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Eda E. Cogburn
ecogburn@utk.edu

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Cortázar's *Rayuela* as Convergent Canvas Between Author and Reader

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Eda Emilie Cogburn

> THE artist is the creator of beautiful things.
>
> To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.
>
> The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things […]
>
> All art is at once surface and symbol.
>
> Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.
>
> Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
>
> It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.
>
> (Oscar Wilde preface to *The Picture Dorian Gray*).

The term 'critic' insinuates active evaluation and interpretation, and Wilde's preface to the novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* places the critic in a participating role as one who "translates into another manner or new material his impression of beautiful things" (1). In Julio Cortázar's 1963 novel, *Rayuela,* the author in fact does withdraw to some degree to garner just such activity from his reader. But with this withdrawal, attention is redirected to the author as a concept, the novel as a construct and the reader as a creator, all structures of the creation process. I would argue that the critic represents all spectators and that no spectator is merely spectating in the passive sense. *Rayuela's* kinesthetic construction and linguistic play form a metafictional frame which unveils the creator-spectator or reader-author relationship as codependent.

Art reflects the spectator because the spectator plays a substantial role in the creation of the art, but also inseparable from the novel are the anxieties in *how* one creates through a system of cultural lenses and historical frames that simultaneously admit and impede rationality and meaning. These anxieties emerge in the novel's main character, Horacio, and his distrust of historically-inherited system of thought, but is also characterized in language as an inadequate

solution to its own divisiveness. Physical and thematic structures work together in the novel to prioritize the merging seams of the creation process, rather than one seamless, absorbing experience. Even so, I will also defend conventional consumption and emotional absorption of the novel as an equally legitimate form of active reading. While *Rayuela* offers the reader a moderately conventional storyline in Book One, it simultaneously provides an opportunity to stretch the limit of conventional reader-engagement, and it is this freedom that forms the rhetorical basis of *Rayuela's* novel structure. This design, encompassing threatening divisions, reflections and multi-directional, simultaneous paths, explores meaning-making, creation, and the novel as a convergent canvas that allows for divergent exploration of unfillable gaps.

Even before the reading process has begun, one can begin to posit the alternating responsibilities of both author and reader to create the experience of novel: an author creates the work; the reader must select the work from among tens of thousands of other novels. While this may seem like an obvious, even unnecessary observation, it is the first decision on which the rest of the mutual creation process hinges. The reader will then soon discover that Cortázar has designed the novel into *two* books. The author presents the reader with 155 chapters and a table prescribing a suggested order of reading. Like a strategic chess match, it is once again the reader's decision to select one of two ways of reading the novel. In the conventional scheme, reader expectation anticipates that the novel will begin on page one and, at least in the physical sense, progress linearly; chapter one will be followed by chapter two, chapter two by chapter three and so on until the conclusion of the text. This expectation is undermined immediately, however, as Cortázar invites the reader to play a game of hopscotch in the opening *Tablero de dirección*:

> A su manera este libro es muchos libros, pero sobre todo es dos libros. El lector queda invitado *a elegir* una de las dos posibilidades siguientes: El primer libro se deja leer en la forma corriente, y termina en el capítulo 56, al pie del cual hay tres vistosas estrellitas que equivalen a la palabra *Fin.* Por consiguiente, el lector prescindirá sin remordimientos de lo que sigue. El segundo libro se deja leer empezando por el capítulo 73 y siguiendo luego en el orden que se indica al pie de cada capítulo. En caso de confusión u olvido, bastará consultar la lista siguiente. (Cortázar 7)
>
> (In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all. The first can be read in a normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56, at the close of which there are three garish little stars which stand for the words *The End*. Consequently, the reader may ignore what follows with a clean conscience. The second should be read by beginning with Chapter 73 and then following the sequence indicated at the end of each chapter. In case of confusion or forgetfulness, one need only consult the following list.) (Translation by Rabassa)

What follows is a suggested sequence for reading the chapters that appear to have been arranged non-sequentially and, ostensibly, non-discriminatorily (73-1-2-116-3-84-4… etc.). As is typical of various metafictional works, from the outset the reader is "explicitly aware of his or her role as player" (Waugh 42).

Patricia Waugh explores the close tie between art, the novel, and the concept of play, a key part in many post-modernist works (Waugh 41). Her book, *Metafiction,* frames metafictional characteristics such as recontextualization of language, or language used for

aesthetic purposes, as play (Waugh 36). Psychologists of play like Susanna Millar claim that "a certain degree of choice, lack of constraint from conventional ways of handling objects, materials and ideas, is inherent in the concept of play. This is its main connection with art" (qtd. in Waugh 36), and *Rayuela's* structure has been lauded for just such "freeing up the *lector-activo* to take full advantage of his active nature" ("Confused Hermeneutics" 435). This freedom is defined by Waugh as "the moment when the game or the genre is being discarded, but the rules of the new one are not yet defined" (Waugh 42). Sharkey however argues that goals of ellipticality have been securely established in modernist writings when *Rayuela* makes it on the scene in 1963, and so it is the extreme nature of the creative liberties transferred to the reader which makes *Rayuela* an innovative novel ("Confused Hermeneutics" 435-436).

