

EXISTENTIAL OCTAVIO PAZ OR THE POETIC ESSENCE OF BEING

by

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ABSTRACT

Octavio Paz is one of the fundamental literary figures of Latin America. His works are diverse in genre, extensive in topics and in many cases polemical. Paz's thinking about Mexican identity, poetry and modernity through his essays and his poetry pose a problem of philosophical interpretation that deserves attention. My hermeneutical reading of Paz's poetics in light of the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger and José Ortega y Gasset facilitates the understanding of some of Paz's fundamental and most enduring tenets. Moreover, studying Paz in this way may help us understanding Mexican culture today.

Phenomenology, vitalism and existential ontology were crucial in the anti-rationalistic environment of post-revolutionary Mexico of Paz's youth. His polemical thoughts on Mexicanness as an identity void of an essence (e.g. in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 1950) make sense in dialogue with Ortega's vitalist call for spontaneous living and Heidegger's notion of authentic existence (i.e. being not defined but open to possibilities). Also, Paz's concern for the existential meaning of poetry and his belief in the poetic essence of man and history (e.g. in *The Bow and the Lyre*, 1956) gains coherence when considered alongside of Heidegger's critique of the aesthetic tradition and his premise that poetic language is the house of Being. Finally, Paz's ambiguous critique of modernity and modern technology as events that alienate but, at the same time, liberate human existence (e.g. in "Signs in Rotation," 1965), gains coherence in light of Heidegger's critique of modern misunderstanding of the essence of technology. In the end, all these structural premises in Paz's poetics may be understood as his

radical call to interpret human existence as otherness; a call with strong ties to Heidegger's belief in human destiny as authentic existence.

At a time when the most recent version of narrow views on Mexico's future have already ignited one of the country's most violent periods to date, it is useful to look back at these existential concerns. The call of Ortega, Heidegger and Paz to avoid programmatic essentialisms, appropriate historicity and to live authentically as a being-in-the-world of socialized others, now gains renewed importance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Table of Contents..... | iv |
| Acknowledgements..... | v |
| CHAPTER 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1. Scope of this Study..... | 1 |
| 1.2. Survey of Major Studies on Octavio Paz's Works..... | 7 |
| 1.3. Summary of Contents..... | 19 |
| CHAPTER 2. The Quest for a New Mexicanness and Existential Philosophy: A Survey of Paz's Formative Milieu..... | 23 |
| 2.1. Anti-Positivism, Revolution and Quest for Identity | 38 |
| 2.2. Ortega y Gasset and Historicism in Mexico | 35 |
| 2.3. Spanish Immigration and Heidegger's Influence in Mexico | 56 |
| CHAPTER 3. Ortega and Heidegger in Paz's View on Mexicanness..... | 72 |
| 3.1. Paz at the Dawn of Authenticity in Mexicanness | 74 |
| 3.2. Existential Philosophy in <i>The Labyrinth of Solitude</i> | 97 |
| 3.2.1. Hermeneutic Phenomenology | 102 |
| 3.2.2. Authenticity as Historicity | 108 |
| 3.2.3. Authenticity as Otherness | 126 |
| 3.3. Authenticity in Mexicanness in Paz's Poetry | 137 |
| CHAPTER 4. Heidegger's Thought in Paz's Poetics..... | 156 |
| 4.1. Poetry as the Essence of Being..... | 160 |
| 4.2. Poetry as the Ground of History | 184 |
| 4.3. Poetry as Epiphany | 195 |
| CHAPTER 5. Modernity and Technology in Paz's Poetics..... | 221 |
| 5.1. Destruction and Recovery of the Image of the World | 225 |
| 5.2. Technology and Poetry for the Disclosure of Being..... | 235 |
| 5.3. Photography and Mass Media as Disclosure | 243 |
| CHAPTER 6. Conclusion: To Be Oneself in Others | 250 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 265 |

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I was searching for the gateway to the present: I wanted to belong to my time and to my century. A little later this obsession became a fixed idea: I wanted to be a modern poet. My search for modernity had begun.

O.P., "In Search of the Present: Nobel Lecture"¹

1.1. Scope of this Study

Octavio Paz (1914-1998) is one of the fundamental literary figures of Latin America. He wrote extensively: poetry, essays and articles, covering a wide range of topics. His texts are often philosophically discerning and in many cases polemical. Paz's thoughts about Mexican identity, the existential meaning of poetry and his critique of modernity pose a problem of philosophical interpretation that deserves attention. My work aims to facilitate the understanding of these themes, which are fundamental in Paz's works and relevant for understanding Mexican culture today.

There is currently a great interest in Paz's works. According to Grenier, Octavio Paz "could easily be considered the twentieth century's most famous and universal

¹ "La búsqueda del presente: Nobel Lecture." *Nobelprize.org*. 1990. Nobel Prize. 15 May 2012
<http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture-s.html>

intellectual from the Spanish-speaking world” (*From Art to Politics*, ix). Moreover, the relevance of Paz as a writer goes far beyond the borders of the Hispanic world. Even before receiving the 1990 Nobel Prize, Paz was already an internationally acclaimed poet and essayist with works translated into more than twenty languages.²

Correspondingly, the extensive critical bibliography devoted to Paz’s works includes thousands of documents.³ I believe that part of this interest resides in the polemical character of his works and his own figure as an intellectual. His unsystematic writing and his poetic language, even in his prose, are sharply critical and authoritative while being magically ambiguous at the same time. Paz’s texts always invite new readings. Moreover, Paz’s themes are often elaborated from heterogeneous perspectives in agreement with the complex mix of his intellectual interests. He had a profound understanding of Western and Eastern cultural traditions; he not only wrote about them, but sometimes he also attempted to embody different cultural backgrounds in the creation of his works. Paz’s diverse roles in culture make him difficult to categorize: he was, simultaneously, a fertile renovator of Hispanic poetry; a sui-generis critic of culture and modern times; a sharp art critic, from modern painting to archaeology; a multi-lingual translator of poetry; a political polemist in polarized times; a diplomat for many years and an influential cultural advocate, to name but a few roles he played. He was born into politics, but his critical—often unpopular—views on the politics of the right and of the left made him a controversial figure. Even more, Paz acted as a bridge to

² As I can find by counting the languages listed in Hugo Verani’s (now dated) *Bibliografía crítica de Octavio Paz, 1931-1996*. Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1997.

³ Verani listed, up to 1996, more than six thousand documents in his *Bibliografía crítica*.

romantic thought during the age of scientific reason. This diversified intellectual profile gives a sense of the richness and complexity of Paz's works.

I aim to contribute to the understanding of Paz's works by making a reading of his poetics⁴ in light of the existential premises of two other major figures of the twentieth century: José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). These philosophers were influential among intellectuals in Mexico after the revolution (c. 1910-1921), including Octavio Paz. On the one hand, Ortega was the most influential philosophical figure of Spain and the Hispanic world through the century. His philosophy of *razón vital* and his early critique of modernity created an unprecedented philosophical trend in Spanish language in a period of political and cultural redefinitions, which extended from Argentina to Mexico and Spain.⁵ Unfortunately, despite Ortega's philosophical achievements he is little known outside the Hispanic world. On the other hand, Heidegger's importance has transcended languages and borders and he is perhaps the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. Heidegger's radical critique of the metaphysic tradition (the basis of Western thought) puts him, as Steiner suggests, as "one of that small number of decisive Western thinkers which would include Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel." In turn, fundamental philosophers of the twentieth century, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida and

⁴ "Poetics" is a word with many meanings. In my study I take "poetics" as poetic theory and practice. Besides Paz's poetry, there is not a clear boundary in his essays for defining which ones fit in this definition. I will argue later that for Paz the human is in essence poetic. Therefore, I consider Paz's critique of culture (e.g. in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*) a part of his poetics because it represents another perspective in his discussion on the poetical essence of the human being.

⁵ About Ortega's importance in his homeland, Neil McInnes writes: "By the time of his death, Ortega was the acknowledged head of the most productive school of thinkers Spain had known for three centuries." See "José Ortega y Gasset," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan, vol. 6, pp. 2-5.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, are indebted to Heidegger's existential thought (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* 4-5).

My comparison of Paz's poetics with Ortega's and Heidegger's philosophical premises will be but one of many possible perspectives in reading Paz's works. Much has been already said about Paz. Santí, one of Paz's most dedicated critics, declared in a recent anthology of short critical essays on the poet, that: "It is difficult to find another author who had received more attention."⁶ Despite the abundance of studies, few have approached Paz's philosophical side by looking at his poetry and essays as a whole. My work aims to clarify, at least partially, Paz's philosophical ground by reading a number of essays and poems in relation to key existential works in the cultural context of post-revolutionary Mexico. In turn, understanding Paz's philosophical concerns and the context he was answering to, may, at least partly, help in the understanding of Mexican culture today.

Thus, a hypothesis of this research is that Paz's poetics answers its cultural context and the influence of existential⁷ philosophy that was part of it. Phenomenology, vitalism and existential ontology were crucial in the anti-rationalistic environment of post-revolutionary Mexico. Paz grew up as an intellectual in this environment that

⁶ "Es difícil encontrar a otro autor a quien se le haya dedicado más atención." See *Luz Espejeante: Octavio Paz ante la crítica*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Ediciones Era, 2009. p. 11.

⁷ Many would consider Ortega and Heidegger to be "existentialist" thinkers. However, this may lead to confusion. The term "existentialism" came to usage with the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, a trend that is in many ways different to the preceding existential thought of Heidegger and also different from Paz's existential poetics. Heidegger marked his distance from Sartre's existentialism in "Letter on Humanism." Paz did the same in *Itinerary*. Therefore, I have preferred to avoid, when appropriate, the term "existentialism" and use instead "existential philosophy."

opposed the legacy of Porfirian positivist ideology and searched for rethinking Mexican identity and the meaning of existence, often in opposition to the “official-national” views on Mexicanness. I presuppose that Paz developed his poetics, including his critique of Mexicanness, in this context of existential thought. Then a second hypothesis, subsidiary of the first, is that reading Paz’s poetics in light of Heidegger’s and Ortega’s existential tenets facilitates or organizes as a whole an understanding of some of Paz’s fundamental and most enduring premises.

Paz’s polemical thoughts on Mexicanness as a history rather than a fixed identity, for example in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (*El laberinto de la soledad*, 1950), make sense in a dialogue with Ortega’s historicism, his vitalist call for spontaneous living and Heidegger’s notion of authentic—not defined but open to possibilities—existence. Also, Paz’s concern for the existential meaning of poetry and his belief in the poetic essence of man and history, in works such as *The Bow and the Lyre* (*El arco y la lira*, 1956), gains coherence when considered alongside of Heidegger’s critique of the aesthetic tradition and his premise that poetic language is the house of Being. Finally, Paz’s ambiguous critique of modernity and modern technology as events that alienate but, at the same time, liberate human existence, in works such as “Signs in Rotation” (“Los signos en rotación,” 1965), is better understood in light of Heidegger’s critique of modern misunderstanding of the essence of technology. In the end, all these structural premises in Paz’s poetics may be understood as his radical call to interpret human existence as otherness; a call with strong ties to Heidegger’s belief in human destiny as authentic existence.

The relevance of this research in Paz's studies lies in adding to the understanding of fundamental premises in Paz's thought. But, at a time when the most recent version of narrow political views on Mexico's future has already ignited one of the country's most violent periods to date, it is also important to look back at these existential concerns. The call of Ortega, Heidegger and Paz to avoid programmatic essentialisms, appropriate historicity and to live authentically as a being-in-the-world of socialized others, may be as important today as 60 years ago.

A hermeneutical premise lies in the background of this work: I presume that by disclosing the relations between Paz's premises and his context, and trying to make sense of the whole, I can add something to the full significance of Paz's polemical works. I have taken Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy as guidance in my process of interpreting Paz's texts. In Gadamer's hermeneutics the conversation is a basic metaphor of the comprehension process. To understand is to make a dialogue between the interpreter's pre-conceptions—my horizon of comprehension—and the text and its contexts (what Gadamer often calls "tradition") which includes the voice of others (*Truth and Method* 397).⁸ So, I develop my reading—even implicitly—of Paz's texts through a question-and-answer logic of comprehension in an ongoing conversation.

⁸ Gadamer hermeneutic philosophy is mostly compiled in his (1975) *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum, 2004. Gadamer is far from lying down a "method" of interpretation. In fact, I believe his book could be renamed "Truth OR Method," as if suggesting that having a "method" would conceal truth. In fact, he suggests that a "method" often blocks out many factors that could actually be useful in understanding the truthfulness of an event. Therefore, "truth" for him has more of an "event" character. Instead of lying down a hermeneutical procedure, Gadamer's fascinating philosophy deals mostly with discussing the way we comprehend (and therefore: we learn, we know, we are) in a hermeneutic way, as an on-going process, as a negotiation of contexts, as each-case-its-own-way, etc. In my work, his philosophy is more a background knowledge that guides my interpretations, rather than a specific "method" that will be explicit through this study.

Paz's texts pose a question to me, the interpreter, such as: what is the meaning of this text? The question must be answered by asking more questions, such as: what is the context? What is the meaning of the whole? There is a constant conversation between the text and my own horizon of comprehension. While trying to make sense of Paz's poetics, I find an existential meaning in his texts. In turn, I choose to read Paz's texts in light of Ortega's and Heidegger's premises because they shape the way I make sense of the whole. Concurrently, this *making sense* relies on a consideration of the historical and cultural contexts where Ortega and Heidegger were prominently important among intellectuals in Mexico (and abroad) during a good part of Paz's life. In sum, I aim to widen the understanding of some fundamental premises in Paz's poetics since my work brings out an existential meaning of the texts—a matter of my comprehension of them—that may not be clear or fully evident at first glance, but is disclosed through the process of my reading.

And finally, I wish to say a word on the originals and their translations throughout this work. I use the English titles whenever the English translations exist; otherwise I keep the original titles. All English translations of originals quotes in Spanish are mine, except when indicated otherwise. In most cases the reader will find the Spanish original in a footnote. In the case of German quotes, according to my own linguistic limitations, I have used the available English editions of German originals.

1.2. Survey of Major Studies on Octavio Paz's Works

My dissertation continues a long path of diverse approaches in reading Paz's works. It would be impossible to review here, even briefly, the whole world of critical studies about his works. A single book, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, has been read, among other things, as a mythic-poetic statement on Mexican identity, as a work on cultural anthropology, as a philosophical reflection on modernity and as a work of historical interpretation. Every reading seems to add new significance and enriches the comprehension of the book. Similarly in Paz's poetry, a single poem, *Piedra de sol*, has been read, among other things, as a love poem, a poetic allegory of Mexican symbols, as an existential journey and as allegory of the myth of the eternal return. Despite the abundance of studies on few single poems or essays, there is a lack of studies on other works and there are only a few comprehensive studies attempting to make sense of the poetry or/and the essays—or at least a part of them—as a whole.⁹ Then, I believe that a hermeneutic approach to Paz's poetics, trying to make sense of a part of the poetry and essays, will bring new perspectives to understand Paz. The ensuing overview attempts to clarify the main premises and approaches of a number of studies that are relevant for my own work. These are mostly comprehensive studies on a facet in Paz's works but there are also a few studies focusing on a single work.

⁹ About the lack of critical studies over much of Paz's works up to 2004, Hector Jaimes says: "Poniendo a un lado *El laberinto de la soledad* y *El arco y la lira*, la obra ensayística de Paz ha sido muy poco atendida por la crítica; sin embargo, aunque existen algunos estudios al respecto, éstos no dan testimonio de la totalidad de esa obra, ni de su complejidad, ni mucho menos del significado de sus ensayos en el contexto literario latinoamericano." See *Octavio Paz: la dimensión estética del ensayo*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2004. p. 12.

Major critical studies about Paz's works started in the early 1970s. The first, Ramón Xirau's *Octavio Paz: El sentido de la palabra* (1970) is a philosophical exegesis of Paz's poetics. It is significant that Xirau's seminal critique was an attempt to answer philosophical concerns in the reading of Paz's works. By looking at a number of poems and to *The Labyrinth of Solitude* Xirau observes a central dialectics in Paz's discourse, between solitude and communion, angst and desire. Briefly, Xirau finds this solitude close to Heidegger's premise of the human condition as "being-thrown" (into this world), and the provisional condition of "not-being" (61). He also interprets that, for Paz, this solitude conveys fullness and transcendence, even in a religious sense. Xirau observes that, close to Marx and Hegel, Paz's dialectics of being and not-being becomes resolved in the union of opposites. Paz's conceptions of poetry and love, and his call for communion with others, all convey a craving for transcendence. My own work is a continuation and sharpening of this early philosophical insight of Xirau. I fully develop Paz's dialectic of being and not being, "solitude and communion" from the perspective of Heidegger's concept of authenticity. We will see that Heidegger developed an interpretation of human existence as the continuous movement between normally being fallen in the world and the possibility of authentic existence. Moreover, Xirau finds in Paz's main essay on poetics, *The Bow and the Lyre*, that—similar to Heidegger—Paz suggests that the poet is "the pastor of being" (Xirau 76); but Xirau doesn't really say more about this relation. I pick up this comparison to suggest that there is an existential statement in Paz's poetics that gains coherence in a conversation with Heidegger's critique of aesthetic tradition.

The second comprehensive study was Rachel Phillips's *The Poetic Modes of Octavio Paz* (1972), a structuralist-semiotic reading of Paz's poetics. She proposes four "modes" in Paz's poetry and suggests that these give aesthetic coherence to his poetics. Her study is concerned with what supposedly remains constant in Paz's poetic world. Also, Phillips's reading is an attempt to analyse Paz's poetry in light of his essays (mostly *The Bow and the Lyre*). Her work showed the relevance of mythical archetypes in Paz's poetics with a particular focus on the Mexican and Indian contexts. She regards Paz's use of myths as an outer cover to the inner "structure" of the texts—supposedly, Paz's "epistemological anxieties"—to make this structure recognizable as universal forms of thought. I believe that more important than Phillips's structuralist analysis is that her study comprehensively traced mythical archetypes in Paz's poetry. Later, I will look too at Paz's use of mythical archetypes in his poetic representation of Mexicanness. Phillips proposed that Paz's use of the myths allowed the poet "to re-enact in them his own spiritual pilgrimage" (56). I believe that this "pilgrimage" is precisely what Xirau identified as the dialectic of solitude and communion. As said before, I will retake this point from the perspective of the individual's craving for authentic existence. Moreover, unlike Phillips's study, I don't aim to find constant "structures" in Paz's works but I take a hermeneutical approach in finding what makes sense in Paz's texts in light of its contexts.

Following up Xirau's and Phillips's pioneering studies, Frances Chiles's *Octavio Paz: the Mythic Dimension* (1987), takes up Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism theory to see how Paz relates the function of poetry to that of myth as a means of transcending the here-and-now of the human condition (Chiles 11). She looks at Paz's use of

myths—classical, pre-Columbian, Indian, biblical—as means to provide a sense of integration in a fragmented world. She finds in Paz’s theme of the dialectics of solitude and communion the imprint of the universal myth of man’s fall from paradise and the subsequent search for redemption. Paz often uses these motives as a suggestion of mystic progress ending up in epiphany. In my study, besides looking at Paz’s representations of “fall” and “redemption” in light of the individual’s authentic self-appropriation, I relate Paz’s expression of epiphany to the Heideggerian concept of ecstatic resolution. I take Chiles’s findings as a valuable context for my study.¹⁰

Recently, in *The Writing in the Stars: a Jungian Reading of the Poetry of Octavio Paz* (2007), Rodney Williamson takes a parallel approach to that of Chiles by reading Paz’s major poems through a psychological lens of mythical archetypes. He looks at the ‘yo’-‘tú’ dialogue of much of Paz’s poetry as the precondition of the archetype of the union of opposites, subject and object, consciousness and the unconscious, which leads to fullness of being in the construction of the self (Williamson 14). Williamson also explores the circular structure of Paz’s longer poems, such as *Sunstone* and *Blanco*, by drawing an analogy to the archetype of the Indian *mandala*, a symbol of psychic integration and wholeness (56). Overall, Williamson aims to establish a “dialogic exegesis” by reading Paz in a conversation with the thought of another thinker, Jung, to add to a fuller understanding of Paz’s texts (4). My study is different as I disclose not Paz’s resonances with psychoanalytical theory but with the existential possibility of

¹⁰ In my own master’s thesis, *‘Piedra de sol’ frente al mito del eterno retorno* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004) I interpreted Paz’s poem *Sunstone* as an allegory of *nahua* myths. I related these myths to the Heideggerian movement of the individual from self-alienation to the full appropriation of being. Now I expand this enquiry over the poetics as a whole and with a broader hermeneutical approach.

becoming an authentic being. I use a similar approach to Williamson's by pursuing an understanding of Paz's texts through a conversation with others—not Jung in my case, but Ortega and Heidegger.

Surrealism is another major topic in Paz's studies. Phillips's *The Poetic Modes of Octavio Paz* had a main focus on myth, but also studied Paz's poetry by looking comprehensively at surrealist elements. She looks at Paz's emphasis on integrating the 'real' and what she calls the 'super-real', as providing a dialectics that results in unity—a variation of what Xirau saw as union of opposites—. She also revealed that surrealism provides Paz with a way to express the alienation and the chaotic environments that precede his recurrent topics of creation, unity and communion (Phillips 81-82). After Phillips, Jason Wilson, in *Octavio Paz* (1986), pursued a detailed contextual reading of Paz's poetry during his postwar years in Paris, in light of his relation with André Breton and surrealism. Wilson interprets Paz's poetry in close relation to its historical and cultural contexts. Actually, Wilson does the same for Paz's poetry of the years returning to Mexico and also for the poetry of Paz's years in India and after. Enrico Mario Santí also finds a surrealist side in Paz's poetics. In "Crítica y poética: *El arco y la lira* y el poeta crítico" (1997), Santí looks at the historical context to briefly situate Paz's *The Bow and the Lyre* at the crossroads of surrealism and Heidegger's phenomenology. My reading of Paz's texts follows Wilson and Santí in attempting a contextual interpretation. I also read Paz's texts in relation to the historical and cultural milieu but with emphasis on Paz's conversation with Ortega and Heidegger—that are also part of these contexts. Unlike Wilson, my study does not have a strictly chronological flow but is organized according to what I see as Paz's major existential topics. Also, my study is closer to

Santí's observations in noticing a crucial philosophical bent in relation to Heidegger. I will return to Santí's work later in this overview.

The political perspective is another frequent theme in studies of Paz's writing. The appeal of this topic probably comes from the controversial positions that the poet held in the context of Mexican and international political polarization—mostly in the context of Latin American Cold War (and real civil wars in several countries).¹¹ However, besides the attention on Paz's public opinions only a few studies on Paz's political thought stand out. Xavier Rodríguez Ledezma's *El pensamiento político de Octavio Paz: Las trampas de la ideología* (1996) is a systematic study focusing on the political axis of Paz's works. Rodríguez Ledezma aims to show that in Paz's writings about socialism, Marxism, Mexican politics and modernity, there is a constant critique and revision of concepts. More recently, Yvon Grenier's *From Art to Politics: Octavio Paz and the Pursuit of Freedom* (2001) and *Gunshots at the Fiesta* (with Marteen Van Delden, 2009) offer an up-to-date analysis of Paz's political thought through his essays. Grenier aims at synthesizing Paz's tension between liberal and romantic traditions. According to Grenier, Paz embraces liberty and democracy from liberalism, but makes a romantic critique of almost everything else in the liberal tradition by drawing ideas from the realm of art (*From Art to Politics* xii). This combination makes Paz's political stand "incredibly slippery" (xi). Also, Grenier situates Paz's critique of modernity at the center of Paz's reflections on his times. According to Grenier, Paz ambivalently argues that modernity has proven constructive in art—the arrival of critical art—but has

¹¹ One of the efforts to document the political controversies in Octavio Paz's life (not the very last years, though) is Fernando Vizcaíno's *Biografía política de Octavio Paz o la razón ardiente*. Malaga: Algazara, 1993.

impoverished the human being (because of rational disassociation of the individual from his essence) (78). For Paz—suggests Grenier—the “original sin” of Western civilization is rationalism, and therefore, there is a necessity to rediscover our true nature by means of art and poetry (*Gunshots at the Fiesta* 84). Also, Grenier points out that Paz makes a romantic critique of progress as utilitarian economic productivism and colonization of the future (86-88). My study adds to Grenier’s assessment by looking at Paz’s permanent rejection of political and nationalist essentialisms from an existential perspective (that is, in many ways, a continuation of the romantic tradition). We will see that the philosophies of Ortega and Heidegger underpinned in Paz a conception of the individual as constant reinvention and, therefore, the rejection of pre-conceived political utopias and essentialisms. Moreover, Grenier’s commentary on Paz’s ambiguous critique of modernity is a reference point for my reading of Paz’s critique of technological modernity from an existential standpoint. I also look at Paz’s critique of reason and his urgency to recover the human being through poetry, but I do so in light of Heidegger’s critique of the aesthetic tradition and the instrumentality of technology.

My reading of Paz’s poetics in light of existential premises relies on some important contributions in this field. Santí made a brief introduction to *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (in the book’s edition from Editorial Cátedra, 1993) that is a starting point for looking at the historical-philosophical context of the making of this work. Santí finds that the book is indebted to Samuel Ramos’s *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (a text that Ramos claimed was influenced by Ortega). Also, Santí finds that the essay is a phenomenological exercise, going from immediate experience to a series of myths that will explain history. However, Santí does not make any specific link to Ortega or any

other phenomenological source. As general assessment, Santí finds that the influence of German thought coming to the Hispanic world via Ortega's *Revista de Occidente* is disseminated throughout the book. Also, Santí briefly mentions the influence of Hegel, Goethe, Hölderlin and Novalis, among others. Finally, Santí relates Heidegger's "inauthenticity" (of the individual) to Paz's use of the term. I believe that much more can be said of the presence of Ortega and Heidegger in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. I will try to show that Paz's book sits in a broader historical context of anti-rational tendencies and proposals for rethinking national culture in post-revolutionary Mexico, where the works of Ortega and Heidegger became a keystone. I relate Ortega's and Heidegger's historicism to my understanding of Paz's interpretation of the Mexican character through Mexican myths and traditions in the text. I will also look at how Heideggerian "authenticity" (being not defined but open to possibilities) plays a role for understanding the book. Beyond *The Labyrinth*,¹² I also emphasize the importance of Ortega and Heideggerian existential premises in reading a number of other essays and poems dealing with Mexicanness.

Santí and Antony Stanton have briefly looked at the existential premises underpinning Paz's major essay on poetry, *The Bow and the Lyre*. In "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" (1992) Stanton recognizes the impossibility of looking at all the intellectual currents in the book and focuses on "some threads" that are more relevant. He finds some relations between Paz's *The Bow and the Lyre* and the thought of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Rudolf Otto and Antonio Machado; however, he finds

¹² From now on, I will sometimes use "*The Labyrinth*" or "*El laberinto*" to refer to "*The Labyrinth of Solitude*."

Heidegger to be more relevant. Stanton identifies a phenomenological discourse through the book that swings between Husserl's phenomenology—Paz's approach to poetry as "poetic experience"—and Heidegger's fundamental ontology—Paz's consideration of being as historicity (305). Also, Stanton ascribes to Heidegger Paz's romantic assessment of Western history as an error that should be corrected by returning to the origin (309). Moreover, Stanton briefly identifies a number of fragments of the book that are related to Heideggerian tenets: the temporality of the individual's being, the relation between being and nothingness, and the ontology of poetic language (Stanton 1992, 304-312). While a valuable starting point, Stanton's findings should be taken up again and implemented in greater depth and scope over Paz's poetics. This is what I try to do in my study.

Close to Stanton, but more briefly, Santí's "Crítica y poética: *El arco y la lira* y el poeta crítico" (1997) examines some of the philosophical underpinnings in *The Bow and the Lyre*. Santí believes that the book is an existentialist and surrealist defence of poetry and "poetic presence" (or the irreducible signifying power of poetry). According to Santí, "while Paz relies on surrealism to identify poetry as epistemological revolution, existentialism helps him to interpret life as meaning and temporality" (238). Santí also suggests that Paz relies on Heidegger to elaborate these ideas and to twist surrealism. For instance, Paz substitutes surrealist-psychic disclosure in poetry for a Heideggerian disclosure of being (239-240). Santí's brief commentary on *The Bow and the Lyre* already points toward the relevance of existential philosophy in the understanding of the book and, therefore, is another starting point for my work.

I will follow the path of Stanton and Santí. Both take a hermeneutical approach by looking at the context (historical, biographical and cultural) of the texts to then assert an interpretation. They both briefly start a historical enquiry on the Ortegian and Heideggerian presence in Mexico. While surveying this context, Santí says: “It has never been documented, as far as I know, this Heideggerian Mexican connection.”¹³ More than a decade later I believe that this “connection” remains under-explored. One objective of my work is to make a reading of Paz’s poetics by exploring further this existential school in Mexico. However, more than studying a single volume, I aim to read Paz’s poetics through several essays and poems as a whole. Adding to what Stanton and Santí have found I will also bring Ortega into the discussion for understanding Paz’s firm call to acknowledge the individual’s historicity. I will also bring into the discussion the Heideggerian concept of authenticity as a central point for understanding Paz’s poetics. Paz’s defence of poetry becomes fully coherent as a central element in achieving the authentic (*i.e.* open) possibilities of the human being.

Another study on Paz with a philosophical perspective is David Martínez’s doctoral dissertation, *The Epic of Peace: Poetry as the Foundation of Philosophical Reflection* (1997). He finds the study of poetry underrepresented in recent philosophy and that Paz’s *The Bow and the Lyre* fills this gap by contributing to our modern understanding of “the poetic experience.” Martínez looks at the book as inserted in the phenomenological tradition of the twentieth century but also as an original proposal that the poetic image “may be the basis for a new form of reason” (Martínez 7). Grounded in

¹³ “Nunca se ha documentado, que yo sepa, esta *Mexican connection* de Heidegger.” See “Crítica y poética: *El arco y la lira* y el poeta crítico.” *El acto de las palabras. Estudios y diálogos con Octavio Paz*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997. p. 240.

Paz's poetics, Martinez argues that philosophy should return to poetic reflection in the contemporary scene. My study develops in a slightly different direction by reading Paz's poetics in light of existential premises and disclosing the philosophical depth of some of Paz's fundamental arguments. My work is intended to add to Martinez's statement. In drawing on existential premises for an understanding of Paz poetics, I will elaborate on the importance of Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and his call to recover poetic language and place it at the center of today's philosophical reflection, as Martinez suggests.

More recently, Todd Oakley Lutes looks at the trace of Ortega in Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and other works concerning modernity. This is another reference point for my reading of Paz's views on modernity. In *Shipwreck and Deliverance: Politics, Culture and Modernity in the works of Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa* (2003), Lutes aims to explain Paz's critique of modernity and modern culture (along with those of Vargas Llosa and García Márquez), by establishing a dialogue with Ortega. Lutes relates Paz's treatment of conceptions of time (linear versus circular), life as absolute present, solitude and his attitude towards the problems of modern life, with Ortega's concepts of life as a shipwreck, life's cyclical patterns, timeless immediacy and deliverance. While Lutes's concern is not to provide a comprehensive study of Paz's poetics but to make sense of the views on modernity in several Latin American authors as a whole, his Ortegian interpretations are of major interest for my study. Adding to Lutes's Ortegian approach to Paz, I will also consider Heidegger's premises that help in understanding Paz's views on modernity. I will show that Heidegger's critique of modern instrumentality of technology helps with an

understanding of Paz's views on the way technology changes society, modern self-alienation, and the role of poetry and art in the age of mass-media, in works such as "Signs in Rotation" and *The Other Voice* (*La otra voz*, 1989). I have not found, so far, anyone else looking at this Paz-Heidegger correlation concerning a critique of technological modernity.

In closing this brief survey of major studies on Paz's works, I should emphasize that these different perspectives add to my own reading of Paz's poetics. From the mythical perspective I will take a few basic archetypes, such as man's fall, the search for redemption and the union of opposites, as a context for my existential interpretations of Paz's texts. From the surrealist perspective I will take the interest in emphasising Paz's radical defence of poetry but I will look at the existential side of this. The political perspective is also an important context for my reading of Paz's critique of modernity. Probably most important of all is that I undertake a comprehensive reading of Paz's poetics as a whole. I find an existential way of understanding Paz's poetics in light of existential premises and the historical and cultural contexts. I presume that by disclosing Paz's relations to these existential tenets I am adding to the full significance of Paz's polemic works.

1.3. Summary of Contents

As stated before, I aim to contribute to the understanding of Paz's works by making a hermeneutical reading of his poetics in light of the existential premises of José

Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger, who were influential among intellectuals in Mexico after the revolution. I presuppose that Paz's poetics answers its cultural context and the influence of these philosophers that was part of it. Therefore, in Chapter 2 I will briefly survey Mexico's cultural milieu during and after the revolution. This is a period where Octavio Paz grew as an intellectual. I discuss here how phenomenology, vitalism and existential ontology became crucial in the anti-rationalistic environment of post-revolutionary Mexico that opposed the legacy of Porfirian positivist ideology. I will put special attention on the impact that Ortega's works had among intellectuals who were looking to find alternatives to the official-national views on the Mexican and Mexicanness, including Paz's early statements on Mexican matters. I emphasize here the importance of Ortega's understanding of culture as a dynamic and spontaneous process in play with the appropriation of history, in works such as *Meditations on Quixote* (*Meditaciones del Quijote*, 1914) and *The Theme of Our Time* (*El tema de nuestro tiempo*, 1923). Linked to this, I will briefly survey the environment that fostered the introduction of Heidegger's philosophy in Mexico.

In Chapter 3, I will briefly survey Paz's personal involvement with the Ortegian-Heideggerian environment, and develop an understanding of Paz's thought on Mexican identity in light of existential premises. I emphasize here the importance of the Heideggerian concept of "authenticity," in works such as *Being and Time* (1927) and "What Is Metaphysics" (1929), in understanding Paz's concept of "otherness." I will argue that Paz's polemical thoughts on Mexicanness as a history but with no fixed identity, mainly in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, make sense in a dialogue with Ortega's historicism, his vitalist call for spontaneous living and with Heidegger's notion of

authentic (not defined but open to possibilities) existence. Keeping the same perspective, I will extend this discussion to some of Paz's most fundamental poems dealing with the topic of Mexicanness, including: *Sunstone* (*Piedra de sol*, 1956), "Mariposa de Obsidiana" (1951) and "Salamandra" (1962).

In Chapter 4, I will discuss the core of Paz's poetics of otherness. I develop an understanding of Paz's concern with the existential meaning of poetry, in other words his belief in the poetic essence of man and history, in light of Heidegger's critique of the aesthetic tradition and his premise that poetic language is the house of Being. In order to do so, I will look at Paz's major statement on poetics in *The Bow and the Lyre*, but I also discuss a number of other essays such as *Children of the Mire* (*Los hijos del limo*, 1974) and poems such as "Hymn among the ruins" ("Himno entre ruinas," 1948) and "Brotherhood" ("Hermandad," 1987) that complement the development of Paz's existential poetics. I relate these works to what Heidegger wrote on his view of aesthetics in works such as "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936) and "Letter on Humanism" (1946).

In Chapter 5, I will argue that Paz's ambiguous critique of technological modernity as an experience that alienates but, at the same time, liberates human existence, in works such as "Signs in Rotation" and "La nueva analogía: Poesía y tecnología" (1967), gains coherence in light of Heidegger's critique of modern misunderstanding of the essence of technology. Heidegger discussed these topics in works such as "The Age of the World Picture" (1938) and "The Question Concerning Technology" (1949). I include here a discussion on Paz's consideration of photography in "Instante y Revelación: Manuel Álvarez Bravo" (1982) and mass media, for example

in *The Other Voice*, as two specific technologies that open the possibilities of being another.

In Chapter 6, I aim to draw a conclusion by emphasizing the current relevance of studying Paz's existential poetics of otherness. I will briefly attempt a comparison between Mexico's circumstances since one hundred years ago, and the current situation of Mexico's humanitarian emergency in 2012. I extend the comparison to discuss the relations between Octavio Paz's call to be the self as another, and the contemporary poetic call from the poet Javier Sicilia to restore the social fabric by making Mexican society acknowledge that the self is realized in the other. In this way, I will attempt to close this dissertation by coming back to some of the initial topics in this work in order to suggest that the existential premises that supported Paz's call to interpret human existence as otherness may now be gaining a renewed importance.

CHAPTER 2. THE QUEST FOR A NEW MEXICANNESS AND EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY: A SURVEY OF PAZ'S FORMATIVE MILIEU

The injustice of being: things suffer
one with the other and with themselves
for to be is the desire to be more,
to always be more than more.
To be time is the sentence; history, our punishment.

O.P. "A Draft of Shadows" (fragment).¹⁴

In the introductory chapter I stated my aim to make a hermeneutical reading of Paz's poetics. I have a premise in mind that organizes my understanding of the whole: Paz's poetics has a strong grounding in Ortega's and Heidegger's existential philosophy. At the same time, my reading makes sense in the context of the Mexican milieu at the time Paz was constructing himself as an intellectual. In this chapter, by presenting a brief survey of this context, I try to answer the following questions: How

¹⁴ "La injusticia de ser: las cosas sufren
unas con otras y consigo mismas
por ser un querer más, siempre ser más que más.
Ser tiempo es la condena, nuestra pena es la historia."

Octavio Paz, "Pasado en claro" (fragmento).

existential thought became influential in Mexico—a country with strong roots in nineteenth-century positivist tradition? How the vicissitudes of Mexican revolution and post revolution played a role in this shift of philosophical paradigms? And finally, how young Octavio Paz grew up and started answering this context in his early intellectual activity? I offer a brief narrative of events in Mexico that transformed the intellectual landscape and established a Hispanic pole of existential philosophy during the first half of the twentieth century. I also situate Paz's early involvement with this environment, a topic that will be continued in the next chapters.

Octavio Paz was raised within a cultural environment that struggled to reject the formerly hegemonic positivism. There was a flourishing of anti-rationalistic tendencies that neglected reason as the essence of man and questioned nineteenth-century definitions of culture. These ideas were also part of an international context of paradigm shifts in philosophy, coming from central Europe, that reshaped Latin American thought.

In the case of Mexico, intellectual changes had an extra catalyst as politics and philosophical renovation mixed at the brink of the Mexican Revolution. What started as a rejection of Porfirio Díaz's liberal-positivist regime in the form of philosophical romanticism, turned into widespread cultural revolt in the search for Mexican identity. As Malas suggests, this movement was a kind of romantic resistance (from the Germanic tradition) where "Mexican philosophers waged a campaign to nationalize meaning, reason, and existence, at the same time as Mexican politicians nationalized industries."¹⁵ In this way, the reinvention of Mexican identity after the revolution mingled

¹⁵ About the precedent of German Romanticism, Malas continues: "There, the romantics had refused to accept the perceived solipsism of the Enlightenment, *i.e.* English and French *national* principles masquerading as 'recipes for mankind at large'. See "The Gaos-Nicol Polemic of 1950: An Argument on

nationalist outcry, anti-positivist (and therefore anti-rationalistic) spirit and existential (also anti-rationalistic) philosophy.

In that environment and within that context the existential thought of Ortega, and then of Heidegger, became important in Mexico from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-fifties. We will see that these forms of existential thought were providing philosophical ground for Mexico's own existential concerns and became the basis for finding alternatives to the official-national views on the Mexican and Mexicanness. During this time Octavio Paz was forming himself as a poet and intellectual. The ensuing survey is important, as my interpretations of Paz's essays and poems (mainly in the next chapters) are situated within the context of this cultural history of Mexico.

2.1. Anti-Positivism, Revolution and Quest for Identity

At the time of Octavio Paz's birth in 1914, Mexico was in the throes of the Mexican Revolution. The cultural and intellectual milieu, from the outbreak of revolt in 1910 to the late 1930s, showed a crisis of values and a breaking point with respect to the positivist ideology of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorial regime.¹⁶ The *porfiriato* was characterized by its appetite for French and English nineteenth-century liberal values, which dismissed the traditions of Mexico's primarily indigenous population. The removal of Díaz from power was one of the first outcomes of the 1910 revolt.

Ortega and Post-Revolutionary Epistemology in Mexico." *Texas Papers on Latin America*, No. 97-02. 1997. Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies. 15 May 2012
<<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/tpla/9702.html>>

¹⁶ Díaz was president from 1876 to 1880 and from 1884 to 1910.

However, positivist ideology had already made strong roots in Mexico. Benito Juárez's minister Gabino Barreda—a pupil of Auguste Comte—implemented since 1868 a positivist education reform. After the closing of the Real y Pontificia Universidad de México,¹⁷ that same year Barreda inaugurated the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria with the motto “Love, Order and Progress.” According to Magallón, Barreda determined that education must have a basis in scientifically-oriented truths, ostensibly in order to make Mexicans overcome all prejudices, illusions, fantasies and other causes of disorder that blind the mind. This would, in turn, secure peace and social order (33).

Díaz adopted Barreda's plan when he came to power in 1876. By 1892, Díaz's close ministers and intellectuals were called *los científicos*, and had begun to be labelled *positivistas* by his political enemies.¹⁸ The notions of reason, science, order, utility and progress were prioritized over social justice, democracy or human dignity. These ingredients fostered the illusory liberal Mexico that the late Díaz regime tried to sell internationally in order to promote foreign investment. In practice, as Curiel puts it, positivism in Mexico was reduced to a philosophy of education that institutionalized the thesis that all objects can be comprehended scientifically (209). On the social stand, *los científicos* had lost any interest in the well-being of the people of the country as they grew into a political and economical oligarchy benefitting from foreign industry. By 1902, press articles in Mexico City identified Díaz's group as *positivistas*, while positivism was

¹⁷ One of the oldest institutions in the Americas, the university was founded in 1553.

¹⁸ However, as Alfonso García Morales claims, only a reduced group of intellectuals were orthodox followers of Comte. See: *El Ateneo de México (1906-1914): Orígenes de la cultura mexicana contemporánea*. Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1992. p. 4. Also, the utilitarianism of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill were part of the basis of *los científicos*'s ideology.

linked to a vague set of meanings, such as: materialism, foreign ideology, policy against Mexico, immoral values and corruption (García Morales, *El Ateneo de México* 104-105).

Less vague than “positivism” in the popular imaginary was the scientific approach to education and the utilitarian values that perpetuated Díaz’s dictatorship. I see the spirit of these values reflected in the naturalism of the novel of the time. Federico Gamboa’s *Santa* (1903) shows one trend of the narrative at the turn of the century. I agree with Bobadilla that the values regulating individual lives in *Santa* are determined by a functionalist spirit that justifies existence strictly as an ability to adapt to society’s material progress. Santa, the girl from a village on the outskirts of Mexico City, fatally fails to assimilate the opportunities and dangers of the metropolis in a process that seems to be in the nature of progress itself. Santa is abducted in her village, discriminated and absorbed by the big city as one more object for material exchange. Moreover, as Bobadilla asserts, there is in the novel a determinist premise based on genetics as the narrator suggests that Santa is the carrier of lasciviousness.¹⁹

A similar spirit regulates social relations in Emilio Rabasa’s novels such as *La bola* (1887) and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera’s short tales such as “Las aventuras de Manón” or “Madame Venus.” Even the new aesthetics of the time, the revolutionary Latin American avant-garde poetry movement *modernismo*, may be read as adding to the positivist environment. The use of a new verse system in Spanish and, as J.M. Martínez observes, the use of exotic images from foreign worlds, always beautifully depicted, remind us of the utopia promised by positivism (216-217).

¹⁹ See Gerardo F. Bobadilla’s “*Santa*, de Federico Gamboa, o la redención artística del naturalismo mexicano.” *Espéculo*. March-June 2006. Facultad de Ciencias de la Información, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 27 July 2009. <<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero32/santaga.html>>

The last years of the *Porfiriato* saw the start of what I believe was a cultural revolt that prompted a change of course in Mexican intellectual life. This started with the launch of the magazine *Savia Moderna* in 1906, the *Sociedad de Conferencias* in 1907 and the birth of the group *El Ateneo de la Juventud* in 1909. *Savia Moderna* was short-lived (only a few issues in one year), but worked as a means to organize a new generation of young intellectuals. These young intellectuals did not agree with a regime-like solidifying spirit that showed in the last years of the magazine *La revista moderna* (1898–1911), and searched for alternatives. Among these young men were Alfonso Reyes, Antonio Caso and, most important for the group, Pedro Henríquez Ureña.²⁰ Henríquez Ureña was the inspiration of a new generation of writers that, by emphasizing the humanities and a return to the Greek classics, would oppose the education policies during the last years of Díaz's regime.

Without a similar precedent in Mexico, the group that came out of *Savia Moderna* organized themselves into a “society” of cultural interests in 1907. The *Sociedad de Conferencias*, led by Reyes and Henríquez Ureña, hosted talks continually from the final years of the *Porfiriato* into the first half of the violent decade of the Mexican revolution. With the purpose of promoting an alternative to the official discourse, they offered open talks about “modern” themes of philosophy, art and literature, while keeping rigour and originality. It is meaningful that the *Sociedad* opened up with a cycle about Friedrich Nietzsche's thought (by Antonio Caso), a leading figure in the critique of

²⁰ García Morales traces the importance of José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* in the influential work of Pedro Henríquez Ureña. Henríquez Ureña was originally from Santo Domingo where *Ariel* was first published outside Uruguay and he had been strongly influenced by the movement triggered by Rodó's book. *Ariel* exposed North America as the bearer of materialist and utilitarian values, and promoted man's need for integral education and the development of spiritual and aesthetic values (García Morales, *El ateneo* 21).

positivism.²¹ Their impulse was soon recognized by Education Minister Justo Sierra, who had begun to search for alternatives to positivist education. He invited the new young intellectuals to collaborate.²²

Nevertheless, the political crisis in 1909 forced a reorganization of the group of young intellectuals. The disputes between Díaz's supporters (vying for his re-election) and his opponents turned into a polarization of political and philosophical tendencies that dispersed the members of the *Sociedad de Conferencias*.²³ Caso reorganized the group by creating the *Ateneo de la Juventud*, a sort of second version of the *Sociedad de Conferencias* that included José Vasconcelos and all the important members of the previous society.²⁴ This newly organized group was unexpectedly going to stir the cultural milieu at the start of the revolution.

When Díaz finally took his opponent Francisco I. Madero prisoner in 1910 and, after a fraudulent election, declared himself re-elected, the *ateneístas* became more

²¹ This cycle was followed by talks about the painting of Eugène Carrière, the architecture of John Rusking and the works of Edgar Alan Poe (García Morales, *El ateneo* 62-65).

²² Through this partnership, the members of the *Sociedad de Conferencias* published José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900) in Mexico in 1908; two editions were made for free distribution. *Ariel* represented for these young intellectuals the Americas' expression of contemporary renaissance by presenting a "new idealism" as rectification and complement—though not always a negation—of the hegemonic positivism (García Morales 122-126).

²³ Díaz's political opponents in the election were Bernardo Reyes, Alfonso's father, and Francisco I. Madero

²⁴ As a young lawyer, Vasconcelos collaborated with Francisco I. Madero's opposition (to Díaz) movement by editing the newspaper *El antirreeleccionista* (García Morales, *El ateneo* 152). 1909 was a year of electoral nervousness in Mexico. García Morales observes that Díaz managed to eliminate Bernardo Reyes's candidacy, attacked Madero's organizations and tried to put Vasconcelos in prison after closing his newspaper. Madero, Vasconcelos and others started to think of an armed revolution (153). A few years later Vasconcelos was to play a role of educational reformer in Mexico, and to create a major shift in Mexican cultural institutions.

active. While Díaz proceeded with the paramount official-nationalist “Centennial Celebrations of Mexican Independence,” the *ateneístas* organized a series of talks for the anniversary that reflected a new interest in national and Latin American philosophy and literature. In these talks, a review of José Enrique Rodó’s works by Henríquez Ureña, a reflection on positivism by Vasconcelos and a discussion of moral philosophy by Caso, were all framed in relation to Henri Bergson’s new phenomenological theory of creative evolution, *L’évolution créatrice* (1907) (García Morales, *El Ateneo* 169). In his book, Bergson suggested that the experience of time as duration was better comprehended through creative intuition—rather than intellect—and that evolution was motivated by an *élan vital* (the human’s creative impulse) that continuously generates contingencies. Therefore, the universe develops in uncertain ways. I believe that given the political crisis at the time of the *ateneístas*’s conferences, the intellectual presence of Bergson came almost as an announcement of the chaotic unfolding of the revolution.

It is worth stressing that these talks happened at the time Díaz was making a major effort to reaffirm his political control by showcasing his idea of Mexico in the “Centennial Celebrations.” While the *ateneístas* participated in the celebrations, I believe they were already looking for alternative ways of substantiating their Mexicanness. They linked their quest for being to philosophical tendencies discarded by the positivists. It is significant that these tensions are still present in Mexican politics. We will see in Chapter 6 that one hundred years later, at the Bi-centennial celebrations in 2010, there is a similar struggle between the State’s decree of “order” (and a correspondent nationalism) and an anti-positivist call for understanding Mexicanness in alternative ways. In the *ateneístas*’s conferences of 1910, Henríquez Ureña related

Rodó's work to Bergson in order to emphasize the notion that we are beings in continuous change and that we should be vigilant of that transformation through new education policies (*El Ateneo* 171). Vasconcelos, in turn, asserted that "contemporary science" had modified positivist cosmology. "Matter is, as Bergson asserts, a descending movement, a falling; life is a reaction, a movement opposite to the fall; it is impulse that tends to loosen itself from material laws."²⁵ Turning to the local circumstance, Vasconcelos also proposed that Bergson's creative evolution enables us to see our lives as continuous self-creation as we crave for being ourselves (173).²⁶

Also part of the centennial celebrations, the *ateneístas* collaborated with Justo Sierra in reopening the four-decades-closed National University. They had clear intentions of fostering a humanist institution and bringing back the teaching of "courses on History of Philosophy, starting with modern tendencies and new systems or revisited ones, from the appearance of positivism to the present day, to the times of Bergson and William James."²⁷ The *ateneístas's* interest in Bergson's phenomenology and James's pragmatism somehow prefigure, as we will see in the next couple of sections, the

²⁵ "La materia es, como afirma Bergson, un movimiento de descenso, de caída; la vida es una reacción, un movimiento contrariante de descenso; impulso que tiende a desprenderse del dominio de las leyes materiales." See Antonio Caso, *et Al.* "Don Gabino Barreda y las ideas contemporáneas". *Conferencias del Ateneo de la Juventud*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000. p. 106.

²⁶ García Morales also observes that the conferences were published and taken to other Latin American countries, Europe and to North America. Through this diffusion Diego Rivera joined the *ateneístas* group from Paris and Max Henríquez Ureña joined them from Cuba. Emile Boutroux, another inspiring philosopher for the *ateneístas*, sent a letter of good will to the group in Mexico. In Cuba a *Sociedad de Conferencias* was born to replicate what was happening in Mexico (*El ateneo* 178).

²⁷ "los cursos de Historia de la Filosofía, empezando por la de las doctrinas modernas y los sistemas más nuevos o renovados, desde la aparición del positivismo, hasta nuestros días, hasta los días de Bergson y W. James." See Justo Sierra. *Prosas*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1990. p. 188.

upcoming interest of Mexican intellectuals in José Ortega y Gasset's vitalism and in Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy.²⁸

Once set free, Madero declared armed insurrection against Díaz's regime on November 20th, 1910, initiating the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution. In May of 1911 Díaz resigned. In June, Madero entered the capital, victorious. A few days later, the *ateneístas* celebrated the fall of Díaz's regime and Vasconcelos gave a speech relating the political revolution to the intellectual one. He declared the triumph of the intellectual revolution and reaffirmed "political and intellectual rebellion" to allow for the transformation of the people. He also congratulated his colleagues for beating the positivist "pseudo scientific dogma."²⁹

In the early days of 1913, when Victoriano Huerta's *coup d'état* defied and assassinated the president, the revolution entered the bloodiest period, and the *ateneístas* were dispersed a few months later. Alfonso Reyes flew to Paris (later to Madrid). In 1914, the year Octavio Paz was born, Reyes wrote from Paris a retrospective article about the *ateneístas*'s cultural "renovation." There he said: "The triumph of anti-intellectualism is almost over. The previous positivism, if it was useful for

²⁸ From the American pragmatism of William James to the neopragmatism of Richard Rorty, there are shared interests with the philosophies of Ortega and Heidegger in that they all attempt a critique of the Cartesian dream of absolute (rational or theoretical) certainty. On the connections between pragmatism and existential philosophy see for example: Charles Guignon's "On saving Heidegger from Rorty." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 46, No. 3 (Mar., 1986), pp. 401-417.

