with an existentialist motivation that accounts for the *cronista*'s quest for knowledge and in which writing becomes the main means of being in the city. Martillo asserts a particular way of writing about the city that has a strong poetic and existential intention, using again the metaphor of the mask:

"To forget its smell, its asphalt, to recognise in her our sensibility. The other reality, that makes us happy and gives us life, that torments us and takes us close to death. To adopt this

⁵ "Este ocioso observar es una actividad captadora; es mirar y ver, es ser actante y testigo. Es devorar a esta ciudad untada de sal y río. Es devorar porque si tú no la devoras, ella te devora a ti" (*GD*: 'Observaciones de un ocioso').

⁶ "Solamente, los observadores ociosos la conocemos [a la ciudad], nosotros estamos ocupados en conocerla, en quitarle el maquillaje, las máscaras que ocultan su verdadero rostro de *chola* hermosa." (*GD*: 'Observaciones de un ocioso').

attitude to make masks fall before we walk naked towards a new baptism. False language is also a mask. The language that turns its back to poetry is a hard shell." (1999: 96)⁷.

From this perspective, the objective of making poetry out of the everyday that is present in Martillo's *crónicas* appears ultimately linked to his wider literary project, of which his poetry⁸ is also a part, which conceives writing as a way of tearing away the masks of everyday existence, of shaking readers out of a facile and taken for granted reality. His poetry and his *crónicas*, however distant in terms of accessibility, structure and thematic scope, stem ultimately from a single poetics, an exclusive concern of an art that makes extreme vital experience its core.

The metaphor of the city as a woman is also used to poetically describe the city in its geographic extension and form:

"The city is also a woman; ours with beautiful long legs, with breasts of hills that have been invaded and inhabited. She bathes in a river adorned with weeds, gets undressed in the arms of estuaries. She is marine, she is fluvial like a kiss of sweet water. And in her we live: sons and lovers." (1999: 113)⁹.

Crónica writing becomes, in this context, the activity through which the *cronista*, who permanently observes and penetrates with his knowledge and writing the city he loves, becomes the city's closest son and, especially, its lover. It is thus understood as a masculine act of love, a form of taking possession of a feminine city, thus reproducing the classical dichotomy of male knowledge and the word versus female landscape and matter. In this context, there is a constant emphasis on the city's sensual qualities, as perceived by the *cronista*. The city is "movement of hips of beautiful black women" (1999: 135)¹⁰, and its more distinctive elements are also associated with the attributes of femaleness: the night is "a woman that one must love

⁷ "Olvidar su hedor, su asfalto, reconocer en ella nuestra sensibilidad. La otra realidad. La que nos alegra y da vida. La que nos atormenta y nos acerca a la muerte. Tomar esta actitud para que caigan las máscaras e ir desnudos a una nueva pila bautismal. El falso lenguaje es también una máscara. El lenguaje que da las espaldas a la poesía es una coraza."

⁸ Martillo has published four books of poetry: *Aviso a los navegantes* (1987), *Fragmentarium* (1992), *Confessionarium* (1996) and *Vida póstuma* (1998).

⁹ "La ciudad es también una mujer; la nuestra, de hermosísimas piernas largas, con senos de colinas que han sido invadidas y pobladas. Ella se baña en un río adornado en lechuguines, se desnuda en brazos de esteros. Es marítima, es fluvial como un beso de agua dulce. Y en ella estamos nosotros: hijos y amantes."

¹⁰ "movimiento de caderas de hermosas morenas"

and hate" (p. 113)¹¹, "silent as a girl that walks in bare feet after love" (p. 101)¹² and the *cronista* perceives its smell "like the last woman who caressed my face in the darkness" (p. 96)¹³, while poverty is "like the true face of a prostitute that has taken off her make-up and cries in front of her mirror" (p. 91)¹⁴.

Writing *crónicas* is thus much more than a simple exercise of knowing or mapping the city: it is an act of possession, of love, of passion for a city that is experienced by its supreme lover, the *cronista*, as both the object and the motivation for the act of writing¹⁵. At the same time, the identification of the city's inhabitants as "we: sons and lovers" subtly excludes its female population, who in Martillo's texts play a very secondary role.

On the other hand, Martillo's characterisation of the city as a woman also possesses a racial dimension. It is especially the sensuality of black or racially mixed women that is associated with the city's character. A mention of the city's 'face of a beautiful *chola*' has appeared above. The term *chola*, which refers to a racial mixture between native indigenous, black and white, describes the majority of the population of Guayaquil. In a country where racial and class gradations are intimately connected, it also identifies a specific section of the population: the working class and other social sectors that are at the basis of the social pyramid¹⁶. It is from this racial and social strata that the character of the city, according to Martillo, emanates.

¹¹ "una mujer que es necesario amar y odiar"

¹² "silenciosa como muchacha que camina descalza tras el amor"

¹³ "como a la última mujer que acarició mi cara en la oscuridad"

¹⁴ "como el verdadero rostro de una prostituta que se ha quitado el colorette y llora frente a su espejo"

¹⁵ The association of the city with a woman and of the *cronista* or artist-*flâneur* with male desire was, as Priscilla Parkhurst has shown, also made in the context of panoramic literature in 19th century Paris. Balzac, who described the city as "a daughter, a woman friend, a spouse", pushed it to an extreme by directly associating *flânerie* with carnal knowledge (1994: 92).

¹⁶ Whitten and Quiroga have described as follows the racial dimension of Ecuador's class pyramid: "An oligarchy, known in the upper classes as *la sociedad*, and internally as *gente de bien* (or *gente bien* – proper, 'right kind of' and, by extension, righteous people), constitutes the pinnacle of political power, economic control and social esteem. The *sociedad* is complemented by what we might call a new oligarchy, whose position is a direct result of accumulated wealth. All members of these oligarchies self-identify unconditionally, and are usually identified, as *bancos*. Ecuador has a significant middle class of professional and business and service industries people who generally self-identify as *bancos*... It is from the elite, the educated upper and middle classes and the military that the concept of a united body of mixed people, *el mestizaje*, emanates. And it is among the elite, and educated upper and middle classes, that the rhetoric separating Ecuador's 'races' also emanates. Farther down the class hierarchy we find people dependent for their livelihood on commercial transactions of varying scale, none of whom self-identify as *mestizo*, except under exceptional circumstances, but who are politely tagged with various labels meaning 'mixed' by those above them, or with the labels of the antipodes – *indio*, *negro* – when discourses reflect interaggregate or inter-personal anger signalling open conflict... Upward mobility is conceived of by those in superordinate positions of power and wealth as a process often called *blanqueamiento*, or whitening..."

Further, Martillo's *crónicas* underline the special significance of black culture in Guayaquil. Guayaquil has attracted widespread migration from all over the country and also from one of its poorest areas, Esmeraldas, the black northern coastal province¹⁷. There is thus an important presence of black people in the city, who have settled especially in the shanty towns of Cristo del Consuelo and also in La Chala and La Marimba¹⁸. However, the significance of black culture in Guayaquil goes far beyond these easily recognisable sectors to embrace its culture as a whole. As pointed out above, the predominant part of Guayaquil's population is considered to be of mixed blood, with white, Indian and black elements. Townsend situates the creation of a *mestizo* people in the late-colonial and early-republican era, when the Spanish terms that categorised whites, blacks and Indians and the various combinations thereof came to be progressively substituted by the word *guayaquileño*, which originally had referred only to elites (1997: 51-52). On the other hand, as Handelsman has shown, the black cultural element was not negated but, on the contrary, exercised a strong influence in a process of Africanisation, which has come to distinguish the culture of the coast from that of the sierra¹⁹. Indeed, (Afro) Caribbean culture, a concept which, as Benítez Rojo has also pointed out (1998), not merely refers to a geographic region but rather describes a tradition in which black elements predominate, extends through the Pacific Coast all the way down to Guayaquil.

Martillo has portrayed the importance of black culture in a series of *crónicas*. Firstly, in the travel *crónicas* of his book *Viajando por pueblos costeños*, where he gives the province of Esmeraldas special attention. Esmeraldas is the starting point of

The processes of *mestizaje* are also often called by the vulgar term *cholificación* in Ecuador, as in Peru and Bolivia.

People represented by those in power as *negro*, on the one side, and *indio*, on the other, are thought to be the real social antipodes of class-status relationships." (1995: 288-289).

¹⁷ Esmeraldas forms part of an Afro-Hispanic cultural region of the Pacific Lowlands of Ecuador and Colombia which extends from Muisne in southern Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador, to the San Juan River, in Valle Department, Colombia. Between 600,000 and 800,000 black people occupy this region, with an estimated figure of about 200,000 for the province of Esmeraldas (Whitten and Quiroga, 1995: 292).

¹⁸ Whitten and Quiroga point at the significance of Guayaquil's black population, immigrants from Esmeraldas, and at their geographical concentration, but they do not give a figure (the black population of the capital Quito is estimated at 50,000-60,000, while a national estimate of 700,000 or 6-7% of the population, is quoted) (1995: 297, 300-301).

¹⁹ Michael Handelsman argues in his book *Lo afro y la plurinacionalidad: El caso ecuatoriano visto desde su literatura* [*Afro Culture and Plurinationality: The Ecuadorian Case Seen from its Literature*, 1999] for an extension of the concept of the Afro-Ecuadorian beyond the region of Esmeraldas or the groups phenotypically considered black, to describe a central cultural component of coastal culture, which defies the traditional conception of Ecuador as an Andean country. He dedicates one chapter of his book to analyse the relationship between black and coastal culture in Jorge Martillo's *crónicas*.

the *cronista's* journey and a total of 10 *crónicas* are devoted to the region (the highest number devoted to a single province), out of the 37 texts that make up the book. They describe the villages and beaches the *cronista* visits, highlighting local habits and crafts (the manufacture of wood and coral products, the local recipe for cocada, a sweet made out of coconut, the production of the *marimbas*, a percussion instrument) and popular culture (the local legends and the oral poetry of the *décimas*, traditional instruments and dances).

In these portrayals, an image of poverty and backwardness, but also of freedom and vitality is evoked. On the one hand, malaria abounds and children and adults die of gastroenteritis and parasites: "Only the old people remember prosperous times. The happy times of ivory palm and wood" (1991: 20)²⁰. The national government has systematically marginalised the area, which is highly isolated from the national reality: "It is a football Sunday. In Quito there are matches for the championship, but the signal does not reach Esmeraldas. Ironies of life: the reserve of players cannot see the games" (1991: 38)²¹ (Esmeraldas, with its "beach football, played with no shoes, to the rhythm of the sea", is the region where many of the country's best players come from).

On the other hand, Esmeraldas, with its long history of independent regimes created by runaway slaves, who first arrived in 1553 after a shipwreck, symbolises freedom. For the *cronista*, poverty cannot erode the vigour of a culture that asserts its simple existence against adverse material circumstances. Thus, he comments on his arrival at the city of Esmeraldas, the provincial capital: "I have the feeling that I have arrived again at the exact port where dying must be most painful" (1991: 43)²². It is this contradiction between material conditions and spiritual life, the exuberant assertion of the latter, that attracts the *cronista* towards a culture with which he identifies and which he celebrates in his texts: "This is life; the farthest from death; even if the prices of food are an insult, a spit in the face of the humble. In spite of that, here life sings, because even to die one must have happiness and dignity." (1991: 62)²³.

²⁰ "Sólo los viejos recuerdan tiempos prósperos. La época feliz de la tagua y de la madera"

²¹ "Es domingo de fútbol. En Quito hay partidos por el campeonato, pero a Esmeraldas no llega la señal. Qué ironía de la vida: la cantera de futbolistas sin ver los juegos"

²² "Tengo la sensación, que otra vez, he arribado al puerto exacto donde morir debe doler más"

²³ "Esto es vida, lo más alejado de la muerte; aunque los precios de víveres sean un insulto, un escupitajo a la cara de los humildes. Pese a ello, aquí la vida canta, porque hasta para morir, hay que tener alegría y dignidad"

The special importance that Esmeraldas has for the *cronista* is fully revealed in page 35, when he states at his arrival: “We have arrived at our origins”. Handelsman has stressed the fact that the significance of Esmeraldas for Martillo goes beyond the strictly racial, pointing out that “the true attraction that Esmeraldas has on Martillo lies in its long history of resistance and creation” (1999: 96). And it is this dimension which vibrates in Martillo’s depictions of the Africanised culture of Guayaquil. This is why, according to Handelsman,

“*Viajando por pueblos costeños* places Esmeraldas in the very centre of coastal life and feeling. For Martillo, traveller from Guayaquil, there is no doubt about his origins... Without Esmeraldas, the Guayaquil that Martillo feels with so much passion would be another city, would be a less Caribbean city, less coastal, less Ecuadorian” (1999: 98).

The most direct depictions of black culture in Guayaquil are the texts that describe the nights out when the *cronista* and his friends penetrate the city, “rumba adentro” (“inside the *rumba*”) towards the bars of the black shanty town of Cristo del Consuelo, where the best salsa music is played: ‘Lugares nocturnos para la salsa’ (‘Night places for salsa’, 1999: 140-142) and ‘Otras noches, otras vidas’ (‘Other nights, other lives’, 1999: 146-150). Nightlife is for the *cronista* and his friends closely associated with salsa, the music that everybody dances to in Guayaquil and that marks its character as a Caribbean city:

“The night flows like furious foam, like a beer erupting out of the top of the bottles. Better to leave for later the impossible sleep, to escape from the probable nightmare. You can hear the drums, the rumba is getting ready. In honour of Yemaya I dress in white. It is only necessary to get out into the streets were life is running barefoot.” (1999: 140)²⁴

The journey starts in the central, traditional salsa pub of Cabo Rojeño, to continue in the disco of Cali Salsoteca, “discovering that Africa is in us, and that it emerges when the drums play” (p. 141)²⁵, and finishing in the dancing salons of Cristo del Consuelo, where, according to the *cronista*, the best music of the city is played.

²⁴ “La noche fluye como espuma rabiosa, como erupción de cerveza en picos de botellas. Mejor dejar para después el sueño imposible, huir a la pesadilla probable. Se escuchan los tambores, la rumba se está armando. En honor a Yemayá me visto de blanco. Todo es salir a las veredas por donde corre la vida descalza.”

²⁵ “Descubriendo que África está en nosotros, y que sale cuando suenan los cueros”

But this journey into the depths of African rhythm is also an excluding, one, as the second of the above mentioned *crónicas* shows. In it, his friend 'El Negro' leads the *cronista* to a world of music into which only blacks are allowed ("Mi Son was full. He is with me, El Negro had to say when a group of blacks said: This is only for blacks", p. 148²⁶), interrupting the *cronista*'s intellectual thoughts and imposing the celebration of life through rhythm:

"What the hell are you thinking about? You look very stupid. Forget your existentialisms. Drink, as drinking is living as well. And he drank wildly as if it was his last real act, his last hope. 'Que bueno baila usted' was playing, and he couldn't find life. Life is this, this Friday. He tried a sip and El Negro spoke again. Let's go into the depths." (1999: 148)²⁷.

3. Mapping the city: Centre and periphery

There are in Martillo's *crónicas* detailed descriptions of the geography in which city life unfolds. With his attentive look and his focus on the spatial dimension of urban culture, the *cronista* traces a sort of map of the city he traverses, describing his personal journeys across the urban landscape.

The *crónicas*' main geographical focus is the central area of Guayaquil, a zone that bears witness to the city's tradition and to its richest past, but also one that has slowly decayed and become a slum, where poor people and peculiar characters of a mixed urban fauna inhabit. These central streets are, especially at night, the favourite path of the *cronista*'s wanderings, through which he scrutinises the city's real face of decadence and marginality, its present decay which contrasts with its old dream of plenty and of European civilisation:

"We go along Quito Avenue and we cross Columbus Avenue. Smoke from fried food shops. Street women made up to look as though they're smiling their saddest and most cruel smile.

Songs from the juke box. Laments. Goodbyes. Broken loves like bottles of brandy, smells of a defeated night. Victoria Park. Drunken men on the floor. The hard face of Gabriel García Moreno sunk in the darkness of his guilt. Evangelists tired of preaching. A dog spitting

²⁶ "Mi Son estaba copado. Él viene conmigo, tuvo que decir el Negro cuando un grupo de prietos dijo: Esto es para negros solamente"

²⁷ "Qué diablos estás pensando. Tienes una cara de grandísimo estúpido. Déjate de existencialismos. Bebe, que beber es también vivir. Y bebió desaforado como si este fuese el último acto verdadero, la

foam like a glass of beer. Why are these dark streets so full of desperate people? A few streets further, on Ninth of October Avenue. The so called French Boulevard, dream of cocoa planters. Palpitating neon lights and colours. Benches of wrought iron just right for lovers' kisses, for conversation and for weekend drinkers." (1999: 97)²⁸.

In the middle of Guayaquil stands Centenario Square, a big shady square with bronze statues in its midst where many marginal urban figures gather: "The place: Liberty is at the centre, as it were seated on the light green, surrounded by bronze leaders. It is crossed by Ninth of October Avenue, which drinks the rotten waters of the Estuary and the sweet ones of the Guayas river. This is Centenario Square."²⁹.

In Martillo's portrayal of the city, Centenario Square is its geographical centre, a microcosm of its underground world of desperate beings who obscurely fulfil their irreversible fate. The *cronista* has depicted the square and its inhabitants in various *crónicas*, and two texts are exclusively focused on tracing its physiognomy and describing its peculiar characters: 'Los apocalípticos del parque' ('The apocalyptic beings from the park', 1999: 127-131) and 'Los apocalípticos del parque: revisitados' ('The apocalyptic beings from the park revisited, *GD*). In both, the square's inhabitants are described as apocalyptic beings, while the image of the square as hell is invoked:

"Who are its apocalyptic beings? What are the features of the scene? One night I crossed the park with a friend. On the benches: retired old people watched their life disappear, drop by drop; women and children tried to laugh, but the shadows were dense and suffocated their vain attempts. On one side, a frantic sweaty preacher moved from place to place. The Bible in his hand, drops of sweat descending through his body like a sea of lava, wild-eyed. He was brother Zamora, the representation of a possibility of salvation, of reaching glory; his listeners

última esperanza. Sonaba Que bueno baila usted y él sin encontrar la vida. La vida es ésta, es este viernes. Probó un trago y el Negro volvió a hablar. Vámonos al fondo."

²⁸ "Vamos por la Quito, pasamos por la Colón. Humareda de fritanguerías. Mujeres públicas maquilladas para simular su sonrisa más cruel y triste.

Canciones rockoleras. Lamentos. Adioses. Amores rotos como botellas de aguardiente, olores a noche vencida. Parque Victoria. Ebrios por los suelos. El duro rostro de Gabriel García Moreno hundido en la oscuridad de sus culpas. Evangelistas cansados de pregonar. Un perro hecha espuma como un pomo de cerveza. ¿Por qué estas calles oscuras están tan nutridas de desesperados? A pocas cuadras, la Nueve de Octubre. El Boulevard dízque francés, sueño de cocoateros. El neón palpitando luces y colores. Bancas de hierros forjados dignas para besos de enamorados, para la tertulia y el trago de fin de semana"

²⁹ "El lugar: La Libertad está en el centro, como sentadita en el verde limón, rodeada por próceres de bronce. Está atravesado por la Nueve de Octubre que bebe las aguas podridas del Estero y las dulces del Guayas. Es el Parque Centenario"

were repentant devils, angels with no wings. On the other side, Clarita singing *boleros* that said that love is a dagger that kills. The crowd surrounded her celebrating her madness. Other people came and went, some without stopping; others paused for a moment to see the barefooted children walking on crushed glass. Or the black man who spits fire. The clown that throws away jokes like somebody throwing stones to undermine the social order. And that friend said: Hell must be like this.” (*GD*: ‘The apocalyptic beings from the square revisited’)³⁰.

Salvation (brother Zamora) and madness (Clarita) are the two poles of this gallery of horrors in which the feast of existence is celebrated and represented daily as if in a theatre. The two characters of the preacher and the mad singer are popular heroes in reverse: while brother Zamora “preaches in the local slang, that reaches his lumpen audience effortlessly” (1999: 129)³¹, Clarita communicates with a public who celebrate insanity.

“Circus, tragedy and city” (1999: 128) are the terms used by the *cronista* to describe the reality that surrounds him. Furthermore, the clowns and jugglers from Centenario Square become a metaphor for the character of the city as a whole: “In Guayaquil live thousands of artists in the circus of appearances, lies and shady dealing” (*GD*)³², reflects the author. It is them and, in a way, all the inhabitants of Guayaquil who struggle for daily subsistence, who represent the spirit of a city of jugglers, in which illusion and deceit have become important means of survival:

“One of the most cultivated arts in our courtyard is survival. Its cultivators steal flowers from the cemeteries which they sell afterwards to couples in the street. On Sunday, a juggler stretches a rope between two trees in Centenario Square and walks the tightrope; it is a matter

³⁰ “¿Quiénes son sus apocalípticos?, ¿cuál es la característica del escenario? Una noche anterior con un amigo atravesábamos el parque. en las bancas: viejos jubilados miraban la vida que se les iba, gota a gota; mujeres y niños trataban de reír, pero las sombras eran espesas y ahogaban sus vanos intentos. A un costado, un predicador frenético, iba sudoroso de un lado al otro. La Biblia en la mano, gotas de sudor descendiendo por su cuerpo como mar de lava, los ojos desorbitados. Era el hermanito Zamora, la representación de una posibilidad de salvación, de alcanzar la gloria, sus escuchas eran demonios arrepentidos, ángeles sin alas. Al otro costado, Clarita cantando boleros que decían que el amor es un puñal que mata. El gentío la rodeaba festejando su locura. Otra gente, iba y venía, algunos sin detenerse; otros paraban un momento a ver a muchachos descalzos que caminaban sobre vidrios triturados. O al negro que vomita fuego. Al payaso que tira chistes como quien lanza piedras y rompe el orden social. Y aquel amigo dijo: Así debe ser el infierno.” (*GD*: ‘Los apocalípticos del parque: revisitados’).

³¹ “predice empleando la jerga. La coña que llega fácil a su público lumpen”

³² “En Guayaquil viven miles de artistas del circo de la apariencia, la mentira y el rebusque.”

of life or death. In the same square, lovers throw stones at the lampposts to be in the darkness romantically at ease.” (GD)³³.

The role of the *cronista* is one of capturing these moments that reveal the nature of daily survival in the city. As Martillo has expressed it: “My thing is narrating the everyday that is walking through Guayaquil, meeting those people who have turned living and surviving into an art” (*Expreso*, 31/10/1999).

Also in the central parts of the city, are other traditional areas that the *cronista* visits and describes with special attention. Among them, the bustle of the flea market, another focal point in Guayaquil’s marginal life, the popular market of Bahía, and the city’s cemetery.

But, interestingly, Martillo has also portrayed in his *crónicas* the city’s outskirts, its forgotten periphery, the lands in the South known as Guasmo, which were ‘invaded’ by the urban poor in 1976. Two *crónicas* are focused on this area, ‘En la playita Miami Beach del Guasmo’ (‘In Miami Beach of Guasmo’, 1991: 187-191) and ‘Un interminable viaje en bus’ (‘A never ending bus journey’, 1999: 123-127), both conceived partly as travel *crónicas*. In the first text, two fictional characters, Viejito Libertino and Dante, embark on a journey to Miami Beach in Guasmo. This is how the *cronista* describes their arrival at the area:

“The bus penetrated the Guasmo of the squatters, come from every corner of the country and not from Mars. Traces of one city inside another. Cane houses, others made with blocks and bricks, a few with some elements of luxury. Empty tanks waiting for the water of Our Saviour of the Tanks, a saint in these areas of Guasmo. People on the streets. Street football, fried and roasted food stalls on every corner.” (1991: 188)³⁴.

The beach bears the signs of the place: it is full of waste and has no toilets or showers, but it is a nice, lively spot, and in the words of a “*chola* siren” with whom Dante is

³³ “Una de las artes más cultivadas en nuestro patio, es el de la supervivencia. Estos cultores, en los cementerios, se dedican a robar flores que luego venden ambulante a parejas de enamorados. Los domingos un malabarista, de verdad, tiende una soga entre dos árboles del parque Centenario y camina por la cuerda floja, es cuestión de vida o muerte. En el mismo parque, los amantes lanzan piedras a los focos del alumbrado para estar a oscuras y a sus románticas anchas.”

³⁴ “El bus se adentraba al Guasmo de invasores, venidos de todos los rincones del país y no de Marte. Retaceos de una ciudad dentro de otra. Casitas de caña, otras de bloques y ladrillos, unas pocas con alardes de lujo. Tanques vacíos en espera del agua del Señor de los Tanqueros, un santo de esos lares Guasmeños. Gente en las calles. El indor callejero, puestos de frituras y asados en cada esquina.”

flirting: "Miami Beach here in Guasmo is more beautiful than the one I see on Sundays in Miami Vice" (p. 191)³⁵.

The second *crónica* focuses especially on the bus journey to the South, describing the people and atmosphere at the station as well as the picturesque situation on the bus. At the end of the journey:

"Darkness descends, public street lamps shine by their absence. The road has less and less asphalt and more and more stones and mud. From the window we see the landscape changing, the big buildings have disappeared and the little houses of cane and bricks have emerged. It is the South, the South that lies in the depths of Guayaquil's night. People descend at every corner one by one. The bus stops and when it starts again it raises clouds of dust or it stirs the rotten waters in the pits. The deafening *rumba* reaching its end. The drums almost explode, the brass melts, the voice of Marvin Santiago sings *Mi Vecindario*: 'Neighbourhood so beautiful now that I'm far away/ for so many struggles and so many good memories/ How beautiful what is far away, the place where we were born (...)'. The old neighbourhood in the city centre, the neighbourhood in the village far away, the neighbourhood that simply no longer exists; we are in the South, in the squatters' South." (1999: 126-7)³⁶

The significance of the *vecindario* or neighbourhood as centre of working-class communal life and culture, as described by Martillo, will be explored below. The slums of the South are the end of the traditional neighbourhood and, at the same time, its new form, as the city's poorest inhabitants are being pushed to its periphery. Guasmo is the modern version of the slums that first emerged with the cocoa boom at the beginning of the century and to which the *cronista* alluded in his *crónica* 'La calle Panamá huele a cacao' ('Panama Street smells of cocoa'): "Peasants seek out the city.

³⁵ "La playita Miami Beach aquí en el Guasmo es más linda que la que veo los domingos en Miami Vice"

³⁶ "La oscuridad se impone, los focos del alumbrado público brillan por la ausencia. El camino cada vez tiene menos de asfalto y mucho de piedras y lodo. Por la ventanilla vemos como el paisaje va cambiando, los grandes edificios han desaparecido y las casitas pequeñas de caña y ladrillos han ido surgiendo. Es el Sur, el Sur que queda al fondo de la noche guayaca. La gente poco a poco va bajando en cada esquina. El bus para y al correr levanta nubes de polvo o agita las podridas aguas de las pozas. La *rumba* atronadora va llegando a su fin. Los timbales casi revientan, los metales se derriten, la voz de Marvin Santiago canta *Mi Vecindario*: 'Vecindario qué bonito ahora que me encuentro lejos / por tantas y tantas luchas y tantos gratos recuerdos. / Qué hermoso lo que está lejos, el lugar donde nacimos (...)'. El antiguo vecindario del centro de la ciudad, el vecindario del pueblito que está lejos, el vecindario que simplemente ya no existe, estamos en el Sur, en el Sur de las invasiones."

In Guayaquil the slums emerge. They rise on the mud of the estuaries. The cane sinks in the mud, a new kind of living death.” (1999: 64)³⁷.

Finally, the *cronista*'s house on the banks of the estuary (Estero Salado), which is both his refuge and observatory, is also pictured in many of the texts. There Martillo lives the other side of the *cronista*'s act: he retreats into solitude, listens to music, returns to his favourite authors and writes poetry, although he is never totally isolated from the life outside, and laughter, music and loose words always penetrate his solitary retirement. The dichotomy between the *cronista*'s private life and his public role has been portrayed in *crónicas* like 'Eclipse lunar en mi pecho' ('Moon eclipse in my chest') and 'Adentro y afuera' ('Inside and outside') (1999: 58-60, 95-97).

4. The *crónica* as an exploration of the popular

The *crónica*, with its fragmentary nature and ephemeral character, offers a particularly appropriate means for capturing the everyday and the unfixed, the variety of social and cultural practices that take place in the fluid realm of daily life. Jorge Martillo has persistently focused the *cronista*'s lens on popular culture and the everyday life of Guayaquil's inhabitants, as part of his exercise of writing and mapping the city, the true face behind its mask. Thus, he states about the focus of his *crónicas*:

“...I became interested in being a sort of photographic camera that registers all the visions that go unnoticed because they are so common and typical. I was interested in marginality because it was the other reality that is hidden under various veils and nobody wants to see because it is grotesque and popular...”(Pérez Pimentel, 1987: 187).

The popular and the marginal are, in Martillo's view, what gives the fragmented city of Guayaquil its real character, its recognisable face, in contrast to the cultural alienation of an elite which reproduces North American living standards and practices and is practically absent in his accounts of city life.

³⁷ “Los campesinos buscan la ciudad. En Guayaquil nace el suburbio. Viven sobre lodo de esteros. La caña se entierra en el fango, una nueva forma de morir en vida.”

Martillo's focus on the city's popular culture has an important antecedent: the literary practices of the writers associated with the group Sicosco in the late 1970s. In a variety of genres, these writers, especially Fernando Nieto and Fernando Artieda (poetry), Jorge Velasco Mackenzie and Edwin Ulloa (prose fiction), rescued some neglected popular forms, particularly music and urban slang, in an attempt to render a literary account of the city through its popular cultural practices. In their poems, short stories and novels:

"...one could observe a totally new way of saying things that was characteristic of the city of Guayaquil. It is the world of 'salsa', of the tropical city, of slang and 'coba' (slang of the port), of music, dance and the neighbourhood or cabaret party, that will be put forward as literary tools and styles." (Itúrburu, 1988: 57)

Jorge Martillo participated in the literary workshops of the Sicosco group. The group's aim of representing the city through its popular culture has found a natural expression not in his poetry but in his activity as a *cronista*, albeit in a redefined personal literary project which makes the description of everyday urban atmospheres its focal point.

To explore the city's popular culture and everyday life in its varied forms is the explicit purpose of the book *La bohemia en Guayaquil*, which is conceived as a sort of map of the city through its street culture and local traditions. The *cronista's* task is here primarily one of taking an inventory of and describing the most recognisable popular cultural practices, and the book includes sections on football, on the city's popular characters, on its typical places and on popular music, and *crónicas* dissecting everything from idiomatic expressions to the art of eating crab. Martillo's underlying conviction is that "...you must interpret the popular not at the level of language but at its most intimate existential levels" (Martillo, in Pimentel, 1987: 187), thus distancing himself from the special attention to popular language and slang of the Sicosco group. What follows is a brief journey through Guayaquil's popular traditions, as portrayed by Jorge Martillo in his texts.

The centre of urban life is the neighbourhood (the *barrio*), in which a number of exemplary institutions are of special significance: the small shop, the pub, the chemists' and the restaurant ('Gente de barrio', 'Neighbourhood people', 1999: 86-88). A particularly important element of Guayaquil's street culture is the corner,

defined by the *cronista* as: "Place of idlers, gathering point of those who smoke, know the taste of beer, pursue love like Cupids, recite compliments of bad taste. They will have a tape recorder at full blast, a handful of cards, a guitar that knows ballads" (1999: 87)³⁸.

The street corner is both an urban observatory and the site and centre of neighbourhood life, where a recent football match is discussed, stories are told and music is played. However, its character and meaning is gender specific, revealing the segregating nature of the city's public spaces. For the men of the neighbourhood, "the corner is the lamppost from which they see the world" (1999: 87)³⁹. The reality is a different one for women, who must content themselves with observing the street corner from their windows: "In other windows, in addition to ferns and flowers, are the girls of the neighbourhood, looking out furtively. Combing their hair. Observing the forbidden corner" (p. 88)⁴⁰. This exclusion is also reflected in the slang spoken in Guayaquil's marginal areas in which, as Itúrburu has noted, women are often the object of aggression and it is less common to find female speaking subjects (1988: 90). Urban slang is the focus of one of Martillo's texts, 'Del habla popular entre nos' ('On popular speech amongst us'), where he reproduces some local expressions and slang designations of everyday objects.

A baroque abundance of food and its significance in the daily routines of Guayaquil's inhabitants is described in *crónicas* like 'Lugares para el sabor popular' ('Places for popular taste') and 'Instrucciones para comer cangrejos' ('Instructions to eat crabs'), while its omnipresence can also be perceived in the accounts of the busy atmospheres of bus stations and street markets, with their recognisable smells, sights and sounds:

"In the very corner, a man has put up a music stand. He sells recorded tapes and there are tapes for every musical taste...

Opposite, and next to dangerous Quito street, a woman fatter than the moon is frying tripe and their smoke captivates more than one passer-by. Further away, in a cart parked in the middle of the pavement, coconut water is sold... The people in the queue get desperate. Some

³⁸ "Lugar de vagos, punto de reunión de los que fuman, saben del sabor de las cervezas, persiguen el amor como Cupidos, recitan piropos de mal gusto. Tendrán una grabadora a alto volumen, un manójo de naipes, una guitarra que sabe de baladas."

³⁹ "la esquina es su faro desde el cual ven al mundo"

⁴⁰ "En otras ventanas, a más de helechos y flores, están las muchachas del barrio; mirando con disimulo. Peinándose. Observando la esquina prohibida."

of them nervous, others angry and tired of standing, others buying sweet bread or enormous loaves that stick out of the basket of the baker. Others get bags of *capulis* to eat during the journey throwing the pips through the window. Half a block away salted nuts are sold and another woman laminates documents: identity cards, police records, prints of miraculous saints like Narcisita or Saint Gregorius.” (p. 124)⁴¹.

The other ubiquitous element of Guayaquil’s everyday life is music. In all depictions of popular atmospheres there is music in the background, and Martillo often quotes the lyrics of *boleros*, *pasillos* or *salsa* rhythms, presenting them as a sort of double text that offers a parallel interpretation of the phenomena described. References to popular singers abound, like Carmen Lara, Panchito Riset, Marvin Santiago, who are played on street corners or city buses; or Arturo Sandoval, Charlie Sepúlveda, Elsa Soares, Fabrizio de André, Adalberto Álvarez, Rey Ruiz, in the *cronista*’s apartment. In addition, several *crónicas* exclusively explore the city’s traditional music clubs of the *lagarteros* or musicians for hire, in ‘La bohemia en Guayaquil’ (‘The bohemia in Guayaquil’) and ‘La bohemia en “El Rincón de los Artistas”’ (‘The bohemia in ‘The Artists’ Corner’’) (1999: 135-140, 143-146) and the salsa nights. Music appears, in all these texts, as the central element of a festive culture, marking the celebratory character of the city’s daily life:

“As in all ports, there’s a party every night after work. Sweat is washed away by celebration. Darkness invites noise; the heat of the tropics makes life indoors impossible and throws people unto the streets. The inhabitants of the port go from the inside to the outside. Their life is in the windows with flowers, in the balconies. They boil on the warm pavements, explode in the aluminium hallways, drink in the pubs where juke boxes moan with *pasillos*. This is the port: work and celebration.” (p. 135)⁴².

⁴¹ “En la justa esquina, un señor ha levantado un Bazar Musical. Vende cassettes grabados y hay para todos los gustos musicales...”

Al frente, y junto a la peligrosa calle Quito, una señora más gorda que la luna asa tripitas y el humo de éstas cautiva a más de un transeúnte. Más allá, en una carretilla estacionada en pleno pase peatonal se vende agua de coco... La gente que hace cola se desespera. Unos inquietos, otros molestos y cansados de estar parados, los de más allá compran panes de dulce o unas gigantescas palanquetas que sobresalen del canasto del panadero. Otros se hacen de funditas de capulíes para ir comiendo en el camino y lanzando las pepitas por la ventana. A media cuadra, se vende canguil con sal y otra mujer emplastica documentos: cédulas de identidad, récord policial, estampitas de santos milagrosos como la Narcisita o San Gregorio.”

⁴² “Como en todos los puertos, la fiesta es de todas las noches después del trabajo de todos los días. El sudor es lavado por el festejo. La oscuridad convoca a la algarabía; el calor del trópico hace insoportable la vida en los interiores y lanza a la gente a las calles. El porteño es de adentro para afuera. Su vida está en las floridas ventanas, en los voladores balcones. Bulle en las cálidas veredas, explota en

The *cronista* has also depicted the city's most significant popular figures, profusely reproduced in images and readily transformed into myths. The *cholo* singer Julio Jaramillo (to whom the *crónica* 'Julio Jaramillo: Vida, pasillo y guitarra', 'Julio Jaramillo: Life, song and guitar', 1999: 47-53) is dedicated) is the most significant of them. On the other hand, popular religion has at its central saint Narcisa:

"Narcisa is the people's saint. Her 'consecrated' image hangs from the walls of the humblest households, shops and restaurants. Pubs with sad drunken men who love *pasillos*: next to the posters of the Barcelona team, Julio Jaramillo, Jaime Roldós and calendars with pictures of naked women stands the image of Narcisa, on one side on an improvised altar." (p. 42)⁴³

Significantly, saint Narcisa, together with mad Clarita from the apocalyptic Centenario Square (see above), are the only two women who, in the *cronista*'s account, have any public prominence in this strongly male-dominated city.

In addition, other *crónicas* portray specific popular cultural practices. Two texts depict a horse race and a cock fight ('Un domingo de equus caballus', 'A Sunday at the Races' and 'Un domingo de espuelas y gallos', 'A Sunday of cocks'). Another portrays the local custom of burning dolls on New Year's night ('Las últimas caretas del año'; 'The last dolls of the year'). There is also an attempt to describe and ascertain the significance of various mass cultural forms. Thus, one *crónica* examines the golden past of Latin American soaps, the radio versions of the more modern *telenovelas* ('En tiempos de radionovelas', 'In the time of radio novels'), while another focuses on the significance of radio as a main means of daily communication between the urban poor ('Los mensajes radiales suenan a bandas de pueblo', 'Radio messages sound like rural bands'). In the latter, typical announcements that can still be heard today in the city's most popular radio-station, which penetrates into the remotest slums, are quoted: "In Palmares, district of Colimes, calling for the family of Ismael Vargas. Family Ismael Vargas and Martha Burgos, we advise that the patient

los zaguanes de aluminio, bebe en las cantinas de rockolas quejumbrosas y pasilleras. Eso es el puerto: trabajo y fiesta."

⁴³ "Narcisa es la Beata del pueblo. Su retrato "bendecido" cuelga de las paredes de los hogares más humildes, tiendas, salones de comidas y cantinas. Cantinas de borrachos tristes y pasilleros: junto a los afiches del Barcelona, Julio Jaramillo, Jaime Roldós y calendarios con fotos de mujeres desnudas, allí a un costado y sobre un improvisado altar, está la imagen de la niña Narcisa"

was operated on yesterday and is fine. Bring the chickens. Natividad Vargas sends this message” (p. 118)⁴⁴.

Newspapers are often the source of peculiar stories reproduced in *crónicas* in which the limits between reality and fiction become unclear. Thus, a *crónica* like ‘De pescadores, ángeles y poetas’ (‘Of fishermen, angels and poets’, 1999: 97-101) recreates, in the context of the narrator’s inability to find poetic inspiration, an amazing story published in Guayaquil’s tabloid *El Extra*, in which fishermen lost at sea claim to have been miraculously saved by an angel. This important role of the press as a source of material for the *crónicas* predominates especially in *Guayaquil de mis desvaríos*, where we find, among other texts, an old story about crocodiles, which used to abound in this tropical port, and the account of a man’s survival in the city’s gutters (‘Historia con lagartos’, ‘Story with crocodiles’, and ‘Ocho días bajo Guayaquil’, ‘Eight days under Guayaquil’), as well as the portrayal of a man who desperately reads old newspapers in search of “a past in which reality goes beyond fiction” (‘El hombre que leía periódicos de ayer’, ‘The man who read yesterday’s paper’, after a popular song of the same name).

An important element in Jorge Martillo’s representation of popular culture is its temporal dimension. Martillo presents his texts in the tradition of the historical *crónica*, the important figures of which he often quotes, offering narrative accounts of the city’s past and also tracing elements of today’s city back in time. However, all his depictions of modern city life and culture are characterised by their ambiguous temporality: they permanently oscillate between past and present, often appear to be describing a recent past rather than the present (the city of the *cronista*’s childhood and adolescence) and are pervaded by a sense of nostalgia towards a way of life that, as a remnant of times gone by, becomes doubly marginal in today’s city. Martillo’s *crónicas* often trace the decay of the city’s most distinctive social and cultural forms. Thus, for example, his account of the neighbourhood also asserts the destructive consequences of the passing of time:

“The corner is inhabited by other boys with untidy hair; the billiard room is a place of electronic games; the shopkeeper left with his money for the sierra and now counts his

⁴⁴ “En Los Palmares, parroquia Colimes se llama a la familia Ismael Vargas. Así Ismael Vargas es la familia y a Martha Burgos les comunicamos que la enferma fue operada ayer y está sin novedad. Traiga los pollos. Comunica Natividad Vargas.”

animals to fall asleep; the chemist committed suicide because nobody listened to his advice; the restaurant is a fried chicken shop; the pub a bar dark as the mouth of a wolf." (1999: 88)⁴⁵

The disappearance of a particular kind of neighbourhood, the *vecindario* or communal organisation of dwellings around a common patio, is contrasted with the creation of new extensive areas of 'invaded' territories in the periphery ('Gente de patios de vecindad', 'People of neighbourhood patios', 1999: 89-91), while the city's bohemian singers (the *lagarteros*) are portrayed as the last remnants of a disappearing tradition ('La bohemia en Guayaquil' and 'La bohemia en El Rincón de los Artistas').

On the other hand, Martillo's *crónicas* become a means of registering the author's lived experience of growing up in Guayaquil, recovering "Reminiscences, memories of the street... Images rescued from trunks and the last hiding place of memory" (1999: 29)⁴⁶ and giving a highly personal tone to some of his accounts of popular cultural forms. For example, one of his *crónicas* on football, is initiated with the following reflection:

"When they told me that Negro Iván had been killed, my memory stretched like an alligator that opens its jaws and suddenly I remembered the Saturdays of five-a-side: Saturdays' freedom and fantasy called us like two beautiful muses to kick routine into touch. I remembered Letamendi Street crossing Los Ríos Street, like the dagger that killed Negro. I remember the people from the corner, 'Barbadillo' Freddy, 'Monkey' Armando: eternal wanderers." ('Rag ball, streets of asphalt', 1999: 29)⁴⁷

The peculiarity of Martillo's *crónicas* is that they offer not just an descriptive dissection of popular cultural forms, but through them an account of the *cronista's* individual lived experience of the city he writes about and loves.

⁴⁵ "La esquina está poblada por otros muchachos de cabellos alborotados; el billar es una sala de juegos electrónicos; el tendero se fue con bastante dinero a la sierra y ahora cuenta a sus animales para conciliar el sueño; el boticario se suicidó porque nadie hacía caso a sus consejos farmacéuticos; el restaurante es un local de venta de pollos fritos; el salón, una barra-bar oscura como una boca de lobo."

⁴⁶ "Recuerdos. Memorias de las calle... Imágenes rescatadas de baúles y el último escondrijo de la memoria".

⁴⁷ "Cuando me contaron que habían matado al Negro Iván, mi memoria se desprecizó como un lagarto que abre sus fauces y de pronto recordé los sábados de índor: sábados en que la libertad y la fantasía como dos hermosas musas nos convocaban para propinarle una soberana goleada a la rutina. Recordé la calle Letamendi atravesando, como el puñal que mató al Negro, la calle Los Ríos. Recordé a la gente de la esquina, a "Barbadillo" Freddy, al "Monito" Armando: caminantes eternos." ('Pelota de trapo, calles de asfalto', 1999: 29).

The mixture between high and low

The *crónica* is characteristically a genre that crosses boundaries between high and low culture, combining the literary vision and practice of its author with its mass cultural character as a form that is inextricably related to the press. Therefore, all *crónicas* and all *cronistas* are permanently moving within this heterogeneous territory defined by the coexistence of its various dissimilar components. However, Jorge Martillo has made the combination between elements from high and low the explicit field of forces in which his texts are situated both in terms of content and of form, so that the combination between the most literary and aestheticising elements with the most popular cultural aspects itself becomes the core of the writing project.