This strategy can be evidenced very early as the novel initially allows the reader to choose an option for reading the novel linearly without the expendable chapters or in a non-linear fashion with the expendable chapters included. The play and interpretive freedom of the novel, however, can be scaled to the relationship between individual chapters. A variety of texts, from Morelli's commentaries and musings to song lyrics and newspaper clippings, are mixed in with Book One's plot, however, it is up to the reader to decipher, categorize, and bridge-build to form meaningful relationships between the juxtaposing chapters. Each reader brings his or her unique experience and history to the novel which produces the multi-faceted array of resulting interpretations.

Chapter 68 is a key example of both the extreme and limited ability to play with language as the chapter is written in La Maga's made-up language of 'glíglico' as seen in the following excerpt:

> Apenas él le amalaba el noema, a ella se le agolpaba el clémiso y caían en hidromurias, en salvajes ambonios, en sustalos exasperantes. Cada vez que él procuraba relamar las incopelusas, se enredaba en un grimado quejumbroso y tenía que envulsionarse de cara al nóvalo, sintiendo cómo poco a poco las arnillas se espejunaban, se iban apeltronando, reduplimiendo, hasta quedar tendido como el trimalciato de ergomanina al que se la han dejado caer unas fílulas de cariaconcia. (Cortázar 488)
>
> (As soon as he began to amalate the noeme, the clemise began to smother her and they fell into hydromuries, into savage ambonies, into exasperating sustales. Each time that he tried to relamate the hairincops, he became entangled in a whining grimate and had to face up to envulsioning the novalisk, feeling how little by little the arnees would spejune, were becoming peltronated, redoblated, until they were stretched out like the ergomanine trimalciate which drops a few filures of cariaconce.) (Rabassa 373)

This brief chapter is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," which Horacio references earlier in the novel, because of a similar phenomenon that takes place (Cortázar 107). As in Carroll's poem, the conglomeration of words appears to be a series of nonsense verses, however, on the linguistic level something extraordinary happens. Likely having never seen these made up words, the reader will very likely understand the scene of love-making between Horacio and La Maga, especially if the reader makes associations of proximity from surrounding chapters. While using recognized words and phrases to initially ground the reader, the reader can use parts

of speech patterns to easily discern nonsense verbs from nouns, adjectives from adverbs and allow the imagination to fill in the general meaning.

The author's play intimates the fluidity of language, but Horacio becomes tired of glíglico complaining to La Maga "decís las mismas cosas. La gunfia, va ya novedad." La Maga responds to Horacio, "vos soltás cualquier cosa y te lucís, pero no es el verdadero glíglico" (Cortázar 122). ("You come out with anything you want and sound like a million dollars, but that's not real Gliglish") (Rabassa 85). Despite the incredible fluidity of language, La Maga acknowledges the system of tacit rules that permit potential "meaning-making" which constricts even the author who is traditionally associated with unconstrained creative power.

As one can see, certain foundational thresholds are in place for meaning-making before such attempts become aleatory art. However, even in the most basic sign stages of language formation (i.e. letter arrangement, and, as evidenced with 'gliglish,' sign arrangement does not have to exist as a word but might merely follow grammatical patterns), language has unfathomable fluidity and the potential for practically exhaustless play (related to positioning but not to be confused with raw creativity which will be addressed later in the essay). We can see both the author's and the reader's potential to almost endless creative abilities with Waugh noting that, "The actual relationship of the signs within the phrase will remain the same, but because of their relationship to signs outside themselves has shifted, the meaning of the phrase will also shift. Thus the language of fiction may appear to imitate the languages of the everyday world, but its 'meaning' will necessarily be different" (Waugh 36).

The manipulation of Chapter 34, then, is another microscopic view of such unconventional entanglement. As with the conspicuous *tablero*, the reader becomes acutely aware of the reading process as two narratives intertwine line by line into a single chapter:

> En setiembre del 80, pocos meses después del falleci—
> Y las cosas que lee, una novela, mal escrita, para colmo una
> miento de mi padre, resolví apartarme de los negocios,
> edicíon infecta, uno se pregunta cómo puede intersarle […].
> (Cortázar 261).
>
> (In September of 1880, a few months after the demise of my
> And the things she reads, a clumsy novel, in a cheap edition
> father, I decided to give up my business activities,
> besides, but you wonder how she can get interested […].)
> (Rabassa 191)

Attempts at a linear reading will work only if applied to every other line. The reader might choose to read alternating lines of the chapter (line 1, line 3, line 5, etc) and then return to the beginning of the chapter to read the second thread of the chapter (line 2, line 4, line 6, etc.). The first narrative strand is an excerpt from La Maga's abandoned novel, *Lo prohibido,* by Spanish, realist author Galdós, while the second strand represents Horacio's hyper self-conscious criticism as it is directed towards the type of readership La Maga represents ("Confused Hermeneutics" 423-424).

This chapter, which has been described as a "clever typographical gimmick" ("Confused Hermeneutics" 424), is a conflated example of both passive and active reading yet is not placed with the expendable chapters. Because of its position in Book One, every reader, regardless of which path they have selected, must choose either to exert the necessary effort to contend with the chapter or, the alternative, skip the chapter entirely. While omission typically implies a

stigma of ultimate passivity, I would argue that omission, too, is a conscious silencing and suppression of material that equates non-action with willful action. As mentioned before, Cortázar has been lauded on basis omissions or "gaps" which increase the reader share (Percival 245), but authorial omissions received in a positive light highlights a conventional preference for authorial control that the structure of the novel works against.