²⁹ "Las grandes transformaciones de los pueblos determinan un violento impulso hacia adelante en que coinciden el despertar moral, la rebelión política y la renovación de las ideas. Nadie que haya observado las manifestaciones recientes de nuestra mentalidad nacional, dejará de reconocer el espíritu de autonomía, el garbo de juventud que deshizo la niebla de aquella dogmatización seudocientífica [...] Se desprestigliaron ante las conciencias las teorías conformistas de ese especial positivismo mexicano, o podría decirse: positivismo porfirista, y desde ese instante, casi sin esfuerzo, quedó consumada la revolución intelectual" (Caso *et Al.* 131).

social restoration, it became pernicious for development [...] of the spirit, in the long term. It was like a false, narrow perspective of the world that was not enough for us anymore....”³⁰

The revolution was to last for several years bringing chaos and bloodshed, an exasperating situation that forced self-questioning in Mexican intellectuals. As Gómez-Martínez suggests, in the midst of the struggle, the country became isolated from the European cultural models (as the Great War started in 1914). In this way, Mexico was left to its own devices for the first time, and now stood facing radical problems and in search for internal solutions. That, in turn, favoured a sense of self-discovery (Gómez-Martínez, *Pensamiento de la liberación* 67). I believe this critical reflection on identity already begins to show in the literature of 1915. Mariano Azuela’s novel, *Los de abajo*, expresses a gloomy view of the revolution. He narrates the misfortunes of the peasant-fighters as greed and opportunism drive the interests of the revolution leaders. As Fuentes suggests, this novel starts the critical view of the revolution by emptying its mythical and epic attributes (“Liminar” XXVIII-XXIX). In a similar tone, Martín Luis Guzmán’s essay, *La querrela de México*, shows his disappointment and critique of Mexican population while simultaneously suggesting the need for pursuing a profound review of Mexican social values. For Guzmán, the problem is that Mexico has not yet established its regular existence as a group of organized people.

³⁰ “El triunfo del anti-intelectualismo en México está casi consumado. El positivismo que lo precedió, si fue útil para la restauración social, vino a ser a la larga pernicioso para el desarrollo [...] del espíritu mismo. Era como una falsa, angosta perspectiva del mundo que no podía bastarnos ya.” See Alfonso Reyes. “Nosotros.” *Nosotros. Revista de Arte y Educación*. N. 9, March 1914. p 220.

As Octavio Paz would do thirty-five years later in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, in the middle of the revolution many intellectuals would, in their quest for the national soul, turn to pre-Hispanic roots, or to the event and consequences of the clash of cultures. In a master-work from the painter Saturnino Hernán, the triptych *Nuestros Dioses* (1915-1916), national identity is represented as a racial and spiritual fusion of the Hispanic and the *Nahua* culture, with Spaniards and Aztecs alike paying tribute to the same goddess, a mix of Christ and Coatlicue.³¹ In literature, in 1915 Alfonso Reyes restated the trend with his watershed work *Visión de Anáhuac* (1919). The work is not only inspired by the clash of cultures but also adds to the anti-positivist spirit of the times. What seems to be just an uncompromising poetic evocation of the national past is in reality a work of unfolding complexity. I agree with Magdalena Perkowska-Álvarez that the book should be read as a reflection on the past in 1519—Cortes's arrival—in relation to the present time of the revolution in 1915 (a reordering of the same numbers). The insistent fragmentation of the narrative and the juxtaposition of stories in the book create a kind of cubist work, following the European trend in those years. The multiple representations of reality neglect a linear perspective and the possibility of “objective” scientific observation, and suggest the need for new approaches to reality—subjective ones—that utilize emotion and intuition (88-96). As we will see, Reyes's work was prefiguring the phenomenological trend in questioning identity that will later flourish in Mexican intellectuals, including Octavio Paz.

³¹ Coatlicue was one of the main deities for the Aztecs and represented the life-death cycle. It was one of the many versions of Quetzalcoatl in Nahua-culture.

Another reflection on national identity comes in the music from composer Manuel M. Ponce. Influenced by German romanticism, Ponce revived traditional-Mexican folk style to create orchestra music. In 1912, he surprised the music scene with his concert on *Musica Popular Mexicana* at El Teatro Nacional in Mexico City. Ponce's student, Carlos Chávez, wrote a 1916 essay "Importancia actual del florecimiento de la Música Nacional" arguing for the need to create an *Escuela Mexicana* style. The new trend caught on, and *música nacionalista* began to play an unprecedented role in Mexican culture (Gómez-Martínez 71-72).

The revolution's struggle diminished as Álvaro Obregón became elected president in 1920 and faced the concrete job of implementing a new constitution and forming national institutions. José Vasconcelos became head of the National University and was finally able to start the education reforms he had long been planning. His rejection of foreign cultural paradigms and his proposal for the search for the country's own national soul shows in his design of the university's coat-of-arms. Vasconcelos's motto says "Through my race shall the spirit speak" ("*Por mi raza hablará el espíritu*," where "*raza*" refers to *mestizo* race or culture) encircling the map of Latin America. As Minister of Education from 1921 to 1924, Vasconcelos started an ambitious cultural reform that promoted a nationalist narrative and the spread of basic institutionalized education for the mostly-illiterate masses throughout the country. In Vasconcelos's view, culture was something that can be taught by the state in order to stir within the masses a particular set of beneficial values for the consolidation of the new nation. As Florescano asserts, for that purpose Vasconcelos summoned intellectuals and artists to "get out of their ivory tower and advocate an alliance with the Revolution," and to then

work on the country-wide “cultural and educative crusade.” Part of this crusade was implemented through promotion of the arts, including music, dance, painting and literature.³²

In literature, Ramón López Velarde’s poem “La suave patria” (1920) was taken as a national paradigm. “La suave patria” is a long epic poem that suggests nationalistic evocations by framing the richness of the traditions of *mestizo* culture. As summarized in these few verses, the nation works as a melting pot of contrasting origins:

Anachronistic, farcial,
the rose bows to your nopal;
you magnetize the Spaniard’s language,
and now is the source of Catholic springs³³

Despite López Velarde’s death in 1921, he quickly became the “National Poet” (García Morales, “Poeta nacional” 195).

Beyond literature, Vasconcelos’s most enduring nationalist effort was his promotion of mural painting as an art-form for the masses. In his view, murals would teach, through visual images, a particular narrative on the history of the new nation. Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros collaborated with

³² See Enrique Florescano. “El Nacionalismo Cultural 1920-1934.” *La Jornada en internet*. 26 Aug. 2004. *Diario La Jornada*. 15 May 2012 <<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2004/08/26/ima-naciona.html>>

³³ “Anacrónicamente, absurdamente,
a tu nopal inclínase el rosál;
al idioma del blanco, tú lo imantas
y es surtidor de católica fuente”

Vasconcelos in this project, painting the walls of public administration buildings. The muralist movement continued long after Vasconcelos's administration.³⁴

An entire movement in painting, the *Escuela Mexicana de Pintura*, emerged alongside the muralists, with the likes of Frida Kahlo, Gerardo Murillo, Juan O'Gorman and Rufino Tamayo, to name a few. National symbols and icons such as national flags, popular stereotypical characters (*e.g. el charro, la tehuana*), watermelons, cactus plants, hand-crafted candies, *magueyes*, etc., were frequently represented in the paintings. As the pictorial movement became well recognized abroad, Mexico found a place among the best of highly acknowledged art on an international level, for the first time. Artists were conscious that, paradoxically, this international recognition (or universality) came when they were trying to be more "Mexican" in their work.

Thus, as I have tried to show, the Mexican quest for local or nationalistic interpretations of the country's soul and its people had begun of its own accord during and after the chaos of the revolution. Cultural reflections about Mexico's identity flourished in this period as a conglomerate of anti-rational, anti-"foreign" (anti-positivist, anti-liberal) and "indigenista" art trends. However, if political nationalism produced a decisive cultural component, philosophical referents were still lacking. The philosophical means that would shape arguments on Mexicanness were soon to arrive in the works of José Ortega y Gasset in spite of the fact that, as we will see, his thought was quite different from Vasconcelos's in its conception of culture.

³⁴ The first walls to be painted were from the Antiguo Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo (1922) and followed swift the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (1922-1926) and the new palace of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (1923-1926). Later, the walls of Palacio Nacional were painted (a first stage from 1929-1935 and another was finished in 1951) and other buildings followed in several cities of the country.

2.2. Ortega y Gasset and Historicism in Mexico

From the 1920s on, the work of Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset became central to the discussion of a national culture in Mexico. Educated in German phenomenology, Ortega promoted a form of existential philosophy by putting concrete human existence (*la vida*) at the centre of all reality. He featured an original philosophy of culture by understanding culture as a continuous process of individual interpretations. Reality is, in this view, an individual perspective that complements the others's perspectives. He also proposed a historicist understanding of reality. These tenets inspired and underpinned the search for local definitions of identity—in rejection of European and North American cultural models—through much of the Hispanic speaking world. At the same time, this philosophy helped to substantiate arguments against fixed definitions of identity. We will see in the next chapters that some of Octavio Paz's arguments in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and later works are better understood when placed in a dialogue with Ortega's philosophy.

Ortega's ideas started to arrive in Mexico most probably through Alfonso Reyes when he served as a diplomat in Spain during the Mexican revolution. However, it was only after Reyes's publication of "Apuntes sobre Ortega y Gasset" in 1922, that Ortega's work began to be widely discussed by intellectuals in the country (Gómez-Martínez, *Pensamiento de la liberación* 76). Ortega's essays were predestined to take root in Mexico as he addressed a situation that was very similar to the Mexican one. Zea has discussed the similarities between Spain's situation after 1898 and Mexico's after the

revolution. As he suggests, after Miguel de Unamuno's critical writings on the brink of the Spanish empire's last decline, Ortega became concerned with redefining the Spanish national identity and creating a definition of a new Spain (Zea, "Presencia cultural" 14).³⁵

In one of Ortega's early works, *Meditations on Quixote* (*Meditaciones del Quijote*, 1914) he stated what, I argue, was taken in Mexico as a summation of much of his philosophy: "I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it then I do not save myself."³⁶ For Ortega, one's own being cannot be separated from the circumstance, or as he emphasized in Latin: *circum-stantia* (*Meditaciones* 65). And he seems to include in the concept of "circumstance" the whole context of the individual (historical, cultural, social, etc.) that restricts him but is also the source of all his possibilities.³⁷ Or, as he put it in other words: "Man lives to the acme of its capabilities when he fully acknowledges his circumstances. Through them he communicates with the universe."³⁸ Therefore, to "save" the circumstance means that it must be first interpreted and appropriated in order to apprehend one's own possibilities. In particular, to appropriate the historical

³⁵ In fact, Unamuno was an early precursor of existential thought in Europe. He directly studied the works of Søren Kierkegaard in Danish and wrote a few novels and essays on existential concerns. See for example *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913) in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida / La agonía del cristianismo*. Madrid: Akal, 1983.

³⁶ "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo." See *Meditaciones del Quijote*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1984. p. 77.

³⁷ Ortega also said that the circumstance is: "the silent things that are in our near surroundings" (*Meditaciones* 65). As Julian Marías explains in the notes to *Meditaciones del Quijote*, Ortega uses the adjective *silent* to indicate that the circumstance makes no sense until the individual engages with it by interpreting it. See Marías's notes 33 (p. 65) and 38 (p. 68).

³⁸ "El hombre rinde al máximo de su capacidad cuando adquiere plena conciencia de sus circunstancias. Por ellas comunica con el universo." (*Meditaciones* 62).

circumstance becomes for Ortega the key to understanding and reconstructing the present. He called for “keeping the past alive” by “opening our veins and injecting our blood into the empty veins of the death.”³⁹ As we will see, this form of historicism became important for Mexican intellectuals.

Also, in *The Theme of Our Time* (*El Tema de nuestro tiempo*, 1923), Ortega asserted that neither history nor life must be dictated by principles. Rationalism is anti-historical by establishing immutable truths. As Ortega argues, at the base of our modern spirit is Descartes’s “pure reasoning” system, a model where history does not have a role to play in discovering reality (33-34). In fact, in this view any spontaneous or non-rational belief should be declared disdainful in origin. The “theme” of modern times (after the Great War) is how to navigate between rational absolutism that neutralizes life and sheer relativism that ignores reason (38). Then, Ortega proposes a third way to achieve balance: to accept that reason is just a function of life and that every perspective of reality, as conditioned by the vital structure of each individual as it is (and therefore his/her history), is not an anomaly but part of the meaningful organization of reality (98-99). As he saw that utopian models (and this included European models) were not answering the current sensibility of the times, he stated:

Until now, philosophy has been always utopia-like. Every system pretended to be valid for humankind. By excluding the *vital dimension*, *historic*, *perspectivist*, they repeated in vain once and again their definitive gesture. In comparison, the point-of-view doctrine urges the system to

³⁹ “abrir nuestras venas e inyectar de su sangre en las venas vacías de los muertos” (*Meditaciones* 82).

include the vital perspective where it comes from, thus allowing its orchestration with other systems in the future, or exotic ones. *Pure reason must be replaced by a vital reason, where reason finds its proper place and acquires mobility and force to transform.*⁴⁰

In Mexico, these premises were interpreted as a new and circumstantial form of reason well-suited for the new post-revolutionary republic, allowing for local interpretations of the national reality under the concepts of *perspectivismo* and *circunstancialismo*. Now, it was possible to make sense of the present reality through the perspective of local history. As Gómez-Martínez observes, Mexicans were already practising much of these tenets, as was the case with mural painting. And I agree with him in suggesting that these premises completed the lack of theoretical structure and were taken as a basis for framing the failure of the Mexican past, while also giving direction for building a new future (*Pensamiento de la liberación* 78). If the revolution had been chaotic and terrible but good for looking back at Mexican past, Mexicans had now a way of explaining their situation. Or at least, as in Gómez-Martínez's view, intellectuals were convinced that the revolution had not been in vain, as the emergence of new ways of perceiving were now a mission and also an authentic event (79).

⁴⁰ "Hasta ahora, la filosofía ha sido siempre utópica. Por eso pretendía cada sistema valer para todos los hombres. Exenta de la *dimensión vital, histórica, perspectivista*, hacía una y otra vez vanamente su gesto definitivo. La doctrina del punto de vista exige, en cambio, que dentro del sistema vaya articulada la perspectiva vital de que ha emanado, permitiendo así su articulación con otros sistemas futuros o exóticos. *La razón pura tiene que ser sustituida por una razón vital, donde aquella se localice y adquiera movilidad y fuerza de transformación.*" See *El tema de nuestro tiempo*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1955. p. 101.

Moreover, Ortega brought a concept of “generation” that was relevant for linking the enquiry on the being of Mexico to personal self-analysis, at this stage of Mexican definitions. Ortega imagined that changes in vital sensibility were present in the form of a “generation” of men. As Ortega puts it:

[A generation] is not a handful of outstanding men, neither is it simply the mass: it is like a new integral social body, with its selected minority and its crowd... as a dynamic trade-off between mass and individual, it is history’s most important concept, and, to say it plainly, it is the hinge where history performs its movements.⁴¹

As Medin observes, by 1925 Daniel Cosío Villegas was already writing on the vital sensibility of his own “generation” in the context of Mexico’s problems. In 1926, Manuel Gómez Morín would follow a similar trend with his book *1915*. The book presents the history of “la generación de 1915” where Gómez Morín situates, in Ortegian terms, the generation of intellectuals during the revolution (Medin, *Ortega y Gasset en la cultura hispanoamericana* 49). In a similar view, Gómez-Martínez asserts that Mexican intellectuals felt that the first step towards understanding the *Revolución*, was to establish the characteristics of the generation that made it possible (*Pensamiento de la liberación* 81). Therefore, beyond the concern of post-revolutionary intellectuals in

⁴¹ “[La generación] no es un puñado de hombres egregios, ni simplemente una masa: es como un nuevo cuerpo social íntegro, con su minoría selecta y su muchedumbre... compromiso dinámico entre masa e individuo, es el concepto más importante de la historia, y, por decirlo así, el gozne sobre que ésta ejecuta sus movimientos.” (*El tema* 14-15).

Mexico as a detached entity, they were including a concern for personal (or generational) self-definition. In other words, they were already raising an existential concern in their reflections on Mexico.

Ortega's perspectivism had some similarities with Vasconcelos's thought, as shown in the motto "por mi raza hablará el espíritu," meaning "through my *mestizo* perspective I will talk about reality," but there were important differences as well. In *La raza cósmica* (1925), Vasconcelos rejects Darwinian views of sociology but also appeals for a definitive, utopia-like view of how culture should be. He proposes beauty and love, over reason and strength, to make a new civilization based on racial mixing. The *mestizo* in the Americas becomes for Vasconcelos the new race that overcomes European misdeeds and that contains the ingredients to create a "universal era of humanity." By the time of its publication, a generation of intellectuals had begun to feel discomfort with Vasconcelos's (and Caso's) romantic idealism (Zea, "Presencia cultural" 15-16)—this, at the same time that Ortega's work was quickly being assimilated. For the new intellectuals, Vasconcelos's anti-rational arguments were mostly acceptable, but his powerful nationalistic project and his emphasis on the superiority of *mestizo* culture in the Americas, suggested a static definition of culture.

For Vasconcelos, culture was meant to be nationalistic. Culture was something to be taught to the masses. Ortega's thought could not be farther from these ideas. In *The Theme of Our Time*, Ortega asserts that the times call for a vitalist view of culture, a rejection of schematic thinking and the allowance of spontaneity, subjectivity and intuition (*El tema* 50-55). Furthermore, for Ortega, "to save the circumstances" is to understand culture as a dynamic and spontaneous process in play with the

appropriation of history. As said before, Ortega called for “keeping the past alive” as source of possibilities, or perspectives, for the making up of the present. Therefore, we may understand that, in Ortega’s view, culture cannot be pre-defined as Vasconcelos wanted, but is the spontaneous and continuous negotiation with the possibilities of the circumstance.

In Mexico, Ortega’s view demanded, as a first step, the understanding of the denied history. Intellectuals began a historicist movement for accomplishing this new task. This is what Gómez Morín’s tries to accomplish in 1915 by discussing the ideas and environment of the generation that played important roles in the course of the revolution. The search continued in Samuel Ramos’s *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934).⁴² Gómez-Martínez has noted that Ramos’s book also answers Ortega’s concern about a “lack of discipline” in the current generation to address its modern problems. Ortega said: “Curiosity is not enough to get around things; there is a need for

⁴² *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* was the first rigorous historicist work to make a critical analysis of Mexican culture. Alongside the psychotherapy of Alfred Adler, the influence of Ortega is clear. As José Gaos and Zea suggest, Ramos’s book was a kind of answer—in Mexican terms—to Ortega’s *Meditaciones del Quijote*. Both works faced the problem of living in a culture that existed on the margins of a universalized cultural ideal. Both Ortega and Ramos try to “save the circumstances”—the historical ones—in order to understand their own culture. See Zea’s “Presencia cultural de Ortega en Hispanoamérica.” *Quinto Centenario* 6 (1983): 13-35. 15 May 2012
<<http://revistas.ucm.es/ghi/02116111/articulos/QUCE8383220013A.PDF>> p. 17. Ramos follows Ortega in criticizing the imitation of a foreign civilization while there remains a need to understand one’s own character and to appropriate it as possessor of a singular destiny. Ramos also suggests that there is a new conscience of the “national self” in Mexico, but that the exaggeration of nationalism and European utopia are extremes that should be rejected. The solution, then, is to allow one’s own Mexican culture to develop as determined by “the *raza*’s vocation” (i.e. the mestizo’s will). See Ramos’s *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México*. Mexico City: Espasa-Calpe, 1972. pp. 89-90. Ramos’s book is well-known for suggesting a number of low-self-esteem characteristics of the Mexican. However, as Medin suggests, Ramos clarifies in Ortegian spirit that these characteristics are not constitutive of the Mexican being, but rather that they form a mask that should be removed to unveil the original being. See Medin’s *Ortega y Gasset en la cultura hispanoamericana*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 61.

intellectual rigour to appropriate them.” As Gómez-Martínez suggests, Ramos answered with his critical book on Mexican culture (*Pensamiento de la liberación* 84-85). I argue that Octavio Paz continued along the same path, “saving the circumstances,” in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950). And the same purpose was underpinned in the works of the group *El Hiperión* in what became, at the end of the 1940s and start of the 1950s, a whole movement of “Filosofía del Mexicano.”

The anti-rational and historicist trend in Mexico had even more referents than the writings of Ortega himself. Ortega’s influence was an open door to German philosophy. In 1923, he launched the *Revista de Occidente* in Spain, a philosophy journal that quickly became influential throughout Latin America. From the start, Ortega focused on publishing topics in German philosophy, what he saw as ways of reintegrating Spain’s Iberian tradition with the European one.⁴³ Ortega saw a barbaric element in Spain that needed to be reconciled with Spain’s European counterpart. As he puts it: “do not incite the Iberian in me with his harsh, hirsute passions, against the blond German.”⁴⁴ As suggested before, it is evident that many of Latin America’s intellectuals identified themselves with this double origin and the need for a renewed identity. Through the journal, Latin America was introduced to Edmund Husserl’s works on phenomenology, the philosophy of values and sociology of knowledge of Max Scheler, the hermeneutics

⁴³ Why did Ortega see German thought as the choice for Spanish renewal? Zea argues that Ortega saw traditional French influence waning because of its practical rationalism; he considered England too focused in pragmatism, but he saw in troubled Germany a balance between science and life. See Zea’s *Esquema para una historia de las ideas en Iberoamérica*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1956. pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴ “no asuzéis al ibero que va en mí con sus ásperas, hirsutas pasiones, contra el blondo Germano.” (*Meditaciones* 159).

of Wilhelm Dilthey, and the first expressions of German existential philosophy. Zea has noted that this influence underpinned the new “historicist” current running through all of Latin America (“Presencia cultural” 19).

Paralleling the appropriation of Ortega’s influence by Mexican intellectuals, the quest for a redefinition of Mexicanness flourished in the arts, both in accordance with nationalistic views but also—and more important for my argument—in critical expressions of cultural essentialisms. In music the quest flourished with the Mexicanist music of Silvestre Revueltas and Carlos Chávez. Though some of Paz’s early works will be introduced and discussed later in this chapter, it is worth bringing here his retrospective view in 1941 of Revueltas’s music:

He was as the taste of people, as the people itself, when the people are people and not multitude. He was like a popular fair; the church, bombarded with fireworks [...] the magic garden with its fountain and kiosk with heroic music, off-beat and out of tune; the peanuts piled into pyramids beside the oranges, the *jicamas* earthy and juicy, and the sugar cane...⁴⁵

It is worth noticing that in these lines Paz describes Revueltas’s music by imagining the typical, rather chaotic, traditional fiesta in the plazas of Mexico’s towns. In painting, Agustín Lazo twists the grandeur of nationalist painting by depicting the harsh reality of

⁴⁵ “Era como el sabor del pueblo, como el pueblo mismo, cuando es pueblo y no multitud. Era como una feria de pueblo; la iglesia, asaeteada por los fuegos de artificio [...] el mágico jardín, con su fuente y su kiosk con la música heroica, desentonada y agria; y los cacahuates, en pirámides, junto a las naranjas, las jicamas terrestres y jugosas y las cañas de azúcar...” See Paz’s *Primeras Letras*. Madrid: Seix Barral, 1988. p. 195.

the common villager and the forgotten people. Lazo utilizes ambiguous brush strokes to paint an execution by a firing squad (*Fusilamiento*, 1930), a bank robbery (*Robo al banco*, 1930) or—lacking any epic pretensions—an ordinary student (*El estudiante*, 1937). Frida Kahlo has an intimate approach to her search for identity. In *Mi nana y yo* (1937) an indigenous woman wearing a harsh mask breastfeeds Frida. *El difunto Dimas* (1937) shows a poorly dressed indigenous child in his deathbed. In cinema, Fernando de Fuentes's film *¡Vámonos con Pancho Villa!* (1936) portrays a group of friends that hear about Villa's leadership during the revolution and decide to enlist in his army, only to discover the cruelty of war and the indifference of Villa towards his suffering men. In the play *El Gesticulador* (1938) Rodolfo Usigli ironically questions the essence of Mexican identity. By showing the corrupted political aftermath of the revolution, Usigli denounces hypocrisy, the inability of the Mexican to handle the truth and the institutionalized demagoguery. The play was banned by the Mexican government for a decade. These examples show a critique of schematic nationalist views in accordance with the first appropriation of Ortega's thought in Mexico.

While artists and intellectuals were discussing nationalism and Mexicanness, by 1935 Octavio Paz was twenty and an intellectual in the making. Let's now move closer to Paz's context during these early years and the way it corresponds to the intellectual environment in Mexico. Similar to the situation of the country, Paz grew up also facing a crisis of identity. His mother Josefina was from the south of Spain and his father Octavio Paz Solórzano was a Mexican lawyer. His grandfather, Irineo Paz, had been a journalist, novelist and renowned printer who had supported Díaz's effort to modernize

Mexico.⁴⁶ By contrast, Octavio's father was a supporter of Emiliano Zapata during the revolution and became the insurgent's personal secretary. The father and grandfather were strong nationalists, but Paz passed his childhood in an environment open to foreign ideas. The house in Mixcoac where Octavio grew up was keen to Francophile culture, mainly because his nationalist grandfather saw France as the emblem of modernity.⁴⁷

Blue-eyed Octavio always fought the "foreign" stereotype in Mexico because of his mixed background. He was given the nickname "Visigoth" by his father's friends because he was different from the typical "moreno" Mexican. Moreover, when Octavio was seven years old, Octavio Paz senior took the family to live for a couple of years in Los Angeles, California. As Paz describes in *Itinerary*, the experience of being an alien in the United States while, paradoxically, being an outsider when he returned to Mexico, marked him: "My experiences in Los Angeles and in Mexico weighed down on me for many years [...] I would say to myself: Yes, I am neither from here nor from there. Then, where I am from?"⁴⁸ By the end of the 1920's, Paz had enrolled in the Preparatoria Nacional at the Colegio de San Ildefonso, where he came into contact with the sparkling culture at the center of the capital and the political events that were shaping the new revolutionary nation.

⁴⁶ I have summarized this biographical information mostly from Nick Caistor's *Octavio Paz*. London: Reaction Books, 2007.

⁴⁷ Caistor finds that Irineo had a large library which included the French classics and with the help of aunt Amalia, Octavio became a reader of French since childhood. Many years later Paz would recognize French Literature to be his "second home" (Caistor 14).

⁴⁸ "La experiencia de Los Ángeles y la de México me apesadumbraron durante muchos años [...] me decía: sí, yo no soy de aquí ni de allá. Entonces, ¿de dónde soy?" See Paz's *Itinerario*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993. p. 17.

In 1931, at the age of seventeen, Octavio joined with other colleagues to begin publishing *Barandal*, a literary review. The magazine lasted for seven issues and shows the influence of the *Contemporáneos* group (and the magazine published with the same name, from 1928 to 1931). *Contemporáneos* grouped some older poets primarily under the patronage of Alfonso Reyes; some of them had been Octavio's teachers at the Preparatoria Nacional. It was a time of national polemics surrounding the artist's obligations towards nationalist art. As Sheridan points out, Reyes had declared since 1923 the need for "searching for the national soul"—an individual effort—against the attempts of the institutionalized revolution of "forming the national soul" through the arts (56). Against all odds, the *Contemporáneos* group was pushing for a cultural alternative to the official "nacionalismo revolucionario." They brought to Mexico the avant-garde literature from Europe, the United States and Japan. The group included Carlos Pellicer, Xavier Villaurrutia, José Gorostiza, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Jorge Cuesta, among others. Their attempt to provide alternative ways of expressing Mexican culture shows the growing political skepticism in the times of the *Maximato*, a succession of puppet regimes put in place by former president Plutarco Elías Calles. As Sheridan observes, this period produced "a state that by 1932 declares itself the only authorized voice, the only educator in the country, the only church, the only enterprise and the only cultural sponsor."⁴⁹

I agree with Quiroga in that the complexity of Paz's role as an intellectual has its roots in these years during the 1930s, when Paz was already trying to maintain a

⁴⁹ "un Estado que en 1932 se declara el único autorizado para hablar, el único educador del país, la única iglesia, el único empresario y el único patrocinador cultural." See Guillermo Sheridan's *México en 1932: la polémica nacionalista*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999. p. 38.

balance between the tension of social responsibility and aesthetic freedom (3-4).

Barandal followed the *Contemporáneos* trend by publishing the avant-garde in literature, but also included political discussion. The nascent relationship between Paz's writings and politics would prove to be a tumultuous one throughout his life. Adding to Quiroga's assessment, I see in Paz's struggle with these opposites his early embodiment of Ortega's ideas.

In "Ética del artista" (1931), an essay published in *Barandal*, Paz argues about the disengaged art of *Contemporáneos* and conveys one of his first political statements. I also see this early essay as showing how Ortega may be already working in Paz's thought. In "Ética del artista" Paz opposes the individualism of art for the arts' sake, and embraces art with a thesis, or engaged art. Between art that "loses all relation to the world" and art "with humane intention to reform [the world]," Paz chooses the second. However, though Paz showed himself to be a committed leftist as a teenager and during his early twenties, in his own poetry works at large, and through all of his life, he remained skeptical of ideological definitions of culture. Many times he openly opposed politically engaged "socially realist" art.⁵⁰ By looking at Ortega's premises we can find a way to reconcile these apparent opposites in Paz's discourse.

Ortega presented this tension since *Meditaciones del Quijote* by asserting that culture was the individual's immediate, in other words spontaneous or not static, product of its circumstance. He asserts: "In my opinion, all necessity, if empowered, gets to be a

⁵⁰ Yvon Grenier has made, in my opinion, the best studies on Paz's polemical—at first glance contradictory—political stances. He finds in Paz a "romantic liberalism" combination that makes it impossible to reduce the poet to being either a right-winger or left-winger. See, for instance, Chapter 5 of *Gunshots at the Fiesta*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2009.

new realm of culture” (68). On the one hand, culture is the immediate human struggle to survive in the world, while on the other hand culture is a way of absorbing ourselves within the circumstances by allowing our circumstantial perspectives to shape the present possibilities. Thus, we may see a tension between the spontaneous possibilities and the necessary prerequisite: the appropriation of the circumstance. Ortega also said that “the absorption of the circumstance is the concrete destiny of men” (75). Paz too spoke of this destiny. He suggests, in “Ética del artista,” that the work of the artist should reflect upon his circumstance: “It is unavoidable to think that we are part of a continent whose history has to be made by ourselves. That there is a manifest destiny in every period that commits man to carry out the will of life and of God. We must make ourselves worthy of our fate.”⁵¹ It is thus possible that while Ortega propped up Paz’s commitment to the historical context, this philosophy also supported Paz’s rejection of static ideologies that could hinder freedom in producing new ways of culture.

Now let’s look at a few more biographical details that may help round out Paz’s figure and lead us to another event in Paz’s early involvement with the Ortegian context. By the time he started the *Barandal* magazine project, he had entered the Faculty of Law of the Universidad Nacional, where he met Elena Garro, daughter of a Spanish immigrant. In 1933, he published his first volume of poems, *Luna Silvestre*. He had years of study, writing and engagement in current Mexican political debates. In 1937, a

⁵¹ “Es indispensable pensar que formamos parte de un continente cuya historia la hemos de hacer nosotros. Que hay un destino manifiesto a través de todos los tiempos, que obliga al hombre a realizar la voluntad de la vida y de Dios. Es necesario hacernos dignos de nuestro sino” (*Primeras Letras* 116).

few years after Paz's father's death,⁵² Octavio left the university at the age of twenty-two, in 1937, to help his mother by finding part-time jobs as a writer. He also published his second volume of poems, *Raíz del hombre*. Under the new socialist policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas, Paz was sent to Yucatán to open a school for the working population, most of whom had not yet had any previous formal education. Months later, he returned to Mexico City, married Elena and they left on a trip to Valencia, Spain. There, Paz was to be part of the Mexican delegation at the Second International Congress of Antifascist Writers. The event was promoted by the Spanish Republican government in spite of General Francisco Franco's uprising and with the Spanish Civil War already underway. In Spain, Paz met many important writers and artists from Europe and Latin America; the course events at the congress shaped much of Paz's political definitions. As Caistor asserts:

Paz was immediately confronted not only with the horrors of the civil war in Spain, but with writers who were more than willing to sacrifice principles to preserve their ideological 'purity.' His previous hope that revolution, the desire for freedom and poetry could go smoothly hand-in-hand was rapidly demolished. Experiences in Spain were to shape his political belief in a rational, critical liberalism that was to remain with him for the rest of his life (32).

⁵² In 1934 Paz's father, a distant figure for the poet, died in an accident (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 29).

I see Paz showing again his affinity with Ortega's thought during his stay at the congress, as he defended the need for a middle ground between the extremes of nationalism and detached creativity. As part of the events, he read "Noticia de la poesía mexicana contemporánea" in the Casa de la Cultura de Valencia. In discussing the existence of a national taste in Mexican poetry, Paz neglects the Mexican official discourse by asserting that Mexicanness ("lo Mexicano") is a changing essence in play with concrete circumstances:

It happens that this emphasis is not what the lovers of "Mexicanness" uselessly search out, because what is Mexican is precisely the opposite of nationalism, in other words, what is at odds with man's mutilation and deception. What is Mexican, like the Spanish, is a way of being man, in its entirety, and not just a way or trap to frustrate and betray man. What is Mexican is not an unchangeable essence as a static and plain sum of reactions, but a changing—as life itself—will and human comprehension in the face of concrete facts, specific ones, national ones.⁵³

⁵³ "Lo que ocurre es que ese acento no es el que inútilmente buscan los enamorados de lo "mexicano," porque lo mexicano es, justamente lo contrario del nacionalismo, es decir, lo irreconciliablemente enemigo de la mutilación y el engaño del hombre. Lo mexicano, como lo español, es una manera de ser hombre, cumplida y vastamente, y no un camino o una red para truncar y traicionar al hombre. Lo mexicano no es una inalterable esencia, una estática y pareja suma de reacciones, sino una cambiante, como la propia vida, voluntad y comprensión humanas frente a hechos objetiva e irremediamente concretos, específicos, nacionales." (*Primeras Letras* 134).

The tension implicit in defending spontaneity of culture and openness to the possibilities of being, but within particular circumstances, will resonate more than a decade later in his writing of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. This is one of the topics in the next chapter.

Now, let's continue with Paz's biographical survey that leads to another important statement in his early involvement with Ortega. He returned from his trip to Europe in 1938. The connections he made in Spain were soon going to be fruitful with the arrival of many Spanish intellectuals who came to Mexico, fleeing Franco's regime. Paz resumed his literary activity by helping reshape the group *Taller Poético*—together with Rafael Solana, Efraín Huerta and Adalberto Quintero—in a new magazine called *Taller* (1938-1941). *Taller* would later identify Paz's generation of poets, as it included the works of both the younger generation and also those of the arriving Spanish writers. As Santí suggests, unlike the previous *Contemporáneos* group, *Taller* aspired to build what it meant to be Mexican and what it meant to be Spanish in exile. As Santí asserts: "Now it is not about the freedom of creation in the face of partisan rhetoric but it is about the confluence of poetry and history, a conception of art as lived experience" (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 47). It is worth noting in these aspirations of the magazine the suggestion of an Ortegian historicizing of existence.

In Paz's manifesto for *Taller* magazine, titled "Razón de ser" (1939), Paz summarizes some arguments in *The Theme of Our Time*, focusing on Ortega's theory of generations. He also outlines the main arguments in Ortega's "El ocaso de las revoluciones." In his discussion, Paz attempts to justify and establish a common aim of the writers of his generation in relation to their historical moment: "The elements making up the spirit of the times are not other than men; not the isolated man, but a group

united by the fatality of blood and time, more than by the freedom of reason.”⁵⁴ Paz then tries to make sense, in Ortega terms, of the history of art after the event of a revolution (only suggesting, however, the specific case of the Mexican revolution). If revolutionaries, Paz suggests, are radicals-rationalist men willing to make reality fit into their utopian ideals, there follows a skeptical young generation of rebels-irrationalists. In what seems to be a description of the avant-garde artists of Europe, but also the *Contemporáneos* group in Mexico, Paz observes a “snobbish”—a term used by Ortega—spirit in their admiration of novelty, their formal obsessions, their irresponsible purification of art for art’s sake. How is it possible to make sense of Paz’s own generation in this historical context? Paz asserts: “The problem of any generation, as Ortega has well said, is to realize what is inherited and what is added... ‘a tradition is not inherited; it is conquered’.”⁵⁵ Now, asserts Paz, is the time to go in-depth into the renovation initiated by one’s predecessors:

by conquering something even more important: man [...] We have to win for ourselves, with our angst, a living earth and a living man. [...] That is *Taller’s* purpose, to be not the place where a generation is erased but the

⁵⁴ “Los agentes del espíritu de la época no son otros que los hombres; no el hombre aislado, sino el grupo unido por la fatalidad de la sangre y del tiempo, más que por la libertad de la razón.” (*Primeras Letras* 157).

⁵⁵ “El problema de toda generación, como bien decía Ortega, consiste en saber qué es lo que se hereda y qué es lo que se agrega [...] ‘la tradición no se hereda; se conquista’.” (*Primeras letras* 160).

place where the Mexican is being made and is rescued from injustice, from a lack of culture, from frivolity and death.⁵⁶

Paz is thus prefiguring, in “Razón de ser,” his Ortegian rejection of schemes in cultural production, whether ideological or reputedly given by a particular context. Paz is calling for “conquering” (interpreting) the context to set man free as continuous reinvention. We will see how this tendency gains strength in Paz’s writings.

As I have tried to show, Ortega’s influence in Mexico arrived in the context of Mexico’s own search for identity after the revolution. Intellectuals used Ortega’s arguments to structure their own concerns with Mexicanness. Moreover, in some instances—as is the case of Octavio Paz—Ortega’s premises served as a starting point for fighting static (nationalist) views on Mexican culture. We will see how this effort gets completed with another philosophy that arrived to Mexico at the end of the 1930s: the fundamental ontology of Martin Heidegger.

2.3. Spanish Immigration and Heidegger’s Influence in Mexico

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) brought a wave of immigrant intellectuals to Mexico. They expanded the horizons of German philosophy in Mexico that, as stated before, had already been promoted by Ortega after the launch of the *Revista de*

⁵⁶ “... conquistar algo más importante: el hombre [...] Tenemos que conquistar, con nuestra angustia, una tierra viva y un hombre vivo [...] Tal es el sentido de Taller, que no quiere ser el sitio en donde se liquida a una generación sino el lugar en que se construye el mexicano y se le rescata de la injusticia, la incultura, la frivolidad y la muerte.” (*Primeras letras* 161-162).

Occidente in 1923.⁵⁷ The most important and enduring influence for the Mexican intellectual milieu was the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, introduced by José Gaos. Heidegger's philosophical axis is a "fundamental ontology," a reflection on the essence of Being, that proved fruitful for structuring Mexican questioning on the essence of Mexicanness. I briefly survey here the arrival of this philosophy into Mexico and I introduce some of its basic premises. In the next chapters I will elaborate more on Heidegger's thought and discuss the relevance of these ideas for understanding Octavio Paz's thought.

By the end of the 1930s Spanish republicans loosed the war against Francisco Franco's *coup d'état* and Mexico saw the greatest arrival of intellectual exiles. Some of them—José Gaos, Joaquín Xirau, José Bergamín, Juan David García-Bacca, Luis Recaséns Siches, María Zambrano, Eugenio Imaz and others—promoted phenomenology and existential philosophy through their teachings in universities across Mexico. Almost all of them had been Ortega's students or followers. Gaos, the recent head of Universidad de Madrid, was particularly important, since he had been Ortega's most devoted disciple in Spain. Besides a reinforcement of the current Ortegan environment, Gaos introduced the thought of Heidegger, a parallel, but more rigorous and radical, form of existential philosophy.

Gaos's arrived in Mexico in 1938 as a founding invitee of La Casa de España—later renamed El Colegio de México—and soon began to produce academic projects.

⁵⁷ As part of the milieu, many Mexican intellectuals went to Germany to get philosophical education. Two cases: Adalberto García de Mendoza studied music and phenomenology in Germany and returned to teach at the National University from 1927 to 1933. Eduardo García Maynez studied with Nikolai Hartmann and Alfred Verdross, then later returned to teach the philosophy of law from 1934.

He launched several seminars and travelled to universities throughout the country teaching philosophy courses. The core of the future generation of Mexican thinkers all attended Gaos's seminars at one point or another.⁵⁸ In the long term, Gaos created a whole school of thought in Mexico and underpinned one of the most original and influential periods in Mexican philosophy. From 1950 on, Mexico was disseminating ideas throughout Latin America.⁵⁹

Gaos's introduction of Heidegger in Mexico became one of the central events in thinking Mexicanness. Heidegger's main work, *Being and Time*, created a wave of philosophical renewal in central Europe upon its publishing in 1927. The book fits within the genre that set out to represent and address the catastrophic climate after the Great War and the search for alternatives, in the context of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Hermann Hesse's *In Sight of Chaos*, to name a few. According to Steiner, *Being and Time* was an immediate success. He asserts that the book harmonized form or style to the meaning of concepts (a trait often more prevalent in poetry and art), while still presenting an innovative academic philosophical achievement (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* 77).

The interest of Mexican intellectuals—who were looking for alternatives to positivist and idealist philosophies—matched many premises in *Being and Time*. The

⁵⁸ For a brief introduction to Gaos's school and their specific publishing production at the start of the 1950s, the reader may also see: John Leddy Phelan's "Mexico y lo Mexicano." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. vol. 35, No. 3 (Aug. 1956), pp. 309-318.

⁵⁹ In 1956 Leopoldo Zea assessed that the publishing work of this school through the Mexican editorial Fondo de Cultura Económica not only complemented but "surpassed" the work done by Ortega's editorial house *Revista de Occidente*. See Zea's *Esquema para una historia de las ideas en Iberoamérica*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1956. p. 83.

arguments in the book were provocative, inasmuch as they disputed rational objectivity and the powers of analysis. As Dreyfus asserts, Heidegger's book calls into question one of the most pervasive premises of traditional philosophy (from Plato to the twentieth century): the idea that one could understand the universe in a detached way by making a theory of everything, even of human beings, trying to find context-free elements and the laws relating them; also, Heidegger calls into question that human beings relate to their world primarily in a theoretical way (Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* 1-2). The originality of Heidegger's tenets, his cryptic language and his personal political vicissitudes continue nurturing philosophical debate till today.⁶⁰

In tune with Mexican concerns on the problem of identity, the arguments in Heidegger's philosophy also featured an elaborated approach to thinking Being. Heidegger asserted that Western thought had forgotten the question concerning Being by making it a universal concept (and therefore trivializing it)—while in reality, it is the most obscure notion there is. However, any science, any philosophy is blind if it does not clarify first the meaning of Being (*Being and Time* 9). The question concerning

⁶⁰ Heidegger's polemic personal history in politics has many times polarized the philosophical arena in discussing his ideas. It would be impossible to properly address here the endless discussion. I only offer a brief and partial overview. Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 (the year Hitler was sworn Chancellor of Germany) after being appointed Rector of the University of Freiburg. Some of his actions as rector pleased the Nazis but some others annoyed them. Fraught with difficulties, he resigned from his rectorate one year later but he did not cancel his membership in the Party until the end of the war. The relation between his (formal) affiliation with the Nazis and his philosophy is a matter of huge controversy among scholars. Heidegger's critics blame him of ambiguous statements intended to praise Nazi ideals. See for instance, Victor Farias's libellous *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1987), and Theodor Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1973). Others argue that Heidegger's political errors do not diminish the importance of his philosophy, which is in most cases incompatible with Nazism. See for instance, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: the Fiction of the Political* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), or George Steiner's "Heidegger: in 1991" (*Martin Heidegger*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1991).

Being—asserted Heidegger—should start by researching the existential structure of the self, the Dasein. *Dasein* means “existence” in German, however Heidegger uses Da-sein exclusively to name the existence of the human being as a being open to the world, a being-in-the-world.⁶¹ According to Heidegger, this Dasein has a way of being that is always interpretation: an ongoing pre-intellectual, pre-conceptual, comprehension of its being in the context of the world that surrounds it (13-14). As Dreyfus suggests, Heidegger’s pre-intellectual approach is basically a phenomenology of “mindless” everyday coping skills as the basis of all intelligibility (*Being-in-the-World* 3). Dasein is a being-in-the-world, embedded in the pattern of everyday practices, the average shared (socialized) knowledge. Dasein’s general background on-going coping with the world is, at the same time, its understanding of being (156-157). However, for Heidegger, all Being is be-ing (continuous becoming in time).⁶² Therefore—and suitable for non-official concerns on Mexicanness at the time—being is not a defined essence but continuous interpretation.

Additionally, Heidegger’s philosophy linked the understanding of Being to time and historicity. As Steiner points out, since Plato metaphysics had considered Being timeless and, therefore, the search for Being had been the search for which is

⁶¹ Etymologically *Dasein* means being-there. There is much discussion as to whether write *Dasein* or *Da-sein*. Heidegger used Da-sein to emphasize that human being is a being-there, in the world. But he also used Da-sein to emphasize a standing-out movement of existence (ek-sistence) because human being is, for Heidegger, essentially transcendence of the self and, therefore, openness to the irruption of new possibilities of being. As the term has become a label to refer to the Heideggerian concept of existence, I will use “Dasein,” as most translators do (e.g. Hubert Dreyfus).

⁶² Roughly, we could say that since *Being and Time* (1927) the more Heidegger searched for being the more he found it located only in time. In Heidegger’s late work “Time and Being” (1962) Heidegger proposed to escape the language of metaphysics by avoiding the question for “being” (a heavily loaded metaphysics term) altogether and shift the emphasis to time.

permanent (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* 78). For Heidegger, time should be the horizon of all comprehension of Being, as the existential and ontological constitution of Dasein is grounded in temporality, in other words its historicity as socialized know-how (*Being and Time* 15-17). Also, through its continuous coping with the world, Dasein is the one that continuously cares ahead-of-itself, making sense of the world and of itself. There is a temporal structure of Dasein as it is continuously opening its future, but also, its present and its past, as a matter of making sense in order to act.

The temporal dimension of Dasein also opens up through one's awareness of death. "Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility" (*Being and Time* 243). Dasein is a being-toward-death. Dasein knows it is mortal and lives anticipating its own death. Then, time is an existential matter. As Dreyfus explains, for Heidegger: "All living things perish, but only Dasein is capable of demise" (*Being-in-the-World* 309). That is, only Dasein dies in a social context, an inherited one. In that way, Dasein's anticipation of its death is a relation to the future but also to the (socialized) past. In Stiegler's reading on this issue, he suggests that there is in Dasein an existential openness to the future because there is an indeterminacy of its death—when is my death going to arrive—whilst at the same time my death is socialized in relation to my inherited, contextual past.⁶³

It is easy to see why Heidegger's concern about Being and existence suited the endeavours in thinking the being of Mexico and the Mexican. Heidegger's phenomenological approach matched the rejection of the positivist legacy in Mexico.

⁶³ See the interview with Bernard Stiegler in the film *The Ister*. Dir. David Barison and Daniel Ross. Icarus Films, 2004.

Furthermore, Ortega had already prepared the minds of Mexican intellectuals for understanding some of Heidegger's tenets. Ortega's circumstantial philosophy (summarized in his "I am myself and my circumstance") did not differ all that much from Heidegger's hermeneutic premise: Being is a "being-in-the-world." Likewise, Ortega's historicizing of the circumstance was not much at variance to Heidegger's conception of Being grounded in temporality. However, I consider that Ortega's emphasis lies less on the finite temporal existence (as in Heidegger's view), but rather on history as circumstance: "We must search for our own circumstance, as it is, precisely in that which has limits, which is peculiar, the right place in the immense perspective of the world [...] Summarizing, to reabsorb circumstance is the concrete destiny of man."⁶⁴ Moreover, Ortega's vitalism promoted the spontaneity of human existence, as Heidegger did too, and that was a familiar trait to many Mexicans not willing to commit the future.⁶⁵ However, beyond the reaches of Ortega's vitalism, we have seen that Heidegger's first concerns were focused on trying to elaborate a new way of thinking Being, a "fundamental ontology." Ortega's concern was for "life," not "Being." In any case, the theoretical mix Ortega-Heidegger, with the arrival of José Gaos in Mexico, established a new, richer stage in the Mexican quest for identity, in opposition to static-nationalist definitions.

⁶⁴ "Hemos de buscar nuestra circunstancia, tal y como ella es, precisamente en lo que tiene de limitación, de peculiaridad, el lugar acertado en la inmensa perspectiva del mundo [...] En suma... la reabsorción de la circunstancia es el destino concreto del hombre." (*Meditaciones* 75).

⁶⁵ The stereotype of the uncommitted-with-the-future Mexican was first widely discussed by Jorge Portilla in his *Fenomenología del relajo* (1966). According to Portilla, this Mexican negates the seriousness of established values by using sarcastic humour and by executing "a deeply irrational suppression of any notion of a regulated future." See *Fenomenología del Relajo*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. Mexico City, 1984. pp. 34-39.

In the next chapter we will see that this trend appears in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* where, apart from Ortega's presence, some of the arguments in the book can be understood in relation to Heidegger's philosophy of Being. And later we will see that Heidegger's thoughts on poetry give some clues to understand other works from Octavio Paz, including several poems and essays on poetics as *The Bow and the Lyre* (*El arco y la lira*, 1956).

Let's now have a closer look at some events in the Heideggerian context in Mexico and the way Paz's early statements were part of it. Several events and publications shaped a Heideggerian environment from the early 1940s. As Cantú observes, Gaos's pioneering studies on *Being and Time* began in the classrooms of Mexico's National University as early as 1942 (242). A long process would lead Gaos, in 1951, to publish in Spanish the first translation ever of Heidegger's book.⁶⁶ Other important translations of Heidegger's works circulated in the Spanish language and were part of the environment before 1950. Heidegger's *What Is Metaphysics* (1929) had been translated and published in Spain twenty years earlier in 1931 by Xavier Zubiri and republished in Mexico in 1941. *On the Essence of Ground* (1929) was translated and published by A. Goller de Walther in Spanish in Argentina in 1941, and translated and published again in Mexico by Juan García Bacca in 1944. García Bacca also translated in Mexico *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* (1936) in 1944. *Letter on Humanism* (1946) was translated in Argentina by A. Wagner de la Reyna in 1948. In connexion

⁶⁶ So said by Ramón Xirau's in his *Introducción a la Historia de la Filosofía*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998. p. 456. Edmundo O'Gorman cites a version of Gaos's translation already in 1947. See *Crisis y porvenir de la ciencia histórica*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006. p. 182. Gaos himself claims he had a translation ready in 1947—most probably a manuscript—. See his 1951 foreword to his translation of *El ser y el tiempo* (11).

with these works, García Bacca translated in Mexico (from Greek) the main pre-Socratic works in *Los Presocráticos* (1943). The interest in the pre-Socratic thinkers increased after Heidegger followed Nietzsche's discoveries surrounding Greek philology. Heidegger searched for a language—different from that of metaphysics—for grounding a phenomenology of Being in the works of Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus, among others (Gadamer, *Heidegger Ways* 189). García Bacca followed the trend and, in his translation made notes and references to Heidegger's understanding of major concepts.