In terms of content, Martillo's depiction of scenes of everyday life often contrast with his allusions to literary figures and works that the *cronista*-poet reads in the intimacy of his home. References to writers of literature – especially poets – like Rilke, Rimbaud, Leopardi, John Dos Passos, Stevenson, Hart Crane, Sylvia Plath, Lawrence Durrell, and Onetti, Cabrera Infante, Gangotena and Cisneros among the Latin Americans, often appear in his texts. Furthermore, these classic readings from the canon of world literature are used to complement Martillo's accounts and to interpret city life, providing a kind of subtext that gives a further dimension to the narrated events. Sometimes, the sheer contrast between these different elements has a comic effect, as in the following example, taken from a text which describes a bus journey to the South of the city:

"The 'show' started: a hungry child started singing and everybody collected a few coins to silence his lament. Viejito Libertino recalled with his good memory some verses by Drummond de Andrade: 'A child weeps at night, behind the wall, behind the street,/ far away a child weeps, maybe in another city,/ maybe in another world'. Some misunderstood and threw some money at him; a fat woman even shed a tear." (1991: 188)⁴⁸

At other times, this contrast identifies an underlying irony, as in the text where the *cronista* interviews an *escribidor* or street writer, a figure who has acquired

⁴⁸ "El 'show' comenzó: un niño hambriento empezó a cantar y todos recolectaron unas pocas monedas para callar su lamento. El memorioso Viejito Libertino recordó versos de Drummond de Andrade y los recitó: "Un niño llora en la noche, tras la pared, tras la calle,/ a lo lejos un niño llora, tal vez en otra

literary notoriety after portrayals by Vargas Llosa and García Márquez: "I ask him my last and innocent question and the street writer tells us: "García Márquez, Vargas Llosa! I swear I don't know those graduates" (*GD*: 'Confessions of a street writer')⁴⁹.

More generally, the *cronista* uses literary quotations to add a deeper, more universal dimension to the particular aspects of everyday life he is describing, as in the following example, which describes an eclipse of the moon:

"One could hear screams from the streets. Barking, the footsteps of shadows. Women had dragged chairs to the hallways, had left pots in the fire, had forgotten their forgetful husbands, had turned their backs on the soap to look at the screen of the nocturnal sky. Something exploded in my chest. My steps led me to the library, and Giacomo Leopardí, with pessimistic voice, said: "Oh you! Gracious moon, I remember / that, a year ago, to this hill / I came full of anguish to contemplate you! / And you rose over that jungle, / like now, illuminating it all". Now it was also illuminating this concrete jungle.

This culture of asphalt that now remembered you. They were all lunatic, from the hallucinated poets to the merchants that complained because they couldn't profit from you, from that moon eclipse." (1999: 59)⁵⁰

Formally, the adoption of a very literary tone is combined with the use of journalistic and stylistic elements that reinforce the texts' communicative aspects. Thus, on the one hand, Martillo adopts what could be described as a sort of Baudelairean aesthetics, stylising his accounts of city life with an abundant use of tropes and especially highlighting and focusing on specific elements like the night, cats, the prostitute; images of marginality and of poverty and decay. On the other hand, the aesthetics of popular song, which are often extensively quoted in his texts, the practice of journalistic techniques (especially the interview), the conscious use of stylistic and structural elements such as profuse employment of adjectives, repetition

ciudad/ en otro mundo tal vez". Algunos creyeron mal y le lanzaron unas ayoras; a una gorda hasta se le escapó un lagrimón."

⁴⁹ "Le hago mi última e inocente pregunta y el Escribidor nos dice: "¡García Márquez, Vargas Llosa! Le juro que yo no conozco a esos licenciados" (*GD*: 'Confesiones del Escribidor').

⁵⁰ "Desde las calles llegaban gritos. Ladridos, pisadas de sombras. Las señoras habían arrastrado sillas a los zaguanes, habían dejado las ollas en brasas del fogón, habían olvidado a sus olvidadizos maridos, habían dado las espaldas a telenovelas para mirar la pantalla del cielo nocturno. Algo reventó en mi pecho. Mis pasos me llevaron a la biblioteca, y Giacomo Leopardí, con voz pesimista, decía: "¡Oh tú! graciosa luna, yo me acuerdo / de que, hace un año, a esta colina / vine lleno de angustias a contemplarte! / Y tú te alzabas sobre aquella selva, / como ahora, que toda la iluminas". Ahora también iluminaba esta selva de cemento.

of distinguishing images and redundancy, as well as the texts' imperfections, are all factors that indicate that the *crónicas* are, in the first instance, texts written for and addressed to the mass public of newspaper readers.

This alternation between the high and the low is also reproduced, on a different plane, in the contrast between Martillo's poetic production, which has a very limited audience, and his *crónicas*, which have been enormously successful. Fernando Iturburu has expressed it as follows:

"In Martillo's case... I think what is striking is that he moves from a world full of life (because life is what the *crónicas* of his villages, full of goats, pigs, fish, sea, sun, *cholos* and women, irradiate) to a world of horrid and grotesque references ("mud immobilises my tongue"). It is also curious that his *crónicas* are as much read (or more, I hope) as the sports pages of the newspapers and that, in almost the opposite way, his poetry (...) has seduced a whole Jury of national recognition and possibly *some readers of poetry*" (1994: 226-227).

5. Conclusion

Jorge Martillo has departed from, renovated and transformed the tradition of the historical *crónica*, which since colonial times had had an established presence in the city he inhabits. His narratives of city life have the descriptive and topographic intention that is characteristic of the historical *crónica* and make ample use of writings and diverse sources that belong to this tradition, but incorporate at the same time the *cronista*'s subjective experience and various literary and journalistic techniques.

Martillo has used the *crónica* as a means of mapping the city, of refamiliarising readers with a fragmented, unknown urban landscape (Ortega) and of recovering and rescuing a marginalised popular tradition that is present in the city's working class and historical areas. He understands the task of the *cronista* as one of uncovering the real character of the city, which is determined by the popular culture and everyday lives of the dominated sectors of the population, of revealing a hidden reality beyond deceiving appearances. Only a profound knowledge and experience of the city and its inhabitants makes his task possible. The *crónica*, far beyond a mere

Esta cultura del asfalto que ahora se acordaba de ti. Todos estaban lunáticos, desde alucinados poetas hasta mercaderes que se lamentaban de no poder sacar provecho de ti, de ese eclipse lunar."

record of everyday existence, becomes in this context the register of a journey of discovery and of interpretation, of decipherment of a complex reality.

However, this journey bears the marks of personal subjectivity and can also be read as the *cronista's* individual diary, memory or chronicle of his experience of the city. The very description of the city's topography and of its popular culture, its general characterisation, is filtered through Martillo's own perception, while the *cronista* is often depicted in the acts of wandering and observing in the streets and in his personal retreats. It is this portrayal of city life through the subjective experience of one of its inhabitants what makes these *crónicas* not just a folkloric portrayal of typicality, but representations of a living tradition in which the *cronista* participates.

In this personal response to living and writing the city, Martillo has produced in his *crónicas* a new way of dealing with present urban fragmentation. The *cronista* does not give up the attempt of comprehending and interpreting an increasingly fragmented city. Rather, he has subjectivised this attempt, establishing a new connection between city and self, and making his texts, as highly personal journeys that recover the city's authentic character in its forgotten landscapes and neglected traditions, also an existential journey of discovery of the self.

The unique popular success of Martillo's *crónicas* is related to the task of recovery and interpretation of the popular and the marginal as signs of the city's character and identity he has undertaken, and to the combination of these elements with a universal literary canon and intellectual tradition. His texts stand out in the midst of the poor, often strictly informative context of the city's press as rare islands of literary stylisation that are nevertheless followed and enjoyed by wide sections of the population. Martillo has been described as the most widely read writer in Ecuador (Itúrburu 1994: 219). In chapter 8 we will see how groups of readers from different social origins relate to one of his texts, which appeal to both educated readers and popular readers who recognise and identify in his *crónicas* a shared experience of everyday life in Guayaquil.

CHAPTER 7

CULTURAL CONSUMPTION, LITERARY TASTE AND *CRÓNICA* READING PRACTICES

1. Theoretical context

Reception and cultural consumption

Since the 1970s a growing theoretical interest in the complex processes that determine the reception of literary texts signalled a move away from the traditional focus on the author's intentions or on the work's 'hidden' meaning in the study of literature. This went hand in hand with a vindication and a renewed understanding of the active role of the reader and, more generally, of the cultural consumer, which contrasted with the image of passive dupe concomitant with the denunciation of the alienating effects of the culture industry by members of the Frankfurt school, and especially by Theodor Adorno (see chapter 1 for a discussion of his views). Communication became the basis of a renewed approach to the literary text, and the text's meaning was seen as the result of the interaction between text and reader. Thus, for Wolfgang Iser, the text is merely "a potential effect that is realized in the reading process", a process which is examined in terms of the reader's creative filling of the structures of indeterminacy that are by necessity embedded in any text (1978).

However, reception theory has generally tended to remain centred on the text, which has continued to be its analytical basis, offering new and wider insights for its fuller understanding rather than shifting its focus towards the readers themselves. Its concern with actual reading processes and their effect on concrete readers has therefore remained limited and theoretical in nature.

On the other hand, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu has shown that taste and cultural consumption are determined by social class and help to reproduce and legitimate in turn social inequalities. Thus, Bourdieu has examined the legitimate way to perceive cultural objects in terms of the 'pure gaze', which is the basis of the aesthetic disposition as:

“...the capacity to consider in and for themselves, as form rather than function, not only the works designated for such apprehension, i.e., legitimate works of art, but everything in the world, including cultural objects which are not yet consecrated... and natural objects.” (1989: 3)

The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world and affirms the Kantian principle of disinterestedness (which gives the pure judgement of taste its characteristic freedom, distinguishing the beautiful from the agreeable and the good) as its main attribute. In this, as Bourdieu shows, it reveals itself as the mode of perception characteristic of a social class that is free from economic necessity:

“The aesthetic disposition, a generalised capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art. In other words, it presupposes the distance from the world (...) which is the basis of the bourgeois experience of the world” (1989: 54)

On the contrary, a popular ‘aesthetic’, which Bourdieu puts in inverted commas because in his view it is an aesthetic ‘in itself’ but not ‘for itself’, is the negative opposite of this Kantian aesthetic and is based on the “systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life”, i.e. on the assumption of a basic continuity between art and the ordinary world. Thus, working class people’s appreciation of cultural objects has, according to Bourdieu, an ethical basis: every object is expected to perform an explicit function, implying the subordination of form to function and thus reversing the assertion of distance from the ordinary world characteristic of the aesthetic disposition:

“In contrast to the detachment and disinterestedness which aesthetic theory regards as the only way of recognizing the work of art for what it is, i.e., autonomous, *selbständig*, the ‘popular aesthetic’ ignores or refuses the refusal of ‘facile’ involvement and ‘vulgar’ enjoyment, a refusal which is the basis of the taste for formal experiment.” (1989: 4)

Bourdieu has especially insisted, against the tendency to naturalise legitimate perception of works of art, on the fact that consumption is also an act of decoding,

which presupposes the mastery of a cipher or code, i.e. a certain degree of aesthetic competence. Cultural objects can only be deciphered by those who possess their code. The lack of competence affects how a work is received, and is also related to the reduction of cultural objects to the perceptual schemes applied to everyday life that is characteristic of working class perception, as pointed out above. Thus, Bourdieu corroborates that,

“When faced with legitimate works of art, people most lacking the specific competence apply to them the perceptual schemes of their own ethos, the very ones which structure their everyday perceptions of everyday existence.” (1989: 44)

Aesthetic competence is acquired by a repeated contact with works of art and is mainly practical. It is the product of a slow and imperceptible familiarisation that has become a habitus, enabling the individual to unconsciously apply to unknown objects its principles and rules, which have been internalised:

“The unconscious mastery of the instruments of appropriation which are the basis of familiarity with cultural works is acquired by slow familiarisation... Connoisseurship is an ‘art’ which, like the art of thinking or the art of living, cannot be imparted entirely in the form of precepts or instruction, and apprenticeship to it presupposes the equivalent of prolonged contact between disciple and initiate in traditional education, i.e. repeated contact with the work (or with works of the same class).” (1993: 228)

Aesthetic competence, or the mastery of the means for the specific appropriation of works of art, is related, according to Bourdieu, to educational capital and social origins. Variations in educational capital are always closely related to variations in competence, even in areas that, like cinema or jazz, do not form part of the educational system. With equal educational capital, differences in aesthetic competence according to social origin are especially marked when, on the one hand, one refers less to a strict competence and more to a sort of familiarity with culture, and when, on the other hand, one moves from the most ‘scholastic’ areas to less legitimate areas of ‘extra-curricular’ culture (1989: 63).

Bourdieu’s demystification of ‘the ideology of natural taste’, which transforms differences in the acquisition of culture into differences of nature, and his insistence on the conditions which make the acquisition of culture possible, are ultimately

related to the aim of showing culture's role in naturalising and legitimising social difference, through revealing the interest in disinterestedness:

"The parenthesizing of the social conditions which render possible culture and culture become nature, cultivated nature, having all the appearances of grace or a gift and yet acquired, so therefore 'deserved', is the precedent condition of charismatic ideology which makes it possible to confer on culture and in particular on 'love of art' the all-important place which they occupy in bourgeois 'sociodicy'. The bourgeoisie find naturally in culture as cultivated nature and culture that has become nature the only possible principle for the legitimation of their privilege." (1993: 235)

Bourdieu's insights into the relationship between taste and social class offer an empirical and theoretical basis through which differences in cultural consumption can be assessed. In particular, I will be examining in the next chapter how the prevalence in readers of an aesthetic disposition or of a popular aesthetic, as well as different degrees of cultural competence, affect the actual reception of *crónicas*. However, a similar reservation to the one expressed above about reception theory can be made. Although attention is here centred on the reader or cultural consumer and no longer on the text, there is also a tendency to move away from actual, concrete reading processes in order to make sociological generalisations on the effects of class on cultural taste, which become the main focus of attention.

Paradoxically, it is the kind of insights offered by reception theory, and in particular the literary hermeneutics of Hans Robert Jauss, that can in turn be used to complement Bourdieu's theories about the character and nature of the legitimate perception of works of art and to go beyond his clearcut distinction between legitimate and popular taste. In his *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (1977), Jauss emphasised the importance of aesthetic experience in communicating norms and contents to social praxis, its preorientative capacity which, according to him, is realised through the process of catharsis. He defined catharsis as "that pleasure of one's own emotions... that are capable of making listeners and/ or spectators change their opinions as well as to liberate their souls", a definition which comprises both the practical use of art for its social function of communicating norms of behaviour and art's capacity to liberate the individual from the practical constraints of everyday reality (1992: 76). On the other hand, "...aesthetic experience...

completes the incomplete world by proposing future experiences as well as by preserving past ones, which would be lost to humanity if it was not for literature and art which explain them and turn them into monuments” (1992: 40).

This emphasis on the work’s content and on its communicative purposes and effects, on the fact that it transmits an experience, a knowledge and a vision of the world to its readers, and that it can transform their views, exposes Bourdieu’s views on the aesthetic disposition and the primacy of form over function as partial, which cannot account for the full complexity of the exchange that takes place between text and reader. It is the communicative and preorienting aspects of aesthetic experience, its power to change people’s attitudes and propose new evaluations of themselves and the world, that accounts for art’s transformative potential in society, which is reduced to a minimum in the theories of Bourdieu. While wanting to preserve Bourdieu’s insights about aesthetic competence as related to differences in educational capital and social origins for the empirical examination of readers’ attitudes towards the *crónica*, I shall be approaching reception also as a communicative process in which people’s experiences and knowledge of their city determine the way in which they perceive and relate to the *crónica* as an account of city life.

The text and the reader

It has been shown in chapter 3 that *crónicas* appear profusely in Mexico City’s newspapers and magazines and more marginally in Guayaquil’s press. Often they are also, at a later stage, compiled in books and consumed by their public in this form. In addition, it must also be noted that *crónicas* appear in the better quality newspapers (the *crónica roja* or crime story of the tabloid press can be considered the *crónica*’s ‘bad twin’), i.e. those consumed by the public with the highest cultural capital and which in Latin America rarely exceed 100,000 copies.

The medium in which the *crónica* appears and its conditions of production have left a mark on the genre. *Crónicas* are determined by the fact that they are written in exchange for money to be published in the periodical press, with pressures and limitations of time, space, theme and style. *Cronistas*, as producers, do not possess autonomy from the medium in which they write and are subject to the demands of the editor, on the one hand, and the readership, on the other.

As Martín Barbero has noticed in the context of the *feuilleton* in the 19th century, the dialectics between writing and reading is a key factor in considering how the genre operates (1997: 144). This author, who views reading as a site for the mediation from the structures of the text to those of society and vice versa, distinguishes four different levels through which the world of the reader is incorporated into the process of writing, penetrating and leaving its marks on the text, which in their turn refer from the text to the cultural universe of the popular. Firstly, at the level of the material organisation of the text, there is what Martín Barbero calls the mechanisms of *typographic composition*: clear big and spaced letters (plus line spacing, margins, letter types) which are destined to make reading easier to inexperienced readers, who are still immersed in a universe of oral culture. Secondly, there are the mechanisms of *fragmentation of reading*: first and foremost, the fragmentation of the story into episodes, but also a series of smaller divisions, from the size of sentences and paragraphs to the partition of the episode into parts, chapters and subchapters. This fragmentation is similarly designed to help a non-experienced public through small reading units. Thirdly, Martín Barbero points to the mechanisms of *seduction*: the organisation of the narrative into episodes (dimensions of duration and suspense) and its open-ended structure (*feuilletons* are written day by day following a plan but are also open to readers' reactions), through which the *feuilleton* can be "confused with life". What these mechanisms reveal is a new kind of writing that is intended primarily for communication with something outside itself, designed to capture and maintain the interest of the reader. Martín Barbero has referred to these significant elements of the *feuilleton* in the following way:

"...in the *feuilleton* a different relation to language appears which breaking the laws of textuality makes of writing itself the space of unfolding of a popular narration, of a *telling to*. And the popular narration lives from surprise as much as from repetition. Between the time of the cycle and the time of linear progress the periodicity of the episode and its structure *mediate*, they constitute a bridge that allows access to the latter without completely abandoning the first; the *feuilleton* is a narration that is no longer a short story but is neither yet a novel. And a writing that is not literary nor journalistic, but their "confusion", that of the current news with fiction." (1997: 146-7).

On a fourth level, Martín Barbero distinguishes the mechanisms of *recognition*, that produce the identification of the narrated world with the world of the popular reader so that “the *feuilleton* speaks to the people of whom it speaks” (1997: 148). He emphasises, for example, the significance of a new kind of hero who no longer occupies the space of the supernatural, but that of the real and the possible.

It is possible to apply the scheme elaborated by Martín Barbero for the roman-*feuilleton* to the *crónica*. At the first level, that of typographic composition, the *crónica* no longer bears the mark of its design for consumption by inexperienced readers, but is frequently differentiated from the other news items. A certain type of *crónicas* are highlighted either in the form of columns (usually with a generic title) or through the use of bold letters (in *La Jornada*, for example), which separate the space they occupy from the informative context of the news. Other *crónicas*, especially opinion articles but also the more informative, strictly journalistic texts, appear integrated with the other news. It is the former type that tends to be compiled in books, although there are exceptions to this, like Loaeza’s columns in Mexico and Febres Cordero’s in Ecuador.

On the second level, that of fragmentation of reading, the *crónica* is clearly conceived as a short text, a fragment, that can be consumed in a similar way to other news items. Many *crónicas* possess the usual journalistic divisions that organise, facilitate and order reading by dividing it into parts through the use of titles and subtitles. Similarly, the length of sentences and paragraphs is generally controlled. In addition, there are clear limits on the size of the *crónica*, which are usually more strict in newspapers than in magazines. Long *crónicas* can and have been written, but have had to appear either divided into episodes or directly published in books. *Crónicas* can also be conceived as belonging to a series and as loosely integrating a larger whole. The most current mechanism to achieve this are the continued portrayal of the same places and atmospheres, and especially the focus of the development of the *crónicas*’ plot around the experiences of central characters (for example, in the texts of the Mexican Pérez Cruz).

The third level concerns the *crónica*’s mechanisms of seduction, the strategies through which it attracts and communicates to its readers. Just as the *feuilleton* is based on its organisation into episodes and its open-ended structure to produce a life effect, the *crónica* is founded on the fragmentary and presents itself as a contemporary and fleeting portrayal of an instant of life. In both cases, the effect is the

association of the text with everyday life, however the strategy followed to achieve it is a different one. The *crónica* is a narrative of the moment; its duration is that of the instant, and it is precisely because of this that it becomes a particularly adequate medium to reflect the fragmentation and plurality of modern urban life. The *crónica* asserts an element of permanent presentness: many *crónicas* are commentaries on current events, others are portraits of contemporary life. Martín Barbero's characterisation of the *feuilleton* as a new form of popular narration in which a story is *told* to someone (quoted above) can be applied to the *crónica* as well which, like the *feuilleton*, can also be considered a "confusion" between journalistic and literary writing, between current news and fiction. On a more specific plane, *cronistas* seek to attract readers with the use of various mechanisms, like a catchy title or first paragraph and the deployment of recurring metaphors and images that can be identified by readers as belonging to an author's personal style.

On the fourth level, that of recognition or the mechanisms that produce the identification of the narrated world with the world of the popular reader, the *crónica* portrays the urban scenes and landscapes that form part of the everyday life of the city's inhabitants. Readers can often recognise streets and settings, peculiar characters or the typicality of the anonymous urban dweller. A plurality of voices from below from individuals and groups of people the author observes and often interviews are incorporated, while the *cronista* him or herself becomes a identifiable character of urban life.

The world of the reader also enters the *crónica* through the *cronistas'* specific conceptions of their public, of the readership they want to address with their texts. While it is true that all texts presuppose or imply a reader, *crónicas* differ from strictly literary texts in that they are explicitly made to be consumed by a certain kind of public: the readers of a particular newspaper. In this respect, it is useful to reassess here *cronistas'* specific images of their readership, which have already been discussed in chapter 4. When asked 'For which reader do you write?' all *cronistas* pointed, implicitly or explicitly, to a general and heterogeneous mass reader. Some, who are also literary writers in the restricted market, made the distinction between the limited public of their literary works and the general public of their *crónicas* (for example the poet Jorge Martillo). Others pointed out that they expected to make their texts attractive to readers who were not specifically interested in the areas they discussed (like Villoro and also Cueli, who desired that his texts on bullfighting could be read

and enjoyed also by people who do not like bullfighting). On the other hand, many *cronistas* dissected their specific audiences along the lines of class, age or gender, and according to the readership of particular newspapers or of specific journalistic genres. Thus, Fabrizio Mejía and Sergio González described the different profiles of the readers of the most prominent newspapers of Mexico City (*Reforma* and *La Jornada*). Simón Espinosa pointed out that the newspaper's editorial page is especially read by bureaucrats and politicians. Poniatowska characterised her public as lower middle-class, left wing and especially female; Guadalupe Loaeza pointed out that her readers are especially women and young people, and Ignacio Trejo identified students as his main audience. While some *cronistas* communicate with a public that is essentially similar to themselves in class terms (for example, Cuví, who points at the middle and upper class intellectual urban reader from Quito), others, like Pérez Cruz, come from and portray a working-class world that is largely unknown to their predominantly middle class readers.

The *crónica's* characteristic features in terms of form and content and the *cronistas'* views and intentions to address a particular readership indicate that readers are structurally present in the text. However, to truly understand the character of the relationship of the text with its reader, it is necessary to turn to the processes of reception themselves, i.e. to the concrete practices through which the *crónica* is consumed and apprehended by its public. It is thus with the attitudes, preferences and practices of readers, that this part of the thesis is primarily concerned.

2. Reception of the *crónica* in México City and Guayaquil

2.1. Introduction

This and the next chapter deal with the reception of the *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil. Different empirical methods have been used to approach this issue. On the one hand, a questionnaire on cultural consumption and *crónica* reading practices was distributed among the public who attended the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City, which took place in Mexico City from the 7th to the 12th of February 2000 (the questionnaire is reproduced in appendix 6). It provided some general information on *crónica* reading patterns in relation to wider habits of cultural consumption. On the other hand, focus groups were used to investigate in detail how

crónicas are read and understood by people from different social backgrounds. In addition, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the members who had participated in the focus group sessions. These explored the relationship between literary reading habits and *crónica* reading practices and preferences, and also included some questions on the reader's social views (see appendix 7, where the questionnaire that served as basis for the interviews is presented).

In studying the reception of the *crónica* my work was limited by several external constraints. In the first place, there is a relative lack of empirical studies of cultural and specifically literary reception, an absence that becomes more striking in the Latin American context. While, especially during the last decade, there have been important initiatives to investigate a wide array of forms of cultural consumption¹, general information on the subject as well as particular studies of the reception of specific forms is still relatively scarce. The genre of the *crónica*, as pointed out elsewhere, has been relegated to a marginal position in the literary institution, and as a consequence has been largely ignored by literary historians and critics. The study of its reception is not assisted by such a lack of critical attention, which has accompanied the genre throughout its history.

In what follows, this chapter examines the results of the questionnaire on *crónica* reading practices as well as the interviews with individual readers of *crónica*. In the next chapter the various reading sessions with focus groups will be analysed.

2.2. A questionnaire on *crónica* reading practices

The questionnaire comprised general questions about reading practices, media consumption and attendance to cultural activities, and also inquired about specific issues related to the reading of *crónicas*, including a series of open-ended questions on the readers' preferences in the genre. It was distributed among what was a very specific and knowledgeable audience with a manifest interest in the genre of the *crónica*: the public of the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City, which was celebrated from the 7th to the 12th of February 2000 in Mexico City. The Meeting was

¹ This is especially true in Mexico, where the group of researchers led by Néstor García Canclini has made significant contributions to the study of cultural consumption in Mexico City. Of special importance are the following works: García Canclini, Gulco and others (1991); García Canclini (Coord.) (1993) and (1998); García Canclini and Moneta (coord.) (1999). In Ecuador, studies as well as official statistics on cultural consumption are practically non-existent.

organised by Instituto Politécnico Nacional, Instituto de Cultura de la Ciudad de México and Consejo de la Crónica; attendance was free of charge. During its course, several conferences as well as panel discussions on the most varied aspects of the historical and contemporary *crónica* took place. The questionnaire was handed out on the last day of activities. Thirty-one completed questionnaires were returned.

General Demographic Data

Sex

There were nine female respondents and twenty-one male (one answer is missing).

Age

Ages ranged from 18 to 75. Almost half the respondents were between 30 and 60 years old. There was a high proportion of people over 60 (30%). Seven respondents were younger than 30.

Education

Most respondents had higher education (24). One had further education and three secondary education.

Occupation

Over half the respondents worked in the professional sector (16). Between them, there were teachers and lecturers, writers and journalists. There were four clerks, five employees in the service sector and four university students. Retired people (5) have been classified following their former occupation.

Reading habits, media and cultural use

Reading habits and media consumption

Fifteen respondents read the newspaper on a daily basis, six every weekend, and five sometimes. *La Jornada* was the most widely read newspaper (16). Six people read *Reforma*, six *El Universal*, six *Excélsior*, four *El Financiero* and four *Unomásuno*. Half of the respondents (15) read more than one newspaper.

Most respondents (18) read from one to three books a month. Eight read more than three books a month and four read less than one book a month. Most (19) read between one and three hours a day. Eight read more than three hours a day, and three less than one hour a day. Half of the respondents (15) watched television from one to three hours a day. Eleven respondents watched less than one hour a day, while four watched more than three hours a day. Thirteen respondents listened to the radio between one and three hours a day; ten listened more than three hours a day, and seven less than an hour a day.

The average amount of hours a day dedicated to reading is 2,8, while respondents watch television an average of 1,4 hours and listen to the radio 2,6 hours. This offers a big contrast to the average figures presented by González and Chávez for the inhabitants of Mexico City: 2.5 hours a day are devoted to watching television, a similar amount to listening to the radio and only half an hour to reading (quoted in García Canclini, 1998: 49). The general pattern of reading and media consumption in this sample responds to the high educational capital and to the occupational background of respondents (the very long hours some members of the liberal professions, especially lecturers and teachers, writers and journalists, devote to reading also pushes the general average up).

Attendance to cultural activities

Nearly all (28) respondents went regularly (at least once a month) to museums and/or exhibitions. Nineteen went to concerts, sixteen to the cinema and ten to the theatre on a regular basis. Only five respondents went regularly to sports events. Many (20) attended other cultural activities such as conferences, book presentations, courses and literary workshops.

In a territorially fragmented city that is generally characterised by a high degree of inequality in cultural provision in different areas and by a low level of participation in public urban culture², we find a relatively high level of attendance at cultural activities among respondents, which corresponds to their high educational levels and socio-economic position. However, the most popular cultural events are exhibitions, museums, courses and conferences, i.e. low cost or free cultural events, and not cinema, theatre or concerts. If the data is recoded into two groups, cultural

² See Néstor García Canclini, 'Las cuatro ciudades de México' and 'Qué hay para ver: mapas de la oferta y prácticas culturales', in García Canclini (coord.) (1998).

consumers and non-consumers, according to attendance at cultural activities in general, and especially to paid ones (cultural consumers have been defined as those who regularly attend at least two among cinema, concert or theatre, plus one other like museum/exhibition or book presentations) we find that people are equally distributed among the two groups: fifteen people are regular cultural consumers and fifteen are not.

***Crónica* reading practices and preferences**

***Crónica* reading practices**

Respondents were regular readers of *crónica*: thirty people read *crónicas*. One person did not read *crónica* and had attended the event out of general interest in cultural activities. Another person stated that she did not read many *crónicas*. Most people had been reading *crónicas* over a long period of time (24), and only four people had been reading *crónicas* for a year or less.

Thirteen respondents said they read *crónicas* in both newspapers and books, while ten people read them solely in newspapers and only three exclusively in books. The number of people who read *crónicas* in books was, unexpectedly, very high (16 out of 31), and indicates the *crónica*'s prominence not just as a journalistic genre, but as a literary one as well. This, however, does not specify frequency, and it is possible that most people read *crónicas* regularly in the newspaper and only occasionally in books.

Nineteen out of twenty-four people who answered the question (80%) stated they had read books of *crónicas*. Eight people pointed to books or authors of *crónicas* from the past. The most often mentioned among them were González Obregón, who has written a very popular book on the history of the streets of Mexico City, and Salvador Novo (four times each). There were also references to Artemio del Valle Arizpe (2), Prieto (2), Enrique Gómez Carrillo, Bernal Díaz and Cortés. Six people pointed to contemporary books or *cronistas*. They referred to popular *cronistas* of the 1980s and 1990s: Emmanuel Carballo, Ignacio Trejo, Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska, Arturo Trejo Villafuerte, Emiliano Pérez Cruz and Jaime Avilés (all mentioned once). The most frequently mentioned book (three times) was *Crónicas romanas*, by Ignacio Trejo. Two respondents pointed to both historical and contemporary books/authors at the same time.

Reasons for reading *crónica*

An open question asked respondents to state their reasons for reading *crónica*. The most widely given reason was to know about city life (6 respondents). It is interesting to note some coincidences in identifying that what is sought is specifically a portrait of urban *life*, as in the following accounts: "I am interested in knowing about city life in all its aspects" (respondent 2), "I find them interesting because they give me the account of the everyday life of our city and of its various manifestations" (respondent 31, who is a journalist). The reference to city life also came up in answers to other questions, and was mentioned at some point of the questionnaire by a total number of seven respondents (see below for other quotes). Further, a respondent said that *crónicas* "are a mirror of my city" (respondent 14) and another pointed to possible uses of the knowledge offered by the *crónicas*: "they take me closer and help me to know better and thus to value and to take care of my city, and also to understand its inhabitants" (respondent 4).

Six people said they read *crónicas* because they like them or find them interesting and informative. Five respondents answered that *crónicas* are amusing, didactic and/or informative, for example: "Because they are very amusing, agile, very informative, and this information is complete and clear" (respondent 7), and "it is the most amusing and didactic journalistic and literary genre. It has the truth of the press and the imagination of literature." (respondent 29) (both respondents were journalists, and the second a *cronista*).

Three respondents pointed out that they read *crónicas* to know or to evoke the city's past, one of them stating: "I have the impression that in the *crónica* one goes back to the past in a lively form" (respondent 3).

Three people wrote they read *crónicas* for informative purposes and one person pointed he looked for an in depth description of events: "Because they describe in depth the reality of a news event" (respondent 5). Another pointed out that he read *crónicas* to know the author's point of view.

One respondent gave entertainment as the reason for *crónica* reading and another said he read *crónicas* to pass the time. Two respondents also pointed out that *crónicas* served to learn to write (respondents 10 and 23).

If we regroup these answers into wider categories, we find a total number of thirteen respondents pointing to general liking/entertainment/amusement as a reason

for reading *crónica*; eight wanted to know about the city or its past, and five sought information.

Age has an impact on the reasons for reading *crónicas*. Most young respondents (aged less than 30) pointed out that they read *crónicas* because of general liking/entertainment (5 out of 6), and one said he wanted to know about the city's past. Among respondents aged from 30 to 60, by contrast, answers were distributed equally between the three main reasons for *crónica* reading: knowledge of the city (4), information (5) and general liking/entertainment (4). (Note that all respondents who pointed at information were aged between 30 and 60). Respondents aged over 60 gave as reasons for reading *crónicas* general liking/entertainment (4) and knowledge of the city (3).

Most female respondents (over 60%) gave general liking/entertainment as the reason for reading *crónicas*. Two out of eight pointed to information and only one to knowledge of the city. Around 40% of male respondents chose general liking/entertainment (8) and knowledge of the city (7) as reasons for reading *crónicas*. Only three out of nineteen pointed at information.

Profession also appears to have some impact on the reasons for reading *crónica*, although due to the small size of many of the groups it is difficult to obtain a definite pattern. The four students from the sample gave general liking/entertainment/amusement as the reason for *crónica* reading. On the other hand, the five respondents who chose information were all professionals.

Respondents who generally read more (from one to three books a month and more than three books a month) pointed less to knowledge of the city and more to information as a reason for reading *crónicas*.

Preferences of different kinds of *crónica*

Respondents chose as their preferred kinds of *crónicas* historical *crónicas* (29) and *crónicas* of everyday life in the city (24). Political *crónicas* followed (14), and the least popular were sports *crónicas* (6). The most often chosen combinations of preferences were historical *crónicas* and *crónicas* of everyday life (11), and historical *crónicas*, *crónicas* of everyday life and political *crónicas* (7).

Generally, age, sex and profession affect the pattern of which type of *crónicas* are chosen. Political and sports *crónicas* were more popular with older age groups. *Crónicas* of everyday life were especially popular amongst the age group between 30

and 60. Female respondents tended to choose historical *crónica* and *crónicas* of everyday life in higher proportion, and male respondents manifested a higher preference for political and sports *crónica*. Political *crónicas* and *crónicas* of everyday life were less popular among service workers and students, and sports *crónicas* were chosen by clerks and service workers in a higher proportion.

A higher proportion of the respondents who read more chose historical *crónicas*. Preference for political *crónicas* is equal among respondents who read less than one book and between one and three books a month (50%), but is significantly lower (25%) with those who read more than three books a month. None of the respondents who read more than three books a month (8) chose sport *crónica* as one of their preferred types (among the other groups, sports *crónicas* were chosen by approximately 25% of the respondents). Between 70 and 75% of respondents who read from one to three books and more than three books a month chose *crónicas* of everyday life, while all the four respondents who read less than a book a month chose *crónicas* of everyday life as one of their preferences.

Where *crónicas* are usually read – newspapers, books or in both – also seems to be related to preferences. Historical *crónicas* tend to be overall popular and sports *crónicas* overall less popular among respondents. Among the three people who only read *crónicas* in books, political *crónicas* and *crónicas* of everyday life are less popular.

There is a relationship between which newspaper respondents read and their preferred kind of *crónicas*, although it is difficult to point to definite trends as some of the groups of newspaper readers are too small. Political *crónicas* tend to be most popular (76% or 10 out of 13 respondents) among readers of newspaper *La Jornada*. None of the three readers of newspaper *Reforma* chose political *crónica*. Two of the three *Reforma* readers did not choose *crónicas* of everyday life as their preferences, while readers of other newspapers tend to choose them in very high proportion.

Twenty-five respondents answered the question of why they liked the different types of *crónica*. Five pointed to general interest/linking and four said they wanted to know about the city in which they live. Among the latter are the following answers: “Because I get more involved with the life of this great city” (respondent 5), which mentions city *life* (see above) once more; and “It is my environment, my sphere and what, in principle, interests me” (respondent 29).

Three respondents pointed out that they look for knowledge of the past; for example: "I am interested in knowing how the city used to be, and in discovering how it has been transformed through time" (respondent 18). Two mentioned remembrance, like respondent 3, who said "It brings to my mind my past as a youth", and two said they had a special interest in history. Further, three respondents said they read these *crónicas* to be informed, one as a representation of the place where she lives, and another to reaffirm his identity with his country.

Thus, answers to the question of why respondents like the particular types of *crónica* they have chosen belong mainly to the following groups: knowledge of the past/remembrance (7 or 28%), knowledge/representation of today's city (7 or 28%), general interest/liking (6 or 24%), information (3 or 12%).

Preferences of *cronistas*

When asked whether they especially liked any *cronista*, thirteen respondents pointed to contemporary writers of urban *crónica*. Among them Monsiváis (5 respondents), Ignacio Trejo (3), Conde Ortega (3), Pacheco (2), Ibarguengoitia, Leñero, César Benítez, Poniatowska, Pérez Cruz, Trejo Villafuerte, Víctor M. Navarro. One person mentioned García Márquez between other Mexican *cronistas*. González Gamio, a contemporary writer of historical *crónicas* and member of the city's Consejo de la *Crónica*, which had co-organised the event, and who was present in most of the sessions, was also mentioned by some of the respondents who pointed primarily to urban *cronistas*. Similarly, Novo (mentioned by 4 respondents), an urban *cronista* from the 1940s and 1950s, was also a preference of some respondents who referred to historical *cronistas*. Eight respondents pointed to historical *cronistas*; these were González Gamio (3 respondents) and Henestrosa (contemporary), González Obregón (3 respondents), Valle Arizpe (2), Payno, Cortés and Bernal Díaz (from the past). Three respondents wrote they did not like any *cronista* in particular and one pointed out that he liked them all.

Fifteen respondents answered the question of why they liked particular *cronistas*. Four of them pointed out that they return us to the past. Two respondents mentioned the *cronista*'s personal style, two their critical and satirical vision and one objectivity and sincerity.

Respondent 4 wrote about his preferences: "Carlos Monsiváis 'Por mi madre, bohemios' ('For my mother, bohemians'), Cristina Pacheco 'Mar de historias' ('Sea

of stories'), Angeles González Gamio; the first ones for their satire about the declarations of politicians; the second, although they are short stories, because they take us closer to the possible characters of our city; and the last ones because they show us the most interesting and often unknown places of our city" (all the *crónicas* chosen are weekly contributions of newspaper *La Jornada*). Respondent 7 pointed out: "Jorge Ibargüengoitia, Gabriel García Márquez, Vicente Leñero, etc. For their ability to represent life in every one of their words".

Other answers included the *cronistas'* culture and amenity (respondent 30) and "because she reaches the depths of the human" (respondent 23, on Cristina Pacheco).

Political views and reasons for attending the Meeting

Views of the public sphere

All respondents replied to the open question of what were considered to be the most important social and political themes in present day Mexico. Most pointed to the very widely discussed issues of the moment: the proximity of the general elections (to be held in July 2000) in which the party that had been in government for over 70 years, the PRI, would be challenged and eventually defeated by the conservative party (PAN) led by Vicente Fox, and the situation at the National University (UNAM), in which a strike was being carried out. In general terms, most respondents highlighted issues related to the PRI government and the coming elections, the situation at UNAM and education, the national economy and poverty. Many respondents combined in their answers several of these themes; the most widely mentioned combination was government and elections and UNAM. UNAM/education appeared in a total of seventeen answers and government and elections in sixteen, while poverty was mentioned in four. Other comments included references to violence and corruption, to the situation in Chiapas, the mass media, globalisation, the water shortage in Mexico city, insecurity and unemployment.

Reasons for attending the meeting

Four of the respondents attended the 1st Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City out of a general interest in cultural activities; five had an interest in what happens in the city or in its history, and eight had an specific interest in the genre of the *crónica*. Among the latter were the following answers, which all underline the proximity of *cronistas* to

their public and the respondents' desire to meet the people who write the everyday history of their city:

"To meet and make contact with the people that are writing the *crónica* of Mexico City; to be able to ask them for advice and help in the knowledge of our city." (Respondent 4)

"Because it is the first time that we can see and listen to the *cronistas* who make the history of this city." (Respondent 14)

"Because I found this kind of meeting very interesting, and to get direct information from the *cronistas* of what they do about the events that take place in Mexico City." (Respondent 22)

Five respondents had attended the meeting out of professional interest and six because of a recommendation or an invitation.

In relation to the question of what themes from the series of conferences and panel discussions were found more interesting, six people pointed to aspects or sessions related to the historical and architectural *crónica*, four referred to those associated with the urban *crónica* and five to a combination of both. Seven respondents said all the themes were equally interesting.

When asked if they would add any other themes that had not been discussed, the following were proposed: *crónicas* of art, of science and of education (respondent 4), street-names in the old city (respondent 5); conservation of historical buildings (respondent 11); legends (respondent 19); urban *crónica* from the present (respondent 29, *cronista*); *crónica* of art, of music and dance and of spectacles, not only national but also international (respondent 31, journalist).

2.2. Interviews with readers: literary reading habits and *crónica* reading practices

This section examines the results of the individual interviews conducted with the people who had participated in the focus group sessions of *crónica* reading (examined in the next chapter). The interviews dealt with social opinions, reading habits and preferences and knowledge of literature, as well as with readers' knowledge and preferences within the genre of the *crónica* (see appendix 7 for a

model of the questionnaire)³. The intention was to relate *crónica* reading practices to wider reading habits, to establish whether the reader of *crónicas* was also a reader of literature and also to inquire into the reasons for reading *crónica* and the particular needs and preferences of readers.

The interviews were conducted amongst most of the people that had participated in the focus group sessions of readings of *crónicas*. The three focus groups in Mexico City were composed of philosophy students from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, a public university (group 1), philosophy students from Universidad Iberoamericana, a private institution (group 2) and people who attended the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City (group 3). In Guayaquil, the three focus groups were constituted by psychology students from the Universidad Estatal de Guayaquil, a public institution (group 1), psychology students from Universidad Católica de Guayaquil, a private institution (group 2) and members of a literary workshop (group 3) (for a fuller explanation of the composition of the focus groups see next chapter). A total of 14 interviews were conducted with Mexican readers: 5 readers from group 1, 2 from group 2 and 7 from group 3. 11 Ecuadorian readers were interviewed: 4 readers from group 1, 3 from group 2 and 4 from group 3.

Social opinions and reading practices

As a preliminary point, it is necessary to note that class differences were much more marked in the groups from Guayaquil than in those of Mexico City. Thus, in Mexico City readers from the two groups of university students were largely middle class, with slight differences in gradation and the presence of two working-class readers in the group from the public university. Readers from group 3 (attendants at the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City) were of mixed social origins: working class (1), lower middle class (4) and upper middle class (2). In Guayaquil, readers from the public university (group 1) were working class or lower middle class, while readers from groups 2 and 3 (private university and members of a literary workshop respectively) were all upper middle class or upper class.