By breaking the novel into two possible readings, Cortázar attempts to claim that there are essentially two types of readers: *"lector-hembra"* and *"lector active."* E. Joseph Sharkey describes the roles of these readers as Cortázar has coined them where "the *lector-hembra* reads a book passively, a mere witness to the creative production of the author; the *lector activo*, by contrast, consciously participates in the creation of the novel he reads" ("Confused Hermeneutics" 424). Horacio's scorn in Chapter 34 and throughout the novel furthers the theory that Cortázar intended the novel to posit two distinct types of readership:

> […] me imagino que después de tragarse cinco o seis páginas uno acaba por engranar y ya no puede dejar de leer, un poco como no se puede dejar de dormir o de mear, servidumbre o látigos o babas. (Cortázar 261).
>
> (I can see how after you swallow four or five pages you get in the groove and can't stop reading, a little like the way you can't help sleeping or pissing, slavery or whipping or drooling.)(Rabassa 191)

Horacio frames La Maga's reading process as a completely absorbing experience—so absorbing, in fact, that it becomes an extension of bodily functions, an involuntary compulsion with base connotations like those of sleeping, pissing, or drooling. It seems that Horacio and

Cortázar both hold passivity in contempt, but Sharkey makes a claim that the narrative plane and metafictional plane yield opposing results:

> La Maga's "passivity" is revealed as the condition of her strength: her self-forgetfulness, even self-effacement, is inseparable from her receptivity to the world. Horacio's hyperactive intellectuality is revealed as the condition of his weakness: his perpetual self-consciousness and desperate self-assertion make him unreceptive to the world. A quirk of the novel is that while on the narrative plane Cortázar respects the value of passivity, on the metafictional plane he disdains it. ("Confused Hermeneutics" 425).

Sharkey's "Confused Hermeneutics" argues that La Maga's passive mode of interaction is not only accurate, but a positive trait that reflects passivity as a necessary factor in the reading and writing process ("Confused Hermeneutics" 425-426). While linguistic and author-constructed structures do work together to form a series of "regulations" in this form of play, the intersection of unique sets of historical and experiential schema create an almost limitless well of creativity from which to draw from. Examining the reading process we can see how a similar pattern of web-like associations based on a larger individual framework affects the creation process as it directly relates to the novel, and while critics generally agree that Cortázar's intention is to associate the "aggressive *lectores-activos* like Horacio" to the second book (Sharkey 424), the metafictional frame of the novel reveals the active participation of every reader and the impossibility of a passive reader.

The concept of two fixed, distinct readers does not appear to fit within the novel's metafictional structure which insinuates the artificial construction of realities and absolutes. As Étienne says, "es el divorcio diabólico de las formas y los contenidos" (Cortázar 91). ("[It] is

the diabolical separation of form and content") (Rabassa 63). I argue that there are no passive readers and no two like-readers with identical reading experiences which are supported not only by the open structure of the novel but by the novel's very nature as a refractory device. Then it is also the novel, traditionally thought of as "finished" or a closed model once published, that becomes a dynamic entity that exists in as many different realities as it has readers. Waugh impresses that the "function of language [is] constructing and maintaining our sense of everyday 'reality.' The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable" (Waugh 3).

Robert L. Turner III's approach to the novel as a reader driven text is helpful in understanding what this semi-open structure allows the reader to do. He notes that Cortázar's novel of hopscotching chapters are arranged in such a way as to provoke a different behavior from the reader of a conventional text: "The text is no longer linear, but begins to form a web of association, and since the reader is obliged to form his/her own associations, the text becomes multi-dimensional" (Turner 499). The deliberate lack of authorial guidance forces the reader to connect the "expendable chapters" to Book One, and if there is meaning to be derived, then Cortázar leaves this, too, in the reader's hands (Sharkey 499). Turner describes the novel as a "deliberately non-finished text" claiming our participation is imperative to reading the book while proposing we think of these two types of readerships as levels of engagement (Turner 500) rather than essentially different. Just as Horacio searches for freedom from traditional modes of thought and action associated with Western Civilization, the structure of the novel suggests that the reader can be freed from traditional roles of receiving the novel. As the author subsides, the reader's role emerges more prominently and the idea of a convergent canvas becomes more evident.

If the reader progresses through the book in hopscotch-fashion, then the chapter prior to Chapter 34, Chapter 142, a discussion between Ronald and Étienne, also sustains evidence of the integral contact between creator and spectator despite La Maga's "tontería [como] el precio de ser tan vegetal, tan caracol, tan pegada a las cosas más misteriosas" (Cortázar 697). ("Silliness [as] the price she paid for being so vegetative, so much of a snail, so stuck onto the most mysterious of things") (Rabassa 536). In this short chapter, Ronald reveals the impracticality of Horacio's hyper-conscious attempts to destroy structures at large and "ponerse de espaldas a todo el occidente, a las Escuelas. Es malo para vivir en una ciudad, para tener que ganarse la vida" (Cortázar 697), ("It's like turning your back on the whole Western world, all the Schools. It's no good for living in a city, having to earn your keep") (Rabassa 536), which ironically is Horacio's constant endeavor and ultimate deterioration. Sharkey characterizes Horacio's sufferings as the "perpetual clash between his paranoiac distrust of human historicity and his fatalistic disbelief that historicity can be escaped" ("Gadamerian" 311). Meanwhile, Étienne affirms La Maga, who is criticized by the Club and Horacio for her lack of understanding, in her emotional superiority noting she is "capaz de felicidades infinitas" (Cortázar 698) of which at least Étinnne admits to be envious of.