Paz was aware of these events. The same year of García Bacca's publication of *Los presocráticos*, Paz wrote a review of the book, hinting towards future concerns in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and *The Bow and the Lyre* about the modern world's dissociation of thought and poetry. After discussing some excerpts from García Bacca's book, Paz concludes:

Philosophy begins as a detachment from poetry. And only after its very advanced development is able to express itself on its own terms and with total independence. This divorce is not beneficial for them: poetry loses some of its prophetic attributes; philosophy, its ability to be contagious, its spiritual humidity, its eroticism. From this discord, the cancer of modern culture, are born abstract uproar and the compensatory wave of irrationalism that later seize our souls.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "La filosofía se inicia como un desprendimiento de la poesía. Y sólo hasta muy avanzado su desarrollo logra expresarse en sus propios términos y con total independencia. Este divorcio no las beneficia: la poesía pierde algunos de sus atributos proféticos; la filosofía, su capacidad de contagio, su humedad

This shows that Paz was aware of and involved in the current discussions at the time.

Paz's critique of modern detachment from poetry will take a Heideggerian turn and will be a major argument in *The Bow and the Lyre*. In the next chapters we will see more of Paz's answer to this context.

The influence of Ortega and Heideggerian thought promoted by Gaos soon started to produce concrete projects concerning identity. In 1940, Gaos started a workgroup at El Colegio de México called *Seminario sobre el Pensamiento Hispano-Americano*, an effort to promote first-level philosophical research in Latin American thought. The aims of the seminar were high: to elaborate a history of ideas in Latin America and to find what was original to the region. Zea has explained that one premise of the seminar was that, in exposing the awkward ways of local adoption of European thought and culture, identity could then emerge ("Presencia cultural" 21). It was an Ortega effort that aimed to historicize, to understand within the historical circumstance, Mexican and Latin American thought. It was also a Heideggerian effort to become "authentic" by avoiding disregard for the past (colonial, pre-revolution, etc.) and instead, to appropriate history in order to be able to find the current being of the culture. We will see in the next chapter that the concept of "authenticity" is fundamental to understand Heidegger and Paz.

Gaos's school produced many intellectuals in Mexico. The first was Leopoldo Zea himself, as he was Gaos's close student in El Colegio de México. Zea became a

espiritual, su erotismo. De esa discordia, cáncer de la cultura moderna, nacen el furor abstracto y la compensadora ola de irracionalismo que luego se apodera de las almas" (*Primeras letras* 248).

philosophy leader throughout Latin America in the years to come. He started by publishing “En torno a una filosofía americana” in 1941. There, he exposed the basis of his future philosophy: the essence of man is freedom “to be,” because his life is not yet complete. From Ortega, Zea takes that “to be free means to lack a constituent identity, not being tied to a particular being.”⁶⁸ Heidegger had a similar approach. Thus, there are no eternal philosophies that aspire to be independent of time and place, but circumstantial philosophy, adequate to the particular context. With this idea in mind, Zea published *El positivismo en México* in 1943. As the title suggests, it is not a book on positivism, but a study of the appropriation—“interpretations,” Zea says—of positivism in the context of Mexican circumstance. It was the first rigorous attempt in Mexico to historicize a philosophical trend, one of great political importance in the recent history of the post-revolution country. After *El Positivismo en México*, Zea was concerned with the identity of Latin American culture and through his publishing⁶⁹ and initiatives became one of the intellectual leaders of a movement in Latin American philosophy and studies.⁷⁰

Another outcome of Gaos’s seminars was Edmundo O’Gorman’s philosophy of history. If Zea brought a historicist approach to the history of ideas in Mexico and the Americas, O’Gorman broke the positivist tradition in Mexican historiography. O’Gorman

⁶⁸ “Ser libre quiere decir carecer de identidad constitutiva, no estar adscrito a un ser determinado” See Ortega’s *Historia como sistema. Obras Completas VI*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 2006. p. 34.

⁶⁹ About Latin America Zea published: *América como conciencia* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Americanos, 1953), *América Latina y el mundo* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1960), *La filosofía americana como filosofía sin más* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 1969).

⁷⁰ About Zea’s efforts in Latin American studies, see José Luis Gómez-Martínez’s *Pensamiento de la Liberación: Proyección de Ortega en Iberoamérica*. Madrid: EGE Ediciones, 1995. Specially Chapter 4, “La forja de un programa iberoamericanista.”

was Gaos's close student and friend,⁷¹ and from Gaos he acquired the Ortegian and, above all, Heideggerian perspectives towards the making of history. At the end of the 1930s, O'Gorman began to unpack the question: What is the being of the Americas? O'Gorman took Heidegger's philosophy as grounding to assert that the past does not exist on its own, but as an element in play with the present and in relation to the meaning of Being. As Matute observes, for O'Gorman, knowledge of the past comes hand in hand with a (Heideggerian) ontology of Being, as it implies knowing ourselves in an authentic way (Matute 66).

O'Gorman produced a large body of work that prefigures the concerns over the upcoming philosophy of "lo mexicano" with Grupo Hieperión. He started organizing his thought in *Fundamentos de la historia de América* (1942). Later, in *Crisis y porvenir de la ciencia histórica* (1947) he aimed to historicize the historiography of the Americas—what Zea had made of positivism in Mexico—and then to advance the need for a new existential "historiology." This "true" historical science should preserve a reflection on the *logos* of history, its meaning; one that reveals our own identity by reminding us that we are ourselves history (203-204). As Matute observes, O'Gorman took Heidegger's fundamental ontology for grounding his search for Being in historicity (Matute 66). It is easy to see the connections. Following Heidegger, O'Gorman asserts that authentic existence, by appropriating its historicity, presupposes the ability to engender history (*Crisis y porvenir* 212). By becoming aware of our own historical situation, we are free to become our own possibilities of being: we are a project in the process *of being*. At the

⁷¹ For more on the relation between O'Gorman and Gaos (who also published in O'Gorman's editorial house *Alcancía* in 1939) see Antonio Saborit's "El profesor O'Gorman y la metáfora del martillo." *Historiadores de México en el siglo XX*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995. pp. 145-147.

same time, “historiology” aims to show the structure of that being from which we make sense of the past by appropriating it (269). Later, O’Gorman became more widely recognized for his *La idea del descubrimiento de América: Historia de esa interpretación y crítica de sus fundamentos* (1951) in which he again applies a Heideggerian-existential approach to history and hermeneutics. In the next chapter we will see more of how Heidegger’s philosophy grounded this perspective in identity and history, in the context of the upcoming philosophy of “lo mexicano.”

This evolving reflection on Mexicanness and Latin Americanism during the 1940s and early 1950s was not exclusive to philosophy but part of the general cultural activity. A few examples will help to outline the environment. In literature, the solidified model of the “revolutionary novel”—the paradigm being Azuela’s *Los de abajo* (1915)—that utilized a naturalist-like technique for showing the uses and misdeeds of the revolution, began to be replaced by a new narrative. In José Revueltas’s *El luto humano* (1943), the events occurring inside the consciousness of the characters replace faithful description of historical deeds. An admirer of Dostoyevsky, Revueltas creates deeply reflective characters, from whom we learn of a desolate landscape where the Revolutionary-State project has fatally failed in a *campesino* (peasant) community. A symbolical-mythical depth in the characters establishes a link between what the Mexican is in the present to what she/he was in the Aztec-mythical past. I agree with Sheldon’s suggestion that this re-appropriation of the Mexican mythical past to expose the *mestizo* dilemma prefigures Paz’s use of Aztec myths in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* a few years later (Sheldon 167).

Agustín Yáñez, educated in philosophy,⁷² was a novelist, cultural policy-maker and politician. He continues Revueltas's innovation but with a twist. In *Al filo del agua* (1947), he makes use of the interior monologues but without emphasis on human protagonists. The main character of the novel is an almost-lost village (or the voices in the village) in rural Jalisco, on the brink of the Mexican Revolution (as the title suggests, "at the edge of the storm"). Yáñez's statement on Mexican history is a full rejection of objectivity as history is made of multiple (socialized) points of view in the minds of the villagers, many of whom are anonymous characters. In tune with this idea, Yáñez utilizes a polished poetic language in prose that renders the "facts" all the more open to interpretation. Moreover, the depiction of the oppressive environment of the Catholic-neo-feudalistic town justifies the upcoming revolution and the project of a possible national subject.⁷³

Also, the surrealist movement took roots in Mexico at the end of the 1930s. The post-revolution rejection of positivist tradition and the following anti-rationalistic premises arriving with Ortega's thought (vitalism over rationalism, spontaneity of culture, etc.), well suited the surrealists' mentality. André Breton declared in 1924 the need to liberate literature and art from the "reign of logic" and "absolute rationalism" and ready-

⁷² José Gaos was one of the examiners in Yáñez's graduate defense.

⁷³ As Anderson asserts, there is a political agenda in Yáñez's novels. Yáñez embraces the role of a subject who is the active history-maker through his novels. He utilizes the novel to justify that the project of a revolutionary national subject was at hand with the philosophy of the Mexican as a project. However, Yáñez depicts the national subject the way the Partido Revolucionario (the official party) imagined it. Yáñez was, in fact, a member of the party and, besides becoming Governor of Jalisco, was at different times in charge of various national cultural institutions. About this, see Mark Anderson's "Agustín Yáñez's Total Mexico and the Embodiment of the National Subject." *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, Volume LXXXIV, Number 1, 2007.

made models of “aesthetic and moral preoccupations.”⁷⁴ Breton spent part of 1938 in Mexico and stirred a surrealist interest among several artists, such as the painter Frida Kahlo and the photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo. The improvised way of existence of Mexicans and the post-revolutionary environment led Breton to say that Mexico was “the ultimate surrealist place” (Schwarzbeck 90). Organized by Breton and others, an International Surrealistic Exposition was held in the Mexican Art Gallery in Mexico City in 1940. Years later Paz became close to Breton. Surrealism, much like existential thought, plays an important role in Paz’s poetics.

Through this chapter I have tried to outline the milieu that made possible the presence in Mexico of existential philosophy, first from Ortega and then from Heidegger, at the time Octavio Paz was rising as a young intellectual. As we have seen, Mexico commenced the twentieth century by living a political revolution that paralleled a cultural one. While civil warfare ended the liberal regime of Porfirio Díaz and opened up new political possibilities, the *ateneístas* intellectuals were fighting for alternatives to the worn views of positivist ideology. This search included looking for anti-rationalistic redefinitions of Mexican identity. We saw that first Ortega’s vitalism and later Heidegger’s fundamental ontology well suited this intellectual environment of Mexico after the revolution. Ortega’s statement “I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it then I do not save myself” fostered in Mexico local interpretations of Mexicanness. Then, the arrival of Gaos and other Spanish exiles reinforced interest in

⁷⁴ See: “Le Manifeste du Surréalisme” (1924) in André Breton’s *Manifestes du Surréalisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 1985.

Ortega historicist approach but also brought the introduction of Heidegger's existential hermeneutics. Heidegger promoted that the search for Being was continuous self-interpretation, but also that the constitution of Being is grounded in its historicity (its being time). These existential premises justified and reinforced the arguments of Mexican intellectuals in the quest for Mexicanness, and provided alternatives to nationalistic or static definitions. We saw that some of Paz's early writings already show his involvement with this context and prefigure later statements in works such as *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

In the next chapter we will see more of Paz's specific involvement with this environment, and the relevance of looking at this relation for understanding important premises in Paz's thought about Mexicanness in a number of essays and poems. Also, we will see in Chapter 6 that the intellectual tensions outlined here in the context of Mexican revolution and post-revolution were still present in current Mexican politics at the time of the revolution's centennial (and independence bi-centennial) celebrations during 2010. And, concurrently, a new existential call for rejecting fixed views of Mexicanness has recently emerged.

CHAPTER 3. ORTEGA AND HEIDEGGER IN PAZ'S VIEW ON MEXICANNESS

Man is the only being who is aware of his
loneliness, and the only one who seeks out another.
His nature—if “nature” can be used in reference to
man, the being who has invented himself by saying
“No” to nature—consists in his longing to realize
himself in another.

O.P., *The Labyrinth of Solitude*⁷⁵

In the previous chapter I briefly surveyed the context of the revolution and post-revolution milieu in Mexico where existential premises mingled with the quest for Mexicanness. We saw that an increasing interest in the works of José Ortega y Gasset, as well as the introduction of Martin Heidegger's philosophy, came to Mexico primarily through the influence of José Gaos's school. We saw that the main arguments from these authors were well-suited to the post-revolutionary context in Mexico, a time in which many were increasingly becoming concerned with defining Mexican identity. In fact, this existential trend helped to oppose monolithic cultural definitions coming out of the state's official discourse. In this chapter I will elaborate more of Octavio Paz's

⁷⁵ “El hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y el único que es búsqueda de otro. Su naturaleza—si se puede hablar de naturaleza al referirse al hombre, el ser que, precisamente, se ha inventado a sí mismo al decirle “no” a la naturaleza—consiste en un aspirar a realizarse en otro” (*El laberinto* 341).

specific relation to this context and how the arriving ideas allowed for and gave ground to the elaboration of a discourse that questioned both the stereotypes and the static interpretations of the revolution's significance, as well as what "Mexicanness" might now mean.

We will see that Ortega's historicist ideas mingled with Heidegger's "authenticity" concept informed many discussions about Mexico during the 1940s and early 1950s. Octavio Paz was at that time an emerging literary figure and, as we already started seeing in the previous chapter, since the late 1930s he had begun to play a role as an intellectual in contemporary discussions. Paz's early polemical thought on Mexicanness becomes coherent in light of Ortega's and Heidegger's work. In this chapter, we will see that some of Paz's cardinal concerns are a historical understanding of the present and the pursuit of authenticity in the individual, in Mexicanness, and in the development of culture. Through an examination of Paz's work—from early writings in the 1940s, to *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in 1950, to his poetry of the 1950s and early 1960s, to his revisiting of *The Labyrinth* at the end of the 1960s—we shall see that Paz calls for an "authentic" Mexicanness. And "authentic" suggests here: being open, opposed to pre-definitions, spontaneous but yet appropriated of one's own historicity.

This chapter is organized in three sections orbiting around Paz's relation with the topic of Mexicanness. In the first section I elaborate more of Paz's involvement with the existential environment and his early statements about Mexico's identity. In the second section I read Paz's tenets in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in relation to Ortega and Heidegger. I attempt to show the importance of the notion of authenticity for

understanding the book. In the third section I extend this reading to some of Paz's major poems that deal with the topic of Mexicanness.

3.1. Octavio Paz at the Dawn of Authenticity in Discussing "Mexicanness"

We saw in the previous chapter that Ortega's influence in Mexico (and the Germanic-philosophy influence of his *Revista de Occidente*) prepared the climate for the arrival of Heidegger's philosophy under the teachings of José Gaos. It was the time of Paz's early formation as an intellectual throughout the 1940s. However, Paz provided few and limited details about his relationship to Ortega's work and even less about his relationship to Heidegger's ideas. Furthermore, Paz's critics have said very little on the subject. We will see that further elaboration in outlining Paz's context at the time of his early activity as an intellectual will help us to understand his appropriation of Ortegian tenets and the Heideggerian "authenticity" concept of his own early works.

In one of the few times that Paz talked about his relation to Ortega's work, he declared himself a devoted reader of Ortega. In "El cómo y el para qué: José Ortega y Gasset" (1980), he wrote:

Like many other Hispanic-Americans of my age, I often read his [Ortega's] books passionately during my adolescence and first youth. These readings marked me and formed me. He guided my first steps and I owe

him some of my first intellectual joys. To read him in those days was almost a physical pleasure, like swimming or walking through the woods.⁷⁶

However, the books he refers to or how these readings “formed” Paz remain guesswork at present. Towards his later years, Paz wrote in *Itinerary* (1991): “I was a fervent reader of Ortega y Gasset”;⁷⁷ again without giving further details. As well, in *The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry* (*La otra voz: Poesía y fin de siglo*, 1990), Paz wrote about his relationship to *Revista de Occidente*: “The intellectual stimulus of that journal, of its books and of the works of Ortega y Gasset, was deep and enormous for my generation.”⁷⁸ But Paz does not specifically tell us which topics from the magazine influenced him, nor how they were an “enormous” influence for his generation. Enrico-Mario Santí, in his well-known introductory analysis of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, discerns too Paz’s indebtedness to Ortega by noting that “the influence of German culture, as promoted by Ortega y Gasset through his *Revista de Occidente*, is so diffused throughout [*The Labyrinth*] that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “Como tantos otros hispanoamericanos de mi edad, frecuenté sus libros [de Ortega] con pasión durante mi adolescencia y mi primera juventud. Esas lecturas me marcaron y me formaron. Él guió mis primeros pasos y al le debo algunas de mis primeras alegrías intelectuales. Leerlo en aquellos días era casi un placer físico, como nadar o caminar por un bosque.” See “El cómo y el para qué: José Ortega y Gasset.” *Fundación y disidencia. Obras Completas 3*. Mexico City: Círculo de Lectores-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 299.

⁷⁷ “Fui un lector ferviente de Ortega y Gasset” (*Itinerario* 82).

⁷⁸ “El estímulo intelectual de esa revista, de sus libros y de la obra misma de Ortega y Gasset fue enorme y profunda para mi generación.” See *La otra voz: poesía y fin de siglo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990. p. 110.

⁷⁹ “La influencia de la cultura alemana, tal como la promovió Ortega y Gasset en su *Revista de Occidente* está tan diseminada en el libro que resulta difícil deslindar una línea de la otra” (*El acto de las palabras*

Paz's early intellectual ties to the Ortegian environment also appear in his comment on Leopoldo Zea's *El positivismo en México* in 1943. In the previous chapter, we saw that Zea's work was one of the first outcomes of Gaos's efforts to initiate a new school of thought in Mexico. Immediately following the publication of Zea's work, Paz published a review: "Leopoldo Zea: '*El positivismo en México*'." Paz asserts that Zea's topic in the book is of "exceptional importance for the history of ideas in Hispanic America." Then, he shows that Zea follows Ortega's "vitalismo histórico" to track positivism in light of Mexican reality (238) and that Zea's effort and style make the book "irreplaceable." However, Paz engages Zea in a discussion about the correct implementation of a historical method. Throughout his arguments, Paz's appeal for Marxist critical thinking also begins to show by making a Marxist critique of current Ortegianism.⁸⁰ While Paz declares his preference for Ortegian historical relativism, he suggests that Zea should state with precision "what is history, how it is transformed and how it changes human society." Without this, "there is not a 'historic vitalism' but only an old form of skepticism" (Paz, *Primeras letras* 240). Further, Paz suggests, Zea fails to recognize the Marxist origin of the concept of "ideology" that Zea mistakenly uses to explain Mexican positivist ties to the bourgeoisie. Also, in a topic that will later appear in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Paz asserts that Zea makes the common mistake of

179, footnote). Most likely, Santí calls "German culture" to the German philosophy which was a major component of magazine's content.

⁸⁰ Paz relation to Marx's work is out of the scope of my work. However, I leave here a hint on how Paz becomes acquainted with the works of Karl Marx. Santí has called attention to the relevance in this period of Paz's editorial work in the magazine *El Hijo Pródigo* (1943-1946). The magazine published quasi-censored authors such as Benjamin Péret, Victor Serge and Jean Malaquais, who, as exiles in Mexico, taught Paz a critical version of Marxism in the vein of Leon Trotsky and André Breton (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 60-61).

extrapolating European history by misinterpreting the role of Mexican industrial bourgeoisie in the years prior to the Mexican revolution. For Paz, this bourgeois group was small and powerless; he also argues that Porfirio Díaz's *científicos* were protecting the feudalistic landlords, more than the bourgeoisie. Paz suggests that the suppression of Marx in Zea's text and the "pointless" proposal of finding "what is Mexican" in Zea's recount of positivism are part of the national milieu of "sacred union"—and Paz is talking here of a myth of national unity—(240-241). To understand Paz's point we should recall that these discussions were taking place during the time of Manuel Ávila Camacho's presidency (1940-1946), a period in which many of the reforms of Lázaro Cárdenas were being dismantled. Camacho promoted a "Policy of National Unity" that controlled social movements and, as Serrano asserts, benefited the right-wing *sinarquista* movement (139). I believe that this official trend explains Paz's rejection of Zea's search for those specifically Mexican characteristics of positivism in Mexico. In this way, in his review of Zea's book, Paz shows his dialogue with Ortega and, more importantly, his rejection of the validity of searching for an essence of Mexicanness. However, as we have seen, Paz's disbelief on a Mexican essence is part of the same Ortegian and early Heideggerian environment that frames Zea's work. Therefore, Paz's argument only differs from Zea's as a matter of emphasis. We will see that this gesture prefigures much of Paz's discourse on Mexican identity issues in works such as *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

Apart from Paz's evident involvement in the Ortegian environment, his direct references to Martin Heidegger are less explicit. Paz rarely mentioned the German philosopher and he never explicitly declared a close affiliation, as he lightly did in the

case of Ortega.⁸¹ Furthermore, Paz was never explicit about which works of Heidegger's he read.

From an interview with Santí in 1985, after mentioning again Ortega's heavy influence on his generation, Paz declared:

[...] phenomenology was the philosophy we studied. We had other readings. We read lots of Nietzsche as well as Marx and the Marxists [...] When Gaos arrived we had some preparation, light as it may have been. We got to know Husserl, Scheller, Marx and we had read Heidegger's texts that had been published in Spain and France.⁸²

Which of Heidegger's works might Paz have read in these early years? Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?" (1929) had circulated widely in a Spanish translation (from Xavier Zubiri) since 1931.⁸³ A clue that Paz was acquainted with this work shows in his *Primeras Letras* (early works from 1931 to 1943).⁸⁴ As Santí suggests, some of the

⁸¹ "*El arco y la lira* is the only work where Paz often refers to Heidegger.

⁸² "[...] la fenomenología era la filosofía que nosotros estudiábamos. Teníamos otras lecturas aparte. Leíamos muchísimo a Nietzsche y bastante bien a Marx y los marxistas [...] Cuando Gaos llega ya nosotros teníamos una preparación, por más ligera que fuese. Conocíamos a Husserl, Scheler, Marx y habíamos leído los textos de Heidegger que se habían publicado en España y Francia" (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 69).

⁸³ As Helena Cortés y Arturo Leyte (translators and editors of *Qué es metafísica?* in Alianza's version) assert, there was a wide reception of Zubiri's translation, followed by another translation for *Sur* magazine, in Argentina, in 1932. See "Nota de los Editores," p. 9 in *¿Qué es metafísica?* Madrid: Alianza, 2003.

⁸⁴ Years later, in the first edition of *The Bow and the Lyre* (*El arco y la lira*, 1956) Paz cites *What Is Metaphysics*, p. 144.

works in these early writings bear the “core and origin of Octavio Paz’s poetic thought.”⁸⁵ In the newspaper article “Don Nadie y Ninguno” (1943), Paz alludes—without direct reference—to some of the topics in “What Is Metaphysics?” By closely following Heidegger, Paz deliberates on the question “Can the nothing be something?” Paz notes, as Heidegger does, the logical absurdity of the question inasmuch as “what is” already relies on the verb “to be” and implies that (nothing) *is* something. The question about “the nothing” reveals that Being has an ambivalent relation to non-being. From there, Paz creates the fictional characters “Don Nadie” (literally: Mr. Nobody) and “Ninguno” (No-one) who will later appear briefly in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. This “Don Nadie” takes us again to Heidegger, as its meaning is quite similar to *Being and Time*’s “the one,” the average Dasein who is *nothing* in itself. “Ninguno” is, in Paz’s article, the publicly-neglected existence of some individuals, a negation of their existence as a way of eroding their possibilities. The tone at least has some similarities to Heidegger’s argument: that the philosophical tradition has neglected the thinking of Being by pretending it is something obvious that does not deserve attention. A Heideggerian framework is likely the source of Paz’s reflections, as he concludes his article with a reference to the philosopher: “The philosopher Martin Heidegger asserts that to exist means ‘to be suspended within nothingness.’ At least for Mexico, the definition is exact. Because to exist, here, means stopping Mr. Nobody from sinking us down forever in

⁸⁵ “Esas notas contienen el meollo y origen del pensamiento poético de Octavio Paz” (*El acto de las palabras* 30).

nothingness.”⁸⁶ Perhaps Paz’s irony relies on the fact that in Heideggerian terms, we all are the average “the one” (or no-one). I believe this is Paz’s first direct reference to Heidegger.

Paz may also have known of Heidegger’s works through Gaos who was, as we have seen, *Being and Time*’s first translator. We know that when Gaos arrived in Mexico in 1938, his contact with Octavio Paz was almost immediate. Lida asserts that Gaos, in what might have been one of his first activities in Mexico, invited Paz to be part of a workshop intended to address the psychological and metaphysical origins of poetic creation (*La Casa de España en Mexico* 79). Stanton found too that Paz was Gaos’s student in a course on philosophy and aesthetics (“Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*” 304). We also know that in 1942, Gaos began to teach *Being and Time* “sentence by sentence, and even word by word” at the National University (Cantú 242). We shall soon see the impact this had on both Paz’s thought and the intellectual environment in Mexico.

I believe that Heidegger’s influence in Mexico introduced the concern for “authenticity” in Octavio Paz’s work, as well as in the intellectual climate of Mexico during the 1940s and 1950s. In order to sketch, even roughly, what “authenticity” means, we should recall from the previous chapter that Heidegger asserted in *Being and Time* that Dasein’s basic mode of being is being-in-the-world, in an everyday way. As a result of the shared, socialized knowledge for coping with the world, Dasein is primarily pre-reflective in the understanding of its world. Dasein’s fall (or absorption) into

⁸⁶ “El filósofo Martin Heidegger asegura que existir significa ‘estar sosteniéndose dentro de la nada.’ Para México, por lo menos, la definición es exacta. Pues existir, aquí, significa impedir que Don Nadie nos sumerja para siempre en la nada” (*Primeras letras* 311).

the world of socialized practices is natural to Dasein. However, there are authentic and inauthentic ways to be absorbed.

As a being-in-the-world, Dasein is precisely involved. This *entanglement* with the world has no negative connotation: “This term, which does not express any negative value judgment, means that Da-sein is initially and for the most part together with the ‘world’ that it takes care of [...] As an authentic potentiality for being a self, Da-sein has initially always already fallen away from itself and fallen prey to the ‘world’” (*Being and Time* 164). To have fallen into the world is Dasein’s normal way of being.

However, for Dasein, to be nothing more than a being-in-the-world implies the anxiety of not having a definition of itself. Dasein becomes inauthentic by falling into the temptation to use norms to cover-up its fundamental unsettledness (or its basic non-being). As Dreyfus explains: “In Heidegger’s account, sinning becomes choosing inauthenticity, *i.e.*, disowning the self. After growing up in the social cover-up, Dasein can succumb to the temptation actively to embrace the distracting social practices of the public in order to flee anxiety” (Dreyfus 315). This alienated way of being is a sort of spiral trap into which Dasein gradually falls. Heidegger says that the fall “has its own kind of movement with the consequence that Dasein gets *entangled* in itself” (*Being and Time* 166). Then he asserts: “We call this kind of ‘movement’ of Da-sein into its own being the *plunge*. Da-sein plunges out of itself, into the groundlessness and nothingness of inauthentic everydayness” (167).

As an alternative to alienation, Dasein could instead be authentically absorbed into the world. This may be the result of angst, as Dasein becomes anxious about

being-in-the world itself. There is a moment when the *possibility* of things at hand (in the world) oppresses Dasein and makes it turn back to itself. Heidegger asserts:

Thus Angst takes away from Da-sein the possibility of understanding itself, falling prey, in terms of the 'world' and the public way of being interpreted. It throws Da-sein back upon that for which it is anxious, its authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world. Angst individuates Da-sein to its ownmost being-in-the-world which, as understanding, projects itself essentially upon possibilities [...] discloses Da-sein as being-possible, and indeed as what can be individualized in individuation of its own accord. Angst reveals in Da-sein its *being toward* its ownmost potentiality of being, that is, *being free* for the freedom of choosing and grasping itself [...] the authenticity of its being as possibility which it always already is. But at the same time, it is this being to which Da-sein as being-in-the-world is entrusted (175-176).

It should be noted that authentic Dasein does not escape the world (it cannot), but is a being-in-the-world with a particular existential concern. As Dreyfus comments, authentic Dasein lives openly in the understanding that there is not a specific project that will make it fulfilled (Dreyfus 322-323). Dasein faces spontaneously its factual circumstance, where there is always room to be in a unique way. By accepting the anxiety of being unsettled and remaining open to self-understanding as possibility, authentic Dasein makes its existence unique. It is not that Dasein "finds" possibilities of

its own (it does not have any), but authentically projects public (in-the-world) possibilities in a way that reveals what it is to be a self. In other words, the human being is authentic by living the tension between his/her indebtedness to the possibilities of the socialized context and his/her search for being unique in that context.⁸⁷

A comparison with Ortega shows a subtle connection. Ortega's urge for a vitalist way of living suggests a need to become "original," to be "one-self," to become a "hero," through the appropriation of one's own circumstance and living in "perpetual rejection of the habitual" (*Meditaciones* 227-228). Heidegger would not exactly call for a "rejection of the habitual" but, not far from Ortega's call for originality, would insist on living the everyday by projecting possibilities to be a self. Although Heidegger's "world" is not an exact correlate to Ortega's "circumstance," I think Heidegger would agree with Ortega's main suggestion of pursuing unique being within a particular circumstance. However, we should remember that Ortega's "circumstance" refers to the surrounding and, over all, the historical circumstance, whereas Heidegger's "world" refers to the background-accumulated know-how of socialized practices, as we have seen before. Nonetheless, this socialized "world" certainly bears a historical dimension as well.

⁸⁷ Heidegger may be credited for bringing the topic of authenticity as a philosophical notion. Since *Being and Time*, authenticity has been widely discussed in an endless bibliography. As an example I will briefly mention three works. In the previous chapter I briefly addressed Theodor Adorno's critical (of Heidegger) work *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964). Adorno believes Heidegger's notion of authentic Dasein is an idealistic reification of the subject (what Heidegger's philosophy was supposed to undermine). Charles Taylor's reflection on modernity in *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1991) centers the debate on modern alienation in the misunderstanding of individualism and calls for a constructive authenticity. Charles Guignon's continues and completes Heidegger's trend in *On Being Authentic* (New York: Routledge, 2004) by emphasizing the social interdependence of the authentic individual, besides the quest for being unique.

As we will see, in Paz's use of the concept of "authenticity" in Mexicanness, the emphasis is not on the quest to be a (unique) self but on the aforementioned prerequisite: that Dasein is *nothing* in itself but (authentically) is free for the possibilities of being in its world. As suggested earlier, Paz's first introduction to this idea was most likely through Heidegger's "What Is Metaphysics?" where Paz could have understood Heidegger's basic tenets. As Gadamer points out, "the monumental theme of overcoming metaphysics and metaphysical thinking, which was the subject of the later Heidegger's thought experiments, emerged for the first time in this lecture" (*Heidegger Ways* 46). In this work, Being (and implicitly Dasein as the being of beings) is concisely described in its originary relation to "the nothing." In fact, this very issue is a landmark in Heidegger's thought, contradicting as it does traditional metaphysics. Heidegger shocked the philosophical establishment by suggesting that metaphysics had mistakenly confused Being as a "thing" regarding it in logical terms. Simply, in terms of logic, being is not nonbeing. Heidegger concludes the contrary: "The nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself as belonging to the being of beings" ("What Is Metaphysics?" 94). As Richardson suggest, Heidegger's point in this work is that the thinking of "Non-being" (and likewise, Being) is non-objective, is not about an object (Richardson 204). In the same way the thinking of Dasein in *Being and Time* is non-subjective because Dasein is not addressed as a subject in a world of objects. Instead, as Richardson asserts, Dasein "is a self that is essentially a thrust into Non-being (transcendence)" (204). I believe that this way of understanding Being as not-an-object, and Dasein as a thrust-into-non-being (but always open to its ownmost possibilities of being), is a major premise for understanding much of Paz's thought. We

will see that for Paz, Mexicanness should not be defined but open to possibilities of being.

One of the first glimpses of Paz's awareness on the topic of authenticity shows in his "América ¿Es un continente?" (1941). Here, he discusses the fragmented identity of Latin America in the face of European and North American imperialism, and calls for an "authentic" Latin American consciousness of being:

And it is not only about the defence of Latin America and democracy but, above all, it is about the creation of an *authentic* Latin Americanism. The problems with Latin America's defence are linked to this question: that of the consciousness that Latin America does indeed have. To create that consciousness is to save Latin America from its aggressors... and its defenders.⁸⁸

We may read "aggressors" and "defenders" as those neglecting a Latin American culture and those trying to encapsulate it in concretized definitions, respectively. Later, in "Respuesta a una encuesta de Letras de México" (also from 1941), in what seems to be Paz's best announcement of some of the future topics in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, he discusses why Mexican poetry is Mexican, what it is to be universal, and what it is to be national. In the case of the spirit of European literature, Paz asserts, there is no

⁸⁸ My emphasis. In the original: "Y no se trata aquí tan solo de la defensa de América y de la democracia sino, por encima de todo, de la creación de un auténtico americanismo. Los problemas de la defensa de América están ligados a esta cuestión: la de la conciencia que de sí tenga América. Crear esa conciencia es salvar a América de sus agresores... y de sus defensores" (*Primeras letras* 192).

particularization of man, but the “invention” of Europe by becoming “universal.” Paz seems to imagine a Europe that has come into being through a process of integrating diverse cultural contributions. He asserts that “the European spirit” lives in the diversification of “fruits” of each of its nations and the capacity to “engender” different perspectives. However, Paz clarifies that “there is no authentic universality without having one’s feet planted firmly in the homeland” (*Primeras letras* 258). As we will see later in this chapter, Paz is proposing a balance of national character that must be, at the same time, an “authentic” (*i.e.* open) one. Paz notes that Mexican colonial poetry and, later, Mexican modernism, were borne out of a single premise: not to be Spanish. Mexican affirmation, thus, “was not coming out of its own being, [as it] tended to emphasize, dismiss or justify, its own negation” (260). Similar to what Paz will later argue in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, he attributes Mexican “solitude” to this negation of its own historicity. The Mexican Revolution was, Paz asserts, Mexico’s encounter with itself. The men of 1910 should have “kept this encounter alive.” Corruption stopped that from happening and “Now we have all returned to solitude, and the dialogue is broken, as are also broken all men.” What to do with people and poetry “fed by solitude”? The task must be, he suggests, resuming the dialogue with the nation’s self, but a dialogue that is different from the “literatura nacional” and the fabricated definitions of nationality (260-261). It is likely that when Paz says “to find Mexico means making it up,” he is bringing together Ortega’s call for spontaneity of culture and Heidegger’s authentic being as open becoming in time. If Mexican literature had survived out of a curiosity for the world, now:

...it must turn inwards. Towards ourselves. Not to look for novelty, or originality, but something more profound. An authenticity that rejects, as unworthy and false, all those treacherous and preconceived attempts at “Mexicanness.” [...The Mexicanness of our literature] will sprout, spontaneously and naturally, from the depths of our intimacy when we find true authenticity, the key of our being.⁸⁹

It seems to be clear, then, what does Paz understand by “authenticity.” In another essay from these years Paz again introduces the same topic. Originally a conference presentation, “Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión” (1943) prefigures some of the themes on poetics that will be fully developed in *The Bow and the Lyre* more than a decade later. While defining poetry as that which keeps man open to live his dreams about “what we could be,” Paz asserts: “We are as much fed up of inept sincerity as of literature disguised as poetry. We want a superior, dignified form of sincerity: authenticity.”⁹⁰ In addition to the very theme of authenticity, the whole topic of poetry as the essence of being as endless becoming something else is a Heideggerian theme in Paz that will be addressed in the next chapter.

⁸⁹ “... debe ahora volverse hacia adentro. Hacia nosotros mismos. No para buscar la novedad, ni la originalidad, sino algo mucho más profundo. Autenticidad que rechaza, como indignos y falsos, todos esos intentos alevosos y preconcebidos de “mexicanidad”. [... La mexicanidad de nuestra literatura] brotará, espontánea y naturalmente, del fondo de nuestra intimidad cuando encontremos la verdadera autenticidad, clave de nuestro ser” (*Primeras letras* 261-262).

⁹⁰ “Estamos hartos de la sinceridad inepta tanto como de la literatura disfrazada de poesía. Queremos una forma superior, digna, de la sinceridad: la autenticidad” (*Primeras letras* 302).

Paz was not alone in the search for authenticity. The topic is the ground for another consequence of Gaos's school in the late 1940s and early 1950s: a young generation of thinkers gathered in *Grupo Filosófico El Hiperión*.⁹¹ They represented the culmination of an unprecedented development of philosophy in Mexico during the 1940s. *El Hiperión*'s work is also the closest philosophical context in Mexico to Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, published in 1950, in spite of the fact that Paz was not living in Mexico at this time. The group aimed to think of "*lo mexicano*,"⁹² or "Mexicanness," as part of universal thought, but with the vantage point of the concrete Mexican reality.⁹³ In a way, they completed the quest begun by the *ateneístas* (Vasconcelos, Caso, Reyes, etc.) in the course of the Mexican Revolution.⁹⁴ *El Hiperión* took Ortega and Heideggerian existential philosophy as common grounding but also incorporated new trends of post-war French existentialism, such as the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel.⁹⁵ However, Mexican philosophers were in a

⁹¹ Cantú situates the works of the group, as such, from 1948 to 1953. See "Pasado Inmediato." *Campo Libre, Journal of Chicano Studies*. 1.2 (1981). p. 243.

⁹² I agree with Sanchez in that "Lo mexicano" cannot be translated as "the Mexican" (the physical individual) in the context of *El Hiperión* since: "the intention [...] is to speak of a particular *manner or mode of being* which 'the Mexican' seems to leave out." See Carlos Alberto Sanchez's "Heidegger in Mexico City: Emilio Uranga's ontological hermeneutics." *Continental Philosophy Review*. 41 (2008). p. 444.

⁹³ Zea explained that the concerns of the group were symbolized in the Greek myth of god Hyperion, son of the Earth and the Sky, interpreted as the junction of the concrete and the universal. See *Conciencia y posibilidad del mexicano*. Mexico City: Porrúa, 1974. p. 42.

⁹⁴ On this, the reader may see the previous chapter.

⁹⁵ There is not "existentialism" but there are "existentialisms." The differences are sometimes radical. I have briefly clarified in Chapter 1 that the distinction between Heidegger's philosophy and Sartre's existentialism is important in my work. Heidegger marked a distance from Sartre's existentialism in "Letter on Humanism." Paz also marked a distance from Sartre in *Itinerary*. Therefore, I have preferred to avoid, when appropriate, the term "existentialism" and use instead "existential philosophy" to talk about the thought of Heidegger, Ortega and Paz.

privileged position in their access to Heidegger's work, given the presence of Gaos in Mexico and his final translation of *Being and Time* in 1951.⁹⁶ Led by Zea, the group included Joaquín Macgregor, Jorge Portilla, Salvador Reyes Nevárez, Emilio Uranga, Fausto Vega, Ricardo Guerra and Luis Villoro. The movement was also a response to the atmosphere during the presidency of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), who implemented national redefinitions of social and economic policies that worked to finalize the shift to open capitalism and industrial development. Alemán definitively abandoned Cárdenas's socialist reforms, but the country remained a semi-colonial structure: a small oligarchy of wealthy men ruling over the lives of an overwhelmingly poor population, many in blatant misery. However, as Medin suggests, there was a feeling of transformation, of political stability and hopes of economic independence through exports. At the same time, following the Second World War, Europe was crumbling as the paradigm of social values, which in turn worked to deepen the search for philosophical self-affirmation in Mexico.⁹⁷ *El Hiperión* responded to that context, producing new ways of interpreting "*lo mexicano*."

The centrality of Heidegger's authenticity in discussing Mexicanness shows in *El Hiperión*'s way of conceiving Mexicanness as an open project rather than a pre-conceived idea. As Uranga, one of the leading figures in *El Hiperión*, wrote:

⁹⁶ Sanchez has noticed that in 1949 Uranga presents *El Hiperión*'s existentialism as closer to that of Sartre. However, by 1951 Uranga recognizes the stronger presence of Heidegger (Sanchez 443).

⁹⁷ On this see Tzivi Medin's "La mexicanidad política y filosófica en el sexenio de Miguel Alemán, 1946-1952." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*. Jan-Jun 1990. 15 May 2012 <http://www.tau.ac.il/eial/I_1/medin.htm>

Mexicanness [or *lo mexicano*], is an inciting project of community life that one group of Mexicans proposes to the rest of Mexicans, so that it may be carried out together [...] That is the reason for raising this issue of the Mexican. Not to proceed by limiting it to premeditated selections, but exposing it, explaining it and launching it amongst people from other fields, urging their contribution, making it a community project and opening it to all.⁹⁸

As Cantú observes, this philosophical environment gave rise to the idea of the Mexican as a project, as historic possibility—a theme that shows up in the works of Leopoldo Zea, Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, Emilio Uranga, Luis Villoro, and others (Cantú 255-256). The link of Gaos's project for pursuing a Mexican philosophy of culture and the Heideggerian interests of *El Hiperión*, also informs Uranga's article "Martín Heidegger y la filosofía de la cultura" (1949). In this essay, Uranga makes a reading of Heidegger's "On the Essence of Ground" (1929) and concludes that man does not live in nature but in a "world" that is grounded in meaning that is freely given by man itself (Uranga 358). The Heideggerian "world" that Uranga is recalling is the permanently open (project of a) culture.

⁹⁸ "Lo mexicano es un proyecto incitante de vida en común que un grupo de mexicanos proponen a los demás mexicanos para que lo realicen juntos... de ahí la forma en que se ha propuesto abordar este asunto del mexicano. No imitándolo a elucubraciones de selectos, sino exponiéndolo, explicándolo y lanzándolo, en medio de las gentes no especialistas, urgiendo a la contribución, poniendo en comunidad el proyecto y abriéndolo a todos." Emilio Uranga. "Notas para un estudio del mexicano." *Cuadernos Americanos*. LVII. 3 (1951). p. 128.

The members of *El Hiperión* also promoted conferences to propagate their ideas, similar to the *ateneístas'* procedure almost forty years earlier. In 1948, *El Hiperión's* members began a series of talks at the National University called *Problemas en filosofía contemporánea*. A year later they hosted another series called *Qué es el mexicano?* and in 1951 they held another conference called *El mexicano y su cultura*. Finally, in 1952, *El Hiperión* closed the cycle with *El mexicano y sus posibilidades*. As part of the same drive, Zea founded that year the Centro de Estudios Sobre el Mexicano at the university and the publishing series "Mexico y lo mexicano." Without delay, the series printed *Conciencia y posibilidad del Mexicano* (Zea), *El amor y la amistad en el Mexicano* (Reyes Nevárez) and *Análisis del ser del Mexicano* (Uranga). It is this vigorous environment, searching for definitions of Mexicanness, that embraces the appearance of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

Uranga, as one of the leaders of the group, worked out a Heideggerian theory of Mexicanness in his *Ensayo de una ontología del mexicano* (1949) that resulted in his *Análisis del ser del Mexicano* (1952). Perhaps as a welcoming of mutual interests, the later book is dedicated to Octavio Paz on the first page. Uranga uses Heidegger's existential phenomenology in *Being and Time* to expose the ontological structure of "Mexicanness." According to Sanchez, Uranga gives a polemical twist to Heidegger's thought by questioning not Dasein, but "a particularly situated Dasein manifesting a particular mode of being-in-the-world, what those in *El Hiperión* group called '*lo mexicano*'" (Sanchez 444). If for Heidegger Dasein exists factically, in other words is thrown into a given world, for Uranga the Mexican Dasein finds a mode of being that is accidental: "to be accidental means *to be in another*, to be fragile, to oscillate between

existence and nothingness, to be lacking and to be random, contingent and free.”⁹⁹

Therefore, the being of the Mexican is (authentically) in the process of becoming—it is an open project. Further, following French existentialism, Uranga pursues more than a hermeneutics of Dasein by including social engagement and the need for action. As Sanchez notes, the revolutionary task Uranga and *El Hiperión* attribute to philosophy in Mexico is their belief that this way-of-being (*lo mexicano*) should progress towards reflective self-awareness by the individual members of culture. The members of *El Hiperión* wanted Mexicanness to be a concern of the people, so that “it may be seen, thought, and appropriated in the service of life itself” (445). In this way, Uranga’s project discloses the mode of the Mexican being, but it is also a project of social transformation. In the words of Uranga, the task is: “to bring about a reform and a conversion. More than a pure rigorous meditation on the being of the Mexican, what brings about this sort of enquiry is the project to enact moral, social, and religious transformations of that being.”¹⁰⁰ In turn, a call for solidarity and social responsibility is sounded. Given the relevance of French existentialism for *El Hiperión*, we could read here Sartre’s suggestion that there is a responsibility of the intellectual to engage politically.

Philosophy was not the only area concerned with the project of Mexicanness. In painting, Mexicanness as an open project is best embodied by Rufino Tamayo. He experimented with evolving ways of understanding Mexicanness. While the *Escuela*

⁹⁹ “Ser accidental quiere decir ser en otro, ser frágil, oscilar entre la existencia y la nada, ser carente y azaroso, contingente y gratuito.” See Uranga’s *Análisis del ser del mexicano*. Mexico City: Gobierno del Estado de Guanajuato, 1990. p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ “[La tarea es] operar a continuación una reforma y una conversión. Más que una limpia meditación rigurosa sobre el ser del mexicano, lo que nos lleva a este tipo de estudios es el proyecto de operar transformaciones morales, sociales y religiosas con ese ser.” (*Análisis* 48).

Mexicana de Pintura and older muralists had established a defined pictorial-political discourse in their “pintura nacionalista,” Tamayo decided to search freely for new horizons. Praising this attitude, Paz wrote in 1950: “Tamayo’s painting is not an aesthetic representation; it is a personal and spontaneous answer to the reality of our times.”¹⁰¹ It is worth noticing Paz’s emphasis on Tamayo’s spontaneous approach, as opposed to a simple representation of pre-defined conceptions of Mexicanness. Tamayo was of indigenous ancestry but, instead of solidifying himself in local traditions, from the 1920s had made the *Contemporáneos* his allies.¹⁰² They shared an appeal for international avant-garde aesthetics and the common problem of confronting official nationalism. Tamayo called his art “Mexican-universal” (Madrigal 159). The Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes exhibited a large retrospective in 1948; for the introduction to the show, Tamayo wrote that the painter’s position should be: “To have the feet steady, buried if necessary, in the homeland; but also to have the eyes and the ears and the mind wide open, scrutinizing all horizons is, in my opinion, the proper position.”¹⁰³ We can see here a similitude between Tamayo’s and Paz’s ideas.¹⁰⁴ Tamayo had always been prone to creating ties with intellectuals and had a long history in “nationalistic” polemics. In 1956, in reference to the philosophers of *El Hiperión* and attempting to

¹⁰¹ La pintura de Tamayo no es una recreación estética; es una respuesta personal y espontánea a la realidad de nuestra época.” See Paz’s “Tres ensayos sobre Rufino Tamayo.” *Los privilegios de la vista II, Obras Completas 7*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 264.

¹⁰² For more on the *Contemporáneos* group, the reader may see the previous chapter.

¹⁰³ “Tener los pies firmes, hundidos si es preciso, en el terruño; pero también tener los ojos y los oídos y la mente bien abiertos, escudriñando todos los horizontes es, en mi opinión, la postura correcta” (Tamayo 15).

¹⁰⁴ For example, in the above discussion of Paz’s “Respuesta a una encuesta de Letras de México.”

make a link to his own work, Tamayo wrote: “We Mexicans had to discover, through visual arts, the fundamental in the Mexican. In other words, to make with our means of expression that which now a group of philosophers is carrying out with their investigations concerning Mexico and Mexicanness.”¹⁰⁵ Paz was a good friend of Tamayo and, in tune with these ideas, they worked together on Paz’s *Eagle or Sun* (*Águila o sol*, 1951), a book of surrealist prose poems where the painter illustrated some of the titles. Later in this chapter, I will address some of these poems concerning Mexicanness.

In cinema, Luis Buñuel’s *Los Olvidados* (1950) shows a very different Mexicanness from that of the revolutionary melodramas of the 1930s and 1940s (the “Golden Age of Mexican cinema”) and introduces the idea of authenticity. Anne Doremus observes that during this period cinema was the major official control-tool for teaching a collective sense of unity and revolutionary pride, and for placating the discomfort caused by economic inequalities (117). *Los Olvidados* entirely contradicts that vision by introducing existential concerns. What seems to be simply a neorealist view of Mexican urban misery is in fact something more.¹⁰⁶ The characters are moved neither by reason nor national values or moral schemes, but by their vital passions and desires within the frame of their fatal circumstances (Faber 233-236). Nearly everyone

¹⁰⁵ “Lo que los mexicanos debíamos descubrir, a través de la plástica, lo fundamental en el mexicano. Es decir, realizar con nuestro medio de expresión lo que aún ahora un grupo de filósofos está llevando a cabo con sus investigaciones acerca de México y lo mexicano.” See Rufino Tamayo’s *Textos de Rufino Tamayo*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987. p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Actually, as the voice-over suggests at the start of the film, the city could be any other modern city. Paz had a similar approach in *The Labyrinth* by suggesting that many of the problems of Mexico are the problems of the modern world.

in the film has been thrown into this world, an unevenly modernized Mexico City, with no choice but to improvise a way to survive. Surrealist images symbolize the desire-driven imagination of some characters, thus emphasising the still-to-be possibility of the individuals.

Paz developed links to this intellectual ferment despite being physically out of Mexico from 1943 when he left the country, not to return until 1953. After staying a couple of years in the United States, with a Guggenheim scholarship, he travelled to Paris as a diplomatic functionary, shortly after the end of the war in 1945. While working in the Mexican embassy at Paris, he followed the debates on existentialism between Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, and others. In fact, Paz was already well acquainted with some of the topics from his Mexican-Spanish background. Paz became a good friend of Camus, but never much liked Sartre's work or personality.¹⁰⁷ I believe that Paz found in Europe the same debates from Mexico (and from his stay in Valencia): debates on freedom of thought and artistic production versus political engagement. Camus rejected any ideological associations and was a proponent of individual freedom and the individual revolt that would lead to solidarity. Sartre, on the other hand, asserted that we are condemned to be free, but that freedom carries a responsibility. In *What is Literature?* (1947), Sartre explains his notion of "committed" literature. In a clear rejection of art for art's sake, he asserted that the artist and the intellectual have a social responsibility. To Paz's dismay, Sartre diminished the importance of poetry, asserting

¹⁰⁷ See Paz's narrative of his stay in Paris in *Itinerario*, pp. 80-91.

that it cannot be committed because it is essentially non-representational.¹⁰⁸ Also, Sartre's "phenomenological ontology" was nothing new to Paz. In *Itinerary*, Paz wrote: "I was a fervent reader of Ortega y Gasset and therefore my amazement at Sartre's thought was less lively than that of many of his readers [...] The philosophical work of the French thinker is an intelligent application of Husserl's method and an adaptation, not lacking originality, of Heidegger's thought."¹⁰⁹ Paz met with Sartre several times during his stay in Paris and both discussed philosophical and political topics.¹¹⁰ Thus, there is no question that Paz continued to be part of existential-philosophy environment while he was outside of Mexico.

Paz also met poet André Breton during those years in Paris, marking the start of what would be a life-long friendly and productive relationship. Paz admired Breton's rejection of authority, his defence of individual freedom based on the power of desire, his defence of a "complete freedom of art" and his rebellion towards any political orthodoxy (Caistor 64). Surrealism influenced Paz's poetry and poetics in all stages of his works.

Paz produced three important works during this period in Paris: *Freedom under Parole* (*Libertad bajo palabra*, 1949), *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) and *Eagle or Sun*

¹⁰⁸ On Paz's disappointment with Sartre's views on poetry and art, see *Itinerario*, p. 82. For a general discussion on Sartre's position on art and literature, see Thomas Flynn's "Jean-Paul Sartre." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2011. Stanford University. 11 April 2012 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sartre/>>

¹⁰⁹ "Fui un lector ferviente de Ortega y Gasset y por eso mi sorpresa ante el pensamiento de Sartre fue menos viva que la de muchos de sus lectores [...] La obra filosófica del pensador francés es una inteligente aplicación del método de Husserl y una adaptación, no carente de originalidad, del pensamiento de Heidegger" (*Itinerario* 82-83).