Interestingly, with regard to social and political views, there were notorious differences in the two countries. Generally, the perception of the social impact of class

³ For the elaboration of the questionnaire I am indebted to Bridget Fowler whose questionnaire on the reception of the romance (1991) provided the basis for this one.

and ethnic origins was much more acute among readers from Guayaquil. In Mexico City only 3 people out of 14 believed that society is constituted by two main social classes, while 8 chose the option that it was composed by groups of different status and 2 by individuals with different amounts of money. In Guayaquil, the proportion was reversed: 8 people out of 11 described society as constituted by two main social classes, while only 1 person said it was composed by groups of different status and 2 by individuals with different amounts of money. In Mexico City, 6 people believed that social class greatly affects or determines the social opportunities of the individual, while 8 people maintained that it was not determinant or only to a relative extent (highlighting especially that education was a very important factor for improvement and for social mobility). With regard to ethnic origins, the weight attributed to its role in determining social opportunities was greater: 9 people maintained it greatly determined the opportunities of the individual, while 5 said it only affected them to a certain extent. The marginal situation of the large Indian population that inhabits Mexico City was mentioned as an example by one reader who believed that ethnic origin had a great determinant effect on social opportunities today (reader 4), while another pointed out that Indians were members of the poorest social sectors (reader 5). Two readers made the following remarks:

“Amongst ourselves we have the idea that an Indian... is dedicated more to gardening, or that they knit to sell and export, or embroider T-shirts. It determines a lot. And I think that, even if our roots are linked, the fact of living in the capital and of there being more creoles than Indians determines you, because sometimes you act as exploiter. You make them literate but you steal their essence and continuing to see them below you.” (reader 7)

“At least here it determines, because if you don't speak good enough Spanish it's a disadvantage. Noone cultivates the dialect nor do the authorities speak it. There is a disadvantage, you are excluded. Here the Indians that matter are the dead ones.” (reader 9)

In Guayaquil 8 readers believed that class determines the social opportunities of the individual today, while only three maintained that class affects them only partially, highlighting the role of individual capacity, effort and preparation. This proportion was maintained with regard to ethnic origins. It must be noted that the view of the great impact of class on social opportunities was shared by working class,

middle class and upper class readers. The following quotes express the differences in how they viewed and assessed this impact; the first comes from a working class reader and the second from an upper class reader:

“For example, those who graduate from a Catholic University, whose daddy has a position, obviously do not need to find a job. They study to have the piece of paper to be able to occupy a position that was already destined to them (...) Everything here works by influences; if you don’t know the right people you are never going to have a good position. Few people are valued for their intellect, for what they really know or their professional competence (...) Generally everything is manipulated. Here we live a democracy in inverted commas.” (reader 16)

“...we live in a very small city that functions like a village, in which everybody knows each other, knows where one comes from, with whom one is related. I have lived this closely. I have been in jobs where the boss tells you ‘I prefer to have people I know, obviously to have capable, brilliant, responsible people, but from within this circle’. But it is also true that sometimes people who come from a lower social class have sufficient merit to have a very important post and they get it, and we have clear examples. But I believe that this happens, that social class determines the opportunities you get. Also because of money: everybody wants people from the best universities, with the best degrees, and if you don’t have a scholarship you have to pay to study.” (reader 22)

Another reader from middle class origins made the following remark:

“I believe that especially Guayaquil – I don’t know how it is in Ecuador in general – functions a lot on the basis of who you know; I don’t know if it’s so much from where you come. Especially at the level of the upper classes it is very important who your mother is, who your father is, which family you come from; it’s a basic question, it’s a need to know where everybody comes from... At the level of other classes, amongst the middle classes, it is more difficult, but also the relations you have determine your opportunities.”(reader 25)

Several upper-middle class readers from Guayaquil maintained that ethnic differences and class differences are inextricably related. As one reader expressed, in Guayaquil “to speak of the working class means to speak of skin, it means you are darker” (reader 25). Another reader similarly maintained that the upper class is white:

“Here there is still no great diversity; for example, there are no big groups of black people with a lot of money, or of indigenous people with a lot of money, or the typical coastal *cholo*. Generally, if you study Guayaquil, the people with a lot of money are descendants of Spaniards or descendants of Europeans.” (reader 22)

In Mexico City, the most important social and political issues of the moment were perceived to be related to education and/or the youth (9 readers out of 14). 5 readers pointed at poverty and unemployment, 5 at politics and the government and two at the mentality and beliefs of the people. In Guayaquil 6 people out of 11 pointed at the economic crisis and/or poverty as the major social issue of the moment, while 3 mentioned politics (a false democracy or problems of governability) and 2 the mentality of the people.

The greater class differences amongst readers from Guayaquil were translated into greater differences in reading practices between groups. In Mexico City, the vast majority of the readers interviewed possessed either what could be described as a middlebrow taste (read texts from mixed origins and traditions, including literature and popular genres, essays and reportage) or were readers of legitimate culture (including some readers who especially enjoyed the works of the literary avant-garde or the *maudit* authors, such as Baudelaire and Bukowski). In Guayaquil, all the members of group 1 (public university) could be characterised as ‘popular’ or ‘lowbrow’ readers: they did not read much and consumed basically non-literary texts (several readers mentioned self-help and spiritualist books). There was one significant exception in this group: a popular reader with also a strong liking of national social realism (especially the works of the group of Guayaquil of the 1930s). Readers from group 2 (private university) had a middlebrow taste, reading the most popular works from the literary tradition (such as the novels of Marcela Serrano, Isabel Allende) and mixing them with best sellers (Verne, Coelho, Cuauhtémoc Sánchez). All the members of group 3 (literary workshop) were literary readers of legitimate taste (with preferences for Latin American authors, especially Cortázar and Borges).

In addition, there were also significant differences with regard to *crónica* reading practices, partly due to the different social significance of the genre in the two countries, and partly to the different social origins and reading practices of readers. *Crónica* reading was much more generalised among Mexican readers: 9 out of 14 regularly read *crónicas*. Two (one from group 1 and one from group 3, public

university and attendants at *cronistas'* meeting respectively) did not read much *crónica* or only read it if it especially caught their attention. One reader with popular taste (group 1) read the social *crónicas* (informative texts about high society events). The two readers from group 2 (private university) that were interviewed did not read *crónicas*. In Guayaquil, none of the members from groups 1 (public university) and 2 (private university) read *crónica* (although two readers said they liked reading opinion articles), and generally the level of newspaper reading was very low, especially among members of group 1. All the readers from group 3 (members of a literary workshop; 4 people) said they did not read much *crónica* at present but used to read Martillo's texts published years before in the Sunday Supplement of newspaper *El Universo*. *Crónica* reading practices appear thus directly related to general habits of cultural consumption, in particular to a legitimate or middlebrow literary taste. Moreover, as will be seen below in some detail in the specific analysis of individual readers, in many cases the habit of reading *crónicas* is not perceived as separate from literary reading practices.

Motivations for reading

With regard to general reading practices, some questions were designed to try to ascertain people's motivation for reading. In particular, there was a multiple choice question which asked readers to choose from among four possible reasons those which best described their interest in reading: distraction, interest in a record of lived experience, interest in an imaginary world and interest in the critical ideas of the writer. Readers' responses proved that the four options were not exclusive; on the contrary, they often implied and/or complemented each other. Many readers chose two or three options; a regularly appearing combination in Mexico City was interest in an imaginary world, interest in a record of lived experience and interest in the critical ideas of the writer (5 readers). In Guayaquil, on the other hand, readers especially emphasised interest in lived experience (9 out of 11), combining it with interest in an imaginary world (3) or interest in the critical ideas of the writer (3). In particular, it is worth noting that readers perceived interest in an imaginary world and interest in a record of lived experience as complementary. As one reader stated, "in lived experience I also include an imaginary one" (reader 23). Other readers related their interest in reading about an imaginary world to the literary currents of magical realism

(reader 3, see below for a quote) and to surrealism. Thus, reader 25 stated with respect to interest in an imaginary world:

“Especially, for example when I speak about surrealist literature, from the three components [the others were distraction and interest in a record of lived experience] it is maybe the least important. I generally don’t read much literature where the main component is imagination; for example, science fiction, things like that, where everything is structured differently. This doesn’t catch my attention. I prefer things that are related to reality, not those impossible worlds, or those things from the history of the time of the dinosaurs.”

Readers who particularly enjoyed reading essays tended to choose interest in the critical ideas of the writer (especially readers 1, 13 and 14). Reader 11 stated that none of the four reasons described his interest in reading, which was mainly related to an aesthetic search for beauty. Distraction, while disregarded by some readers of legitimate taste or put in a secondary place of importance (for example, by reader 3), was chosen by other readers of legitimate taste as a main reason for reading (readers 6, 9, 22, 25) and by none of the readers of popular taste.⁴

However, people’s reasons for reading were more richly revealed in the course of the interview, when readers talked freely about their preferences. Thus, reader 3, of legitimate taste, emphasised he preferred the form in which things are said over their content and read selectively following this choice. In this context, reader 23 made the following remark, which sums up the reasons and expectations characteristic of a reader of legitimate taste:

“When I choose a book I generally expect to find a good story. And one always learns something about one thing or other, and if it is something about social reality good, that is, this is good and anything else is also good. But I’m not expecting anything special when I read a book, only that it is good in all its aspects.”

⁴ The design of this multiple choice question about reasons for reading was based on a question from Bridget Fowler’s study of the reception of the romance (1991), but my results contradict some of her assumptions. By explicitly choosing not to take account of literary modernism (1991: 119-120), Fowler established a direct opposition between realist literature (and legitimate readers’ desire to find out the truth about people and society) and the mythological fantasy of popular genres such as the romance, which has proven too reductive with readers who have a wide experience of non-realist 20th century literary forms. The fact that some readers of legitimate taste chose distraction as a reason for reading, that sheer pleasure and enjoyment can be associated with the highest artistic forms, also points to the fact that the art/entertainment dichotomy is far more complex than is sometimes assumed to be.

By contrast, reader 6 expressed that what he liked in his favourite authors is that they reflect the world in which he lives, while reader 19 made the following comment:

“...I like reading books that teach you something. For example I have read all those written by Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez... They are books of personal improvement, that make you think what you are doing with your life... Also a lot of books like those of Marcela Serrano, books that tell stories... but that at the end help you think. That you can identify with them.”

Both these readers can be considered to have middlebrow taste.

Similarly, there was a multiple choice question about reasons for reading *crónica*, which contemplated four possible answers: a) to recognise the places in which one has lived or been, b) to obtain information about the past of the city, c) to read about aspects of the popular culture and everyday life of the various social groups of the city, and d) to obtain information about the present situation and interpretations of news events. The vast majority of readers from Mexico City chose d) as a reason for reading *crónica* (11 out of 14). This reveals how important the *crónica*'s role as an everyday news item is in this country. 3 readers from group 3 (attendants to the First Meeting of *Cronistas*) stated that all the four reasons described their interest in the *crónica*. To recognise the places in which one has lived or been was also explicitly highlighted by several readers (4). Two readers chose reason c) and only one reader reason b).

In Guayaquil choices varied greatly in the different groups. All readers from group 1 (public university) pointed at reason c), i.e. to read about aspects of the popular culture and everyday life of the various social groups of the city, as a reason for reading *crónica*. Thus, these readers, although they were not actual consumers of *crónicas* and were asked about their preferences merely in hypothetical terms, expressed an interest in seeing their own everyday lives reflected in the *crónica*. All the readers in group 2 (private university) highlighted reason d) – to obtain information about the present situation and interpretations of news events – while all the readers of group 3 (literary workshop members) chose reason c), and none of them selected reason d). In Guayaquil, 9 of 10 readers selected reason c), 4 readers chose d), 4 chose reason b) and 3 readers (all of them from group 3) selected a). Readers from Guayaquil thus privileged the *crónica* as a portrayal of popular culture and

everyday life in the city, while Mexican readers especially highlighted its informative and interpretative role of current news.

Other reasons for reading *crónica* given at different moments during the course of the interview can be divided into those that privilege information and those that emphasise literary enjoyment and form. Thus, among the second type, reader 3 insisted that “when I read something I do it because of a desire to read and sometimes not with the consciousness that I am reading a *crónica*”. On the other extreme, reader 1 said that she read the *cronistas* “because they reflect, they generally know the political and cultural themes. One cannot have this knowledge oneself”. Reader 7 similarly highlighted the *crónica*’s informative content, although she also suggested the importance of form. She commented that she read *crónicas*

“... depending on the event. If there is an important problem, it is to see what they say, how they narrate it. It is precisely that what distracts you. With others, it is not an important theme, but they do take you away from where you are. It is for distraction, or also to find out more. You also learn about what is happening or about what they narrate.”

She also stated that a *crónica* is more attractive than other journalistic genres: “because I believe that it reads easier than a journalistic article or a very formal news report. The *crónica* narrates, it takes you in.”

Reader 10 expressed a similar view, relating the *crónica*’s informative content to its formal qualities:

“I read them because, to begin with, they are informative, very interesting, they reflect a different vision of the news...The language they use is not a very informative language, but it is rather more descriptive; that’s very nice. Also to have a general vision of what is written in a newspaper.”

Preferences of types of *crónica*

With regard to preferences of types of *crónica*, in Mexico City the most popular were *crónicas* of social movements (selected by 10 readers). Historical *crónicas*, *crónicas* of everyday life and political *crónicas* followed, each selected by 8

readers. Only two readers liked sports *crónicas*. In Guayaquil⁵, historical *crónicas* and *crónicas* of everyday life were each selected by five readers, while political *crónicas* were chosen by 3. None of the people interviewed read sports *crónica*.

Reader 13 said with respect to *crónicas* of social movements: "I like them but I don't take them as urban *crónica*, but as stories based on reality. I think they are very subjective." Some readers (5, 7 and 25) explicitly stated that they did not enjoy reading political *crónicas*. For reader 6, political *crónicas* were the most adventurous:

"Generally, I believe that political *crónicas* are the most risky. Like those about social movements. They don't make any commitments but are always confronting... The style is to criticise the politician or the social movement (...) They are the most risky because of the themes."

Reader 23, from Guayaquil, stated the following about political *crónicas*: "I really like humour in politics, I think here it is very important. (...) Sharp humour is very interesting in politics; one can even have an atmosphere of discussion with sharp humour".

Many readers expressed preferences for certain *cronistas*, especially in Mexico City, where they were more familiar with the genre. Several readers pointed out they especially liked reading Monsiváis' texts: reader 1 (who liked his spontaneous and gay form of speaking), reader 3 (who liked his black humour), and readers 4, 7 (both liked his irony and style of denouncing and accusing) and 11. Other authors highlighted by more than one reader were Pacheco (readers 4, 7, 9), Villoro (readers 6, 9, 10, 12), and, in Ecuador, Martillo (readers 22, 23, 24, 25).

Descriptions of the city and of ordinary people's lives

The interview also included two questions that asked readers whether they enjoyed reading about their city and about ordinary people and their lives. These questions were designed to ascertain whether there was a relationship between *crónica* reading practices and readers' interest in descriptions of everyday urban life. Most readers manifested an interest in reading about their city (18 out of 25 or 72%):

⁵ The category '*crónicas* of social movements' was not given as an option to readers of Guayaquil, because this type of *crónica* is not produced there. Some readers who never read *crónicas* and seldom the newspaper (4) were not asked to select their favourite types of *crónica*.

10 out of 14 readers in México City (including all the 7 readers from group 3, attendants at the Meeting of *Cronistas*) and 8 out of 11 readers in Guayaquil. Some readers expressed their interest in a rather passive way, while others showed a very keen attitude with regard to reading about their city. An example of the latter is reader 4, an enthusiastic reader of urban *crónica*, who stated: "I really like reading about the city, because I live and walk in it; I know it all". Reader 5 specified he liked reading about the city streets and their history, while reader 6 stated the following:

"Yes, of course, and about cities in general. What I like about Servín... is that he speaks about everyday life, about the everyday city, about the world that we live daily, without falling into slang, or becoming one of the gang, or the 'people', or whatever you want to call it. He has a great command of language."

The reasons for these readers' interest in reading about their city all seem to be related with the ability to recognise places and habits, to relate them to their everyday experiences of their city.

On the other hand, knowledge and the desire to understand hidden or less visible aspects of the everyday reality more fully, and in some cases a search for an interpretation of urban life, was hinted at by other readers. For example, reader 9, who stated:

"I like having an interest in my city... There is a book called *Crónicas y leyendas mexicanas* which I like. Well, it's not books, it's more like magazines of legends, of stories that happen in the city. I sometimes walk by and don't notice them until someone tells me 'hey, here they are'. That's why I like reading *crónicas* about my city".

Knowledge of the city's past was important for reader 19, who stated that she likes to read about her city "because one is curious about knowing what there went before. I like it and have read it. But sometimes it is also very disappointing, there have been so many things that one says 'ah, our history is a disaster'. It is interesting but also a bit sad."

Reader 23 underlined that she liked reading about her city and searched especially for an interpretation of urban life within a universal pattern:

"I think it is interesting when one recognises the city in a novel, and even more interesting when one detects in that narration something that one can extrapolate to the universal, because one has the benefit of experience but feels that it can be understood by any other person and that it is your city which is being understood under universal concepts."

Both attitudes – the desire to recognise places and habits that form part of everyday urban life and the need to know and understand one's city more fully -- are not mutually excluding, but rather represent different sides of the same interest in seeing one's own world literarily expressed.

Readers 8, 11, 12 (group 1, public university, Mexico City), 14 (group 2, private university, Mexico City), 15 (group 1, public university, Guayaquil), 21 (group 2, private university, Guayaquil) and 22 (group 3, member of literary workshop, Guayaquil) did not especially like reading about their city. Precisely the same element of recognition of urban practices and experiences was given by one of these readers as a reason for *not* choosing to read about his city: "I would prefer to read the history of Berlin, because I don't share the experiences of other cities" (reader 12).

14 readers or 56% stated they liked to read about ordinary people and their lives: 8 of the 14 Mexican readers and 6 of the 11 Ecuadorian readers. Readers 4 and 7, who usually read historical *crónicas*, *crónicas* of everyday life and *crónicas* of social movements, both stated they loved reading about ordinary people's lives. Reader 7 enthusiastically answered: "Yes, I like it very much. You always see it but don't imagine it can be like that, as they narrate it, or don't see it's there. That's why I like it.". Reader 11, from working class origins and who had said he did not particularly like reading about his city stated the following: "Of course; in fact, I intend to write a book about the culture of my neighbourhood. For example, Agustín Yáñez, José Agustín, Poniatowska, have this style". Similarly, reader 14, who did not like reading about her city and was not a regular reader of *crónicas*, manifested a keen interest in reading about ordinary people's lives, referring to a popular book on youth gangs from *cronista* Emiliano Pérez Cruz: "I like that. There is a book called *Los chavos banda...* well, maybe it could be considered *crónica*. And it is very interesting, because it lets you see the social problem as it is. It faithfully reveals the social problem. To that extent, yes".

Reader 23 pointed out that the expression of ordinary people's lives was a necessary element in good (realist) novels, discriminating between this and the mere intention of portraying the life of the working classes without a wider literary objective: "Well, I think that this forms a constitutive part of a good novel if it is urban. Then I like it, because otherwise I think a good documentary can be better. A television documentary or a journalistic reportage."

In this context, several readers expressed some reserve with respect to the form ordinary people's lives are portrayed in literature. Among them, reader 6 from Mexico City, who criticised the tendency of either idealising or merely criticising ordinary people's lives. He answered to the question as follows:

"Yes, but sometimes it is done very badly. There is a tendency to sublimate the life of the working class man, the peasant, life on the streets. Or there is the tendency to criticise. I would prefer that the people did it. Because for example Pacheco did create a school of writing about everyday life; her programs of *Here we live*, her *Sea of stories*. But I don't like Pacheco, I have never liked her, I find her too stylised..."

Similarly, three Ecuadorian readers made some nuances to their interest in reading about ordinary people's lives. Reader 15, from working-class origins, said that sometimes these texts focus on gossip, but that she was interested when there was a contribution to the community. Reader 16 said she was interested provided that the book was good, while reader 19 stated that it depended on how it was written.

Readers 3, 5 (group 3, attendant at Meeting of *Cronistas*, Mexico City), 8, 9, 10 (group 1, public university, Mexico City), 13 (group 2, private university, Mexico City), 17 (group 1, public university, Guayaquil), 20, 21 (group 2, private university, Guayaquil), 22 and 24 (group 3, literary workshop, Guayaquil) did not like reading about ordinary people's lives. Reader 5, from working-class origins, stated the following: "I don't like it very much. But I find it interesting when I read something about why it is like that. I live it rather than read about it. I understand them more because I talk with them, I am one of them". Reader 8, also working class, similarly pointed out that he preferred talking to the people than reading about them. Reader 22 tended to avoid this kind of subjects, but pointed out that she would be interested in certain themes, if she was doing research or if it was considered something of national importance.

Some comments that were made during the general course of the interviews further revealed significant aspects of the relationship between *crónica* reading practices and the enjoyment of readers when they recognised familiar landscapes and events in which they had participated in literary texts. Thus, reader 3 stated that he had especially liked an article by Onetti about Mexico City and its people because it was describing the place he inhabits and its past (see quote below). Reader 4 made the following comments about her interest in *crónicas* of social movements: "I also like them very much. Including those about education, as a teacher. For example, there are many interesting ones about our great leaders of the social movements of teachers. I like them because of my personal interest, because I am a teacher, everything I lived, the present". Reader 6 also stated: "I like very much reading the *crónicas* about something I lived; for example, about demonstrations in which I participated".

2.3. Literary taste and *crónica* reading practices: A selection of readers' profiles

It is difficult to reveal in a general analysis how reading habits and preferences are concretely constituted, organised and expressed, as well as to be truly faithful to the diversity of personal reasons and forms of enjoyment of reading. Therefore, a selection of the most representative individual profiles of readers is presented below. These individual profiles function both as concrete illustrations of how a variety of tastes and preferences can be manifested and also as a sort of series of ideal types in which the combination between readers' social background, their cultural tastes and habits and their specific preferences with regard to the *crónica* takes different forms. I have chosen to focus on individuals rather than on groups of readers because of these advantages. However, the wider cultural categories to which individuals belong in terms of legitimate, middlebrow or popular taste have also been indicated.

Reader 3. Legitimate taste. A reader who particularly emphasised the primacy of form over content

Reader 3 (Group 3, attendants at the Meeting of Cronistas, Mexico City) was 28 years old. He had lower middle class origins, was doing a law degree at the National University (UNAM) and produced handicrafts.

He believed that, in what affected him personally, the most important social question of the moment was the situation of the young: unemployment, low wages, fear of violence. He also pointed at ecological problems. In his opinion, society was mainly constituted by two classes, and the middle class was progressively disappearing. He maintained that it is not social class but economic status which determines peoples' opportunities and considered that ethnic origins could be limiting, although many examples proved the contrary.

He read an average of a minimum of five books a month. His favourite genre was the short story but he also read novels. With respect to his favourite authors he said: "the ones I most enjoy are the Latin Americans, because they write in my language", and mentioned Borges, Cortázar, Monterroso, Donoso and Onetti. Among foreign authors he mentioned Marguerite Yourcenar, Michael Ende, Virginia Woolf, Edgar Alan Poe as his favourites. When asked if there was an author he did not like he answered Carlos Cuahémoc Sánchez, a writer of best sellers of personal improvement, whom he had read earlier but would not read again.

He said all the four possible reasons indicated in the questionnaire – distraction, interest in a record of lived experience, interest in an imaginary world and interest in the critical ideas of the writer – described his personal interest in reading, and added:

"Look, as Borges is one of my favourite authors, like Cortázar, and you know this is fantastic realism, magical realism, or whatever you want to call it, then I really go for the imaginary world. That is why I also really enjoy Ende's books. And – before Grass won the Nobel prize – I also thought *Tin Drum* was a marvellous book. Because of the enormous display of imagination that there is in those authors, especially in Borges and Cortázar. I think their imagination is wonderful. And the reason that I like the least I think would be distraction. I started like that, but now it has become a need, a vice."

With respect to the genre of the *crónica*, he stated the following:

"...I am not sure of what the features of the *crónica* are, so I couldn't tell you if Galeano writes *crónica*. There are many authors I've read whom one could say that in a way they write *crónicas*. In this book by Onetti there are many articles that from my point of view are *crónicas*."

He was rereading Monsiváis (*Días de guardar, Days to Remember*) before coming to the interview, whose humour he really enjoyed. He did not like Guadalupe Loaeza, whom he considered light and superficial, a best seller, and said that he probably would not buy a book by Elena Poniatowska (of whom he had read *La noche de Tlatelolco*):

“Because I consider that she writes a 100% journalistic genre. This doesn’t mean that the *crónica* cannot be a literary genre. In fact, it is. But there are writers and writers. I especially like form, more than content. Not so much what they say, but how they say it. Onetti is very boring, monotonous, but how nicely he says things. I know I am going to die without having read all the authors I would like to read, so I’m a bit selective and I choose the ones I think I like more.”

He had stopped reading the newspaper since he had internet and thus no longer read the *crónicas* that regularly appear in the press. He chose as reasons for reading *crónica* the recognition of places in which one has lived, the acquisition of information about the city’s past and the reading of aspects of popular culture of the different social groups of the city, discarding the *crónica*’s most journalistic and informative aspects. He especially emphasised the first reason:

“For example, there is here an article where Onetti speaks about Mexico and the people of Mexico and he does it in a very beautiful way and I like it. I really like the article, and not only because I am a Mexican, but also because he is speaking about the place where I live and about my past.”

He chose historical *crónicas* of the city and *crónicas* of social movements as his favourite genres. He enjoyed reading about his city, and mentioned the book *Las calles de México [The Streets of Mexico]*, although he also stated that since he had stopped reading the newspapers, which was where the urban *crónica* of the present appeared, he did not read much about that. He did not like reading about ordinary people and their lives.

Reader 4 – Middlebrow taste. An enthusiastic reader of urban *crónicas* who emphasised their reality content

Reader 4 (Group 3, attendant at Meeting of *Cronistas*, Mexico City) was 63 years old. She had middle class origins, had completed secondary education and was a teacher of crafts to adults.

She thought that politics, the private interests of politicians and the fact that they exercised power for the benefit of a privileged class were the main social problems of the time. She believed that alternation of power was the beginning of a significant change. In her opinion, society was constituted by two main social classes, and the least prepared class dominated: "As a whole, the highest posts are not given to people who are competent, but to people who have connections". According to her, social class determined social opportunities a great deal ("what you have is what you are worth", she stated); and ethnic origins also played a big influence - she talked about the different ethnic groups that immigrated to Mexico City, mentioning that the third generation has been able to study and has improved socially.

She said she was not able to read as much as she would like to because of her working hours. She could read a paperback in a week, but also liked reading cultural magazines and "everything about the *crónica*, stories, articles. It is because it is easy, quick; with a book, on the contrary, it takes me longer". She did not read many novels, because she was often interrupted and found it difficult to keep her concentration and finish the book, and preferred history instead. Among her favourite authors she mentioned historical *cronistas* who narrated the past of Mexico City: Artemio del Valle Arizpe and Calderón de la Barca. She mentioned Poniatowska as a novelist she liked, and also stated that she read no poetry. She said she would neither read about politics nor detective novels.

About Loeza she stated the following: "sometimes I listen to her, she attracts because she is so sweet, but I think she is quite simple, I think it is literature for the ladies who come for a coffee, I don't think she is very intellectual". She thought Poniatowska was "more profound, more intense", and enjoyed reading Monsiváis because "I feel he has an eye, an ear, a capacity to take part in everything, in everything that's popular..."

She highlighted interest in a record of lived experience and interest in the critical ideas of the writer as reasons for reading, also pointing out that she liked interest in an imaginary world because it implied creativity.

She read the newspaper everyday, usually two, *Reforma* and either *El Universal* or *La Jornada*. She especially focused on their cultural sections, and stated that she never read the 'social' section on high society events.

She usually read *crónicas* in the newspaper and highlighted several authors she enjoyed, emphasising the reality content of their texts. Thus, González Gamio was among her favourites because a *crónica* of hers "is well documented, is not invented". About Monsiváis she stated: "I like his way of narrating things, in between mocking, joking, a little pejorative, but describing reality. He never leaves this accusing line. I like him very much for this reason. He speaks with reality". She also read and enjoyed the urban *crónica* of newspaper *Unomásuno* (fictionalised accounts of everyday life in the city): "I feel they all have a lot of creativity, all those who appeared [in the Meeting of *Cronistas*]... to make their stories. All that is imaginary but real, treating it in a literary way in their manner as an urban *crónica*. I like that very much". In the same line, she also enjoyed Cristina Pacheco's *crónicas* of the everyday life of the poor: "she narrates it, but it is something she has always lived, that she has been asking about, that she knows; what she says is real". Finally, she also highlighted the social commitment of a writer like Galeano: "I really like Galeano because he is always defending our roots, the people, everything that has been damaged".

She liked and regularly read historical *crónicas*, *crónicas* about social movements (she highlighted in particular *crónicas* about the movements of teachers, see quote above), *crónicas* about everyday life and political *crónicas*. She found all the four reasons for reading *crónica* indicated in the questionnaire equally important (to recognise the places in which one has lived, to get information about the past of the city, to read about aspects of the popular culture and everyday life of different social groups in the city, and to get information about the present situation and interpretation of the news events). She enjoyed very much reading about her city, because "I live and walk in it", as well as reading about ordinary people's lives.

Reader 6 – Middlebrow taste. An example of an ethical reader who asserts the primacy of content over form

Reader 6 (group 3, attendant at the Meeting of *Cronistas*, Mexico City) was 22, a student of Communication Science at the National University (UNAM) and had lower middle class origins. He highlighted education, the drugs traffic, politics and especially the situation of the young as the most significant social problems of the country, and hoped that the constitution of a strong social movement from civil society could mark a way forward. He believed that class had a great impact on social opportunities, and stressed its determining influence over that of ethnic origins.

He read about one full book a month, but consulted many others. He also stressed that he read a lot of magazines. He read especially about politics, and pointed out that he liked science fiction and the Mexican novels of the present (but not the classics in the style of Rulfo, which he had read at school). He highlighted as his favourites Sartre's *La nausée*, *Cuartos para gente sola* [*Rooms for Lonely People*], a Mexican novel by Juan Manuel Servín, and Nabokov's *Lolita*. He liked Servín's novel because "it reflects the world in which I live".

As an author he did not like he pointed to the Mexican poet Jaime Sabines, also indicating what he expected from literature in general:

"He has a poem called 'Let's canonise the whores' and he has never been with a whore. He should at least speak about something he had experienced. And he was a PRI MP, in Chiapas to make it worse. Then you also realise that there are political interests behind being a poet... One reads Paz and one's world is widened, but with Sabines I don't think this happens. And this is the aim of reading, to open one's world, to say 'I had lived this and hadn't seen it like that', or 'I haven't lived this but I would like to live it'... I think that what annoys me the most in poetry is to read something that doesn't go with my life, or that doesn't say anything to me, that is pure brilliance in poetic technique. And in literature in general what I like most is what confronts me, what tells me 'don't be stupid', independently from whether the book is good or bad."

This ethical position also led him to judge the role of intellectuals like Carlos Fuentes or Octavio Paz, because

“they don’t live with the people; I have never seen Fuentes in the streets. At least Monsiváis is in the streets. They see everything from the heights and want to be right, that’s what annoys me. Their novels are generally not bad, they are good because they are well written, because their quality is good, but I like being confronted... You cannot discuss with them because it is not something you have lived and it is not something you believe they lived”.

Similarly, he criticised Elena Poniatowska for her ambiguous role during the student strike at UNAM, stating that “her duty as an intellectual is to criticise the State and politics in general for the benefit of the people”.

He liked Carlos Monsiváis, but pointed out that he used to be better in the 1970s, and that *Días de guardar* was his best book: “if you read *Días de guardar* you have read Monsiváis and in addition you have read all the history of Mexico”.

In correspondence with his interest in literature as an accurate expression of reality, he chose distraction, interest in a record of lived experience and interest in the critical ideas of the writer as main reasons for reading, pointing out that interest in an imaginary world was for him secondary.

He read the newspaper twice a week, *La Jornada* and *Milenio*, focusing on the cultural and political sections and also reading all the comics and caricatures (a very important genre in Mexico). He regularly read *crónicas* in the press – Servín was his favourite at the moment – and especially enjoyed *crónicas* of everyday life. He said all the possible reasons I enumerated for reading *crónica* were necessary, although he also expressed that to get information about the present situation and interpretations of the news events was the closest to his motivations, emphasising the *crónica*’s important role in interpreting the news:

“There are many interpretations and the news report could also do that, but in Mexico reportage is statistics, data, a very impartial vision of things. And the *crónica* is like creating the story itself... you recreate it but you are also creating it... the *crónica* as a search for interpretation rather than as the absolute truth of an event.”

He enjoyed reading about his city and about cities in general, about “the world which we experience daily”: “I really like reading about the things of my city because it brings you face to face with reality”. He also liked to read about ordinary people’s lives although he pointed out that there was often a decorative tendency in this kind of texts (see quote above).

Finally, he reinstated: “I really like the *crónicas* that confront me with what I don’t want to see, or what I still haven’t perceived”, independently from the aesthetic qualities of the texts.

Reader 8 – Popular taste

Reader 8 (Group 1, public university, Mexico City) was 27 years old and had working class origins. He pointed to education and poverty as the main social problems of the country, and thought that the household as a basic social unit was a key factor for improvement. In his opinion, society was constituted by individuals with different amounts of money, social class only partially affected the individual’s opportunities, and he viewed the dominance of the *mestizo* majority of the population over the Indian minority as necessary.

He rarely read a full book, but often read chapters of books. He liked fantasy, and mentioned adventure novels, detective novels and melodrama. He did not read books of *crónica*. He highlighted as favourite authors Machiavelli and Verne, and said he did not like John Stuart Mill or authors who dealt with political questions. He was not familiar with many of the authors I asked him about, and stated that he had not read any writings by Azuela, Loaeza, Poniatowska or Monsiváis. As his main reason for reading he highlighted interest in an imaginary world.

He occasionally read the newspaper *El Financiero*, focusing especially on the headlines, sports section, spectacles and the social pages on high society events. His favourite types of *crónica* were the *crónica* on society events and the sports *crónica*, and as the main reason for reading them he chose to get information about the present situation and interpretations of news events.

He liked reading about his city, but preferred fiction to reality. With regard to reading about ordinary people’s lives he stated the following: “not so much reading, in the sense that I prefer to investigate myself. If I am talking to somebody I like to inquire into things”.

Reader 10 – Legitimate taste

Reader 10 (group 1, public university, Mexico City) was 28 years old and had upper-middle class origins. She thought Mexico's most important problems were educational backwardness and illiteracy, poverty and crime, and stated:

"I don't think that there is a solution in terms of political parties. I do believe that there is a movement that is generated in society to change the direction of how power is exercised in this country. There have been a lot of demonstrations over this. Social movements started to emerge 30 years ago, with the student movement of 1968... In 1985, with the earthquake that affected Mexico, a lot of solidarity groups emerged; not the kind of solidarity that the hegemonic party talked about, but social solidarity and help to those who needed it. Thus I believe that within society many movements have emerged... but not much from the core of politics, it is very difficult".

She believed that society was mainly constituted by two social classes, and that resources were concentrated in a few hands. In her opinion social class had a great effect on the individual's opportunities and people with a native Indian heritage had very few opportunities for self-development and were totally marginalised (educationally, socially and politically) in present day Mexican society.

She read between 10 and 15 books a month, stating: "I am a voracious reader, yes. Because I considered that I spent a period of my life doing nothing, and there are many things that I have to read and like to read". She read especially novels; also biographies, philosophical essays and books of *crónica*, which was one of her favourite genres. She mentioned Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, Franz Kafka, Plato, Apollinaire, Baudelaire and Goethe as her favourite literary authors, "because of their critique of society. And because of the critique of sexual censorship and the amorality of their writings". Within the genre of the *crónica* she highlighted the work of Jaime Avilés ("his style is very fluid, caustic, ironic").

She read the *crónicas* of Guadalupe Loaeza in the newspaper, but did not buy her books: "I find them very vulgar; it is a *crónica* directed to a very specific public that I don't like very much. But I read it". About the work of Monsiváis, she stated the following: "I find it a very arriviste style, very fashionable. It's as if what is

fashionable must be written about. I think he is an author who is too trapped within the popular...”

She pointed to interest in a register of lived experience, interest in an imaginary world and interest in the critical ideas of the writers as main reasons for reading.

She read the newspaper four times a week, sometimes *La Jornada* and sometimes *Reforma* (especially because of its cultural supplement) and focused mainly on their cultural sections and on international and national news. She read *crónicas* that appear in the newspaper, especially those of *Reforma*, because they “reflect another vision of the news”, and stated that she liked historical *crónicas*, but also those written by Avilés and by Villoro. As reasons for reading *crónicas* she chose to recognise the places in which one has lived and to get information about the present situation and interpretations of news events.

She liked reading and finding out more about her city, but did not enjoy reading about the lives of ordinary people – “it shocks me a little”, she stated.

Reader 16 – Popular taste. A reader of Ecuadorian realism

Reader 16 (group 1, public university, Guayaquil) was 23 years old and had lower middle class origins. She thought that Ecuador’s most important problems were all related to the national economic crisis and also talked about the country’s regional divisions. She had the view that society was mainly constituted of two classes, and thought that social class has a big impact on individual opportunities but that ethnic origins do not play a determinant role, as the economic factor predominates: “as long as they have money and influences forget it. They can be from wherever they want to be, as they want to be, and they will equally find a good position”.

She stated that she read about a book a month, commenting that “I am not fanatical about reading”, and pointed at romantic fiction and books of spiritual growth as her usual readings. She mentioned *Prioridad uno* [*First Priority*] by Norman Lewis as her favourite book. However, her views and manifest interest in reading changed radically as I questioned her about specific books from Ecuadorian literature. With regard to the first work I asked her about – Juan León Mera’s *Cumandá* – she enthusiastically answered, referring to several other works of national literature: “Yes, it fascinates me. Yes; I’ve read everything that’s national literature. *Cumandá*,

Huasipungo, *La Emancipada* [*The Emancipated Woman*], *A la costa* [*To the Coast*], *Los que se van* [*Those Who Go Away*]... all of them!". She had also read Cuadra's *Los Sangurimas* and had heard about the modern realist novel *El rincón de los justos* [*The Corner of the Just*], by Jorge Velasco Mackenzie, which had been recommended to her by a friend. She had read García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*], which she found "more gloomy" than the other books she commented upon, and said that she would like to read another book by the same author. She had also read all the five books of Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez.

I asked her what she liked in the many books from the national realist tradition she had read, to which she answered:

"I like them because they describe a lot. They describe the nature of our country; they are very explicit. I also really like that they talk a lot about the feelings of the people, about habits, about the indigenous peoples. For example, *Huasipungo*. I really like that in *Huasipungo*, that there is a feeling for the place where they were born, a love of their land, a love that we are progressively losing nowadays. One no longer fights for one's land, people leave for other places... But this is what I like. That they are ours."

She also pointed out how her literary tastes differed from those of her mother:

"I disagree very much with my mum about that, because... my mum reads a lot, but she likes best sellers, that kind of literature. I tell her: 'why don't you like to read *A la costa*, *La Emancipada*, *Siete lunas siete serpientes* [*Seven Moons Seven Serpents*]?' Definitely, my mum doesn't like that kind of literature."

She pointed to interest in a record of lived experience and interest in an imaginary world as her main reasons for reading.

She liked reading the newspaper, usually when she bought it at the weekend, from which she especially enjoyed the 'social' section on high society events. She also read the opinion articles, and stated that those were her favourite type of *crónica*, because "they explain more; they are not confusing". However, she mentioned recognising the places in which she has lived and reading about aspects of the popular culture of the various social groups of the city as the main reasons that would interest her in *crónicas*.

She enjoyed reading about her city and about the lives of ordinary people, as long as the book had been recommended to her.

Reader 22 – Legitimate taste. A reader who emphasised fantasy

Reader 22 (group 3, members of a literary workshop, Guayaquil) was 24 years old and had upper middle class origins. She had a degree in Communication Sciences (from the private institution Escuela de Comunicación Social Mónica Herrera) and worked in a publicity firm and in a school.

She thought the feeling of living in a false democracy and the fact that decisions are made by a small elite, which provoked political apathy, were the main problems of the country at the moment. With regard to Guayaquil, she pointed to the fact that its inhabitants do not like or care for their city, comparing it to the capital Quito and stating the following: "This is simply like a city to pass through, especially because there is so much migration, so many people from the provinces who come here. One comes to Guayaquil to work, to make money, to set up a business, but not to live well and to create a city that gives you a beautiful life". She mentioned neighbourhood organisations as a possible way to slowly improve things. She believed society is constituted by individuals with different amounts of money, but stated that class and ethnic origins had a great impact on social opportunities.

She read between one and two books a month, and her favourite genre was at present the short story (which interested her especially because that is what she also writes), although she also read novels and had formerly read a lot of poetry. About the kind of novels she liked she stated the following: "I like fictional stories with a mixture of romance. I also like it very much fantasy mixed with reality. I couldn't say I would stick to Latin American magical realism, to García Márquez only, but maybe to novels that also involve the psychological aspect".

She did not read many essays and, in this context, stated: "I would maybe go more for fantasy. The less real I know it to be, the better". She said that she liked *crónicas*, and used to enjoy the travel *crónicas* that Pablo Cuvi published in the magazine *Diners* '.

As favourite authors she mentioned Cortázar, Cristina Peri Rossi (both her short stories and her poetry), the novels of Tomás Eloy Martínez, Benedetti and Saramago, and stated the following:

"I find it fascinating to see the structure they use to write. I enjoy seeing how they write the dialogues, those who write in different ways, with no dashes, those that write continuously... Whether certain words are often repeated on purpose, or paragraphs begin with the same sentence. I pay a lot of attention to this. And I obviously also look for an exciting story, something that shakes me somehow."

She did not like the kind of literature from "women who complain", mentioning Isabel Allende, Marcela Serrano and Rosa Montero, the stories of whom were, in her opinion, all alike.

She had read Juan León Mera's *Cumandá* and some short stories by José de la Cuadra, and stated that it is a necessary reading when one starts but she would not read them now. She had read Jorge Velasco's contemporary realist novel about Guayaquil's marginal life *El rincón de los justos*, about which she said: "I like it from the point of view of portraying, rescuing, reflecting so well that part of Guayaquil, that sort of Guayaquil. But it is not a literature I enjoyed page by page". She enjoyed very much reading books by García Márquez, especially his short stories. About Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez she stated the following:

"I have to admit it, I read *Una juventud en éxtasis* [*An Ecstatic Youth*]. And well, there are many things; but I don't know, I'd see it as advice. It annoys me that it is considered literature. To me, literature must be emotional... but it must also be cold, because to write is an art. That is, the use of words has to be an art. But if I write so many commonplaces and all that, the magic is lost. I'd prefer to sit with him to get his advice, I'd prefer to talk with a psychoanalyst in that way, but not to read that kind of book."

She chose distraction and interest in an imaginary world as her main reasons for reading.

She read the newspaper *El Universo* about three times a week and focused especially on the opinion articles and cinema and theatre reviews. She stated that she used to read Jorge Martillo's urban *crónicas* when they appeared in the Sunday supplement ("I liked them a lot because they resembled short stories"), and she also read the texts of Francisco Febres Cordero. About Pablo Cuvi she pointed out: "I like him because his narrative is slightly poetic. The images, how he describes the places;

he mixes them a lot with the things he was feeling when he was seeing everything. That is what I like, that mixture”.

She also pointed out that she read other texts from magazine *Diners* written in a similar style, and that sometimes it was difficult to identify what was a *crónica* and what was not. She chose to read about the popular culture of the various social groups of the city as the main reason to read *crónica*.

She did not especially enjoy reading about her city or about ordinary people's lives, although she stated that “when you get a little into the world of those houses, of those people, those pubs, it is interesting, and the fact that it is so near but you didn't know it makes it more attractive”.

Reader 25 – Legitimate taste

Reader 25 (group 3, members of a literary workshop, Guayaquil) was 24 years old and had upper middle class origins. She had studied Social Communication and worked as a lecturer in Escuela de Comunicación Social Mónica Herrera.

In her opinion, poverty was the country's main social problem. She also mentioned education, unemployment and social injustice (the unjust distribution of wealth). She emphasised the need to construct instances of a dialogue based on a true vision and understanding of the standpoint and needs of the other, and believed in the positive role of non-governmental organisations that work in specific sectors. She thought that society was mainly constituted by groups of different status, and believed that class and ethnic origins have a great impact on social opportunities.

She read approximately two books of fiction a month and also many essays, both in relation with her work as a lecturer and because of personal interests. She liked both short stories and novels, and stated: “I prefer stories with characters that are a little out of the commonplace, strange. I like very much the surrealist component”. She did not usually read *crónicas* or reportage or biography, making the following point about the latter: “I don't know why it doesn't really attract me. Although there are some that resemble fiction I prefer to know they are fiction rather than read these things that are very real, which I already read enough about in the newspapers”.

She said that she especially liked women's writing, both in terms of their vision of life and the world and their way of narrating, and mentioned Marguerite

Duras. She also referred to Latin American authors: Cortázar, Borges, García Márquez. She read a lot of poetry as well, and mentioned Rilke as a favourite author.