Cortázar dilutes his gendered concept of feminine and masculine reader archetypes, for which he would later submit a formal apology, in what Sharkey describes as an allowing of La Maga and "the stereotypical female's mode of understanding," of intuition, to supersede that of Horacio's hyper-intellectuality ("Confused Hermeneutics" 425). I fault this strategy for the use of one stereotype, females as markedly more emotional than males, to soften the stereotypes of inferior passivity, but as a fictional character in a novelistic world we might instead comment on

La Maga as an example of *emotional* activity that the spectator can bring to the work. The chapter goes on to describe La Maga in front of Étienne's newly-finished painting:

> 4.— […] Lloraba como lloraba ella, con toda la cara, horrible y maravillosa. Miraba mi cuadro y lloraba. No fui bastante hombre para decirle que por la mañana yo también había llorado. Pensar que eso le hubiera dado tanta tranquilidad, vos sabés cuánto dudaba, cómo se sentía poca cosa rodeada de nuestras brillantes astucias.
>
> 5.—Se llora por muchas razones—dijo Ronald—Eso no prueba nada.
>
> 6.—Por lo menos prueba un contacto […] Ves, había que llegar a un nivel donde fuera posible reunir las dos cosas. (Cortázar 698)
>
> (4. "[…] She was crying the way she used to cry, with her whole face, horrible and marvelous. She was looking at my painting and crying. I wasn't enough of a man to tell her I had cried that morning too. To think that it could have given her so much tranquillity [sic], you know how much she doubted, how small she felt, surrounded by our clever brilliance."
>
> 5. "One cries for many reasons," Ronald said. "That doesn't prove anything […] You see, you had to reach a level where it would be possible to join both things together."
>
> 6. "At least it proves a contact.") (Rabassa 537)

In this scene there is a desire for contact between the artist and the spectator at the site of the work. Ronald discounts the emotional reaction, but Étienne sustains that La Maga's similar experience of the painting has in some way situated herself in the artist's role as creator. Her

emotional experience is equivalent with intellectual experience; the projection and interaction of such experiences (and all the associations they entail) are far from passive as they meet to create the work for La Maga. Conversely, Étienne steps out of his role as artist and into the role of spectator describing his mental progression as a series of associations in regards to Italian artists as well as the critics of Italian art:

> Al principio era de los que miraban a Rafael pensando en Perugino, saltando como una langosta sobre Leo Battista Alberti, conectando, soldando, Pico por aquí, Lorenzo Valla por allá, pero fíjate, Burckhardt dice, Berenson niega, Argan cree, esos azules son sieneses , eso paños vienen de Masaccio. No me acuerdo cuándo, fue en Roma, en la galería Baberini, estaba analizando un Andrea del Sarto, lo que se dice nada. Lo vi (y todo el cuadro, apenas un detalle del fondo, una figurita en un camino). Se me saltaron las lágrimas, es todo lo que te puedo decir. (Cortázar 698-699).
>
> (At first I was someone who would look at Raphael and think about Perugino, pounce like a lobster on Leo Battista Alberti, connect, link, Pico here, Lorenzo Valla there, but look, Burckhardt says, Berenson denies, Argan thinks, those blues are Sienese, those blurs are from Masaccio. I don't remember when, it was in Rome in the Barberini gallery, I was analyzing an Andrea del Sarto, what they call analyzing, and all of a sudden I saw. Don't ask me to explain anything. I saw it (and not the whole painting, just a detail in the background, a small figure on a road). Tears came to my eyes, I mean it.) (Rabassa 537).

Not only do we see a cut-away of Étienne's very active mental paths as a spectator, this conglomeration of artists and critics at the site of the painting may also reflect similar anxieties Horacio's wrestles with. The spectator not only builds connective associations, but there is also an inability to separate the painting from its historical predecessors. It begs the reader to consider how much of the creation-process is raw creation, and if Horacio's view is considered seriously, then the answer is relatively little. While there is the appearance of exhaustive creativity, it actually becomes a game of repositioning.

While I have noted the relative openness of the novel's structure, it is impossible to ignore evidence of more deliberate structuring occurring in the work else we might read the chapters in any order. If we break this down further to think about reading the novel's sentences or words in an arbitrary fashion, then it becomes quite clear that the reader does not wield complete creative power. While Cortázar has created a work that draws attention to the reader's part in its creation, we must also credit the author and artist with his craft: the ability to construct concrete associations between abstract concepts in unique and innovative ways.