¹¹⁰ Paz's recount of his meetings with Sartre is in "Memento: Jean Paul Sartre." *Excursiones / Incursiones. Obras Completas 2*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991.

(1951). *Freedom under Parole* compiled Paz's poetry written up until that point. The title reflects Paz's political vicissitudes with the topic of freedom but also informs Paz's understanding of it not as a petrified essence but, closer to an Ortegian spontaneity or Heideggerian authenticity, as a becoming something else. There is a play on words here: "freedom under parole" is a legal term for a freedom that must be earned by oath and is conditional; but it also means a freedom achieved by the powers of the word. In the next chapter I will discuss Paz's idea of the poetic word as the bearer of freedom (to be other).

As we have seen here, even though Paz did not provide detailed information on his early involvement with Ortega and Heidegger, he was definitely part of the existential environment in discussing Mexicanness. The unprecedented study of Heidegger's works in Mexico via Gaos's school brought an interest in the notion of authenticity: to be authentic is to appropriate one's own context while remaining undefined and open to future possibilities. We saw that this starts to show in Paz's early writings on Mexicanness and, as we will see next, is fundamental for understanding *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and several of Paz's major poems.

3.2. Existential Philosophy in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

It is not my purpose to make a general critique of *The Labyrinth*. Santí and Stanton, among others, have made an enormous effort of this sort in their respective

introductions to the book.¹¹¹ However, there is still much to add to an existential reading of *The Labyrinth*. To begin with, this is Paz's book that best answers the context in Mexico during times of a national search for self-definition in a climate, as we have seen, of existential concerns in intellectual circles and in cultural production. Further, the existential context helps us to understand Paz's major premises throughout the book that also resonate with many of his other works.

The Labyrinth is Paz's best-selling work¹¹² while, at the same time, it has proven to be his most polemical. The multiple facets of the book make it difficult to classify. *The Labyrinth* is simultaneously an autobiographical narrative, a critique of national identity, a critique of modernity, a reading of the history of Mexico, and a poetic manifesto. Following the eclectic "genre," the book draws on an equally mixed background of intellectual sources: romanticism, sociology of myth, psychoanalysis, existential philosophy, hermeneutic phenomenology and surrealism. However, in spite of the fragmentary thematic structure of *The Labyrinth*, this is Paz's first sustained effort to consolidate organically many of his previous concerns in a book.

Faithful to the context in Mexico at the brink of the middle century, the overall investigative approach in *The Labyrinth* shows a rejection of rationalism and positivist premises. We will see that Paz stays closer to a hermeneutic phenomenology in the

¹¹¹ These are: Santí's "Introducción" in Ediciones Cátedra's edition of *El laberinto de la soledad* (Madrid, 1993). Here, I will quote the same essay as published in Santí's compilation *El Acto de las Palabras*, with the name "Introducción a 'El laberinto de la soledad'." (Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997). Also, Stanton published "Introduction" within Manchester University Press's edition of *El laberinto de la soledad* (Manchester, 2008).

¹¹² The largest publisher of Paz's works, El Fondo de Cultura Económica, lists only three other titles that have outsold *El laberinto*: Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo*, and Juan Rufo's *El llano en llamas* and *Pedro Páramo* (Stanton, "Introduction" 1).

development of many of his topics. Paz also rejects objectivist views on history. In addition, we will see that perhaps Paz's main argument in the book is the rejection of Mexicanness as a defined essence. These premises show Paz's philosophical affiliation with existential philosophy, mainly of an Ortegian and Heideggerian dimension, that has not received much attention. Most important of all, Paz's major arguments seem to orbit closely around Heidegger's authenticity concept. I believe that authenticity is a theme that links many of Paz's essays and poems in regards to his idea of Mexicanness.

Santí has already begun the examination of existential threads throughout *The Labyrinth* in his "Introducción a *El laberinto de la soledad*" (1995). He notes that the book lies in the context of Ortega's *Meditaciones del Quijote*—among other similar essays of national identity in the Hispanic world (*El acto de las palabras* 124). As mentioned earlier, Santí also finds that "the influence of German culture, as promoted by Ortega y Gasset through his *Revista de Occidente*, is so diffused throughout [*The Labyrinth*] that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other."¹¹³ Santí also notes that Paz's elaboration of the "estrangement feeling," a variation of modern alienation, is an existential topic; he then suggests that the book belongs to the context of existentialist post-war-Paris where it was written (17). However, I should add that the book also belongs to the context of existential philosophy in Mexico. As I noted before, existential topics began to show in Paz's first writings in Mexico during the 1940s.

However, the weight of Ortega and Heidegger in Paz's approach is not self-evident in *The Labyrinth*. As Santí points out, "Paz's book, a literary essay, is reticent

¹¹³ "La influencia de la cultura alemana, tal como la promovió Ortega y Gasset en su *Revista de Occidente* está tan diseminada en el libro que resulta difícil deslindar una línea de la otra." (*El acto de las palabras* 179 footnote).

about its own method" ("Ten Keys" 20). Despite that Paz included in the book an overview of the philosophical context in relation to the environment of the philosophy of "lo mexicano" (in the chapter "La 'inteligencia' mexicana"), the explicit influences of Ortega and Heidegger are not outwardly evident. Later, Paz directly addresses the "sources" of his thinking in the writing of *The Labyrinth*, in the well-known interview "Vuelta a *El laberinto de la soledad*: Conversación con Claude Fell" (1975). When Fell asks about the book's relation to "José Gaos's school," Paz gives an account of the general environment of Zea and *El Hiperión* group. About the latter, he says:

They were also José Gaos disciples and among them existentialism was a deep influence as a vogueish philosophy, mostly in the French version of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty [...] In general, those young guys tried to make a 'philosophy of the Mexicans' or 'of Mexicanness.' In my case: I did not want to make either ontology or a philosophy of the Mexicans. My book is a book of social, political and psychological critique. It is a book within the French "moralist" tradition. It is on the other hand an essay of historical interpretation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ "También eran discípulos de José Gaos y en ellos fue muy profunda la influencia de la filosofía que en aquellos años estaba en boga, el existencialismo, sobre todo en la versión francesa de Sartre y Merleau-Ponty [...] En general, esos muchachos trataron de hacer una "filosofía del mexicano" o de "lo mexicano". En cuanto a mí: yo no quise hacer ni ontología ni filosofía del mexicano. Mi libro es un libro de crítica social, política y psicológica. Es un libro dentro de la tradición francesa del "moralismo". Es por la otra, un ensayo de interpretación histórica." (*El laberinto* 420-421).

Although Paz says he did not want to make a “philosophy of Mexicanness,” he could have given some clues of his personal involvement in Gaos’s school. We are also left with no explanation for omitting Heidegger and Ortega as influences for *El Hiperión* while still mentioning Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Later, in the same interview with Fell, Paz addresses his personal debts to other thinkers. He briefly suggests the influences of Freud, Marx, Caillois, Bataille, Mauss and Nietzsche. About the late Germanic influence he said: “I also learned a lot from the German philosophers whom Ortega y Gasset had made known a few years before in our language: phenomenology, the philosophy of culture, and the work of historians and essayists such as Dilthey and Simmel.”¹¹⁵ He seems to be alluding here to the influence of Ortega’s *Revista de Occidente*, but there is no mention of Heidegger and no reference to his specific debts to Ortega’s own works.

My point here is to bring some light, through my own interpretative effort, to the way Paz’s arguments answer to existential premises in the context of “la filosofía de lo mexicano” at the middle of the century. I believe that looking at these relations adds to the understanding the book.

3.2.1. *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*

Heidegger’s philosophy brought a renewed interest in hermeneutics and phenomenology. And Paz seems to be well aware of this. I agree with Santí in that in

¹¹⁵ “También me ensaaron mucho los filósofos alemanes que unos pocos años antes había dado a conocer en nuestra lengua Ortega y Gasset: la fenomenología, la filosofía de la cultura y la obra de historiadores y ensayistas como Dilthey y Simmel” (422).

the general structure of *The Labyrinth* there is a phenomenological approach or a theory of appearances as grasped by direct experience. Santí suggests that the book wants to be a personal history, a confession, which tries to express the truth about being (*El acto de las palabras* 153). In this way, *The Labyrinth* is a reading of the history of Mexico in relation to a personal history. By moving from the particular to the general, Paz's phenomenology proceeds by describing his personal experience with the surrounding reality and then, hermeneutically, relating that experience to a historical context.

"Hermeneutically" refers to the practice of "hermeneutics": the art of interpretation (a search for meaning) as a matter of comprehension of the parts in their relation to the context of the whole. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger re-founded hermeneutics by making it an existential matter: the search for meaning is always self-interpretation. In *The Labyrinth*, the particular-to-the-general analogy has another version. As Santí suggests, the book "wants to interpret the rhythm of the history of Mexico departing from the appearances of a series of national 'myths'."¹¹⁶ I will add to Santí's appraisal by noting that Paz's use of phenomenology is of a Heideggerian kind and by showing specific instances. We have seen that Paz was well aware of Husserl's phenomenological theory. Husserl proposed an analysis of appearances as they are represented in conscience. While this approach is present on Paz's horizon, I believe that his focus on studying socialized practices has a link to Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology. Moreover, there is a link between the ontological concerns of Paz's phenomenology (as an inquiry on the being of the Mexican) and Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

¹¹⁶ "quiere interpretar el ritmo de la historia de México partiendo de las apariencias de una serie de "mitos" nacionales" (*El acto de las palabras* 169)

Paz's general phenomenological clues are visible from the first paragraphs in *The Labyrinth*. As Stanton suggests, Paz could have started with an interpretation on previous books with the same topic, but instead we are introduced to "the priority of life over writing" ("Introduction" 3-4). Paz rejects a conceptual definition of Mexican being in lieu of a living experience that hermeneutically recreates that being. With this approach in mind, Paz writes: "My concern for the meaning of my country's individuality—a preoccupation that I share with many others—appeared to me as superfluous and dangerous. Instead of asking ourselves questions, wouldn't it be better to create and work on a reality that is not evident to he who contemplates it, but to he who is willing to immerse himself in it?"¹¹⁷ Paz is suggesting here that "reality" will not show in objective analysis but in the living experience of the phenomenon. In a similar way, Paz's thoughts on *el pachuco* (or Mexican zoot-suiters from Los Angeles) show a phenomenological approach by describing his first-hand experience: "When I started living in the United States, I lived for some time in Los Angeles [...] It is surprising to the traveler, at first sight—besides the purity of the sky and the ugliness of the dispersed and flamboyant buildings—the vaguely Mexican atmosphere of the city, impossible to capture through words and concepts."¹¹⁸ And it is clear that there is a hermeneutical

¹¹⁷ From now on, I use my own translation of the fragments of *El laberinto* into English. In the original: "La preocupación por el sentido de las singularidades de mi país, que comparto con muchos, me parecía hace tiempo superflua y peligrosa. En lugar de interrogarnos a nosotros mismos, ¿no sería mejor crear, obrar sobre una realidad que no se entrega al que la contempla, sino al que es capaz de sumergirse en ella?" (*El laberinto* 144-145).

¹¹⁸ "Al iniciar mi vida en los Estados Unidos, residí algún tiempo en Los Ángeles [...] A primera vista sorprende al viajero—además de la pureza del cielo y de la fealdad de las dispersas y ostentosas construcciones—la atmósfera vagamente mexicana de la ciudad, imposible apresar con palabras o conceptos" (147).

premise here. For Paz, the Mexicanness of the environment is only apprehended as what makes sense as a whole but is beyond “words and concepts,” in other words, beyond the strictly intelligible through analysis. Later, in the chapter “Máscaras mexicanas,” Paz also begins by suggesting a phenomenological approach: “The Mexican, whether young or old, *criollo* or *mestizo*, general or labourer or lawyer, *appears to me*¹¹⁹ to be a person who shuts himself away to protect himself [...].”¹²⁰

Husserl is best known as the father of phenomenology and Paz was familiar with his thought since university times.¹²¹ However, I believe that Paz’s phenomenology is far from Husserl’s “eidetic reduction.” Husserl’s method attempted to be a presupposition-free discipline by studying the conscious awareness (intentionality or intentional content) of phenomena while trying to identify the “essential” components that make the phenomenon unique. This process should be performed while “bracketing” the world (basically ignoring the context).¹²² In contrast, Paz does not seem to be looking for essences in *The Labyrinth*, but a personalized interpretation by making sense of phenomena in light of a cultural and historical context. By including his own historicity (a concern on self-interpretation) Paz is closer to Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology than Husserl’s phenomenology. Far from Husserl’s rigour in his science

¹¹⁹ My emphasis here.

¹²⁰ “Viejo o adolescente, criollo o mestizo, general, obrero o licenciado, el mexicano *se me aparece* como un ser que se encierra y se preserva” (164). My emphasis.

¹²¹ In *Itinerario*, Paz declares: “La influencia de la filosofía alemana era tal en nuestra universidad que en el curso de Lógica nuestro texto de base era el de Alexander Pfänder, un discípulo de Husserl. Al lado de la fenomenología, el psicoanálisis” (49). Also see Santí’s interview with Paz (*El acto de las palabras* 69).

¹²² Husserl’s phenomenological method is mainly explained in *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

of conscience, Paz's asserts: "[...] I am only trying to clarify the meaning of certain experiences for my own self, and I admit that what I say may be worth no more than a personal answer to a personal question."¹²³ Paz is then, hermeneutically, looking for what makes sense to him without claiming any scientific proof.

Moreover, Paz's inquiry into Mexicanness is often a reflection on the socialized practices of Mexican types. About the *pachuco*, Paz explores his way of dressing, his taste for ornamentation, his rebel behaviour. Paz also tries to make sense of Mexican popular language, mannerisms in the interaction with others, and current practices in secular and religious rituals. Such a phenomenological approach opposes Husserl's analysis of the conscious's "intentional content" and is closer to one of Heidegger's major innovations in *Being and Time*. As Dreyfus reminds us: "At the foundation of Heidegger's new approach is a phenomenology of 'mindless' everyday coping skills as the basis of all intelligibility" (*Being-in-the-World* 3).¹²⁴

We should recall at this point that, for Heidegger, Dasein is ongoing interpretation and continuous understanding of its world; and this "making sense" of the world is

¹²³ "[...] no pretendo sino aclararme a mí mismo el sentido de algunas experiencias y admito que tal vez no tenga más valor que el de construir una respuesta personal a una pregunta personal" (*El laberinto* 156).

¹²⁴ Dreyfus explains more about Heidegger's novelty: "Since Descartes, philosophers have been stuck with the epistemological problem of explaining how the ideas in our mind can be true of the external world. Heidegger shows that this subject/object epistemology presupposes a background of everyday practices into which we are socialized but that we do not represent in our minds. Since he calls this more fundamental way of making sense of things our understanding of being, he claims that he is doing ontology, that is, asking about the nature of this understanding of being that we do not know--that is not a representation in the mind corresponding to the world--but that we simply are." See Hubert Dreyfus's *Being-in-the-World*. New Baskerville: The MIT Press, 1991. p. 3.

ontology: it is the very understanding of being.¹²⁵ As Dreyfus suggests, phenomenology was previously concerned with epistemological questions or the relation of the knower and the known, but Heidegger changed it to “ontological questions concerning what sort of beings we are and how our being is bound up with the intelligibility of the world” (*Being-in-the-World* 3). Paz’s existential-ontological concerns are quite evident from the start of *The Labyrinth*. The opening paragraph already announces this approach:

All of us, at some moment, have had a vision of our existence as something unique, untransferable and precious. This revelation always takes place during adolescence. Self-discovery is above all the realization that we are alone: it is the opening of an impalpable, transparent wall—that of our consciousness—between the world and ourselves. [...] The adolescent is astonished at the fact of his being. This astonishment leads to reflection: as he leans over the river of his consciousness, he asks himself if the face that appears there, disfigured by the water, is his own. The singularity of being, which is pure sensation in children, becomes a problem and a question.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ This is mostly explained in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. pp. 135 and on.

¹²⁶ “A todos, en algún momento, se nos ha revelado nuestra existencia como algo particular, intransferible y precioso. Casi siempre esta revelación se sitúa en la adolescencia. El descubrimiento de nosotros mismos se manifiesta como un sabernos solos; entre el mundo y nosotros se abre una impalpable, transparente muralla: la de nuestra conciencia. [...] El adolescente se asombra de ser. Y al pasmo sucede la reflexión: inclinado sobre el río de su conciencia se pregunta si ese rostro que aflora lentamente del fondo, deformado por el agua, es el suyo. La singularidad de ser—pura sensación en el niño—se transforma en problema y pregunta, en conciencia interrogante” (*El laberinto* 143).

What seems to be the concern over the being (or existence) of the individual soon turns into the concern over the being of Mexicanness: “A similar thing happens to nations and peoples [...]. Their being manifests as questioning: What are we, and how can we fulfill our obligations to ourselves as we are?”¹²⁷ As Santí suggests, throughout the book there is an underlying inductive reasoning process between the particular and the general, the individual biography and Mexico’s history, the national and the universal (*El acto de las palabras* 169). Inductive reasoning has been part of hermeneutics for centuries, but the relation between self-understanding and the understanding of the world has not. This is another premise of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology. Spinoza, Schleiermacher and others considered the problem of interpretation to be a hermeneutic circle between the text, as a whole, and the individual parts, or between the general and the particular. For Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle is rather the continuous interplay between self-understanding and the understanding of the world. Therefore, understanding the world becomes an existential task. In the words of Heidegger: “[...] *because understanding always has to do with the complete disclosedness of Da-sein as being-in-the-world, the involvement of understanding is an existential modification of project [of understanding] as a whole*. In understanding the world, being-in [*i.e.* Dasein] is always also understood. Understanding of existence as such is always an understanding of world” (*Being and Time* 137). As we have seen, this

¹²⁷ “A los pueblos [...] les ocurre algo parecido. Su ser se manifiesta como interrogación: ¿qué somos y cómo realizaremos eso que somos?” (144).

premises resonate with Paz's hermeneutic phenomenology from the very start of *The Labyrinth*.

3.2.2. Authenticity as Historicity

We may notice that by hermeneutically relating a current lived experience with historical context, Paz is presupposing a dynamic conception of history. For Paz, what Mexicans are today is only explained as the recurrence of history, as if the past were still alive in the present. Such a view is contrary to traditional Mexican historiography at the middle of the twentieth century, when the book was first published. For Paz, history is neither deterministic nor a detached "object of study." I assert that Paz is more in tune with Heidegger's "historicity" of authentic Dasein and Ortega's "historical reason." These referents also help to understand Paz's dynamic conception of culture. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the works of Zea and O'Gorman, since the early 1940s, were already developing in this direction.

A dynamic conception of history was briefly suggested in Ortega's *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914) in the paradox: "The dying of what is death is life," as if we could only appropriate the process of the past by "dealing with it as a way of life."¹²⁸ We could read a similar idea in Ortega's previously discussed premise: "I am myself and my circumstance," where we should take the historical situation as the main component of what Ortega is calling "circumstance." We may understand here that historical context is

¹²⁸ "Toléreseme, a beneficio de concisión, una fórmula paradójica: la muerte de lo muerto es la vida. Sólo un modo hay de dominar al pasado, reino de las cosas fenecidas: abrir nuestras venas e inyectar de su sangre en las venas vacías de los muertos. Esto es lo que no puede hacer el reaccionario: tratar el pasado como un modo de la vida" (*Meditaciones* 82).

part of the living self. A few years later, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger made a wider effort in developing a similar idea for looking at history.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger addressed Dasein's historicity by asserting that Dasein is factually stretched along the have-been since its birth, until the not-yet of its death. "The 'between' of birth and death already lies in the being of Da-sein" (343). Dasein is temporal, it is made of time. Therefore, the being of Dasein is not "in history," as a fish in the river of history, but Dasein exists "historically only because it is temporal in the ground of its being" (345). Dasein exists as history. The approach of historiographical science, that makes the past an object of study, is for Heidegger part of Dasein's inauthentic possibility of existence. Inauthentic Dasein is lost in the inconsistency of dispersion of its being-in-the-world (stretched in time) and makes present its "today." Then, this Dasein is detached from its being-temporal. Heidegger says:

Awaiting the next new thing, it has already forgotten what is old. The they evades choice. Blind toward possibilities, it is incapable of retrieving what has been, but only retains what is and receives 'real,' what has been left over, of the world-historical that has been, the remnants, and the information about them that is objectively present. Lost in the making present of the today, it understands the 'past' in terms of the 'present' (357).

We may understand this Dasein as a sort of alienated being from its own constitution as time. However, Dasein may rather choose to be authentic. Resolute Dasein brings itself back “immediately” to what has already been, into the “Moment” of constancy.¹²⁹ In this “Moment,” Dasein anticipates what is being-toward-death while simultaneously retrieving the “possibilities that have-been” (357). The constancy of authentic Dasein resides in incorporating into existence birth, death and the in-between.

In the end, what will be of the most importance for understanding Paz is to recall that Heidegger’s authentic Dasein keeps itself open to possibilities of being. In terms of the historicity of Dasein, Heidegger asserts: “As fate, resoluteness is freedom to give up a definite resolution, as may be required in the situation. Thus, the steadiness of existence is not interrupted but precisely confirmed in the Moment” (357). We may rephrase Heidegger to say that Dasein, by keeping itself open to being-the-past and to being-the-future, is free to act spontaneously in unique ways that fulfill his ownmost possibilities of being-the-present. In this way, Heidegger is suggesting that retrieving possibilities from the past, in the present, is actually a recurrence of history. “Authentic historicity understands history as the ‘recurrence’ of what is possible and knows that a possibility recurs only when existence is open for it fatefully, in the Moment, in resolute retrieve” (358). We will return later to this idea of the past as recurrence.

In *History as a System* (1935), Ortega follows an idea similar to Heidegger’s historicity. Actually, by then Ortega was well aware of Heidegger’s ideas and the similitude with his own previous writings. This is mostly noticeable in Ortega’s works

¹²⁹ Heidegger explains: “Constancy is not first formed either through or by “Moments” adjoining each other, but rather the Moments arise from the temporality [of Da-sein], *already stretched along*, of that retrieve which is futurally in the process of having-been” (*Being and Time* 357).

during the 1930s.¹³⁰ In *History as a System* he proposes that life is a task that we live according to beliefs and convictions that don't require deliberation. If, for Heidegger, Dasein is the accumulated socialized know-how, for Ortega, man is a collection of beliefs that are socialized. Beliefs may lack logical articulation but have vital articulation by forming a meaningful whole. Man is ontologically compelled to always advance beyond himself, as he is continuously accumulating "experience of life" and the socialized experience. "The past is not yonder, at the date when it happened, but here, in me. The past is me—by which I mean—, my life" (*History as a System* 138). This is Ortega's existential historicity. Further, Ortega asserts that until now reason has not been historical and history has not been rational. "Historical reason" is made of "what has happened to man" beyond theories. Ortega's historical reason takes no fact for granted, as it makes facts "fluid" by looking at *how* the fact takes place.

Throughout *The Labyrinth*, Paz seems to incorporate these ideas from Ortega and Heidegger about history and the historicity of human being. For Paz, Mexican history is a past that is still alive in popular culture. He asserts: "Any contact with the Mexican people, however brief, reveals that the ancient beliefs and customs are still in existence beneath Western forms. These still-living remains testify to the vitality of the pre-Cortesian cultures."¹³¹ Also, for Paz, there is a mutual implication of man and history. This relation is like living fluid, where hermeneutically "historical circumstances

¹³⁰ About Ortega's debts to Heidegger in this period, see chapter 5 in Pedro Cerezo's *La voluntad de la aventura*. Madrid: Ariel, 1983.

¹³¹ "Cualquier contacto con el pueblo mexicano, así sea fugaz, muestra que bajo formas occidentales laten todavía las antiguas creencias y costumbres. Esos despojos, vivos aún, son testimonio de la vitalidad de las culturas precortesianas" (*El laberinto* 228).

explain our character in the same way our character explains those. Both are the same thing.”¹³² For that reason, one of the many faces of *The Labyrinth* is that of a description (and critique) of persistent Mexican historical myths in contemporary society. It is important to note that this is not about a mechanical cause-effect historical relation to define Mexican being, but rather a continuous interaction (interpretation) of history as a living present. Later, in “*Postdata*” (1969), in a reflection on and continuation of *The Labyrinth*, Paz explains: “The Mexican is not an essence but a history.”¹³³ There, Paz also establishes a relationship between the current living of the present and the “invisible history”: “We pass our lives between living history and interpreting it. In interpreting it, we live it: each of our acts is a sign. The history we live is a document, and in this document of our visible history we should read the changes and metamorphoses of our invisible history.”¹³⁴ We may read here that the living of the present is a continuous reinterpretation, a re-enacting (recurrence in Heidegger) of history. Or, in another words, it is likely that in Paz’s view the current history of Mexico (when *The Labyrinth* was written) is a transformed recurrence of Mexico’s mythical past.

Examples of this re-enacting of history are suggested throughout *The Labyrinth*. Paz’s interpretation of the Mexican ritual “*fiesta*” is one of them. For Paz, in the *fiesta* Mexicans have communion with their hidden mythical past. While modern masses

¹³² “las circunstancias históricas explican nuestro carácter en la medida en que nuestro carácter también las explica a ellas. Ambas son lo mismo” (209).

¹³³ “El mexicano no es una esencia sino una historia” (*El laberinto* 363).

¹³⁴ “Entre vivir la historia e interpretarla se pasan nuestras vidas. Al interpretarla, la vivimos: cada uno de nuestros actos es un signo. La historia que vivimos es una escritura; en la escritura de la historia visible debemos leer las metamorfosis y los cambios de la historia invisible” (392).

throughout the world are “solitary crowds” that never interact as “living community,” in Mexico, the past meets the present. In a celebratory gathering such as December 12th (Day of Guadalupe Virgin) in Mexico: “...time comes to a full stop, and instead of pushing us toward a deceptive tomorrow that is always beyond our reach, offers us a complete and perfect today of dancing and revelry, of communion with the most ancient and secret of Mexico.”¹³⁵ Paz seems to be describing here a return to a mythical epiphany, but also to Heidegger’s moment of constancy, when resolute Dasein has fully appropriated its historicity. I believe these two choices are suggested in Paz’s further explanation of the climax of the *fiesta*: “It all occurs in an enchanted world: time is transformed to a mythical past or a pure present [...]”¹³⁶ Where again, “pure present” is analogous to the “Moment” in Heidegger: an instant that sums-up the historicity of Dasein. Then, for Paz, *fiesta* is not the celebration of an event, as commonly understood, but a re-enacting the past: “It does not celebrate an event: it reproduces it. Chronometric time is opened in half and the eternal present—for a brief but immeasurable period—is reinstated.”¹³⁷ Moreover, the reference to the pre-hispanic *mitote* is suggested in Paz’s description of Mexican *fiesta* as a quasi-ritualistic event. The *mitote* was for the Aztecs (and the Nahua culture in general) a regeneration dance event of ritual connotations.

¹³⁵ “el tiempo suspende su carrera, hace un alto y en lugar de empujarnos hacia un mañana siempre inalcanzable y mentiroso, nos ofrece un presente redondo y perfecto, de danza y juerga, de comunión y comilona con lo más antiguo y secreto de México” (183).

¹³⁶ “Todo ocurre en un mundo encantado: el tiempo es otro tiempo (situado en un pasado mítico o en una actualidad pura) [...]” (186).

¹³⁷ “No celebra, sino reproduce un suceso: abre en dos el tiempo cronométrico para que, por espacio de unas breves horas inconmensurables, el presente eterno se reinstale” (358).

Following Paz, Mexican devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe is in itself another case of a present that incorporates a living past.¹³⁸ The Virgin of Guadalupe is perhaps the only living symbol that unifies all the regions of the country and certainly is the core of Mexican Catholicism. Paz suggests that this devotion is a re-creation of the indigenous rituals to *Tonantzin* (fertility goddess of the Aztecs). He also affirms that the famous Basilica de Guadalupe sanctuary sits in the old shrine to *Tonantzin* on *Tepeyac* hill. As Jaques Lafaye showed, there are also strong connections between the Virgin of Guadalupe and Quetzalcoatl as phoenix-symbols of regeneration.¹³⁹ However, Paz asserts, Mexicans today do not ask the Virgin for fertility in the crops, but rather: “The Virgin is the consolation of the poor, the shield of the weak, the protection of the oppressed. In sum, she is the Mother of orphans. All men are born disinherited and their true condition is orphanhood, but this is particularly true among the Indians and the poor of Mexico.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Paz seems to be saying that the indigenous past is alive, though transformed, in the present of Mexicans.

The current devotion in Mexico to a sacrificed Christ is, Paz suggests, another case of the living past. From virginal births to sacrificial deaths, there are several analogies between the myths of Christ and the indigenous characters Quetzalcoatl,

¹³⁸ The discussion on Guadalupe Virgin is only added in the Second Edition of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in 1959.

¹³⁹ Quetzalcoatl was the main deity of fertility in *Nahua* culture in Mexico. Quetzalcoatl was also the sun and the creator of man. On the transference of mythical attributes to Virgin of Guadalupe, see Jacques Lafaye’s *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976) a book that, by the way, was fore worded by Octavio Paz.

¹⁴⁰ “La Virgen es el consuelo de los pobres, el escudo de los débiles, el amparo de los oprimidos. En suma, es la Madre de los huérfanos. Todos los hombres nacimos desheredados y nuestra condición verdadera es la orfandad, pero esto es particularmente cierto para los indios y los pobres de México” (*El laberinto* 223).

Huitzilopochtli, *Cuauhtémoc*, etc. Furthermore, Paz suggests that the sacrificed Christ is a re-occurrence of the sacrifice of the Conquest: "The Mexican venerates a bleeding and humiliated Christ, a Christ who has been beaten by the soldiers and condemned by the judges, because he sees in him the transfigured image of his own destiny. And this same Christ-figure leads him to recognize himself in *Cuauhtémoc*, the young Aztec emperor who was dethroned, tortured and murdered by Cortes."¹⁴¹

Later, in "*Posdata*" (1969), Paz again links the present and the recurrence of the past. The poet relates the despotic character of the Mexican state to the recreation of power symbolized in the ancient pyramid of Aztec architecture. A few months after the events of the state massacre in October 1968, when hundreds of students were killed in Tlatelolco public plaza, Paz questions what was behind those actions. For Paz, there is an "imaginary reality" in the current population of Mexico¹⁴², where "PRI [the 'Revolutionary' party] and the President are mythical projections, forms that substantiate the image we have made of power."¹⁴³ There is a concealed past of Mexico, Paz asserts, that Mexicans don't yet face properly but which shapes much of Mexicanness in the present: "Neither within nor outside, neither before nor after: the past reappears because it is a hidden present."¹⁴⁴ If the military Aztec state required frequent sacrifice

¹⁴¹ "El mexicano venera al Cristo sangrante y humillado, golpeado por los soldados, condenado por los jueces, porque ve en él la imagen transfigurada de su propio destino. Y esto mismo lo lleva a reconocerse en Cuauhtémoc, el joven emperador azteca destronado, torturado y asesinado por Cortés" (221).

¹⁴² Paz writes this in 1969.

¹⁴³ "el PRI y el Presidente son proyecciones míticas, formas en las que se condensa la imagen que nos hemos hecho del poder" ("*Posdata*" 383).

¹⁴⁴ "Ni adentro ni afuera, ni antes ni después: el pasado reaparece porque es un presente oculto" (390).

of enemy prisoners atop the pyramid (supposedly to assure the continuity of the Sun), according to Paz the massacre of Tlatelolco was also a dual reality with historical and ritual meaning. The deadly events were “a symbolic representation of our underground or invisible history. What unfolded before our eyes was an act of ritual sacrifice.”¹⁴⁵ Also, as the stone pyramid was a symbol of the continuity of time, Paz suggests that the Mexican state perpetuates its long existence by re-enacting its mythical history.

We should notice that by showing this living history, Paz wants to therapeutically criticise Mexicanness, as he did before in much of *The Labyrinth*: “... The critique of Mexico and its history—a critique that is similar to psychoanalysis’s therapeutics—must start by assessing what the Aztec world-view meant and still means for us.”¹⁴⁶ Paz’s therapeutic intentions are well-analysed in Santí’s critique of *The Labyrinth*. For Santí, psychoanalysis is “but one of several important conceptual strands in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, and yet its imprint is indelible” (“Ten Keys” 21). According to Santí, if psychoanalysis seeks to “free the subject from history and memory,” in Paz it is only through analysis and awareness of “the imaginary product of a historical trauma” that the Mexican will be free (22). While I agree with Santí that psychoanalysis is one of Paz’s referents, I also believe that Paz’s therapeutics is also a call for authenticity. In order to become authentic, that is to fully live one’s ownmost possibilities of being, Paz

¹⁴⁵ “una representación simbólica de nuestra historia subterránea o invisible... lo que se desplegó ante nuestros ojos fue un acto ritual: un sacrificio” (391).

¹⁴⁶ “... la crítica de México y de su historia—una crítica que se asemeja a la terapéutica de los psicoanalistas—debe iniciarse por un examen de lo que significó y significa todavía la visión azteca del mundo” (403).

calls for an acknowledgment of the recurrence of history; a call to appropriate our historicity.

Santí also suggests there is a romantic “monism” (an original unitary substance) in the way the *The Labyrinth* deals with history, which he traces back to German idealism, with possible references to Rank, Schelling, Hegel, Goethe, Novalis and Heidegger. For Santí, a recurring theme in the book is that of “detachment” (“from Mexican Being or Identity”) and therefore the Mexican wish to “return to the center of life from which he was separated one day” (22). This Romantic detachment is for Santí the origin of Paz’s use of the term “solitude.” The therapy and cure for this solitude is, then, the ground for Paz’s “communion” and, therefore, the Romantic possibility of “return.”

While I agree with Santí’s “Keys” in that in order to understand *The Labyrinth* we must look at the Romantic spirit behind the text, I add to that argument by focusing more on the fresher existential context—in many ways a continuation of the Romantic tradition—in which the book was born, and that links to other works in Paz’s poetics. In fact, as Santí briefly suggests in his introduction to *The Labyrinth*, I believe that in several ways solitude is Paz’s analog to Heidegger’s inauthenticity. For Santí, “solitude” resembles Heidegger’s concept, “in the sense that it recognizes its inherent-and-non-accidental function in human nature.”¹⁴⁷ Santí is recalling here Heidegger’s premise that Dasein is normally inauthentic, a being-in-the-world, even without being aware of it. I add to Santí’s intuition by stressing further this analogy and also by noting that Paz’s “communion” is analogous to Heidegger’s resolute authenticity. Solitude and

¹⁴⁷ “en el sentido que reconoce su función inherente, no accidental, en la naturaleza humana” (*El acto de las palabras* 217).

communion are like two moods in every human being and, similar to Heidegger's Dasein, for Paz too, humans move repeatedly from one state to the other. In fact, as this "solitude" is what makes the subject aware of itself, then, the appropriation of solitude is already a form of communion. For this reason Paz sometimes refers paradoxically to "solitude" as inauthenticity, while at other times solitude is the condition to be authentic (to seek for communion). As Santí points out, in Paz's effort throughout the book, "It is not a matter of avoiding alienation by pursuing historical analysis, but reconciliation with alienation (Heidegger would say 'inauthenticity') as the unavoidable premise of human existence."¹⁴⁸

As indicated before, throughout *The Labyrinth* Paz presupposes an analogy between the individual subject and the history of the entire nation. He suggests that Mexicans as a whole are in solitude because they are inauthentically detached from their own history. It follows that, in Heidegger's framework, Mexicans will come back to communion (to start, with themselves) once they authentically become aware of the recurrence of the past in their everyday living. However, for Paz, communion comes at certain times (as in the *fiesta*, the revolution, or love), only to sway back to solitude. What seems to be at stake here for Mexicanness are two of Heidegger's premises of authentic Dasein: on the one hand, the appropriation of one's own historicity and, on the other hand, the constant risk of covering up one's own instability of being by means of definitions. It is worth examining some examples.

¹⁴⁸ "No es cuestión ya, por tanto, de deshacer la alienación por medio del análisis histórico, sino de reconciliarse con la alienación (Heidegger diría la 'inautenticidad') como ineludible premisa de la existencia humana" (217).

One of *The Labyrinth's* thematic avenues is its critique of the modern world. Paz suggests that Mexicans, like all modern men, have been detached from the sacred side of reality. However, Mexicans are a special case, Paz suggests, as they have been forced to negate their historical context, through the conquest, the *Reforma*, the liberalism of Porfirio Díaz and, finally, the post-revolution's institutionalized definitions of Mexicanness. Mexican solitude is caused by this detachment from its own context. As Paz asserts: "Now, I want to point out that any break (with ourselves or those around us, with the past or the present) creates a feeling of solitude."¹⁴⁹ To show "how" and "when" the alienation happened is one of Paz's major efforts in the book.

Paz suggests that Mexico commenced its historical alienation with the violence of the Conquest. By analysing the current and popular use of such terms as *la chingada*¹⁵⁰ and *malinchista*, Paz tries to uncover the hidden origin of Mexican rejection of its own history. He goes back to the black-legend times of the Spanish conqueror raping the indigenous woman. Following Paz, the macho man in Mexico is a closed, aggressive individual. "It is impossible not to notice the similarity between the macho image and the Spanish conqueror."¹⁵¹ For Paz, the conqueror becomes a hidden prototype of "*el macho chingón*" who, while a closed individual himself, violently gets what he wants (*chinga*) by violently opening-up. As conqueror Hernán Cortés took *La Malinche*, an

¹⁴⁹ "Ahora bien, todo desprendimiento provoca una herida. A reserva de indagar cómo y en qué momento se produjo ese desprendimiento, debo apuntar que cualquier ruptura (con nosotros mismos o con lo que nos rodea, con el pasado o con el presente), engendra un sentimiento de soledad" (*El laberinto* 200).

¹⁵⁰ As a verb (*chingar*) or a noun (*chingado*, *chingada*) there are plenty of meanings for this word in Mexican language, depending on the context. Paz takes here *la chingada* as a reference to the violated mother, as in the insult: "*hijo de la chingada*."

¹⁵¹ "Es imposible no advertir la semejanza que guarda la figura del "macho" con la del conquistador español" (*El laberinto* 220).

indigenous woman, as translator and lover, she symbolically becomes *la chingada* (the opened-up), the Mother of actual Mexicans. Paz's point is that despite the fact that this Spanish-indigenous mixture is the basis of actual Mexican culture, in popular language to be *malinchista* (to be like *La Malinche*) means derogatorily to be open to the exterior. Also, paradoxically, to be *chingón* has positive connotations for macho men: power, strength, etc. Paz asserts: "The strange permanence of Cortes and *La Malinche* in the Mexicans' imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are the symbols of a not-yet-solved secret conflict. By rejecting *La Malinche* [...] the Mexican beaks his ties with the past, renounces his origins, and lives in isolation and solitude."¹⁵² Paz seems to suggest here that the Mexican, by neglecting his being as living history (by being inauthentic), also neglects his hybrid culture and therefore, remains "solo" (*i.e.* in solitude.)

Other instances of an inauthentic relation to history follow. For Paz, modern Mexico starts with the liberal project at the breaking point of the *Reforma* period (c. 1854-1876) with Benito Juárez in power. Juárez tried to create a new nation by negating the traditions of the indigenous population, the Church, and the Spanish tradition. This is again a neglecting of one's own history. Although Paz accepts that *Reforma* project aimed at transforming Mexico to liberal-universal values, he asserts: "*La Reforma* re-constitutes Mexico by neglecting its past. It rejects tradition and seeks to justify itself in

¹⁵² "La extraña permanencia de Cortés y de la Malinche en la imaginación y en la sensibilidad de los mexicanos actuales revela que son algo más que figuras históricas: son símbolos de un conflicto secreto, que aún no hemos resuelto. Al repudiar a la Malinche [...] el mexicano rompe ligas con el pasado, reniega de su origen y se adentra solo en la vida histórica" (225).

the future.”¹⁵³ What follows is the arrival of the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. We shall now discuss Paz’s ideas on the positivist ideology of this period.

I agree with Santí in his perception that Paz’s critique of positivism brings together Heidegger’s lack of authenticity, Sartre’s “bad faith” (to negate what oneself is), and Hegel’s “unhappy conscience,” in other words, the consciousness of the self as divided nature (*El acto de las palabras* 209). However, while Santí, emphasises Paz’s use of Sartre’s “bad faith,” I will add to Santí’s insight by pointing out the relevance of Heidegger’s authenticity as a premise that brings coherence to Paz’s critique of positivism in relation to the other references to authenticity through the book.

We saw before that Leopoldo Zea analysed this period in *El positivismo en México* within the context of the Ortegán-historicist movement in Mexico. In commenting on Zea’s work in *The Labyrinth*, Paz returns to some of the arguments he made in 1943 in his review of Zea’s book.¹⁵⁴ Paz agrees with most of Zea’s arguments, but adds that in Mexico positivism was not true liberalism as it was in Europe. In Mexico, positivism developed in compromise with the *latifundistas*, of feudal mentality, that owned most of the workable land in the country. However, most likely with Heidegger in mind, Paz asserts that Díaz adopted positivism as an imported ideology against the reality of Mexican history, condemning the country to inauthenticity. In Paz’s words: “An abyss opens between the system and the regime that adopts it, rendering impossible any authentic relationship with ideas, which at times become mere masks. *Porfirirismo* is,

¹⁵³ “La Reforma funda a México negando su pasado. Rechaza la tradición y busca justificarse en el futuro” (270).

¹⁵⁴ On my previous discussion of Paz’s review of Zea’s book see sections 2.3 and 3.1 of this dissertation.

indeed, a period of historical inauthenticity.”¹⁵⁵ Also, Paz notes that there was a “bad faith barrier” between the landlords and their support for Diaz’s positivism (276). And later, “Lies and inauthenticity are the psychological ground of Mexican positivism.”¹⁵⁶ We may now see that Paz made few changes to his 1943 critique of positivism in authenticity terms.

Similarly, Heidegger’s inauthenticity notion has a correlation with Ortega’s critique of the adoption of hypocritical utopian projects. For Ortega, we lack “loyalty” to ourselves when we adopt utopian—necessarily rational—projects that neglect spontaneity of life and bring hypocrisy (*El tema de nuestro tiempo* 54). We have seen that for Heidegger Dasein is inauthentic when it adopts schemes to cover up its unsettledness. Likewise for Paz, “The ideals of Reform, that great historical project by means of which Mexico was to become a nation destined to realize itself through certain universal values, were reduced to utopia. Its laws and principles became a rigid framework that stifled our spontaneity and mutilated our being.”¹⁵⁷ Paz seems to suggest here that the inauthentic character of the *Reforma* and positivism, utopian but at odds with the spontaneous being of Mexico as a whole, introduces an ontological problem (“mutilated our being”). This incongruence will lead, at the end of *Porfiriato*, to Mexican revolution.

¹⁵⁵ “Entre el sistema y el que lo adopta se abre así un abismo, muy sutil si se quiere, pero que hace imposible toda relación auténtica con las ideas, que se convierten a veces en máscaras. El porfirismo, en efecto, es un período de inautenticidad histórica” (275).

¹⁵⁶ “Mentira e inautenticidad son así el fondo psicológico del positivismo mexicano” (277).

¹⁵⁷ “El esquema de la Reforma, el gran proyecto histórico mediante el cual México se fundaba a sí mismo como una nación destinada a realizarse en ciertas verdades universales, queda reducido a sueño y utopía. Y sus principios y leyes se convierten en un armazón rígido, que ahoga nuestra espontaneidad y mutila nuestro ser” (277).

In comparison with the utopian projects of Independence and liberal *Reforma*, Mexican revolution was, for Paz, a return to authenticity, spontaneity, communion and—ontologically— “breaks as a real disclosure of our being.”¹⁵⁸ While the Independence and *Reforma* movements had a plan, an ideology, rationalized by Mexican intellectuals, for Paz the revolution had no ideological program, and “the lack of a set program gave it popular authenticity and originality.”¹⁵⁹ Besides Heideggerian authenticity, we can almost hear the voice of Ortega’s vitalism in Paz’s justification of the non-utopian—more spontaneous than programmatic—character of the revolution in Mexico.

However, it is paradoxical that for Ortega the phenomenon of revolution itself is what should be declared rational and utopian. About revolutions, in general, Ortega asserts: “The ideal future made by pure intellect must replace past and present. This is the mood that ignites revolutions.”¹⁶⁰ By suggesting that we now live a new age, with a new sensibility that should balance out spontaneous life with reason, Ortega declares “the decline of revolutions.”¹⁶¹ Paz knows this and briefly engages a dialogue, in *The Labyrinth*, with Ortega’s arguments. According to Paz, Ortega missed the mythical character (“the eternal return”) implicit in the social revolutions (*El laberinto* 287-288). In Mexico, this was the case in Emiliano Zapata’s “Plan de Ayala”—a demand for the legal restitution of land to the peasants—that, according to Paz, had an origin in the pre-colonial *Calpulli*, the organizational unit of the land in the Aztec society. “The Revolution

¹⁵⁸ “irrumpe como una verdadera revelación de nuestro ser” (279-280).

¹⁵⁹ “esta ausencia de programa previo le otorga originalidad y autenticidad populares” (280).

¹⁶⁰ “El futuro ideal construido por el intelecto puro debe suplantarse al pasado y al presente. Este es el temperamento que lleva a las revoluciones” (*El tema* 37).

¹⁶¹ “El ocaso de las revoluciones” is the title of one of the appendixes in *El tema de nuestro tiempo*.

became an attempt to integrate our present and our past, or—as Leopoldo Zea put it—to ‘assimilate our history’, to change it into a living thing: a past now made present.”¹⁶²

In the case of the Mexican Revolution, this return signifies for Paz what I see as two premises of Heideggerian authenticity: a re-appropriation of one’s own historicity (the reinsertion of the past into the present), that also leads to a re-appropriation of one’s own being (one of the meanings of Paz’s communion). Paz clarifies these ideas further:

“If we look at the Mexican Revolution from the ideas outlined in this essay, we see that it is a movement to regain our past, to assimilate it and make it a living present [. ...] Thanks to the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican wants to reconcile with his history and his origin. Hence, our movement has a character at once desperate and redemptive [... In this revolution] the people refuse all foreign aid, any scheme proposed from outside and with no deep relationship to its being, and look to themselves. Despair, the refusal to be saved by a project beyond its history, is a movement of being that withdraws from all solace and delves into itself: it is alone. And at that moment, that loneliness is resolved in attempted communion.”¹⁶³

¹⁶² “La Revolución se convierte en una tentativa por reintegrarnos a nuestro pasado. O, como diría Leopoldo Zea, por ‘asimilar nuestra historia’, por hacer de ella algo vivo: un pasado hecho ya presente” (*El laberinto* 289).

¹⁶³ “Si se contempla la Revolución mexicana desde las ideas esbozadas en este ensayo, se advierte que consiste en un movimiento tendiente a reconquistar nuestro pasado, asimilarlo y hacerlo vivo en el presente [...] Gracias a la Revolución el mexicano quiere reconciliarse con su Historia y con su origen. De ahí que nuestro movimiento tenga un carácter al mismo tiempo desesperado y redentor [... En esta revolución] el pueblo se rehúsa a toda ayuda exterior, a todo esquema propuesto desde afuera y sin relación profunda con su ser, y se vuelve sobre sí mismo. La desesperación, el rehusarse a ser salvado por un proyecto ajeno a su historia, es un movimiento del ser que se desprende de todo consuelo y se

However, as The Revolution progressed, it soon had to conform to already-set ideologies. According to Paz, as the ideas of the revolutionaries proved to be unworkable in practice, the movement became inauthentic again by adopting the liberal agenda in the “Constitución de 1917.” As Paz asserts: “The permanence of the liberal agenda, with its classical division of powers—nonexistent in Mexico— its theoretical federalism, and its blindness to our reality, reopened the door to untruth and inauthenticity. No wonder, then, that a large part of our political ideas continue to be words intended to oppress and conceal our true being.”¹⁶⁴

As in the other examples I have discussed here, we may read in this quote that Mexicans became inauthentic by choosing once more to neglect their historicity. It is perhaps clearer now that authenticity as appropriation of one’s own historicity plays a major role in understanding *The Labyrinth*. And as we can see in this last quote, for Paz, we may also be inauthentic by rationally imposing defined schemes of being. This leads to our next topic, Paz’s consideration of authenticity as being undefined.

adentra en su propia intimidad: está solo. Y en ese mismo instante, esa soledad se resuelve en tentativa de comunión” (292).

¹⁶⁴ “La permanencia del programa liberal, con su división clásica de poderes—inexistentes en México—, su federalismo teórico y su ceguera ante nuestra realidad, abrió nuevamente la puerta a la mentira y la inautenticidad. No es extraño, por lo tanto, que buena parte de nuestras ideas políticas sigan siendo palabras destinadas a ocultar y oprimir nuestro verdadero ser” (291).

3.2.3. *Authenticity as Otherness*

I believe that the most important Heideggerian clue to understanding Paz's works is that being is nothing in itself, but rather a becoming something else. We saw before that Dasein is the instability of being as it is a being-in-the-world. Authentic Dasein assumes the instability and lives out most of its possibilities of being as open project, i.e. open to be *another* being. This is the process toward Heidegger's "resolution" of Dasein. A similar discourse underlies *The Labyrinth*. The book describes the problem of being inauthentic and the possibility of redemption by becoming "another" as individuals and as Mexicanness.

The "resolution" needed in order to appropriate otherness seems to be suggested in the book's title. As Stanton asserts, the "labyrinth" symbol has a deep mythical resonance as a place of transformation. In his words:

The labyrinth is a mysterious enigma that defies rational analysis and explanation. It functions here as an emblem of the modern world in which individuals see themselves as trapped prisoners, caught in a web of winding paths [...] the labyrinth is also a place of initiation and trial, a symbolic space in which the individual searches for and explores his own self and the universe in hope of discovering true identity and freedom. [...] The final goal consists of the liberated subject who is able to glimpse the 'otherness' of the self and the subjective nature of others ("Introduction" 32-33).

I add that the labyrinth is a symbol that also recalls the individual's situation of being alone to discover the best of its possibilities in a spontaneous way. Further, Stanton explains that in the Minoan myth, Theseus should appropriate the other, instinctive part of himself, rather than kill the Minotaur. Moreover, the Thread of Ariadne is what enables the hero to find his way out by retracing his steps and "come to terms with the past" (32). I believe this is also an allegory to the prerequisite of authentic resolution of Dasein: the appropriation of one's own historicity.

In addition to the title of the book, I see the opening quote in *The Labyrinth* from Antonio Machado's *Juan de Mairena* (1936) as another clue to understanding the relevance of authenticity (as otherness) in Paz's arguments. The quote recites:

The other does not exist: that is the rational faith, the incurable conviction of all human reason. Identity = reality: as if, when all is said and done, all had to be, necessarily and absolutely, one and the same. But the Other will never submit to such elimination: it persists and it survives; it is the hard bone on which reason fastens and breaks its teeth. Abel Martín, with poetic faith, no less human than rational faith, believed in the Other, in the "Essential Heterogeneity of Being," the incurable *otherness* that the *one* suffers.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ "Lo otro no existe: tal es la fe racional, la incurable creencia de la razón humana. Identidad = realidad, como si, a fin de cuentas, todo hubiera de ser, absoluta y necesariamente, uno y lo mismo. Pero lo otro no se deja eliminar; subsiste, persiste; es el hueso duro de roer en que la razón se deja los dientes. Abel Martín, con fe poética, no menos humana que la fe racional, creía en lo otro, en "La esencial heterogeneidad del ser," como si dijéramos en la incurable *otredad* que padece lo *uno*" (*El laberinto* 141). Paz quotes Antonio Machado's *Juan de Mairena I*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2006. p. 85.