When I asked her if there was an author she did not like, she directly referred to Cuauhtémoc Sánchez, making the following observations:

“To me, what this guy is selling is moral pills and all those commonplaces, and everybody applauds him because what he does is simply to maintain the status quo (‘women are like that, men are like that, men come first’). People praise him, I don’t know whether it is because they are conscious of the fact that they are not themselves close to that, or because it is good that somebody tells people what they have to do. I would never read something like that... To me, books, literature or any written thing have to be like a rock, something that hits you... something that moves your floor, that makes you see things. And that’s true for all kinds of art. I am referring to something that when you see it or read it or listen to it, even at a theoretical level, it makes you see life, as if it suddenly opened a door that didn’t exist before... But what that man does is to always open the same doors. (...) I would never read... all those books about success, those books of self-help.”

She said she had liked *Los Sangurimas*, by Cuadra, because the novel has a strong component of magical realism and is very Latin American, presenting traditional rural life in a non-folkloric way. Similarly, she enjoyed reading works by García Márquez. Her favourite was *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* [*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*], in which she saw a classical Latin American story, and also praised its structure and treatment of time.

She chose distraction, interest in a record of lived experience and interest in an imaginary world as her reasons for reading. With respect to the first reason, she pointed out that literature is for her a distraction from the theoretical readings she has to do for her work. With respect to the second, that she liked reading stories of other people’s experiences that are far from her own (she gave as examples literature by gay women and Chinese literature). She said that the third reason was the least important amongst the three and that she did not like genres like science fiction, where imagination is the main component, but also referred positively to the imaginary content of surrealist literature.

She read the newspaper *El Universo* generally every day, in part because of her work, focusing on all its sections (including adverts) except sports. She used to read the *crónicas* of Jorge Martillo that appeared in the Sunday supplement of the

newspaper. Her favourite types of *crónicas* were historical *crónicas* and *crónicas* of everyday life, because “it’s a good thing that somebody tells you a story you don’t know about a place where you live”. She did not like political *crónicas* (was not interested in politics as a whole) and sports *crónicas*. She chose as reasons for reading *crónica* to recognise the places in which one has lived and to read about the popular culture of the various social groups of the city, pointing out about the first one that “It is interesting to read a story about a place in which I have been, even if this story is remote from me. It gives a meaning to that place, it gives a greater meaning to the city as an experience that must be lived”.

She liked reading about her city and especially enjoyed reading stories about ordinary people’s lives, also because of her academic interests and the belief that knowing more about other, different people could help her to understand who she is.

3. Conclusion

The diversity of opinions and reading practices that were revealed in the questionnaire and the interviews on *crónica* reading allow us to make some general points about the significance and meaning the genre has for different types of readers. As a preliminary point, however, it is necessary to bear in mind that in Mexico City the *crónica* is a truly popular genre, while it is relatively marginal in Guayaquil; knowledge of the genre and perception of its significance by readers is determined by this fact.

First of all, with reference to reading practices, both in the questionnaire and in the interviews a division has appeared between those who looked in *crónicas* for descriptions of everyday life (present or past) and those who read *crónicas* in search of information and interpretations of news events. Mexican readers largely emphasised being informed about current events as a reason for reading *crónica*, while readers from Guayaquil looked for a portrait of the city’s contemporary life and popular culture. This reveals the special significance the *crónica* has in Mexico as a journalistic genre, which is conspicuously present in the press, as well as a more literary genre through which everyday life in the city is portrayed.

In describing everyday life, the *crónica* proves to be an especially flexible and permeable genre. Several readers emphasised in the questionnaire that they looked for descriptions of people’s lives or that *crónicas* brought back the past in a way that was

alive, while the closeness of the *cronista* to the people was stressed. In the interviews it became manifest that several readers' special interest in the *crónica* was their ability to identify and experience their proximity to the narrated events: to recognise urban landscapes and social events in which they participated.

Secondly, the question of how *crónica* reading practices correspond to wider cultural tastes and divisions must be addressed. The reader of *crónicas*, although a mass reader, generally also possesses a high cultural capital: *crónicas* are consumed by the readers of the best quality newspapers. An exception to this are sports *crónicas* (and *crónicas* of bullfights), which are consumed by a large, very heterogeneous public.

There exist significant differences in the reception of *crónicas* in correspondence to readers' wider cultural tastes, and the division between legitimate and popular taste is echoed in readers' perception of *crónicas*. Readers of legitimate taste with an aesthetic disposition tend to stress the *crónica*'s formal and literary qualities (eg. readers 3, 10, 22, 23), while readers of middlebrow or popular taste emphasise the *crónica*'s reality content (eg. readers 4 and 6) or their informative aspects. Popular readers look to *crónicas* for a clear and informative exposition of events (readers 8 and 16).

The next chapter will explore the specific ways in which these divisions are manifested in the actual reading of texts and how the *crónicas*' content is related to the lives and experiences of different types of readers.

CHAPTER 8

READING *CRÓNICAS*: A DISCUSSION OF EVERYDAY LITERATURE

1. Introduction

To explore how *crónicas* appearing in the press are read, what readers expect in a *crónica* and how they understand its particular aspects, several focus group sessions in which *crónicas* were discussed were organised. A total of six focus groups were arranged: three in Mexico City and three in Guayaquil. In one off sessions with a duration of from one hour thirty minutes to two hours, three different *crónicas* were read and subsequently commented upon by participants.

The intention was to be able to discuss the texts with participants who were potential readers of *crónica*. As the proportion of newspaper readers in these countries is low, the focus groups had to be selected from the highly educated minority. Therefore, two focus groups in each city were composed of university students; one group of students from a public university and the other one of students from a private institution. This allowed for comparisons between readers from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Generally, students from public and from private universities represent different sectors of the lower-middle classes and the upper-middle classes or upper classes respectively, although these differences vary according to the history and nature of the institutions in each particular country. Thus, Mexico is characterised by a very wide and good quality system of public universities. By contrast, public universities in Ecuador have undergone a long-term crisis and their quality is markedly inferior to that of private universities. This accounts for the fact that its students, who are unable to pay the expensive fees of private education, come almost exclusively from working-class and lower-middle class sectors.

Students were recruited from humanistic disciplines that were not directly related to the study and interpretation of literary and journalistic genres: philosophy in Mexico City and psychology in Guayaquil (philosophy was not taught at the Catholic University of this city). Thus, Group 1 from Mexico City (5 people, aged from 21 to 28) was recruited from amongst philosophy students of Universidad Autónoma

Metropolitana (UAM, a public university). Group 2 from Mexico City (4 people, aged from 20 to 22) was recruited from amongst philosophy students of Universidad Iberoamericana (a private institution). Group 1 from Guayaquil (5 people, aged from 22 to 33) was composed of psychology students from Universidad de Guayaquil (a public university) and group 2 from Guayaquil (four people, aged from 19 to 22) of psychology students from Universidad Católica de Guayaquil (a private university).

In addition, a third focus group in each city was composed of people who were already familiar and/or particularly interested in urban *crónicas*, or who had some training in literary reading and commentary. In Mexico City this group was formed with people who had attended the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City, a public event celebrated in February 2000 (group 3, five people). This group was heterogeneous and composed of three students of ages comprised between 22 and 23, a doctor and a teacher, aged 52 and 63 respectively. In Guayaquil, group 3 was formed with the attendants at a literary workshop (four people, aged from 24 to 39, two from middle class and two from upper class origins).

The *crónicas* read in the focus group sessions are the six texts which have been analysed in detail in chapter 3 (see appendix 4 for a reproduction of the texts), and were chosen to represent to some degree, both formally and thematically, an existing variety of texts appearing in the press of each city. They had all been published in major newspapers in the previous months (except Martillo's *crónica*, published in 1997). In the case of Mexico City, the first *crónica*, a narrative about the influence of the media in national politics, was written by well-known *cronista* Monsiváis; the second *crónica* was a literary exploration of various aspects of Mexico City under the rain, while the third was a more directly journalistic account of a student demonstration. In Guayaquil, the first *crónica*, a tale of a bohemian city wanderer, was written by Jorge Martillo; the second *crónica* came from the section of political comment and was a fictionalised account of the recent coup of 21st January 2000, and the third, a journalistic story of intimidation and intended robbery in a bus, was a text that belonged to the group of *crónicas* which explore the many faces of the social and economic crisis of the country.

The approach to the focus groups was primarily unstructured, in contrast with widespread focus group designs which organise discussions around a series of questions formulated by the researcher. In my reading session, direct questions from the researcher were kept to a minimum and were of a general nature (participants

were asked what they thought about a particular text or whether they liked it). It was the intention that the participants themselves should identify and discuss the elements they considered to be significant in each text, and my intervention as a moderator was thus largely limited to the role of helping the debate to flow naturally. In addition, one of the reasons for this approach was that participants' knowledge of their everyday reality was anticipated to play an important role in the reading and interpretation of the texts, thus revealing new dimensions in them which were previously unknown to the researcher, and which would have been minimised by a structured questionnaire.

2. Reading the *crónica* in Mexico City

2.1. *Crónica* 1: A satire of Mexican politics and mass media

Group 1 (public university)

Monsiváis' text did not provoke among the participants of group 1 very enthusiastic comments and the general view about it was rather critical. The first person to intervene stated that the *crónica* "...is pleasant but a bit exaggerated. It is too exaggerated a parody. I don't think the *crónica* is normally like that, so light...". This provoked a discussion about whether parody was appropriate to the subject matter, and whether the portrayed events are taken from real life or not. One participant emphasised the reality content of the text, referring to the degradation of politics in the following way: "I think that of course there is something that is not real. But some points, even if they make us laugh, have their basis in real life. And especially if we speak about political life, which these days is very degraded, with dirty tricks and pure performance". It must be noted that this *crónica* was written in a context characterised by heightened political debate and campaigning prior to the July 2000 presidential elections, when there was for the first time a real challenge to the party that had governed Mexico for 70 years. The discussions with the focus groups took place within this context, which is why the participant referred to "these times". He also identified the comic television programme of Adal Ramones, in which the presidential candidates were interviewed, as the inspiration for Monsiváis' text, and pointed out that, in this kind of programme, politics became a spectacle aimed at the majority of the population.

Another participant pointed out that the *cronista* treated his subject matter too subtly and that actual corruption in Mexican politics was much worse in comparison, also emphasising the significance of the comedian's role:

"On the one hand, he touches on the disappointment that one has as an intellectual when you have to sell yourself in the labour market. On the other, he also touches on disappointment at the political level, or at the level of real politics, in terms of the quality of Mexican political life. In my view it stops short in both cases. Carlos Monsiváis treats it so subtly that it seems that reality is very noble."

Two participants who defended the view that the text is an exaggeration specified then that they were referring particularly to its form as a parody, and one of them added:

"I have also said that it was an exaggeration not because it stops short of reality, but because it seemed to me that it was not making a parody of what really happens. I don't think that it is mere publicity-seeking or lightness that characterises our politicians, but... a much deeper corruption. It is exaggerated to emphasise the light while leaving other things untouched."

The discussion also focused on the intended meaning of the parody as an exaggeration of reality. One participant stated "I think that this is a gross exaggeration to make us realise what is happening. It's nice, but it is a very poisonous, very charged satire", and later "...maybe his objective was to provoke this uneasiness or discomfort to raise our consciousness". A second participant agreed with the point of view that "by inducing a certain irritation one could create consciousness", while a third one stated that the text contained a sort of "moral", in which the character of A4 represents how individual desires and aspirations are easily frustrated in reality.

By contrast, for two participants the *crónica* did not contribute to a "constructive" critique of reality, following my introduction of this term during the course of the discussion. One of them stated that the satire was "realistic but somewhat mediocre", and that "I don't see anything constructive in it. I think it merely expresses reality in a beautiful way, or in a more spicy way". For another the exaggeration of the parody was "a form of masking what he really wants to say, he doesn't dare to say directly how things are", and "...finally the *cronista* does not dare

to say something we all know and has to take his parody to extremes". She also pointed out that,

"I really don't know if it is constructive or not... I think that there are many features and aspects of our real life that are understated... Maybe many things that are said are meant to be moral, or informative, or constructive, to use this word. But actually I think that there are so many things he touches upon that seem so familiar to us that we stop treating them as something important or valuable."

Thus, for her the value of the text seemed to be linked to its recuperation of hidden dimensions of everyday reality.

Finally one participant mentioned the peculiarities and also the quality of Monsiváis' style of urban *crónica*, while the others commented on a certain predisposition in favour of Monsiváis' because he was famous.

Group 2 (private university)

The session was opened by a question about the section of the newspaper where the *crónica* had appeared. The participant who made it then proceeded to remark on the text's satirical tone, stating that "It makes us laugh because I think it is related to what is happening. I don't know if this is one of the features of the *crónica*, but this reading can be so closely related to everyday life that it is even funny". Another participant stated that the text is a critique of superficial politics, but that it does exactly the same thing it is criticising, that is, it treats its subject matter in a popular, easy and funny manner to attract readers. Thus, the text on the one hand identifies a less rigid form of politics in which "You can no longer do things in a structured, planned and disciplined way. Now things have to be more flexible... more agreeable to give confidence". On the other hand, "...what Monsiváis is doing, is precisely to offer another kind of literature, or a much more flexible access to literature, that is not difficult for people. People don't read books any more, they read articles". She specified that articles do not possess the abstraction of books, do not demand much time, do not imply a complex level of understanding and are closer to everyday life, and also emphasised the important role of the media and the fact that

“political decisions are made because of mass media opinions, not following reflection or discussion”.

The theme of the social role of the media, both in terms of its importance and of its legitimising character, as well as of the gullibility of audiences as passive recipients of a manipulated reality (as suggested in the text) was then taken up by the other participants and widely discussed, as the major point of the *crónica*. One participant pointed out that the subject of the *crónica* was wider than just politics, and defined it as follows: “he is talking about politics and what politics is doing in the media, especially television”. For another, the *crónica* was “a pretty sharp way of criticising how politics is becoming a circus”. Monsiváis’ ironic statement “if it doesn’t happen on telly it’s as if it never happened” was repeated approvingly by several participants. One of them stated that “television becomes a legitimating source that offers recognition, access, and that tells you that something can be taken seriously. From this point of view, there is a manipulation”; while for another “...information reaches people through the impact of television. What can be better than a television programme in which all of us laugh, participate, share a language, certain meaning of the words, the swearwords, as the only way in which we can communicate and understand each other”. The responsibility of individuals as media users was then emphasised by one participant, who pointed out that “slogans, clichés, swearwords, sayings, give you ready-made judgements that do not require further elaboration” and are in this way easily accepted and shared by people who do not want to examine reality in a more complex manner.

One participant referred to the chronicle’s objective as follows: “I have the impression that what Monsiváis is doing is to give readers the elements of a possible... form of rebellion against those institutions, those forms that somehow have established how things must be”. She later formulated the question whether Monsiváis’ satire was constructive, to which she answered that she thought it did not contain an alternative vision of reality. This provoked another discussion in which different views were voiced: for one participant the goal was the satire itself, the fact that the text shows that something is wrong; another said that she did not know whether a *crónica* needed to contain an alternative vision, because it is primarily a description.

A recurrent concern especially of one participant in this group was to know what were the formal features and requirements of the *crónica* as a genre. She asked

me, at various points, several questions in this respect, from an initial one about in which section had this *crónica* appeared, to what the nature of the *crónica* is and whether it has a chronological order, and also the following final questions: “What is a *crónica* as a journalistic genre?”, and “What is the objective of a *crónica*? To offer a point of view, to inform?”

Group 3 (attendants at the Meeting of *Cronistas*)

The first participant to intervene made a descriptive summary of the *crónica*. She said it was related to the problems of the present and showed how politicians always (and especially in election time) want to appear on television and promote, through comedy and informality, a populist and superficial image, wrongly considering that this is what the public wants. Another participant referred to Monsiváis’ mocking attitude and to the central theme of the *crónica* in the following way: “Monsiváis always ridicules everybody, and in this case the media and the people; and talks about a student who will never be able to exercise his profession. He is also making fun of this: why study if you are never going to be able to do what you want”. She stated that the text was making a comparison with the comic television programme of popular presenter Adal Ramones, who had interviewed the presidential candidates.

A discussion followed on the social role of the media and of this kind of comic programmes and the views of the public they are based upon, following Monsiváis’ parody and his emphasis that, according to the owner of the media, what the public wants is sheer spectacle without content. One participant stated that “They think that the people are stupid, that they must be at this ridiculously low level, of constantly using swearwords, doing silly things, and in this way they have more communication with the people”, making the following self-reflection: “we are bread and circuses... We like this because we don’t have a thought-out proposal”. According to another participant, it was not the nature of the politicians themselves, but the media that gave Mexican politics this character of empty spectacle: “One hears that the mass media are sensationalist. So they don’t go so much for the policies of the candidate, but for the jokes, or what they said about the others. That is what the mass media are doing”.

There were also some reflections on the nature of Monsiváis’ parody and its consequences. For one participant, it has the quality of making you laugh while saying

something at the same time. Everybody can understand it and it is a very easy and accessible way of getting to know about how things are. According to another, the text is a parody which merely describes the reality it mocks; Monsiváis "in principle only shows the features of the people of whom he is making fun". He added: "I don't consider this to be a critique or a form of protest... but a form of saying 'this is what is happening', and he mocks it. It is a form of narrating what is happening... he has shown the situation in the text, but it still has to be changed". He also said that the text depicts very precisely the context of the media, mentioning other television programmes in which candidates have also appeared. A third participant stressed that the text does offer reflections about reality, shows what is really happening, and that that is its purpose.

Analysis

Participants in the three groups knew at least the name of Monsiváis, the author of this *crónica* and the most popular *cronista* of Mexico City, and some participants, especially in groups 1 and 3, made some statements about particular features of his personal style and satirical tone.

In groups 2 and 3 the *crónica* provoked some lively discussion amongst participants on its main theme: the influence of the media in current Mexican politics in the form of degradation and vulgarisation of the latter. These reflections were most accurate and detailed in group 2, where there were some direct references to statements made in the text such as 'if it's not on telly it's as if it never existed', and also implied a consideration on the nature and form of the text itself as an example of a more flexible form of address to cultural consumers. By contrast, participants in group 1 were not very interested in the the issue of the effects of mass media on politics, and stated that the text was an exaggeration and that it concentrated on aspects that were of comparatively little importance if one takes into account existing levels of corruption among politicians. However rich the discussion about the role of the media was among participants of group 2, this was the only group where the text's direct reference to Adal Ramones' comic television programme was not identified, and the discussion tended to focus on more abstract aspects, such as the forms of communication that are being promoted by the media.

The text provoked in the three groups a reflection on form, whether in terms of its parodic character and its exaggeration of some aspects of reality or in terms of what it actually does with the narrated events, whether its objective is mere description and narration or whether it is denunciation of the present state of affairs. Thus, reservations were expressed in the three groups with regard to the intention of the *crónica* and whether it accomplished its objective as a critique. While some participants noted that the text can raise awareness by showing what is happening and by through its burlesque and exaggerated tone (all three groups), it was also pointed out that the *cronista* finally avoids saying directly how things really are (group 1), that the text does not really contain an alternative vision (group 2), and that the *cronista* merely shows a situation, without taking any sides, thus identifying the distanced tone that is characteristic of the *crónica* (group 3).

A concern to elucidate the *crónica* as a genre was expressed explicitly several times by members of group 2, who kept asking me questions about generic features of the genre. This concern was also expressed by participants in group 1 who, during the interval between the discussion of the first text and the second one, asked me for a definition of the *crónica*. Participants of group 3, who had attended a series of conferences about the *crónica*, were already familiar with general definitions and features of the genre in Mexico City.

2.2. *Crónica* 2: Images of the city, past and present

Group 1 (public university)

The first person to intervene pointed out that the statue of the god Tláloc was not found in the village indicated by the *cronista* but in another one, where he has been living for 20 years, and pointing out that "Everybody knows the story. In fact, the roads that were built there, were built to get Tláloc out, otherwise they wouldn't have been built". Another participant made the following statement: "... I never thought that when it rained something like what he describes might happen... There are things that in my view are more related to popular traditions and to the cultural tradition... He makes a sort of comparison between a natural phenomenon with a social event", thus identifying the main themes of the text. A reflection on the transformation of the city when it rains followed, and a participant stated that "what is

indeed real is that the city is transformed when it rains”, referring to its past as a city built upon a lake and commenting on various images from the text.

The text’s form, creativity and its relationship to everyday life was a main focus of attention. A participant pointed out that more than a *crónica*, the text is a series of anecdotes, that it was very creative in the form of narrating, more entertaining than that of Monsiváis because it describes other circumstances (“it puzzled me a lot more”), and emphasised that it shows traditional aspects of Mexican culture. Its creativity was also underlined by another participant, who linked it with the text’s close relationship with the everyday. One participant said that the text “makes poetry of a moment about the city”, and that “to make a *crónica* like this one needs, apart from a certain culture, a more ordinary inspiration” (he was comparing it with Monsiváis’ text, and by ordinary he was referring to the everyday reality). There was also a remark on the *crónica*’s intuitive character and the fact that “it has captured simultaneously and instantaneously the everyday”.

One participant disagreed with the others in the group finding Monsiváis’ *crónica* more original and creative. He thought the second text was much closer to everyday life, which made it easier to interpret, and more entertaining. Participants also stated that the texts and their intended audiences were very different: “I think they are different. Maybe we liked this one because now there is a dislike of politicians. And this one... in my case I had never thought in this way such meaningful things about the rain”. One participant thought that the second *crónica* was more communicative, easier to understand, because of its references to the everyday, while another insisted that, although it might give this impression at the start, Mejía’s *crónica* has some elements that are not very familiar to her.

Finally, references were made to other writers. This *crónica* reminded one participant of Mexican literature from the 1960s and 1970s which, according to him, focused on recuperating dreams as well as tracking what had been lost (he mentioned, in this context, writers like Agustín, Poniatowska, Yáñez and Leñero). To illustrate his point, and as an example of the atmosphere also expressed in this kind of literature, he quoted the following fragment from the text: “In the lagoons we see reflected the inverted image of the city, as if another, more authentic city existed”. Another participant referred to a certain element of nostalgia and longing for the past as typical of Mexican culture, and also mentioned in this context Jaime Avilés, another *cronista* of the present.

Group 2 (private university)

One participant made an initial general comment on the nature of some texts that, although intended as narrations of real events, do not just refer to the facts and thus become literature. The two *crónicas* read thus far, because of their language and development, because this type of text “does not refer much to facts”, would enter into this category. She then explained that that is why she asked (at the end of the discussion about the first *crónica*) what the purpose of a *crónica* was, and stated that if she wanted to be factually informed she would not choose a *crónica*, adding “I think that the purpose of the *crónica* is to show things to people in a different way”.

This theme was then widely discussed, and several working definitions of the genre were given. Thus, one participant stated: “I believe that the intention of the *crónica* is to narrate a fact and that it makes use of what you might call literary genres” (she was actually referring to literary techniques), to which she later added that a *crónica* “seeks to narrate a fact from a point of view”. The participant who had made the initial comments on the literary nature of some journalistic texts said she had attended a writing workshop in which journalistic genres were explored and where “a *crónica* was the narration of an event in a more or less ordered form in which the author described a point of view”. That is why she did not see the two texts read thus far as *crónicas*, but rather as short stories, while the term *crónica* “in fact referred mainly to accounts of accidents, or of football matches, or to what happened in parliament...”. In this context, she also stated, defending a strictly journalistic view of the *crónica* and quoting a literary image from Mejía’s text: “For example, I have never seen a *crónica* that says ‘had two snakes on his face, curled up like bags under the eyes’”.

One participant observed that the text, which “docs present itself as a *crónica*”, is narrating everyday life, and added: “It seems that everyday life is again gaining more importance than theory, than abstract questions, than thought. Maybe, in that way, the objective of the *crónica* is to say ‘pay more attention to everyday life’”.

The section of the newspaper where the *crónicas* appeared was once again commented upon among members of this group, and one participant stated that Monsiváis’ *crónica* could be put in a section of Political Comment (alongside texts by

Gabriel Zaid and Guadalupe Loaeza, well known Mexican commentators) and that the *crónica* about the rain would rather belong in an anthology of texts.

When asked about whether they liked this *crónica* all participants answered negatively. One said that her horizon was not widened, another that it was strange, another one that it was too elaborate and confusing if it was meant for a wide public, and yet another one that maybe it was “too everyday”. She stated:

“I didn’t like it because it wants to find a meaning everywhere, but it is empty. Where does it take us? What does it want to say? And in spite of the fact that he tries to put cultural elements in it, and speaks of Marx and of Tláloc and all those things, there is no coherence. It is very diverse but it doesn’t achieve anything.”

A final reference to the title (‘Snapshots of a city in the rain’) from one participant was meant to tell others that maybe they were looking for something the text was not, to which a short reinterpretation followed in which the different scenes were identified as reflections, pictures of what happens in the city when it rains.

Group 3 (attendants to the Meeting of *Cronistas*)

In group 3, the first comments referred to the poetic intention of the *crónica* which, following one participant, portrayed how the inhabitants of Mexico City learn to live in their hybrid cultures with the heterogeneous elements that form part of the city’s mixed tradition, as described in a text which focuses on “those magic events that I identify with poetry”. The central theme of the subsequent discussion – the city and identity – was thus explicitly stated from the beginning. Another participant remarked on the historical and serious tone of the *crónica*, referring to the differences in style with Monsiváis’ text.

The issue of the poetic character of the text was taken up by a participant who emphasised its creative images, comparing them with the more current and everyday images of the former text. He then alluded to the image of a city which is “the replacement for another imagined city”, which surprised him, and added that the *crónica* is examining history as a form of addressing issues of identity. He also pointed out that although it is made of little parts or narrations, they belong to a whole that is the history of water in the city. Similarly, for another participant, the text “tells

a story like a *crónica*, but is also poetic, about what our city is, about these problems we have. We would like to see this city, the city of water, but we are in the city above...”, partly identifying the hidden city of dreams with the traces of a lost past (Tenochtitlán, the Aztec city which was built upon a lake).

Identity was further discussed in relation to particular moments and images of the text, such as the history of the statue of the god Tláloc and the reference to Marx and to the children who speak Nahuatl, about which one participant stated: “We are all this: we are an imposed culture, but we also have the past from before this culture. We are this result. Thus, I think that the idea is like remembering; we lost the city, but we are finding it now”. In fact, several participants remarked that the text is as much about the present as about the past, and one of them stated that the text is searching for social and historical continuity between both.

The text’s form and specific composition were emphasised by one participant, who stated that it had a three-dimensional quality, like a photograph of Nacho López¹ he had seen of a reflection in the water of a boy in a bicycle.

There were also some references to the text’s reflective tone. One participant emphasised the different meanings rain had for different people, following one of the stories of the text: “For example, there is a very beautiful fragment where he is speaking on his way, then a latest model car comes by and they see water in a different way, and then the children are completely enjoying the water”. Another pointed out: “I think there is also a tragic moment. When rain takes the woman away and they say it might be a kidnapping. She is taken away in a car, but the rain doesn’t let you see what is happening. The rain contains the tragic and the happy”. Finally, a third participant, referring to the last episode of the story in which a group of friends are trapped in a brothel without money, stated: “I think that it uses history to say that we’ve never had anything. Things come and go, we don’t have money, but it’s all right”.

Analysis

The reading of this *crónica* provoked markedly different debates in the three groups. Participants of group 1 concentrated on how the text portrayed the everyday

¹ Mexican photographer who has produced an extensive body of work depicting urban scenes in Mexico City.

in new unusual and creative ways. Participants of group 3 also observed the relationship of the text with everyday life in the city, but focused on a different dimension, emphasising the issue of identity as the text's central point, and discussing certain aspects related to the character of Mexican identity. Contrasting with that, participants of group 2 did not pay much attention to the contents of the *crónica* or to its purpose. Instead, a formal concern that had already been expressed during the commentary on the first text, became now the centre of the discussion and different visions about the *crónica* as a genre were explored.

The themes of these discussions could be linked to whether participants liked the text or not, both in terms of its literary form and of the type of urban reality it describes. In group 1 the *crónica* was generally liked, its creative and intuitive qualities mentioned, and several people said it made them realise that there was a wholly different dimension in the reality of city life. In group 3, the attitude was also clearly positive, and the contents of the text were discussed in a relatively high degree of detail, with references to many of its particular images. The more upper-middle class participants from group 2 explicitly expressed a dislike of the text. During the discussion they only referred once to any concrete image in the text ("had two snakes on his face, curled up like bags under the eyes") to assert that this was not the language a *crónica* is supposed to use, and no mentions were made until the very end about the theme of the *crónica* or its purpose. This lack of interest is related, on the one hand, to a lack of appreciation of the literary form of the text and a demand for a more factual account of its basic ideas. On the other, more importantly, there is a manifest wider lack of interest in the issues that the text poses about identity and everyday life in the city, which can be related to the social and spatial distance of some upper class sectors of the population of Mexico City with respect to the old, traditional neighbourhoods of their city.

The literariness of the text was a focus of attention in the three groups, in contrast with its absence when discussing text 1. There were references to creativity (group 1), to its poetic character (group 3) and to the fact that it made poetry of everyday life (group 1). The widest discussion on this subject took place between the participants of group 2, where the text's literary qualities were discussed in relation to the general features of the genre. There were some references to other authors of literature and *crónica* (group 1) and to journalistic commentators (group 3).

Finally, among groups 1 and 2, there was some reflection on the differences between the two texts and also a specification that they were intended for different audiences.

2.3. *Crónica* 3: A distanced account of a student demonstration

Group 1 (public university)

The first participant to intervene noted the contradictory character of the introductory sentence of the *crónica*, which gives the impression that the position of the author is a sympathetic one with the participants of the demonstration, while the text itself is a critique of the march. She did not think this was an impartial account; on the contrary, the *cronista* had a specific ideological position, and the text was tendentious. She also made the point that the vision of the *cronista*, which implied that Mexicans turn their tragedies into jokes, is a very questionable one.

A second participant took up the point to focus on the *crónica*'s tone, which in her view was not the appropriate one for a *crónica* because of its too visible and exaggerated value judgement about events. She also pointed out that the text only depicted certain things that are relatively peripheral for an urban *crónica*, while silencing others. She stated that she was present on the march, and that she observed many other things, and added "There are other *crónicas* that impressively describe the face of the father, the daughter or the brother of the prisoner. This one merely attacked the political aspects".

A third participant stated that the text ridicules the people who participated and also remarked on its superficiality:

"It's as if it only wants to provoke or to discredit a movement, discredit an event, because it does not go into it. It doesn't comment on the ideals that made people go, outside the party interests or the few very dubious contingents that participated in the march. It doesn't explore the origins of the movement... why is this great hive trembling, for example?"

Various elements were further discussed as examples of irrelevant details the *crónica* gives about the demonstration (the sales of the shops, the T-shirts some students are wearing). The participants generally agreed, and each subsequent

response to the *crónica* (which was described as “tendentious”, “questionable” and “superficial” by different participants) was approved by the participants who had already intervened and added to the former ones.

Only one participant, who stated that those who went to the demonstration have always had an anti-government culture, had a different opinion. He explained that the title of the *crónica*, which he thought expresses the presence of a variety of interests and groups outside the student movement, “is in fact a great truth”.

At various points the knowledge and views of those who had been there, had witnessed the events and perceived them in a wholly different way were invoked, for example in the following quotes, from two different participants:

“To anybody who doesn’t agree, who doesn’t know a great deal about what really happened, who didn’t go to the demonstration, this will be saying: ‘don’t go, this is just a carnival itself’. What carnival? (...) It is very tendentious; criticising all the time, when actually I was there and can say ‘it isn’t true’.”

“And the fact of comparing the people to the drones in a hive! Those of us who have been there don’t consider ourselves drones, nor hippies, nor dancers, nor anything it says... I think that if this person was open and was participating in a march or sharing some of its ideals, he wouldn’t like to see a text like this. I did dislike this one.”

It is also significant that the person who did not agree with the other participants, and had not participated in the demonstration, invoked the authority of other sources of information: “From what it says here and from what I saw on television – even if it is biased I did see something there, and I don’t think it was a montage – there were many issues there external to the university movement...”

The second part of the discussion was taken to another point by one participant who had previously remained silent most of the time, and who stated:

“If I was a newspaper editor I would rather give a job to this one than to the other two, because this kind of text is totally or much more descriptive than the other two, it is much more digestible than the other two. In this sense, the public who would consume this product would be greater... it is more a *crónica* than the other texts. We understood better what a more urban journalistic *crónica* is, because of the fact that it is describing the urban rather than making poetry or being creative”.

He clearly saw this journalistic quality as a good one, because, as he later pointed out: "In the world in which we live it is the impression, that what happened yesterday or just now that matters, not the imaginary". He further commented on the generally good interpretative quality of Mexican *cronistas*, "even this one which is descriptive has a lot of literary elements, a lot of artistic background", and added that between newspapers *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, and *Reforma*, he would place this text in *El Universal*, because "they sell by weight".

Other participants pointed out that, whatever its (formal) merits, the text is still empty, "it's disparaging, brainwashing", while one participant still insisted on the fact that this is not the appropriate tone for a *crónica*, because "*crónicas* should not define", i.e. adopt the judgemental role of an editorial column.

Group 2 (private university)

A participant opened the conversation stating that this text was more like a *crónica*, in terms of the (journalistic) definition she had given of the genre in the discussion of the previous text. Another pointed out that it resembled the second text in its descriptive tone, although "it is less poetic because it is an event that concretely happened". The first participant added that this text has more data and that it is easy to see the author's (critical) opinion of the events, quoting its concluding sentence. The same fragment was then quoted more extensively by another participant, who pointed out that the author was making value judgements. It was also stated that the author was playing tricks because of the manner he uses sarcasm as a way of evading the need to justify his opinions.

One participant observed that the *crónicas* they had read all appeared in different sections of the newspaper and had different purposes, legitimating the fact that the third text made value judgements. Another participant similarly believed that to make value judgements was permissible within the tasks and competences of the *crónica* as a genre.

There followed a discussion in which two participants maintained that in this *crónica* (as in the first one) personal views are often masked and exposed in such a way that they do not have to be argued (words such as questionable and tendentious were used). One of them also stated: "Monsiváis' text criticises a more general

situation, and this one relates to a specific fact that became very important. That is why in my view it is more questionable; that it gives an opinion in this way, without substantiating anything". The way the text states rhetorical questions for which the author already possessed the answer was particularly criticised, and it was argued, from an example in the text, that it would have been more honest to say that student leader "Mosh doesn't deserve two full squares" (i.e. to express directly the author's opinion on the matter) rather than to pose the question. However, one participant also remarked:

"But there is also another problem. The writer has a view of reality which he cannot ignore, that is, he judges situations on the basis of his views. Thus, when we speak of objectivity it is very dangerous. How could this writer avoid making value judgements? Maybe what we are saying is that this can be done in this way, but with a certain rigour, with a certain care."

One participant pointed out that she thought they should know more about the genre of the *crónica* and about other journalistic genres in order to be able to determine what type of judgements can be made and in what way. She also stated that "Maybe a *crónica* is leaving things in a question form and being sarcastic, and in between the sarcasm putting one's arguments. There are many editorial columns in which things are criticised in that way. The title itself has a question mark, is sarcastic...". She later added that this article is intended as a Comment, for people who are tired and have no time to read any other sections of the newspaper.

There were some observations on the informative character of the *crónica*. In this context, one participant stated: "I also think that it wants to narrate what happened in the city at the moment the demonstration took place. This about Zara, that the windows were painted, that two squares were filled... is a development of events. I think he is not only narrating his position, but also what happened".

Finally, participants said they had not liked the text because its views are not well argued, and because "we don't look for how beautiful the style is, but for the power of the arguments".

Group 3 (attendants at Meeting of *Cronistas*)

One participant opened the conversation pointing out that this third text is the most realist one, and referred to description and to the concrete data it gives, such as the number of people present at the demonstration and the route they followed. The *crónica's* descriptive qualities were also emphasised by two other participants. While the first of them mentioned the burlesque element as well as the fact that this text is clearer than the former text, the second made the reflection that people from different social classes and cultural backgrounds are described, but also portrayed as a "non-reflective mass", thus opening the debate that would be the centre of the discussion. One participant referred negatively to the people who took part in the demonstration who, according to her, do not have clear ideas, and pointed out that the text is insinuating that the same was true of the student movement of 1968.

All participants agreed that the text portrayed the people who took part in the demonstration negatively. In this context, the following comparison with another popular author of urban *crónica* was made:

"— There are some *crónicas*, like those of Bellinghausen, that you read and feel the need to join in, because he narrates how the girl is shaking and crying, things that you can feel when you read them, so that you say "I am joining them". And this one tells you how they go but...

— Without putting his soul into it.

— Exactly, it is more mocking. It says why are they doing this if they finally don't do anything."

The text's main critical point against the demonstration was identified and questioned by one participant in the following way: "He says it is a funeral with signs of a party. Why? Because he says that there are no political ideas. But the idea is political, and in fact marching is political".

The *crónica's* portrayal of events and its interpretation was then discussed in relation to whether the text offered a realist depiction of events or not. In this respect, one participant pointed out "it is realist because it describes in depth, but it describes people as objects", while another maintained "I think it is realist, but with a point of view". He also stated:

“The problem is how the mass is seen... For example, when he says that the biggest square of the city is filled twice, as hadn’t happened since 1988... one can also see the mass as potential. It is necessary to know how we are going to view the mass; the mass as... a bunch of crazy people or as a potential...”

Two participants did not think the text was realist, and one of them stated, referring to the author’s position: “I don’t think it is so realistic. It is real in the strict sense because the event occurred, but if you look at it in twenty years time it won’t be”. It was thus generally accepted that the text was realist in its description, but not in its interpretation of events.

Finally, one participant, comparing this text with Monsiváis’ portrayal of the television programme of Adal Ramones, stated:

“We are accepting Monsiváis’ *crónica* as we see it because we are constantly seeing it, we know it is real because we see it on television. But in the *crónica* that we are reading now we cannot accept everything, because some of us know some things and others different things. There is a different universe for all of us.”

Analysis

There were in the various group readings of the third *crónica* differences of detail, accuracy and, this time, also of intensity of the discussion. The most passionate discussion took place among participants of group 1, who had plenty to say about the text. They offered the most detailed debate about how tendentious the depiction of the demonstration was, focusing on the general ideas of the text as well as on particular scenes as illustrations of the author’s strategy of dismissing the student movement. They criticised the author’s description of events and time and again referred to the distortions of the text and to the facts ‘as they really were’, as witnessed directly by many of them who had participated in the demonstration described in the text. The discussion was long and lively, and the observations detailed and concrete.

Some participants of group 2 voiced a rejection of the way the author expressed his value judgements about the narrated event, but they did not comment on his views or on the demonstration itself and remained at the more abstract level of whether it was justified or not to express value judgements in a text of this kind. In

group 3, some participants passionately criticised the text's partiality and stance, however its description of events was generally accepted as accurate.

Curiously, two very similar references were made by two participants in groups 1 and 3 to other *crónicas* that offered positive and detailed descriptions of individuals taking part in the demonstration which are almost certainly allusions to the same author (Hermann Bellinghausen, who published a *crónica* of the same demonstration in newspaper *La Jornada*), thus pointing to the genre's popularity and to its important role in offering narratives of city events to newspaper readers.

In the three groups, at least one participant pointed to the more informative qualities of this text with respect to the former two: it was considered descriptive and digestible, written for a wider public (group 1); it was also noted that it contained specific data and expressed the author's opinion (group 2), and its realism and descriptive qualities were emphasised (group 3).

Finally, it is significant that there were almost no references to the student movement of 1968, which was the author's constant point of comparison through which his critical view of the recent march was expressed. Only one (older) person in group 3 referred to the text's allusions in that respect, although she wrongly interpreted the author's references as a critique of the movement of 1968.

3. Reading the *crónica* in Guayaquil

3.1. *Crónica* 1: Bohemian explorations of a marginal city

Group 1 (public university)

The first person to intervene pointed out that what she liked in Martillo's *crónica* is that it reminded her of the old times in Guayaquil. A second participant interjected that the author actually referred to what has changed in the city, and in particular to cultural alienation, making a comparison between the barmaid's mask of make-up and the general social and cultural situation of the country:

"Here the author is referring all the time to what has been changing in Guayaquil, and not only in Guayaquil but in the whole country. It about cultural alienation, which is getting stronger and stronger. That is why he speaks of the Garay district. He says that a woman

comes to him... a waitress, with her mask... And this is how we are: there is a mask. It is not ours, it is from somewhere else”.

She then referred to the artificiality of the name Guayaquil Inn and to the fact that the national currency is being changed by the dollar, as illustrations of the presence of foreign cultural and social influences. Another participant took up this theme, in particular the reference to the barmaid's name, observing changes in the language people use:

“They don't call things exactly by their name, but are giving them new identities... people sometimes to use better terms, don't use the terms from here, our own terms... Then we forget what is ours, we adopt new habits, new images in television... The title itself says it, because it ceases to be simply Guayaquil; it wants to appear to be more”.

There were, during the course of the debate, further references to the name of Guayaquil Inn, which participants found shocking: “Why does it have this title? I am impressed by the title. Why is it called Guayaquil Inn and not the city of Guayaquil?” Thus, the ambiguity of the title was both reflected upon but also explicitly rejected by some participants, which would have liked to see the indeterminacy of its metaphor reduced to a straightforward identification with their city and to a more realist narrative.

Further, the identification of the barmaid with the city was found strange and interesting. One participant stated the following:

“I [initially] understood the text from the perspective that he really was with a woman, and when it starts changing I understand that it is speaking of the city as a woman, as if the city was a woman. Then I see that she says she is Guayaquil Inn, because it refers to what the city is living, to how it has been changing. That is what I liked.”

Another participant described the character of El Conde, emphasising his typicality as an inhabitant of Guayaquil:

“He is the typical man from the coast, the typical Guayaquilean, who gets drunk, who prefers to forget his sorrows, who lives in the most deprived areas... And generally drunkards tend to

tell this kind of stories, of things that happen to them, of anecdotes. That is what I understood.”

With this she was pointing to a widespread tradition of storytelling that is a very significant component of the oral culture of the city and is associated with working class culture (the significance of this tradition was also emphasised by participants of other groups, see below).

The temporal dimension of the portrayal of the city and the issue of cultural alienation were the main focus of the discussion on this text, often in direct interrelation with each other. With reference to the first, contrasting views were expressed in an attempt to further specify the initial interventions and to clarify whether the text described the everyday life of a city of the past or its transformations through time (nobody maintained it was simply about the present city). Thus, for one participant: “It is beautiful because it is describing all our city; the things people do in their daily lives... it is truly describing everything that happens, what is taking place, how it changes, how the city is being transformed, how it used to be and how it is now”. Another stated at a later point that the text “look me to a long time ago, to how things were, how I was told they were. One could even bathe in the estuary and all that”.

I asked participants why they thought the text was portraying a city from the past. Responses were varied and interesting, drawing once more on this constant movement the *crónica* makes between the past and the present. One participant answered, accurately identifying the temporal dimension and the tone of Martillo’s vision of the city:

“It is because he is practically remembering. He is narrating the things he likes in Guayaquil. For example, when he says ‘when the afternoon dies’, he is observing things that pass, that have happened to him before. And at the same time that he is changing, all the things that surround him change”.

Another participant pointed at the figure of the barmaid, who is ragged and defeated: “She is not worth anything anymore, she is not as she used to be, she is ruined, she is something different. This shows that the city he knew was beautiful and that it has changed now that it is all painted, it has the signs of something different”. The bar

itself, where the story takes place, was identified as belonging to the past: “Now there are few places that have a jukebox and all that”.

Contrasting with this, another participant pointed out that:

“At root, the text never speaks of the past. He only complains about the present. I feel it this way, because he is describing just one day, not any past. He describes every moment, every step, what is happening at the moment. Now, what is really striking is when he starts speaking about Guayaquil Inn. He speaks about the situation which the city is in today.”

Other participants thought that the narrator described the past and/or alluded, through the image of the mask, to how things used to be, to a sort of unpolluted tradition of the city. Interestingly, they related this to the present situation and to contemporary urban changes, as for example in the following dialogue:

– ...In the way he says you are not like that any more, you are defeated; this means that what he used to know was different.

– Like Pier 2000².

– Yes, all painted. Now it has a mask.”