As noted in the 'gliglish' chapter, deliberate proximity to chapters about love and La Maga and Horacio's relationship, suggests paths of association to the reader, as do other commonly cited chapter-chains featuring torture, human cruelty and capital punishment to Rocamadour's death displaced by an article on careless supervision of boy's zippers. The author can work as a guide, but this novel does not overly presuppose the reader, and this tension allows for the most creative satisfaction for both parties; the creator co-creates creators from his creation—a creative reach to the umpteenth power. In one of Morelli's notes he wonders if he will ever succeed "hacer sentir que el verdadero y único personaje que me interesa es el lector, en la medida en que algo de lo que escribo debería contribuir a mutarlo, desplazarlo, a

extrañarlo, a enajenarlo" (Cortázar 568). ("For my part, I wonder whether someday I will ever succeed in making it felt that the true character and the only one that interests me is the reader, to the degree in which something of what I write ought to contribute to his mutation, displacement, alienation, transportation") (Rabassa 437). While an author can create a novel in the physical and simultaneously static sense, to become co-creator with the reader, to create, mutate, displace, alienate and transport *within* the reader, is a metaphysical feat which allows the novel to live outside of itself.

Anthony Percival claims that any meaning derived from a text is a linguistic process that moves and reacts with our personal experiences:

> Words on a page act as signals which are de-coded in order to generate a process of meaning. This is an intricate operation involving the interplay of faculties like perception, imagination and memory. The reader is engaged in a re-creative task that lasts an indeterminate length of time. Belonging to a particular time and place, the reader brings to his activity certain cultural attitudes and assumptions. He responds to language as a social being who shares with other members of his society an understanding of a range of words in common usage, and also as an individual whose senses of words is coloured by his experience in living and in using language […] The reader uses his imagination to forge the links, thus causing the novel to unfold in a dynamic way. (240-241)

Étienne's extensive catalogue of cultural icons and references in Chapter 34 is one example of many in the novel. Cortázar incorporates a plethora of references, and like dammed action potential, the reader can follow these breadcrumbs of associations in multiple, simultaneous directions, but relative ambiguity of such relationships forms the cornerstone of the novel's

ability to share the creation process with the reader. Percival insists that successful novels are never completed to the point of exclusion on the reader's behalf, that "the reader has his own personal contribution to make towards the bringing to life of the fictional world" (241), but Cortázar has taken this concept to the extreme, and Sharkey uses the term "autor-espectador" to describe Cortázar's attempt to control but not participate his novel ("A Gadamerian Interpretation" 317). The author appears to remove himself by handing over a greater portion of interpretation and creation to the reader through the very deliberate structuring of the novel.

Percival characterizes the gap, or the break in reading, created by a back and forth experience of reader anticipation and retrospection as an essential characteristic of the experimental novel (Percival 241), and Chapter 62 magnifies a microscopic view of the complex neuron paths sequentially stimulated in order to evoke such "basic" mental processes like thought and memory—the building blocks language consumption. This phenomenon is exposed and accentuated in *Rayuela* by the physical structure of the chapters. As the reader searches for the next chapter in the suggested sequence, the reader is drawn out of the reading process to be made *aware* of the reading process. The physical turning of the pages affords the reader an extra moment to reflect over the events that have just transpired (retrospection), the events to come (anticipation) (Percival 245) and forces the reader to become physically aware of their kinesthetic consumption of the text as even the tactile experience of reading has been altered. The reader's awareness of physical progression through the novel is also suspended. In the hopscotch method, when the reader reads chapters from Book One, which progress in numerical order though interspersed with expendable chapters, there is some sense of working towards a final goal; this, however, is confused by chapter-skipping between Book One and Book Two so that at any point in the novel, the reader is unable to viscerally ascertain his or her position in

what might be conventionally labeled the beginning, the middle, or the end of the novel. The reader must compensate for this dislocation and disorientation as the reader moves from both ends of the novel to the center, perhaps a reflection of Horacio's search for the center:

> 'Ese centro que no sé lo que es, ¿no vale como como expresión topográfica de una unidad? Ando por una enorme pieza con piso de baldosas y una de esas baldosas es el punto exacto en el que debería pararme para que todo se ordenara en su justa perspectiva. El punto exacto,' enfatizó Oliveria, ya medio tomándose el pelo para estar más seguro de que no se iba en puras palabras. 'Un cuadro anamórfico en el que hay que buscar el ángulo justo (y lo importante de este hejemplo es que el hángulo es terriblemente hagudo, hay que tener nariz casi hadosada a la tela para que de golpe el montón de rayas sin sentido se convierta en el retrato de Francisco I o en la batalla de Sinigaglia, algo hincalificablemente hasombroso).' (Cortázar 113-114)
>
> ('And just what is this center that I don't know what it really is; can it be the coordinates of some unity? I'm walking back and forth in the apartment whose floor is tiled with flat stones and of these stones is the exact spot where I ought to stop so that everything would come into its proper focus. The exact spot,' Oliveria said emphatically, kidding himself a little so as to know that he was not just playing with words. 'A shapeless quadrilateral in which we must look for the precise angle (and the importance of this example is that the angel is horribly a cute and won must have his knows right up to the canvas so that suddenly all the

> senseless lines will come together to form a portrait of Francis I or the Battle of Sinigaglia, something that deflies descrumption).') (Rabassa 78-79)

The reader mirrors Horacio's internal pacing with external page flipping, searching for "exact spots" to anchor angles of perspective upon which to build meaning and make sense of the novel. Once again, we see the metaphor of a painting and how the spectator's perspective (which may be kinesthetic or metaphysical) changes the work. Even in an existentialist novel like *Rayuela*, there is an anxiety about the need to arrange and make meaning of the language as shown by Horacio's need to convince himself that everything is not one big game with language. This fear may spark legitimate doubts in the reader that perhaps the novel is little more than a game with words. If language is the constraint of our reality, then the novel suggest that our relative realities are games with words as well.