Ortega briefly talked about the “Other” with a similar meaning in *The Theme of Our Time* (*El tema de nuestro tiempo*, 1923): “Life is an altruist cosmic fact, and exists only as perpetual migration of the vital ‘I’ toward the Other.”¹⁶⁶ Machado had been Ortega’s student and grew intellectually under the—difficult to escape—influence of the philosopher in Spain (Fernández 37-39). However, the ontological concern in Machado’s quote puts the issue of otherness in surprising affinity to Heidegger’s authenticity. Machado suggests that contrary to logic, being (the “bone on which reason breaks its teeth”) is not a fixed essence but is always the “other,” given that “being” is always a being something else (*i.e.* “otherness”). According to Fernández, Machado was a good reader of Nietzsche and Bergson, among other philosophers, and also followed Heidegger from whom Machado felt in his last years “a peculiar fascination” (40). Heidegger is discussed in other parts of Machado’s *Juan de Mairena* as the bearer of a “new philosophy” about “what is being.”¹⁶⁷ Additionally, we should remember that the Spanish edition of Heidegger’s “What Is Metaphysics?”—where being is described

¹⁶⁶ “La vida es el hecho cósmico del altruismo, y existe sólo como perpetua emigración del Yo vital hacia lo Otro” (*El tema* 80).

¹⁶⁷ For instance, in another paragraph of *Juan de Mairena*: “Yo no sé qué trascendencia puede alcanzar en el futuro del mundo filosófico (...) la filosofía de Heidegger; pero no puedo menos de pensar en Sócrates y en la sentencia délfica (...) ante esta nueva —¿nueva?— filosofía, que a la pregunta esencial de la metafísica: ¿qué es el ser?, responde: investigadlo en la existencia humana; que ella sea vuestro punto de partida (...) Tal es la nota profundamente lírica, que llevará a los poetas a la filosofía de Heidegger como las mariposas a la luz” (Machado, *Juan de Mairena I* 263). Later, in *Juan de Mairena* chapter LXI (1937), one of Machado’s last writings, he summarizes Heidegger’s tenets in *Being and Time* (Machado, *Juan de Mairena II* 87-99). Juan Cano Ballesta goes deeper in looking at Machado’s parallelisms and influence from Heidegger. See Chapter 1 in Ballesta’s *Las estrategias de la imaginación: utopías literarias y retórica política*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1994.

as nothing in itself—had widely circulated in Spain since 1931.¹⁶⁸ In fact, Machado's "otherness" as applied to the human being (the human being as otherness) is analogous to Heidegger's "Dasein is a being-in-the-world." We have seen that Dasein finds itself, factically, as being the shared socialized know-how. In this way, Dasein's being is the other (human) beings' heritage.

Paz was well acquainted with Machado's work and personally met him in Spain in 1937. In a talk about the Spanish poet in Paris (1951) Paz makes clear the importance of Machado's otherness: "Conversion is necessary to be, so the 'I' realizes itself and becomes fulfilled: the 'I' longs for the 'you,' the one longs for the other, 'being is eagerness to become what it is not'."¹⁶⁹ Also, Paz points that Machado reflected—beyond his own poetry—in being time: "man projects himself in time: all life is a projection with no other final destination than death [...] death is part of life."¹⁷⁰ We will see that Paz's appropriation of Machado's "the other" and "otherness" to point to authenticity plays a central role in Paz's thought on Mexico and in his poetics.

I argue that besides understanding Paz's "solitude" as a detachment from one's own historicity, it may also be a detachment from being otherness. Paz sometimes suggests that solitude is a detachment from a sort of unity (hence Santí's suggestion of Paz's Romantic "monism"). However, I believe that Paz suggests two sides to the

¹⁶⁸ However, Antonio Fernández suggests that Machado knew Heidegger indirectly, from German-philosophy manuals. See Fernández's "Introducción." *Juan de Mairena I*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2006. p. 40.

¹⁶⁹ "Para ser, para que el yo se realice y logre su plenitud, es necesaria la conversión: el yo aspira al tú, lo uno a lo otro, 'el ser es avidez de ser lo que él no es'." See Paz's: *Fundación y Disidencia. Obras Completas* 3. Mexico City: Círculo de Lectores-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 340.

¹⁷⁰ "el hombre se proyecta en el tiempo: toda vida es proyección en un tiempo que no tiene más perspectiva que la muerte [...] la muerte es parte de la vida" (Paz, *Fundación y Disidencia* 342).

supposed “monism.” As Santí intuitively, Paz suggests a return to a now-lost Mexican identity. However, my point is that Paz also suggests a return not to a fixed essence of Mexicanness, but to the contrary: a return to being as otherness. Mexican identity is for Paz, in this case, a movable target, always being other.

Further, for Paz and Heidegger, authentic otherness is, paradoxically, another face of being inauthentically detached from one’s own otherness. As Santí briefly suggests, Paz’s “detachment” evokes Heidegger’s “thrown-ness,” to be thrown, *de facto*, into the world (“Ten Keys” 22). We may recall at this point that for Heidegger Dasein is “thrown” into the world as pre-reflective involvement in the understanding of its world. However, inauthentic “Da-sein has initially always already fallen away from itself and fallen prey to the ‘world.’” (*Being and Time* 164). Furthermore, we saw that inauthentic Dasein, by neglecting its historicity, is detached from its full realization as being-history. For Paz: “We are alone. Solitude, the source of anxiety, begins on the day we are deprived of maternal protection and fall into a strange and hostile world. We have fallen; and this fall, to find ourselves fallen, makes us guilty. Of what? A crime without a name: to be born.”¹⁷¹ Similar to Paz’s description, we saw before that Heidegger calls Dasein’s movement of falling-in-the-world “the plunge.” This causes Dasein’s anxiety towards not having any definition of himself and, similar to Paz’s solitude, makes him “guilty.” As Heidegger explains: “In the structure of thrownness as well as in that of the [existential] project, essentially lies a nullity. And it is the ground for

¹⁷¹ “Estamos solos. La soledad, fondo de donde brota la angustia, empezó el día en que nos desprendimos del ámbito materno y caímos en un mundo extraño y hostil. Hemos caído; y esta caída, este sabernos caídos, nos vuelve culpables. ¿De qué? De un delito sin nombre: el haber nacido” (*El laberinto* 217-218).

the possibility of the nullity of inauthentic Da-sein in its falling prey which it always already actually is factically. [...] And that means that Da-sein as such is guilty..." (*Being and Time* 263).¹⁷² In Heidegger's view, guilt is Dasein's awareness (of being nothing in itself) and presupposes Dasein's care of itself. As such, guilt is not to be eliminated but to be appropriated in order to achieve the resolution of Dasein (*i.e.* authenticity). And to be authentic, Dasein only has to appropriate its possibilities that it already is as fallen *in-the-world*. As said before, for Paz as well, solitude must be appropriated rather than eliminated. "Man is nostalgia and search for communion. Therefore, each time he feels complete, he is aware of his nullity as a self, that is, he is aware of his solitude."¹⁷³ Paz is suggesting that solitude always stays behind communion, as it actually conveys the potentiality of communion. Communion presupposes solitude.

Throughout *The Labyrinth*, Paz repeatedly applies this idea of authenticity as otherness in order to criticize Mexicanness. Paz calls for an open (authentic) Mexicanness, while rejecting petrified (closed, inauthentic) definitions of it. From the first essay of *The Labyrinth*, Paz calls for an appropriation of otherness: "I remember that in Spain during the civil war I had a revelation of 'the other man' and of another kind of solitude: neither closed nor mechanical, but open to transcendence."¹⁷⁴ And a few lines later: "In every man there is the possibility of his being—or, to be more exact, of his

¹⁷² Heidegger makes use of "guilt" for explaining the process towards resolution, as "guilt" is primarily a pre-reflective (*i.e.* non-rational) feeling. This is in tune with Heidegger's idea of Dasein as pre-reflective involvement in the world.

¹⁷³ "El hombre es nostalgia y búsqueda de comunión. Por eso, cada vez que se siente a sí mismo, se siente como carencia de sí mismo, como soledad" (*El laberinto* 341).

¹⁷⁴ "Recuerdo que en España, durante la guerra, tuve la revelación de 'otro hombre' y de otra clase de soledad: ni cerrada ni maquinal, sino abierta a la trascendencia" (162).

becoming once again—another man.”¹⁷⁵ Paz applies a similar thinking in discussing Mexican falsehood.

In characterizing solitude, Paz alludes to Mexican untruth. Surprisingly enough, by conceiving of falsehood in terms of the concept of authenticity, Paz seems to justify it. For Paz, Mexican falsehood “has a decisive importance in our daily lives.”¹⁷⁶ He suggests that in seeking ways to escape solitude, Mexicans lie—but not only to deceive others. Mexican falsehood is fruitful as it looks to risk what Mexican subjects actually are. Then, the Mexican lies striving to invent himself in another. Paz asserts: “The dissembler pretends to be someone he is not. His role requires constant improvisation, a steady forward progress across shifting sands. [...] Our lies reflect, simultaneously, our shortcomings and our appetites, what we are not and what we want to be.”¹⁷⁷ And there is no doubt here that Paz is talking about lying as means to being authentic: “If we can arrive at authenticity by means of lies, an excess of sincerity can bring us to refined forms of lying.”¹⁷⁸ Paz makes love an example of this “excess of sincerity.” For Paz, if love is to “open-up” to the other, to show one’s true insides, it does so at the risk of avoiding the erotic game. Following this idea, the subject that is fully sincere to the other because is foolishly in-love “has saved his true self by replacing it with an image.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ “En cada hombre late la posibilidad de ser o, más exactamente, de volver a ser, otro hombre” (163).

¹⁷⁶ “posee una importancia decisiva en nuestra vida cotidiana” (176).

¹⁷⁷ “El simulador pretende ser lo que no es. Su actividad reclama una constante improvisación, un ir hacia adelante siempre, entre arenas movedizas. [...] Nuestras mentiras reflejan, simultáneamente, nuestras carencias y nuestros apetitos, lo que no somos y lo que deseamos ser” (176).

¹⁷⁸ “Si por el camino de la mentira podemos llegar a la autenticidad, un exceso de sinceridad puede conducir a formas refinadas de la mentira” (176).

¹⁷⁹ “pone a salvo su verdadero ser, lo sustituye por una imagen” (177).

The “refined lie,” in Paz’s example is the subject’s concealment of his own unstable being by a fixed (unconditionally in love) image. We may recall here Heidegger’s claim that inauthentic Dasein looks for covering-up its factual instability of being. For Paz, eroticism requires simulation in order to be lived as what it should be: “a perpetual discovery, an immersion in the waters of reality and constant invention.”¹⁸⁰ It is perhaps evident that Paz is proposing that, by appropriating otherness, true erotic love is a recreation of the instability of being.

Similarly, in speaking of the Mexican revolution and its consequences, Paz seems to make a Heideggerian interpretation: “[...] the revolutionary movement transformed Mexico and made it ‘another.’ To be oneself is always to become that other person who we also are but hide, that hidden promise or possibility of being.”¹⁸¹ Actually, Paz tells that *la Revolución* was “a marvellous fiesta in which the Mexican, drunk of himself, finally meets, in deadly embrace, the other Mexican.”¹⁸² However, if the revolution was a movement towards authenticity, Paz notices that it failed to build a community. Moreover, he suggests that when the institutionalized revolution degrades into nationalism (closing Mexico’s project to being “another”) Mexico is, ontologically, missing the point. While calling to look abroad, at the other countries in Latin America with a similar circumstance, Paz says: “Our nationalism, to be more than mental illness

¹⁸⁰ “un perpetuo descubrimiento, una inmersión en las aguas de la realidad y una recreación constante” (177).

¹⁸¹ “[...] el movimiento revolucionario transformó a México, lo hizo ‘otro’. Ser uno mismo es, siempre, llegar a ser ese otro que somos y que llevamos escondido en nuestro interior, más que nada como promesa o posibilidad de ser” (320).

¹⁸² “una portentosa fiesta en la que el mexicano, borracho de sí mismo, conoce al fin, en abrazo mortal, al otro mexicano” (294).

or self-adulation must search the whole world. We must start from the awareness that our alienation is similar to the situation of most of the rest of the people. To be ourselves will be to oppose the movement of historical ice with the changing face of man.”¹⁸³

I believe the most firm existential discourse in *The Labyrinth* is the “Appendix: A Dialectics of Solitude.” This is also the only essay in the book that does not address directly Mexicanness, but the solitude of all men. The essay is a sort of manifesto for the rest of the book and it is meaningful that it was renamed in the second edition of *The Labyrinth* (1959) to include the word “Appendix” in the title.¹⁸⁴ This suggests a sort of clarification or further explanation that may be needed to understand the book. The “Dialectics” in the title already points to the swinging movement of the individual between solitude and communion (or inauthenticity and authenticity).

The starting concerns in the “Appendix” are analogous to Heidegger’s inquiry into the nature of Dasein in *Being and Time*. According to Paz, all men are in solitude and “to live” means “to embody the other that one will be as permanent and strange future. Solitude is the ultimate basis of human condition. Man is the only being who is aware of his loneliness, and the only one who is looking for being another.”¹⁸⁵ If for Paz, life is becoming a “future” (a temporal concern), for Heidegger also Dasein is a “being-toward-

¹⁸³ “Nuestro nacionalismo, si no es una enfermedad mental o una idolatría, debe desembocar en una búsqueda universal. Hay que partir de la conciencia de que nuestra situación de enajenación es la de la mayoría de los pueblos. Ser nosotros mismos será oponer al avance de los hielos históricos el rostro móvil del hombre” (339).

¹⁸⁴ In the 1950 edition, this was the last chapter, “Capítulo VIII: La dialéctica de la soledad.”

¹⁸⁵ “internarnos en el que vamos a ser, futuro extraño siempre. La soledad es el fondo último de la condición humana. El hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y el único que es búsqueda de otro” (341). This last sentence in the 1950 edition, “...y es el único que es ser antinatural por definición” (173). See below (a couple of paragraphs down) the discussion on the “nature” of man in Ortegán terms.

the-end” as he exists anticipating itself in the future. As Heidegger asserts: “Anticipation makes Da-sein authentically futural in such a way that anticipation itself is possible only in that Da-sein, as existing, always already comes toward itself, that is, is futural in its being in general” (*Being and Time* 299).

A comparison with Ortega brings other clues for understanding Paz. For Ortega, man’s concern for the future comes out of “desire”: “Desire, the vital role that best symbolizes the essence of all others, is a constant movement of our being to go beyond itself: Desire is an indefatigable Sagittarius that tirelessly launches us toward provocative targets.”¹⁸⁶ We must notice, however, that Ortega’s emphasis here is not in the temporal dimension, but the human becoming something else (necessarily in the future, though). Perhaps thinking of Ortega, Paz also suggests that “desire” is inherent to solitude: “Hence, to feel oneself alone has a double significance: on the one hand, it consists in having a consciousness of self, on the other hand in a desire to stand out from it.”¹⁸⁷ It is meaningful that Paz specifies here that solitude conveys a desire to “stand out” of oneself. Paz could be thinking of Heidegger’s “Ek-sistence” as standing out: “Da-sein exists, and it alone. Thus existence is standing out and perduring the openness of the there: Ek-sistence ” (*Being and Time* 125). We will see in the next chapter how “Desire” and ek-sistence also play important roles for Paz’s poetics in *The Bow and the Lire*.

¹⁸⁶ “El deseo, la función vital que mejor simboliza la esencia de todas las demás, es una constante movilización de nuestro ser hacia más allá de él: sagitario infatigable nos dispara sin descanso sobre blancos incitantes” (*El tema* 79).

¹⁸⁷ “Así, sentirse solos posee un doble significado: por una parte consiste en tener conciencia de sí; por la otra, en un deseo de salir de sí” (*El laberinto* 341).

The “Appendix” also brings, I believe, an Ortegian concern on the “nature” of man. Paz says: “Man is the only being who is aware of his loneliness, and the only one who seeks out another. His nature—if ‘nature’ can be used in reference to man, the being who has invented himself by saying ‘No’ to nature—consists in his longing to realize himself in another.”¹⁸⁸ Paz is rejecting here man’s “nature” or an original essence. Ortega used similar words in *History as a System*. For Ortega “Man has no nature. Man is not his body which is a thing, nor his soul psyche, conscience, or spirit which is also a thing. Man is not a thing, but a drama...” (*History* 129). Also, if for Paz man “invents itself” by neglecting “nature,” similarly for Ortega man is continuous invention given that is not a concrete thing. Ortega says, “I invent projects of being and of doing in light of circumstance” (130).

Thus, we have seen that a number of existential premises and, most important of all, the Heideggerian concept of authenticity organize the meaning of much of Paz’s discourse in *The Labyrinth*. Besides Paz’s existential-hermeneutics approach through the book, we saw that authenticity is an underlying premise in Paz’s conception of history. For Paz, the present is a recurrence of the past because the past is still alive. Moreover, we saw that authenticity also helps understanding Paz’s conception of man, and Being in general, as otherness. Therefore, authenticity as historicity and otherness help understanding Paz’s critique of Mexicanness. We will see next that several of Paz’s poems dealing with the topic of Mexicanness, from the same decade as *The Labyrinth* and a few years later, are framed within a similar premise of authenticity.

¹⁸⁸ “El hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y es el único que es búsqueda de otro. Su naturaleza—si se puede hablar de naturaleza al referirse al hombre, el ser que, precisamente, se ha inventado a sí mismo al decirle “no” a la naturaleza—consiste en un aspirar a realizarse en otro” (342).

3.3. Authenticity in Mexicanness in Octavio Paz's Poetry

Mexico had been the topic of Paz's poetry in a few poems before *The Labyrinth*, as in *Entre la piedra y la flor* (1941). However, it is after *The Labyrinth* when Paz nurtures his best poems with the theme of Mexicanness. After publishing a compendium of his previous poetry in *Libertad bajo palabra* (1949), Paz addressed Mexicanness in the poetry of *¿Águila o sol?* (1951), *Semillas para un himno* (1954), *Piedra de sol* (1957), *La estación violenta* (1958) and *Salamandra* (1962). My reading of a brief selection of poems will show that after *The Labyrinth* Paz continued to develop different nuances on the topic of authenticity in Mexicanness.

Eagle or Sun? (¿Águila o sol?, 1951) was published one year after *The Labyrinth*. The book is an art-object composed of Paz's most surrealist prose poems accompanied with illustrations by Rufino Tamayo. We saw before that Tamayo shared interests with Paz and *El Hiperión* group in finding new and non-nationalistic approaches to Mexicanness. Tamayo's illustration on the cover of the book conveys multiple meanings. It shows a hand flipping a coin that traces a spiral in the air. The coin's trace is followed by the inscription "¿AGUILA O SOL?" In older Mexican coins the *Águila* (eagle) and the *sol* (Sun) were the names for the two sides of the coin. The question "¿águila o sol?" was used to challenge someone to flip a coin and make a guess on the random outcome. In tune with the illustration, the opening paragraph of the book suggests the poet's struggles to find the proper word (even by flipping a coin) to continue the creation of the poem: "Today I fight alone with a word. The word which

belongs to me, and to which I belong: heads or tails? eagle or sun?”¹⁸⁹ However, both, the eagle and the sun are symbols of pre-Hispanic Mexicanness. In fact, the eagle eating a serpent is the main symbol in the Mexican flag (also stamped in all Mexican coins), and for the Aztecs, this image symbolized the duality of Quetzalcoatl (*Quetzalcoatl*: literally “bird-serpent”).¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the Sun is Tonatiuh, another personality of Quetzalcoatl represented as the Fifth Sun. Some old coins showed in one side Teotihuacan’s Sun pyramid. Therefore, Tamayo’s illustration suggests that Mexicanness is “on the fly” without a definite outcome.

Perhaps the poem that best addresses authenticity in *Eagle or Sun?* is “Obsidian Butterfly” (“Mariposa de Obsidiana”). Once more we shall look at the title as a clue for the rest of the work. The butterfly is an insect that is the metamorphosis of another being. And flimsy as it is, it gets contrasted here with the hardness of obsidian stone. As a symbol of the balance of contraries, it also refers to Quetzalcoatl. Moreover, a footnote clarifies that the title refers to Izpápálotl, “goddess sometimes confused with Teteoinan, our mother, and Tonantzin. All of these female divinities were fused in the cult that, since the sixteenth century, has been worshipping the Virgin of Guadalupe.”¹⁹¹ It is meaningful that Paz refers to the Guadalupe, as he did in *The Labyrinth*, one of few symbols of Mexicanness that is actually embraced by most Mexicans in all regions of

¹⁸⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all English translations from *¿Águila o Sol?* are taken from Eliot Weinberger’s translation of the book. In the original: “Hoy lucho a solas con una palabra. La que me pertenece, a la que pertenezco: ¿cara o cruz, águila o sol?” See *Águila o Sol*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001. p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Quetzalcoatl was for the *Nahua* culture it was the main god of fertility and the balance of the opposites.

¹⁹¹ “diosa mexicana a veces confundida con *Teteoinan*, nuestra madre, y *Tonantzin*. Todas estas divinidades se han fundido en el culto que desde el siglo XVI se profesa a la Virgen de Guadalupe” (*Águila o sol* 83).

Mexico. Also, we may recall from the previous section that, the Virgin of Guadalupe and Quetzalcoatl are connected as symbols of regeneration.

“Obsidian Butterfly” suggests the voice of the goddess narrating oppressing episodes on the obliterated indigenous past. The violence of the Conquest and the weakened condition of the goddess are contrasted with the memories of her almighty potentialities as regeneration power: “The eagle throbbed in my belly. I was the mountain that creates as it dreams, the house of fire, the primordial pot where man is cooked and becomes man. [...] I was the flint that rips the storm clouds of night and opens the doors of showers.”¹⁹² But then, the dreadful episode seems to include the present time: “And the day never ends, never stops counting itself, broken into copper coins. [...] I am tired of this unfinished solitaire.”¹⁹³ Despite her weakened condition, the goddess wants to be regeneration power again and pleas to a “you” (that could be Mexico) to take her as such. The voice recites: “Lucky the spider that sheds its skin. [...] Sow me among the battle dead by firing squad. I will be born in the captain’s eye.”¹⁹⁴ There is a possible reference here to the Mexican revolution as the execution by firing squad is quite common among the revolution’s stories. Next, the voice continues the call for regeneration: “My body, ploughed by your body, will turn into a field where one is sown and a hundred reaped. [...] Burn, fall into me: I am the pit of living lime that cures

¹⁹² “En mi vientre latía el águila. Yo era la montaña que engendra cuando sueña, la casa del fuego, la olla primordial donde el hombre se cuece y se hace hombre. [...] Yo era el pedernal que rasga la cerrazón nocturna y abre las puertas del chubasco” (83-84).

¹⁹³ “Y el día no acaba nunca, no acaba nunca de contarse a sí mismo, roto en monedas de cobre [...] Estoy cansada de este solitario trunco” (84).

¹⁹⁴ My translation from “Dichosa la serpiente, que muda de camisa. [...] Siémbreme entre los fusilados. Naceré del ojo del capitán” (84-85).

the bones of their afflictions. Die in my lips. Rise from my eyes. Images gush from my body: drink in these waters and remember what you forgot at birth.”¹⁹⁵ These last words remind us of Paz’s call for appropriation of one’s own historicity to become authentic. And there is also in the poem a call to be as an open project. This is suggested toward the last lines of the poem:

“I am the wound that does not heal, the small solar stone: if you strike me,
the world will go up in flames.

Take my necklace of tears. I wait for you on this side of time where
light has inaugurated a joyous reign: the covenant of the enemy twins,
water, that escapes between our fingers and the ice, petrified like a king in
his pride. There you will open my body to read the inscription of your
fate.”¹⁹⁶

The poem suggests an invitation to Mexico to appropriate its contradictions (the covenant of the enemy twins) and flourish in the “wound that does not heal” as an open project. In this redemption space, forms are changeable as the water that escapes the

¹⁹⁵ “Mi cuerpo arado por el tuyo ha de volverse un campo donde se siembra uno y se cosecha ciento. [...] Arde, cae en mí: soy la fosa de cal viva que cura los huesos de su pesadumbre. Muere en mis labios. Nace en mis ojos. De mi cuerpo brotan imágenes: bebe en esas aguas y recuerda lo que olvidaste al nacer” (85).

¹⁹⁶ My translation of: “Yo soy la herida que no cicatriza, la pequeña piedra solar: si me rozas, el mundo se incendia. Toma mi collar de lágrimas. Te espero en ese lado del tiempo en donde la luz inaugura un reinado dichoso: el pacto de dos gemelos enemigos, el agua que escapa entre los dedos y el hielo, petrificado como un rey en su orgullo. Allí abrirás mi cuerpo en dos, para leer las letras de tu destino” (84).

fingers that try to hold it, and escapes the cold-hard ice (“petrified as a king in his pride”). Paz is suggesting that Mexico’s destiny is to escape petrified definitions and regenerate itself. In tune with this idea, Tamayo’s accompanying illustration suggests a butterfly tracing a spiral similar to the flipping coin on the book’s cover.

Regeneration and the ‘one’ that turns in the ‘other’ is the topic of several other poems in *Eagle or Sun?* “Head of an Angel” (“Cabeza de Ángel”) also points to identity issues in Mexicanness. The poem suggests, again, a feminine voice—a girl that could be Mexico—narrating a dreamlike story. The girl gets into a world—apparently some scenes of Spanish Crusades and the Inquisition—depicted in the hanging paintings of a room. The suffering of the people being tormented in the paintings becomes her live torture. Moreover, as she is decapitated, the stream of her blood irrigates and fertilizes the land. The poem alludes to the regeneration of life as the blood-fertilized land produces a myriad of flowers. It is worth recalling that sacrifice by beheading of women was a common practice in the Aztec’s fertility rituals.¹⁹⁷ The narrating voice then tells that after she gets a replacement head (backwards) she walks back to her reality in a Mexican village. Here she finds herself again without head. Looking for her head, she finds an indigenous old man that offers her several heads, but none that fits her well. Then, the man takes her to search for a head in the village’s plaza where there is a typical *fiesta* environment. The *fiesta* is contrasted by another event in the plaza, an official state commemoration of “Cinco de Mayo.” This is the commemoration date of defeat of the French in 1862 and, symbolically, of all European interventions in Mexico).

¹⁹⁷ See, for instance, Elizabeth Baquedano’s and Michel Graulich’s, “Decapitation Among the Aztecs: Mythology, Agriculture and Politics, and Hunting.” *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 23 (1993): 163-178.

It is meaningful here that the official celebration is mixed with the public torturing of a girl (*i.e.* the first girl as another) in the plaza.

“[...] and after a long time we came to the village and in the square there was a girl who was being martyred and some men dressed in black as though it was a burial and one of them read a speech like on National Day and there were a lot of Mexican flags and in the bandstand they played a march and it was like a fair there were piles of peanuts and jicamas and sugar cane and coconuts and watermelons and everybody bought and sold stuff except for a group that was listening to the man while the soldiers martyred the girl [...]”¹⁹⁸

The poem suggests that the first girl finds herself (*i.e.* Mexico) tortured by the official nationalism of some personages. This is contrasted with the rest of the people who seem to be absorbed into the colourful *fiesta*. The indigenous old man (a re-appropriation of Mexico's past?) chops the head of the tortured girl to give it to the first girl. This time the head fits her well and she happily comes back home. Similar to *The Labyrinth*, the poem suggests that beyond the nationalist discourse Mexico should find its way by authentically trying different possibilities and embodying its historicity.

¹⁹⁸ “[...] y luego de muchas vueltas llegamos al pueblo y en la plaza había una niña que estaban martirizando unos señores vestidos de negro como si fueran a un entierro y uno de ellos leía un discurso como en el Cinco de Mayo y había muchas banderas mexicanas y en el kiosco tocaban una marcha y era como una feria había montones de cacahuates y de jicamas y cañas de azúcar y cocos y sandías y toda la gente compraba y vendía menos un grupo que oía al señor del discurso mientras los soldados martirizaban a la niña [...]” (*Águila o Sol* 66).

Mexicanness is also one of the themes of Paz's best known long-poem: *Sunstone* (*Piedra de sol*, 1956).¹⁹⁹ The topic of Mexicanness is announced in the title as *Piedra de sol* refers to the huge monolith—also known as Aztec Calendar—unburied at Mexico City's central plaza in 1790. Carved in the stone, there are multiple allegories to Quetzalcoatl represented as the Fifth Sun. Moreover, the structure of verses in the poem refers to planet Venus, another of Quetzalcoatl's personalities. 584 hendecasyllables form an allegory with the same number of days in the synodic cycle of Venus around the Sun. Also, the last six verses are the same as the initial verses, suggesting a cyclical character in the poem.²⁰⁰ As the poem progresses, a voice in the first person suggests a wandering walk through multiple scenarios. The text alludes—through poetic suggestions—to episodes (sometimes overlapping) of a personal biography; historical incidents (from Mexico and other places); Quetzalcoatl's mythical vicissitudes as regeneration god (as Xólotl, Coatlicue, Venus); the erotic encounter with a woman (that sometimes turns into an encounter with a fertility Goddess); and also an existential journey where the poetic "I," strives between alienation and authentic self realization.

In *Sunstone* Paz seems to borrow the strategy used in *The Labyrinth* of making an analogy of the personal identity quest to the national one. While the poetic "I" voice seems to clearly indicate the vicissitudes of a person (that could be the poet himself), the name and structure of the poem, plus the insinuated meaning in some passages,

¹⁹⁹ The reader may look at Chapter 4 of my Master's dissertation '*Piedra de sol*' frente al mito del eterno retorno, for a more complete analysis of this poem in relation to pre-Hispanic myths.

²⁰⁰ The analogy between the circular structure of the poem and Venus was suggested by Paz himself in a note to the first edition of the poem in 1957.

suggest the endeavours of Mexicanness between inauthenticity and authentic appropriation of its historicity and its being as otherness. Similar to “Head of an Angel,” the character wanders in search of identity:²⁰¹

75 now I collect my fragments one by one
and go on, bodiless, searching, in the dark,

the limitless corridors of memory
(...)

86 [I] search without finding, I search for a moment,
for a face of lightning-flash and thunderstorm²⁰²

The passage suggests the personage’s search for a face in the meanders of history. It is meaningful that the issue of Mexicanness is at stake here as the same lines refer as well to Quetzalcoatl or Xólotl in his mythical travel through the underworld. In this Nahua legend, Quetzalcoatl as Xólotl (or Quetzalcotal and its double Xólotl, the dog) travels to

²⁰¹ As *Piedra de sol* is a very long poem, from here onwards I use sequential numbers to identify the verses, assuming each verse is a line of the poem (but not necessarily every hendecasyllable). This applies to any edition of the poem. I use the edition “Piedra de sol.” *La estación violenta*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. The English translation is by Muriel Rukeyser.

²⁰² “recojo mis fragmentos uno a uno / y prosigo sin cuerpo, busco a tientas, /corredores sin fin de la memoria, / (...) / busco sin encontrar, busco un instante, / un rostro de relámpago y tormenta”

the land of death to pick up the bones—spread in the ground—which will be the base for making the first man.²⁰³

The quest for identity (or for the personage's being) is suggested in other stages of the poem in different contexts. However, there is no room for a fixed identity. If for Heidegger Dasein is nothing in itself, in Paz's poem the personage recognizes a similar condition:

224 now there is nothing in me but one vast wound,
a gap with no possible way of healing,²⁰⁴

Similar to "Obsidian Butterfly," the image of the "wound... with no possible way of healing" suggests the open project of being. Then, the voice talks to itself (or the self as another) telling that he is nothing but (the use of) tools:

241 you were no one, nobody,
a heap of ashes and a broom,
a knife with a notched edge, a feather duster,
a few feet of skin suspended on some bones,²⁰⁵

²⁰³ I have analysed before this passage in Chapter 4 of my master's thesis *Piedra de sol frente al mito del eterno retorno*. See specially pp. 91-93 and 97-101. According to the "Leyenda de los soles," Quetzalcoatl travels to the underworld to negotiate the bones with Mictlantecuhtli. Quetzalcoatl steals the bones but, while running away from the place, he falls down spreading the bones in the ground. After getting advice from Xólotl and desperately collecting the bones, Quetzalcoatl escapes to the surface to create the first man with the help of Citlacpi.

²⁰⁴ "no hay nada en mí sino una larga herida, / una oquedad que ya nadie recorre,"

It is worth recalling that, for Heidegger, Dasein is primarily its socialized know-how. Paz seems to relate here the personage's being to a broom, a knife, a duster; practical objects of everyday living. Heidegger took the example of using a hammer to illustrate Dasein's understanding of the world as socialized practices.²⁰⁶ Right after, the poem suggests that the character recognizes himself as history:

245 a dried-out bunch of something, a black hole
and there at the bottom of the hole two eyes
of a girl drowned a thousand years ago,²⁰⁷

The girl's gaze in these verses seems to be the gaze of history that, as suggested in the following verses, conveys the re-enactment of the past in the present:

248 those looks buried at the bottom of the pit,
looking at us from the beginning of time,
the young girl in her seeing an old mother
who sees within her grown son a young father,
the mother's seeing of a lonely daughter

²⁰⁵ "no hay nadie, no eres nadie, / un montón de ceniza y una escoba, / un cuchillo mellado y un plumero, / un pellejo colgado de unos huesos,"

²⁰⁶ Heidegger starts exposing this argument in *Being and Time*, p. 64

²⁰⁷ "un racimo ya seco, un hoyo negro / y en el fondo del hoyo los dos ojos / de una niña ahogada hace mil años,"

who sees in the kingly father a young son,

By recognizing his being as history the character opens the meaning possibilities of his identity:

261 —tonight is my life, and this single moment
which never stops opening, never stops revealing
where my life lay, who I was, what your name is
and what my own name is.²⁰⁸

Then, as suggested in the following verses, the character's appropriation of one's own historicity leads to the possibility of recognizing his own being as another:

274 Was it I riding through a Oaxaca night
that was black-green and enormous, like a tree,
soliloquizing like the fantastic wind;
coming back to my room—always a room somewhere—
could the mirrors really not recognize me?²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ “miradas enterradas en un pozo, / miradas que nos ven desde el principio, / mirada niña de la madre vieja / que ve en el hijo grande un padre joven, / mirada madre de la niña sola / que ve en el padre grande un hijo niño (...) / —esta noche me basta, y este instante / que no acaba de abrirse y revelarme / dónde estuve, quién fui, cómo te llamas, / cómo me llamo yo:”

²⁰⁹ “¿caminé por la noche de Oaxaca, / inmensa y verdinegra como un árbol, / hablando solo como el viento loco / y al llegar a mi cuarto —siempre un cuarto— / no me reconocieron los espejos?”

Later in the poem, the personage realizes that he is nothing but a being-in-the-world, the world of the others. He *is* the others:

518 for surely we are not, we never are anything
alone but spinning and emptiness,
crazy faces made in the mirror, horror vomit;
life is not ours, it is the others',
life it is not anybody's, all of us
are life—the bread of the sun for all the others
all those others who are us, we ourselves—,
I am the other when I am myself, my acts
are more my own when they are everybody's,
because to be myself I must be other,
go out of myself, seek myself among others,
those others who are not if I do not exist,
others give me the fullness of my existence,²¹⁰

However, as we saw before, being-in-the-world always conveys the risk of alienation.

For Heidegger, authenticity is only possible because we are continuously at risk of being lost in publicity. In tune with this idea, the voice in the poem says:

²¹⁰ “bien mirado no somos, nunca somos / a solas sino vértigo y vacío, / muecas en el espejo, horror y vómito, / nunca la vida es nuestra, es de los otros, / la vida no es de nadie, todos somos / la vida —pan de sol para los otros, / los otros todos que nosotros somos—, / soy otro cuando soy, los actos míos / son más míos si son también de todos, / para que pueda ser he de ser otro, / salir de mí, buscarme entre los otros, / los otros que no son si yo no existo, / los otros que me dan plena existencia,”

532 and life is otherwise, always *there*, farther,
beyond thee, beyond me, eternal horizon,
life that sucks life from us, life that alienates us
while inventing us a face, to then wear it down,
thirst for existence, death, bread of us all,²¹¹

Facing the possibility of alienation, as if the voice were inauthentically lost in the world
of the others, he pleas to the Goddess of regeneration:

537 Heloise, Persephone, and Mary, thou,
turn to me then at last that you may see
my turn and central face, that of the other,
my face of us all, that is always all of us,
face of the living tree and the breadman,
the driver and the thunderhead, the sailor,
the sun's face, the arroyo's, faces of Peter and Paul,
face of the individual collective,
awaken me, now I am born:²¹²

²¹¹ "la vida es otra, siempre allá, más lejos, / fuera de ti, de mí, siempre horizonte, / vida que nos desvive
y enajena, / que nos inventa un rostro y lo desgasta, / hambre de ser, oh muerte, pan de todos,"

²¹² "Eloísa, Perséfone, María, / muestra tu rostro al fin para que vea / mi cara verdadera, la del otro, / mi
cara de nosotros siempre todos, / cara de árbol y de panadero, / de chofer y de nube y de marino, / cara
de sol y arroyo y Pedro y Pablo, / cara de solitario colectivo, / despiértame, ya nazco:"

While Heloise is here perhaps as a symbol of transgression against dogmas,²¹³ Mary and Persephone are clear symbols of regeneration.²¹⁴ It is significant that the personage pleads to them for an identity that is, beforehand, “that of the other.” If as said before, at least in one of the possible interpretations, the poem refers to the vicissitudes of Mexicanness, then Paz is suggesting here that Mexican identity should not be a defined essence but a changing “other.” The poem finalizes while the character appropriates its being:

576 gateway of being: open your being, awaken,
learn then to be, begin to carve your face,
develop your elements, and keep your vision
keen to look at my face, as I at yours,
keen to look full at life right through to death,²¹⁵

It is worth noting that despite that the structure of the poem and the title “*Piedra de sol*” are direct references to pre-Hispanic Mexicanness, the other references are indirect or

²¹³ Heloise refers to Héloïse d’Argenteuil, French nun and lover of Peter Abélard. There is another reference to this couple in the poem, lines before, in vv. 385-388.

²¹⁴ In Greek mythology Persephone is daughter of harvest-goddess Demeter and symbolizes the cycle of harvest. María suggests a reference to Virgin Marie, that has been related to Sumerian Inanna, fertility Goddess. I explained more on these two goddesses in my ‘*Piedra de sol*’ frente al mito del eterno retorno, pp. 117-118.

²¹⁵ “puerta del ser: abre tu ser, despierta, / aprende a ser también, labra tu cara, / trabaja tus facciones, ten un rostro / para mirar mi rostro y que te mire, / para mirar la vida hasta la muerte,”

poetically mediated.²¹⁶ However, the poem mingles many direct references to other episodes, names, places, etc. from universal (or Western) culture as a whole. In that way Paz suggests, close to Tamayo's art and in a parallel way to *The Labyrinth*, that Mexicanness will find its authenticity, neither by closing itself to the national "roots" nor by imposing foreign ideologies, but by opening the national to relations with the universal.²¹⁷

The collection of poems *Salamander* (*Salamandra*, 1962), takes its name from the last of its poems. Though several poems in the book deal with the topic of otherness, it is in the poem "Salamandra" that Paz introduces again the theme of Mexicanness as otherness. Salamander is the name of the ubiquitous lizard-like amphibious animal, capable of regenerating its limbs. However, once more, Paz bridges here the universal and the national as the poem also addresses the *axólotl*, Mexican salamander that was mythically one of Quetzalcoatl's forms. In tune with Quetzalcoatl's duality, *axólotl* animals undergo some kind of metamorphosis. Besides changing form and being able to regenerate, some axolotls also change their aquatic nature to live in the land.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ For instance: the names Quetzalcoatl, Coatlicue or *Guadalupe*, are not in the poem, but these characters are suggested poetically. However, the names of Persephone, María (Virgin) or Melusine are addressed directly.

²¹⁷ For instance, Paz asserts in *The Labyrinth*: "La mexicanidad, así, es una manera de no ser nosotros mismos, una reiterada manera de ser y vivir otra cosa. En suma, a veces una máscara y otras una súbita determinación por buscamos, un repentino abrirnos el pecho para encontrar nuestra voz más secreta. Una filosofía mexicana tendrá que afrontar la ambigüedad de nuestra tradición y de nuestra voluntad misma de ser, que si exige una plena originalidad nacional no se satisface con algo que no implique una solución universal" (*El laberinto* 315-316).

²¹⁸ However, *axólotl* species is best known for failing to complete the metamorphosis, keeping characteristics of larvae through adulthood. Most axolotls remain in the water in this state. See, for example, National Geographic's: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/amphibians/axolotl/>

“Salamandra” is basically a poem of enumeration, a song to the being that is always another. The poem describes physical or poetic attributes of this animal in a variety of contexts, from its identification with fire²¹⁹ (always changing but the same), to characteristics from different subspecies (the “Spanish,” the “Alpine,” etc.), to its mythical significance as Axólotl and Xólotl.

According to the Mexican myth, Xólotl (double of Quetzalcoatl) is the god that refuses to die (sacrificed to the Sun). Escaping its pursuers, Xólotl hides by transforming itself in double maize, then in an *axólotl* to hide in the water (González Torres 49). In analogous way, Paz tells in the poem:

Xólotl refuses to consume himself
he hid himself in the corn but they found him
he hid himself in the maguey but they found him
he fell into the water and became the fish axólotl
the Double-Being²²⁰

As stated before, in Aztec mythology, Xólotl (or Quetzalcoatl as Xólotl) travels to the underworld to pick up the bones to make the first man. The importance of Xólotl as the life giver, creator of mankind (of Mexican race), should not be understated. In the poem:

²¹⁹ The name salamander might have originated from Greek *salambe*, fireplace. The animal often hides in old logs and branches. If these are used as firewood, the salamander escapes the flames, therefore the relation to fire.

²²⁰ Unless otherwise specified, I reproduce the English translation from Denise Levertov. In the original: “Xólotl se niega a consumirse / se escondió en el maíz pero lo hallaron / se escondió en el maguey pero lo hallaron / cayó en el agua y fue el pez axólotl / el dos-seres.”

Xólotl the dog, guide to Hell
he who dug up the bones of the fathers
he who cooked the bones in a pot
he who lit the fire of the years
the maker of man²²¹

However, the myth suggests that Mexicans are born out of the unstable being (“the Double-Being” in the lines above) of Axólotl. Then, the poem suggests that this “man-creator” is nothing but transformation:

Xólotl the penitent
the burst eye that weeps for us
Xólotl
larva of the butterfly
double of the Star
sea-shell
other face of the Lord of Dawn
Xólotl the axólotl

Salamander²²²

²²¹ “Xólotl el perro guía del infierno / el que desenterró los huesos de los padres / el que coció los huesos en la olla / el que encendió la lumbre de los años / el hacedor de hombres.”

²²² “Xólotl el penitente / el ojo reventado que llora por nosotros / Xólotl la larva de la mariposa / el doble de la estrella / el caracol marino / la otra cara del señor de la Aurora / Xólotl el ajolote / Salamandra.”

Finally, in closing the poem, Paz makes a reference to “*Atl-tlachinolli*,” another symbol in *nahua* mythology of Quetzalcoatl’s duality of being and balance of opposites:

If she carves herself in the flame
she burns her monument
Fire is her passion, her *patience*

Salamother

Aquamother²²³

While “Salamother” (“Salamadre” in the original) suggests *salambe* (fire or fireplace in the Greek etymology), “Aquamother” (“Aguamadre” in the original) suggests *agua*, water. And both “madre” endings, in Spanish, are a reference to the life-giver mother. However, by placing one term in front of the other, Paz is bridging once more contexts by alluding to the Mexican symbol “*Atl-tlachinolli*”: “water in fire” or “burned water.” Then, it is possible now to see that in “Salamandra” and in the other presented poems, Paz is poetically addressing the same idea of authenticity in Mexicanness, as he did before in *The Labyrinth*.

Through this chapter we have seen how Paz answered to the existential context of his time. I have tried to show that a number of existential premises organize the

²²³ My translation of: “Si en la llama esculpe / su monumento incendia / El fuego es su pasión es su paciencia / Salamadre Aguamadre.”

meaning of Paz's thought on Mexicanness in *The Labyrinth* and other essays and poems. We saw that Ortega's influence in Mexico paved the way for Heidegger's notion of authenticity: the individual's acceptance of his/her unstable non-being and therefore of his/her open possibilities as historicity. We saw that Paz was part of this Heideggerian environment since the early forties, as we may read in his early statements on cultural identity. This trend became central to the studies of "lo mexicano" in the works of *El Hiperión* group and other intellectuals and artists, through the forties and fifties. Moreover, we saw that these existential premises add to the understanding of the core ideas in *The Labyrinth*. In particular, Paz's interpretation of Mexican ways and traditions as linked to pre-Hispanic history show a conception of the present as a recurrence of a living past. This, in turn, has a relation to Heidegger's conception of Dasein's authentic appropriation of its being time: Dasein brings itself back to what has already been. Then the past is here, now, as a source of possibilities. Also, we saw that Paz's use of the notion of otherness—Being is always *be-ing* another—has links to Machado's use of the same term and Heidegger's call for Dasein's authentic appropriation of its own indefinite, socialized, being-in-the-world. And this being indefinite must be understood as another source of possibilities. Most important of all, these existential premises explain Paz's rejection of nationalism and pre-conceived definitions of Mexicanness, while calling at the same time for appropriating Mexican history. Finally, we saw that Paz's arguments on Mexican identity are extended through some of his most important poems addressing Mexico and Mexicanness, such as "Obsidian butterfly" and *Sunstone*. We will see that the core of Paz's poetics may also be understood as grounded in a variation of the notions of authenticity and otherness.

CHAPTER 4. HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT IN PAZ'S POETICS

You are just a dream
but the world dreams in you
and its muteness speaks through your words.

O.P., "Poetry" (fragment)²²⁴

In the previous chapter we saw that Octavio Paz's concern in Mexicanness is better understood in relation to existential premises. Paz's interpretations on the being of Mexico as the reoccurrence of the past but always "otherness" gains a new existential depth when seen in relation to Heidegger's notion of authentic being (being history but open to possibilities). We also saw that Paz started his formal reflections on the essence of poetry with his conference presentation "Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion" ("Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión," 1942), in the context of Paz's early craving for the authenticity of Mexican letters. We will see that the essence of Being as authenticity and otherness is also the starting point for Paz's long-term reflection on the existential meaning of poetry. Paz wrote several essays on poetics showing this trend. Also, in many cases, the poetry itself was the realm for expressing

²²⁴ "Eres tan sólo un sueño,
pero en ti sueña el mundo
y su mudez habla con tus palabras."

"La poesía" (fragment). The translation into English of this and other poems is mine, unless otherwise stated.

existential concerns on the poetic phenomenon, thematically or in performative ways.²²⁵

A number of poems with this approach where Paz specifically addressed the being of Mexico were already discussed in the previous chapter.

In the current chapter I pursue a reading of Paz's thought on poetry in relation to Heidegger's existential premises on poetic language and his critique of aesthetic tradition. My understanding of these relations—a matter of my hermeneutical interpretation of the texts—disclose a number of existential premises organizing Paz's poetics. Paz delayed a full exhibition of the philosophical dimension of his poetics until the publishing of *The Bow and the Lyre* (*El arco y la lira*, 1956). This book is Paz's most comprehensive exposure of his philosophy of poetry; however, other works on poetics continued, such as *Children of the Mire* (*Los hijos del limo*, 1974) and *The Other Voice* (*La otra voz: Poesía y fin de siglo*, 1990). Also, as said before, Paz's poetry is another part of the same reflection on poetry. I compare Paz's poetics with Heidegger's tenets in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (1936), "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936) and "Letter on Humanism" (1946), among other titles. The starting point for looking at this connection between the two authors is suggested by Paz himself as Heidegger is quoted several times throughout *The Bow and the Lyre*.²²⁶ However, my reading shows that the link between Paz's poetics (in essays and poetry) and Heidegger's philosophy goes far beyond Paz's direct references to the philosopher. I also propose that Paz

²²⁵ In other words, the poem as performance of its own utterance. For instance, we will see that in many instances Paz deploys his poetics in a poem by referring to the actual process of creating that same poem.

²²⁶ *The Bow and the Lyre* is perhaps Paz's most polyphonic work as there are plenty of references to other authors. However, as a quick look at the index reveals, Heidegger is one of the most mentioned, together with Novalis, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Dante and San Juan de la Cruz.

made his poetics discourse unique by interbreeding existential premises with other ideas.

Enrico Mario Santí, Anthony Stanton and Emir Rodríguez Monegal, among others, have discussed Paz's most important intellectual debts specifically in the writing of *The Bow*. They have also discussed the changes from the first (1956) edition of the book to the second (1967).²²⁷ These changes are sometimes important. In fact, Stanton considers the second edition "a new stage in the author's aesthetic ideas" ("Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" 301). On the other hand, Santí considers that Paz's changes between these editions, as important as they are, do not make Paz renounce his main stand as "existential humanist" (*El acto de las palabras* 244).²²⁸ I agree with Santí. In fact, my reading of Paz through several works beyond *The Bow* reinforces the critic's assessment. However, as Stanton does in his discussion of this book, I will refer mostly at the first edition as it shows more of Paz's debts with existential philosophy.

²²⁷ Hence, I will refer to these editions as follows: *El arco I* (*El arco y la lira*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956) and *El arco II* ("El arco y la lira." *La casa de la presencia: Poesía e Historia. Obras Completas 1*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1990).

²²⁸ Also, Rodríguez Monegal considers that the second edition follows the influence of linguistics and structuralism in France through the 1960s. According to him Paz eliminated the centrality of the creator (the poet, the man, the human) in the poetic phenomenon in favour of an idea of the poem as a self-contained system of meaning. For Rodríguez Monegal that would explain the removal of several references to French existentialism and Heidegger's philosophy in the second edition (Rodríguez Monegal 43-44). Rodríguez Monegal also suggests that Paz substituted existentialism with Oriental thinking (45). In comparison, Santí shows that the changes between editions are more complex and allow for a heterogeneous discourse in "the middle ground between the defence of the talking subject and the arbitrariness of the sign" (*El acto de las palabras* 242). According to Santí, there is continuity in Paz's existential defence of the "poetic presence," through his different stages. However, Paz mixed this with a "domesticated" critique of the subject (243-244). Also, as Stanton points out, the primacy of language over man is already part of Heidegger's own turn after *Being and Time* towards the primacy of poetic language ("Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" 310).

A comprehensive exposure of the different influences in the writing of *The Bow* and other works in poetics is beyond the scope of this work. I do not really address—though I do in a few cases—other currents of thought embodied in Paz’s discourse. Santí and Stanton have each one made the best effort in drawing a preliminary map of the major intellectual currents throughout the book.

I proceed by looking at Paz’s tenets by going back and forth from Paz’s essays to his poetry. With this I do not pretend to show how Paz’s theory is realized in his practice of writing poetry, but to make sense of Paz’s existential premises from both essays and poetry. I consider Paz’s poetry to be not the practice but another part (as important as the essays, even if more mediated by indirect language) of the making of his thought on poetry.

Finally, this chapter is organized in three sections that correspond to major existential approaches for understanding Paz’s poetics. Paz’s thought on poetry as revelation of otherness in human existence and Being in general, his thought on poetry as a polemical ground of history, and his belief about poetry as a fundamental (for existence) epiphany, are all coherent in relation to Heidegger’s philosophy.

4.1. Poetry as the Essence of Being

Poetry puts man outside himself and,
simultaneously, makes him return to his
original being: returns him to himself [...] Poetry
is entering into Being.

O.P., *The Bow and the Lyre*²²⁹

As said before, it is possible to trace Paz's concern in poetry as an existential phenomenon to "Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion." In this talk Paz briefly stated: "[...] poetry continues to be a force capable of revealing to man his own dreams and invite him to live them out in plain sight [...] At night we dream and our destiny is manifested because we dream about what we could become. We are that dream and we are born only to make it come true."²³⁰ We can see that even at this early stage there is a clue of Paz's future premise that poetry opens up possibilities of being in a fundamental way for human existence. In Paz's poetry of the same year, there is a similar concern. A fragment from the poem "Poetry" ("La poesía," 1942) says:

²²⁹ "La poesía pone al hombre fuera de sí y, simultáneamente, lo hace regresar a su ser original: lo vuelve a sí. [...] La poesía es entrar en el ser." (*El arco* 108).