This gave way to a further discussion on cultural alienation, and the text was reinterpreted in the following way to give a view of the *present* situation: “...it is no longer Santiago of Guayaquil because we no longer use sucrés; there is no tradition. Now it is Guayaquil Inn instead, because it has to become international, it has to live in the present, there are dollars...”, thus finally doing away with the disturbing ambiguity of the *crónica*'s title.

The class dimension of the story was also implicitly present in the background throughout the discussion. An initial intervention pointed to the representative nature of the character of El Conde as somebody whose origins lay in the depressed areas of the city. Throughout, the customs and places portrayed by the text, which come exclusively from working class areas of the city centre, were directly accepted as traditional, authentic images of the city, and contrasted to cultural alienation. Later, I also asked them explicitly whether they thought the reality of Guayaquil that is being portrayed in the text corresponded to a certain poor and depressed city. The answer

² Malecón 2000 or Pier 2000 is the biggest urban project which recently transformed the city's old fashioned, shaded colonial port into a North-American style space of leisure.

was illuminating, as it similarly linked the popular to Guayaquil's own distinctive and idiosyncratic tradition, implying that it was the higher classes that were culturally and socially alienated:

"It is because generally those of us who are affected [by this reality] are those who are not millionaires. Those who have money will notice a little bit, but not much, because they live in a material world in which they go to Miami, to Europe on holiday. On the contrary, we go on holiday to Salinas, to the theatre, to the countryside... that kind of thing. Then there will be a lot of drunkards who are sentimental in that way, if they come from this social class, from these areas, they will be talking like this drunken man talks... We become more sensitive, because we are the ones that take the blows, that suffer the economic packages, who receive the bad treatment, the impositions from above. I assure you that if you go to a pub or to a poor area and you see a drunk talking..., many will talk about that, will recall the past like that, that Guayaquil..."

All participants liked the text, and the discussion was closed with further references to the fact that it described "what the neighbourhood used to be", "what was really worthwhile".

Group 2 (private university)

Two participants pointed out at the start that they liked the *crónica*. One of them referred explicitly to the literary nature and qualities of the text, to the mode of writing and changes of point of view, stating that "it seems strange to me and I like things which are unusual". The other pointed to the comparison of the barmaid with the city, and especially to the enigmatic aspect of both, underlined in the text, according to him, by an evocative reference to the city's hidden side: "what I like is the comparison between the waitress and Guayaquil. How he compares her to the city and how he has visited us seeing the hidden face of Guayaquil and making it partially visible. It did seem depressive to me, but real".

I asked whether the *crónica* spoke to them about Guayaquil. Their answers revealed some knowledge and appreciation of its "typicality" but, at the same time, a significant distance from the realities portrayed in the text:

“It has typical elements from Guayaquil. The jukebox playing songs that we’ve never heard in our lives, but that are probably bread and butter to these people. And also, when he says she was a *mestizo* with traces of former beauty, that she was covered with make-up, it is like the city, which may have been beautiful before, but is now covered with all kinds of cultural estrangement.”

To explain and emphasise the question of cultural alienation he then added: “Here we listen to everything; the city has been globalised and has not retained its own particular characteristics, nor does it even have a cosmopolitan sphere. It is a strange mixture. This is what is worrying”. Cultural and class differences and fragmentation are part of the alienation he referred to:

“For example, one is supposed to live in northern areas and to go to certain schools. This is part of the alienation. To listen to certain music. If you listen to La Sonora Matancera I don’t think you consider yourself capable of entering the circle in which most of Guayaquil’s “nice” people move. But this other reality exists.”

Thus, despite his distance from the described places, this participant knew that the reality portrayed in the *crónica* is a very common one in some areas of the city: “...in the centre you see these places. I don’t know if I may have passed through the Garay district, but you see the culture of the street corner; people drinking and talking at street corners. And there are pubs and everybody listens to the sound of the jukebox blasting”. He also added: “This could perfectly well be a scene in any other city of the country, not just in Guayaquil”, specifying later on that it is especially to the cities of the Ecuadorian coast he was referring.

Social distance and class differences in cultural tastes were addressed directly by all the participants. Thus, one of them observed: “For me all this is unknown... I would never put on Sonora Matancera to pass the time. I don’t even know where the Garay district is”. Another similarly pointed out about the Garay district that “I didn’t know it existed”. The others were also unfamiliar with the city landscapes described in the text. One participant stated: “We see it from the outside, but maybe if they read it they would identify with it, because it is something they experience”. In this context, the narrator’s reference to the hidden side of the city was reinterpreted in a new light, as identifying a class dimension to the portrayed events: “...we don’t know if it is the hidden side of the city or the city. For some it might be the hidden side, and

for the people that live in this medium it is their own thing, their everyday life. For us it is not". By contrast, one participant insisted that "the text is speaking to anyone to identify with it, from any background".

The characters of the text were perceived "like the typical characters you could find in a place like that". El Conde, qualified as a bohemian, was said to have identified with the woman in the pub, "then he realised that the life he had could be this hidden side of Guayaquil within him", and "she caught my attention because she was like him. He admired her because he saw himself portrayed in her...". Further, one participant emphasised the truth of the story and the knowledge and authority to narrate of this bohemian character: "Another thing I liked from the story is that it is true. To listen to a bohemian character speaking is interesting, because everything he says has a sad content", and "he has known so much and seen so many places, that everything he speaks about is interesting, intelligent, sad. Enigmatic". The experiences of such a character were not just related to his condition as a wanderer through the city, but more directly to his class origins, which put him into contact with a reality that is ignored by the participants. In this sense, they referred to working class people they know, such as the porter of the university or the domestic servant, from whom "one learns a lot of things and even gets to know another reality...".

No comments were made about the temporal dimension of the *crónica*, so at the end I asked them whether they thought the text was describing the present day city or a reality from the past. This was not considered a very relevant theme for discussion, which focused instead on the amount of external influences and the fact that "...now the city is more dressed up. There are more external influences". In this respect, the following dialogue took place:

"- There is a process of alienation. To enjoy yourself you no longer consider that necessary, but other things: the disco...

- The "after party"³.

- The after party. Things like that. The English words in your vocabulary."

It was also noted that the culture of the street corner, as described earlier by one participant, was being reduced and limited to certain marginal areas. In addition,

³ In English in the original.

some references to street violence and its effect on habits were made, and this was related to this possible loss of the tradition of street culture.

Group 3 (members of literary workshop)

One participant opened the conversation stating: "It is like a comparison between a woman and the city; the decay of the city reflected in a woman". A second participant adequately situated the text's temporal dimension, making a general statement about the *cronista's* work as a whole:

"Generally one sees this kind of things in Martillo, that his *crónica* touches so many aspects of the past, or of the past that is still in the present. Because this image of the baker, for example, who passes by whistling, everybody remembers that... And he complements this with the music people listen to. It is going from present to past, and always mixing today's Guayaquil with yesterday's."

Another participant commented that in Latin America strange things such as the fact that a woman is called Guayaquil Inn are quite common, and added the following to the observation made by the former participant, also identifying the geographical location of the *crónica*: "like she says... one must have some experience to understand this business of Sonora Matancera, Daniel Santos, etc. I have a knowledge of this because of my parents... I grew up in the centre and those are typical images from the centre... for me they are not so strange".

The ability to locate and thus correctly understand certain cultural elements and references from the text was the central issue of the discussion. In this context, one participant expressed the following concern:

"I don't know if reading this everybody will be able to locate certain things or put themselves in this context the author is trying to create. Obviously, with the form in which he narrates he is involving people, but it is far richer if one knows what Sonora Matancera or things like that are... I think that if one can't locate certain details... one loses the story."

What must be understood and located in its very particular references from the text is, according to the participants of this group, a portrait of everyday life from a past that is still alive in the present, not only in the memories of its inhabitants, but also in

secluded, working class areas where this tradition has survived. Its understanding depends not just on knowledge of the city and its places but, more importantly, on a lived experience of certain cultural modes. Thus,

“...a past that is still present anyway. One can call it past because it is things that have always been there for a thousand years, but that are now also present, especially in certain areas. Many areas of Guayaquil are in fact like frozen in time. People have the same daily routine, the same activities they had many years ago.”

And,

“This is typical of all those pubs in the city centre, because I have been in a couple of them. I have been in Cabo Rojeño and you say ‘here the last 20 years have not gone by’. This is what one feels in these places. I don’t know if it is only about being able to locate yourself in Guayaquil; *it is having lived a certain Guayaquil* as an inhabitant of this city.”

It is thus having lived the city in a certain way that gives the key to the full enjoyment and understanding of the text, in an identification that now goes beyond strict class divisions to point to a sort of marginal cultural tradition, based on popular culture.

On the other hand, there is a significant temporal element in the participants’ contact with and knowledge of the more traditional aspects of city life, related to their ages (they are in their mid twenties and thirties) and to the recent dramatic increase of urban violence and the fact that “violence and terror establish new routes”:

“...all of us in a way have had some contact with areas like that, without living there. Especially in former years, when everything was quieter. Now we are scared; we cannot go through the place nor live it with the intensity and proximity with which we would have done at another time. But we could some years ago, and we remember that.”

Another participant also underlined this aspect: “...I teach the new generation. The other day I was appalled to find out that 30% of my class had never been in the city centre” (she teaches at a private university). She referred to “a fragmenting city” and to the fact that for this new generation “these things don’t mean anything”.

By contrast, one participant emphasised the universal (literary) content of the text in the following way:

"It's like you say; you can enjoy it more if you have had this experience of Guayaquil, but one can also extrapolate the universal from it. That is, it is using local elements, but it is also extrapolating a feeling universal to any city, which is a mystery... Any city can trap, involve and kill somebody because it implies mystery. I think that is what can be extrapolated."

Participants also reflected on the form through which the text speaks of the city. On the one hand, following one participant, the text does not contain a story, nothing happens. On the other, according to another, it creates a sensation which symbolises Guayaquil; it is "a poetic way of speaking of Guayaquil".

One participant stated in relation to the comparison between the city and the woman, pointing to issues of cultural identity:

"Guayaquil is a painted *mestizo*. It could be that as well. And when she says 'I don't remember my name. They have given me so many': Guayaquil is a city that has a questionable identity. It is being transformed so much, constantly, it lives for each day, it also adopts any name it is given..."

Another participant pointed out, in this respect, that the reader of this text "is looking at certain contradictions of Guayaquil":

"In my opinion this is a joke, Guayaquil Inn. It's like Guayaquil can be, so provincial in a way, like cities that on the other hand have North-American norms. Guayaquil is the typical city in which you can have a Mercedes Benz and beside it somebody on a donkey. You can have the shop on the corner, which is falling apart, but is called a minimarket. To me, Guayaquil Inn is trying to show this contradiction."

Thus, "it is like an irony, because this woman of former beauty, but with a lot of make-up, with this name... is a bit like Guayaquil".

Participants shared the view that this strangely contradictory nature of the city, its combination of autochthonous and foreign elements, and the transformation and assimilation of the latter in Guayaquil's own particular and idiosyncratic tradition was a key element to understand its typically mixed culture and identity. This was further emphasised in the following terms:

“At night all this area of Victoria Square, the transvestites, the fights... It seems that García Márquez didn't say anything special. In these areas what one sees is so strange. I have seen children being taken down in a basket from the second to the first floor... And this in the centre of Guayaquil! (...) It's as if this contradiction is in this name [Guayaquil Inn]; as if readers must have some consciousness of this contradiction, I believe, to enjoy the story, to understand what it is about.”

At the end, some significant aspects that had not been touched upon before appeared. Someone asked whether El Conde is a well-known character. One participant answered that the *cronista* repeats the character in other texts, while another participant informed them that Martillo is also known by the name of El Conde. There was also a reference to the enigma of the text. One participant especially stressed this element: “The enigma that it leaves is interesting. He leaves the question open; at the end he goes away and gets lost in the city, and no one knows what the enigma is”, and pointing out that “I feel a desolation about not knowing”. Another participant pointed out that the enigma “is this very contradiction, this very indefinite quality of the city”, while a third one stated that she would have liked more explanation and clarification of what this enigma or enigmas might be.

Finally, I asked them whether they recognised Guayaquil in the text or it could be about another city, to which one participant answered that “we recognise ourselves in it, but I think that our city can be any city”, while another pointed out that “it's the kind of city that is not a capital city but is pretty active”.

Analysis

The most significant difference between the various readings this *crónica* produced in the three groups is primarily related to the degree of familiarity participants had with the particular images of the city portrayed in the text. Participants of group 1, from working class origins, seemed to be very familiar with the scenes of everyday life represented in the *crónica*, to the extent that its actual images themselves were not explicitly discussed. The particular temporal dimension of the text and its constant references to a past that lives in the present was accurately interpreted, and the parallel between the barmaid and the city traced and explored. The text significantly provoked at this point a lively discussion of the issue of cultural

alienation, in which constant references were made to the present situation of the city. In fact, the text became a tool for the interpretation of the present crisis of the country in terms of cultural alienation, while it was itself reinterpreted in the light of these events. Also significantly, references to the country's situation and how it is lived by the people were made in the first person, by people who clearly considered themselves directly addressed by the text.

Participants from the other two groups, from middle and upper-class origins, showed a different degree of familiarity with the city portrayed in the text. In the discussions, the significance of some concrete elements emphasized by Martillo as references to particular aspects of the city were explored. Participants of group 2, who showed a position of clear distance from the reality of the text, made various references to the music (classic salsa from Sonora Matancera), which they had never listened to, and to the Garay district, where they had never been, and referred to the people who experienced the realities described by the text always in the third person. Among this group, the discussion centered on social difference and diverse cultural uses, while some dimensions of the text were not accurately interpreted. This is especially the case of its temporal perspective which, on the other hand, was not considered important (in contrast with the other two groups).

It was among participants of group 3 that the *cronista's* concrete references to particular elements of the popular culture of Guayaquil were most accurately identified and discussed. People pointed to the kind of music, the figure of the baker in his bicycle, street football matches, as typical and idiosyncratic elements of a city they had known and experienced in their childhood, when social barriers were not as severe as today. The position of most of these participants with relation to the culture described in the text can be characterised as one of "distanced proximity": they have never been part of it but have witnessed, especially in former years, its forms and, more significantly, had some familiarity with this 'marginal experience' of the city that is evoked in the text. Their age – participants are in their mid 20s and 30s, older than those of group 2, in their early 20s – explains some of the differences between the two groups, who come from a similar socio-economic position.

Cultural alienation, while a major theme of debate in group 1 and also mentioned by one participant in group 2, was not discussed in the same terms in group 3. Here, the focus was identity rather than alienation, and participants emphasised the contradictory character of the culture of Guayaquil as an indication of its very

particular tradition in which the local is recombined with the international and global in unusual ways, and which, according to them, is what the *cronista* was also trying to highlight in his text. Clearly, this position of 'distanced proximity' allowed participants to examine and comprehend what the role of foreign cultural elements might be in Guayaquil, in contrast with the identification of participants from group 1 with traditional and popular culture, and their straightforward condemnation of those foreign elements. Both positions are justified if we take into account the social place from which they are expressed, and point to different cultural experiences of the city.

In group 1, participants did not possess the ability to describe the formal qualities of the text with specialised language, and there was only one reference to form, which was of a general character. However, they did have the knowledge and everyday experience of the city to adequately interpret the atmosphere and traditions evoked (sometimes indirectly and metaphorically, in a very stylised language) in the text. By contrast, participants of group 3, in addition to being widely familiar with literary reading of texts, all knew who the *cronista* was and had a certain idea about his style before reading this *crónica*. In group 2, one participant said Martillo's name was familiar, although she did not recognise the *cronista*'s style.

3.2. *Crónica 2: Fictionalisation and comment on current political events*

Group 1 (public university)

The first participant to comment on this text remarked that it was funny and that it referred to the recent coup of 21st January 2000, although she also pointed to some difficulties in reading it: "When he speaks I don't understand much... It wasn't easy to read... When it said 'ununited'. It's as if he's from the *sierra*". The article was indeed published in Quito's daily *Hoy*, and its wide use of colloquial language immediately revealed to readers from the coast its regional origins. However, the difficulties in reading that this participant was pointing to derived more from the level of formal elaboration of the text and from its language games than from regional linguistic differences. To explain the use of English words, another participant pointed out that one of the characters in the story is an emigrant who lives in the United States.

There followed a brief discussion of the political events that took place on the day of the coup, in which these were immediately related to participants' everyday lives and their experience of the political situation of the country: "They are talking and telling one another what happened and everything we experienced. Because I do remember that. I lived it. I spent two days watching the news...". In the discussion there were references to the role the Indians played in the events; one participant pointed out: "I don't know if it is for good or for bad, but the Indians fight. They are united. And maybe they have won something. We should be like that, united like them, because they fight to the death". Another participant reflected on struggle and conformism, saying that she tends to be more a conformist because struggle is useless: "democracy is democracy in inverted commas. There is no true democracy. The people that we elect as leaders of our country are all the same, it will always be the same". A critique of those in power and their government was formulated, using some of the expressions introduced in the text, and denouncing that politicians do nothing to deliver concrete policies.

Participants commented on the joke made in the text when the migrant is told not to return to her country because during her visits there are always coups, which was reformulated in the light of the wider economic and social crisis. As one participant expressed: "she says better not to come back, because you are going to find a bigger disaster than when you left". Another participant also observed that this was, in the current context, a common reality for many Ecuadorians who emigrated: "This sentence 'don't come back' I have heard it from many people. To many people who are over there and want to come here to start a little business, their families, their friends tell them: 'you better stay there'".

I asked them whether they had liked the *crónica*, how it narrates the coup. One participant considered it to be "real experience" and written "like a short story". For another, the narration "could be perceived clearly" and was beautiful. And yet another observed that "at one moment, all this was true and it made a big impact upon us". Participants shared the view that the text was just a description of events as they had taken place, and not an interpretation, noting that "these perspectives took place, because they really happened as he narrates it in few words", and that "it is something we saw. To me, everything I saw is in it". One participant pointed out that these *crónicas* are also forms of protest, because one is able to perceive the harshness through them, the possible manipulation of events by the colonel and the fact that "the

person changes and everything stays the same. There have really been no changes; everything is the same”.

Only one participant stated that she disagreed with the way the *cronista* presents the Indians as passive victims or as people who “got up very early to set the cat among the pigeons”, because “they are people that have fought and are going to continue fighting in spite of everything”. In her opinion events were narrated in a mocking form. Nevertheless, most participants, even when explicitly asked whether they could perceive a certain subjectivity, as in the example of the view of the Indians, did not consider the text had a subjective tone.

Finally, I asked them why they thought the author was using English words, giving an example which also contained a word game with the name of removed president Jamil Mahuad and a reference to the literature of García Márquez (“Is that Macondo? Hey what’s up? What’s going down? What’s Jamil the big wheel saying now?”). No formal intention on the part of the author was remarked upon, and the English expressions were explained in the following manner: “when one emigrates elsewhere one has to speak English”, and “some people just get used to it”. The reference to Macondo was clearly not understood, as neither had been earlier references to another of his novels *El Coronel no tiene quien le escriba* [*Nobody writes to the colonel*]: “And this bit about nobody follows the colonel; he risked everything because he knew there were people who supported him”.

Group 2 (private university)

During the reading of the text some participants laughed and they also commented on the newspaper it comes from and the fact that it is written by someone from the *sierra*, which, following one participant, could be established just by looking at words such as “comadrita”. The first participant to intervene in the discussion pronounced with emphasis the name of Macondo, used in the text to refer to the Ecuadorian political reality. He continued: “It is sad but true. The only thing lacking is a caravan of gypsies coming along and convincing us that the ice exists” (alluding to the famous passage in *Cien años de soledad* in which the inhabitants of Macondo discover ice).

Another participant stated: “In my view all this is irony and mocking... On the other hand I sometimes found it difficult to understand, because it is talking about

somebody, for example, with words in English, or for example this: Coup d'Etat Queen. Secondly, it is a joke about everything that happened that day". Brief clarifying comments followed about who were the protagonists of the coup as described in the text, and then the following dialogue took place, in which the first four lines come from the four different participants that were taking part in the discussion:

– Its funny what happened.

– You can't do anything but laugh about it

– No, but it's nice, because it is exactly what happened but as a joke.

– A joke about the political joke.

– But it is exactly what happened, he has not invented or changed anything. It is exactly how it was."

Some comments on form and language followed, focusing first on how people from the *sierra* speak, which they said is clearly noticeable in the text because "it's written as if somebody was talking", and also on the use of English words. The author's agility and speed were commented upon as features participants liked, while some of his word games and expressions, such as "donkibus tribus" and "banana republic", were quoted.

I asked them whether they thought the text gave a correct version of events. The initial answer expressed a general doubt about national politics:

"...in this country one is fed up of listening to so many versions that one doesn't know anymore who is stating the correct thing... We don't know if Jamil was doing the correct thing and they threw him out because of political games or interests, or if he really was doing things very badly and what they wanted was truly to save the people, democracy and the economy of the country... I share a feeling of scepticism towards the intentions of politicians."

However, no interest was shown in discussing which particular version of events the author of the text was portraying.

I asked whether they thought the article was making fun of a serious matter. One participant answered:

"I think it is ironic rather than funny. Everything it says has a double meaning. It's like the typical person who talks making jokes, but you know is trying to say something in a different way, with a message. And this is like that; you laugh, but it is trying to say what happened and how it happened."

On the other hand, one participant commented, at a later moment: "The ironic tone of the author picks up the style of the people, who don't want this to happen again. Because people start mocking serious things or giving them less importance". One participant pointed out that the text also introduced the issue of emigration, although this was not discussed further.

Observations about the references in the text to the literature of García Márquez were numerous. The participant who made the opening comment about Macondo added later: "Do you realise our stereotype of banana republic, that we are described as Macondo, the most backward village in the world?". Another pointed out that she would read the article if she saw it in the newspaper because of its title, correctly identifying the reference to the novel *El coronel no tiene quién le escriba*. There was also a reference from one participant to the end of *Cien años de soledad*: "The prophecy said that after a hundred years the last of the Buendía family would die... Maybe in a hundred years Ecuador will disappear".

I finally asked participants which style of *crónica* they found more interesting. Three of them pointed to Martillo's text, because "it makes you think more", and because of the way of writing and of its style. One participant stated: "I would like to read this style, that of the colonel, just like now, but...I wouldn't read a book like that (...). I'd love a book like [Martillo's *crónica*]". One participant preferred Ulchur's political *crónica* because "it affects you more". She did not like the first *crónica* because of its form and its depth: "it's easier that somebody reads this and then laughs and thinks, than to read something so deep... where there are many things left unclear..." (this participant said later that she did not like reading poetry, having to interpret things; she wanted instead to know exactly what was being said). On the other hand, this ambiguity is precisely what one of the participants that preferred Martillo's style liked: "I like it because it leaves you without explanations, it makes you work more, as if you can arrive at your own truth according to who you are". There were also some reflections on the fact that the texts are too dissimilar to be compared, have different intentions and style. Martillo's text was perceived to be for a

book while Ulchur's was meant for a newspaper; that is why, one participant expressed, the first text came out on a Sunday paper.

Group 3 (members of a literary workshop)

The first observation made about Ulchur's text was that it is more related to the present than the former one, also because of its word games, and that one must know what happened to understand it. One participant also asked whether this text would fall within the genre of the *crónica*. I answered that this was not clear, that it depended on the definition of *crónica*, and she then added: "I suppose this is in the page of Comment. It's like those critical comments from Febres Cordero. But it is a *crónica* of an event, *crónica* of a fact, and maybe because of this one can say that it is a *crónica*". Another participant observed that the text is "a political critique" and that "it is also an editorial column". She quoted one of the final comments of the text, where the author's view of the coup is offered.

Participants thought the text clearly revealed the author's vision of events, in particular his critical view of two of the members of the triumvirate (Solórzano and colonel Lucio Gutiérrez) and his vindication to some degree of the role of the Indians. However, his specific political vision was not further discussed, and the debate focused instead on the satirical nature of the text and the author's ironical attitude with respect to the events he portrayed, which was identified with a general attitude on the part of the Ecuadorians who had witnessed the developments of that day. Thus, all participants perceived the author's humour, sarcasm and irony; "a humour that criticises, an ironical humour that is trying to put everyone in their real places". One participant noted: "I think the way it is written makes it very funny. For one that lived through all this it was also very funny; you didn't know whether to cry or to laugh when all this happened"; and later "I think what's nice in the text is to laugh at oneself. After all you are also taking part in this banana republic"; and "I believe that one recognises oneself in this humour". Another participant approached the humour of the text as a means that allowed the author to express some tough realities (she quoted the sentence "things are going downhill fast in our country right back to where it all started, all loose ends and loose cannons, all privates out of uniform and colonels out of their minds"), pointing out that "the mask of humour makes his critique more

subtle". The author's general critique of society was also found interesting by one participant, who quoted his concepts of "collective utopias versus cyber solitudes".

On the other hand, the complexity of the text's form was emphasised: its word games, its long paragraphs and the references to García Márquez. Some of the words and expressions of the text were quoted, like the word "chapulinesco". When I asked them what it meant, the word's connections to a shared knowledge of a popular cultural tradition were fully revealed to me in the explanation given by one participant: "There is a famous Mexican programme that many people used to watch here, with a character called Chapulín Colorado, a super hero. He was so clumsy and stupid with things...Very comic". Another participant stated that "this text has the literary turn within journalism; it is the perfect hybrid", and that everybody could understand the reference to the title of García Márquez's novel, even if they had not read it.

The second half of the discussion centred on the nature of the political events that had taken place and the participants' attitude towards them. One participant remarked that the end of the text ("shiiiiit!") was very good, because it does not mean anything, it does not give a solution, it does not prescribe what people should do. Then, another participant, defending the weak constitutional regime, referred to the danger of another coup in the following terms:

"Here it poses a question that personally terrifies me: she is not to come in July because at any moment the president can be overturned. This feeling we were left with. Personally, I can have a lot of respect for a nation that stands up and says no, but I do believe that this has to be stopped in some way; people cannot have so much power."

There were comments on how people are manipulated by certain political groups and how at the end always the same people remain in power. One participant referred to the version of events she had from her father, who is an advisor to the new government, according to whom the developments of that day and the final outcome were known and agreed upon by the relevant political fractions from the start. She also commented, agreeing with another participant: "Then...it is about living with this mockery towards the masses, towards the people. It is feeling part of the mocked people in a way, when everyone knows that it is just five people who have the power". One participant finally remarked: "This is the country of crises, there is

always a crisis and demonstrations for everything... One can do nothing but laugh at what happens"; and

"Because of all these crises you are so obliged merely to survive that sometimes you just concentrate on that, on passing the day. That a march passes by and that they don't throw stones at my car or burn the bus in which I travel; or in having bread for tomorrow... An ironic laughter comes... So many things happen and nobody is interested any more, nobody says anything."

Irony and distance were thus the main feelings expressed in relation to the political events the *crónica* described, a distance which might appear paradoxical when we take into account that this discussion took place just a few months after the coup.

Analysis

Two main types of differences were revealed in the reception of this text by the three groups. The first of these is related to the ability to decode the text and to understand it adequately, while the second refers to the political views that were expressed by the participants of the different groups.

With reference to the first dimension, it must be noted that only the participants of group 3 successfully decoded the text as a whole. Its members understood and explicitly discussed the *crónica* as being an editorial comment, i.e. a text the main function of which is to express the author's opinion of a particular event, and also correctly deciphered its formal and textual elements, its word games and literary intertextuality. Participants of group 2 also adequately interpreted many of the literary references and the text's ironic tone, although they did not focus on the nature of the text as an editorial comment. Participants of group 1, on the contrary, were unable to decode the text's literary references nor did they correctly read the text as a comment, but as a simple, straightforward narration of events. In both groups 2 and 3 there were abundant comments on form, on the word games of the text and on its literary references, which were completely absent in group 1. In this group, participants repeatedly related the text to their everyday lives and their various personal experiences of the narrated events.

With reference to the second dimension, the political attitudes that the reading of this *crónica* aroused among the different groups, significant differences can be observed. Among the members of group 1, a generalised feeling of mistrust of those in power was expressed, as well as a certain solidarity with the Indians, and the view that in their country there is no real democracy. In none of the groups was the need to discuss the author's concrete version of events felt, but the participants of both group 2 and group 3 shared the *cronista's* ironic vision, emphasising the funny and grotesque dimension of the political events the text comments upon. The theme of migration – a phenomenon that has become widespread during the present crisis affecting mainly people of lower middle-class and working-class origins – was strongly underlined only among members of group 1.

3.3. *Crónica* 3: A journalistic version of the signs of the crisis in everyday life

Group 1 (public university)

The first participant to intervene pointed out that the situation described by the text – intimidation of the passengers travelling in a city bus – is constantly happening to her, that she is always scared. All the participants concurred that this is something that occurs on a daily basis, while one noticed that it is not only black people (as those portrayed in the text) who engage in this kind of activities. Another participant pointed out that “if a black with a strange attitude gets on I get scared”, while a third one interjected: “what happens is that one always judges the black as a thief, but there are also many well-dressed whites who are bigger thieves”. The participant who had made the first comment on the racial dimension of the *crónica*, insisted that it offers a particular, personal view of events, because it refers to a certain kind of people, and gave examples from the text: the mention that the boys were black, that their armpits stank, and the allusion to the girl from the catholic university.

The reality and circumstances of the people who make a living by selling things on public transport were explained by one participant in the following way: “Because of the lack of employment these people work selling sweets and they often get on the bus just to beg. And maybe they think that because we are in the bus we are not poor...”. For another participant, reading a text like that “makes me sad, because I have seen people from my neighbourhood who have had no real opportunities...”.

Other participants, on the contrary, noticed that begging was an easy way of making money, and several particular stories of people who begged were discussed.

Finally, participants discussed which *crónica* they had liked the most. One participant pointed to the first *crónica*, while another mentioned the second one, and a third pointed to this last text, “because I see this practically every day”.

Group 2 (private university)

The opening comment on the discussion of this text was the following: (“I really liked this one. It’s typical, the most typical thing one can have. Everything it says has happened to me” (somewhat paradoxically, this is the participant who also liked the ambiguity of Martillo’s *crónica* and who enjoys literature and especially poetry). Two other participants commented on similar experiences they had had in public transport. Only one participant, who did not use public transport and was referred to as a “snob”, had never encountered situations of this kind.

I told them that I had initially thought the reality portrayed in this *crónica*, like that described in the first text, would not have a direct relationship to their everyday life. One participant answered: “It’s because in the first case it is a form of leisure. One can choose his leisure activities. But this is general”. Another stated that she had to take the bus to come to university. The generalised experience of begging and selling things on public transport was identified as something very typical and compared to the culture of the street corner, referred to earlier during the reading of the first text. One participant stated:

“One is tired of hearing the same typical phrase; one listens and listens and at the end even learns them by heart... At just one stop two sellers get on, one sells banana chips and the other one crisps; another one pens and another razors; the other one a magic cream that cures... everything. Once a man got on who swallowed a nail this big...”

Several negative observations were made about the little children who beg on buses, who “just learn to walk and are already begging”, and one participant pointed out that “here people believe that you have the obligation to help them. That we owe this to them because they are poor, and we who are also poor but have a little more... Because I think no rich people are left here, they have all gone to Miami”.

The racial connotations of the *crónica* were also discussed, and participants generally agreed on their views with respect to black people: when they see black people they are more scared, “it’s not that you’re racist, but you are more careful than if someone is white”; “it’s sad but true”. One participant, however, pointed to social class as the main reason for racial discrimination. He said: “you see this here because there are not many blacks. If you go to United States you can see blacks in big cars, famous lawyers. Here, on the contrary, blacks have no cars. Then, I think they inspire fear also because of this”. Participants also identified concrete references to race in the text, as in the expression “a frightened girl gapes at the youngest black man”, quoted by one of them, and in the fragment “‘You know what, it gets right up my nose when these sons of...look down their noses at us black people!’ The boy at the back spits the words, with a deep and endless rage...”, quoted by another.

The text was found to be of an informative type, with the objective of “portraying what really happens”. For another participant it was “a denunciation, because nobody likes being robbed”. I asked whether they thought the text was describing reality in a neutral way, and they all agreed that it did; that it was objective and offered “a real vision”; “it hasn’t added or taken anything away”. One participant also pointed out: “it’s a true narration of something that happens; it even starts with the time”.

In comparison with the other texts, this *crónica* was considered by one participant to be “not very elaborate, simple. The author merely wanted to say something”. She added: “This kind of *crónica* is written, in my opinion, by anybody. There is no specialisation. It’s only written by someone who wanted to write what happened, to denounce something”. She distinguished it from the second *crónica* (another participant had remarked on some similarity between them because both belonged to the journalistic context and were straightforward, in that “everybody understands the same thing”) which, although also written in a journalistic style, was well made, with good jokes. Participants also repeated that this third *crónica* “doesn’t imply a value judgement, it only tells what is happening” and that it is easy to understand. Answering a question of mine, two participants pointed out that this was, among the three *crónicas*, the kind of text they would most like reading in the newspapers on a daily basis, while one insisted that she would read texts like the second *crónica* as well. There was a final reflection on the kind of texts they had read and the section of the newspaper they belonged to.

Group 3 (members of a literary workshop)

The first participant to intervene pointed to the *crónica*'s circular structure and closed ending: "it starts with a song and finishes equally with a song". Then, another participant pointed out: "luckily I have never been attacked, but for the people who always travel on public transport it happens everyday", and remarked that in the case portrayed in the text the situation is less dangerous because the youngsters are not armed and only intimidate. There were comments on the "gentle" and strange nature of the theft, and also on a new style of 'robbery' of forcing people to buy things. One participant insisted that she has an everyday experience of public transport (she is the only one amongst participants in this group) and that these things happen a lot and are greatly on the increase.

One participant pointed out that she felt the text had a certain defensive tone on behalf of the people who staged the 'robbery', to which another remarked on the fact that they were identified as being black: "I sensed in the way it is written certain prejudices. This importance given to the fact that they are black. Maybe it was part of that particular story. I don't know if it is like that with people who are not black, maybe *mestizos*; if they would have pointed at it, if they would have emphasised it as a feature".

On the other hand, it was noted that the text reproduces some widespread stereotypes, such as in the examples of the "beautiful student from the Catholic University". In this context, one participant stated: "I don't know if the author really saw a theft or just attempted to recreate it with literary skills". Another pointed out that the text does reproduce the way beggars and street sellers speak (quoting expressions like "ponte mosca", "get angry"), as well as the kind of music that is usually played in buses. A participant then noted: "The music again. Like in the first *crónica*, it is the means to situate yourself, to feel that this is something that belongs to you, to feel that they are speaking of *your* place". All these aspects thus emphasised the *crónica* not just as a description of events, but rather as a recreation of reality; not its exactness but rather its verisimilitude. In this context, the following final clarification on the nature of the three *crónicas* was made:

"I think the three writers have picked a totally real experience, a real event, and have put it into words and narrated it in a literary manner giving it certain touches. Maybe the beautiful girl from the Catholic University wasn't there. The author couldn't know whether she is from the Catholic University. But a way of making it more attractive is putting in it the beautiful girl from the Catholic University".

Further, it was pointed out that the text "it is also so easy to follow... even if you haven't lived through something like that you know it so well that anyone can comment upon it", and that it is of a simple, strictly journalistic nature, even in its title. One participant remarked that the text is "a piece of news narrated...with literary language, more attractive, but one could say it's a piece of news. An item of news that is also written as a symbol of...similar things that happen", thus underlining the exemplary nature of the text as a recreation of a 'typical' situation, as she had earlier emphasised. The different styles of the three texts were also distinguished by participants: while the first *crónica* is more literary, like a short story, and could be about an existing character but also totally fictitious, the second is an editorial comment, and the third is journalistic. The last text was also said to be representative of the current situation of crisis and of a proliferation of people who "prefer to go to beg to the streets".

At the end of the discussion, several stories of beggars and street sellers were told, while one participant made the following comment: "This is typical of this country. Here people stay with their arms crossed and this is their option. Charity, charity and charity, and not thinking of other possibilities. Even the way they do it, they could be selling something in the bus in a more creative way. One repeats the same commonplaces again and again". Another participant pointed out that "the problem is that the inhabitants of Guayaquil are so used to being asked for money with an account of a tragedy".

Analysis

With respect to the other two texts, differences in reading between the three groups were in the case of this third *crónica* relatively few. Due to its more straightforward journalistic nature and to its lower degree of formal complexity and ambiguity, discussions tended to focus here on very similar topics. It must be

specially noted that all participants demonstrated a considerable degree of proximity to the events narrated in the text (even those who did not use public transport), which were identified as typical and everyday. In the three groups there was a discussion of similar experiences participants had had, and abundant stories of beggars, street sellers and thieves were told. The text thus clearly motivated participants to speak about the everyday realities of their city as they experienced them in their daily lives.

Only among participants of group 3 were the formal features of the text discussed. While in groups 1 and 2 this *crónica* was considered to be an accurate and informative description of everyday life, participants of group 3 discussed the way in which the text recreated and fictionalised reality in a particular way.

While in group 1 some participants referred to the lack of jobs and of opportunities as a reason for the kind of situations portrayed in the text, the participants of other groups showed a more distanced attitude with respect to the realities of beggars, street vendors and petty thieves.

4. Conclusion

Urban *crónicas* are to various degrees literary texts that as such assert a certain distance and autonomy from the world. However, the genre is also characterised by the affirmation of its proximity to everyday reality. A *crónica* generally engages its readers by portraying elements that can be related to their lives and experiences⁴. One important implication of this is that a *crónica* only acquires its full meaning when explicitly related to concrete phenomena of everyday existence in a particular place. The various focus group readings of *crónicas* have illustrated this fact. Thus, the ability to relate the narrated events to personal knowledge and experiences of life in the city proved to be a necessary element for a full and engaging understanding of each text. Constant references and connections to the participants' own experiences and perceptions of the elements portrayed in the *crónicas* were made in all the discussions, which added in turn new dimensions and nuances to the text's original written content.

⁴ There are two instances where this is not true in a direct sense: on the one hand, historical *crónicas*, which portray events from the past, on the other, travel *crónicas*, which offer accounts of other, unknown places. In both cases, even if there exists either a temporal or a spatial distance from the immediate reality of the reader, the *crónica* still depicts everyday manifestations of the world it portrays, thus offering the reader a sense of proximity with a lived reality.

The importance of such a close knowledge about everyday social reality was maybe nowhere as striking as in the case of the first text read in Mexico City. Monsiváis' account of the influence of the mass media on national politics relied heavily on the fictionalisation of a series of recent television programmes in which political candidates were interviewed. Only if this link with reality was recognised could the text be fully understood as a satire of specific developments in actually existing politics in Mexico. Of course, this connection does not exhaust the texts' meaning, which also contains a general critique of the influence of modern mass media in politics.

The four texts that offered depictions of particular urban events and topographies (Mejía and Martillo's more literary and stylised texts and the two more journalistic accounts of a demonstration in Mexico City and a theft in a Guayaquil bus) similarly appealed to participants' experiences of their city. Interestingly, they also revealed the class dimension of these experiences, as they provoked different responses and identifications in the various groups. With respect to Mexico City, Mejía's portrayal was from a middle class perspective and vision of city life, and concentrated on central, well-known areas, attempting to offer a view of the city made out of the montage of its fragments, experiences and traditions. Martillo's portrayal of Guayaquil was more radical, because it was entirely based upon a marginalised popular cultural tradition, elevating it as the key to the city's identity. In both cases, readers from the private university did not show a special interest in the *cronistas'* depiction of the city or in the issues of cultural identity raised by the text. Especially in the case of Guayaquil, they also demonstrated a very partial knowledge of a city that is fragmented along strict class lines, and a distance from the working class atmospheres evoked in the text.

One particular aspect of the *crónica's* engagement with everyday life that should be especially emphasised is that readers may possess a first hand knowledge of events that radically questions the *cronista's* representation of them. The best illustration of this is the systematic critique that participants of group 1 of Mexico City offered of the account of the student demonstration, invoking their own experiences as direct witnesses and actors of the narrated events.

As a consequence of the *crónica's* proximity to everyday reality, its reception would seem to contradict Bourdieu's clearcut distinction between the distance of the pure gaze of the aesthetic disposition and a 'popular aesthetic', which establishes the

continuity between art and life and “performs a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life” (1989: 5). In the *crónicas*, a recognition of this continuity is not a sign of naivety on the part of the reader, but rather a prerequisite for a full understanding of the text, which functions on the basis of the affirmation of a sort of poetics of everyday existence.

However, the various focus group sessions revealed that there are different ways of reading *crónicas* also confirming, to a certain extent, this very distinction between the aesthetic disposition as the affirmation of form over function and a ‘popular aesthetic’. This dichotomy, which can be misleading as a general means to explain the adequate reception of the *crónica* as a genre, proves nevertheless to have some significance when explaining differences in actual readings of texts. Thus, generally, working class participants (most clearly group 1 from Guayaquil) tended to focus less on the formal aspects of the text and more on linking its images to their own experiences of similar phenomena. On the other hand, most middle class and upper-middle class readers concentrated on a distanced, rather abstract and more formal reading, reflecting on what a *crónica* is, what its features as a genre are and about their possible audiences (especially in group 2 from Mexico City, but also in group 3 from Guayaquil, which performed a more literary reading of the texts). In particular, conventions of genre were invoked many times, especially among participants of groups 1 and 2 from Mexico City, and also among participants of group 3 from Guayaquil, in order to interpret, evaluate and classify particular texts.

I would again question Bourdieu’s implication that a reception based on the continuity of the text with everyday life is always reductive, by claiming that it is also possible to effect an adequate and creative reading of some *crónicas* without the distance and concern with form which the aesthetic disposition implies. As already emphasised above, a reading that affirms the continuity of the text with everyday life does especially have a point in the case of the *crónica*. An example of its relevance is offered by the reflection on cultural alienation Martillo’s text provoked among participants of group 1 from Guayaquil, which was illustrated with concrete references to recent urban changes that directly affected participants’ lives and their views of the city. This productive relationship between text and reality works in a two-way direction, from text to reality and from reality to text, allowing participants to engage with their realities in new ways and, at the same time, adding something to the original text, completing it with new meanings and social significance.

On the other hand, the relevance of possessing a degree of cultural competence (in Bourdieu's sense of the mastery of the code necessary for the appropriation of the work) for an adequate reception of certain texts was also established. Thus, the inability of group 1 from Guayaquil's public university to grasp the (literary) references and word games of Ulchur's political *crónica*, resulted in the failure to successfully decode and thus fully comprehend the meaning of the text as a whole. However, it must also be noted that an everyday familiarity with the world the text portrays can – in some cases and to a certain extent – substitute for a lack of mastery of the cultural code. This is illustrated by this group's rich reception of Martillo's text which, in spite of its high degree of literary stylisation, is drawing on working class experiences of city life, an experience these participants shared. Both dimensions – relevant cultural competence and familiarity with the portrayed reality – seem to be related in complex ways.

Finally, it can also be noted that in the focus group sessions the more journalistic *crónicas* (text 3 and text 6), i.e. those texts that are less stylised and also less autonomous from everyday reality, attracted less attention to form from the participants. This was especially the case with the more simple and straightforward *crónica* that portrayed a theft in a Guayaquil bus. Only participants from group 3 commented on its circular structure and on its particular (literary) reconstruction of facts, while there were in all the groups abundant references and stories about similar situations the participants had experienced or heard about.

CONCLUSION

The *crónica* has been described by Juan Villoro as the wild genre of the end of the 20th century because through the combination of literary and journalistic practices in new ways it has provided a space for the exploration and representation of ignored territories of social reality. Through the *crónica*, which has documented emergent social movements and rescued a variety of popular cultural forms, habits and ways of life of large sectors of Latin America's urban population, uncharted social practices and actors have gained a place in literature; the marginal has been brought to the centre stage.

Furthermore, the *crónica* is not merely a non-fiction genre through which neglected traditions and practices can be recorded and documented. It is specifically a literary genre that has produced new images and created original narratives of city life. Whether in Martillo's intention of making poetry of the marginal, in Pérez Cruz's recreations of collective life in the urban periphery, or in the work of other *cronistas* who have captured diverse aspects of a rapidly changing reality, *cronistas* have described and interpreted city life and turned it into literature. It is the proximity of the *crónica* to the life it documents, its fragmentary character as a form of everyday literature that appears in the press, which makes it a privileged terrain through which this reality which is in permanent flux can be captured and recreated.