Chapter 28 speaks directly to the phenomenon of the convergent canvas generating divergent realities when the Ronald and Horacio discuss the perception of reality and language's contribution to it:

> --De acuerdo en que no hay que fiarse de las palabras, pero en realidad las palabras vienen después de esto otro, de que unos cuantos estemos aquí esta noche, sentados alrededor de una lamparita—. […] –Sin palabra alguna yo siento, yo sé que estoy aquí—insistió Ronald--. A eso le llamo la realidad. Aunque no sea más que eso.
>
> --Perfecto—dijo Oliveira--. Sólo que esta realidad es ninguna garantía para vos o para nadie, salvo que la transformés en concepto, y de ahí en conencion, en esquema útil. El solo hech de que vos estés a mi izquierda y yo a tu derecha hace de la realidad por lo menos dos realidades, y conste que no quiero ir a lo profundo

y senalarete que vos y yo somos dos entes absolutamente incomunicados entre sí salvo por medio de los sentidos y la palabra, cosas de las que hay que desconfiar si uno es serio--.

--Los dos estamos aquí—insistió Ronald—A la derecha o a la izquierda, poco importa. Los dos estamos viendo a Babs, todos oyen lo que estoy diciendo. […]

--Lo único que cuenta es eso de entenderla a nuestra manera—dijo Oliveira--. Vos creés que hay una realidad postulable porque vos y yo estamos hablando en esta cuarto y en esta noche […] Pero si al mismo tiempo pudieras asistir a esa realidad desde mí, o desde Babs, si te fuera dada una ubicuidad, entendés, y pudieras estar ahora mismo en esta misma pieza desde donde estoy yo y con todo lo que soy y lo que he sido yo, y con todo lo que es y lo que ha sido Babs, comprenderías tal vez que tu egocentrismo barato no te da ninguna realidad válida. (Cortázar 221-222).

("Agreed, that we can't trust words, but actually words come after this other thing, the fact that a bunch of us is here tonight seated around a lamp." […]

"Without any words I feel, I know, that I am here," Ronald insisted. "That's what I call reality. Even if that's all it is."

"Perfect," said Oliveira. "Except that this reality is no guarantee for you or for anybody else unless you transform it into a concept, and then into a a convention, a useful scheme. The simple fact that you are on my left and I am on your right makes at least two realities out of this one reality, and realize that I don't want to get abstruse and point out that you and I are two entities that are absolutely out of

> touch with one another except by means of feelings and words, things that one must mistrust if he is to be serious about it all."
>
> "Reality is there and we're inside of it, understanding it each in his own way."
>
> "The only thing that matters is the business of each understanding it in his own way," Oliveira said. "You think that there is a definable reality because you and I are talking in this room and at this time […] But if at the same time you could be present in this reality from my position, or from Babs's, if you could be placed, you see, and right now could be in this same room, but from where I am with everything I am and have been, and with everything that Babs is and has been, you would understand that your cheap egocentrism would not afford you any valid reality.") (Rabassa 160-161)

Like Horacio's Janus, the very perspective of conflicting views support the idea of simultaneously divergent realities, but, as can be applied to the reader, Horacio first separates these realities based on the *cogito's* unique experience (the reader's experience; what he or she brings to the work), but more importantly on how reality and the *cogito* are fashioned by language (how the reader's experience of the novel is manipulated by language). Misunderstanding derived from language's detachability, generates at least two distinct realities, yet, in support of Horacio's claim that defining is as important to *being* as it is divisive, Gregorovius purports, "Without speech there's no such thing as man. Without history man doesn't exist" (Rabassa 162), and Waugh also acknowledges how "an existing object is made knowable only through a symbol—by being translated into something it is not" (Waugh 57-58). This then is one of the most troubling problems; language is the vehicle implemented to restore the very division it fosters. It is like "el alacrán clavándose el aguijón, harto de ser un alacrán

pero necesitado de alacranidad para acabar con el alacrán" (Cortázar 28). ("the scorpion stabbing itself in the neck, tired of being a scorpion but having to have recourse to its own scorpioness in order to do away with itself as a scorpion") (Rabassa 158).

An excerpt from Jacques Vaché's letter to André Breton, "Rien ne vous tue un homme comme d'être oblige de représenter un pays" (qtd. in Cortázar 13), (Nothing kills a man like being forced to represent a country.) located in the opening pages of the novel, suggests the rifts and divisions expressed throughout. Representation is Vaché's dilemma as much as it is the core of various anxieties in the novel. Representation defined as, "the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature" ("Representation" def. 2) is inextricable from the idea of division as representation separates entity from essence. A description, a portrayal, a representation can never *be* as it essentially *is*, yet the very idea of division derived from various possibilities of representation and perception undermine the concept of an absolute reality. This excerpt directly invokes Horacio's identity as divided by a dual sense of place and culture between Paris and Buenos Aires, but also reflects the nature of the novel and language as material manifestations of representative attempts which result in the division of realities. Nevertheless, striving for relative unity, cohesion, and meaning is the backbone of Cortázar's and Morelli's active reader, and this endeavor, as insinuated by Vache's letter become a matter of survival—or at least of mental preservation.