²³⁰ "... la poesía sigue siendo una fuerza capaz de revelar al hombre sus sueños e invitarlo a vivirlos en pleno día [...] En la noche soñamos y nuestro destino se manifiesta porque soñamos lo que podríamos ser. Somos ese sueño y sólo nacimos para realizarlo" (*Primeras letras* 302).

Because I only exist because you exist,
and my mouth and my tongue were formed
only to say your existence
and your secret syllables, word
impalpable and despotic,
substance of my soul.²³¹

It is significant that these verses suggest that poetry is the very substance of man, and that man speaks only to say poetry. These early concerns were not a consequence but, most probably, appeared simultaneously with the arrival of Heidegger's influence in Mexico. As we saw in the previous chapter, Paz was well acquainted with the poetics of Antonio Machado that promoted (as quoted by Paz in the epigraph to *The Labyrinth*) "the essential heterogeneity of Being" and "the incurable otherness that the one suffers." And also, Machado in the voice of his heteronymous Abel Martín, proposed that is the poet's task to show the heterogeneity of Being: "Now (in poetry) the task is to do once more that which was undone [...]: Once Being has been thought as what it is not, it is necessary to think it as what it is; it is urgent to give it back its rich, inexhaustible heterogeneity."²³² However, Paz only fully addressed these issues almost 25 years later

²³¹ "porque tan sólo existo porque existes,
y mi boca y mi lengua se formaron
para decir tan sólo tu existencia
y tus secretas sílabas, palabra
impalpable y despótica,
substancia de mi alma."

²³² "Ahora se trata (en poesía) de realizar nuevamente lo desrealizado [...]: una vez que el ser ha sido pensado como no es, es preciso pensarlo como es; urge devolverle su rica, inagotable heterogeneidad"

in *The Bow and the Lyre*. By then, as discussed in the previous chapter, a whole existential movement had developed among Mexican intellectuals, at least in part thanks to Heidegger's influence. Paz had also lived in France from 1945 to 1953, where he was immersed in a variation of this existential environment and in surrealism (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 238). We will see that Heidegger's thought on poetry became solid foundation for Paz's further elaboration of his own initial concerns.

If, as we saw, the title "*The Labyrinth of Solitude*" suggested a rite of passage for man's self realization of his being as otherness, also the title "*The Bow and the Lyre*" refers to similar ontological concerns. As Paz himself tells in the book, in Heraclitus's "polemical approach to being," the world "by changing, reposes," as the strings of the bow and the lyre (*El arco I* 198). Then, the title is another suggestion that Being is, paradoxically, by being another. Also, the lyre—the rhythm—consecrates man through music, whilst the bow launches man beyond itself (to be as another) (*El arco II* 273). And, as we will see, for Paz it all comes to poetry (otherness and rhythm) as the primary

(Antonio Machado, *Poesías completas*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1994. p. 349). As Stanton notices, what captivates Paz is not Machado's poetry (which Paz considered enclosed in Spanish traditionalism) but his philosophical prose that was, by then, little known (Stanton, "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*." Ed. Rafael Olea Franco and James Valender. *Reflexiones lingüísticas y literarias*. Vol. 2. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992. p. 318). Actually, perhaps involuntarily, what Paz highlights in his 1951 talk "Antonio Machado" (see previous chapter) is mainly the existential topics that have an affinity with Heidegger's premises. Paz points out that for Machado: "Being is eagerness to be what it is not" ("el ser es avidez de ser lo que no es") (Paz, "Antonio Machado" 340). Also Paz highlights that, for Machado, man projects himself in time, towards his death, and that this way of thinking ends in Machados's "essential heterogeneity of Being." Paz also said: "Machado has sensed the essential topics of poetry and philosophy of our times. His view of Being as heterogeneity and otherness touches, I believe, the very core, the central theme of contemporary philosophy [...]" ("Machado ha intuido los temas esenciales de la poesía y filosofía de nuestro tiempo. Su visión del ser como heterogeneidad y otredad me parece que toca la entraña misma, el tema central de la filosofía contemporánea [...]" (343).

way of changing the individual that allows him/her to be as another and to interpret reality as otherness.

In *The Bow* Paz engages the distinction between prose and poetry. He asserts that the word is inevitably plural in its meanings. Prose and thoughtful discourse try to pinpoint the meaning of words without fully accomplishing it. In a similar way, he suggests, utilitarian technical manipulation also seeks to dominate matter. In comparison, the poet works in the opposite direction by setting matter free. He does so by liberating meaning to its utmost plurality: "In poetic creation there is no victory over matter or over instruments, as the vain aesthetic of artisans wishes, but a setting free of matter."²³³ And we may find similar concerns in Paz's poetry.

In the poem "Source" ("Fuente," 1950) the singing poet is the inexhaustible "source" of meanings. As the poet faces the surrounding world (parks, trees, walls, streets, etc.), a poetic epiphany opens up the endless meanings of the world:

everything that is tied to the ground for love of matter-in-love breaks loose
and ascends radiantly between the intangible hands of this hour.

The old world of stones arises and flies off.

It is a town of whales and dolphins that frolic in the open sky,

throwing each other great gushes of glory.²³⁴

²³³ "En la creación poética no hay victoria sobre la materia o sobre los instrumentos, como quiere una vana retórica de los artesanos, sino un poner en libertad la materia" (*El arco* I 22).

²³⁴ "todo lo atado al suelo por amor de materia enamorada rompe amarras y asciende radiante entre las manos intangibles de esta hora.

In the poem, matter is set free like the world of “stones” that “arises and flies off.” Paz often used images of flight to suggest the meaning-opening possibilities of the poetic epiphany. In another poem, “Spring at Sight” (“Primavera a la vista,” 1949), the voice (the poet?) faces the plurality of reality in the clarifying vision of a poetic rapture. As the daylight, the moment arrives opening up reality (an analogy of spring) and the voice declares:

Everything that my hands touch, flies.

The world is full of birds.²³⁵

These verses suggest the flight of matter as metaphor of poetic otherness. This is relevant as the power of poetry for liberating the never-exhausted-meaning possibilities of matter (the world at hand) is also a major topic in Heidegger’s philosophy on the essence of art and poetry.

Heidegger’s most comprehensive essay on the essence of art is “The Origin of the Work of Art.”²³⁶ If *Being and Time* makes a critique of the tradition of metaphysics

El viejo mundo de las piedras se levanta y vuela.

Es un pueblo de ballenas y delfines que retozan en pleno cielo, arrojándose grandes chorros de gloria;”

²³⁵ “Todo lo que mis manos tocan, vuela.

Está lleno de pájaros el mundo.”

²³⁶ If not before, Paz probably read this work in the 1952 Spanish translation “El origen de la obra de arte” (Trad. Francisco Soler Grima) In: *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* (Madrid), Numbers 25, 26, 27 (January, February, March, 1952).

tradition (that thinks Being as an object that stands before a subject), in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger makes a critique of aesthetics tradition that also makes the work of art an object for a subject.²³⁷ For Heidegger, the “truth” (*i.e.* the being) of the work of art can only be approached by phenomenological apprehension of the work while allowing its ambiguous suggestions to release the never ending possibilities of matter.

According to Heidegger, the work of art installs a “world” of its own, in a struggle with the uncanny possibilities of the “earth.”²³⁸ As Gadamer points out, Heidegger’s use of “world” and “earth” in this original way “was something almost stunningly new” that “shifted the emphasis from a cosmological problem to its anthropological counterpart” (*Heidegger’s Ways* 190). For Heidegger, the truth of the work of art lives in a tension between what is revealed by its installed world and, at the same time, what the work suggests but conceals: the infinite possibilities of the earth or the matter. In comparison, a tool does not offer such ambiguity. Tool making utilizes matter to serve the tool’s purpose as is the case of the stone in the making of a stone axe. This process actually brings matter close to disappearance in favour of efficiency. On the opposite side, the work of art allows matter to install a world that opens up the very being of matter: “the

²³⁷ As in *Being and Time*, the proposed way to overcome aesthetic subjectivism in approaching the work of art is through phenomenological approach. We may recall that Dasein is primarily a being-in-the-world (in an involved mode, rather than a rational-detached one). It is only when our practical coping with the world encounters an unexpected difficulty that we isolate ourselves as subjects in a world of objects. As Thompson puts it, what Heidegger proposes is that “trying to approach art while staying within the aesthetic approach is like trying to learn what is like to ride a bike by staring at a broken bicycle.” See Iain Thomson’s “Heidegger’s Aesthetics.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2011. 10 January 2012 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/heidegger-aesthetics/>>.

²³⁸ Heidegger could have picked “mother earth” instead. His concept of “earth” suggests the inexhaustible creation of reality, as “mother earth” does.

rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to say” (“The Origin” 171).

Thus, the work of art opens up a window that “brings here,” by the act of creation, a glimpse of the inexhaustible possibilities of the “earth.” In this way, Heidegger says: “The work moves the earth itself into the open region of a world and keeps it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth*” (“The Origin” 172). We may understand this earth as a darkness into which light suddenly shows and rests. As Gadamer asserts: “The earth is not only that which resists the penetration of the beams of light. This darkness that conceals is also one that shelters, a site from which everything is brought into brightness—like a word from silence” (*Heidegger’s Ways* 191). Heidegger is thus suggesting that the work of art keeps different meanings open by concealing (but suggesting) the signifying potencies of reality. Therefore, the work of art can never be fully comprehended by the rational analysis of aesthetics. As Heidegger asserts:

Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself off only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained [...]. The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable [...] (172).

Or as Gadamer interprets, “we are no longer able to approach this [work of art] like an object of knowledge, grasping, measuring, and controlling. Rather than meeting us in

our world, it is much more a world into which we ourselves are drawn" (*Heidegger Ways*, 192).

Most probably Heidegger's existential thought on aesthetics caught Paz's attention from an early stage. Paz could have found Heidegger's thinking to have much in common with his own early thoughts on the nature of poetry since the early 1940s. As Gadamer reports, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (first known as academic talks) "had begun to have a profound influence [in intellectual circles] long before it was first published" in the form of copies and reports of the talks (*Heidegger's Ways* 98). Also, some of these ideas from Heidegger were already available in Spanish from David García Bacca's translation (in Mexico in 1944)²³⁹ of Heidegger's "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (also written in 1936). Then, by the mid 1950s, when Paz compares in *The Bow* utilitarian manipulation of matter (that reduces matter to a thing) to the work of the poet who creates to "to set matter free," he seems to be making, perhaps involuntarily, a reference to Heidegger's discourse in "The Origin."

Then, Paz most probably knew of "The Origin" and read "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" (actually, there is an indirect reference to this work in *The Bow*).²⁴⁰ Also, Paz may have read Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (translated into Spanish in

²³⁹ *Hölderlin y la esencia de la poesía seguido de Esencia del fundamento*. Mexico City: Séneca, 1944.

²⁴⁰ Paz wrote: "Para saber qué es la esencia de la poesía, Heidegger escogió unos cuantos versos de Hölderlin sobre la misma poesía. A imitación suya, habría que buscar una imagen que fuese una imagen de las imágenes" (*El arco* I 89).

1948).²⁴¹ We will see that many of Paz's premises on poetics seem to be in a dialog with these essays from the German philosopher.

For Heidegger, to Paz's liking, poetry plays a central role among other ways of artistic endeavour. Heidegger says: "language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home" ("Letter on Humanism" 239). According to Heidegger, the poet relates to language in a special way, different from habitual talking that uses and wears down words. The poet creates language by allowing the word to establish itself as truth ("The Origin" 173). Actually, Heidegger asserts, all art is the becoming of truth as a happening. And truth is poetic: "Truth, as the lighting and concealing of beings, happens in being composed. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is as such, in *essence, poetry*" (197). Therefore, for Heidegger there is a privileged place for language at its best (or poetic language) among arts. Or, in other words, he thinks that all art is poetic because all art is about establishing poetic truth. In his words "[poetic] language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time" (198). Language names what "is" for the first time. However, different from habitual talking that takes names for granted definitions, the naming Heidegger proposes here is not about labelling things but opening being to its possibilities of Being. As he suggests, the saying that "projects" Being to its possibilities is poetry (197). Other arts happen in the unstable space already open by poetic "saying and naming" (198).

²⁴¹ *Carta sobre el "Humanismo"* (Trad. Alberto Wagner de Reyna) In: *Realidad* (Buenos Aires.), Year II, No. 7 (Jan-Feb 1948) pp. 1-25; Year II, No. 9 (May-Jun 1948) pp.343-367.

In “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger, by interpreting Hölderlin’s verses, proposes that the being of man is to manifest his existence—a permanent discovery—as pertaining to the “earth.” In doing so, man creates a world by authentically gathering the possibilities of reality in his “intimacy.” According to Heidegger’s reading, “man dwells in earth” by keeping open the “opposition” among these possibilities (“Hölderlin and the Essence” 54). It is clear that the philosopher proposes that man’s primary task is to avoid concretization of reality. Moreover, he asserts that this already presupposes man as history and, therefore, as language: “But so that history may be possible, language has been given to man” (54). In Heidegger’s view, originary language is man’s first and fundamental way of creating an open space of (inexhaustible) interpretation of himself and the world (*i.e.* history). Therefore, for Heidegger, “Only where there is language, there is world” (56).

However, language also conveys the danger of enframing being, as a thing, when used for the concretizing of reality. To avoid reality from becoming definite, Heidegger proposes that: “Language must constantly place itself into the illusion which it engenders by itself, and so endanger what is most its own, genuine utterance” (55). In other words, Heidegger suggests that authentic happening of language is poetic ambiguity. Also, he believes that language is not anymore a tool for the use of man, but his radical occurrence: his being-history (56). And history is only possible through the interpretation opened up by language. Is in this way that Heidegger understands Hölderlin verses:

Full of merit, yet poetically, man

Dwells on this earth

Heidegger also suggests a saving role for the poet (and the thinker). Given the ruling of modern metaphysics (the subject/object dichotomy), that has taken language out of its original role; man has also lost his being (“Letter on Humanism” 243). In its origin, language is what allows man to be another (since he has “‘language’ as the home that preserves the ecstatic for his essence”) (247). However, at the same time, man is the guardian of Being and, therefore, of the authenticity of language (239). Moreover, in Heidegger’s view, when the thinker is really getting somewhere it is because he or she is bringing the “unspoken word of being” to the realm of authentic language (274-275). Therefore, Heidegger is suggesting that there is a similar role for the authentic thinker and the poet in keeping alive the authenticity of language and save humanity from the reductive views of the metaphysics tradition.

We may now say that Heidegger elaborated a philosophy of Being as a poetic event, that is not separated but complementary to his fundamental ontology of Dasein in *Being and Time*. However, Heidegger had a “turn” after *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s interests shifted from an emphasis on Dasein, that understands Being in terms of Dasein itself, to thinking about Being by emphasizing poetic language and art.²⁴² Rather simplistically (only for the sake of summarizing) we could say that, for Heidegger after the “turn,” man is being history by being language by poetizing. And now, radically,

²⁴² See, for instance, Steiner’s discussion on Heidegger’s “turn,” in “Introduction—Heidegger: In 1991.” *Martin Heidegger*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

poetry is the very essence of Being: “Poetry is a founding [of Being] by the word and in the word” (“Hölderlin and the Essence” 58).

As we saw in the previous chapter, the concern with “authenticity” created by José Gaos’s school in Mexico (of strong Heideggerian tendency) and the early translation into Spanish of Heidegger’s early works such as “What Is Metaphysics?” helps us understand important premises in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. In a similar way, the Heidegger of the “turn” into poetry and art helps in understanding fundamental tenets in Paz’s thought on poetry.

I concur with Stanton that the unusual importance that Heidegger gave to poetry “should have deeply impressed the Mexican poet, avid of an ontological and metaphysical justification for poetry.”²⁴³ Let’s now see how Paz’s poetics presented poetry as the essence of being. We saw that in agreement with Heidegger, Paz asserted in *The Bow* (and in some verses) that the poet sets the (meaning) possibilities of matter free. Moreover, the enquiry about “the poetic” in *The Bow* is, as Paz himself suggests, a fundamental question concerning Being that should be approached as an existential issue.

For Paz, thinking the poetic is about a critique of modernity by bringing man from modern alienation back to his origin. He suggests that the uprooting of man from himself started with the old metaphysics premise of “being is not non-being” (*El arco* 194). As we saw in the previous chapter, Heidegger’s main premise in “What Is Metaphysics?” is that metaphysics had mistakenly confused Being as a “thing” that could be regarded in

²⁴³ “debio de impresionar profundamente al poeta mexicano, ávido de una justificación ontológica y metafísica de la poesía” (Stanton, “Una lectura de ‘*El arco y la lira*’” 310).

logical terms. Logically, being is not nonbeing but Heidegger concludes the contrary: “The nothing does not remain the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself as belonging to the being of beings” (“What Is Metaphysics?” 94). The similarity of Paz’s discourse to that of Heidegger’s becomes clearer as Paz himself brings the philosopher into the discussion:

On this conception [“being is not non-being”] was built the edifice of “clear and distinct ideas,” which, if it has made Western history possible, has also condemned to a kind of illegality every attempt to lay hold upon being by any means other than those of these principles. Mysticism and poetry have thus lived a subsidiary, clandestine and diminished life. [...] The consequences of that banishment are more evident and frightening each day: man is an exile from the cosmic flux and from himself. [...] Heidegger goes back to the pre-Socratics to ask himself the same question that Parmenides asked and to find an answer that will not immobilize Being. We have not yet heard Heidegger’s last word, but we know that his attempt to find Being in existence ran up against a wall. Now, as some of his writings show, he has turned to poetry. Whatever may be the outcome of this adventure, the fact is that, from this angle, Western history can be seen as the history of an error: We have to begin again.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ “Sobre esta concepción se construyó el edificio de las ideas “claras y distintas,” que si ha hecho posible la historia de Occidente también ha condenado a una suerte de ilegalidad toda tentativa de asir el ser por vías que no sean las de esos principios. Mística y poesía han vivido así una vida subsidiaria, clandestina y disminuida [...] las consecuencias de ese exilio son cada vez más evidentes y aterradoras: el hombre es un desterrado del fluir cósmico y de sí mismo [...] Heidegger retorna a los presocráticos

Even in an impersonal way—as Paz does not directly address his affinities with Heidegger’s tenets—, we can see what Paz is borrowing as a starting argument for his own poetics. For both thinkers the task is to overcome the modern oblivion of Being through a recovery of language as a poetic event.

Bringing back man’s originary relation to language is the basis of a new existential ontology. If for Heidegger, as we saw, language “is the house of being” and “In its home human beings dwell” (“Letter” 239), for Paz “man is a being made of words” (*El arco* 30). Therefore, for Paz, language is never an object for a subject, but “Word is man himself” (30). In “Hymn among the ruins” (“Himno entre ruinas,” 1948), a poem that hints at a poetic epiphany among the contrasts of the Mexican landscape, Paz suggests the final recovery of man’s ability to poetize. In the climax, the poem ends:

Mind embodies in forms,
the two hostile became one,
the conscience-mirror liquifies,
once more a fountain of legends:
man, tree of images,

para hacerse la misma pregunta que se hizo Parménides y encontrar una respuesta que no inmovilice al ser. No conocemos aún la palabra última de Heidegger, pero sabemos que su tentativa por encontrar el ser en la existencia tropezó con un muro. Ahora, según lo muestran algunos de sus escritos últimos, se vuelve a la poesía. Cualquiera que sea el desenlace de su aventura, lo cierto es que, desde este ángulo, la historia de Occidente puede verse como la historia de un error: hay que empezar de nuevo” (*El arco* 94).

words which are flowers become fruits which are deeds.²⁴⁵

As the fragment suggests, Paz calls for a ruling out (liquefying) of the representationist model of consciousness. This is the “consciousness-mirror” that takes reality as a given object represented in the subject’s mind. Paz calls for a return to the view of the human as “tree of images,” made of (and at the same time the source of) poetic language.

Moreover, if for Heidegger language is the human first and fundamental way of interpreting its ambiguous possibilities of being, for Paz: “Man is man because of language, because of the original metaphor that caused him to be another [...].”²⁴⁶

There is a distinction—as much for Paz as for Heidegger—between the use of a concretized language in habitual talking versus poetic language. For Paz, any attempt to make use of language as a thing degrades it: “Each time we are served by words, we mutilate them.”²⁴⁷ Moreover, if according to Heidegger, man (the poet) is the guardian of authentic language, for Paz there is a similar argument: “But the poet is not served by

²⁴⁵ “La inteligencia al fin encarna,
se reconcilian las dos mitades enemigas
y la conciencia-espejo se licúa,
vuelve a ser fuente, manantial de fábulas:
Hombre, árbol de imágenes,
palabras que son flores que son frutos que son actos.”

(The English translation of this fragment is from William Carlos Williams.)

²⁴⁶ “El hombre es hombre gracias al lenguaje, esto es, gracias a la metáfora original que lo hizo ser otro [...].” (*El arco* I 34).

²⁴⁷ “cada vez que nos servimos de las palabras las mutilamos” (*El arco* I 47).

words. He is their servant. In serving them, he returns them to the plenitude of their nature, makes them recover their being.”²⁴⁸

The poet as the guardian of authentic language is also a theme in “Mutra” (1952). The poem suggests a number of vignettes from India’s chaotic urban landscape. The turmoil of images turns into poetic rapture that seeks to “anchor Being” away from confusion. But everything turns into a flux of poetic images. Then, the voice in the poem claims:

Where is the man who gives life to the stones of the dead, the man who makes the stones and the dead speak?

Foundations of stone and music, the factory that produces the mirrors of discourse and the poem’s castle of fire
entwine their roots in his breast, rest in his head; his hand sustains them.²⁴⁹

As the final line of the fragment suggests, is the human who “sustains”—as Heidegger called for—the foundations of poetic language by creating images (“mirrors of

²⁴⁸ “Mas el poeta no se sirve de las palabras. Es su servidor. Al servir las, las devuelve a su plena naturaleza, las hace recobrar su ser. Gracias a la poesía el lenguaje reconquista su estado original” (*El arco* / 48).

²⁴⁹ “¿Dónde está el hombre, el que da la vida a las piedras de los muertos, el que hace hablar piedras y muertos?
Las fundaciones de la piedra y de la música, la fábrica de espejos del discurso y el castillo de fuego del poema
enlazan sus raíces en su pecho, descansan en su fuente: él los sostiene a pulso.”

(The English translation of this and subsequent fragments of this poem are from Muriel Rukeyser.)

discourse”), founding history by recovering the voice of the dead and setting the meaning of concretized matter (*i.e.* stones) free to speak.

Then—in summarizing—the radical affirmation of poetic language as the essence of Being is similar for both thinkers: if, as we saw, for Heidegger “Poetry is a founding [of Being] by the word and in the word” (“Hölderlin and the Essence” 58), for Paz “Poetry is entering into Being” (*El arco* / 107).

We can see that Paz’s poetic ontology is close to Heidegger’s thought on aesthetics. However, Paz goes beyond Heidegger by deepening the existential dimensions of poetry. We saw that, for Heidegger, poetic language is the essence of being because is the foundation of Dasein’s own interpretation as a being-in-the-world. Paz integrates Heidegger’s premise but also brings in two variations on the same theme: poetic language’s existential particularity as rhythm (*i.e.* being time), and being as otherness through the poetic image.

In the previous chapter we saw that Heidegger introduced the notion of the temporality of existence in *Being and Time*. We could infer that the title of the book suggests just that: Being is temporal because Dasein is the occurrence—an event—of its self-interpretation. Therefore, Dasein is its historicity. Resolute Dasein authentically lives up to the possibilities of its stretched temporality as being its past and being its future. On the other hand Heidegger (after his “turn”) asserts that poetic language is the essence of being. However, Heidegger did not relate the temporality of existence to the musical (temporal) properties of poetry. Paz did it by thinking about rhythm.

Regarding rhythm as a central idea, Paz could have envisioned the link between Heidegger’s temporality of Dasein and the existential importance of poetry. According to

Stanton, the making of *The Bow* coincides with Heidegger's thought after his "turn" to poetry (Stanton, "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" 310). On the other hand, Santí emphasizes *The Bow*'s proximity to Heidegger's temporality and other tenets from *Being and Time* (Santí, *El acto de las palabras* 239-240). I see Paz incorporating both perspectives from Heidegger in his study of rhythm. And the reflections on poetry and time from Antonio Machado (well known to Paz) may be another clue here. In the voice of Juan de Mairena, Machado says:

Already on another occasion, we defined poetry as a dialogue with time, and called someone a "pure poet" when he succeeded in emptying his own time to reach an agreement with it alone, or nearly alone; almost as if someone has a conversation with the buzz in his own ears, which is the most elementary sonorous materialization of the temporal flow.²⁵⁰

In this way, there is already a clue here of time as the substance of poet and poetry.

Moreover, another influx into the base of Paz's disquisitions on the rhythmic-temporal aspect of poetry is his romantic theory of analogy: "Analogy conceives the world as rhythm: everything corresponds because everything fits together and

²⁵⁰ "Ya en otra ocasión definíamos la poesía como diálogo con el tiempo, y llamábamos 'poeta puro' a quién lograba vaciar el suyo para entendérselas a solas con él, o casi a solas; algo así como quien conversa con el zumbir de sus propios oídos, que es la más elemental materialización sonora del fluir temporal" (Machado, *Juan de Mairena I* 111). Stanton points out that Machado's emphasis in the temporality of poetry permeates through the first edition of *The Bow*, but is partially displaced in "Signs in Rotation" (in *The Bow*'s second edition) by a spatial conception of poetry. I agree that spatial concerns start to show in Paz after "Signs in Rotation." However, as I try to show, Paz's concern in poetry as the primary way of temporal resolution (the reaching of the Moment, a Heideggerian topic) continued till Paz's last years (e.g. in *The Other Voice*).

rhymes.”²⁵¹ Paz thought of language as a universe of correspondences regulated by the rhythm of calls and answers: “flux and reflux, union and separation, inspiration and expiration. [...] Speech is a cluster of living beings, moved by rhythms like the rhythms that rule the stars and the plants.”²⁵² Rhythm is a property of language itself. Paz asserts: “At the heart of every verbal phenomenon there is a rhythm.”²⁵³ And there is something magical about rhythm that the poet seeks to disclose. According to Paz, the poet craves to awake “the secret forces of language.” Moreover, “The poet bewitches the language by means of rhythm.”²⁵⁴ However, contrary to the magician, the poet does not seek to manipulate external objects but creates the poem as a way of inventing himself. Paz asserts that “The poem is an absolute happening where the poet risks his own being.”²⁵⁵ In short, Paz thinks that analogy, correspondences and the rhythm of language make the very being of the human. Paz complemented this idea through

²⁵¹ “La analogía concibe al mundo como ritmo: todo se corresponde porque todo ritma y rima.” See, *Los hijos del limo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990. p. 97. In this book, *Children of the Mire*, Paz fully disclosed his thought on the analogical philosophy of the romantics. In fact, this book is supposed to be a course at Harvard on modern poetry and its origin in the romantic tradition. But it is really more of a continuation, after *The Bow and the Lyre*, of Paz’s own poetics. Paz asserts that the idea of universal correspondence is as old as human society because “analogy makes a liveable world” (102). “Analogy is the science of correspondences. But is a science that only exists thanks to difference: precisely because this *is not* that, is possible to bridge this and that. The bridge is the word *like* or the word *is*: this is *like* that, this *is* that” (109). According to Paz, the romantic tradition coming out of Germany, England and later France accomplished the union of the idea of ‘world-as-rhythm’ with phonetic rhythm and the rhythm of language as a system of signs (98-108). Along this lines, Paz argues that modern poetry comes out of this romantic recovery of analogy in a tension with modern irony.

²⁵² “flujo y reflujo, unión y separación, inspiración y respiración. [...] El habla es un conjunto de seres vivos movidos por ritmos semejantes a los que rigen a los astros y a las plantas” (*El arco* / 51).

²⁵³ “En el fondo de todo fenómeno verbal hay un ritmo” (*El arco* / 52).

²⁵⁴ “El poeta encanta al lenguaje por medio del ritmo” (*El arco* / 56).

²⁵⁵ “El poema es un acto total, en el que se juega el ser mismo del poeta” (*El arco* / 56).

several poems. Paz's short poem "Brotherhood" ("Hermandad" 1987) may be read as another development of this way of understanding analogy:

Homage to Claudius Ptolemy

I am a man: little do I last
and the night is enormous.

But I look up:
the stars write.

Unknowing I understand:

I too am written,
and at this very moment
someone spells me out.²⁵⁶

As suggested by the dedication sentence, "Homage to Claudius Ptolemy," the poem is about the search for rhythmic correspondences in the universe.²⁵⁷ The title suggests

²⁵⁶ " Homenaje a Claudio Ptolomeo

Soy hombre: duro poco
y es enorme la noche.
Pero miro hacia arriba:
las estrellas escriben.
Sin entender comprendo:
también soy escritura
y en este mismo instante
alguien me deletrea."

(The English translation is from Elliot Weinberger.)

this too: a “brotherhood” as an idea of relationship between different entities that work organically. The first line of the poem, “I am a man: little do I last” suggests the temporal-existential predicament of man: I am but a finite lapse of time. But the universe that surrounds me is “enormous” in meaning, like the night sky. My world, like the stars that rhythmically move and shine (and write), is a concert of calls and answers. Non-rationally (“unknowing”) is that “I understand.” Comprehension of being goes beyond what is intelligible. What I understand is myself: “I too am written.” I too am an analogy of the calls and answers of the universe with infinite meanings. I too am language. I am a being-in-the-world of open possibilities. However, this is a poem. You, reader (“someone,”) are reading this poem “at this very moment;” and by doing it you are re-creating the world installed by the poem. You, reader, by reading the poem are “spell[ing] me out,” because I (the creator of the poem) am the poem. My being is a rhythmic-poetic language that is re-actualized every time this poem is told. By creating (and re-creating) this poem the uncanny forces of language re-invent me.

Being analogy, being language, being rhythm, being time, being self-understanding, being as another every time, being-in-the-world, these are all shining scintillations in the poem. They all come together in the poem, a rhythmic-verbal construction.

Paz still finds another temporal analogy of rhythm to the being of man: they are both temporal anticipation or pre-supposition of meaning. Heidegger explained that Dasein’s being as understanding is grounded in Dasein’s affective disposition.

²⁵⁷ Ptolemy (c. AD90 - c. AD 160) was astronomer in Egypt, under Roman rule. He created the *Almagest*, a mathematical treatise on the apparent motion of stars and planets in a geocentric model. His work became the basis of western astronomy for the next twelve centuries.

Therefore, Dasein is always oriented towards meaning. And Dasein is always pointing toward the future because it is continuously looking to make sense of its world. Paz seems to incorporate this but stresses the temporal character of understanding to make the connection with rhythm. For Paz rhythm is a succession of beats and pauses that reveals a “a given intentionality, a sort of direction.” Then, rhythm creates an expectation of what is coming next. Or, as Paz asserts, “All rhythm is pre-supposition of meaning.”²⁵⁸ And we get a clue that Paz is thinking on Heidegger here:

Rhythm is not measure, but originary time. And measure is not time but a way to calculate it. Heidegger has shown that every measure is a “mode of making time present.” Calendars and clocks are ways to mark our steps. This presentation implies a reduction or abstraction of the original time: the clock presents time and in order to present it, divides it into equal parts devoid of meaning. Temporality—which is man himself and which, therefore, gives meaning to what he touches—is prior to the presentation and that which makes it possible.

Time is not outside us, nor is it something that passes before our eyes like the hands of the clock: we are time and it is not the years that pass but we ourselves. Time has a direction, a sense, because it is we ourselves.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ “Todo ritmo es sentido de algo” (*El arco* I 57).

²⁵⁹ “En efecto, el ritmo no es medida, sino tiempo original. La medida no es tiempo sino manera de calcularlo. Heidegger—y desde otro ángulo, Bergson—ha mostrado que toda medida es una “forma de hacer presente el tiempo”. Calendarios y relojes son maneras de marcar nuestros pasos. Esta

For Paz, as for Heidegger, time is the human himself. The human embodies rhythm because he or she is always a becoming, a desire to be something else. And poetry is just that: “Poetry is desire” (*El arco* / 66). According to Paz, the conception of the being of man as desire is not articulated by the Aristotelian “impossible-but-likely,” but it is actual “appetite for reality” that is articulated by the poetic image. In this way Paz says: “The image is the bridge that desire places between man and reality.”²⁶⁰

Thus, the poetic image is for Paz, besides rhythm, the other element in poetry’s essence as otherness and, therefore, constitutive of all art:

“An ambivalent being, the poetic word is completely that which is—rhythm, color, meaning—and it is also something else: image. Poetry changes stone, color, word, and sound into images. And this second quality, that of being images, and the strange power they have to arouse in the listener or spectator constellations of images, turns all works of art into poems.”²⁶¹

presentación implica una reducción o abstracción del tiempo original: el reloj presenta al tiempo y para presentarlo lo divide en porciones iguales y carentes de sentido. La temporalidad—que es el hombre mismo y que, por tanto, da sentido a lo que toca—es anterior a la presentación y lo que la hace posible.

El tiempo no está fuera de nosotros, ni es algo que pasa frente a nuestros ojos como las manecillas del reloj: nosotros somos el tiempo y no son los años sino nosotros los que pasamos. El tiempo posee una operación, un sentido, porque es nosotros mismos” (*El arco* / 57).

²⁶⁰ “La imagen es el puente que tiende el deseo entre el hombre y la realidad” (67).

²⁶¹ “Ser ambivalente, la palabra poética es plenamente lo que es—ritmo, color, significado—y, así mismo, es otra cosa: imagen. Y esta segunda nota, el ser imágenes, y el extraño poder que tienen para suscitar en el oyente o en el espectador constelaciones de imágenes, vuelve poemas todas las obras de arte” (*El arco* / 23).

We should recall that for both Heidegger and Paz, all art is poetry. However, for Paz the key is the production of poetic images: “The artist is a creator of images: a poet” (24).

Ultimately, for Paz, rhythm and image are constitutive of the essence of human being as poetry. He asserts that the poetic phrase is composed of rhythm and poetic image. On one hand, rhythm is “man pouring himself,” continuously setting off man’s temporality out of itself (89). On the other hand, by bridging the opposites, the image allows man to be image too, to become another (108). Paz is suggesting also that the image launches man out of himself into otherness.

Moreover, according to Paz, the image allows opposite realities to come together: “brings into unity the plurality of reality” (91). The unifying operation of science that states “a kilogram of stones has the same weight than a kilogram of feathers” impoverishes the plurality of the being of things. In opposition, the poetic image, by joining the contraries, expands the possibilities of the being of things: “the stones are feathers” (91). However, what is the truth of such a contradictory relation? For Paz, the union of opposites in the poetic image is not just a curious event, but it is actually a statement of what reality is.

Thus, Paz proposes a poetical-existential ontology of truth, as Heidegger does. We saw that, for Heidegger, the work of art poetically “opens a world” of its own, as an unrepeatable event. The truth of the work is neither a property of things nor a property of propositions, but a disclosing event that Dasein performs (“The Origin” 179). For Paz, the images created by the poet have “authenticity” as they actually come from the poet’s experience and they make a reality of its own. Paz asserts: “the poet makes something

besides just telling the truth; he creates realities that own a truth: the truth of his own existence.”²⁶²

To summarize, we have seen that Paz had an existential concern with poetry since his early statements on poetics in the early forties. Most probably, Paz further developed his thoughts on poetics based on Heidegger’s existential critique of aesthetics. We saw that beyond Paz’s direct references to the philosopher, the core ideas about poetics in *The Bow and the Lyre* and in his poetry may be understood in relation to Heidegger’s poetics. For both Heidegger and Paz, poetry is the essence of Being because poetry opens up the plurality of meanings of reality. Thus, poetry is the essence of the human (the unstable being) and is the foundation of truth. Also, we saw that beyond Heidegger, for Paz, rhythm, analogy and the poetic image further explain man’s existential relation to poetry. Let’s now see how the poetic foundation of truth is related to the foundation of history.

²⁶² “el poeta hace algo más que decir la verdad; crea realidades dueñas de una verdad: las de su propia existencia” (*El arco* / 102).

4.2. Poetry as the Ground of History

To write poetry
is to erase the written
To write
the unwritten
on what is written
To write the *Commedia* without an ending

O.P., "Letter to León Felipe" (fragment)²⁶³

We saw that behind the aesthetic discourses of both Paz and Heidegger, there is a manifest task for poets and thinkers: overcoming modern oblivion of Being through a recovery of poetic language as the fundamental otherness. We will see that for both thinkers there is a variation of this role for poetry: to be the foundation of history.

In *The Bow and the Lyre*, Paz asserts that poetry is the originary language that "establishes the people because the poet retraces the course of language and drinks

²⁶³ "La escritura poética
es borrar lo escrito
Escribir
sobre lo escrito
lo no escrito
Representar la *comedia* sin desenlace"

("Carta a León Felipe" (fragment). The English version of this and the subsequent fragments of this poem are from Elliot Weinberger.)

from the originary source.”²⁶⁴ All classic works of art are embodied in society as “models and living archetypes” (*El arco* / 41). With this Paz plays an oxymoron: “Model” suggests the instauration of a moment in history that works as an exemplar role for society; whereas “living archetype” suggests that the model is reinterpreted by society in unique ways every time. Moreover, according to Paz, poetry is historical in a “polemical way” because poetry is: “transmutation of historical time into archetypal time and incarnation of that archetype in a determinate-historical now.”²⁶⁵ Therefore, Paz is suggesting that poetry establishes history whilst, at the same time, the recreation of the poem continuously re-actualizes history. Let’s now see how this relates to Heidegger’s discourse.

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger states that “Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history.” Actually, he asserts, the essence of art is to be an origin of history or how, historically, truth comes to be (“The Origin” 202). Heidegger is suggesting that art grounds history by leaving a durable imprint of what is meaningful for a community that will regulate the way the community understands itself. As Thomson explains Heidegger’s *ontological historicity*, “great art *works* by selectively focusing an historical community’s tacit sense of what is and what matters and reflecting it back to that community, which thereby comes implicitly to understand itself in light of this artwork. Artworks function as ontological paradigms, serving their communities both as ‘models of’ and ‘models for’ reality [...]” (Thomson 2011).

²⁶⁴ “funda al pueblo porque el poeta remonta la corriente del lenguaje y bebe en la fuente original” (*El arco* / 41).

²⁶⁵ “trasmutación del tiempo histórico en arquetípico y encarnación de ese arquetipo en un ahora determinado e histórico” (*El arco* / 185).

As discussed before, for Heidegger, all art is essentially poetry. Therefore, we should expect that poetry also plays a central role as the ground for history. In “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry” Heidegger asserts that “Poetry is the sustaining ground of history” (“Hölderlin and the essence” 60). Also, in “Letter on Humanism,” in discussing a parallelism between authentic thinking in philosophy and poetry, Heidegger makes a similar statement on the ontological historicity of poetry. For Heidegger both thinking and poetizing take language to unexplored regions of being. And when language is taken to the level of clarifying Being, by being at the same time a mystery, then language is “historical, being is entrusted to recollection” (“Letter” 274).

Heidegger also interprets Hölderlin’s verses to suggest that poetical language is “the most innocent of all occupations,” but at the same time is “the most dangerous of goods.” On the one hand man “is,” by the event (historical occurrence) of interpreting his existence through language. Therefore, poetry is the most innocent and primary activity of man’s existence, its being history (“Hölderlin and the essence” 54). However, Heidegger believes that language is also the most dangerous thing because “is charged with the task of making beings manifest” (55), opening up the possibility of concretizing reality and, therefore, defining existence. As we saw before, Heidegger ambiguously plays with these two possibilities of language: language names new regions of Being (the very making of history) but language also opens up the possibility of reifying reality and making history a thing.

Moreover, Heidegger also asserts that poetic language is the most dangerous precisely because the poet finds what remains in history by being a dissenter in his historical context. Heidegger says: “Poetry awakens the illusion of the unreal and of the

dream as opposed to the tangible and clamorous actuality in which we believe ourselves to be at home. And yet, on the contrary, what the poet says and undertakes to be is what is truly real” (62). It is by being a dissenter that the poet makes the historical instauration of truth. We may read Heidegger as if he were saying that the poet’s truth establishes *what is* by dissenting from *what already is* (what the names and labels have already concretized). Therefore, the poet’s interpretation of reality is always a new view of reality.

Thus, for Heidegger, the poet has an ambiguous role to play. On the one hand, he interprets the “voice of the people,” given that poetry comes out of the people’s tradition; but, on the other hand, the poet is also reading the “signs of the gods,” naming what “is” for the first time and in this way establishing reality. Therefore, the poet: “is the one who has been cast out—out into that *between*, between gods and men. But first and only in this between is it decided who man is and where his existence is settled. ‘Poetically man dwells in earth’” (64).

Now, also for Paz the poet is the one that establishes reality. In *Children of the Mire*, Paz traced the origin of modern poetry (his own tradition) back to the romantic tradition. He asserts that the romantics tried to join poetry (verbal object) and history (action). The poet “says,” while he is founding reality, history and at the same time constructing himself up: “The poet speaks, and as he speaks, he *makes*.”²⁶⁶ And there is a link here with the worldview of correspondences in romantic analogy: “If poetry was man’s first language—or if language is essentially a poetic operation which consist of seeing the world as a fabric of symbols and relations between these symbols—then

²⁶⁶ “El poeta dice y, al decir, *hace*” (*Los hijos* 93).

each society is built upon a poem.”²⁶⁷ Paz is suggesting that the poet is the weaver (interpreter) of relations (*i.e.* history), and that his creation of poetry is also the creation of historical reality. We can see the same idea going on in Paz’s poem “The River” (“El río,” 1953). The poem suggests that while the poet is poetizing, his word makes up reality and history. The poet’s wandering view through a city turns into a river of images in the creation of a poem (perhaps the same “The River” poem). However, at the same time:

and the city goes and comes and its stone body shatters as it arrives at
my temple,
all night, one by one, statue by statue, fountain by fountain, stone by
stone, the whole night long
its shards seek one another in my forehead, all night long the city talks in
its sleep through my mouth
a gasping discourse, a stammering of stoned waters struggling, its
history.²⁶⁸

Therefore, poetic discourse is the maker of history. Moreover, as stated before, for Paz poetry is also historical in a “polemical way:” poetry establishes historical truth but also

²⁶⁷ “Si la poesía ha sido el primer lenguaje de los hombres—o si el lenguaje es en su esencia una operación poética que consiste en ver al mundo como un tejido de símbolos y de relaciones entre esos símbolos—cada sociedad está fundada sobre un poema” (*Los hijos* 91).

²⁶⁸ “y la ciudad va y viene y su cuerpo de piedra se hace añicos al llegar a mi sien,
toda la noche, uno a uno, estatua a estatua, fuente a fuente, piedra a piedra, toda la noche
sus pedazos se buscan en mi frente, toda la noche la ciudad habla dormida por mi boca
y es un discurso incomprensible y jadeante, un tartamudeo de aguas de piedra batallando, su historia.”

re-recreates (re-interprets) it in heterodox ways. This is one of the readings in “Letter to León Felipe” (“Carta a León Felipe,” 1967). Almost predicting the endless myth that surrounds the figure of “El Che” Guevara, Paz compares poetry’s historical instauration, to the (then) recent death of the revolutionary leader:

Poetry

is a sudden rupture

suddenly healed

and torn open again

by the glances of others

Rupture

is continuity

The death of Comandante Guevara

is also rupture

not an end

His memory

is not a scar

it is a continuity that tears itself apart

in order to continue²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ “La poesía

es la ruptura instantánea
instantáneamente cicatrizada

abierta de nuevo

por la mirada de otros

La ruptura

es la continuidad

As poetry, the death of “El Che” is neither an “end” nor a “scar” in the current of history, but continuous reinterpretation. Paz returned to the same theme in others poems. In “San Ildefonso nocturne” (“Nocturno de San Ildefonso,” 1976) the poet wanders through his past.²⁷⁰ While looking through a window at night the poet has a vision of flying “Sign-seeds” that, by configuring the poem, open the possibilities of history:

the night shoots them off,
they rise,
bursting above,
fall
still burning
in a cone of shadow,
reappear,
rambling sparks,
syllable-clusters,
spinning flames

La muerte del comandante Guevara
también es ruptura

no un fin
Su memoria
no es una cicatriz
es una continuidad que se desgarra
para continuarse”

²⁷⁰ El Colegio de San Ildefonso is the historical edifice in downtown Mexico City that hosted the Preparatoria Nacional where Paz made his early studies.

that scatter,

smithereens once more.²⁷¹

As the poem progresses, the narrated events (of Paz's personal history) mingles with the actual act of creating the poem: "The boy who walks through this poem / between San Ildefonso and the Zócalo, / is the man who writes it: / this page too / is a ramble through the night."²⁷² By poetizing, the poet is making up himself and creating history. However, not history as a concretized past but the opposite: history as an open creation and re-creation:

Poetry is not truth:

it is the resurrection of presences,

history

transfigured in the truth of undated time.

²⁷¹ " la noche los dispara,
suben,
 estallan allá arriba,
 se precipitan,
ya quemados,
 en un cono de sombra,
 reaparecen,
lumbres divagantes,
 racimos de sílabas,
incendios giratorios,
 se dispersan,
 otra vez añicos."

The English translation of this poem is from Elliot Weinberger.

²⁷² "El muchacho que camina por este poema, / entre San Ildefonso y el Zócalo, / es el hombre que lo escribe: / esta página / también es una caminata nocturna."

Poetry,
like history, is made;
poetry,
like truth, is seen.²⁷³

History is the re-occurrence of “presences,” but as poetry, “is made” up continuously. And like history and truth, poetry “is seen” as a perspective over reality. We may see the similitude with Heidegger’s discourse: poetic language establishes historical truth but also brings forward new readings in the established reality. This contradiction in poetry is for Paz, as it is for Heidegger, the “danger” of poetry. Paz acknowledges Heidegger’s way of putting it: “And from this struggle [...] also comes what is called the danger of poetry. Even that poetry has communion in the social altar and shares, in good faith, the beliefs of its time, the poet is a being-aside, a heterodox being by congenital fatality: he always says *another* thing [...].”²⁷⁴ Or, as he will put it in the title of his late book on poetics, the poet bears always *The Other Voice* (1990).

²⁷³ “La poesía no es la verdad:
es la resurrección de las presencias,
la historia
transfigurada en la verdad del tiempo no fechado.
La poesía,
como la historia, se hace;
la poesía,
como la verdad, se ve.”

²⁷⁴ “Y de esta continua querella [...] procede también lo que se ha dado en llamar la peligrosidad de la poesía. Aunque comulgue en el altar social y comparta con entera buena fe las creencias de su época, el poeta es un ser aparte, un heterodoxo por fatalidad congénita: siempre dice *otra* cosa [...]” (*El arco I* 186).

However, Paz seems to drift away from Heidegger's tenets by emphasizing the poet's historical instauration as a mythical return to the archetypical origin. We saw that for Paz poetic language is analogy and rhythm. And he suggests that it is the rhythmic character of poetry which connects it to the realm of myth. There is something ritual about rhythm in poetry that mythically "consecrates" the moment: "every poem is myth to the extent that it is also rhythm."²⁷⁵ Paz seems to be thinking on the (rhythmical) recurrence of mythical archetypes. As he later states in *The Other Voice*: "Analogy has a definite place, plays an integral role, in myth: its essence is rhythm, the cyclical time of appearances and disappearances, deaths and resurrections."²⁷⁶ It is worth noticing that, at least while writing *The Bow*, Paz lived a revival of comparative religion and mythology studies, such as Mircea Eliade works in France.²⁷⁷ As Eliade extensively argued, the experience of time may be either understood as a realm of profane time (secular metered time), or as another realm of sacred time (ritual time). Sacred time happens as return to an archetypical moment when a ritual is performed. Therefore, the recreation of mythical archetypes is a return to a historical origin. (Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno* 41-44). For Paz too, poetry recreates a moment that is archetypical. Poetry is a return to the origin. What poetry tells is "a past that re-begets and re-incarnates" every time the poem is read (*El Arco* I 65).

²⁷⁵ "todo poema, en la medida en que es ritmo es mito" (*El arco* I 64).

²⁷⁶ "La analogía se inserta en el mito; su esencia es el ritmo, es decir, el tiempo cíclico hecho de apariciones y desapariciones, muertes y resurrecciones" (*La otra voz* 36).

²⁷⁷ Eliade published in 1949 two books in Paris (in the meanwhile Paz was living there): "*Traité d'histoire des religions* and *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: Archétypes et répétitions*.", Eliade argued, some how concurring with Heidegger's interests, that his studies were an ontology ("conceptions about *being* and *reality*") of pre-modern societies (Eliade, *El mito del eterno retorno* 13).

Even with Paz's emphasis in the return to a mythical origin, the relation to Heidegger is still clear. In the previous chapter we saw that for Heidegger, the historicity of Dasein is the recurrence of the past as present. Also, for Heidegger, history is not a sequence of events in time, but history is the repeated instauration—as a fresh start every time—of the truth of poetic language: “whenever art happens—that is, whenever there is a beginning—a thrust enters history; history either begins or starts over again” (“The Origin” 201). Therefore, there is also in Heidegger a notion of a re-start in history (not mythical though) through poetic language. For Paz, the return to the mythical origin through poetry is a return to an epiphany of existential meaning. What is “revealed” in this origin is “the condition of man, the movement that launches him forward, toward nothingness, to give it a name, always conquering new territories [...]”²⁷⁸ Let's now see how Paz developed this premise of poetry as an epiphany.

4.3. Poetry as an Epiphany

A steady brilliance floods me and blinds me,
a dazzled-empty circle,
because to the light itself its light neglects it.

O.P., “Noon” (fragment)²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ “la condición última del hombre, ese movimiento que lo lanza sin cesar hacia adelante, hacia la nada, para darle ser y nombrarla, conquistando siempre nuevos territorios [...]” (*El arco* I 186).

²⁷⁹ “Un quieto resplandor me inunda y ciega,
un deslumbrado círculo vacío,
porque a la misma luz su luz la niega.”

(“Mediodía” (1942), fragment.)

In *The Bow and the Lyre*, Paz explained that the poetic image has a “disturbing” property: the image cannot be explained conceptually but has to be re-created as “poetic communion” (*El arco* / 107-108). What Paz seems to suggest as “disturbing” is that the experience of poetic communion, by means of the image, “transforms man and at the same time turns him into an image, that is, the space where opposites merge.”²⁸⁰ Then, this experience places poetry in a realm similar to religious experience. According to Paz, poetry is akin—not equal, though—to magic, religion and other ways of transforming the human into another. In the very moment of transformation, Paz explains:

The universe ceases to be a vast storehouse of heterogeneous things. Stars, shoes, tears, locomotives, willow trees, all is an immense family, all is in mutual communication and is unceasingly transformed, the same blood flows through all the forms and man can at last be his desire: he himself. Poetry puts man outside himself and, simultaneously, makes him return to his original being: returns to himself.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ “transforma al hombre y lo convierte a su vez en imagen, esto es, en espacio donde los contrarios se funden” (*El arco* / 107-108).

²⁸¹ “El universo deja de ser un vasto almacén de cosas heterogéneas. Astros, zapatos, lágrimas, locomotoras, sauces, mujeres, diccionarios, todo es una inmensa familia, todo se comunica y se transforma sin cesar, una misma sangre corre por todas las formas y el hombre puede ser al fin su deseo: él mismo. La poesía pone al hombre fuera de sí y, simultáneamente, lo hace regresar a su ser original: lo vuelve a sí” (*El arco* / 108).