In recording and recreating the popular, the marginal and the transitory in the daily press *crónicas* have opened up new avenues of communication with the public. Although appearing in the best quality newspapers and addressing a primarily middle class audience, *crónicas* have succeeded in taking literature to larger audiences than ever before, in addressing and engaging social sectors that had previously been largely excluded from it. Writers and intellectuals have found through the *crónica* a privileged channel of communication with a wide public, acquiring a new kind of social prominence that is mirrored in their popularity amongst ordinary readers and in their significant presence in radio and television. Paralleling the role of writers as interpreters of the national reality in the 1960s, in the 1980s and the 1990s *cronistas* have assumed a more modest role as interpreters of city life by taking to the streets as both observers and participants in urban events, thus acquiring and manifesting a new proximity to their public and social reality.

The *crónica* has acquired its contemporary significance in the context of the full constitution of an autonomous cultural field in Latin America from the 1960s. Its character and popularity express a new kind of cultural combination that emerges at the crossroads between high, popular and mass cultural traditions. In this thesis I have analysed the *crónica* as an intermediate genre, showing that it is neither the vehicle of an unpolluted popular cultural tradition that offers an alternative vision to that of official or legitimate culture, nor a product of cultural manipulation through which social contradictions are written away. The *crónica*, by virtue of its proximity to everyday life and to popular urban culture, offers a space for the register and self interpretation from below of popular cultural forms, but it is not strictly a popular cultural genre nor is it reserved to and primarily consumed by working class readers. On the other hand, the *crónica* can reveal the character of hidden, marginal traditions of urban life, but it can also mask the real city through the excessive recreation of typicality and of topographic detail, eliminating disturbing social contradictions.

I have explored in this thesis the main forms and present significance of the *crónica* in Mexico City and Guayaquil. While both cities possess a relevant tradition in *crónica* writing which goes back to colonial times, a tradition which has been continued, developed and modernised until the present day, the significance of the genre varies greatly in the two cities. In Mexico City, the *crónica* has known an unprecedented boom in terms of quantity, richness and diversity of accounts of city life since the late 1960s. This city has witnessed the appearance of a new kind of cultural commentator, the *cronista*, who is in many cases a professional journalist but also possesses a solid literary formation, and who moves exactly between the two fields. In the 1980s and 1990s, the *crónica* has been an essential item of the newspaper, appearing in its most significant sections and commenting on every subject from politics to bullfights. Readers are familiar with the genre and its writers, they see and read it daily in the press and they consider it as a necessary part of the news, highlighting its important role in the commentary on and interpretation of news events. The *crónica* in Guayaquil occupies a marginal but significant place. It is the preferred genre of some isolated authors who have used it in very innovative ways to communicate their vision of city life and who have acquired an unprecedented popularity as *cronistas*. However, in a poor press in which strictly commercial concerns have taken the upper hand, quality reporting and literary journalism have been increasingly sacrificed to the benefit of the merely informative note.

This study has dedicated a great deal of attention to cultural reception and the particular forms in which *crónicas* are read. The reception of *crónicas* by readers who are familiar with the genre and the social reality they describe, has revealed that the *crónica* relates to and addresses people's diverse experiences of their city and everyday reality. In particular, in addition to readers' cultural capital, familiarity with the atmosphere and situations narrated in the *crónicas*, proved to be an important factor for their appreciation and correct understanding. In this respect, the study of the reception of the *crónica* also challenges prevailing beliefs about how the high/ low division operates in cultural reception and questions assumptions about the separation between art and everyday life by affirming the importance of knowledge derived from lived experience in the decoding and understanding of texts.

APPENDIX 1. STATISTICAL INDICATORS OF THE LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL FIELD

Table 1. Illiteracy rates, 1940-2000 (%).

	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Argentina		13.3 ¹	8.6	7.4	6.1	4.2	3.1
Bolivia		68.9		36.8 ²	30.9	21.6	14.4
Brazil	56.7	51.4	39.5	33.8	25.4	18.3	14.7
Chile	28.2	19.4 ³	16.4	11.0	8.5	6.0	4.3
Colombia	44.2 ⁴	38.5 ⁵	27.1 ⁶	19.2 ⁷	15.6	11.3	8.2
Cuba	22.1 ⁸	23.6 ⁹			7.9	5.2	3.6
Ecuador		43.7	69.4 ¹⁰	25.8 ¹¹	18.1	11.6	8.1
Guatemala	65.4	70.3	62.1 ¹²	54.0 ¹³	46.2	38.5	31.3
Mexico	51.6	44.1	34.6	25.8 ¹⁴	17.0	12.3	9.0
Paraguay		31.8	25.6 ¹⁵	19.9 ¹⁶	14.1	9.7	6.7
Peru	56.6 ¹⁷		39.9 ¹⁸	27.5 ¹⁹	20.2	14.3	10.1
Venezuela	56.6 ²⁰	51.1 ²¹	34.2 ²²	23.5 ²³	15.1	9.9	7.0

SOURCES

United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1949-50*, New York 1950.

United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1957*, New York 1957.

United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1964*, New York 1965.

Statistical Abstract of Latin America 1957, Los Angeles Committee on Latin American Studies, University of California, 1959.

Kenneth Ruddle and Mukhtar Hamour (ed.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America 1969*, Latin American Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1970.

James W. Wilkie, Eduardo Aleman, Jose Guadalupe Ortega (eds.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, Vol. 37, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 2001.

Table 2. Newspaper circulation, radio receivers and television sets, selected countries 1996-1998 (per thousand inhabitants).

	<i>Daily Newspapers</i> ²⁴	<i>Radios</i> ²⁵	<i>Television Sets</i> ²⁶
Argentina	123	681	289
Bolivia	55	675	116
Brazil	40	444	316
Chile	98	354	232
Colombia	46	581	217
Cuba	118	353	239
Ecuador	70	419	293
Guatemala	33	79	126
Mexico	97	325	261
Paraguay	43	182	101
Peru	84	273	144
Venezuela	206	468	185
United States	215	2,146	847

SOURCE

James W. Wilkie, Eduardo Alemán and José Guadalupe Ortega (eds.) *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, Vol. 37, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, 2001.

Table 3. Number of daily newspapers²⁷ published, selected countries, 1949-1996.

	1949	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1994	1996
Argentina	180	171	179	164	220	218	159	187	181
Bolivia	9	9	21	14	14	14	17	11	18
Brazil	220	-	-	209	343	322	356	317	380
Chile	39	-	-	47	34	38*	45	32	52
Colombia	-	39	-	40	36	46*	45	46	37
Cuba	33 ²⁸	-	16	15	17	17	17	17	17
Ecuador	25 ²⁹	23	25	29	18	26	25	24	29
Guatemala	-	-	8	10	9	9	6	5	7
Mexico	98 ³⁰	220	200	216	317	332	285*	309	295
Paraguay	3	-	11	8	5	6	5	5	5
Peru	41	69	85	49	66	70	66	48	74*
Venezuela	29	33	-	49	66	55	54	89	86
United States	1,780	1,751 ³¹	1,763 ³²	1,775	1,745	1,676	1,611	1,548	1,520

Table 4. Circulation of daily newspapers, selected countries, 1949-1996 (per thousand inhabitants).

	1949	1955	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1996
Argentina ³³	215	162	149	179	115*	142*	130*	123*	123*
Bolivia ³⁴	14	23	22	49	42	42	49*	61*	55*
Brazil ³⁵	31	50	-	42*	43	45	48	43*	40
Chile ³⁶	81	74	-	95	97*	108*	104*	103*	98*
Colombia ³⁷	-	40*	-	53*	57*	49*	57*	57*	46*
Cuba ³⁸	87	129	-	59*	64*	108	119	172	118*
Ecuador ³⁹	25	74	-	42	48*	70	88*	80*	70*
Guatemala ⁴⁰	-	27	-	38*	41	29*	32*	22	33*
Mexico ⁴¹	46	48	115	91	93	123	132	135	97
Paraguay ⁴²	13	12	-	85*	53*	51*	47*	39*	43
Peru ⁴³	44	40	-	126*	91	81*	82*	79*	84*
Venezuela ⁴⁴	67	71	70	93*	102*	195	158*	144	206*
United States ⁴⁵	354	337	311	296	275	270	260	245	218

* Provisional or estimated data.

Table 5. Radio receivers, selected countries 1950-97 (per thousand inhabitants).

	1950	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1997
Argentina	158 ⁴⁶	296	376	380	427	594	670	676	681
Bolivia	50		427	483	523	623	625	672	675
Brazil	61 ⁴⁷		208	240	312	362	385	399	434
Chile	100 ⁴⁸		147	164	292	332	344	348	354
Colombia	44	88	98	111	116	126	160	524	524
Cuba	154 ⁴⁹		156	194	300	324	343	351	352
Ecuador	16	105	285	290	305	313	324	332	348
Guatemala	11 ⁵⁰		42	50	51	58	69	75	79
Mexico	84 ⁵¹	208	111	117	133	199	258	263	329
Paraguay	53 ⁵²		94	102	112	166	173	180	182
Peru	59		132	135	159	205	251	259	273
Venezuela	41 ⁵³		354	375	391	408	441	458	472
United States	892 ⁵⁴	1,235	1,380	1,821	1,973	2,067	2,084	2,093	2,116

Table 6. Television broadcasting receivers, selected countries, 1957-1997 (per thousand inhabitants).

	1957	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1997
Argentina	4	72	146	154	183	214	218	219	223
Bolivia			8.3	9	56	71	11	115	116
Brazil	8		64	78	123	185	208	220	223
Chile			53	68	110	145	206	215	215
Colombia	4	19	36	63	79	87	103	109	115
Cuba	43		47	64	131	158	167	228	239
Ecuador		8	25	36	63	66	86	96	130
Guatemala		12	14	18	26	27	54	60	61
Mexico	8	28	36	46	57	113	148	219	272
Paraguay			19	20	22	24	71	93	101
Peru		18	30	40	52	77	96	106	126
Venezuela	16	72	89	101	113	131	159	169	180
United States	246	362	403	550	676	786	799	805	806

SOURCES

James W. Wilkie, Eduardo Alemán and José Guadalupe Ortega (eds.) *Statistical abstract of Latin America*, Vol. 37, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, University of California, 2001.

Statistical Abstract of Latin America 1957, Los Angeles: Committee on Latin American Studies, University of California, 1959.

United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1949-50*, New York, 1950.

Table 7. Book production⁵⁵ (Number of Titles Published), 1965-1995.

	1968	1985	1991	1995
Argentina	3,645 ⁵⁵	4,836 ⁵⁷	5,628 ⁵⁸	9,113
Bolivia		301 ⁵⁹	365 ⁶⁰	
Brazil	4,972 ⁶¹	17,648	27,557 ⁶²	21,574 ⁶³
Chile	1,546	1,638	1,716 ⁶⁴	2,469
Colombia	709 ⁶⁵	15,041 ⁶⁶	1,481	
Cuba	955		1,017	698
Ecuador			717	12
Mexico	4,558 ⁶⁷	5,482	2,608 ⁶⁸	
Paraguay				152 ⁶⁹
Peru	783		1,063	1,294
Venezuela	743 ⁷⁰		3,879 ⁷¹	3,660 ⁷²

SOURCES

Kenneth Ruddle and Mukhtar Hamour (ed.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America 1969*, Los Angeles, 1970.

James W. Wilkie, Eduardo Alemán, José Guadalupe Ortega (eds.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, Vol. 34, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1998.

¹ Data refer to 1947.

² Data refer to 1976.

³ Data refer to 1952.

- ⁴ Data refer to 1938 and exclude 4,775 aborigines of unknown age, all illiterate.
- ⁵ Data refer to 1951.
- ⁶ Data refer to 1964.
- ⁷ Data refer to 1973.
- ⁸ Data refer to 1943.
- ⁹ Data refer to 1953.
- ¹⁰ Data refer to 1962 and exclude Indian jungle population. Data are based on a 3% sample of census returns.
- ¹¹ Data refer to 1974.
- ¹² Data refer to 1964 and are obtained from a sample of approximately 5% of private dwellings.
- ¹³ Data refer to 1973. De jure population, based on a 5% sample.
- ¹⁴ De jure population.
- ¹⁵ Data refer to 1962 and exclude 1,795 (0.2%) inhabitants whose condition of literacy remained undeclared.
- ¹⁶ Data refer to 1972.
- ¹⁷ Population actually enumerated, not including an estimate of 465,144 for underenumeration and 350,000 for jungle population.
- ¹⁸ Data refer to 1961. Population actually enumerated excluding adjustment of 412,781 for underenumeration and an estimate of 100,830 for Indian jungle population.
- ¹⁹ Data refer to 1972.
- ²⁰ Data refer to 1941 and exclude tribal Indians.
- ²¹ Excluding Indian jungle population, numbering 56,705. Included among the illiterate are the following numbers of unknown literacy: 107,933 (7-14), and 67,964 (15 and over, incl. unknown).
- ²² Data refer to 1961 and are based on a 1.5% sample of census returns. Excluding Indian jungle population, estimated at 31,800 persons of all ages.
- ²³ Data refer to 1971 and exclude Indian jungle population.
- ²⁴ 1996.
- ²⁵ 1997.
- ²⁶ 1998.
- ²⁷ A daily newspaper is defined as a publication devoted primarily to recording news of current events in public affairs, international affairs, politics, which is published at least four times a week.
- ²⁸ Data refer to 1948.
- ²⁹ Data refer to 1948.
- ³⁰ Data refer to 1948.
- ³¹ English-language papers only.
- ³² English-language papers only.
- ³³ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1956. Data on circulation for 1970 refer to 154 dailies; 1975 refers to 147 dailies.
- ³⁴ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1952. Data on circulation for 1970 refer to 13 dailies.
- ³⁵ Data on circulation for 1955 refer to 223 out of a total of 235 dailies.
- ³⁶ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1952. Data on circulation for 1985 refer to 1983.
- ³⁷ Data on circulation for 1975 refer to 34 dailies.
- ³⁸ Data shown for 1949 refer to 1948. Data shown for 1955 refer to 1956. Data on circulation for 1975 refer to 2 dailies.
- ³⁹ Data shown for 1949 refer to 1948. Data shown for 1955 refer to 1952.
- ⁴⁰ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1953 and exclude data on one daily newspaper in English.
- ⁴¹ Data shown for 1949 refer to 1948. Data shown for 1955 refer to 1954.
- ⁴² Data shown for 1955 refer to 1952. Data on circulation for 1970 refer to 5 dailies; 1975 refers to 4 dailies.
- ⁴³ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1952. Data on circulation for 1970 refer to 59 dailies.
- ⁴⁴ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1954. Data on circulation for 1975 refer to 30 dailies.
- ⁴⁵ Data shown for 1955 refer to 1956.
- ⁴⁶ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1953.
- ⁴⁷ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1954.
- ⁴⁸ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1954.
- ⁴⁹ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1953.
- ⁵⁰ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1954.
- ⁵¹ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1955.
- ⁵² Data shown for 1950 refer to 1953.

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- ⁵³ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1952.
- ⁵⁴ Data shown for 1950 refer to 1956.
- ⁵⁵ The data refer to the total number of titles of both first editions and re-editions.
- ⁵⁶ Data shown for 1968 refer to 1967.
- ⁵⁷ Data shown for 1985 refer to 1987.
- ⁵⁸ Data shown for 1991 refer to 1992.
- ⁵⁹ Data shown for 1985 refer to 1982.
- ⁶⁰ Data shown for 1991 refer to 1988.
- ⁶¹ Data shown for 1968 refer to 1964.
- ⁶² Data shown for 1991 refer to 1992.
- ⁶³ Data shown for 1995 refer to 1994.
- ⁶⁴ Data shown for 1991 refer to 1989.
- ⁶⁵ Data shown for 1968 refer to 1965.
- ⁶⁶ Data shown for 1985 refer to 1984.
- ⁶⁷ Data shown for 1968 refer to 1967.
- ⁶⁸ Data shown for 1991 refer to 1990.
- ⁶⁹ Data shown for 1995 refer to 1993.
- ⁷⁰ Data shown for 1968 refer to 1963.
- ⁷¹ Data shown for 1991 refer to 1992.
- ⁷² Data shown for 1995 refer to 1994.

APPENDIX 2. SELECTION OF *CRÓNICAS* APPEARING IN THE PRESS OF MEXICO CITY

The selection of *crónicas* of Mexico city is based on texts appearing in newspapers *Universal*, *Reforma* and *La Jornada*, weekly political magazines *Proceso* and *Milenio*, and the monthly magazine *Nexos* during the months of September and October 1999. Newspaper *Excelsior* and monthly magazines *Equis* and *Letras Libres* were also consulted, but no *crónicas* were found there.

A total number of 108 texts were selected: 27 from *Reforma*, 57 from *La Jornada*, 21 from *El Universal*, 1 from *Proceso*, 1 from *Milenio* and one from *Nexos*. Thus, texts from *La Jornada* alone account for more than half (52.8%) of the whole selection, while *Reforma* has a share of 25% and *El Universal* of 19.4%.

Crónicas appear in many of the major sections of the newspaper: National politics, Editorial comments, City, Culture, Sports and cultural supplements. Major sections with no *crónicas* are the foreign and economic pages. In general terms, the cultural section (including cultural supplements) of the newspaper is the first in importance for the appearance of *crónicas* (36.2% of the total number), followed by Comment/ National Politics sections and by City (both with 20%). In the fourth place comes Sports, with 14.3%, and last the *crónicas* that *La Jornada* publishes in its back page, which account for 9.5% of the total number (see table 1).

Table 1. Section of the newspaper in which *crónicas* appear

	Comment + Politics/Nation		City		Culture/Specta cles + Cultural supplement		Sports		Back page		TOTAL
		%		%		%		%		%	
Reforma	7	25.9	8	29.6	12	44.4	0	0	0	0	27
La Jornada	9	15.8	6	10.5	24	42.1	8	14.0	10	17.5	57
El Universal	5	23.8	7	33.3	2	9.5	7	33.3	0	0	21
TOTAL	21	20.0	21	20.0	38	36.2	15	14.3	10	9.5	105

Reforma's texts come from the sections of Comment (7 or 25.9%), City (8 or 29.6%) and Culture (12 or 44.4%). Texts from *La Jornada* come from the sections of Politics (9 or 15.8%), City (6 or 10.5%), Culture (12 or 21.1%), Sports (8 or 14%), the back page (10 or 17.5%) and the cultural supplement published on Sundays, *La*

Jornada Semanal (12 or 21.1%). Texts from *El Universal* come from the sections of Nation (5 or 23.8%), City (7 or 33.3%), Sports (7 or 33.3%).

Thus, a very distinctive pattern emerges in the different newspapers. Both *Reforma* and *La Jornada* share an essentially similar pattern of distribution of *crónicas*: their most important place is the cultural sections, which account for nearly half of all the published *crónicas*. The City comes second in *Reforma* but third in *La Jornada*, after politics. *El Universal* radically breaks with the pattern followed by *Reforma* and *La Jornada*, making the section of culture the least important in numbers of *crónicas* (with less than 10% of the texts, it occupies the fourth position after City, Sports and Politics, in order of importance). Like *Reforma* and unlike *La Jornada*, in *El Universal* the section of City is comparatively more important than the section of Politics/Comment. In *El Universal* political *crónicas* are characterised by their wide scope, and the fact that they are not directly linked to current events.

Crónicas do not necessarily appear highlighted and separated from the rest of the news, although in many cases they do. This is particularly true of regular contributions by certain authors or of texts that are not directly related to the context of current news.

Most *crónicas* are the product of regular contributions to the newspaper. Of the *crónicas* published in dailies, 79% are contributions made on a weekly basis or more often from *cronistas* and columnists, while 21% are more sporadic contributions or respond to a special event. In this case, there are again significant differences in the patterns of the different newspapers (see table 2).

Table 2. Regularity of publication of the *crónicas*

	Weekly or + contribution		Not every week		TOTAL
		%		%	
Reforma	15	55.6	12	44.4	27
La Jornada	52	91.2	5	8.8	57
El Universal	16	76.2	5	23.8	21
TOTAL	83	79.0	22	21.0	105

In *La Jornada* *crónicas* are almost exclusively weekly contributions from the same authors. The only five texts that do not fall into this category are three *crónicas* of concerts and those written by Jordi Soler, a contributor who publishes, on a more sporadic basis, in the cultural section. *El Universal* also has a clear majority of texts that are regular weekly publications. Five of its *crónicas* are occasional contributions:

one from Monsiváis in the section of politics on the Annual Presidential Report, one in the Sports section and three in the sections of Culture and City, on various aspects of urban life. By contrast, in *Reforma* the presence of *crónicas* that are not weekly contributions is more important, accounting for more than forty percent of the texts. Moreover, these are all published in the section of Culture.

La Jornada's crónicas are all concentrated on Mondays and the weekend. On Monday, there are the contributions of Carlos Monsiváis to the Politics section, of Hermann Bellinghausen to the Cultural section, and of José Cueli to the Sports section. Monsiváis, writes a very distinctive and successful one page contribution called 'Por mi madre, bohemios' ('For my mother, bohemians'), which is a montage of quotations from politicians extracted from the news with the occasional brief comment. Hermann Bellinghausen writes in the cultural section a series of small sketches that are far removed from the context of current news. José Cueli writes on Sunday's bullfights with a great freedom to focus on the description of the actual event, on details of the atmosphere or on general reflections about the meaning of bullfighting and its philosophical implications. On Saturday, the contributions of Jaime Avilés in the Politics section appear. This is usually a space where the author focuses on some of the main political events of the week, often offering a predominantly informative account of their development. On Sunday there are Angeles González Gamio's contributions in the section of City news, Cristina Pacheco's 'Mar de historias' ('Sea of Stories') in the back page, and, in the cultural supplement *La Jornada Semanal*, the columns of Hugo Gutiérrez Vega, Juan Villoro and Fabrizio Mejía Madrid. González Gamio's texts are historical reviews of the buildings, areas and traditions of the city centre. Pacheco's almost one page long fictional short stories portray closely the everyday life of (especially women from) working class sectors, and are one special form in which the *crónica* can comment closely upon reality without being tied to narrating actual events. Gutiérrez Vega and Mejía Madrid both write highly literary columns of a mixed nature, and some of their texts, which deal with various aspects of city life, are *crónicas*. Villoro writes *crónicas* in which he mixes narration and description with interpretation and reflection on urban phenomena, often adding a humorous tone.

In *Reforma*, *crónicas* appear more spread through the week, although the day with the highest concentration is similarly Sunday, with 8 or 39.6% of the *crónicas*. Unlike *La Jornada*, here a higher proportion of *crónicas* are not weekly contributions.

Guadalupe Loacza writes her political comments on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Alberto Barranco Chavarría publishes his *crónicas* on the history of particular areas and customs of the city on Sundays.

In *El Universal*, Juan Villoro's *crónicas* on football appeared on Tuesdays, and Monsiváis' political *crónicas* on Sundays. Guillermo Ochoa publishes a column almost every weekday, and some of them have the characteristic tone of the *crónica*, focusing on social and cultural aspects of city life.

Crónicas can be distinguished according to their specific links with the current news. This is significant because it sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the *crónica* and the informative context of the newspaper. *Crónicas* are generally characterised, in comparison with other news items, by the freedom their authors exercise both in terms of form and content. This is also true in *crónicas* that directly comment upon news events; for example, Villoro's *crónicas* on football and Cueli's texts on bullfights introduce literary quotations and digressions on abstract themes. But this freedom becomes much greater when the *cronista* is no longer obliged to comment upon current events, and can construct his or her story with complete independence from them. *Cronistas* have here the choice to narrate particular episodes they observed in the city streets, to describe specific angles of events that would otherwise not become pieces of the news, and to reflect on ideas and themes of their choice.

Of the above mentioned contributions, those of Carlos Monsiváis, José Cueli, Jaime Avilés in *La Jornada* and Juan Villoro in *El Universal*, narrate and comment upon current events in their respective fields (see table 3). By contrast, the contributions of Hermann Bellinghausen, Juan Villoro, Fabrizio Mejía, Hugo Gutiérrez Vega (*La Jornada*), Alberto Barranco Chavarría (*Reforma*), Guillermo Ochoa and Carlos Monsiváis (*El Universal*) are not directly linked to current events. They narrate fictional stories (Bellinghausen, Pacheco), personal experiences or interpretations of various aspects of everyday life in the city (Gutiérrez Vega, Bellinghausen), reflect on the habits and the character of the contemporary city (Villoro in *La Jornada*), describe the past of particular urban areas (González Gamio, Barranco Chavarría). Or they focus upon issues which are only indirectly related to the context of everyday news (Monsiváis' political parables in *El Universal*). Guadalupe Loacza (*Reforma*) possesses a great autonomy in her column in the section of Comment, where she usually discusses current events but can also offer reflections

that are not directly related to the news. On the other hand, some of the *crónicas* are related to special events, whether they are fixed events of the calendar or unexpected events. They have been classified in an intermediate group, together with texts that have a great independence from their context but make some indirect reference or link to the current news.

Table 3. Type of *crónica*

	Comment on current event		Special event		Not related to current news		TOTAL
		%		%		%	
Reforma	5	18.5	9	33.3	13	48.1	27
La Jornada	21	36.8	3	5.3	33	57.9	57
El Universal	9	42.9	1	4.8	11	52.4	21
Proceso	1	100	0	0	0	0	1
Milenio	1	100	0	0	0	0	1
Nexos	1	100	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	38	35.2	13	12	57	52.8	108

Many of *Reforma's* abundant sporadic contributions refer to special events, such as earthquakes (text 12) and rain (texts 16 and 23), or to calendar events, like the Day of the Dead (26). Others are not related to the news. They portray, for example, historical characters (8), customs from the past (2), particular moments in the life of the *cronista* (5 and 7), the author's perception of urban changes (17). Occasional contributions in *El Universal* are similarly not related to current events, although they focus on different themes than those from *Reforma*, especially on images of working class and peasant life (87 and 105). Some refer to special events like the presidential report, a fixed calendar event that takes place every year on the 1st of September (85). Three of *La Jornada's* few sporadic contributions refer to current news (concerts: 57, 71 and 80), while the other two do not.

The *crónicas* published in magazines *Proceso*, *Milenio* and *Nexos* are all directly related to the context of current news events, although in two cases (106 and 108) these events take place in more extended periods of time. They deal with the role of television in political campaigns and the images of politicians in television (106), the presidential report (107) and the drug traffic in the North of the country (108).

Generally, the newspaper that has a greater number of *crónicas* not directly related to the context of current news is *La Jornada*. However, *Reforma* has a great number of *crónicas* that relate to special events, which usually have the kind of freedom of form and content that is characteristic of the first mentioned group. *El*

Universal is the newspaper that has a larger proportion of *crónicas* directly linked to the context of current news, followed by *La Jornada*. Overall, more than half of all the *crónicas* are not directly related to the context of current news.

In relation to their theme, *crónicas* which can be classified as belonging to the category of 'scenes of everyday life', understood in very broad terms and comprising both particular events that the authors have encountered or undergone and typical situations or portraits of idiosyncratic features of life in the city, are the biggest group, accounting for 35.2% of the total (see table 4). Second in importance are the categories of 'the city' (*crónicas* that focus on various aspects of the city's buildings, streets and specific areas) and of 'politics', both with 14.8%. 'Sports' comes after them, with 13%. Some *crónicas* offer portraits of historical or present day characters or public figures, in many cases little known: a perennial presidential candidate from the past (8), a thief at the beginning of the 20th century (47), a reader of tarot (81), a popular champion of wrestling (84), a gunman and a KGB spy (93). Other themes are popular customs (the Day of the Dead, celebration of Independence), natural phenomena, concerts and travel.

Table 4. Theme of the *crónicas*

	City	Scenes of Characte	Politics	Travel	Sports	Customs	Other	TOTAL									
	%	everyday life	%	%	%	%	%	L									
Reforma	7	25.9	11	40.7	2	7.4	1	3.7	0	0	0	3	11.1	3	11.1	27	
Jornada	7	12.3	19	33.3	4	7.0	10	17.5	2	3.5	8	14.0	2	3.5	5	8.8	57
Universal	2	9.5	8	38.1	1	4.8	3	14.3	0	0	6	28.6	0	0	1	4.8	21
Proceso	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Milenio	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nexos	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	1
TOTAL	16	14.8	38	35.2	7	6.5	16	14.8	2	1.9	14	13.0	5	4.6	10	9.3	108

The category of scenes of everyday life is especially important in the newspaper *Reforma*, with over 40% of the texts. Together with the themes of 'the city', 'customs' and 'characters', it accounts for around 85% of the texts, which are thus primarily devoted to life in the city, its streets, its characters and its peculiarities. In *La Jornada* and *El Universal* themes are more diverse: the category of the city accounts for only around 10% of their texts and comes in the fourth place of importance, after politics and sports. The latter is very significant in *El Universal*, accounting for 28.6% of its *crónicas*.

With respect to the distinction made above between *crónicas* that are linked to the context of current news and *crónicas* that are independent from it, particular themes can be closely associated with one form of the other: 'the city', 'scenes of everyday life', 'characters' and 'travel' are generally not related to current news, while the opposite is true in the cases of 'politics' and 'sports'.

Table 5. Are the events narrated past or present?

	<i>Past</i>		<i>Present</i>		<i>Past and present</i>		<i>TOTAL</i>
		%		%		%	
Reforma	14	51.9	12	44.4	1	3.7	27
La Jornada	6	10.5	50	87.7	1	1.8	57
El Universal	1	4.8	20	95.2	0	0	21
Proceso	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
Milenio	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
Nexos	0	0	1	100	0	0	1
TOTAL	21	19.4	85	78.7	2	1.9	108

Finally, it is useful to consider the moment in time in which the *crónicas* are situated, as this differs very significantly in the various newspapers. In general, there is a much greater frequency of texts that are situated in the present, which account for 78% as opposed to 19.4% of *crónicas* that focus on past events (see table 5). But this relationship is reversed in newspaper *Reforma*, where over half the *crónicas* are situated in the past. The newspaper that has a smaller presence of texts that narrate past events is *El Universal*. The established tradition of the historical *crónica* as exploration and record of the little, insignificant events in history has also exerted its influence in the press: both *Reforma* and *La Jornada* have specific weekly contributions that focus exclusively on the city's past, written by Barranco Chavarría and González Gamio, respectively.

SELECTION OF *CRÓNICAS* APPEARING IN THE PRESS OF MEXICO CITY

REFORMA

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
1	Sunday 5-9-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	¾ page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	1949	CITY/PAST Urban changes in 1940s Mexico
2	Saturday 11-9-99	Culture (De Memoria)	Box	Sealtiel Alatríste	Erotismo garnachero	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PAST Memories of a popular restaurant from childhood
3	Sunday 12-9-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	¾ page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	Noche de Grito	CUSTOMS/PAST Celebrations of <i>El Grito</i> , 1896 and others
4	Sunday 19-9-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	¾ page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	El último tranvía	CITY/PAST On cars and their regulations at the end of the 18 th century
5	Wednesda y 22-9-99	Culture (Un día en la vida de...)	¼ page	Alain Derbez	Landero y Coss y el Atlante	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT A match of Atlante, a mother in law from the PRI, and two brothers Landero and Coss
6	Thursday 23-9-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	El sueño de Enrique	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Opening of a Mexican boutique in Madison Avenue
7	Saturday 25-9-99	Culture (Noche y día)	¼ page	Sergio González Rodríguez	Mi vuelta al mundo	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Doctors' questions after recovery
8	Monday 27-9-99	Culture (Relicario de historias)	Column	Alejandro Rosas	Eterno candidato	CHARACTERS/PAST Story of Nicolás Zúñiga, perennial presidential candidate
9	Tuesday 28-9-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	Neza York	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Mexicans in New York
10	Thursday 30-9-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	La regenta	POLITICS/PRESENT First morning of Rosario Robles in the government of the Federal District

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
11	Sunday 3-10-99	City (Ciudad de la Nostalgia)	1 page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	Suspiros por San Cosme	CITY/PAST <i>Tivoli</i> of Ribera de San Cosme, end 19 th century

12	Monday 4-10-99	Culture	½ page	Alejandro Rosas	Temblores, un 'castigo' de la Providencia	NATURAL PHENOMENA/ PAST Earthquakes in Mexico City, 19 th century
13	Tuesday 5-10-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	¡¡¡Treinta años!!!	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT The author goes to a concert
14	Wednesda y 6-10-99	Culture (Un día en la vida de...)	¼ page	Alain Derbez	Landero y Coss y los refugiados españoles	VARIOUS/ PRESENT Looks up politicians in encyclopedia + 60 years of the Spanish exile
15	Sunday 10-10-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	Page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	Andanzas de la Guerrero	CITY/PAST Emblematic places of Guerrero area
16	Tuesday 12-10-99	Culture (Entre paréntesis)	¼ page	David Martín del Campo	Llover sobre mojado	NATURAL PHENOM./ PRESENT Comments on the recent rain
17	Saturday 16-10-99	Culture (De memoria)	Box	Sealtiel Alatríste	¿Estado de salud?	CITY/ PRESENT Reflection on the urban changes of Mexico City
18	Sunday 17-10-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	¾ page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	La guerra del agua	CITY/ PAST Fights for water in 1922 + historical floods
19	Tuesday 19-10-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	Setenta y tres días...	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Sofia doesn't know how to spend new year's eve
20	Thursday 21-10-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	Imagina, Olivia, imagina	CHARACTERS/ PAST On John Lennon
21	Saturday 23-10-99	Cultura (De memoria)	Box	Sealtiel Alatríste	Al norte: las enchiladas	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PAST Breakfast with his grandmother and breakfast with politicians
22	Sunday 24-10-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	Page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	Historias de San Rafael	CITY/PAST Various stories from the area quarter of San Rafael
23	Monday 25-10-99	Culture	¾ page	Fabrizio Mejía Madrid	Instantáneas de una ciudad bajo la lluvia	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PAST AND PRESENT Sketches of Mexico City in the rain
24	Tuesday 26-10-99	Comment	Box	Guadalupe Loaeza	Chez Sofia	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Sofia thinks dinners to collect money for schools
25	Friday 29-10-99	Culture (Ruidos de la calle)	Column	Pacho	Crónicas de NY	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Party in the Lower East Side
26	Saturday 30-10-99	Culture	1 page	Alejandro Rosas	Historias que viven en la memoria	CUSTOMS/ PAST Celebrations of the Day of the Dead
27	Sunday 31-10-99	City (Ciudad de la nostalgia)	½ page	Alberto Barranco Chavarría	Días de muertos	CUSTOMS/ PAST Day of the Dead, cemeteries 19 th century

LA JORNADA

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
28	Sunday 5-9-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	La única palabra	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Story of children who lost their mother in a flood
29	Sunday 5-9-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	El camaleón, sus problemas de paisaje	CITY/ PRESENT City landscapes and monuments
30	Monday 6-9-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre, bohemia	POLITICS/ PRESENT Various current themes
31	Monday 6-9-99	Culture	1/3 page	Hermann Bellinghaus	Las curvas de un hijo del desierto	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT On baseball
32	Monday 6-9-99	Sports	¼ page	José Cueli	Angelino y Celia Barbabosa	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Mexican bullfighters of the season
33	Saturday 11-9-99	Culture	¼ page	Jordi Soler	La mujer que decía bon jour	CHARACTERS/PAST Breton girl's granddaughter looks for communion dresses in Mexico
34	Sunday 12-9-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	El salón de belleza	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Story Of a girl who ends up in prison because of her boyfriend
35	Sunday 12-9-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo Breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	Sincretismos	CITY/ PRESENT Figures of the apocalypse: cars bursting into pyramids and mixed traditions
36	Monday 13-9-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre bohemia	POLITICS/ PRESENT Quotes on current themes
37	Monday 13-9-99	Culture	1/3 page	Hermann Bellinghaus	Avalancha de nieves	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT A day in the life of somebody who is looking for a job (9 th of 9 of 1999)
38	Monday 13-9-99	Sports	¼ page	José Cueli	Fiebre de tormenta	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Bullfights under the rain
39	Saturday 18-9-99	Politics (El tonto del pueblo)	1 page	Jaime Avilés	Cárdenas: lo que está naciendo	POLITICS/ PRESENT Second report from Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas
40	Sunday 19-9-99	City	1/3 page	Ángeles González Gamio	Vocaciones persistentes	CUSTOMS/PAST Old customs of Mexico City

41	Sunday 19-9-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	½ page	Cristina Pacheco	La ley de azogue	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT An employee thinks of her grandmother
42	Monday 20-9-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre, bohémios	POLITICS/ PRESENT Quotes on various current themes
43	Monday 20-9-99	Culture	¼ page	Hermann Bellinghau sen	Agitación de gitanas	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Gypsy women refuse to read cronista's hand
44	Monday 20-9-99	Sports	¼ page	José Cueli	A aburrirse, tocan en la México	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Bullfighting technique + inferior quality of Mexican bullfighters
45	Sunday 26-9-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¼ page	Cristina Pacheco	El último capítulo	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Story of a birthday party
46	Sunday 26-9-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	La ciudad y la esperanza	CITY/ PRESENT Reflections on what cities offer
47	Sunday 26-9-99	La Jornada Semanal (Tiempo fuera)	½ page	Fabrizio Mejía Madrid	El lamento de Malverde	CHARACTERS/PAST Story of a burglar from the beginning of the century
48	Monday 27-9-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre, bohémios	POLITICS/ PRESENT Quotes on various current themes
49	Monday 27-9-99	Culture	1/3 page	Hermann Bellinghau sen	Umbría a deshoras	TRAVEL/ PRESENT Description of a moment in Umbría, Italy
50	Monday 27-9-99	Sports	¼ page	José Cueli	La clase de Daniel Anaya	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Technique and style of bullfighter Daniel Anaya

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
51	Saturday 2-10-99	Politics (El tonto del pueblo)	1 page	Jaime Avilés	Un riñón para Verónica	POLITICS/ PRESENT Various current themes
52	Sunday 3-10-99	City	1/3 page	Angeles González Gamio	Regocijo del corazón y contento del alma es el vino...	CITY/ PAST AND PRESENT On pubs of Mexico City
53	Sunday 3-10-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¼ page	Cristina Pacheco	Anita la larga	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Story of a very tall girl and her seclusion
54	Sunday 3-10-99	La Jornada Semana (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	Gatopriismo	POLITICS/PRESENT Government report + TV debate: PRI at the end of the century

55	Monday 4-10-99	Culture	¼ page	Hermann Bellinghaus	Las gallinas tienen risa	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Selé tells a story about hens
56	Monday 4-10-99	Sports	Box	José Cueli	Una corona bien fría, ¡porfa!	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Drinking beer in the bullfights
57	Monday 4-10-99	Back page	¾ page	Pablo Espinosa	Son y danzón en el Zócalo	CONCERT/ PRESENT Concert of Afro Cuban All Stars
58	Sunday 10-10-99	City	½ page	Ángeles González Gamio	Los hermanos Pinzón	HISTORY/PAST On Columbus, his enterprise and later recognition
59	Sunday 10-10-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	Entre la piedra y el agua	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT The 1985 earthquake
60	Sunday 10-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Bazar de asombros)	½ page	Hugo Gutiérrez Vega	Vías rápidas, el Tercer Mundo y Toluca nunca acaba	CITY/PRESENT Description of the road to Toluca
61	Monday 11-10-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre, bohémios	POLITICS/ PRESENT Quotes on various current themes
62	Monday 11-10-99	Culture	Casi ½ page	Hermann Bellinghaus	Para pie pequeño	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Filipo gives a ride to a mysterious woman
63	Monday 11-10-99	Sports	¾ page	José Cueli	¡Bien por los novilleros!	BULLFIGHTS/PRESEN T Bullfighting and death
64	Sunday 17-10-99	City	½ page	Ángeles González Gamio	Historia de un predio	CITY/PAST Story of Santa Isabel convent
65	Sunday 17-10-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	Estatuas bajo la lluvia	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Floods and lynching of a shopkeeper
66	Sunday 17-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Bazar de asombros)	½ page	Hugo Gutiérrez Vega	Oaxaca, Toledo, La Mixteca, tamales y atole blanco	TRAVEL/ PRESENT Visit to Oaxaca
67	Sunday 17-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	El huevo kinder	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Symbology of the kinder egg and other chocolates
68	Monday 18-10-99	Politics	1 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Por mi madre, bohémios	POLITICS/ PRESENT Quotes on various current themes
69	Monday 18-10-99	Culture	¼ page	Hermann Bellinghaus	El rey de las patadas	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Colín steals a hat

70	Monday 18-10-99	Sports	Box (1/4)	José Cueli	¿Una bronca desplazada al juez?	BULLFIGHTS/PRESENT T Popular explosion in the arena against the judge
71	Saturday 23-10-99	Politics (El tonto del pueblo)	1 page	Jaime Avilés	Revueltas vive	POLITICS/ PRESENT Various current themes
72	Saturday 23-10-99	Spectacles	½ page	Jorge Caballero	Sisters of Mercy cambió su neblina...	CONCERT/ PRESENT Concert of Sisters of Mercy
73	Sunday 24-10-99	City	½ page	Ángeles González Gamio	Boda de gran postín	CITY/PAST Story of the Merced convent
74	Sunday 24-10-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	Aquí nos matan también	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Margarita's son leaves for the US after a flood
75	Sunday 24-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	Valet Parkingson	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Parking in the Federal District
76	Sunday 24-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Bazar de asombros)	½ page	Hugo Gutiérrez Vega	Orgullosamente mexicanos en México	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Language used by TV commentators
77	Sunday 24-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Tiempo fuera)	½ page	Fabrizio Mejía Madrid	Una historia ridícula	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Story of an editor harassed by an adolescent who wants to publish a novel
78	Monday 25-10-99	Culture	1/3 page	Hermann Bellinghau sen	Un aire de ver lejos	LANDSCAPE/ PRESENT Scene in Rome + tropical landscape
79	Monday 25-10-99	Sports	¼ page	José Cueli	Ayala y El Cuate, y ya...	BULLFIGHTS/PRESENT T On the bullfight of Ayala and El Cuate
80	Friday 29-10-99	Culture	¾ page	Hermann Bellinghau sen	Abrieron un boquete al muro...	CONCERT/ PRESENT Concert of Rage Against the Machine
81	Saturday 30-10-99	Culture	1/3 page	Jordi Soler	Viaje al país del tarot	CHARACTERS/ PRESENT Jodorowski, reader of tarot in Paris
82	Sunday 31-10-99	City	1/3 page	Ángeles González Gamio	Siempre vivos	CUSTOMS/ PRESENT Day of the dead
83	Sunday 31-10-99	Back page (Mar de historias)	¾ page	Cristina Pacheco	Cruz de olvido	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT A woman returns to the village of her childhood
84	Sunday 31-10-99	La Jornada Semanal (Domingo breve)	½ page	Juan Villoro	El Santo	CHARACTERS/ PRESENT Return of the wrestling hero

EL UNIVERSAL

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
85	Friday 3-9-99	Nation	2/3 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Crónica de cuatro informes	POLITICS/ PRESENT On the 5 th Presidential Report
86	Sunday 5-9-99	Nation	1/3 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Dramas de la vida irreal	POLITICS/ PRESENT Comic A4 interviews politicians in his show
87	Sunday 5-9-99	Culture	Box	José David Cano	Un hombre	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Situation of a Xochimilco peasant
88	Tuesday 7-9-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Column	Juan Villoro	Dos clásicos y un ausente	FOOTBALL/ PRESENT America-Guadalajara match + meetings Argentina-Brazil
89	Sunday 12-9-99	Nation	1/3 page	Carlos Monsiváis	El debate o de la reiteración de cuatro spots	POLITICS/ PRESENT PRI oratory
90	Tuesday 14-9-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Column	Juan Villoro	La faena de Cuauhtémoc	FOOTBALL / PRESENT America- Guadalajara match
91	Tuesday 21-9-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Column	Juan Villoro	Los goles necesarios	FOOTBALL / PRESENT How many goals guarantee a good match?
92	Sunday 26-9-99	Nation	1/3 page	Carlos Monsiváis	Historias de la postmodernid ad tardía	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Various imaginary stories
93	Tuesday 28-9-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	Espías y pistoleros	CHARACTERS/ PRESENT Story of gunman "El Güero" and of a KGB spy
94	Tuesday 28-9-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Column	Juan Villoro	Un domingo en Colombia	FOOTBALL / PRESENT Football in Colombia
95	Thursday 30-9-99	Culture (Voz invitada)	Column	Mónica Lavín	Caminata cantinera	CITY/ PRESENT Journey through various pubs

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
96	Tuesday 5-10-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Column	Juan Villoro	Necaxa mundialista	FOOTBALL / PRESENT Necaxa match
97	Thursday 7-10-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	Lo de ayer en la de ayer	CITY/PAST Memories of yesterday's city

98	Sunday 10-10-99	Nation	- ½ page	Carlos Monsiváis	Temas del fin del milenio	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Conferences, soaps, etc.
99	Tuesday 12-10-99	Sports (El estadio individual)	Box	Juan Villoro	Adiós provisional	FOOTBALL / PRESENT Farewell from the cronista of this column
100	Wednesda y 13-10-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	De mujer a mujer	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Reproduction of a conversation of two women over the phone
101	Friday 15-10-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	Los niños del cuatro	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Poverty in Guadalajara
102	Monday 18-10-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	Historias de lodo y sol	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Floods in the south of the country
103	Thursday 21-10-99	City (La vida va)	Column	Guillermo Ochoa	San Judas y la crisis	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT On the cult of San Judas
104	Friday 22-10-99	Sports (Sumas y restas)	Column	Armando Satow		SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Attempts at stealing from famous sports people
105	Sunday 24-10-99	City (Ciudad de sobreviviente s)	Column	David Cano	Aquí, tenga de conejo	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE / PRESENT Food business of doña Antonia

PROCESO

	DATE	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
106	Sunday 19-9-99	5 pages	Carlos Monsiváis	La vocación del aliviane	POLITICS/PRESENT Politicians on tv

MILENIO

	DATE	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
107	Monday 6-9-99	2 pages	Ciro Gómez Leyva	El día del Informe final	POLITICS/PRESENT Presidential report

NEXOS

	DATE	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
108	October 1999	4 pages	Julián Andrade Jardí	Las leyes del narco	MAFIA/ PRESENT Drug traffic in Ciudad Juárez

APPENDIX 3. SELECTION OF *CRÓNICAS* APPEARING IN THE PRESS OF GUAYAQUIL

The selection of *crónicas* from Guayaquil is based on the texts that appeared in the newspapers *El Universo* and *Expreso* from Guayaquil, and *El Comercio* and *Hoy* from Quito; and monthly magazines *Diners* and *Cash International*, which circulate among cardholders. The newspaper *El Telégrafo* and magazine *Vistazo* were also consulted, but no *crónicas* were found there. The period of the selection is January and February 2000. The addition of the two most important newspapers from Quito, which are of national circulation, is due to the general scarcity of *crónicas* in the press. In the case of the newspaper *Hoy*, a further reason is that this is a newspaper especially read by intellectuals throughout the country. Although it is not sold in the streets, the magazine *Diners* has been one of the most important media in which a literary *crónica* has been able to develop in Ecuador. Since the 1980s, texts on travel and popular culture by Pablo Cuvi, Jorge Martillo, Edwin Ulloa and others have been regularly published there. *Cash* is a new magazine which is made following the model of *Diners*, and in which Fernando Artieda now publishes his urban *crónicas*.