As the reader approaches the "end" of the novel, Horacio's withdrawal into himself correlates positively with his demise however the reader should choose to define it at the end of the novel. It is this withdrawal from greater structures which provide a base necessary for meaning-making and Horacio's setting as the mental hospital which reminds of us the delicate

balance of managing and sorting realities as a part of a meaning-making scheme. In another dialectic affirming the importance of the spectator's contribution to a work, Horacio attempts to define an absolute:

> --Según vos una tela de Mondrian se basta a sí misma. Ergo, necesita de tu inocencia más que de tu experiencia. Hablo de inocencia edénica, no de estupidez […] Paradójicamente Klee es mucho más modesto porque exige la múltiple complicidad del espectador, no se basta a sí mismo. En el fondo Klee es historia y Mondrian atemporalidad. Y vos te morís por lo absoluto. ¿Te explico? […]
> --¿Qué es un absoluto, Horacio?
> --Mirá—dijo Oliveira--, viene a ser ese momento en que algo logra su máxima profundidad, su máximo alcance, su máximo sentido, y deja por completo de ser interesante. (Cortázar 60-61)
>
> ("According to you a Mondrian canvas is sufficient unto itself. Therefore it calls upon your innocence more than on your experience. I mean Edenic innocence, not stupidity […] Paradoxically, Klee is much more modest since he ask for the co-operation of the viewer and is not sufficient unto himself. The fact of the matter is that Klee is history while Modrian is atemporality. And you're dying to find the absolute. Do I make myself clear? […]
> "What is an absolute, Horacio?"

> "Look," Oliveira said, "it's just that moment in which something attains its maximum depth, its maximum reach, its maximum sense, and becomes completely uninteresting.") (Rabassa 38)

Once again the image of the canvas becomes the site for managing the two-way creation process, but Horacio's definition of an absolute is vague at best, thanks to language's limitations, because an absolute, like the passive reader, is unattainable in these realities we create and distort through imperfect language. Non-absolutes do not work together to create absolutes, and, therefore, maximum depth, reach, and sense actually equally non-*being*.

While there is an inability to reach the absolute, that does not prevent one from contending with and struggling towards this ideal. In fact, numerous times in the novel the author insinuates that our lives and realities function much in the same way as the novel. Horacio uses the imagery of La Maga's necklace to join their altering perceptions: "Pero vos a tu vez pasabas por esas cosas como el hielo por esas piedras verdes (Cortázar 111), ("But you in turn went through those things like the string went through those green stones") (Rabassa 77). Morelli offers his own visual representation, which might be a familiar metaphor for readers of Cortázar:

> En alguna parte Morelli procuraba justificar sus incoherencias narrativas, sosteniendo que la vida de los otros, tal como nos llega en la llamada realidad, no es cine sino fotografía, es decir que no podemos aprehender la acción sino tan sólo sus fragmentos eleáticamente recortados […] dar coherencia a la serie de fotos para que pasaran a ser cine (como le hubiera gustado tan enormemente al lector que él llamaba el lector-hembra) significaba rellenar con literatura, presunciones, hipótesis e invenciones los hiatos entre una y otra foto […] El libro

> debía ser como esos dibujos que proponen los psicólogos de Gestalt, y así ciertas líneas inducirían al observador a trazar imaginativamente las que cerraban la figura. Pero a veces las líneas ausentes eran las más importantes, las únicas que realmente contaban. (Rabassa 611-612)

> (In some place Morelli tried to justify his narrative incoherencies, maintaining that the life of others, such as it comes to us in so-called reality, is not a movie but still photography that is to say, that we cannot grasp the action, only a few of its eleatically recorded fragments […] giving coherence to the series of pictures so they could become a movie (which would have been so very pleasing to the reader he called the female-reader) meant filling in with literature, presumptions, hypotheses, and inventions the gaps between one and another photograph […] The book would have to be something like those sketches proposed by Gestalt psychologists, and therefore certain lines would induce the observer to trace imaginatively the ones that would complete the figure. But sometimes the missing lines were the most important ones, the only ones that really counted. (Rabassa 468-469)

Reading the novel becomes the ultimate spectating, but it is also far from passive. It becomes the reader's job, not the artist's, to make sense of and gap-bridge series of "snapshots" into a cohesive unity. However, author who fears the *lector-hembra* does so pointlessly as the reader will always work *imperfectly* towards or against the artist's conception of the work. The interlocking narratives of Chapter 34 discussed previously create an experiential representation of this theme of multiple, partially intersecting realities that coexist but cannot be consumed

simultaneously, visually resembling Horacio's trees where there are "contactos de ramas y hojas que se entrecruzan y acarician de árbol, mientras los troncos alzan desdeños sus paralelas inconciliables" (Cortázar 139) ("contacts between branches and leaves which reached out and caressed each other from tree to tree while the trunks stood there disdainfully and irreconcilably parallel") (Rabassa 99).