Paz is suggesting that man has the possibility of living a poetic moment of rapture; a sort of ecstatic epiphany that is fundamental for recovering authentic existence. Paz used many names to talk of such experience: otherness, presence, communion, transparency, participation, leap, return to the original moment, poetic unveiling, and poetic experience, among others. Even Paz's description of the Mexican "art of Fiesta" in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* shows similitude with a poetic epiphany. In the midst of the epiphany of Fiesta, Paz declares, "Time ceases to be succession and returns to be what it was, and is in its origin: a present where finally past and future find reconciliation."²⁸²

Heidegger talked too of Dasein's possibility of living an ecstasy, a "moment of resolution" since Dasein is "ecstatic" in its very essence. We will see how this may be related to some elements in Paz's discourse. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explained that Dasein has an ecstatic-temporal structure. As Dreyfus suggests, when Heidegger talks of Dasein as being thrown, falling, projecting (being pre-understanding, being-ahead-of-itself, etc.), he is referring to Dasein's *ecstatic temporal structure*; meaning that "the activity of clearing is *outside itself* in opening up past, present, and future" (Dreyfus 214). We may recall that Dasein is the understanding (clearing) of itself. And, as Dreyfus interprets, Dasein understands his being by standing out of itself. In one of the many ways Heidegger suggested this, he said that "*the 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence*" (*Being and Time* 40). And we should keep in mind Heidegger's premise

²⁸² "El tiempo deja de ser sucesión y vuelve a ser lo que fue, y es, originariamente: un presente en donde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian" (*El laberinto* 183).

that existence is ek-sistence, stressing the “ex” (standing out) prefix implicit in the word.²⁸³

Moreover, the standing out movement has a revelatory counterpart. As Heidegger asserts, Dasein’s standing out is, paradoxically, to be inside “into the truth of being” (“Letter” 249). Therefore, Dasein’s disclosure of the truth of being presupposes Dasein’s ecstatic character. And time plays a meaningful role in this revealing moment. In the previous chapter we saw that the authentic Dasein recovers his dispersed historicity—its socialized have-been-the-others, and its future-not-yet-been—in the present “Moment.” That is what Heidegger called Dasein’s “resoluteness.” And resolute *present*, Heidegger tells us, is a moment of revealing ecstasy:

We call the *present* that is held in authentic temporality, and is thus *authentic*, the *Moment*. This term must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasy. It means the resolute raptness of Da-sein, which is yet held in resoluteness, in what is encountered as possibilities and circumstances to be taken care in the situation [...] ‘In the Moment’ nothing can happen, but as an authentic present it lets us *encounter for the first time* what can be ‘in a time’ as something at hand or objectively present (*Being and Time* 211).

²⁸³ As explained in “Letter on Humanism,” for Heidegger the essence of man is his ek-sistence, as an ecstatic possibility. He also clarifies that ek-sistence is different from what is traditionally called “existence,” as effective reality (e.g. as in the ‘existence’ of commercial inventories). See “Letter on Humanism.” *Pathmarks*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 248.

Heidegger is suggesting that “in the Moment,” the resolute “authentic present” that brings together past and future in ecstasy, things become clear in their being. As Steiner points out, Heidegger emphasizes that the human has the unique possibility to “stand outside (whence the hyphen in ‘ex-ist’), to make himself ecstatically open to the radiance of Being, a stance to which the etymological links between ‘ex-sistence’ and ‘ex-stasy’ are a clue” (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* 71). It should be noticed that Heidegger is not proposing a privileged moment that happens to a subject that discovers objects, but a mutual implication between the self understanding of the human and his/her opening up to understand his/her world, answering the call of Being to be comprehended. In “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger explains that Being calls on the human to reveal the truth of Being: “the human being is rather ‘thrown’ by being itself into the truth of being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of being in order that beings might appear in the light of being as the beings they are” (“Letter” 252).

Now, we shall recall that poetic language is actually central to “ek-sistence.” Heidegger asserted that poetic language is what “preserves the ecstatic” of man’s essence (“Letter” 247). Also, we saw that poetry is what allows the human to unveil new regions of being. Heidegger now adds that this disclosure happens as ecstasy, and “as authentic present it lets us *encounter for the first time* what can be ‘in a time’ as something at hand or objectively present.” We may conclude that according to Heidegger poetry happens as an epiphany that reveals Dasein’s existence and beings in general.

We may now understand Paz's belief in a fundamental (for existence) moment of "poetic communion," in relation to Heidegger's thought on Dasein's ecstatic character. For both thinkers there is a privileged-poetic moment of whole involvement with the world, that is also a sort of ecstasy or epiphany, where man is able to see clearly (unveil the truth). Actually, this is a recurrent topic in Paz's essays from all periods. Since the early 1940s, in "Poetry of Solitude and Poetry of Communion" Paz suggested that there was a connection between the poetic experience and the mystic ecstasy, as they both seek "communion" or reunification of the poet with "his own soul, his beloved other, God, nature" (*Primeras Letras* 292-293). At the end, poetry is "a testimony of ecstasy" (295). Later, we have seen that Paz developed the topic in *The Bow and the Lyre*. And he kept thinking on this until his last years. In *The Other Voice*, Paz suggested a similar idea by calling for a return to poetry as that which can teach the experience of a "trans-historic yonder": "I am speaking of the perception of the *other side* of reality. That perception is common to all men in all periods; it is an experience that seems to me to be *prior* to all religions and philosophies."²⁸⁴

However, is in poetry—in a performative way, the very poetic experience—where Paz more often suggested the essence of man as being in ecstasy; being temporal resolution in the "present;" being in an epiphany that reveals truth, God, being, etc. We may find these topics in Paz's poetry since the early 1940s. In "Day" ("Día," 1942) the poet talks to himself making a comparison (or confusion) with the day as an epiphany:

²⁸⁴ "Hablo de la percepción del *otro lado* de la realidad. Es una experiencia común a todos los hombres en todas las épocas y que me parece anterior a todas las religiones y las filosofías" (*La otra voz* 133-134).

You are the duration
the time that ripens
in an enormous, diaphanous instant:
arrow in the air
delighted target
and space with no recollection of being arrow anymore.
A day made of time and emptiness
you vacate me, erase
my name and what I am,
filling me up with you: light, nothingness.

And I hover, relieved of myself now, sheer existence.²⁸⁵

The voice talks to the self as another (or to the day) about being time, but a time that “gets ripe” as “enormous moment.” It is worth noticing that in the final line the voice

²⁸⁵ “Eres la duración,
el tiempo que madura
en un instante enorme, diáfano:
flecha en el aire,
blanco embelesado
y espacio sin memoria ya de flecha.
Día hecho de tiempo y de vacío:
me deshabras, borras
mi nombre y lo que soy,
llenándome de ti: luz, nada.

Y floto, ya sin mí, pura existencia.”

declares to be “sheer existence” but “without me,” in this way stressing that ex-sistence is, as in Heidegger’s discourse, a (ecstatic) standing out movement.

A similar suggestion shows in “Mutra.” We previously saw that this poem brings about a metaphor of the chaos of Indian landscape as an epiphany. The man in the poem, described as the one that “holds up” the foundations of poetic language, is also called “bow stretched over nothingness [...] always running behind himself, blundering, exhausted, without ever reaching himself.”²⁸⁶ The poetic epiphany happens while—as the poem stresses—man is standing out of himself.

“Is there no way out?” (“No hay salida,” 1952) suggests, once more, a poetic epiphany. This time, the poet struggles to write a poem (that may be this poem) in a moment that gets confused with an erotic encounter. In the midst of the climax of love, that is also a moment of poetic rapture, the voice finds no other way out than to face the moment. As in “Day” and “Mutra” the poet finds that:

“this instant is I, I went out of myself all at once, I have no name and no
face,

I am here, cast at my feet, looking at myself looking to see myself
seen.”²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ “arco tendido sobre la nada [...] corriendo siempre tras de sí, disparado, exhalado, sin jamás alcanzarse [...].”

²⁸⁷ “este instante soy yo, salí de pronto de mi mismo, no tengo nombre ni rostro, yo está aquí, echado a mis pies, mirándome mirándose mirarme mirado.”
(The English translation is from Denise Levertov.)

Again, the epiphany is clearly described in relation to the standing out movement of (ecstatic) existence, even—in the last verse of the fragment—as an unfolding of the self.

As said before, Paz used many names to refer to the poetic moment. In “June” (“Junio,” 1949), Paz addressed epiphany as “presence,” as he did in many poems thereafter. This time the epiphany is confused with the flourishing arrival of summer:

the eyes see, the heart senses.

Hour of eternity, all of it presence,
time is in you fulfilled and spilled
and everything acquires being, even absence! ²⁸⁸

“Presence” is also an important concept in *Being and Time*. One element of Heidegger’s critique of the history of metaphysics is his critique of the determination of being as *parousia*, i.e. presence, in the sense of being objectively present (in the present time) as something already given without considering an ontology of time.²⁸⁹ Instead, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology proposes that resolute Dasein lets “what presences”

²⁸⁸ “los ojos ven, el corazón presiente.

¡Hora de eternidad, toda presencia,
el tiempo en ti se colma y desemboca
y todo cobra ser, hasta la ausencia!”

²⁸⁹ This is discussed in *Being and Time* paragraph 6 of the second chapter.

be encountered by “making present”—a becoming—beings.²⁹⁰ And we saw before that this happens in the Moment as “authentic present” (*Being and Time* 211). Later, the issue of the “making present” of the truth in the work of art, in other words poetry, is one of the key points in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” According to Heidegger: “In the creation of the work, the strife [with the world], as rift, must be set back into the earth, and the earth itself must be set forth [*i.e.* brought to presence]²⁹¹ and put to use as self-secluding. Such use, however, does not use up or misuse the earth as matter, but rather sets it free to be nothing but itself” (“The Origin” 189).

As we just saw, in “June” the poetic epiphany is a clarifying moment where “the eyes see, the heart senses.” And it is meaningful that the moment is “all of it presence” because entities come to being (come to presence): “and everything acquires being.”

A making beings present as in Heidegger’s “authentic present,” a present that brings back being’s past and its future possibilities, shows up in other poems. We previously saw that in “Source” the poetic epiphany opens up the endless-meaning-possibilities of the surrounding world. In the midst of the turmoil of images, the voice says: “Everything is presence, all the centuries are this Present.”²⁹² The authenticity of this present is suggested as “all the centuries” become the Present. In a similar way, in

²⁹⁰ “Resolute being together with what is at hand in the situation, that is, letting *what presences* in the surrounding world be encountered in action, is possible only in a *making* that being *present*. Only as present, in the sense of making present, can resoluteness be what is, namely, the undistorted letting what it grasps in action be encountered” (*Being and Time* 300).

²⁹¹ “Set forth” in the English translation. In the Spanish translation says: “Brought to presence” (“traída a la presencia”) in Helena Cortés and Arturo Leyte’s edition of “El origen de la obra de arte.” *Caminos del Bosque*. Madrid: Alianza, 2001.

²⁹² “Todo es presencia, todos los siglos son este Presente.” This verse, and the engraving of Paz’s face, were stamped in a limited edition of 20-pesos-value coins (commemorative of year 2000). These coins are rare but still used as common currency in Mexico.

“Is there no way out?,” epiphany happens as a temporal resolution: “The time is past already for hoping for time’s arrival, the time of yesterday, today and tomorrow, / yesterday is today, tomorrow is today, today all is today, [...]”²⁹³ Clearly the poem suggests a resolution of past and future in the present moment.

Poetic epiphany that happens in the authentic present is also a major topic of *Sunstone*. In the previous chapter we saw that in this poem there is a first-person voice suggesting a wandering walk. In some instances, the walk turns into the existential journey of the poet striving between alienation and self realization. The poem starts with the depiction of an epiphany-transfigured vision of reality: “a crystal willow, a poplar of water, a tall fountain the wind arches over.”²⁹⁴ And the poet’s epiphany makes Being present, as the waves of the ocean reaching the shore:

11 a single presence in a surge of waves
wave after wave till it covers all,
[...]
24 a sudden presence like a burst of song,
like the wind singing in a burning building,²⁹⁵

²⁹³ “Pasó el tiempo de esperar la llegada del tiempo, el tiempo de ayer hoy y mañana, / ayer es hoy, mañana es hoy, hoy todo es hoy, [...]”

²⁹⁴ “un sauce de cristal, un chopo de agua, / un alto surtidor que el viento arquea,”. The english translation of this and subsequent fragments of this poem are from Elliot Weinberger. I indicate the verse number (taking each verse of the poem as each full hendecasyllable in the Spanish original) in first line of every fragment.

²⁹⁵ “unánime presencia en oleaje,
ola tras ola hasta cubrirlo todo,
[...]

As in the poem “Source,” this epiphany happens in the authentic present, bringing back past and future, as: “all of the centuries are a single moment.”²⁹⁶ And later, with a similar meaning:

190 oh life to live, life already lived,
time that comes back in a swell of sea,
time that recedes without turning its head,
the past is not past, it is still passing by,
flowing silently into the next vanishing moment.²⁹⁷

The past life (“already lived”) and the future life (“life to live”) come to presence. And to reinforce this idea: the past was not (“past is not past”), but is re-occurring now (“it is still passing by”) in the Moment. Moreover, the poem suggests that this authentic present is a moment of disclosing clarity:

226 a windowless present, a thought that returns

una presencia como un canto súbito,
como el viento cantando en el incendio,”

²⁹⁶ “todos los siglos son un solo instante” (v. 151).

²⁹⁷ “oh vida por vivir y ya vivida,
tiempo que vuelve en una marejada
y se retira sin volver el rostro,
lo que pasó no fue pero está siendo
y silenciosamente desemboca
en otro instante que se desvanece:”

and repeats itself, reflects itself,
and loses itself in its own transparency,
a mind transfixed by an eye that watches
it watching itself till it drowns itself
in clarity: ²⁹⁸

Like an eye-conscience that is drowning in clarity, Being is revealed. However, this epiphany is not about disclosing what is already present, but as Heidegger wanted, is about making Being present:

576 door of being: open your being
and wake, learn to be, form
your face, develop your features, have
a face I can see to see my face
to see life until its death, a face
of the sea, bread, rocks and a fountain,
source where all our faces dissolve
in the nameless face, the faceless being,
the unspeakable presence of presences... ²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ "presente sin ventanas, pensamiento
que vuelve, se repite, se refleja
y se pierde en su misma transparencia,
conciencia traspasada por un ojo
que se mira hasta anegarse
de claridad."

It should be noticed that the disclosing (a becoming) of Being (“learn to be, form your face”) corresponds with the resolution of man (“have a face I can see to see my face”). However, the disclosed Being is not a fixed essence but is otherness, a plurality of meanings (sea, bread, rock, source). This is the ultimate revelation: Being is an “unspeakable presence of presences.”

Moreover, we saw before that for both Paz and Heidegger, this moment of disclosure of Being is closely related to poetic endeavour as the making of poetic language. In *Sunstone* the poetic experience is a theme of the poem; but it is also a performative utterance of writing the actual (*Sunstone*) poem. The wandering voice declares that its existential vicissitudes are nothing but the struggle with poetic images in the process of writing:

154 there is nothing in front of me, only a moment
salvaged from a dream tonight of coupled
images dreamed, a moment chiseled
from the dream, torn from the nothing
of this night, lifted by hand, letter

²⁹⁹ “puerta del ser: abre tu ser, despierta,
aprende a ser también, labra tu cara,
trabaja tus facciones, ten un rostro
para mirar mi rostro y que te mire,
para mirar la vida hasta la muerte,
rostro de mar, de pan, de roca y fuente,
manantial que disuelve nuestros rostros
en el rostro sin nombre, el ser sin rostro,
indecible presencia de presencias...”

by letter, while time, outside, gallops³⁰⁰

Then, in *Sunstone* the “moment” is sustained by the efforts of the poetic creation: “lifted by hand, letter by letter.” Also, in “The River” Paz addresses the epiphany as a moment of poetic production. As we saw before, in this poem the poet’s wandering view through the city turns into a river of images for the creation of a poem. In the midst of rapture, the poet calls to “open up the moment” and “drink from the inexhaustible source,” in other words, to release the infinite possibilities of reality. The poet searches to “say what time says in hard sentences of stone, in vast gestures of sea covering worlds.”³⁰¹ The climax of the epiphany is the moment of poetic inspiration:

To stop myself, to be quiet, to close my eyes until a green spike sprouts
from my eyelids, a stream of suns,
and the alphabet wavers long under the wind of the vision and the tide
rolls into one wave and the wave breaks the dike,³⁰²

³⁰⁰ “no hay nada frente a mí, solo un instante
rescatado esta noche, contra un sueño
de ayuntadas imágenes soñado,
duramente esculpido contra el sueño,
arrancado a la nada de esta noche,
a pulso levantado letra a letra,
mientras afuera el tiempo se desboca”

³⁰¹ “decir lo que dice el tiempo en duras frases de piedra, en vastos ademanes de mar cubriendo mundos.”

³⁰² “detenerme, callar, cerrar los ojos hasta que brote de mis párpados una espiga, un surtidor de soles, y el alfabeto ondule largamente bajo el viento del sueño y la marea crezca en una ola y la ola rompa el dique,”

The poet halts until the “alphabet wavers long” and that makes him be ecstatic (the growing tide that “breaks the dike”). Moreover, the poet is creating himself by writing the poem: “And I speak my face bent over the paper and someone besides me writes while the blood goes and comes.”³⁰³ Therefore, the poetic epiphany is also the substance of the poet that happens as the unfolding of himself (standing out: “someone besides me writes”). Therefore, the poet exists by ek-sisting.

It is not difficult to see the similitude of the poetic raptness of man to a religious epiphany. In fact, Paz emphasises the poetic experience’s relation to the sacred. For instance, in *Sunstone*, the poetic epiphany turns into a holy one:

340 all is transformed, all is sacred
every room is the center of the world
it’s still the first night, the first day,³⁰⁴

Also, through *The Bow* Paz made numerous comparisons between the poetic experience and the experience of the holy. Paz asserts: “Religion and poetry tend to fulfill, once and for all, that possibility of being that we are and these constitute our

³⁰³ “Y digo mi rostro inclinado sobre el papel y alguien a mi lado escribe mientras la sangre va y viene.”

³⁰⁴ “todo se transfigura y es sagrado,
es el centro del mundo cada cuarto,
es la primer noche, el primer día,”

ownmost way of being.”³⁰⁵ And Heidegger may be, at least partially, behind Paz’s thought here. As Xirau pointed out “Heidegger’s language is close to that of the mystics” (Xirau, *Cuatro filósofos y lo sagrado* 48). In fact, Heidegger struggled to avoid the parallel between Dasein’s resolute moment and the experience of the holy. Instead, he considered the resolute clearing of being to be a prerequisite of the sacred:

In such nearness [to Being], if at all, a decision may be made as to whether and how God and the gods withhold their presence and the night remains, whether and how the day of the holy dawns, whether and how in the upsurge of the holy an epiphany of God and the gods can begin anew. But the holy, which alone is the essential sphere of divinity, which in turn alone affords a dimension for the gods and for the God, comes to radiate only when being itself beforehand and after extensive preparation has been cleared and its experienced in its truth (“Letter” 258).

As Steiner points out, Heidegger’s efforts to avoid an “onto-theology” were not entirely successful. His language often resembles the theological (Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* ix-xx). When Heidegger says “Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought” (“Letter” 267), he is only trying to avoid an equivalency. According to Steiner,

³⁰⁵ “Religión y poesía tienden a realizar de una vez y para siempre esa posibilidad de ser que somos y que constituye nuestra manera propia de ser” (*El arco* I 132). In fact the chapters “La otra orilla” and “La revelación poética” in *El arco*, deal with different comparative approaches of the poetic experience to a holy epiphany.

Heidegger's turn to poetry, art and, later, "the gods" (as in a pagan context) was in part to emphasize the distinction to the sacred (Steiner xxi).

We have also seen that for Heidegger it is the poetic (and not directly the holy) which plays the big role in the happening of ecstatic resolution. However, the relation of the poetic experience to the holy haunts Heidegger. As Stanton points out, Paz could have been impressed by Heidegger's view of the poet as a quasi-sacred hero that translates the holy to humans (Stanton, "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" 312).

Interpreting Hölderlin, Heidegger asserts that the poet reads the signs ("by surprising them" he says, therefore suggesting a fresh reading) of the gods and passes on their message to the people. In that way: "The founding of being is bound to the god's hints" ("Hölderlin y the essence" 63). Moreover, the poet, a paradigm of authentic existence (standing out) is then "the one who has been cast out—out into that *between*, between gods and men" (64).

Beyond Heidegger, Paz stressed the relation to the holy by linking poetic rhythm to the recurrence of sacred rituals. We saw that rhythm is for Paz one of the existential faces of poetry. And he also argues that rhythm, in a merger with the poetic image, is the key to understand the connection of poetry to the holy:

By means of rhythm, creative repetition, the image—a bundle of meanings that rebel at explanation—is opened to participation. [...] The poem is realized in participation, which is nothing but re-creation of the original instant. [...] Poetic rhythm does not fail to offer analogies to mythical time; the image, to mystical utterance; participation, to magical alchemy and

religious communion. Everything leads us to insert the poetic act into the realm of the sacred.³⁰⁶

Paz also suggests that besides poetry, the holy is another way of turning man into another and showing that reality is otherness.³⁰⁷ By means of the experience of the sacred “we see the ‘other face of being’” (*El arco* / 134). Also, sacred otherness, as poetry, is ecstatic, and is also a return to the origin. He often related the experience of the “Moment” to the sacred because he saw a return to a primordial origin in the sense that Eliade gave to the “eternal return” of a mythical-primordial time: a craving of man for living a perpetual present.³⁰⁸

Paz argues that the holy brings past and future into the present moment: “A return to what we were and foretaste of what we shall be. Nostalgia for the former life is presentiment of the future life. But a former life and future life that are here and now and are resolved in a lightning moment.”³⁰⁹ However, as Heidegger did before him, Paz tries

³⁰⁶ “Por obra del ritmo, repetición creadora, la imagen—haz de sentidos rebeldes a la explicación—se abre a la participación. [...] El poema se realiza en la participación, que no es sino recreación del instante original. [...] Ahora bien, según se ha visto, el ritmo poético no deja de ofrecer analogías con el tiempo mítico; la imagen con el decir místico; la participación con la alquimia mágica y la comunión religiosa. Todo nos lleva a insertar al acto poético en la zona eléctrica de lo sagrado” (*El arco* / 111).

³⁰⁷ Actually, a number of attributes conceded by Paz to the experience of the holy (*El arco* / 120-121), are basically the same he attributed before to the poetic experience.

³⁰⁸ According to Eliade, pre-modern societies periodically re-enact “time-regeneration rituals” intended to abolish “historical time” (*El mito del eterno retorno* 56-60). In that way, the individual can live in a perpetual “present”: “As the mystic and the religious person in general, primitive man lives in a continuous present” (87).

³⁰⁹ “Sospecho que este regreso [to the experience of the holy] a lo que fuimos es también anticipación de lo que seremos. La nostalgia de la vida anterior es presentimiento de la vida futura. Pero una vida anterior y una vida futura que son aquí y ahora y que se resuelven en un instante relampagueante” (*El arco* / 131).

to avoid equivalence between the poetic experience and the holy. Paz clearly states that he is not explaining the poetic experience through the holy, but drawing a line in between and showing that poetry is irreducible to any other phenomenon (111). Also, while Heidegger stated that the disclosure of the truth of Being is a prerequisite of the holy, for Paz, the poetic experience, that is the fundamental disclosure of Being, is previous to the religious experience (152). And this deserves further explanation.

Beyond Heidegger, Paz argues that poetry, religion, love, they all have a common origin. They all are “manifestations” of “Desire” as the essence of man. He thinks these manifestations are all nostalgia of the “originary unity” from which we are continuously detached, but to which we are always returning. However, Paz seems to mingle these premises with Heidegger’s authentic (*i.e.* stretched) temporality of Dasein. As we saw, Paz says that in the holy experience: “Nostalgia for the former life is presentiment of the future life.” And we get a clue here that he is thinking on Heidegger’s temporality of Dasein:

And perhaps man’s real name, the emblem of his being, is Desire. For what is Heidegger’s temporality or Machado’s “otherness,” what is man’s continuous casting himself toward that which is not he himself, if not Desire? If man is a being who is not, but who is be-ing, is he not a being of desires as much as a desire for being?³¹⁰

³¹⁰ “Y quizá el verdadero nombre del hombre, la cifra de su ser, sea el Deseo. Pues ¿qué es la temporalidad de Heidegger o la ‘otredad’ de Machado, qué es ese continuo proyectarse del hombre hacia lo que no es él mismo sino Deseo? Si el hombre es un ser que no es, sino que está siendo, un ser que nunca acaba de serse, ¿no es un ser de deseos tanto como un deseo de ser?” (*El arco* I 131)

Then, according to Paz, poetry, religion, love, they all have a common origin in Desire. However, Paz radically believes that there is a priority of the poetic phenomenon over the holy. And he finds in Heidegger (and Rudolf Otto) the argument for such statement.³¹¹ Paz believes that the original and determinant situation of man is that of being “detached, thrown into a strange world and nothing else,”³¹² and also that man keeps returning to this feeling throughout his life. Citing for the first time *Being and Time* Paz argues, in *The Bow*, that this feeling is not different from Heidegger’s “sudden feeling of being-there”³¹³ (to be thrown into the world). Then, for Paz, the holy is a consequence and an interpretation of the originary “radical fact of ‘being-there,’ of finding ourselves always thrown, finite and defenceless.”³¹⁴

For Paz, poetry also comes from the originary “knowing we have been thrown into that there that is the hostile world”³¹⁵ and the “temporality and finitude” of existence

³¹¹ Several times through *The Bow*, Paz quotes Rudolf Otto’s *The Holy* (originally published in German in 1917). Otto argued that Man’s originary condition is the feeling of being created, being born, but being nothing before the overwhelming power of the Creator. Thus, there is a subtle similitude to Heidegger’s premise of Dasein as “being thrown.”

³¹² “desarraigado, echado en un mundo extraño y nada más” (*El arco* I 138).

³¹³ Paz quotes Heidegger directly from José Gaos’s translation of *Being and Time*, but also quotes from Alphonse Waelhens’s *La Philosophie de Martin Heidegger*, Lovaina: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1948 (Paz himself refers to this work in *The Bow*). In this quote Paz probably refers to Heidegger’s discussion of “The Existential Constitution of the There” in *Being and Time*, where he says: “We shall call this character of being of Da-sein which is veiled in its whence and whither, but in itself all the more openly disclosed, this ‘that it is,’ the *thrownness* of this being into the there; it is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world. The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*” (*Being and Time* 127).

³¹⁴ “hecho radical de ‘estar ahí’, de encontramos siempre lanzados a lo extraño, finitos e indefensos” (*El arco* I 139).

³¹⁵ “sabernos arrojados en ese ahí que es el mundo hostil” (*El arco* I 142).

(*El arco I* 142-143). However, Paz argues that unlike religion, poetry “is not an interpretation, in its origin at least, but a revelation of our condition”³¹⁶ since poetry is rhythm and continuously-flowing temporality (142). Paz is suggesting that poetry comes first in man’s existence.

Love too, Paz suggests, is a revelation of Being as it discloses, in a moment, the union of two lovers: “the inextricable fusion of the opposites” (146). Here, in another gesture of looking for support in Heidegger, Paz says:

Heidegger himself has pointed out that joy in the presence of the loved one is one of the ways to approach the revelation of ourselves. Even that he has never developed his statement, it is notable that the German philosopher confirms what we all know with prior and obscure knowledge: that love, the joy of love, is a revelation of Being. Like all of man’s movements, love is a “going to the meeting.” While waiting, all of our being stretches out forward [...] keeps us in suspended standing out of ourselves.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ “no constituye, originalmente al menos, una interpretación, sino una revelación de nuestra condición” (*El arco I* 142).

³¹⁷ “Heidegger mismo ha señalado que la alegría ante la presencia del ser amado es una de las vías de acceso a la revelación de nosotros mismos. Aunque nunca ha desarrollado su afirmación, es notable que el filósofo alemán confirme lo que todos sabemos con saber oscuro y previo: el amor, la alegría del amor, es una revelación del ser. Como todo movimiento del hombre, el amor es un ‘ir al encuentro’. En la espera todo nuestro ser se tiende hacia adelante [...] nos tiene en vilo, es decir, suspendidos, fuera de nosotros” (*El arco I* 146).

Perhaps involuntarily Paz shows here the flexibility of his intellectual relation with Heidegger's philosophy. Paz seems to be making a reference to what Heidegger briefly says in "What Is Metaphysics?": "Another possibility of such revelation [of the disclosure of Being in its wholeness] is concealed in our joy in the presence of Dasein—and not simply of the person—of a human being whom we love" (87). But Heidegger does not say much more about love.³¹⁸ Paz interprets and almost freely completes Heidegger.

In this chapter I aimed at exposing the relevance of Paz's relation to Heidegger's thought in understanding Paz's own poetics. I have only briefly commented on a few (of a myriad) of the other voices that resound in Paz's discourse. In discussing Paz's poetics in *The Bow and the Lyre*, Santí and Stanton have already given preliminary directions for a study on Paz's influences.³¹⁹ A comprehensive work of this kind is still to be done. However, surrealism deserves a word here. Most probably Paz's notion of the being of man as "Desire" has, besides some existential premises, a link to the surrealist ideal of letting man's desires be freely exposed in artistic work. There are several other correspondences between Heidegger's tenets and those of surrealism. Paz himself proposed some of the parallelisms in an interview in 1953:

³¹⁸ In fact, the topic of love is almost absent in Heidegger's works. Jean-Luc Nancy and, more recently, George Steiner have written on love taking Heidegger, indirectly, as a point of reference. In "Shattered Love" (*The Inoperative Community*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991), Nancy takes Heidegger's concept of *coexistence*, from Being and time, to develop a philosophy of love as being-with. In *Lessons of the Masters* (Harvard UP, 2003), Steiner explores Heidegger's view of love from his love relationship with Hanna Arendt.

³¹⁹ Stanton, in his "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*," identifies some of the voices in Paz's "heterogeneous" discourse. His list include (though in some cases only mentioning the name): Husserl, Heidegger, the pre-Socratics, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Ortega, Otto, Machado, theories of the sacred, Buddhism and surrealism, among others.

What [in surrealism] moves and interests me, over all, is the trend itself: its character of collective-spiritual adventure, its desperate attempt to incarnate in the times and make food for society out of poetry, its affirmation of desire and love, and the continuous projection of imagination. Don't you think that as far as an attempt to radicalize poetic creation, surrealism runs parallel, for instance, with Heidegger's metaphysics of freedom? As a starting point for such a comparison, we should reflect upon the meaning of the words imagination and projection, among others.³²⁰

Therefore, there is no question about Paz's interests in looking at the relation between Heidegger's discourse and Surrealism. Stanton already pointed that Paz's theory of inspiration draws on surrealism but is tamed by Heidegger's and Machado's premises (Stanton, "Una lectura de *El arco y la lira*" 319-320). Paz criticizes Breton's view of inspiration as dictation of the unconscious because man is pre-occupation, in other words, presupposition of meaning and anticipation of his own death (*El arco* / 170-

³²⁰ "Lo que me conmueve e interesa [del surrealismo], por sobre todo, es el movimiento en sí: su carácter de aventura espiritual colectiva; su desesperada tentativa por encarnar en los tiempos y hacer de la poesía el alimento propio de la sociedad; su afirmación del deseo y del amor; el continuo proyectarse de la imaginación. ¿No te parece que, en cuanto tentativa por radicalizar la creación poética, el surrealismo corre paralelo con la metafísica de la libertad de un Heidegger, por ejemplo? Habría que meditar, como punto de partida de semejante confrontación, el sentido de las palabras imaginación y proyección, entre otras." See Paz's "Una entrevista con Octavio Paz." *Miscelanea III. Obras Completas* 15. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 170. The interview was originally published as "Una entrevista con Octavio Paz" in 1954 in Mexico's *Revista de la Universidad* and in *Sur*, in Buenos Aires.

171).³²¹ Looking at these tensions between existential tenets and surrealism, Santí asserts: “Whilst surrealism supports Paz in identifying poetry as an epistemic revolution, existentialism aids him to interpret life as meaning and temporality.”³²² As suggested before, a proper study of these relations in Paz’s discourse is out of the scope of this chapter but it would undoubtedly enrich and complement the present study.

To summarize, we have seen through this chapter that Heidegger’s philosophy is an important reference for understanding Paz’s poetics. Some of Paz’s most central arguments and concepts in his poetics are openly or—in most cases—implicitly related to Heidegger’s philosophy. We saw that Paz’s critique of modern human alienation due to the rationalization of reality follows Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics and aesthetic tradition. Most important of all, we saw that Paz’s belief on the poet as the bearer of otherness, who has the existential task of opening up the infinite meanings of reality, has a clarifying relation to Heidegger’s existential poetics. For both thinkers the task is to overcome the modern oblivion of Being by bringing back man’s originary relation to language as the basis of a new existential ontology. Poetry (and therefore all art) is not an object made by a subject but is the very making of otherness, that is, the human interpreting himself and his reality. Moreover, we saw that Paz extended Heidegger’s authentic temporality of Dasein by introducing poetic rhythm as the basis of human

³²¹ Also Paz says: “Because all willing and desiring, as Heidegger has shown, have their roots and foundation in man’s very being, which is now and has been since his birth a wanting to be, a permanent yearning for being, a continuous pre-being-himself.” In the Spanish original: “Pues todo querer y desear, según ha mostrado Heidegger, tienen su raíz y fundamento en el ser mismo del hombre, que ya es desde que nace un querer ser, una avidez permanente de ser, un continuo pre-ser-se” (*El arco* I 171).

³²² “Mientras que el surrealismo le sirve a Paz para identificar a la poesía como revolución epistemológica, el existencialismo le ayuda a interpretar la vida como sentido y temporalidad” (*El acto de las palabras* 238).

constitution as time. In the same way, Paz complemented Heidegger's poetics by introducing analogy and the poetic image as existential constituents of the human being. We also saw that Heidegger's existential poetics help clarifying Paz's arguments on the role of poetic language in establishing history. Poetic language founds historical truth by, paradoxically, keeping the truth open to new interpretations. At the end, for Heidegger and for Paz the task is to keep history alive as a source of possibilities. And here, again, Paz complements Heidegger's historical ontology by introducing the relation of poetic language with the recurrence of mythical archetypes. Finally, we saw that Paz's belief in a poetic epiphany as a moment of revelation of Being that conjoins past and future in the present, may be explained in relation to Heidegger's conception of the ecstatic essence of authentic Dasein. For both thinkers the moment of resolution is of temporal-ontological relevance, as it opens up past and future possibilities for interpreting reality, and therefore, for interpreting one's own being.

CHAPTER 5. Modernity and Technology in Paz's Poetics

Technology sees the world as defiance, not archetype: technology builds up a reality, not a figure. This reality cannot be reduced to an image and is, literarily, unimaginable.

O.P. "Signs in Rotation"³²³

We saw in the previous chapter that a number of existential premises from Martin Heidegger organize much of Paz's thought on the meaning of poetry. For Paz, the essence of poetry is otherness and therefore poetry is the essence of the human being. We also saw that, most probably following Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Paz suggests that the modern task is to overcome the oblivion of Being (from modern rationality) through a recovery of language as a poetic event.

In this chapter I continue with a similar approach by looking at another face of Paz's poetics. I make a reading of Paz's thought on technological modernity in light of

³²³ "Para la técnica el mundo se presenta como resistencia, no como arquetipo: tiene realidad, no figura. Esa realidad no se puede reducir a ninguna imagen y es, al pie de la letra, inimaginable." See Octavio Paz's "Los signos en rotación." *La casa de la presencia: Poesía e Historia. Obras Completas 1*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 254.

Heidegger's philosophy. In fact, Paz's thought in modern science and technology is a variation or extension of the existential themes discussed in the previous chapters. He discusses modernity and technology as he talks about contemporary self-alienation, technology's effect on society and poetry's role in the age of mass media. This side of Paz's reflection on modernity has hitherto been little regarded in Paz studies. He deals with these topics particularly in "Signs in Rotation" ("Los signos en rotación," 1965), "The New Analogy: Poetry and Technology" ("La nueva analogía: Poesía y tecnología, 1967), "In Search of the Present" ("La búsqueda del presente" 1990) and in his collection of essays *The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry* (*La otra voz: Poesía y fin de siglo*, 1990). I confront Paz's thought with Heidegger's premises in "The Age of the World Picture" (1938), "The Question Concerning Technology" (1949), and Ortega's *Thoughts on Technology* (*Meditación de la técnica*, 1939) among other works. We will see that in Heidegger's and Paz's thought modernity has brought human freedom but also alienation and a correspondent loss of meaning in the worldview. The modern task is to learn how to live the up to the modern contradiction and understand technology as a way of being authentic. And this is achieved by appropriating the teachings of poetry and art. I also discuss the thought of Ortega that in some cases prefigures Heidegger's more elaborated critique of technological modernity.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Paz's critique of modernity goes back to Paz's origins and his first writings. Essays such as "Poesía de soledad y poesía de comunión" in the early forties already show a critique of modern rationality. Also, as we have seen in Chapter 3, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* may also be read as a critique of modern alienation and a call to recover human authenticity. However, major works

discussing Paz as an important critic of modernity are only recently appearing.³²⁴ These studies have helped clarify how Paz's views on the modern world differ from the apocalyptic view we find in Max Weber or Friedrich Nietzsche. Paz does not seem to consider modernity as the end of history or as an inescapable "iron cage." Instead, he characterizes the modern as a contradictory but open space, full of risks and opportunities to be lived. This is similar to what Berman, Paz's contemporary, said about modernity as the experience of "find[ing] one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction" (Berman 345).

Grenier and Lutes have particularly focused on Paz's ambivalence toward modernity and their work is the starting point of my own conjectures on this topic. Grenier argues that Paz characterizes modernity as simultaneously conducive to art, with the arrival of critical art, but destructive to the soul (because of unbalanced rationalism). Grenier suggests that, for Paz, modernity's liberalism instigated the individual's craving to be free, but also brought an ideology of productivism and colonization of the future that alienated mankind from others and from itself (*Gunshots*

³²⁴ Yvon Grenier has shown how Paz drew ideas from romantic tradition and art to underpin his political thought and his critique of modernity (see *From Art to Politics: Octavio Paz and the Pursuit of Freedom*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001). Todd Oakley Lutes has found similar critiques of modernity among Paz, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa (see *Politics, Culture and Modernity in the works of Octavio Paz, Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa*. Lanham: UP of America, 2003). More recently, Grenier's book *Gunshots at the Fiesta* (with Marteen Van Delden, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009) includes a few essays linking Paz's thought on politics and modernity to the romantic and liberal traditions. Several contributors in the collection, *Octavio Paz: Humanism and Critique* (Oliver Kozlarek (ed.) Bielfeld: Transcript, 2009) consider the poet's views on modernity from a sociological standpoint. In the same book, Rolando Vázquez's essay ("On visual modernity and Poetic Critique, between Octavio Paz and Walter Benjamin.") breaks new ground in his study of Paz's critique of technology (in this case: photography), to which I will return later in this essay.

at the Fiesta 84). Grenier also points out Paz's ambivalence about reason. He argues that Paz's romantic sensibility leads him to criticize a reliance on reason, but at the same time Paz sees reason as an instrument that, if used against itself, can rescue modernity from nihilistic annihilation (*From art to Politics* 78). Overall, Grenier's point is that Paz's critique of modernity was complex rather than simply essentialist or politically committed. Lutes, too, notices a divided vision of modernity in Paz's works. He finds that for Paz, while modernity entails the experience of life as shipwreck and struggle, deliverance and dignity in life are still possible outcomes (Lutes 154). Most interestingly, Lutes argues that Paz's contemporaries, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa owe their similarly ambivalent views on modernity to Ortega y Gasset's existentialist philosophy.

Indeed, Paz's ambivalence on modernity may have developed through his readings of Ortega's works. We have seen in the previous chapters that Ortega was an important reference for Paz. On the one hand, for Ortega the age of reason has left us in "solitude, radical solitude" (*Qué es filosofía* 377) by making us suspicious and critical of anything spontaneous (*i.e.* vital). Ortega asserts that the sign of the times is "vital disorientation." As our system of values has vanished, western society has become unsure about how to proceed (*El tema de nuestro tiempo* 88-89). However, there is a possibility of recovery. According to Ortega, the present task of our times is to reconsider life—and not only reason—as a "right and a principle" (67). We must then build our cultural values from within our lived circumstances. Consequently, today we should not reject but embrace the flow of modernity, accepting the variety of individual perspectives on reality and giving room to spontaneous, vital sensitivity (55-56). We

should notice the relation with Ortega's old premise: "I am myself and my circumstance" that promotes living appropriating the current (present but historical) circumstance. There is in Ortega, therefore, a degree of optimism. Modern life can be led with dignity. Also, in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) Ortega locates the fulfillment of modern culture in the European masses at the end of the Great War. With the successful rise of modern culture, followed by the decadence and uncertainty of the times, he argues, a horizon of possibilities opened as well (57-62). Paz seems to follow Ortega in his ambivalent stand toward modernity by criticizing it but at the same time proposing a favorable way of living it.

Adding to Grenier's and Lutes's perspectives in Paz's ambivalence toward modernity, I wish to discuss Paz's ambiguous position on technological modernity. This side of Paz's reflection on modernity has hitherto been little regarded in Paz studies. Paz may have begun his reflections on social effects of modern technology by reading Ortega's pioneering *Thoughts on Technology* (originally a 1933 course but not published until 1939). Paz briefly refers to this book in "El cómo y el para qué: José Ortega y Gasset" (1980). However, I believe Heidegger's critique of the instrumentality of technology is even more important in clarifying Paz's ambivalence toward technological modernity and his urgency to recover the human being through poetry.

5.1. Destruction and Recovery of the Image of the World

Paz could have known about a couple of Heidegger's essays on technology, science and their relation to art in modern times. Beginning with "Signs in Rotation"

(1965) Paz proposed that in the age of reason, modern science and technology have brought a vanishing “image of the world” (“Los signos en rotación” 252). Paz compares the present reality with the ancient image of the world, this is, the mythical view of reality as correspondences and “cyclical rhythms” of the cosmos. And we have seen in the previous chapter that in Paz’s poetics rhythm is an existential feature of man itself that predisposes us to see the world as analogy. Paz argues that in pre-modern times there was a correspondence of man and his surrounding reality as “Everything was a whole.” However, modern times have changed this relation: “Technology comes between us and the world, it closes every prospect from view: beyond its geometries of iron, glass, or aluminum there is exactly nothing, except the unknown, the region of the formless that is not yet transformed by man.”³²⁵ Moreover, according to Paz, ancient times produced cities, laws, rituals, poetry and art, works that are analogies of the cosmic rhythms. However, modernity has broken the harmony as time has become linear and the space infinite. Therefore, man is now lost (252-253).

Paz’s stand is clarified in light of Heidegger’s reflections on technological modernity. Paz may have read Heidegger’s “The Age of the World Picture” (1938) and “The Question Concerning Technology” (1949) as they were translated into Spanish in 1958.³²⁶ As we have seen before, Paz rarely disclosed what specific works he may

³²⁵ “La técnica se interpone entre nosotros y el mundo, cierra toda perspectiva a la mirada: más allá de sus geometrías de hierro, vidrio o aluminio no hay rigurosamente nada, excepto lo desconocido, la región de lo informe todavía no transformada por el hombre” (“Los signos” 254).

³²⁶ “La pregunta por la técnica” was translated and published by Francisco Soler in: *Revista de Filosofía* (Santiago de Chile), No. 1 (1958) pp. 55-79. “La época de la imagen del mundo” was translated and published by Alberto Wagner de Reyna also in Chile: *Ediciones de los Anales de la Universidad de Chile*, in 1958.

have read from Heidegger. However, in *Itinerary*, Paz suggests that he was aware of Heidegger's thought on modern science and technology. While making a distinction between Sartre and Heidegger, Paz explains that Sartre's philosophical works are a "marinated" version of Heidegger's philosophy, and immediately afterwards complains that "the big absence in Sartre's work is modern science."³²⁷ However, we can know more of Paz's relation to Heidegger on these topics by comparing their essays and recalling that, as we saw before, Heidegger was an important reference for other facets in Paz's poetics.

Let's now discuss Heidegger's specific premises that are relevant in order to clarify Paz's thought. In "The Age of the World Picture" Heidegger criticized modernity's objectified picture of the world and the subsequent loss of the interwoven relation between man and Being. Heidegger asserts that modernity—starting with Plato—has made the world the representation of a system, to the person who has become a subject (128-131). In opposition, ancient Greeks saw the essence of humanity as interwoven with the being of things, as ambiguous and contradictory as the space of being could be: "in order to fulfill his essence, Greek man must gather (*legein*) and save (*sōzein*), catch up and preserve, what opens itself in its openness, and he must remain exposed (*alētheuein*) to all its sundering confusions" (131). We can see that Heidegger continues here his *Being and Time* complaint, that the metaphysical tradition, by trivializing the concept of Being, or by taking it as a thing, has neglected the obscure meaning it had for ancient Greeks (*Being and Time* 2-3). In "The Age of the World Picture" Heidegger's presents a variation of the same idea by criticizing the arrogance

³²⁷ "La gran ausente en la obra de Sartre es la ciencia moderna." (*Itinerario* 83).

of modern rational man and the subsequent loss of the meaning of our world. Heidegger asserts that the fundamental characteristic of “Modern Age” is that man has conquered its own objectified picture of the world by taking human capability as the domain given for realization of everything which is (132). Then, by gaining mastery through science and technology, over that which is as a whole, the open relation of mutual implication between man and Being (re-creation, interpretation) is now broken.

Moreover, for Heidegger too (as it is for Ortega and for Paz) modernity is in essence contradictory. He argues that modernity, by breaking the links with medieval thought has brought the liberation of man by introducing individualism and subjectivism. However, “it remains just as certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as having worth” (“The Age of the World Picture” 129). Then, Heidegger is suggesting that while modernity liberates the individual, paradoxically it also eliminates him by enhancing the enframing powers of “the collective.” And this enframing power is enhanced through modern technology.

Paz’s argument that modern science and technology have brought a vanishing image of the world may be seen in relation to Heidegger’s idea that modernity has broken the meaningful relation of open interpretation between man and the world. Heidegger asserts that the rational subject has made himself free to define truth as *cogitatio*, and engages a game with the unlimited powers of calculation. However, what was supposed to be calculated may be concealed in the process. Heidegger asserts: “But as soon as the gigantic in planning and calculating and adjusting and making secure shifts over out of the quantitative and becomes a special quality, then what is

gigantic, and what can seemingly always be calculated completely, becomes, precisely through this, incalculable” (135). Heidegger’s point is that the modern-subjective-objective world picture ambiguously installs itself as defined but then vanishes in a space that escapes representation. In another way of putting it, for Heidegger, when man objectifies a world picture, the individual loses his open relation to Being in mutual re-creation. We can see that Heidegger’s concern with the image of the world seems to resonate in Paz’s argument. The loss of the “image of the world” as something meaningful for existence, in Paz’s discourse, somehow corresponds to Heidegger’s objectification of a defined “world picture” and the subsequent loss of different but meaningful world pictures.

There are also some similarities with Ortega’s *Thoughts on Technology*. In this work Ortega suggests that modern technology may be alienating for man because is pushing us for the first time into a field that is as much unknown as it is unlimited. He writes, “Man today, at his deepest, is amazed precisely by being conscious of his own limitlessness. And perhaps that prevents him from knowing who he is [. . .] because to be technological and only technological is to be both everything and, at the same time, nothing definitive.”³²⁸ We should notice, therefore, that although Paz shares with Ortega a concern for the way man locates (or dis-locates) itself in the midst of the gigantic possibilities of technological modernity, Ortega does not talk at all of a loss of the image of the world.

³²⁸ “... el hombre está hoy, en su fondo, azorado precisamente por la conciencia de su principal ilimitación. Y acaso ello contribuye a que no sepa ya quién es [. . .] Porque ser técnico y sólo técnico es poder serlo todo y consecuentemente no ser nada determinado.” See *Meditación de la Técnica*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1965. p.81.

Ortega's concern with the alienation of the self seems to resonate in Paz's critique of modernity. However, Paz is closer to Heidegger in looking at this alienation as a loss of the possibilities of being human. We should recall that uniformity or the definition of being is, for Paz, a lack of otherness. One way Paz exemplifies this modern inability to experience different ways of looking is in our efficient forms of communication. He argues that though modernity has provided us with advanced technology for communication, it has simultaneously increased human alienation by degrading conversation. As he writes:

The modern phenomenon of the lack of communication depends less on the plurality of subjects than on the disappearance of the "you" as a constitutive element of each consciousness. We do not speak to others, because we cannot speak to ourselves [. . .] Today we are not alone in the world: there is no world. Each place is the same place, and nowhere is everywhere.³²⁹

Paz is suggesting that the individual's modern inability to acknowledge the self as the other, or to understand ourselves as socialized otherness, makes us incapable of recovering the image of the world as a whole, and therefore we can no longer establish meaningful links across differences. Moreover, in another way of putting it, Paz states:

³²⁹ "El fenómeno moderno de la incomunicación no depende tanto de la pluralidad de sujetos cuanto de la desaparición del tú como elemento constitutivo de cada conciencia. No hablamos con los otros porque no podemos hablar con nosotros mismos [. . .] Hoy no estamos solos en el mundo: no hay mundo. Cada sitio es el mismo sitio y ninguna parte está en todas partes" ("Los signos" 253).

“In a universe that shucks and scatters itself—a whole that is now unthinkable but as absence or collection of heterogeneous fragments—the self is also scattered” (“Los signos” 253). Then, modern fragmentation (in Paz’s case) or objectification (in Heidegger’s case) of reality, with the implicit separation of subject and object, has a correspondence with the alienation of the individual.

We have seen that otherness is a major topic for Paz that has a relation to Heidegger’s critique of traditional metaphysics. We saw in the previous chapters that since *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) and more emphatically in *The Bow and the Lyre* (1956) Paz developed the concept of “otherness” as the essence of man, poetry and Being, in general. Following Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and *What is Metaphysics* (1929) Paz asserts: “Being can lean on nothing, because the nothing is its foundation.”³³⁰ The essence of Being is nothing defined but openness: constant becoming Other.³³¹ This also resonates in Heidegger’s previous assertion that pre-Socratic Greeks did not have an objectified world picture but ambiguously considered it “what opens itself in its openness.” In fact, we saw that Paz made otherness a core idea of his poetics by affirming that the poetic image is in itself otherness. Therefore, poetry “is a revelation of our original condition because through poetry man actually names himself another, and thus he is, at the same time, this and that, he himself and the

³³⁰ “En nada puede apoyarse el ser porque la nada es su fundamento” (*El arco* I 149).

³³¹ We saw in chapter 3 that Paz uses the expression “the other” to address the essence of being as a constant becoming, always in the way to be *other*.

other.”³³² However, as we are now finding, modernity has for Paz (and for Heidegger) ambiguous repercussions for otherness.

Thus, we should not understate that for Paz modern alienation goes hand in hand with a lack of plurality, and he may be following Heidegger on this. For Paz, modernity may shatter otherness—and therefore the being of man—as modern scattering of the image of the world, and of the self, turns into repetition of the same. And according to Paz this is a contradictory event: while dispersion of the self multiplies it and seems to strengthen it, at the end “dispersion is not plurality, but repetition: always the same self that blindly combats another blind self. Propagation, pullulation of the identical.”³³³ For Heidegger the modern problem is also the imposition of uniformity that also happens ambiguously. He asserts that for the man that has become a subject and makes the world a picture, there is a growing form of I-ness and egoism (e.g. man’s empowering as lord of earth). However, modern technology also works the other way:

“Subjective egoism [...] can be canceled out through the insertion of the I into the we [...] In the planetary imperialism of technologically organized man, the subjectivism of man attains its acme, from which point it will descend to the level of organized uniformity and there firmly establish itself. This uniformity becomes the surest instrument of total, *i.e.*, technological, rule over the earth. The modern freedom of subjectivity

³³² “es revelación de nuestra condición original porque por ella el hombre efectivamente se nombra otro, y así él es, al mismo tiempo, éste y aquél, él mismo y el otro” (*El arco* I 175).