A total of 44 *crónicas* were selected: 15 from *El Universo* (34.1%), 9 from *Expreso* (20.5%), 2 from *El Comercio* (4.5%), 16 from *Hoy* (36.4%), 1 from *Diners* and 1 from *Cash Continental*.

Crónicas come from four major sections: Comment (23 or 54.8%), City (7 or 16.7%), Sports (3 or 7.1%) and the Sunday supplement (9 or 21.4%) (see table 1). Thus, the section of political comment is here the most important one for the appearance of *crónicas*, with over half of the texts. *Crónicas* from the Sunday supplement are specifically dedicated to travel and come in the second place of importance, although they are all texts from a single contributor (Jorge Martillo), while the City section occupies the third place. In contrast to Mexico, no *crónicas* are found in the cultural sections nor in the section dedicated to national politics.

There are very different patterns according to newspaper, in part because most texts are produced by a few contributors. Texts from *El Universo* come essentially (14 of a total of 15) from two weekly contributors, Francisco Febres Cordero, who writes in the section of Comment on Thursdays, and Jorge Martillo, who contributes to the section of Tourism of the Sunday Supplement. Febres Cordero writes sarcastic

vignettes in which he recreates and derides current political events, focusing especially on the political crises. Jorge Martillo's *crónicas* are a combination of the traditional genre of travel *crónicas* with a more pragmatic approach to tourism. They offer short recreations of the history, landscapes and local uses of places all over Ecuador with some useful information for travellers.

Table 1. Section of the newspaper in which *crónicas* appear

	<i>Comment</i>		<i>City</i>		<i>Sports</i>		<i>Sunday supplement</i>		<i>TOTAL</i>
		%		%		%		%	
El Universo	7	46.7	1	6.7	0	0	7	46.7	15
Expreso	0	0	6	66.7	3	33.3	0	0	9
El Comercio	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	100	2
Hoy	16	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
TOTAL	23	54.8	7	16.7	3	7.1%	9	21.4	42

In *Expreso*, most texts come from the section dedicated to city news, they are occasional informative accounts rather than regular contributions. They reproduce the various scenes of poverty and survival observed in the city streets, related to the major economic and social crises affecting the country, depicting street vendors and beggars, public hospitals and the difficulties of aspiring migrants. These texts are written by professional journalists, not by recognised *cronistas*. Ricardo Chacón publishes a weekly column in the section of Sports in which he discusses with great freedom issues related to the world of sports. Some of his contributions, especially those that evoke figures from the past, can be considered *crónicas*.

In *El Comercio*, only two *crónicas* were found, both in the Sunday pages that appear in the middle of the newspaper. They are journalistic accounts that narrate in detail the story of an aspiring emigrant, and the violent return of the inhabitants of Baños to their town, which had been evacuated because of the threat of eruption from neighbouring volcano Tungurahua.

All the *crónicas* in *Hoy* are written by regular contributors to the Comment section: Iván Ulchur and Simón Espinosa. Iván Ulchur publishes every Saturday a humorous political sketch. Simón Espinosa writes on Tuesdays a comment that is more in the nature of the article of opinion, and has another contribution on Thursdays, which is called 'Mail' and has an epistolary form. Here, he writes texts in the form of emails addressed to an emigrant, where issues of politics and daily life are

discussed from the point of view of imaginary characters that represent certain middle social strata in Ecuadorian society.

In the magazine *Diners*, Pablo Cuvi writes a monthly travel *crónica*. In *Cash International*, Artieda publishes a monthly *crónica* on diverse aspects of the daily life and popular culture of Guayaquil.

The contributions that come from the sections of Comment, i.e. those by Febres Cordero (*El Universo*), Ulchur and Espinosa (*Hoy*), are all directly related to current news events. On the other hand, the texts of Martillo (*El Universo*), Cuvi (*Diners*) and Artieda (*Cash*) introduce and discuss themes that are not related to the current news. In an intermediate position are the whole series of *crónicas* that appear in the City section of the newspapers (especially in *Expreso*), which illuminate various aspects of how the crisis is lived by the inhabitants of the city (see table 2).

Table 2. Type of *crónica*

	Comment on current events		Special event/intermediate		Not related to current events		TOTAL
		%		%		%	
El Universo	7	46.7	1	6.7	7	46.7	15
Expreso	0	0	9	100	0	0	9
El Comercio	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	2
Hoy	16	100	0	0	0	0	16
Diners	0	0	0	0	1	100	1
Cash Continental	0	0	0	0	1	100	1
TOTAL	24	54.5%	11	25.0%	9	20.5%	44

There is in this selection a direct correspondence between the section of the newspaper where the *crónicas* appear and their theme: all the texts that come from the Comment section are related to current political issues of the country; those that appear in the section on the City focus exclusively on scenes of poverty and crisis, and those from the Tourism section of the Sunday Supplement are travel *crónicas*.

Thus, we find that half the *crónicas* are discussions of the political affairs of the day, devoted primarily to the grave political and economic crisis that was hitting the country in those months, and discussing issues such as the coup of the 21st of January 2000, the change of the national currency to the dollar and corruption (see table 3). Political *crónicas* have a considerable weight in the newspaper *El Universo* (7 *crónicas* or 46.7%) and are the almost exclusive object of attention in *Hoy* (15 texts or 93.8%), but are of no significance whatsoever in *Expreso*. Further, political *crónicas* do not appear in the sections of (national) politics of the newspaper, where

contributors usually have more freedom to depart from and elaborate on actual events, but in the section of Comment, where texts are often shorter and primarily designed to offer interpretations of the current news to their readers.

Table 3. Theme of the *crónicas*

	Scenes of poverty/crises		Politics		Travel		Sports		Other		TOTAL
		%		%		%		%		%	
El Universo	1	6.7	7	46.7	7	46.7	0	0	0	0	15
Expreso	6	66.7	0	0	0	0	3	33.3	0	0	9
El Comercio	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Hoy	0	0	15	93.8	0	0	0	0	1	6.3	16
Diners	0	0	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	1
Cash	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	100	1
TOTAL	9	20.5	22	50.0	8	18.2	3	6.8	2	4.5	44

The theme of scenes of poverty/ crises is the second in importance, with over 20% of the contributions, and is especially the focus of newspaper *Expreso* (66.7% of the texts), and of the two only *crónicas* in *El Comercio*. Travel is the theme of Jorge Martillo's contributions to the Sunday supplement of *El Universo* and of Cuví's monthly contribution to magazine *Diners*. Artieda's *crónica* in magazine *Cash* is about popular culture.

Table 4. Type of *crónica* by theme

	Comment on current events		Special event/ intermediate		Not related to current events		TOTAL
		%		%		%	
Scenes of poverty/crises	1	11.1	8	88.9	0	0	9
Politics	22	100	0	0	0	0	22
Travel	0	0	0	0	8	100	8
Sports	0	0	3	100	0	0	3
Other	1	50.0	0	0	1	50.0	2
TOTAL	24	54.5	11	25.0	9	20.5	44

As in Mexico City, there is here a close correspondence between the theme of the *crónicas* and their form, whether or not they are directly related to the context of current news. In the case of Guayaquil, this relationship is even more marked: all the texts about politics are directly linked to current events, none of the texts on travel are related to current events, and the texts on poverty/crises and on sports occupy an intermediate position (see table 4).

It must also be pointed out that the nature of the texts which have been classified as intermediate is different from those texts from Mexico City which were considered as falling within this category. While in Mexico those *crónicas* were usually literary exercises that made some kind of indirect reference to the current news as a pretext, in Guayaquil they are essentially informative texts that have been classified as intermediate because of the nature of the events they portray, which are scenes of everyday life rather than some specific news event.

Ecuadorian *crónicas* are primarily representations of the present (39 of the texts or 88.6%). Only three texts narrate past events: two sport *crónicas* by Chacón (*Expreso*) and Artieda's *crónica* on Mexican cinema in *Cash*. Jorge Martillo mixes in two of his travel *crónicas* the past and the present, offering accounts of the origin of some of today's habits and commenting on old *crónicas* and legends about the places he visits.

SELECTION OF *CRÓNICAS* APPEARING IN THE PRESS OF GUAYAQUIL

EL UNIVERSO

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
1	Sunday 2-1-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	1 page	Jorge Martillo	Playas de olas	TRAVEL/PAST AND PRESENT History and present of Playas
2	Thursday 6-1-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	La nueva imagen	POLITICS/PRESENT The turn of the century and president Mahuad
3	Sunday 9-1-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	2 pages	Jorge Martillo	Bajo el son del mar	TRAVEL /PRESENT Customs, streets and beaches of Esmeraldas
4	Thursday 13-1-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	El Rápido	POLITICS/PRESENT Mahuad accelerates dolarisation of economy
5	Sunday 16-1-00	City	Almost one page	Fernando Astucillo	Hagan negocio en crisis	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Queue of unemployed people to participate in a tv quiz
6	Sunday 16-1-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	1 page	Jorge Martillo	Cotacachi. El arte del cuero	TRAVEL/PAST AND PRESENT History and present of Cotacachi
7	Thursday 20-1-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	La dolarización	POLITICS/PRESENT Descriptions of dolarisation written by children
8	Sunday 23-1-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	2 pages	Jorge Martillo	Montañita. Playa de surfistas	TRAVEL/PRESENT Montañita and surfers
9	Thursday 27-1-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	Golpes de pinzas	POLITICS/PRESENT On the coup

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
10	Thursday 3-2-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	Imagen de seriedad	POLITICS/PRESENT Politicians want to give a serious image
11	Sunday 6-2-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	Two pages	Jorge Martillo	Romance ecológico en la Isla del Amor	TRAVEL/PRESENT Description of the Island of Love, paradise of birds.
12	Sunday 13-2-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	1 page	Jorge Martillo	San Jacinto y San Clemente. Unidos por el mar	TRAVEL/PRESENT Legends, customs and occupations of San Jacinto y San Clemente

13	Thursday 17-2-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	Los despojos	POLITICS/PRESENT The corrupt and the situation of the country
14	Thursday 24-2-00	Comment	Box	Francisco Febres Cordero	Pensar en la patria	POLITICS/PRESENT Comments on a sentence of the president
15	Sunday 27-2-00	Sunday supplement (Destinos)	1 page	Jorge Martillo	Volando sobre Crucita, Bella	TRAVEL/ PRESENT Parapente in Crucita

EXPRESO

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
16	Saturday 1-1-00	Sports (La columna)	Box	Ricardo Chacón García	Cuando las hazañas mueren	SPORTS/PAST On the victory of an Ecuadorian swimmer 60 year ago
17	Saturday 8-1-00	Sports (La columna)	Box	Ricardo Chacón García	Los grandes héroes olvidados	SPORTS/ PRESENT On figures from sports
18	Saturday 15-1-00	Sports (La columna)	Box	Ricardo Chacón García	Los grandes héroes olvidados (II)	SPORTS/ PAST On a forgotten boxer
19	Monday 17-1-00	City	¾ page	Diana Auz	Autosala de la muerte	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Precarious situation in Guayaquil hospital
20	Sunday 30-1-00	City	1 page	Vicente Tagle León	Mendigos de un sueño extranjero	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Queue to obtain passports

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
21	Sunday 6-2-00	City	Almost 1 page	BAM	Esta caridad es con escopeta	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Youths who "beg" on a bus
22	Tuesday 8-2-00	City	¾ page	Vicente Tagle León	La miseria tiene nombre de niño	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Family who beg on the road to Salinas
23	Saturday 12-2-00	City	¾ page	Diana Auz	Una esquina vestida de canas y pobreza	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT History of two old people who live in the streets
24	Sunday 27-2-00	City	1 page	Betty Abad M.	El ingenio criollo inventa y vende	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Street-sellers in the city

EL COMERCIO

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
25	Sunday 2-1-00	Sunday special	2 pages	Byron Rodríguez V.	Migración	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Attempts of a migrant to go to US
26	Sunday 9-1-00	Sunday special	2 pages	Byron Rodríguez V.	Baños. Un retorno violento y dramático	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT Violent return of the inhabitants of Baños

HOY

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
27	Saturday 1-1-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur Collazos	Faltan cinco p'a las doce	SCENES EVERYDAY LIFE/ PRESENT New year's eve
28	Thursday 6-1-00	Comment (Correo)	Colum n	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Referencia	POLITICS/PRESENT Email to Rosita on new year's eve and the crisis
29	Saturday 8-1-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur	Al mal genio, Jamilenio	POLITICS/PRESENT Optimism and the national situation
30	Thursday 13-1-00	Comment (Correo)	Colum n	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Dólar	POLITICS/PRESENT Email to Rosita on dolarisation
31	Tuesday 11-1-00	Comment	Box	Simón Espinosa Cordero	La nobel Shu Chita Chang	POLITICS/PRESENT The disappearance of Ecuador seen from the year 2236
32	Saturday 15-1-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur Collazos	Soupa dei verde en salsa de Tío Sam-cocho	POLITICS/PRESENT Dolarisation of the economy
33	Thursday 20-1-00	Comment (Correo)	Colum n	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Gallardo	POLITICS/PRESENT Email on the resignation of the minister of defence
34	Tuesday 25-1-00	Comment	Box	Simón Espinosa Cordero	La salida histórica	POLITICS/PRESENT Questions former presidents on the way out from the crisis
35	Thursday 27-1-00	Comment (Correo)	Colum n	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Cuicas	POLITICS/PRESENT Email on the situation after the coup
36	Saturday 29-1-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur Collazos	El coronel no tiene quién lo siga	POLITICS/PRESENT Dialogue about the coup

	DATE	SECTION	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
37	Thursday 3-2-00	Comment (Correo)	Column	Simón Espinosa Cordero	¡Agringada!	POLITICS/PRESENT Comments to Rosita, who is ashamed of being Ecuadorian
38	Thursday 10-2-00	Comment (Correo)	Column	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Transfusión	POLITICS/PRESENT Email on the importance of emigrants
39	Saturday 12-2-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur	¡LUCIO mismo mágico	POLITICS/PRESENT A lecture on magic realism and the coup
40	Thursday 17-2-00	Comment (Correo)	Column	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Vogue	POLITICS/PRESENT Email on the racket of the owner of Banco del Progreso and other
41	Saturday 19-2-00	Comment	Box	Iván Ulchur Collazos	Amor Rosa miente tuyo: Valentín	POLITICS/PRESENT On Sint Valentine's day
42	Thursday 24-2-00	Comment (Correo)	Column	Simón Espinosa Cordero	Pirañas	POLITICS/PRESENT The corrupt

DINERS

	DATE	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
43	February 2000, No. 202	3 pages	Pablo Cuví	Santiago para gastrónomos, arquitectos y poetas	TRAVEL/ PRESENT Visit to Santiago de Chile

CASH CONTINENTAL

	DATE	SIZE	AUTHOR	TITLE	SUBJECT
44	Feb. 2000 no. 107	4 pages	Fernando Artieda	De charros, rumberas y otras películas mexicanas	CINEMA/ PAST Golden times of Mexican cinema in Ecuador

APPENDIX 4. SIX *CRÓNICAS* FROM THE NEWSPAPERS OF MEXICO CITY AND GUAYAQUIL

1. Carlos Monsiváis, 'Dramas de la vida irreal' ('Dramas in an unreal life'), *El Universal*, 5th September 1999.
2. Fabrizio Mejía Madrid, 'Instantáneas de una ciudad bajo la lluvia' ('Snapshots of a city in the rain'), *Reforma*, 25th October, 1999.
3. Roberto Zamarripa, 'Agitan gran panal' ('The bees pour out of the hive'), *Reforma*, 10th February 2000.
4. Jorge Martillo, 'La Guayaquil Inn' ('The Guayaquil Inn'), *El Universo*, *Paratodos*, 19th January 1997.
5. Iván Ulchur Collazos, 'El coronel no tiene quién le siga' ('Nobody follows the Colonel'), *Hoy*, 29th January 2000.
6. BAM, 'Esta caridad es con escopeta' ('Your charity or your life!'), *Expreso*, 6th February 2000.

Dramas de la vida irreal

CARLOS MONSIVÁIS

El cómico que era cutisimo (y a lo mejor lo sigue siendo)

Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (así, sin apellido, antes de ser el cómico de más éxito de la televisión, probó fortuna como estudioso de la ciencia política, y en especial como gran experto en Maquiavelo y Norberto Bobbio. Amaba a la teoría del Estado sobre todas las cosas, y le robaba tiempo al sueño leyendo (anotando, memorizando) las tesis sobre el desarrollo de la conducta del

Vea Monsiváis, página 26

EL UNIVERSAL

Domingo 5 de septiembre de 1988

Monsiváis

Continúa de la página 1

poder y sus contrapesos. Pero la vida, indisciplinada y nada científica, lo condujo por el camino de la comicidad, y para sobrevivir entró de animador a un programa infantil. Algo pasó, el mundo hizo click con Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (que entonces se llamaba distinto y poseía apellido) y el éxito lo persiguió sin tregua. Día a día el rating aumentaba; A4, como le decían al presentarlo, pasó a ser cómico para adultos y el triunfo se le entregó. Un programa diario, en horario estelar, y un país entero que celebra y repite sus chistes, vueltos frases célebres. ¿Quién no ha usado como propias algunas expresiones de A4: "Llégame campeón/ Métele ganas/ Allá nomás tras lo-mita", y otras igualmente nuevas e ingeniosas?

A4, sin embargo, no se alegraba en lo íntimo por su condición de rey de la televisión. Seguía creyendo en la ciencia política y suspiraba por el día de la independencia cuando abandonase tan ridículas banalidades y se entregase a la causa de precisar con detalle el porqué unos ganan las elecciones y otros nomás cometen fraude. Por eso, uno de los grandes días de su vida fue aquél del encuentro con el dueño de su empresa.

-A4, tengo un proyecto fregonísimo y pensé en ti.

-Tú dirás, jefe. Aquí a tus órdenes como caja negra.

-Así me gustan los valentones. Pues ya ves que el año próximo habrá elecciones muy reñidas y hay desde ahora un gastazo en publicidad y todos quieren salir en la tele. Ya conoces el dicho: "Si no te pueden monitorear, haz cuenta que no te conocen".

-No, claro. Los políticos son o sala vacía o estadio lleno. Y eso sólo depende de cuán lejos o cuán cerca estén de la pantalla casera.

-Dilo como quieras, A4. Pero hay problemas. Se han hecho estudios concienzudos y estudios superficiales y los dos coinciden en que la gente ni se asoma a las entrevistas de tono intelectual. Como que esa onda no es onda de nadie, como que esa rola los aburre a madres. Y he pensado, fíjate qué verbo tan chido, he pensado que la política para ser vista debe entrar en programas cómicos del tipo del tuyo, lleno de payasos y chavas en bikini y chistes de la edad del pato Donald. Eso le da confianza a la plebe y entonces sí se chutan el mensaje y lo que les pongas.

A4 regresó a su casa con fiebre. El chance de los chances entraba sin tocar la puerta. Por fin, y obligado por la empresa, podría hacer uso de su sabiduría en materia de ciencia política. No dejaría pasar el momento, y en cuanto el candidato que sería presidente advirtiera su talento analítico, al llegar a la Silla lo mandaría llamar, y a lo mejor le pediría que colaborase en su Gabinete, o por lo menos, al principio, lo nom-

braría su asesor principal. "El arte de lo posible" en sus manos. Por fin el mundo sabría quién es y cómo funciona conceptualmente el mejor politólogo del país.

Dedicó una semana a reflexionar, y al cabo de esos días de pensamiento y angustia redactó un cuestionario de prueba que juzgó fundamental. Disponía además de un elemento determinante. El escándalo desatado por el asesinato del animador Paco Stanley desprestigió a por un tiempo a la banalidad. Eso sin duda. La frivolidad era un campo minado, y se inauguraba la era de la profundidad. En el cuestionario, A4 usó citas de Hobbes, Montaigne, John Locke, Jefferson, Isaiah Berlin, Disraeli, Sartre, Alain Touraine, Tocqueville, Ignacio Ramírez... Aguardó con impaciencia las respuestas.

Lo que sucedió llevó al trastorno a A4. Todos los precandidatos o candidatos respondieron afirmativamente. Por supuesto que podían contar con su presencia, nomás eso faltaba. La televisión, escribió uno, es el ágora de nuestro tiempo y lo que allí no pasa ya estuvo que nomás no pasó. Y otro fue más enfático: asistir a una entrevista televisada era el más alto honor en la carrera de un político, el equivalente a doce medallas de oro y a un estatua en el Paseo de la Reforma. Allí estaría, como un solo hombre. Varios le enviaron al "amigo A4" sus fotos autografiadas y videocasetes de algunas vacaciones en Cuernavaca con los niños. "Son buen material, anotaban. Inspirante confianza". Pero ninguno, absolutamente ninguno, mencionaba el cuestionario.

Se iniciaron las entrevistas previas a la grabación. Todos insistieron en la necesidad de varios ensayos, y dos por lo menos solicitaron la asistencia de un coreógrafo, "por lo del lenguaje corporal atractivo o por si se requiere que baile con el ballet del programa". Tres de los entrevistables llevaron sus pistas con la música que creían adecuada (rock y bolero, la mezcla perfecta) y uno insistió en que la entrevista fuera en un gimnasio porque él era un atleta consumado y valía la pena que la nación lo supiera. A4 aceptó las propuestas, festejó los chistes (que no le hacían la menor gracia, pero los que le escribían para el programa eran igualmente pesados y los festejaba la nación) y fijó las fechas. Pero seguían sin mencionarle su cuestionario y eso lo desconcertaba. Bueno, tal vez era muy buena señal. Quería decir lo obvio: lo esperaban a pie firme el día de la grabación.

A la hora de la primera entrevista, A4 decidió cambiar su look (mexicanismo que significa apariencia). Se enfundó sus anteojos de carey, se peinó despeinadamente, se puso una chamarra de mezclilla y aguardó. Le extrañó que el candidato co-

mentara su pasión por los albuces, pero atribuyó la pregunta al nerviosismo. Al fin al cabo, el político era un abogado de larga trayectoria, un constitucionalista reconocido, un experto en las diferencias entre derecho natural y derecho mercantil. Y A4 se deslumbró internamente con su intervención de entrada: "Usted, con su experiencia, jurídica y su tesis profesional sobre el Leviatán, ¿qué limitaciones encuentra en el Estado contemporáneo? ¿Qué le diría hoy a un estudioso de nuestras instituciones?"

La respuesta fue velocísima: "Me prestas a tu hermana, de noche o en la mañana". A4 creyó oír mal y se propuso ir con el médico esa misma tarde, pero insistió con una variante: "¿Cree usted posible salvar el Sistema, como asegura la politología escandinava?" El eminente jurista, que iba en bermudas y traía un arete y un walkman, tal vez insólitos en un cincuentón, le contestó como de rayo: "De frente y de perfil, te trueno el quintonil". A4 interrumpió la grabación.

"Pero licenciado, ¿qué ocurre? ¿No le leyó el cuestionario que le mandé? ¿Para qué me albeura?" El candidato, que jugaba con un balero, fue sincero: "Mira mano, ni me asomé a tus jaladas. Esta es otra época, galán. Lo que hoy se requiere es dar una imagen de confianza, de que el candidato es como todos, que albeura, que quiere ser joven a la de güevo, que no le sacatea al parche. Ya viste mis lemas de campaña: "Sóplate esa y caifás con tu voto/ Take care, hermano, porque la delincuencia se acabó llegando con tu rey". ¿Tú crees que con ese tipo de campaña, asesorada por publicistas gabachos, me iba yo a dar el lujo de opinar sobre don Crescencio Rejón y la ley del amparo? Sáquese güey".

A4 se sintió fulminado, y ya no se contentó nada a sí mismo para no albeurarse solo. Como pudo, terminó con el programa y aceptó bailar bugui-bugui con el candidato, que de un puntapié incidental le provocó un desmayo. Y las siguientes entrevistas no fueron más relajadas. La clase política estaba convencida de los nuevos estilos de hacer campaña, y sólo quería hablar con albuces, bailar con las modelos, hacer señales fornicatorias light, cambiar las ideas por las "palabrotas" (que de tan usadas ya parecen palabritas). No hubo modo de que alguien le diera su juicio sobre la transición a la democracia. Preguntaba A4: "¿Cuál es el fundamento del consenso?", y le replicaban: "Que a tu papá se le quite lo menso". Pedía aclarar las diferencias entre los programas de gobierno y los contaban chistes en la índole de "Venían en un avión Salinas, Clinton y Yeltsin...".

Desesperado, A4 renunció a ser político de altura, aceptó que la política actual es una variante de los programas cómicos, memorizó 6144 albuces que le prepararon nomás para él en dos billares, se dejó el pelo largo (con trenza) y no volvió a tocar un libro. Uno de sus entrevistados ganó la Presidencia de la República y hoy A4 despacha en la Secretaría de Gobernación.

BAJO LA LLUVIA

que sobreviven aquí como bichardo una ciudad sustitua: todo el tiempo esperamos que sea otra, que nos dé algo para lo que no fue construida. La Ciudad de México tiene desde siempre ese signo, el de una deuda: sus habitantes vamos por sus inundaciones pensando que, algún día, nos pagará todas las que nos debe. Ella nos deja empapados, sin nada más que ofrecernos. Es la ciudad sigilosa de otra soñada, que se hunde en la nada bajo ella.

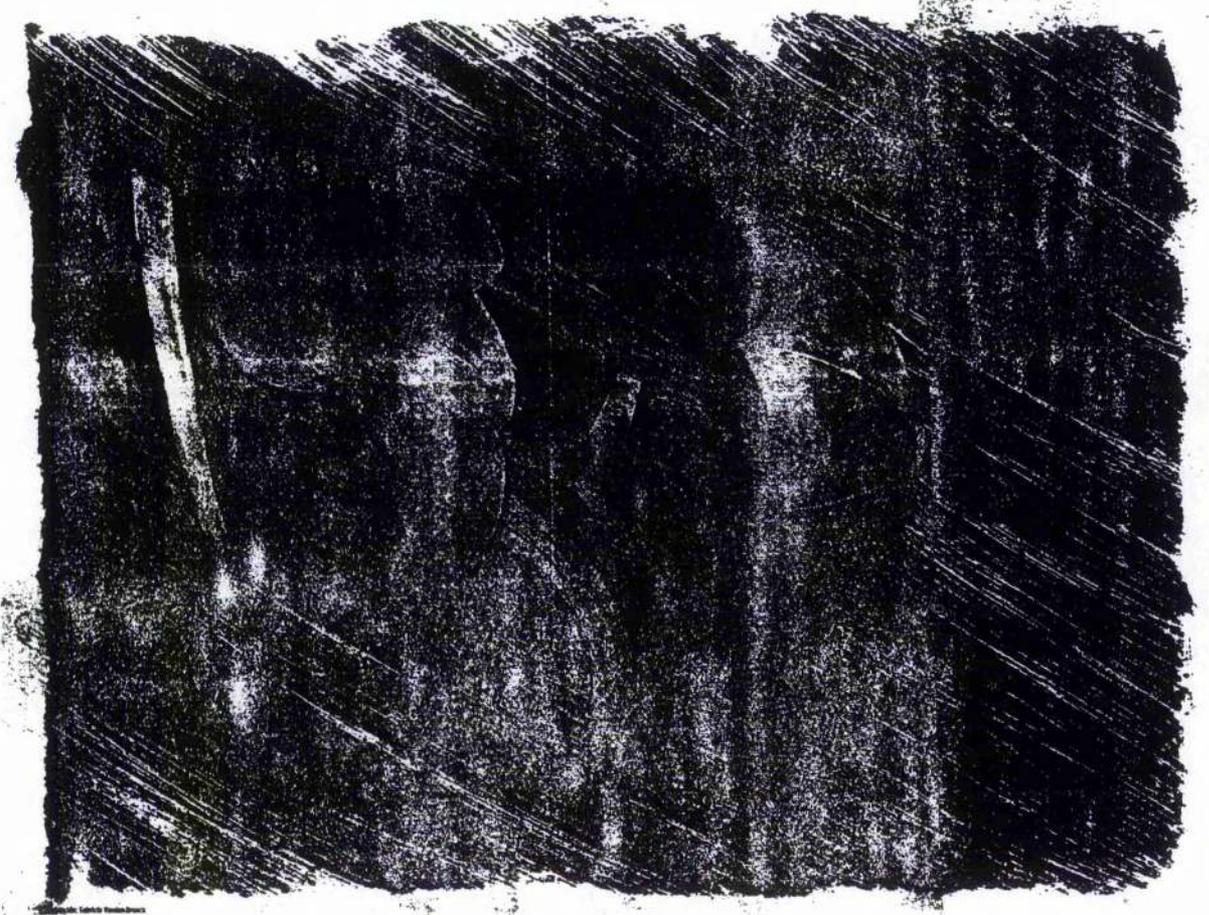
La ciudad lluviosa desahiente y afirma a Clark Varios caminos en medio de un agua y Carla dice

...Que el hombre controla a la naturaleza? Como se ve que Marx jamás se movió los pies. Mientras termina su diatriba anti-materialista, un Percebe pasa a gran velocidad y nos empaja con el agua sinestra de los charcos.

—Aunque eso sí es lucha, de clases —dice. Un lado de arcuquiles nos hace volar en un enorme eddico del cruceño, a nuestra izquierda, cuando ellos bajan a que tienen abeja. De sus bocas afloran: salen burbujas y ruidual. No sé si dello hablgamos. Sus rrras me hacen dudar.

Talbot, el dios de la lluvia de la ciudad nativa, tenía sobre sí cara dos serpientes enrollada, como gatas. Las serpientes se enrollan por la nariz y sus colas formaban dos bigotes. En 1882, cuando José Sánchez y el pintor José María Velasco descubrieron un almorzador de 7 metros de altura en la barranca de Santa Clara, en lo que fuera el lago de Texcoco. Ya identificado como Talbot, las autoridades decidieron exponerlo en la entrada del Museo de Antropología. La mañana del 7 de febrero de 1965, tratamos de cargar la pesada piedra con grúas y cables metálicos. Pero la gente de Santa Clara se los impidió, armados con cuchillos, palos y piedras. Los pobladores se arrojaron para defender a Talbot. Fue hacia la madrugada del día 8 que el Ejército tomó la zona y las arqueólogas pudieron sacar el monolito. Esa noche comenzó una lluvia que duró más de 76 horas. Atascado en el tráfico que las inundaciones produjeron, Carla Matutez, de visita en México, tuvo la primera idea para una gran novela: un lugar en el que no parara de llover en muchos años.

Para explicarse por qué en América había tanta humedad y mucha gente vestida con plumas, Sir Francis Bacon hizo una hipótesis en *The New Atlantis* (1614) que el continente americano era la Atlántida y que ésta se había perdido irremediablemente por causa de un terremoto. La sea inundaría solo sobrevivieron los hombres, los pájaros y los animales que pudieron salir a las montañas. Cuando finalmente pudieran bajar, los hombres "hablaban adquiriendo de sus amigos y ellos explican las razones por las que los pueblos aztecas e incas, aun viviendo en zonas altas y frías, siguen usando plumas por toda indumentaria". A pesar de las experiencias, Bacon no estaba tan errado. Quinte años después de su alegato, la Ciudad de México se inundó por las lluvias inabundantes de julio a septiembre de 1529, cuyos consecuencias fueron informadas al Rey por el Azteca Moctezuma y Zethtiga, de 20 mil familias



400. Y 30 mil indios han perecido en aquellos días, unos ahogados, otros sepultados bajo las ruinas, y no pocos de hambre". En lo único de la lluvia no subieron a las montañas, sino que iban y venían en carrozas con sus miembros, sin saber a dónde entrarlos: los ca-

se siguen usando como transporte, cuando, hirviendo, flotan como balsas.

Las estatuas disecadas en las tiendas de antigüedades por toda la Avenida División del Norte son muestra viva. La historia que cuentan los jugue-

tarde del disco, los armadillos en el acto inútil de la huída, es la de una prohibición de los suburbios en una discoteca. "El Cerebro", esos animales congelados acababan por ser los únicos habitantes de los borrachos. Los perros se escondían adentro las historias de amor fallidas y los armadillos presaban sus caparzo-

infernal con la figura de la Virgen de Guadalupe. En torno a ella, hay cientos de tribuladas figuras que tienen la misma forma, y es muy probable que lo que la gente mire en el momento sea el hervor que un atropello dejó hace 500 millones de años. Y es que sobre el sillón de la ciudad, profuso en resaca de entres y sagrados, los ingenieros que construyeron el Metro y sus hijos tienen una capa geológica con fosiles. Así cuando un arqueólogo del futuro nos encuentre, lechará a los actores antes que a los creadores.

Los "laberintos" eran la encarnación de las lluvias. Para las fiestas de Talbot, en las que se abrogaban a algunos niños como sacrificios, los laberintos salían a danzar. En el transcurso de la danza ritual, cada laberinto perdía el nombre que se habían dado el año anterior y debían buscar uno nuevo. Así, mientras se salaban, los laberintos iban definiéndose distintos nombres y el último en pronunciarse —era lo que el canal definía al final de la danza— era el que se los quedaba. Después, eran destruidos e sus palacios habituales donde iban a su morada, como los peces, los laberintos eran remans.

Desde que compré mi propia línea de teléfono no he dejado de llorar a una tal "Ingeniera Azucena Fraile". Los primeros meses, lo he más como parte de los nombres equivocados en una ciudad cuyos habitantes cambiaban a menudo de domicilio. Al año, las confesiones habélicas parecían diluirse a fuerza de desmentidas. Pero ayer en la madrugada sentí el teléfono. Empapado en sudor, desperté sobresaltado. La lluvia caía a cántaros abierta. Levanté la bofetina, mientras estaba un malampago, sólo para escuchar una voz entrecortada.

—Azucena, me divorcé. Ahora sí vamos a casarnos.

Vamos circunabulo en un taxi por Miramontes a las 11 de la noche. Del automóvil de junio no nos damos sino una imagen disminuida entre las gotas que escurren por el cristal. Treemos addivinar medio campo de una mujer saltando por la ventanilla y un grito imperceptible. El auto da vuelta en un rededor y se pierde en la tormenta.

—¿Que fue eso? —pregunto al otro lado.

—Están de fiesta —sigue el taxista.

—Era un secuestro —afirma Carla.

En 1955, el cronista de la ciudad, Salvador Novo, llevó al actor Alec Guinness al que de la manía, postevolucionaria por construir "la más grande del continente". La Inmensa Torre Lalli nomenclorata. Cuando estaban mirando desde lo alto, comenzó a llover. Los estrados terminaron empallados y la ciudad que, según Salvador Novo, se veía hermosa desde allí, se emborronó. Alec Guinness, con un gesto desdichado, salió corriendo.

—¿Cuándo fue que los mexicanos decidieron cambiar la piedra por el vidrio?

Queríamos mirar, sólo eso. Y de pronto, esas lamas arqueólogos porque las *lup dater* no nos miran. La culpa es del Serge que no hacer ni media hora nos dice: "Y hoy no vamos a ver ni a veres desuadas". Pero las mujeres no tienen ojos más que para un ensayo que se ha sentido en una mesa de pisa. —¿Lanto a la muestra? —agitando pulidones de dólares.

—¿Cómo la llamas? —le pregunta el ensayo a uno de las chicas que lo sabemos desde hace tiempo se llama "Baque".

—Como tu quieres —le responde y sonrío.

—Tú no eres ella, tú eres otra. —grita el ensayo en una promesa ondulosa inabundante. —Vale. Y así van pasando las pallas, sin que ninguna sea al mismo tiempo otra. Nadie entiende la escena, pero no podemos huir. Ahora llueve y

La Guayaquil Inn

JORGE MARTILLO

Cómo podré escribir esta crónica sin que parezca una ficción más?, es mi pregunta desde que *El Conde* me contó la historia. Lo mejor será buscar la punta inicial del hilo y desmadejar el resto.

Aquella tarde escuchaba *Bye, bye baby* de Janis Joplin, tocaron a la puerta y apareció *El Conde*. Olfí su característico tufo etílico. Me saludó con sus dedos huesudos y dijo: Ya olvidate de esas canciones hipopíes, estamos en los noventa. Se acercó a la refri y agarró una cerveza, según él para matar al chuchaqui que torturaba su garganta con puñados de ceniza.

Bebió y triste se puso a mirar a la tarde que moría. Yo sospechaba que quería contarme algo, pero era necesario que el trago soltara su lengua, y la del *Conde* era como una soga con muchísimos nudos.

Cuando la tarde muere

El panadero de la tarde pasó silbando, lento, a lomo de su vieja bicicleta. Era sábado y las calles estaban casi desiertas y doradas por las virutas del sol que caía. De cuando en cuando llegaban gritos de distantes jugadores de indor en su último partido.

Cuando fue por la segunda botella, puso el disco de Adalberto Alvarez y su Son, sono *Reflexiones Mías*: "Disculpenme se-

El salón tenía una buena rockola, el típico olor de cerveza rancia tatuado en sus paredes y las meseras escondían su tristeza en máscaras de colorate. Bebí, escuché viejas guarachas de La Sonora Matancera y Daniel Santos.

ñores licenciados/ pero yo soy un imperfecto más".

El Conde un poco más a gusto, bebió unos sorbos largos: "Reflexiones con sus heridas/ Aprendiendo de la escuela de la vida". Los nudos de su discurso se fueron desatando. Te voy a contar lo que me pasó la otra noche, dijo. Habla, le respondí.

En el barrio Garay

La botella verde quedó vacía y solo coronada por un destello de marea espumosa. Fue por la tercera. La cuestión es que fui a una cantina de las del frente, dijo mirando a su barrio Garay y limpiando, con sus dedos, el óxido del pico de la botella. El salón tenía una buena rockola, el típico olor de cerveza rancia tatuado en sus paredes y las meseras escondían su tristeza en máscaras de colorate. Bebí, escuché viejas guarachas de La Sonora Matancera y Daniel Santos. Hasta rememoraré tiempos en que aún tenía algunas es-

peranzas de inquilinas en mi pecho. La cuestión es (esa es una muletilla del habla del *Conde*) que una salонера se sentó a mi lado, a mi mesa sembrada de botellas. Era una chola con rastros de antigua belleza, pero eran más evidentes en su piel, las cicatrices que regala una vida agitada. Su cuerpo quería mostrarse altivo, pero la derrota lo halaba hacia la lona, hacia el suelo de aserrín y escupidajos.

El Conde bebió un trago y continuó hablando, sin mirarme, observando triste las aguas del estero que al morir la tarde se oscurecían como golondrinas. Y cómo te llamas, le pregunté. *Guayaquil Inn*, me dijo. Créte escuchar mal por las canciones que vomitaba la rockola. Ella volvió a decir: *La Guayaquil Inn*, así me dicen, así me llaman porque hasta mi verdadero nombre lo he olvidado y para lo que me importa. Le acerqué mi vaso que rebosaba, lo bebió, sus labios rojísimos quedaron coronados por la espuma.

La cuestión es que, de pronto, caí en cuenta que estaba bebiendo con la ciudad misma. Ignoraba, no podía adivinar si me acompañaba la cara visible o el lado oculto de la ciudad. Pero veía ese rostro de arrugas y colorate y sentía que estaba compartiendo mi mesa con la esfinge de la ciudad, en un momento me acordé de la esfinge griega con cabeza y pechos de mujer, alas de pájaro, y cuerpo y pies de león, aquella que asolaba el país de Tebas, proponiendo enigmas a los hombres y devoraba a quienes no sabían resolverlos. Ah, *Guayaquil Inn*, la llamaron de otra mesa y hacia allá se dirigió, sobre unos zapatos de tacones gastados, meciendo sus caderas anchas. Cuando la vi conversando con unos malandros, tomé el último sorbo y me supo a agua con gusarapos y lodo podrido del estero, dijo *El Conde* y bebió con cierta desesperación. Qué te dijo, qué enigma te formuló, curioso pregunté a mi amigo. *El Conde* solo sonrió, con esa mueca cínica que refleja sus imposibles, no me contestó y se limitó a mirar al Barrio Garay cubierto por la noche. Olvidala, le aconseje. Bebió el último sorbo: Escribelo, me dijo hundiéndose en el sábado nocturno. En ese momento presentí que mi cerveza iba a regalarme un sabor a muerte y mito, porque estaba seguro que *El Conde* iba al encuentro de los enigmas de la *Guayaquil Inn*.

El coronel no tiene quién lo siga

Por Iván Ulchur Collazos.

Nomás la comadrita Rosamunda Sintapujos quien, desde las 8 de la mañana del viernes 21 de enero hasta las 12 pm, se dispone a tomar el avión de regreso a su pequeño arrebolado, allá en Berea. Kentucky, en los imatitad estáticos cuando juá-quetel, desde la sala de embarque empieza a ver que su deslunaited paisito de pasillos melancólicos se le viene abajo. ¡Paisetes, paisetes! -piensa y se remuerde por juzgar así a su cielito lleno de estrellas.

Llega a Berea toda confundida con sus tiempos de vuelo, toda embullada, toda cajibundia y meditataja, con el chuchaqui todavía fresco de "adelante, Ecuador adelante"; piensa en el estereotipo aquel que nos convierte en banana republics y no puede dejar de pensar en que pues sí, no tenemos solución y que las cosas en nuestros territorios regresan lastimosamente a sus lugares comunes de antes, repletas de cabos sueltos y coronelitos desamarrados y entonces, lo

primerito que hace es llamarnos, espantaca
- ¡Allá Macondo? ¿What is up? ¿Cómo así, mismo ca? ¿Que dizque Jamil ya no rál? ¿Cómo es posible? ¿Que dizque el coronel no tiene quien lo siga?

- Bueno, pues, escuche, comadrita, mi in-marcial versión, ¡aió!