³³³ “La dispersión no es pluralidad, sino repetición [...] Repetición, pululación de lo idéntico” (“Los signos en rotación” 253).

vanishes totally in the objectivity commensurate with it ("The Age of the World Picture" 152-153).

Then, for both Heidegger and Paz the problem is this "organized uniformity" that vanishes the endless possibilities of being. The consequence of having a normalized individual in a world that looks always the same is the concealing of the truth of Being. We have seen that the call for clearing of the truth of Being as inexhaustible possibilities is also the theme of "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry." In "The Age of the World Picture" Heidegger continues the argument: "A fleeting cloud shadow over a concealed land, such is the darkening which that truth as the certainty of subjectivity [...] remains denied to subjectivity itself to experience" (153). The truth that is concealed, in Heidegger's view, is the endless interpretations of reality. In close relation, for Paz, "the scattering of the image of the world turns into uniformity and, therefore, in the loss of *otherness*."³³⁴

In "The New Analogy: Poetry and Technology" (1967) Paz discusses our modern conception of time as another way technological modernity undermines its own premises and shadows a meaningful image of the world. Paz asserts that an image of the world has always been tied to a particular idea of time. Modern technology entails a critique of time as it replaces enduring mythical views with meaningless and fragile realities and constructions (302-303). The result, according to Paz, is paradoxical. The idea of progress, supported by the Christian notion of linear time, was born in

³³⁴ "la dispersión de la imagen del mundo en fragmentos inconexos se resuelve en uniformidad y, así, en pérdida de la *otredad* (257).

modernity, yet the potential result of this so-called progress is ecological catastrophe that not only sets an end to time, but also makes progress vanish and shatters our present image of the world (303).³³⁵ The best example of this contradiction is, for Paz, the atomic bomb. This terrible weapon employs a refined technology but at the same time negates itself by potentially shattering the image of the world (305). Paz later stated that “if the atomic bomb has not yet destroyed the world, it has already destroyed our idea of the world” (*La otra voz* 50).

However, despite their ecological concerns about technology, neither Heidegger nor Paz (nor Ortega) presents the problem of modernity as the final catastrophe of history, but instead as something to be lived properly. Heidegger calls for a recovery of the unknown, the incalculable reality of the world, through a philosophical inquiry into the essence of Being. This process should be performed by the man who recovers his historicity for himself in the present moment, overcomes himself as a subject and ceases to represent the world as an object (“The Age of the World Picture” 136,154). In other words, Heidegger is calling for a recovery of Dasein’s authenticity. And Paz may be taking Heidegger’s premises as ground to propose the recovery of otherness. According to Paz, our modern task is to establish an image of the world from the fragments, to perceive the links among differences. Humankind will experience true life by being able to sense the “flashing of otherness” and perceive that our being is somewhere else (“Los signos en rotación” 257-258). As we have seen before, for both Heidegger and Paz, the modern task is the individual’s appropriation of his authentic

³³⁵ As Grenier has pointed out, Paz was one of the first Latin American intellectuals to denounce the deterioration of the environment as one of the outcomes of modern progress (From *Art to Politics* 84).

(i.e. open) possibilities. And as we shall see, for both of them, poetry (and therefore, art) may be the surest guide.

5.2. Technology and Poetry for the Disclosure of Being

Technology seems to be a fundamental motor of modernity. However, Heidegger proposed that if technology may help liberate the individual, it also enframes the individual's being. We will see that Paz seems to follow Heidegger in this way of looking at technology. And also, they both critique the instrumentality of technology and call for learning the teachings of poetry and art, to then think of technology as a way of being authentic.

Heidegger discussed these issues in his landmark essay, "The Question Concerning Technology." This essay has a different approach than "The Age of the World Picture" in making a critique of technological modernity and modern science. In "The Question," Heidegger asserts that technology is not essentially "technical." That is, it is neither applied science, nor essentially something man does, nor a medium for something he does, but a form of *poiesis* (i.e. *techné*, unveiling) that discloses Being (12-13). Technology therefore is not an instrument but simply a feature of the essence of Dasein as the being who brings forth concealed beings.

With some differences, Ortega also regards as an obscuring force the way in which humans misunderstand technology as simply an instrument. He sees humanity as a continuous invention which, through technology, realizes itself as extra-natural. Man's radical essence is his struggle for inventing himself beyond nature. In other

words, Ortega believes that there is no humanity without technology because technology is a way of creating himself. (*Meditación de la técnica* 33). However, the modern misunderstanding is that man may think that technology is something “natural,” and thus he may lose his awareness of technology as the essence of inventing himself (83-84).

It is important to note here the distance between Heidegger and Ortega. As Dust has pointed out, despite some overlaps between the two,³³⁶ there is a significant distinction between Heidegger’s assertion that man exists as opening to reveal Being, and Ortega’s belief that human life is the radical reality (Dust 279). In other words, there are no ontological concerns in Ortega’s philosophy. Moreover, while Ortega would agree with Heidegger that the essence of technology is other than “the technical,” for Ortega technology is the way humankind invents itself, whereas for Heidegger technology is man’s disclosure of Being (and therefore, a disclosure of *his* being).

As contradictory as it may appear, for Heidegger modern technology also carries the risk of the opposite of revealing: technology conceals Being when we consider technology simply as an instrument. Heidegger seems to bestow attributes to technology similar to those he had put on language. As we saw in the previous chapter, in “The Origin of the Work of Art” and in “Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry,” Heidegger calls for poetically recovering the plurality of meanings of the “earth” and keeping it open as inexhaustible source of possibilities of Being. In other words, poetic language is the opening of the inexhaustible possibilities of reality. But we saw that

³³⁶ Actually, he develops a full comparison between Ortega and Heidegger and believes there are some influences. See Patrick H. Dust. *Ortega y Gasset and the Question of Modernity*. Minneapolis: The Prisma Institute, 1989.

language may conceal Being when used as an instrument. In a similar way, Heidegger now asserts that when we deem technology a straightforward matter of cause and effect, we strip it of its truth-unveiling character. Misled by his own negligence with the essence of technology, man may believe he is the lord of the Earth and may see everything that exists as his own artifact. By doing so, he loses his true essence, loses both himself and his capacity to unveil truth in general. As Heidegger writes:

In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounters himself, *i.e.*, his essence [. . .] Where this [instrumental] ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing [. . . It] conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance ("The Question" 27).

The similarities between Heidegger and Paz are revealing and help understanding Paz's argument. We shall recall that for Paz modern science and technology have fragmented man's image of the world and therefore he is incapable of listening to the voice of otherness. Therefore, man has been alienated from himself and from a meaningful image of the world. And, as suggests next, for Paz too the problem is instrumentality of technology:

What do our airplane hangars, railway stations, office buildings, factories, and public monuments express? They express nothing: they are functions, not meanings. They are centers of energy, monuments of will, signs that

radiate power, not meaning. Ancient constructions were a representation of reality, the real and the imaginary; the constructions of technology are an operation made over reality. For technology the world is neither a sensible image of the idea nor a cosmic model: it is an obstacle that must be overcome and modified.³³⁷

Similar to Heidegger, for Paz the problem is misunderstanding technology as an instrument to modify the world, as if a subject was making an operation over an objectified reality. However, according to Heidegger, for all the negative outcomes of modern technology the danger is not technology itself. We should neither push ahead compulsively and blindly with technology nor rebel helplessly against it. If we open ourselves properly to the essence of technology, we may then take part in its liberating powers ("The Question" 26). There is a somewhat similar argument in Ortega's thought on technology. For Ortega, technology releases man to be himself, because he exists only through technology (*Meditación de la técnica* 47). Again, for Heidegger, the emphasis is on the ontological: technology liberates us by disclosing possibilities of being. Let's now see how Heidegger completes this argument and Paz's relation to this.

³³⁷ "¿Qué dicen nuestros hangares, estaciones de ferrocarril, edificios de oficinas, fábricas y monumentos públicos? No dicen: son funciones, no significaciones. Son centros de energía, monumentos de la voluntad, signos que irradian poder, no sentido. Las obras antiguas eran una representación de la realidad, la real y la imaginaria; las de la técnica son una operación sobre la realidad. Para la técnica el mundo no es ni una imagen sensible de la idea ni un modelo cósmico: es un obstáculo que debemos vencer y modificar. El mundo como imagen desaparece y en su lugar se levantan las realidades de la técnica, frágiles a pesar de su solidez ya que están condenadas a ser negadas por nuevas realidades." See Paz's "La nueva analogía: Poesía y tecnología." *La casa de la presencia: Poesía e Historia. Obras Completas 1*. Mexico City: Círculo de Lectores-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. p. 303.

If, as we saw in the previous chapter, Paz was well aware of Heidegger's interpretations of Hölderlin verses in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Paz may also have appreciated Heidegger's quoting of Hölderlin in "The Question Concerning Technology": "But where danger is, grows / The saving power also" (28).³³⁸ As Heidegger interprets Hölderlin, what saves man is to understand the essence of technology as truth-unveiling, and to understand that man is the necessary mediator of this process (32).³³⁹ Moreover, recovering an argument from "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger asserts in "The Question" that *techné* was also the name given to art, because of art's power to unveil the hidden (34). And art is *poiesis* (*i.e.* bringing-forth) a term now synonymous with poetry. Heidegger summons Hölderlin again, quoting his line, "poetically dwells man upon this earth." If in the "The Origin" Heidegger concluded that poetry (and therefore any form of art) will save us from the concealment of the infinite possibilities of reality, in "The Question" he asserts that in this age of misunderstanding, art will lead us to mediate properly on the essence of technology (34-35).

Similar to Heidegger, Paz also considers that poetry will save humankind from the misunderstandings of modernity. He asserts that our modern task is to rediscover

³³⁸ Paz left us another suggestion that he was aware of Heidegger's interpretations on Hölderlin. In *Itinerary*, in a brief comparison between Heidegger and Sartre, Paz says, "From the start I felt distant from Sartre [. . .] Unlike Heidegger, who is the interpreter of Hölderlin and Rilke, Sartre leaves no place for poetry in his system." In the Spanish original: "Desde el principio me sentí lejos de Sartre [. . .] al contrario de lo que ocurre con Heidegger, exégeta de Hölderlin y de Rilke, la poesía no tiene lugar en el sistema de Sartre." (*Itinerario* 82).

³³⁹ This is the very existential topic through Heidegger's thought on technology. Being is not a given thing that man just finds out there. Being is disclosed by the discoverer, so to speak. The existence of man is necessary for the world to be disclosed through technology, poetry and art.

otherness by gathering a picture of the world from the fragments, by perceiving the “this” in the “that” (“Los signos en rotación” 254). Poetry, Paz tells us, is exactly suited for that task, since it configures signs: “Poetry is the discovery of otherness” (254). The poem is a blank page in search for meaning (256). Later, in Paz’s final book on poetics *The Other Voice: Essays on Modern Poetry*, he returns to the same theme. As we face ecological disaster, Paz proposes that our modern task should be to hear “the other voice” of poetry. Poetry will inspire us to make links between opposite realities and recover a coherent image of the world, because poetry “exercises our imagination, and therefore teaches us to recognize differences and discover similitude. The universe is a living tissue of affinities and oppositions. Living proof of universal fraternity, each poem is a practical lesson in harmony and concord [. . .] Poetry is the antidote to technology and the rules of the market.”³⁴⁰ Then, Paz calls for making sense of the world, but in plural ways, as poetry teaches.

Moreover, for Heidegger and Paz technology and poetry play important roles in living an authentic experience of time. We have seen that for Heidegger, modern science and technology have made the future unknown. Similarly, for Paz, the future that technology offers is less and less imaginable, lacking any meaning (“Los signos en rotación” 302). However, Paz asserts, by shattering the future, technology returns us to the “here and now,” to our eternal instant in which one place is all places (256). As Grenier has pointed out, one of Paz’s major Romantic rebellions against modernity is

³⁴⁰ “ejercita nuestra imaginación y así nos enseña a reconocer las diferencias y a descubrir las semejanzas. El universo es un tejido vivo de afinidades y de oposiciones. Prueba viviente de la fraternidad universal, cada poema es una lección práctica de armonía y de concordia [. . .] La poesía es el antídoto de la técnica y el mercado.” (*La otra voz* 138).

his rejection of the notion of linear time, the idea of progress and the utopian “colonization of the future” as the manifest destiny of humankind (*Gunshots at the Fiesta* 88-89). Paz urges us to recognize the poet as the one who flows with the current of living the everyday and, as we saw in the previous chapter, recovers the “Present.” I believe that Paz agrees here with Ortega’s call for spontaneous living and, perhaps more important, with Heidegger’s call for authentically reaching the Moment of resolution. Paz believes that what today’s social imaginary needs is the discovery that poetic experience brings, and the projection of the “here and now” into poetry (“Los signos en rotación” 258). Modernity, suggests Paz, has been the cult of the future; today (in what has confusingly been called post-modernity), the “future is no longer a magnet” as its idea of time disappears (*La otra voz* 7). Instead, he declares: “I believe that the new star—the star that is yet to show itself in the historical horizon but that is announced in many ways—is the star of the now.”³⁴¹ Therefore, Paz is again calling for authentically living the present.

With some similitude, Ortega linked modern art to spontaneity. He said in *The Theme of Our Time* that modern art is what fosters our understanding of culture as spontaneously and continuously creating itself. Modern art promotes the act of performance in itself [necessarily in the present] rather than the old values of working hard and conforming to pre-existing cultural categories (*El Tema* 92-93). Closer to Heidegger, Paz emphasizes the importance of poetry and the poet by suggesting that through poetry we recover our ability to experience the present. And Paz leaves yet

³⁴¹ “Creo que la nueva estrella—esa que aún no despunta en el horizonte histórico pero que se anuncia de muchas maneras—será la del ahora” (*La otra voz* 53).

another clue of his Heideggerian influences on this when he quotes the philosopher's sentence, "We are too late for the gods and too early for Being. Being's poem, just begun, is man."³⁴² Paz interprets this as a metaphor for the modern condition: in modern times the archaic worldview has vanished, but man is as yet an open ("just begun") poem in search of otherness, a continuous being another ("Los signos en rotación" 260). It is this Heideggerian experience of the present that Paz emphasizes.

Moreover, we might understand Paz's concern with living the present in the context of—as we have seen in the previous chapter—an older theme in his work: the possibility of escaping profane time by experiencing poetic epiphany. We saw that thematically or in performative ways, Paz's poems often promote opening the poetic experience in the reader, by living "the otherness" as pure presence. The topic also shows even in late writings such as "In Search of the Present" (The Nobel-ceremony speech in 1990), where Paz declares that "poetry is in love of the Moment and seeks to relive it in the poem, thus separating it from sequential time and turning it into a fixed present."³⁴³ Let's now see how also technology can help us reach that moment.

³⁴² Paz takes these verses from Heidegger's poem *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (the English title was published as "The Thinker as a Poet." See Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. p. 4.

³⁴³ "La poesía está enamorada del instante y quiere revivirlo en un poema; lo aparta de la sucesión y lo convierte en presente fijo." See "La búsqueda del presente: Nobel Lecture." *Nobelprize.org*. 1990. Nobel Prize. 15 May 2012 <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1990/paz-lecture-s.html>

5.3. Photography and Mass Media as Disclosure

For Paz, technology may disclose Being and may also help us live the Moment. For one possible form of technology we might consider one of modernity's favorite children, the quintessential art-technology that is photography, and what Paz said about it. After, I will extend this discussion to include Paz's ideas on mass media.

Photography is a paradigmatic case that reminds us that art is *techné*. However, photography was born first as an instrument of science and was for long regarded as valuable for its ability to accurately represent reality, as opposed to the ambiguous representations of painting. However, though favored by many modernists, photography may also participate in the poetic critique of modern notions of time. Photographic art, rather than pursuing the future, captures the present instant with the flicker of a shutter. And we should also remember that, despite all the ways in which technology may obscure reality, in Heidegger's view *techné*, is essentially *poiesis*. Then, photography may be disclosure of otherness and as open to meanings as a poem.

Paz was well aware of how photography incarnates these modern paradoxes. In "Instante y Revelación: Manuel Álvarez Bravo" (1982), Paz discusses the way photography developed as a continuation of Renaissance efforts to represent space through the analytical techniques of perspective. Yet even if photography is the culmination of this search for an ideal rational order, Paz believes that in the hands of the artist the photograph becomes a critique of modern concepts of time. Photography reveals the ecstatic instant, the "flickering of time, its invisible steps" ("Instante y revelación" 316).

There is another aspect of Paz's critique of time in relation to photography. As Vázquez notices, modern reproduction of images enables us to produce pictures as commodities, giving us a visual sense of time as never-ending novelty (105). However, for Paz, poetic photography breaks the arrow of time toward the future by continually evoking another image: "... a photograph evokes another one that, in turn, takes us to a third and a fourth. In this way we establish a network of relations that are visual, mental, and even tactile. These relations make us think of the lines of a poem linked by rhyme or the patterns made by stars in celestial maps."³⁴⁴ According to Vázquez's interpretation, Paz implies that one image evokes another coming necessarily from the past, therefore activating memory and breaking the linearity of time (108). Photography, then, embodies time moving backward, not time moving forward as in the utopian ideal of progress. I add to Vázquez's argument by pointing that Paz may be also referring to a Heideggerian possibility of being authentic through art. We should recall that authentic Dasein recovers his socialized historicity in the Moment of resolution. By emphasizing the way every picture captures the instant while inevitably links to previous (socialized) events and images, Paz is pointing to one of the several ways art teaches us the path to authentic resolution.

And Paz points out yet another way photography is *techné* (i.e. disclosure). According to Paz, photography was meant to be the culmination of rational objectivity as in the photographic process a machine, rather than a human, is what creates the

³⁴⁴ "... una foto alude a otra que, a su vez, nos lleva a una tercera y a una cuarta. Así se establece una red de relaciones visuales, mentales e incluso táctiles que hacen pensar en las líneas de un poema unidas por la rima o en las configuraciones que dibujan las estrellas en los mapas celestes." See Paz's: "Instante y Revelación: Manuel Álvarez Bravo." *Los privilegios de la vista II. Obras Completas 7*. Mexico City: Círculo de Lectores-Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. pp. 315-316.

representation of reality. But Paz believes that the act of mechanically creating perspective actually fosters one of photography's modern paradoxes:

Through its ability to reproduce perspective mechanically, without the intervention of the artist, [photography] facilitated the mobility of viewpoints and multiplied them. What was most surprising was that the triumph of subjectivity was achieved thanks to a mechanical procedure that reproduces the visible world with maximum fidelity. In a photograph, subjectivity and objectivity are conjoined: the world as we see it, but simultaneously as seen from an unexpected angle at an unexpected moment [. . .] The lens is a powerful extension of the eye, and yet what photography shows us, once the film is developed, is something the eye failed to see, or that it was unable to retain the memory of.³⁴⁵

Then, for Paz photography is a technology that expands the number of perspectives for interpreting reality. In the hands of an artist like Álvarez Bravo, photography becomes a “poetic art” as it unveils the “persistence of the instant” and the hidden communication between “this” and “that” (“Instante y revelación” 315). Therefore, Paz is suggesting that photography is, as poetry, otherness. Furthermore, photography is disclosure if we

³⁴⁵ “Por su facultad de reproducir mecánicamente a la perspectiva, sin intervención del artista, facilitó la movilidad de los puntos de vista y los multiplicó. Lo más sorprendente es que se consumase el triunfo de la subjetividad gracias a un procedimiento mecánico que reproduce con la máxima fidelidad al mundo visible. En la foto se conjugan subjetividad y objetividad: el mundo tal cual lo vemos pero, así mismo, visto desde un ángulo inesperado o en un momento inesperado [. . .] El lente es una poderosa prolongación del ojo, y sin embargo, lo que nos muestra la fotografía, una vez revelada la película, es algo que no vio el ojo o que no pudo retener la memoria” (“Instante y revelación” 314).

account that “what photography shows us, once the film is developed, is something the eye failed to see.” As Vázquez suggests in reading this line, Paz is punning on the meaning of “develop,” since in Spanish *revelado* also means unveiling (108). Then, I add to this argument by pointing out that in Paz’s view of photographic art, technology recovers its Heideggerian meaning: photography is *techné*, *poiesis* that discloses the possibilities of being.

So far we have seen that, for Paz, technological modernity shatters the image of the world, but at the same time technology—photography being one example—may work toward re-establishing existence as otherness. Paz makes a similar case for mass media. He takes mass media production techniques as another instance of technology as *techné*, unveiling. He elaborated an original defense of media technologies because he regarded them as a way to disclose the original characteristics of poetry. Paz argues that the poet may take broadcast technology in its capability of revealing poetry as a collective oral performance developing in time (“La nueva analogía” 305). If for Heidegger we should fully open ourselves to the essence of technology in order to experience its liberating power, for Paz, television and cinema should be used to the fullest in order to experience poetry as a blend of reading, hearing, and seeing.

According to Paz, the ambivalent relations between technology and poetry are old. The advent of print technology brought about the shift from poetry as aural-musical to poetry as a mental art that is only written and read. Moreover, the publishing market dissolved the diversity of readers into an impersonal mass (*La otra voz* 99). However, Paz also observes that modern technology is shifting society back toward its original conception of poetry. Not only are the aural characteristics of art returning in mass media, but as

Mallarmé and Apollinaire imagined, cinema, journalism, advertising, television and other visual media are transforming writing to include the spatial dimension. Predicting what we now take for granted with the use of computers and internet, for Paz, the technology of modern visual communication can liberate poetry, allowing us to play the game of linking the visual space of the poem with its rhythm and its images (“Los signos en rotación” 269). As Paz explains:

In the poem to come, heard and read, seen and listened to, there will be joined [. . .] celebration and contemplation on the animated screen, typography will be a source of signs, strokes and images full of color and motion; at the same time, voices will draw a geometry made of echoes and reflections, a tissue composed of air, sound, and sense.³⁴⁶

The poem will be able to escape the page of the book and become a concrete object conveying simultaneous aural, visual, and mental experiences (“La nueva analogía” 307).³⁴⁷ Moreover, he believes that whereas print culture had dissolved the diversity of readers, audio and video cassettes can liberate us from the tyranny of “the ratings” and once again foster the diversity of the audience (*La otra voz* 122-123). With this, Paz was

³⁴⁶ “En el poema venidero, oído y leído, visto y escuchado, han de enlazarse [. . .] Fiesta y contemplación: sobre la página animada de la pantalla, la tipografía será un surtidor de signos, trazos e imágenes dotadas de color y movimiento; a su vez, las voces dibujarán una geometría de ecos y reflejos, un tejido de aire, sonidos y sentidos enlazados” (*La otra voz* 123-124).

³⁴⁷ One example of this may be the successful experiments of the concrete poets of Brazil.

again anticipating the audience diversity with the upcoming media-revolution of the internet.

Paz did not content himself with speculations on the liberating powers of technology and mass media. He developed his own performances to take advantage of television as a medium for promoting poetic culture. In 1988 he performed in a series of television programs called *México en la obra de Octavio Paz*. At moments in each program, fragments of essays and poems are read aloud while images play across the screen. Paz also produced an extensive CD collection of his own poetry readings. Unfortunately, much of the philosophical stand of his arguments on mass media was lost in the backlash of political criticism he faced when forming ties with the Mexican mass media giant, Televisa.³⁴⁸ While the political vicissitudes of Paz's venture into television are not in the scope of this work, it is worth noting the paradoxical character of his involvement with mass media. Paz thought of poetry as the image of cosmic fraternity (*La otra voz* 123). Presumably he saw his broadcasting venture as putting this idea into practice, attempting to foster the fellowship that modern society had lost. However, the Mexican political climate kept Paz's efforts from being understood as he wished.

In summarizing, we have seen that Paz's dialectical view of all facets of the modern experience has ties to both Ortega and Heidegger. Through this chapter we saw that their reflections on technology, in particular, add to our understanding of the

³⁴⁸ As Grenier finds, Paz was even blamed of receiving the Nobel Prize thanks to the power of Televisa and former ex-president Salinas. See "Octavio Paz: An Intellectual and his Critics." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*. 21:1 (2005): 251-267.

philosophical dimension of Paz's stand on technological modernity. They also help understanding Paz's ambivalence about the impact of modern technology in human existence. We saw that, for Paz, we currently live the loss of a meaningful image of the world. And he seems to include in this loss the individual's incapability of making sense of himself and his world, but also of making-sense in a plurality of perspectives. As we saw, this may be read in relation to Heidegger's critique of the modern-objectified world picture. Also, Heidegger's stand on technological modernity helps in understanding Paz's belief in the possibility of human recovery through technology, poetry and art. For Heidegger, if we open ourselves properly to the essence of technology, we may then take part in its liberating powers. For both Heidegger and Paz, the problem is not technology itself but modern misunderstanding of the relationship between the human being and technology. They propose avoiding the instrumental approach to technology and learning to see it as disclosure of possibilities of being otherness and interpret reality as otherness. Finally, we saw that Heidegger and Paz propose to counteract the instrumentality of technology by learning to see otherness through the teachings of poetry and art. In Paz's case, he put some effort in showing the ways *techné* is art (e.g. in photography) as it was supposed to be in the first place. And Paz also showed ways in which poetry and technology may be a critique of linear time and a recovery of the Moment.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION: TO BE ONESELF IN OTHERS

I am the other when I am myself, my acts
are more my own when they are everybody's,
because to be myself I must be other,
go out of myself, seek myself among others,
those others who are not if I do not exist,

(O.P., fragment from *Sunstone*)³⁴⁹

The thesis of this dissertation is that fundamental premises in the poetics of Octavio Paz are organized—a matter of my reading of the texts—in the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger and José Ortega y Gasset. As a hermeneutical exercise, this research was mainly about understanding Paz's texts in light of Paz's historical context. Mexican cultural history, Paz's life and Ortega's and Heidegger's works are all part of this horizon of interpretation. We saw that Paz was born with the Mexican revolution and consequential interest in redefining identity that moved intellectuals and artists after the revolution. This concern with identity, at least partially, nourished the development of existential philosophy in Mexico and is also the context

³⁴⁹ “soy otro cuando soy, los actos míos
son más míos si son también de todos,
para que pueda ser he de ser otro,
salir de mí, buscarme entre los otros,
los otros que no son si yo no existo,”

(*Piedra de sol*, v.525-529).

where Paz grew as an intellectual. Moreover, we saw that these ideas fostered Paz's existential poetics.

In doing my reading I discovered that Ortega, Heidegger and Paz have a shared project in making a critique of their reality. Ortega denounced the lack of vitality in the modern-rational order and called for vitalizing the past to enrich the making of the present. Heidegger criticised the oblivion of Being in the roots of modern thinking and called for acknowledging the historicity of Being and the recovery of authenticity through poetic language. Paz resonates with both in his own critique of identity and also in his arguments beyond the debate on Mexicanness. His most fundamental premises about human existence, the meaning of poetry, modernity and technology, they all make sense in light of the existential philosophy of Ortega and Heidegger. In doing the comparison, Paz's arguments acquire an extended philosophical meaning that goes beyond what we can directly read from his works.

My reading of Paz's poetics does not make Paz a disciple of Ortega or Heidegger but discloses a relation to these authors that is not evident in the first place. Paz's complex thought is far from having a "major" intellectual mentor. A myriad of names scintillate and blend in every essay from Paz. The list of poets, philosophers and artists that were his source of inspiration would be almost endless. However, following his deliberate stand as a non-academic intellectual, Paz is mostly vague in his references to other authors. Though he liked to recognize his debt to Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, he also referred many times to the thought of Kant, Hegel, Rousseau, Fourier, just to mention some names in the philosophical arena. As stated earlier in this dissertation, Paz also referred to Ortega as an influence for his generation but wrote

little about him.³⁵⁰ And the only work where Heidegger is several times referred directly is *The Bow and the Lyre*. Paz never wrote specifically about Heidegger. My study shows that the relevance of Ortega and Heidegger in understanding Paz's poetics goes far beyond Paz's acknowledgment of his own intellectual "debts" to these thinkers.

I feel compelled to clarify the importance of this study of Paz. The premises of Ortega, Heidegger and Paz were important in the mid-twentieth century but they may be even more relevant in today's world. In pointing to the current relevance of these topics I could at least try to round off this hermeneutical exercise by explicitly including my own horizon of comprehension. At the end, this research project is also, inevitably, a reflection about my own circumstances. I wish to close this work by, at least partially, exercising this understanding of my situation as a Mexican in relation to my historicity. I will weigh in the increasing relevance of studying the existential premises that moved Octavio Paz beginning more than sixty years ago, by looking at the current situation of Mexico at the first half of 2012, which is a part of my own circumstance.

I presume that my current situation resonates with the past. We saw that Ortega, Heidegger and Paz thought of the present as the recurrence of history. As Paz suggested in one of his last poems, history is like:

a spring of visions and resurrections,
listen to me as one listens to the rain,
the years go by, the moments return,

³⁵⁰ As stated in Chapter 3, Paz wrote a brief essay about Ortega: "El cómo y el para qué: José Ortega y Gasset."

do you hear your footsteps in the next room?
not here, not there: you hear them
in another time that is now,
listen to the footsteps of time,
inventor of places with no weight, nowhere³⁵¹

For Paz we should learn to listen to our present “footsteps” “in another time that is now” because “the moments return.” Paz, as Ortega and Heidegger, called for making this historicity neither the cause, nor the restraint of the present, but quite the opposite, the source of possibilities for continuous and spontaneous reinvention. These thinkers, each in his own way, argued against narrow definitions of identity and pre-determined destinies. In the case of Mexico, we saw that Paz fought national essentialisms from his early days as an intellectual. Today, when the most recent version of static views on the destiny of Mexico have already ignited one of the most violent episodes in Mexican history, it seems increasingly urgent to look back at these existential concerns and their circumstance, as a source of present possibilities.

³⁵¹ “manar de apariciones y resurrecciones,
óyeme como quien oye llover,
pasan los años, regresan los instantes,
¿oyes tus pasos en el cuarto vecino?
no aquí ni allá: los oyes
en otro tiempo que es ahora mismo,
oye los pasos del tiempo
inventor de lugares sin peso ni sitio,”

Fragment of “As One Listens to the Rain” (“Como quien oye llover,” 1987). The English translation is from Elliot Weinberger.

One cannot but see the similitude, at least partially, of the present state of affairs in Mexico in comparison to the events of one hundred years ago, and after. We saw in chapter 2 that the political events in the early days of the Mexican revolution in 1910 included the making of a colossal centennial celebration of the Mexican independence and the creation of monuments. These events displayed an imposed—“inauthentic,” Heidegger and Paz would say—view of Mexicanness that Porfirio Díaz wished to showcase. As we saw, a founding positivist motto in Mexico was: “Love, Order and Progress,” where the last two items summarize much of the spirit of Díaz’s dictatorial policies and his planned idea as to the destiny of the country. At the same time, the social-political situation was breaking out, igniting the most violent period of the revolution. One hundred years later, in the times of the recent “Bicentenario” celebration in Mexico in 2010 (the two hundred years anniversary of independence and one hundred of the revolution), Mexico is still living a similar contradiction.

Since the moment Felipe Calderón took power in December of 2006, he imposed one of the narrowest possible definitions on the country’s future: that of war. With a programmatic discourse on making Mexico a strong state that should be made free of drug-traffic business, Calderón openly inaugurated a military campaign with more than 50,000 soldiers in the streets, supposedly to attack the drug traffic cartels.³⁵² The death toll of this “War on Drugs” up to the beginning of 2012, exceeds fifty thousand

³⁵² According to the numbers reported by Human Rights Watch: “Neither Rights Nor Security: Killings, Torture, and Disappearances in Mexico’s ‘War on Drugs’.” 9 Nov. 2011. 15 May 2012
<<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2011/11/09/neither-rights-nor-security-0>>

casualties.³⁵³ There are also more than ten thousand missing people and hundreds of thousands of displaced people.³⁵⁴ Also, from 2007 to October 2011 there were more than 5,800 formal complaints against the military forces due to human rights violations.³⁵⁵ Moreover, it is revealing that at the same time that the Mexican state promotes a programmatic and narrow vision of the destiny of the country, the national educational policies were reformed accordingly. In 2008, by Presidential decree, courses on humanities and philosophy were eliminated at primary and secondary education levels (while most post-secondary educational programs in Mexico currently lack any philosophy content).³⁵⁶ In this way, it seems important for the state to eliminate the only courses in the educational system oriented to open up people's perspectives and question their current and future possibilities.

³⁵³ Human Rights Watch reported 35,000 deaths recognized by the Mexican state from 2007 to 2010, plus 11,000 reported by the press from January to November 2011 (See the report "Neither Rights Nor Security"). By June 2012 Leticia Ramírez de Alba's report (Índice de Víctimas Visibles e Invisibles) counts more of 88, 000 accumulated deaths since Calderon took power. See "Primer corte preelectoral: 88 mil 361 muertos en el sexenio." *Revista Proceso*. 2 Jun. 2012. 5 Aug. 2012. <http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=309572>.

³⁵⁴ Marcela Turati has estimated 12,000 disappeared people in Mexico during the first 5 years of Calderón's presidency. See "Colombia: la recuperación de los desaparecidos." See: "Colombia: la recuperación de los desaparecidos." *Revista Proceso*. 25 Jan. 2012. 14 April 2012 <<http://www.proceso.com.mx/?p=296007>>. About the displaced people, see Ingrid Sandnæs's report "Severe Displacement Situation in Mexico" from the Norwegian Refugee Council (1 March 2011). The report counts 230,000 displaced people since 2006. 15 May 2012 <<http://www.nrc.no/?did=9547824>>.

³⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch reported this numbers on early 2012. The report also mentions that 74 journalists were killed in Mexico from 2000 to September 2011. See: "World Report 2012: Mexico." Jan. 2012. 15 May 2012. <<http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/mexico>>

³⁵⁶ In 2008 Calderón's Administration launched the "Reforma Integral de la Educación Media Superior" that excluded humanities and philosophy as "mandatory" in the curriculum of studies below university level. In the practice, this means a quasi-elimination of these subjects in the educational system. See, for instance, José Alfredo Torres's "La reforma al bachillerato mexicano expulsa a la filosofía." *Dialéctica*. 33.42 (2010).

Nevertheless, in the midst of national-humanitarian disaster, the 2010 celebrations displayed a centralist and pre-defined idea of Mexicanness that the Mexican state wished to showcase. In early 2010 the President announced 2,300 events (but less than one quarter outside the capital) “to be able to measure the size of the national spirit that beats in each one of us.”³⁵⁷ Facing criticism for upcoming expending, the state minister in charge of managing the event said that “this [event] is a method, a form, a mechanism to consolidate our unity.”³⁵⁸ About 300 million dollars were expended in propaganda, celebrations and monuments (Delgado 33). As Florescano asserts: “the current government not only repeats again the hegemonic and centralist discourse of that Porfirio Díaz used in the Centennial celebrations of Independence in 1910, but it has again centralized and imposed the content of the celebrations, leaving out the participation of the states.”³⁵⁹

However, narrow definitions of the destiny of the country seem to go beyond the Mexican state. Polls have shown that more than half of the Mexican population actually

³⁵⁷ See the article EFE’s article: “Celebrará México ‘el grito más grande’.” *Milenio Online*. 11 Feb. 2010. *Grupo Milenio*. 14 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.milenio.com/cdb/doc/impreso/8717678>>

³⁵⁸ See Francisco Reséndiz’s “Arremete Lujambio contra críticos de Bicentenario.” *El Universal.mx*. 21 Aug. 2010. *El Universal: El gran diario de México*. 15 May 2012 <<http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/703217.html>>

³⁵⁹ “el gobierno actual no sólo repite el discurso hegemónico y centralista que Porfirio Díaz realizó durante las celebraciones del Centenario de la Independencia en 1910, sino que ha vuelto a concentrar e imponer el contenido de las conmemoraciones, dejando de lado la participación de los demás estados del país.” See Juan Carlos Talavera article . “Extraer los restos de 12 próceres es un agravio; el gobierno usa el discurso porfirista: Enrique Florescano” *Crónica.com.mx*. 3 June 2010. *La Crónica de Hoy*. 15 May 2012 <http://www.cronica.com.mx/nota.php?id_notas=510266>. About Enrique Florescano’s conference “Independencia, Identidad y Nación en México: 1810-1910.” Seminario Internacional Los Centenarios: Conmemoraciones e Historia Oficial. El Colegio de México. 2 Jun. 2010. <<http://2010.colmex.mx/videos/index.html>>

supports the President's current policies for the country.³⁶⁰ The current government did not need to struggle much to convince a good part of the population that there are "good" citizens (legal, patriotic, morally-correct, etc.) that should support the state in "fighting the evil people"³⁶¹ in the country, in order "recover the power of the state"³⁶² and preserve "the empire of the law."³⁶³

It seems to me that the current crisis in Mexico is not because of a fight between the state and two or more cartels of "evil" Mexicans, or between the cartels themselves—as the Mexican state promotes—but something deeper. One of the major problems in Mexico is the difficulty of individuals to recognize themselves in their historicity and, more specifically, as socialized others. As we saw in Chapter 3, in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) Paz called Mexicans to open their being to otherness: the other undefined self that *is* in relation to the other individuals. He criticized the Mexican he imagined as closed to the other, unconfident of the others: "A Mexican is always a problem for another Mexican and for himself."³⁶⁴ One may reply by saying that not recognizing the self in the other is also a sign of the times. As we saw in chapter 4, Paz

³⁶⁰ Consulta Mitofsky has metered a peak of 69% of the population supporting the President in 2009, while the average throughout 2011 was of 51% of the population supporting the President. See their report at: <http://www.centropolitico.org/mexico-aprobacion-presid-2011/>

³⁶¹ In Calderón's words, he is "combatiendo a los malos." See Arturo Rodríguez García's "Airadas Respuestas." *Revista Proceso*. 8 May 2011. p. 14.

³⁶² As Calderón put it in his "Discurso de toma de protesta" as President of Mexico.

³⁶³ As Calderón put it in his "Primer informe de gobierno" in September 2007. <http://primer.informe.gob.mx/mensajealanacion/>

³⁶⁴ "Un mexicano es un problema siempre para otro mexicano y para sí mismo" (*El laberinto* 207).

asserted the same in “Signs in Rotation” (1965). He said that modernity has brought the “disappearance of the ‘you’ as a constitutive element of each consciousness.”³⁶⁵

In Mexico this alienation from the other, that Paz criticized, does not seem to have changed much over time. Often, a Mexican thinks of the “other” (“indígena,” “prole,” “naco,” “fresa,” “gay,” “narco,” etc.) as a non-socialized other that somehow is detached from the historicity of the country. That Mexican believes he is unrelated to that other because he does not appropriate his own historicity that makes the others be a part of the self. It does not come as a surprise that the Zapatista-indigenous uprising of 1994 had the motto: “*Nunca más un México sin nosotros*” (“Never again a Mexico without us”), as if calling out for their urgency of being re-inserted in Mexican history and make the rest of the Mexicans recognize their own historicity. Unfortunately, that “other” in Mexico is often repressed and fought in order to make it look a non-human. This may be seen in the horrifying characteristics of the killings happening in the current violence throughout the country and the disappearance, even by physical disintegration, of *human* remains.³⁶⁶ The conception of the non-human “other” also shows in the attitude of the Mexican state (and a good part of the Mexican population) that shows no concern about the current number of people being killed in the drug-war because, allegedly,

³⁶⁵ “la desaparición del tú como elemento constitutivo de cada conciencia. No hablamos con los otros porque no podemos hablar con nosotros mismos [. . .] Hoy no estamos solos en el mundo: no hay mundo. Cada sitio es el mismo sitio y ninguna parte está en todas partes” (“Los signos” 253).

³⁶⁶ Unfortunately I have not found much discussion on this issue in the context of the violence in Mexico: One thing—already degrading—is killing someone with a firearm, but another thing is killing someone by utterly dehumanizing the other (and, therefore dehumanizing one’s own self). Many killings in Mexico are accomplished by first torturing the person and then by performing the most horrifying (and inexplicable) procedures for elimination of the human body: beheadings, dismembering and acid-disintegration, among others.

those others are just “criminals.” A similar attitude seems to drive state declarations labelling “collateral damage” to hundreds of crime-unrelated people that are killed or disappeared.³⁶⁷

In the midst of Mexico’s spread violence, Ortega’s call in *Meditations on Quixote* (1914): “I am myself and my circumstance, and if I do not save it then I do not save myself,”³⁶⁸ seems to be as fresh as ever. Mexicans still have to open themselves to their historicity and learn that, as Paz put it in a perfect hendecasyllable of *Sunstone*: “a donde yo soy tú somos nosotros” (“the place where I am You, equals Ourselves”). Perhaps Mexicans still have to appropriate their authenticity and acknowledge that as individuals we are, as Heidegger asserted, a socialized being-in-the-world of the others.

I believe that it would be a big step to solving the current crisis in Mexico if the country would open itself to the “otherness” that Paz wanted. And we saw in Chapter 4 and 5 that for Heidegger and Paz this may be achieved by following the way of the poets and re-appropriating the meaning of poetry as the source of possibilities for being. Then, it does not come as a surprise that a mystic poet, Javier Sicilia, currently leads the major protest movement against the essentialisms of the state and its war.³⁶⁹ Sicilia started a nation-wide political movement in April 2011 after his own son was tortured

³⁶⁷ In the 2011 Human Rights Watch report: “In the immediate aftermath of killings, victims are routinely labeled by security forces as criminals or ‘collateral damage’ (*daños colaterales*) of shootouts between security forces and armed persons—determinations that are made before an investigation has been conducted into the incidents leading to the deaths” (“Neither Rights Nor Security” 168-169).

³⁶⁸ “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia, y si no la salvo a ella no me salvo yo” (*Meditaciones* 77).

³⁶⁹ And neither is it a surprise that Sicilia shares interests with Octavio Paz with regard to the meaning of poetry as epiphany. Sicilia wrote *Poesía y espíritu* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998) about the relation between poetry and mysticism (where, by the way, Heidegger is quoted a couple of times).

and killed. With the purpose of raising awareness in the population about the urgency to restore the social fabric and demanding a stop to the war, Sicilia grouped hundreds of thousands of people in the “Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad.” This has been by far the largest protest during Calderon’s presidency.³⁷⁰

It is meaningful that during the first “Marcha por la Paz,” at the end of the four-day rally in May 2011, Sicilia started his final speech by quoting Heidegger and calling for re-appropriating one’s own historicity. (And he has started almost every other speech by reading a piece of poetry.)³⁷¹ It is also significant that Sicilia gave this speech in front of a massive gathering of people in Mexico City’s “Zócalo,” the plaza at the heart of the old city that is considered a major symbol of Mexicanness.³⁷² By suggesting that there is still hope of recovering Mexico from the lost track, Sicilia quoted from Heidegger’s essay “What poets are for”:

³⁷⁰ The extended rally had many meetings throughout the country. Just the final gathering in Mexico City grouped 80,000 people, according to the police (200,000, according to the organizers). To learn more about the country-wide rally, see “La caminata hermanada por el dolor” of José Gil Olmos (*Revista Proceso*. 8 May 2011). For more information about the last day of rally and the final gathering at Zócalo, Mexico City, see “Marcha por la Paz” of Ciro Pérez and Victor Ballinas (*La Jornada*. 8 May 2011).

³⁷¹ Sicilia has read poetry from: Elsa Cross, Marco Antonio Campos, Xhevdet Bajraj, Cesar Vallejo, Miguel Aguilar Carrillo, among others. Several times Sicilia has talked about the relevance of poetry in his movement. See, for instance, José Gil Olmos’s “Sobre Calderón las consecuencias de esta guerra...” (*Revista Proceso*. 10 April 2011.) where Sicilia asserted: “I tell people that I did not summon this [movement]. It was the citizens and their love for the dignified word that is poetry. Then, the citizens have the word.” (“Yo les digo que no convoqué esto. Son los ciudadanos y el amor que tienen por la palabra digna que es la poesía. Entonces, los ciudadanos tienen la palabra.”)

³⁷² The Zócalo is the main plaza at the center of the old city and was built on top of the remnants of Tenochtitlan, the old Aztec empire. Is the site of the Catedral Metropolitana, but also the Palacio Nacional, the symbol of the Mexican state. Also, the plaza is the mythical site where, according to the Aztec legend, the wandering tribes from up north founded Tenochtitlan because they found an eagle eating a serpent, standing over a cactus plant, which they interpreted as a divine signal. As we saw in chapter 3, the eagle eating the serpent is another version of Quetzalcoatl (“The feathered serpent”) and is a national symbol that still appears in the Mexican flag and in all Mexican coins.

“Perhaps the world’s time is now becoming the completely destitute time. But also perhaps not, not yet, not even yet, despite the immeasurable need, despite all suffering, despite nameless sorrow, despite the growing and spreading peacelessness, despite the mounting confusion.”

It is significant that in this essay, Heidegger argues that in our modern destitute time, poets are the “the mortals who, singing earnestly of the wine-god, sense the trace of the fugitive gods, stay on the gods’ tracks, and so trace for their kindred mortals the way towards the turning” (91-92). Therefore, Sicilia was suggesting that there is hope if we return to the understanding of poetry as the essence of being. He then continued by calling Mexicans to reappropriate their historicity:

“We have come to this corner where once Tenochtitlan dwelled—to this corner where the state and the church sit upon the foundations of a past rich in teachings, and where the paths meet and branch out—; we have come here to make visible again the roots of our nation, so that its nakedness, that accompany the nakedness of language, which is silence, and the painful nakedness of our dead ones, help us to illuminate the path.”³⁷³

³⁷³ “Hemos llegado hasta esta esquina donde alguna vez habitó Tenochtitlan—a esta esquina donde el Estado y la Iglesia se asientan sobre los basamentos de un pasado rico en enseñanzas y donde los caminos se encuentran y se bifurcan—; hemos llegado aquí para volver a hacer visibles las raíces de nuestra nación, para que su desnudez, que acompañan la desnudez de la palabra, que es el silencio, y la dolorosa desnudez de nuestros muertos, nos ayuden a alumbrar el camino.” See “Discurso

This brief starting paragraph (of a long discourse) is full of allusions to several topics in this dissertation. Sicilia suggested that Mexicans should appropriate their past “rich in teachings,” not as an encapsulated-written past, but as a space of renewal where “the paths converge and branch out.” Also, he called to disclose (“make visible again”) the roots of the nation, but hand in hand with poetic language (“the nakedness of language”) that is the otherness that opposes the state’s essentialisms. And finally, he called for re-appropriating the socialized heritage of the past (“the nakedness of our dead people”) as the source of new possibilities (to “help us to illuminate the path”). It is also revealing that Sicilia considers it fundamental to appropriate the original sense of “charity” as a way of restoring the broken links between the self and the other in the population. In his declarations he has called the state and the population to recognize the pain and dignity of those others who have been tortured, killed or disappeared, as well as the pain of their families. Sicilia has explained that “charity” (which he links to the original meaning of Christian poverty) “does not mean giving something away, but *giving yourself*” to the others (Ruíz Parra 96). It is significant that Sicilia grounds his critique of the Mexican situation (and of modernity, in general) in the urgency to recognize the other in the self. In a similar tone he has explained several times that the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan (*Gospel of Luke* 10:25-37) represents for him a radical and revolutionary change of paradigms that should guide the recovery from

pronunciado en el Zócalo de la Ciudad de México al arribo de la Marcha Nacional por la Paz el 8 de mayo de 2011.” Red Por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad. 14 April 2012.
<http://redporlapazyjusticia.org/?page_id=1359>

modern alienation.³⁷⁴ In an interview discussing human freedom in the age of institutionalized rules, Sicilia argues:

Don't you think that freedom can only exist in those [individuals] that have wisely acknowledged their limits? In other words, beings that have accepted to renounce any form of power and of administration of their lives and live, as the Good Samaritan, open to the encounter with the other and with the others; that is, open to the others in their own weakness that makes them free and full of a profound acceptance of their finitude.³⁷⁵

It seems to me that in Mexico's current situation, there are a number of links and analogies, between past and present. It is perhaps evident that there is a link between the premises that moved Paz, which propped him in formulating his poetics and his critique of Mexicanness, and the present premises that move Sicilia in his critique of the current Mexican state and his call to restore the social fabric in times of modern alienation.

³⁷⁴ On this see Emiliano Ruíz Parra's "La voz de la tribu." *Revista Gatopardo*. June 2011. 14 April 2012. <<http://www.gatopardo.com/ReportajesGP.php?R=90>>

³⁷⁵ "¿No te parece que la libertad sólo puede existir en aquellos que han sabido aceptar sabiamente sus límites, es decir, en seres que han aceptado renunciar a cualquier forma del poder y administración de sus vidas y viven, como el samaritano, abiertos al encuentro con otro y con otros, es decir, abiertos a los demás en su propia debilidad que los hace libres y llenos de una profunda aceptación de su finitud?" See interview with Humberto Beck "La fe y el mundo 'post-secular'. Conversación con Javier Sicilia." *Revista Conspiratio en línea*. Aug. 2010. *Revista Conspiratio*. 15 May 2012 <http://www.conspiratio.com.mx/conspiratio/?page_id=845>

Or perhaps it is not that the past is similar to the present, but as Heidegger, Ortega and Paz argued, the past is re-occurring in the present. Because the present “self” is nobody-in-him/herself but his/her dispersed otherness in all the other socialized live and dead individuals. The modern task is still, as in Ortega’s *Meditaciones del Quijote* or Heidegger’s *Being and Time* or in Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, to recognize ourselves in our historicity (and with that, our socialized others) to then open up our future possibilities. And as we saw in Chapter 4 and 5, in order to achieve this, as Heidegger argued in “Hölderlin or the Essence of Poetry” or Paz proposed in “Signs in Rotation” or Sicilia is nowadays suggesting, we still need to hear the “other voice” of the poets and learn to recognize ourselves in the otherness of poetry and art. That will perhaps help Mexicans, even if only partially, to find their way against the essentialisms of the state, inhuman violence, crime and corruption. Thus, I wish to suggest that this dissertation adds too to the general understanding of these *currently relevant* topics. There are already signs suggesting that this “poetics” of otherness is infiltrating its surroundings.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ The efforts of Sicilia’s movement to raise awareness in the population have already produced several nation-wide rallies and have made the President to (personally) attend two public hearings where the victims’ families have been allowed to speak. Moreover, it is significant that, starting February 2012, a group of more than one hundred artists throughout the country joined Sicilia’s movement with a TV-add campaign called “Ponte en los zapatos del otro” (“Put yourself in another’s shoes”). The campaign aims to urge the population to recognize the self in the other. In each video clip, Nepomuceno Moreno gets impersonated by a number of artists that, by shifting their voices, start saying: “Soy Nepomuceno Moreno...,” thus suggesting that we are all Nepomuceno Moreno. (Nepomuceno was a peace activist, father of a disappeared 17-year-old boy. Nepomuceno was also silenced and gunned down in November 29, 2011.) Finally, in April 2012, Sicilia’s social mobilization got the first proposal of law approved by the Mexican congress. This new “Ley General de Víctimas” will make the Mexican State responsible of clarifying and prosecuting the cases of victims of the violence. In June, just a few months before leaving the presidency, Felipe Calderon vetted this law. On this see Hernández Barros’s “Ley General de Víctimas. Improcedencia del Veto Presidencial.” 12 Jul. 2012. Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y

In closing this conclusion I wish to point out some perspectives for future research. The process of doing this dissertation has allowed me to foresee several topics that are related but, unfortunately, out of the scope of this dissertation. Perhaps these treads could be a starting point for the continuation of this conversation in other research projects. First of all, it would be revealing to look at Paz's writings about love and eroticism in light of Paz's existential poetics. In one of Paz's last works, *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism* (1993), he argued that love and eroticism are also ways of being otherness. Another research thread could elaborate on Paz's political vicissitudes during the monstrous effects of the cold war in Latin America, in the context of Paz's poetics of otherness and, therefore, in light of Paz's rejection of political essentialisms. One more research project could look at Paz as an art critic in relation to his poetics of otherness. And finally, it would be of interest to make a comparative work looking at the relations between Paz's poetics and other poets who had a philosophical conversation with Heidegger such as Paul Celan, René Char, Wallace Stevens and others.

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