- El coronel Lucidito Gutiérrez, graáuado con honores, y ejemplar esposo de un doctora de la más bien hablada, me muero, destapó la olla podrida y comprobó que no había más que uros ingenuos compañeros indígenas, un ex magistraco Su-olor-sano, traído de no se sabe dónde con unos apellidos consantinos por ceñirse la banda y otro gordito que más bien parecía la Miss golpes de Estado con una banda roja sobre su pecho inmarcesible.

Entonces el romántico coronel retiró sus promesas del fogón constitucional, justificó la mitad de su discurso en el destino de su

oficio y con una proclama inflamada de Revoluciones Julianas rasgó el interior de las demos gracias jamilianas, hasta cuando se desprendieron las últimas raspaduras del reguren revueltas con óxido de oportunismo.

- Ay, compadres, entonces me están hablando de asonadas, así le llaman, ¿no?

- En principio, sí, porque hicieron ruido y asonaron el panorama mundial. Pero, después todo terminó en pasonada.

- ¿Cómo?, ¿aió?

El asunto fue que los indígenas se levantaron muy temprano a revolver el avispero y a querer tomarse el poder burgués con las proletarias armas de los parlamentos populares. La levantada tenía el objetivo maximalista de todo o nada. O se levantaban o se quedaban roncando la pudrición.

Entonces se toparon con dos solidarios coroneles que, como se creían predestinados, hicieron traca y proclamaron un triunvira-

to, al estilo de esos triunviros romanos, (de búrribus illus tribus, decía Julio César) con ayuda de un general Mendoza.

- ¿Y?
- Pues que mi general Mendoza se robó la película de héroe al retirarse del triunfo a ratos y proclamar su adhesión a los principios constitucionales. Total, un estado de golpe chapulinesco con escenarios tras bambalinas, y unos compañeros indígenas bur-lados en su legítimo deseo de redención. Usted sabe ¿no? Utopías colectivas vs. soledades cyber.

Un cosa comadrita. ¿por qué será que siempre que usted viene, tumban al presidente? No se le vaya ocurrir venirse en julio, verá.

Entonces la comadrita recordó el final de la novelita de G. Márquez y se sintió explicita al gritar: ¡Mieersáda!



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Esta caridad es con escopeta

En el interior de los colectivos se ha instalado la intimidación como negocio. Es un nuevo estilo de asaltar a los usuarios del transporte

18:45. Cae la noche sobre el bulanguero puerto de Guayaquil.

El calor sofoca, mientras en los estruendosos parlantes de un selectivo semivacio de la línea 14 retumba la voz de Aladino. Interpreta el tema rocolero "Asciéndeme a marido".

Ha sonado dos veces. Parece ser el predilecto del chofer: "...Si en verdad me quieres, ven duermeme conmigo, no te hagas la tonta, haz lo que te pido, sube despacito que atrás yo te sigo..."

De pronto, se silencia la música. Cinco jóvenes negros se suben rápidamente al vehículo, a la altura de las calles Clemente Ballén y Tungurahua.

Sus ojos enrojecidos adoptan la peor y más intimidadora de las miradas. Tres avanzan al fondo y los otros dos se quedan en la parte delantera.

Examinan los rostros de cada pasajero. Recorren el pasillo, en un 'análisis' concienzudo de su escenario de operación.

Los viajeros simulan no dar importancia a la presencia del grupo de mozalbetes. Las reacciones son variadas.

Miedo, ira e impotencia se respiran. La adrenalina sube y gruesas gotas de sudor empiezan a verse en algunas sienas.

La guapa estudiante de la Universidad Católica palidece y sus ojos parecen pedir auxilio al hombre que está a su lado. El los evade y fija los suyos en el parabrisas del automotor.

Una mujer, de más de 70 años, mirando hacia la calle por la ventanilla rezonga: "ivagos, vagos, eso es lo que son! ¡Sinvergüenzas, creen que me van a asustar! ¡Vayan a cargar a la plaza y gánense la vida honradamente! ¡Yo soy vieja y trabajo! ¡Yo no les voy a dar nada!"...

Asustada, una niña observa al negro más joven. Su manita se aferra al brazo de su madre, quien nerviosa y atropelladamente le habla y le muestra 'algo' en la calle.

¡No queremos robarles!, dice el jovenzuelo que está delante. Sus palabras tienen sabor de amenaza.

"Somos ladrones peligrosos, recién salidos de la peni. No queremos robarles", continúa.

"No les estamos metiendo la mano al bolsillo; estamos pidiendo su colaboración para estos jóvenes que no tienen trabajo", prosigue esta vez en una

lastimera sentencia.

De la mitad del colectivo hacia adelante y hacia atrás se reparten el trabajo de recoger el "fruto" de sus amenazas.

El mal olor que emana de las axilas de los muchachos llega al pasajero, cuando ellos extienden la mano y golpean el hombro de la víctima, a la voz de icaiga con algo!, icolabore!

Ponen bien en claro que ese 'algo' no es voluntario, cuando dicen: "Quinientos, mil, dos mil sucres no empobrecen, ni enriquecen a nadie, así es que caiga con su ayuda".

Los pasajeros están atemorizados, pero nadie da muestras de ir a 'colaborar' con los exigentes 'pordioseros'.

Mal disimulados gestos de asco se dibujan en los rostros.

¿Sabes ñaño? ¡Me da rabia cuando estos hijue... miran mal a los negros! La frase es como un escupitajo lanzado con infinita y profunda ira, al rostro de sus objetivos, por el chico que se ha ubicado en la parte trasera.

¡Lo que les gusta es que les roben!, isi hubiéramos subido con cuchillos, se hubieran aflojado enseguida!

"Ponte mosca ñaño", dice el moreno que está en el centro. "Ponte mosca con los que no cayeron", repite, y vuelve a pasar la mano en un segundo intento por lograr respuesta económica a sus amenazas.

'Despedida' y alivio

El carro toma Los Ríos y llega a la altura de Pedro P. Gómez. Uno grita: "Para ahí chófer".

Se agolpan en el estribo, y el último, mira desafiante a los pasajeros y amaga: "La próxima vez nos dejamos de tanto parlamento y tanta gue... y los bajamos de lo que tengan. Eso quieren estos malditos hijue... Su rostro habla de un odio que no se concibe cuando aún no se llega a los 20 años.

No necesitan saltar cual felinos como a la subida. El bus tiene bien la marcha y permite el desembarque de los 'pordioseros con escopeta'.

Los usuarios miran acusadores al chofer, pero respiran aliviados. Este repite su canción favorita, y en los ruidosos parlantes del bus vuelve a escucharse la voz de Aladino cantando "...Si en verdad me quieres ven duermeme conmigo...". (BAM)



Los Informales tienen competencia en los pordioseros y los delincuentes.

La banda se inició obligando, con similar discurso, a comprar melcocha a los pasajeros

"Ver y tocar no significa que me va a comprar". "Como se lo ha ido comiendo ya me lo puede ir pagando"

DRAMAS IN AN UNREAL LIFE

Carlos Monsiváis

The comedian that was a la mode (and probably still is) Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (like that, all Christian names) before he became TV's most successful comic, tried his luck as an expert in political science, and specifically as a disciple of Machiavelli and Norberto Bobbio. He loved the theory of the state above all things, and he stayed up until all hours reading (taking notes, committing to memory) theses on the conduct of State power and the checks and balances upon it. But life, with its tendency to indiscipline and its resistance to scientific explanation, took him in the direction of comedy, and to make a living he ended up as a presenter on a children's TV show. Something happened then; the world clocked on to Alberto Antonio Arturo Adán (who was called something else then and still possessed a surname) and success relentlessly pursued him. His ratings went up day by day; A4 as they started calling him became a comic for grown ups and success was handed to him on a plate. A daily program at peak hours, an entire country that remembered and repeated his jokes and turned them into national catchphrases. Who among us can deny having used one of A4's lines at some point? "Get with it champ/ Give it all you've got pal/ it's just the other side of the hill" and other equally new and original thoughts.

But A4 wasn't happy in his heart, even though he was the king of the small screen. He still believed in political science and he sighed for the day when he would be free of these absurd banalities and he could get back to the business of defining exactly why some people won the elections and others just falsified ballots. So the day he met the director of his company was a great one for A4.

– A4 I've got a fantastically funny project and I thought of you..

– At your service as always chief.

– That's the kind of people I like. Well, you know there are going to be elections next year and they're going to be pretty controversial, and people are already appearing on tele. You know the saying 'If you are not on tele, you don't exist'.

– That's it – with politicians it's either empty halls or full stadiums. And the difference comes from how close they are to the small screen.

– Put it how you like A4. The point is there are problems. There have been proper surveys and superficial surveys but they're all coming to the same conclusion – that nobody tunes in to intellectual debates. It's like noone cares, that mothers and families

don't give a toss. And so it occurred to me that the thing to do would be to put politics into comedy programmes like yours, with clowns and girls in bikinis and jokes as old as Donald Duck. That makes people feel at home and they'll relax and take in whatever message you want to send them.

* * *

A4 had a temperature when he got home. The big chance had arrived without even calling first. At last, and with the company's support, he could use his knowledge of political science. He wouldn't let his moment pass, and when the candidate who was going to be president recognised his talent for analysis, he'd call him in as soon as he sat down in the presidential chair and ask him to join his Cabinet or at the very least make him an adviser. "The art of the possible" in his hands at last. At last the world would have a chance to see who was the best political analyst in the country and how he thought.

He spent a week thinking it over, at the end of which he drew up a draft questionnaire which asked what he thought were the fundamental questions. And he had another thing in his favour. The scandal that followed the murder of animator Paco Stanley had discredited stupidity, for a while at least. Frivolity was out of fashion for a while – no doubt about it – and a time for depth and seriousness was coming. On his questionnaire he quoted Hobbes, Montaigne, John Locke, Jefferson, Isaiah Berlin, Disraeli, Sartre, Alain Touraine, de Tocqueville and Ignacio Ramirez... And he sat back to impatiently await the replies.

* * *

What followed turned A4's world upside down. All the presidential candidates replied in the affirmative. Of course they would appear with him – with the greatest pleasure. After all, television is the oracle of our day, one said, and if you're not there you're nowhere. Another was even more emphatic: a TV interview was the highest honour a politician could be offered, the equivalent (roughly) of twelve gold medals and a statue on Reforma Avenue. They would all be there' they were as one on that. Some sent their "good friend A4" signed photographs or videos of their family

holidays in Cuernavaca. "It's good material" they said "because it inspires confidence". But no one of them even mentioned the questionnaire.

* * *

The pre-transmission interviews began. All the candidates insisted on rehearsals and at least two of them asked for a choreographer to assist them "to make sure their body language was attractive and just in case they were asked to join a corps de ballet on the programme". Three candidates brought what they thought was appropriate music with them (rock with boleros, the perfect mix) and one insisted that the interview should take place in a gym because he was a fine athlete and the nation should know it. A4 accepted all their proposals, laughed at their jokes (which didn't amuse him at all, in fact, but the ones they wrote for his own show were just as boring and the whole nation seemed to love them) and they agreed on dates. But still noone mentioned his questionnaire and he was very put out. But maybe it was a good sign; obviously it meant they'd be well prepared when the day came.

* * *

On the day of the first interview A4 decided to change his look. He put on his tortoiseshell glasses, mussed his hair, put on a denim jacket and sat down to wait. He was surprised that the candidate expressed an enthusiasm for swear words but presumed it was just nerves. After all, the candidate was a lawyer, with years of experience, an acknowledged expert on the constitution and on the differences between commercial and natural law. And A4 was taken back by his first comment "With your legal experience and your doctoral thesis on *Leviathan*, what constraints do you think are faced by the modern State? What would you say to a contemporary student of our institutions?"

The reply came in a flash. "Lend me your sister, will you, tonight or any night". A4 thought he'd misheard and noted that he had to see his doctor that very evening. But he came back with a slightly rephrased question. "Do you think the system can be saved, as contemporary Scandinavian theorists seem to suggest?" The eminent jurist, who was wearing bermuda shorts, an earring and a walkman -

surprisingly perhaps for a man in his fifties – replied in an instant. “From the front or from the back/ I’ll get you in the sack”.

“But what’s going on here, sir? Didn’t you read the questionnaire I sent you? Why are you swearing at me?” The candidate, playing with a cup and ball, replied sincerely. “Listen pal – I don’t fall for your tricks. That stuff’s so uncool. People want an image of someone they can trust, of a candidate like them, someone who swears, someone who hangs on to his youth for dear life, someone who’s up for whatever’s going down. You’ve seen my campaign slogans ‘Take a drag and sod the vote/ Take care hermano, the lads are outside your door’. You think with that kind of campaign, written and approved by PR men from Fifth Avenue, I was going to turn round and discuss the law of habeas corpus and its implications for human rights? Get real, you prick”.

* * *

A4 felt blasted and he didn’t say anything to himself because he didn’t want to curse. He got through the programme as best as he could, let the candidate swing him round in a late jive, and fainted when he was caught on the side of the head by a stray foot. The interviews that followed were no better. The political class was convinced by the new campaign methods and only wanted to curse and swear, dance with the chicks, tell soft porn stories and replace ideas with ‘dirty words’ (which seemed less dirty by overuse). Nobody had an opinion to offer on the transition to democracy. A4 would ask “What’s the basis of the social consensus, in your view” and back would come the reply “When your old lady gets married”. He asked for clarification of the different manifestoes and all he got back were jokes along the lines of “Clinton, Salinas and Yeltsin went up in a plane...”

In desperation, A4 resigned from his role as a high level political scientist, acknowledged that politics today is a variety of comedy, memorised 6144 swearwords that he collected in two local snooker halls, let his hair grow and wore a pony tail and never touched a book again. One of his interviewees became President of the republic and today A4 lives at the Ministry of Interior.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

SNAPSHOTS OF A CITY IN THE RAIN

Fabrizio Mejía Madrid

Every time it rains, Mexico City returns to its primitive origins; its streets become canals again, its squares revert to lakes. In the lagoons we see reflected the inverted image of the city, as if another, more authentic city existed under the surface – a sort of muddy alter ego. Perhaps that's why we go on inhabiting what feels like a substitute city, always wishing it were a different place, that it could give us something it was never built to give. Mexico City has always carried that mark, that sense of a debt unpaid; so we who live there wade through the floods imagining that some day it will pay back all it owes. It is the replacement for another imagined city buried in the emptiness beneath this one.

* * *

The rainy city both challenges and confirms Marx's words. We're walking through a storm and Carla says

– Man controls nature, does he? You can tell that Marx never got his feet wet.

While she continues with her anti-materialist diatribe, a Porsche passes by at speed and soak us with the murky water of the streets.

– But he's right about the class struggle – she says.

The noise of raucous laughing makes us turn around. In a huge puddle to our left four kids are playing, pretending it's a swimming pool. Out of their mouths come bubbles and Nahuatl. I don't know whether to be angry. Their laughter makes me hesitate.

* * *

Tlaloc, the Aztec god of rain, had two snakes on his face, curled up like bags under the eyes. They slithered down his nose and their tails formed a moustache. In 1882, when Jesus Sanchez and the painter Jose Maria Velasco discovered a 7 metre high monster in the Santa Clara canyon in what was once the lake of Texcoco. It was identified as Tlaloc, and the authorities decided to stand him at the entrance of the Museum of Anthropology. On the morning of February 7th 1965, they tried to raise

the bulky piece using cranes and metal cables. But the people of Santa Clara stopped them; armed with knives, sticks and stones, the locals rose up in defence of Tlaloc. The army only managed to take the area on the morning of the 8th, and only then could the archaeologists get the statue out. That night a rainstorm began that lasted for 26 hours. Stuck in the traffic jams that always happen when the rain starts, Garcia Marquez, visiting Mexico, had an idea for the great novel – a place where it rained for years non-stop.

* * *

To explain why America was so damp and why the people wore feathers, Francis Bacon in *The New Atlantis* (1614) put forward the hypothesis that America was Atlantis, which had been lost forever because of a great Flood. Only men, birds and animals capable of climbing mountains survived the flood. And when they were finally able to come down again, “men had learned from their friends the birds the habit of covering themselves with feathers, which explains why the Aztecs and the Incas, although they lived in high, cold regions, still wore feathers”. Bacon was not so far wrong. Fifteen years after he published his theories, the city of Mexico was flooded by rains that continued uninterrupted from July to September 1629. Archbishop Manzo y Zúñiga informed the King of the consequences: “of 20,000 Spanish families living here, only 400 remain, and 30,000 Indians have perished in these days, some drowned, others buried under the ruins, and many through hunger.” The only thing Bacon was wrong about was that those fleeing the rain did not climb the mountains, but came and went in their “canoes of horror” carrying their dead with nowhere to bury them; the corpses of the horses continued to be used as means of transport, because as they swelled they floated like rafts.

* * *

The dried animals in the tile shops of Avenida Division del Norte are our tabernacle. The story that is told by the open-jawed jaguars, the possums at the moment of being shot, the armadillos caught in futile attempts at flight, is the prehistory of the suburbs of the city. In the ‘El Cerebro’ discotheque, these frozen animals were the only ones remaining to hear the ramblings of the drunks. The tigers

listened with astonishment to the tales of failed love and the armadillos offered their shells to hold up the tottering speaker in tongues. But one night they were saved by a Flood that caused an electricity cut. In an instant the drunks leaning against the wires were burnt to a cinder. Three died and several were wounded in the stampede. The owner, forced to close the club, placed the animals in the local tile shops. Noone confesses to them any more, and they are not asked to give their absolution. Crawling over their hardened skins, the ants will ultimately restore them to the history of Nature.

* * *

A rush of water split open the marble floor and the Virgin of Guadalupe forced her way through, surrounded by hundreds of trilobite fossils which are similar in shape. What the public is gazing at with such devotion is probably the hole left by an arthropod some 500 million years ago. Because the engineers who built the subway system brought together on the subsoil beneath the city its layer of holy relics and the deeper geological layers full of fossils. So when some future archaeologist investigates us, he will probably put the Aztecs at an earlier date than the fossils.

* * *

The 'tlalocs' were the incarnation of drops of rain. For the feast of Tlaloc, when some children were drowned as a sacrifice, the tlalocs came out to dance. In the course of the ritual dance, each tlaloc lost the name given to him the year before, and had to find a new one. So as they danced the tlalocs shouted out names, and the last name they spoke before the sound of the conch shell marked the end of the dance was the name they would take on for the next year. Then they were returned to their places where everything was made to measure for them, because like the drops of rain, the tlalocs were dwarves.

* * *

Ever since I got my first telephone people have gone on phoning to ask for Engineer Azucena Triana. For the first few months I just assumed it was just a case of

the mistaken identities that happen in a city where people change address frequently. By the end of the first year, the babbling confusions seemed to diminish after endless denials. But yesterday morning the phone rang, and startled me out of my sleep. I was bathed in sweat, the rain was pouring down outside. I lifted the receiver just as lightning flashed; a half-crying voice said 'Yesterday I got divorced. So now we can marry'.

* * *

We're driving around Miramontes in a taxi at 11 at night. In the car next to us we see an image blurred by the rain pouring down the glass, but we think we see the top half of a woman's body emerging through the window and then an indefinable cry. The car turns around and disappears into the storm.

- What was that? - I ask, terrified.

- They're having a party - the taxi driver assured us.

- It was a kidnapping - Carla asserts.

* * *

In 1955, Salvador Novo, chronicler of the city took the actor Sir Alec Guinness to that monument to the post-revolutionary mania for building 'the biggest in the America' - the Latin American Tower. Looking down from the top, it began to rain. The windows misted up and the city which Novo had assured him could be seen from there in all its glory, grew blurred. Alec Guinness, with a disdainful gesture, just said:

- And when exactly did the Mexicans decide to build with glass instead of stone?

* * *

We just wanted to look, that's all. And suddenly we're upset because the lap dancers wouldn't look at us. Its Serge's fault; not half an hour ago he said 'Aren't we going to see any naked women today?'. But the dancers are all looking at a dwarf

sitting at a table at the edge of the dance floor – next to us – who is waving fistfuls of dollars.

– What’s your name? – the dwarf asks one of the dancers whose name (we’ve known it for ages) is Raquel.

– Whatever you like – she says, smiling.

– You’re not her, you’re someone else – the dwarf shouts out, in an irrefutable ontological statement. – Go away.

And one by one the whores go by, and none of them is another. Noone understand what’s going on, but we can’t bring ourselves to leave. It’s raining outside, and we haven’t enough cash to pay the bill.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

THE BEES POUR OUT OF THE HIVE

Roberto Zamarripa

It was the entry of the police into the University City and the faculties of UNAM that once again brought on to the streets of the city those to whom the Government owed a social debt.

Considering it was a funeral, everyone seems very cheerful. Thousands of fathers are being forced to run, dance, sing, chant slogans in a mambo rhythm and shout the things they used to say in anger to a marching beat. 'Free the political prisoners'.

That's how they spend this cool afternoon, waiting nearly 300 minutes to fill the Zocalo square, literally twice over, in the biggest march the city has seen since 1988. The first, at 7.30, brings the student vanguard, trade unions, social movements; they filled the square and demanded that the speakers deliver their speeches. Two hours later, a joyful second column three quarters filled the square again while the earlier marchers were making their escape.

Two full Zocalos; does El Mosh deserve this? Noone is shouting 'compañero Alejandro Echavarría, presente, now and forever'; there are no placards demanding 'Liberty for El Mosh'. No high school girls shouting for El Diablo, no bomm-boom-titty-boom, El Munra, El Munra, ra ra ra. No, no jumping squads. They were going to a funeral and having a wild time. A mass of poor kids wearing football shirts, Flamengo, the Pumas, Pachuca, even the America team; some crazy kids are wearing Lenin or Che Guevara. They're wearing baggy trousers, long skirts, rasta hats, coloured hair, carrings even on their tongues, darks in the dark, black on black, purple lips, clouds of dope from the Encp Aragon crew, dancers, runners, shouters, smilers. The point is to be different, to be non-conformist, not to be tied down, here they're in Reno.

This is a good time 'terrorism'. There they go, shouting like anyone would at that age 'Freedom, freedom, freedom'.

* * *

The windows of the Spanish-owned store Zara, in Madero St, are empty. It's sale time and they're getting in new stock. Christ, these kids don't respect anything -- not even sales. They turn cosmopolitan and in blue spray write on the walls -- Zedillo+Aznar=fascists. Zedillo gets most insults, after him Juan Ramon de la Fuente. And then a shout goes up -- 'not a single vote for the PRI' -- if they vote at all. Some of them won't even be on the voter's register.

Now they're really hitting the honeypot. The freed prisoners and the fugitives from the CGH, the high school activists, the kids from the Prepa, from CCII, E-E- Economics, Chemistry, Eneps, Politics -- students and teachers- Architecture, Medicine, the veterans of 68 who were probably watching their grandkids in the square, the Pancho Villas and their menacing contingent, the bureaucrats of Stunam. By their bellies shall you know them, and there's the belly dance of the electrical workers, the anti-globalization people from Petatiux, a symbolic representation of the Trique Indians of Oaxaca, concheros with horns, bells and incense with their Chichimec slogan 'He is God', the other fatbelly, Superbarrio, the enraged CUT, the crazy BOS, the off-the-wall the PRD.

City centre shops lower their shutters, one goes down every ten seconds scraping like a great guiro, hiding from the dancing dragon joyfully jumping by. They've got dozens of prisoners, they grabbed them at the University, they smashed their...strike and so they came out to have a party !

A prickly country coop member carries a placard that covers half his body, nose to knees. It's painted with a magic marker in grey 'The anti-globalization movement of Tequixquiac support the students'. The village is a peasant community where they make no money out of their little plots and end up as workers at the brickmaking plants owned by Mexicans and foreigners.

The truncheons of the Federal preventive Police stir up a hornets nest. Mature ladies join the march and they're the angriest of all. They carry handmade placards that say 'Don't count on me, cause I don't count for you. Boycott the census'. That's what's new. There are placards and slogans encouraging people to say nothing to the census takers. 'One form of protesting the census is say nothing', they shout along the lines. But these are just a few lines of rage. The rest really is a party.

'I'm going on strike, yes I am', they walk, trot, laugh, the students. Like La Perra Brava of Toluca they chant their I-am-go-ing-on-strike; though some kids in ski masks or cover faces ignore them. There's not been enough time for them to change

their attitude. They show their faces, and do it smiling. They've been on strike for ten months, enough to grow up a bit and to change your life.

* * *

Alfredo Montero speaks on behalf of the CGH; he shouts through a trembling megaphone. 'We want the government and the bourgeoisie to be very clear that they're not going to win, that De la Fuente's call for reconciliation is a lie as long as the political prisoners are still in jail and the arrest warrants aren't cancelled for public dialogue the strike is still on there will be no classes enough persecution we're not afraid the CGH won't surrender....' and on and on without hesitating, his voice hoarse as if the Police were after him as he was speaking. His isn't the tone of the mass, it's the sound of the spontaneous leader. Because this demo has everything except leadership. The kids run and hold up a V sign and their nostalgic fathers imagine that they're remembering the 2nd October of three decades ago, and which will never be forgotten, though some even suggest it's a greeting to Vicente Fox.

'You're not alone, you're not alone' the parents shout, from the roadside, and the chants are taken up on the pavements 'Freedom for political prisoners', which once they shouted foaming at the mouth, but now they chant to the rhythm of the drum and they dance to demand their prisoners, still wet behind the ears, are freed.

'They're the ones who won't serve me beer', 'Police, d'you hear me, give it up' 'Don't watch tele, read' 'We'll get Ramon out of the Rectory'. They shout it all swinging their hips, banging the drums, ringing their bells... that's why they keep them off TV Azteca's news bulletins.

The seriousness is imposed by the self-appointed leaders. 'Their shouts fill our silence, just as our shouts filled their hearts, thank you for today, we know we're not alone' – they read from a letter that's come out of the North prison. The noise in the square is deafening. The loudspeakers have to go back at 8 but they want to parade all the problems and have their catharsis. The timetable for this Thursday's meetings is read out. Social Work at 10 at UAM Xochimilco, Prepa 6 in the square at Coyoacan, Economics at Red Square in UAM and there are greetings from Canada, some say even from Havana, and it's when you imagine that Maradona remembered the movement but it's not a message from a group called Oclae but what the MC

announces as Oclea, one more among so many initials that even a stammerer could shout them without a second thought.

The march goes on and on. The first are leaving and the PRD hasn't even reached the square. It's stopped at Bolivar and Madero, at the back of the huge contingent. Lopez Obrador is walking along the rows and Martinez Verdugo walks beside him; people greet the man from Tabasco and some even ask for an autograph. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas decided not to come, in accordance with that now well known PRD strategy of on the one hand yes on the other hand no. At the end, Luciano Dominguez, in dark glasses and a dark brown suit is patiently carrying his yellow banner with the sun at its centre. He's the very last man; his two legs are the closing mark. Nothing you can do -- the organisers put all the delegations in alphabetical order and he's from Xochimilco. The thing he most regrets is that Zacatecas isn't here. He left the Angel at 5 and it's 9 o'clock now and he's still not reached the Zocalo. They stirred up the hive and the bees they thought half dead buzzed but didn't sting. They spread a little honey, though, to sweeten a left that had become just a little bitter.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

THE GUAYAQUIL INN

Jorge Martillo

How can I write this chronicle without making it sound like one more fiction? That was the question I've been asking myself since El Conde told me the story. The best thing would be to find the free end of the thread and just let the rest unravel.

That afternoon I was listening to Janis Joplin singing 'Bye Bye Baby', when there was a knock on the door and El Conde appeared. I could smell his characteristic stink. He raised his bony hand and said 'Why don't you give up those hippie songs; it's the nineties now, you know'. He opened the fridge, took out a beer; he said it was to kill the hangover that was chucking handfuls of ash down his throat.

He drank and looked out into the dying afternoon; he seemed sad. I suspected that he had something to tell me, but I'd have to wait till the alcohol loosened his tongue – and El Conde's tongue was like a rope full of knots.

When the evening dies

The evening baker passed by, whistling, slowly, on his old bike. It was Saturday and the streets were almost deserted; they were bathed in the gold of the whirls of dying sunlight. Sometimes in the distance you could hear the distant shouts of people playing their last game of five-a-side football.

When he went to get the second bottle, he put on Adalberto Alvarez y su Son playing 'My Reflections'. "You educated people,/ you'll have to forgive me/I'm just one more imperfect man". El Conde was a little more relaxed now. He took some long draughts. "Reflections bring back the wounds/Learning in the school of life". The knots of his story began to unravel. I want to tell you what happened to me the other night, he said. Go on, I answered.

In the Garay district

The green bottle was empty but for a little foam at the neck. He went for a third. Anyway, I went in to one of those bars across the road, he said, looking down on his Garay district and wiping the rust off the bottle with his fingers. There's a good jukebox, there was the usual smell of sour beer that always sticks to the walls of these places and the waitresses, hiding their sadness behind their rouge. I drank and listened to some old *guarachas* by La Sonora Matancera and Daniel Santos. I even

thought back to the times when I still had hopes that someone might turn up to occupy my heart. Anyway (that's a prop that he always uses) one of the bar girls sat down at my table, my table full of bottles. She was dark-skinned and she'd been beautiful once, but the scars that a full life had left were the most obvious thing about her, marked on her skin. Her body tried to be straight and arrogant, but defeat dragged it down towards the floor, a floor covered in sawdust and spit.

El Conde took another swig and talked on, not looking at me, watching the waters of the lake that grew dark as night fell and faded like the swallows. And what's your name, I asked her. Guayaquil Inn, she said. I thought I'd misheard because of the noise from the jukebox. She said it again – Guayaquil Inn they call me, and to tell you the truth I've forgotten my real name – not that it matters anyway. I passed her my glass, it was full, and she drank; there was a line of foam on her bright red lips.

Anyway, I suddenly realized that my drinking companion was the city itself. I just couldn't tell whether it was the visible face or the hidden one I was seeing. But I looked at that face full of wrinkles and covered in rouge and I realized I was sharing a table with the sphinx of the city, then I remembered the Greek one with its face and breasts of a woman, its bird's wings, its body and feet of a lion, the sphinx that brought ruin to the city of Thebes by asking riddles and consuming anyone who couldn't solve them. Ah, Guayaquil Inn – they called her from another table and she walked over on her worn high heels swinging her broad hips as she went.

When I saw her talking to some other sharp characters, I took one last sip -- it tasted foul, like the muddy water of the lake, El Conde said, taking another, desperate, drink. But what did she say, what riddle did she ask you to solve? I asked my friend, full of curiosity. El Conde just smiled, with that cynical look that reflects how impossible it is to answer, said nothing but just looked down on the Garay district at night. Forget her, was my advice. He drained the bottle. Write it down, he said, disappearing into the Saturday night. At that moment I thought that my beer would just leave an aftertaste of death and of myth, because I knew that El Conde had gone down to seek out the riddle of Guayaquil Inn.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

NOBODY FOLLOWS THE COLONEL

Iván Ulchur Collazos

Just as our kinswoman Rosamunda Sintapujos, who had spent from 8 to 12 o'clock of the morning of Friday the 21st of January getting ready to board the plane back to her little backwoods town of Berea Kentucky, in the good old u s of a, she began to realize as she sat in the departure lounge that her little country, with its melancholy little songs, was falling apart before her very eyes. My little compatriots, my little acrobats, my little clowns! she thought, and then felt bad for thinking of her own homeland that way.

She arrived in Berea all confused about her flight times, all mixed up, and mucked up, all downcast and crestfallen, with 'Ecuador, the best place in the world' ringing in her ears, and thinking about the stereotypes that turn us all into banana republics, and all she could think was well yes, there's no getting away from it, things are going downhill fast in our country right back to where it all started, all loose ends and loose canons, all privates out of uniform and colonels out of their minds, and so the first thing she did was ring us up, scared out of her wits...

– Is that Macondo? Hey what's up? What's going down? What's Jamil the big wheel saying now? No way it can happen, no way there's noone to follow the colonel!

– Well look cousin here's my non-military version. Are you listening?

– Colonel Lucidito Gutierrez, honours graduate and exemplary husband to a well spoken doctor, took the lid off the pot and found that all there was was a few naïve indian compatriots, an ex PM called Smellhimsweet, come from somewhere or other with a yearning for a sash and another little fat man who looked more like the Coup d'Etat Queen with his red bandanna on his big round belly.

Anyway the romantic colonel pulled his promises out of the constitutional fire, spent half his speech talking about the honour of his calling and then declared the July Revolutions, and then scratched away at the Jameelian hordes until all the surfaces came away in a shower of opportunistic rust.

– So you're talking about coups, compadre?

– Well at first yes because there was lots of noise and assaults on the citadel. And then suddenly it all went quiet.

– What. Hallo are you there?

The fact of the matter is that the Indians got up very early to set the cat among the pigeons, and they'd decided to take power from the bourgeoisie with the weapons of the proletariat and set up a people's parliament. The rising was for all or nothing. Either they rose or they went on breathing the foul air.

And then they bumped into two colonels who expressed solidarity and since they assumed it was their destiny they set up a triumvirate like the Roman ones (out of donkibus tribus and Julius Caesar) with the help of a general Mendoza.

– And?

– Well general Mendoza took the hero's role and left the triumvirate every now and then to declare his faith in the constitution. So a kind of Charlie Chaplin coup with lots of custard pies and the Indian brothers and sisters cheated out of their legitimate claim to recognition. You know – collective utopias versus cyber solitudes.

One thing strikes me, cousin. How come a president falls every time you come home? You're not thinking of coming back in July I hope.

Then my kinswoman remembered how Garcia Marquez's novel ends and shouted 'Shiiiiit' – 'Mierda'.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

YOUR CHARITY OR YOUR LIFE!

On the buses, intimidation has turned into a mini-industry. It's just a different kind of highway robbery.

18.45 Night falls on the busy port of Guayaquil.

The heat is suffocating, while on the loudspeakers of a half-empty number 14 bus Aladino's voice echoes noisily. He's singing the rock tune 'Promote me; make me your husband'.

This is the second time it's been on; it seems to be the driver's favourite. "If you really love me, come and sleep with me, don't go shy on me, do what I'm asking, just creep upstairs and I'll be right behind you".

Suddenly the music stops. Five young black men have jumped on to the bus between Clemente Ballen and Tungurahua Streets. Their bloodshot eyes look out in the nastiest and most intimidating way. Three walk to the back while the other two stay at the front. They look straight into each passenger's face, up and down the passageway, carefully 'casing' the crime scene. The passengers pretend not to see anything significant in the arrival of this group of kids. There are different reactions.

Fear, rage and impotence are in the air. The adrenalin rises and you can see heavy drops of sweat appearing on some foreheads. The pretty student from the Catholic University goes pale and her eyes seem to be appealing for help from the man she's sitting next to. He looks the other way and stares intently at the bumper of a car outside.

An elderly woman of seventy or more looks out on to the street and mumbles 'Lazy bums that's all they are! Cheeky bastards, think they're going to scare me! Get out into the street and carry a few parcels for a living! I'm an old woman and I work! You'll get nothing out of me!'

A frightened girl gapes at the youngest black man. Her hand grips her mother's arm, and she talks to her nervously and keeps pointing 'something' out to her in the street outside.

The young man at the front speaks. 'We're not here to rob you', he says, in a voice full of menace. 'We're dangerous criminals, just out of the nick. But we're not here to steal from you. We're not putting our hands in your pockets. We're asking for contributions for these young men who are jobless'. His tone is pleading now.

They divide up the bus from the middle, some going forward, some towards the back, collecting money.

The smell of their armpits reaches the passengers when they stretch out their hands and hit the victim's shoulder. 'Come on, where's your contribution?'

They make it pretty clear that there's nothing voluntary about it. 'Five hundred, a thousand, a couple of thousand sucres isn't going to make anyone rich, or poor, so cough up'.

The passengers are frightened, but no one shows any sign of willingness to contribute anything to the beggars fund. Barely concealed looks of disgust cross every face.

'You know what, it gets right up my nose when these sons of...look down their noses at us black people!' The boy at the back spits the words, with a deep and endless rage, into the faces of the passengers. 'These people like getting robbed. If we'd jumped on and flashed our blades they'd have come up with the money straight off.'

The boy in the centre says, 'Push a bit harder, mate, lean on the ones that haven't paid' and he put out his hand for a second time to get some economic reaction to his threats.

Farewell and relief

The bus goes up Los Rios and reached Pedro P. Gomez. 'Up there driver' one of them shouts.

They gather on the platform and the last one looks back defiantly at the passengers. 'Next time we won't talk so much...we'll just grab everything you've got. That's what you fuckers want'. His face is full of a kind of hate you're not supposed to feel when you're not even twenty yet.

They don't need any skill to jump off; the bus stops and lets off the 'beggars with a gun in their hand'. The passengers stare accusingly at the driver, but they breathe a sigh of relief. He puts on his favourite song again, and once again it's the voice of Madino that crackles over the loudspeakers. 'If you really love come and sleep with me'.

Translated by Mike Gonzalez

APPENDIX 5. INTERVIEW WITH *CRONISTAS*

Interviews to writers of *crónica* were semi-structured and organised around a common set of questions, but also incorporated some specific questions about each writer's work. The following questionnaire reproduces the basic structure of all interviews.

1. Trajectory as *cronista*

- 1.1. How and when did you start writing *crónicas*? In which newspapers have you published them? (with dates) How did you become involved in the newspapers where you have published? In which newspapers or magazines are you currently publishing?
- 1.2. Do you only write *crónicas* or also other journalistic texts?
- 1.3. Why do you write *crónicas*?

2. Relationship of the *crónicas* with the author's general project of writing

- 2.1. Do you write literature? Would you describe yourself as a writer or as a *cronista*?
- 2.2. With relation to the *crónicas*, would you define your work as that of a writer or that of a journalist?
- 2.3. What is the place of writing *crónicas* in relation to your writing in general? Is it mainly a means to obtain a salary or does it occupy a specific place within a particular artistic project?
- 2.4. Would you write *crónicas* independently of their economic returns?

3. Determinations of the media + various aspects of the writing of *crónicas*

- 3.1. Does the newspaper make you any demands with respect to themes, style, etc.?
- 3.2. Do you feel any limitations to your work due to the newspaper?
- 3.3. Do you follow any conventions in the writing of your *crónicas*?
- 3.4. What do you consider is the most important thing in the writing of a *crónica*?
- 3.5. What are your sources?
- 3.6. What do you seek to express in your *crónicas*?
- 3.7. For which reader do you write?
- 3.8. In your opinion, what do readers seek in your *crónicas*?

3.9. What relationship do you have with your readers? Do you receive letters? Do you answer them? Do you try to respond to suggestions from your readers?

4. Relationship with radio and television

4.1. What has the expansion of radio and television as media that register the everyday meant to you as *cronista*, and how do you think that this role of radio and television affects the written *crónica*?

4.2. Do you participate in radio or television programmes?

5. Definition of *crónica*

5.1. How would you define the *crónica*?

5.2. How would you characterise the figure and role of the *cronista*?

6. Relationship with other *cronistas* and writers, past and present

6.1. Do you read the *cronistas*? Do you feel influenced by any particular ones?

6.2. Do you read *crónicas* from other countries? Do you know *cronistas* from other countries?

6.3. Has North-American New Journalism been an influence in your *crónicas*? How?

6.4. What (other) writers in general have influenced your ideas and your style?

7. Social class and cultural capital

7.1. What is the occupation of your parents? Do you consider your present social position to be the same as that of your parents?

7.2. What formal education do you have and where did you study?

7.3. What jobs have you been in?

8. Political opinions

8.1. What are in your opinion the most important social and political issues of the country at present?

8.2. Do you seek to express these issues in your *crónicas*? Do you find any difficulties to do that?

8.3. Mexico: What do you think of the political opening that is taking place in relation to the following presidential elections?

Ecuador: What do you think could be the solution to the present crisis?

**APPENDIX 6. QUESTIONNAIRE ON *CRÓNICA* READING PRACTICES
AND CULTURAL CONSUMPTION**

1. Do you read the newspaper? Yes/ No
How often do you read the newspaper? Every day/ weekend/ sometimes
What newspaper do you read?
2. How many books do you read a month?
3. Do you read *crónicas*? Yes/ No
4. When did you start reading *crónicas*?
5. Why do you read *crónicas*?
6. Where do you normally read *crónicas*? Newspaper/ Books
Have you read any book of *crónicas*? Which one/s?
7. What kind of *crónicas* do you most like reading?
Historical *crónicas* of the city
Political *crónicas*
Sports *crónicas* (football, bullfights, etc.)
Crónicas of popular culture and of the everyday life of the present city
Other (please specify which)
Why?
8. Do you like any particular writer of *crónicas*? Why?
9. How many hours a day do you:
Watch television
Read
Listen to the radio

10. How many times a month do you go to:

Cinema

Concerts

Theatre

Museum/ exhibitions

Sports events

Other cultural activities. Which?

11. Which are, in your opinion, the most important social and political issues in present day Mexico?

12. Why have you come to the First Meeting of *Cronistas* of Mexico City?

13. Which of the discussed themes have you found most interesting? Would you add any other theme that has not been discussed?

14. Other comments.

15. Personal information:

Sex

Age

Occupation

What is your job at the moment?

Formal education received

APPENDIX 7. INTERVIEW WITH READERS

Personal information

1. Name
2. Address
3. Age
4. Marital status
5. Occupation.
Present job
6. What education do you have?
7. Would you mind telling me about your family? What is the occupation of your father?
And that of your mother?
And that of your spouse?

Political and social opinions

8. Which are, in your opinion, the most important issues in present day Mexico/Ecuador?
9. What can be done to solve them? Is there a social movement, for example a political party, that could help to change the present state of things?
10. Could you please indicate which of the following statements best describes your beliefs?

- a) Society is constituted by two main classes, so that the more power one has the less power the other has.
- b) Society is made up of individuals with different amounts of money.
- c) Society is constituted by groups of different status.

11. To which extent do you think that social class determines opportunities in Mexico/ Ecuador today?

12. And ethnic origins? Do you think that ethnic origin determines job and social opportunities in present day Mexico/ Ecuador?

Cultural questions

13. Do you read books? How many books do you read a month?

14. What kind of books do you mainly read?

Novels (thrillers, historical, dramatic, romantic, classic, adventure)

Essays

Biographies

Crónica and reportage

Other

15. What are your favourite books and authors? Why do you like them?

16. Is there an author that you do not like, a book that you would not read?

17. Do you know/ like?

MEXICO:

- a) Mariano Azuela eg. *Los de abajo*
- b) Paco Ignacio Taibo II eg. *Días de Combate*
- c) Carlos Fuentes eg. *La región más transparente*
- d) Guadalupe Loacza eg. *Las niñas bien*
- e) Elena Poniatowska eg. *Tinísima*
- f) Carlos Monsiváis eg. *Amor perdido*

ECUADOR

- a) Juan León Mera eg. Cumandá
- b) Jorge Velasco Mackenzie eg. El rincón de los justos
- c) José de la Cuadra eg. Los Sangurimas
- d) Gabriel García Márquez
- e) Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez

18. Which of the following reasons best describe your interest in reading?

- a) Distraction.
- b) Interest in a register of lived experience.
- c) Interest in an imaginary world.
- d) Interest in the critical ideas of the writers.

19. Do you read the newspaper? Which newspaper do you read and how often?

20. What sections of the newspaper do you prefer?

21. Do you read *crónicas*? Why?

22. What type of *crónicas* do you most like reading?

- a) Historical *crónicas* of the city MEXICO: eg. González Gamio / ECUADOR: eg. Pérez Pimentel
- b) *Crónicas* of social movements ONLY MEXICO: eg. Monsiváis
- c) *Crónicas* about everyday life MEXICO: eg. Monsiváis, Villoro / ECUADOR: eg. Martillo
- d) Political *crónicas* MEXICO: eg. Jaime Avilés, Monsiváis / ECUADOR: eg. Febres Cordero, Ulchur
- e) Sports *crónicas* or *crónicas* of bullfights MEXICO: eg. Villoro, Cueli / ECUADOR: eg. Chacón

22. What authors of *crónica* do you most like reading? Why?

23. Do you like to read about your city?
24. Do you like to read stories about ordinary people (their jobs, unemployment, their houses...)?
25. Do you like reading books or stories that reveal aspects that you did not know about the reality in which you live?
26. Which of the following reasons best describe your interest in urban *crónicas*?
- a) To recognise the places in which one has lived or been.
 - b) To get information about the city's past.
 - c) To read about aspects of the popular culture of the diverse social groups of the city.
 - d) To get information about the present situation and interpretations of news events.

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