Horacio is tormented by the inescapability of inherited systems that threaten the agency of his own mental processes even while his obsessive search for rationality threatens to collapse on its own argument. He searches for "realidad sin interposición de mitos, religiones, sistemas y reticulados (Cortázar 639). ("reality without the interposition of myths, religions, systems, and reticula") (Rabassa 493) while contradictorily admitting "para definir y entender habría que estar fuera de lo definido y lo entendible" (Cortázar 219). ("in order to define and understand something one would have to be outside of what is being defined and understood") (Rabassa 159). But the novel itself inevitably exemplifies historical meaning-stacking despite its strain against ineludible convention. As Horacio puts it, "Se tiene la impresión […] de estar caminando sobre viejas huellas" (Cortázar 223). ("One has the impression […] that he's following old footprints") (Rabassa 161).

In Chapter 60 Morelli, as he often does, draws attention to the construct of the novel with explicit commentary typical of metaficiton. Despite the novel's incredible fluidity, there are concerns about how is actually created and how far the work is able to escape 'old footprints':

> Morelli había pensado una lista de acknowledgements que nunca llegó a incorporar a su obra publicada. Dejó varios nombres: : Jelly Roll Morton, Robert Musil, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Raymond Roussel, Kurt Schwitters, Viera da Silva, Akutagawa, Anton Webern, Greta Garbo, José Lezama Lima, Buñel, Louis

> Armstrong, Borges, Michaux, Dino Buzzati, Max Ernst, Pevsner, Gilgamesh (?), Garcilaso, Arcimboldo, René Clair, Piero di Cosimo, Wallace Stevens, Izak Dinesen. Los nombres de Rimbaud, Picasso, Chaplin, Alban Berg y otros habían sido tachados con un trazo muy fino, como si fueran demasiado obvios para citarlos. Pero todos debían serlo al fin y al cabo, porque Morelli no se decidió a incluir la lista en ninguno de los volúmenes. (Cortázar 471)
>
> (Morelli had been thinking about a list of acknowledgements which he never got around to including in his published works. It had several names: Jelly Roll Morton, Robert Musil, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Raymond Roussel, Kurt Schwitters, Viera da Silva, Akutagawa, Anton Webern, Greta Garbo, José Lezama Lima, Buñel, Louis Armstrong, Borges, Michaux, Dino Buzzati, Max Ernst, Pevsner, Gilgamesh (?), Garcilaso, Arcimboldo, René Clair, Piero di Cosimo, Wallace Stevens, Isak Dinesen. The names of Rimbaud, Picasso, Chaplin, Alban Berg, and others had a very fine line drawn through them, as though they were too obvious to be mentioned. But in the end he should have done the same to all of them, because Morelli had decided not to include the list in any of his volumes.)
>
> (Rabassa 358)

Morelli highlights how extratextual influence shapes the work whether consciously or unconsciously, acknowledged or not. In Morelli's list, influence is not limited to writing, though a great deal of the list consists of authors and poets, but include examples from various ends of the cultural spectrum from musicians and actors to scholars. Creation becomes a game of

strategic positioning and repositioning, and each work becomes a reflecting point in multiple directions, reflecting prior artists, works, movements, and systems, before it, too, is assimilated into this "cannon" which anachronistically reflects future works. This model is especially apparent in *Rayuela* in that every chapter works in a similar fashion reflecting backwards, forwards, and in multiple simultaneous directions. As discussed earlier, these reflections and contact points shift and change depending on the author, the reader and kinesthetic (including temporal) distance. Complication of the traditional unilateral reflection becomes a kaleidoscopic effect consisting of semi-predictable associations, reflections and mutations.

Talita and La Maga, Traveler and Horacio, La Maga and the Club, Horacio and the patients, Paris and Buenos Aires are reflecting pairs that resonate with doppelganger imagery, but what is most interesting, however, is how the novel (or any work) acts as a double between intratextual and extratextual realities while also becoming a hinge on which images of past and future are reflected and create a chain of refracting associations that allow for meaning-making, even while language is its unpredictable vehicle:

> [T]enían el pavor de estarse equivocando, de ser un par de perfectos cretinos empecinados en creer que no se puede levantar la torre de Babel para que al final no sirva de nada. La moral de occidente se les aparecía a esa hora como una proxeneta, insinuándoles una a una todas las ilusiones de treinta siglos inevitablemente heredados, asimilados y masticados. Era duro renunciar a creer que una flor puede ser hermosa para la nada; era amargo aceptar que se puede bailar en la oscuridad. (Cortázar 696)

> [T]hey feared they were making mistakes, that they were a pair of perfect cretins insisting on the belief that the Tower of Babel could not be built if in the end it was meaningless. Occidental morality at this point seemed like a pimp to them, as one by one it insinuated all the illusions of thirty centuries that had been inevitably inherited, assimilated and digested. It was hard to deny belief in the fact that a flower could be beautiful to no end; it was bitter to accept the fact that one could dance in darkness. (Rabassa 535).

Here the novel cultivates the tension between the desire to make meaning at all costs and the concept of art for art's sake. In this passage, Cortázar invokes the image of the Tower of Babel to construct this dichotomy of language as a self-destructive method to understanding. Man literally tries to position himself closer and closer to perfect understanding (represented by heaven in the account of Babylon and 'el cielo' in the game of hopscotch) only to have the form of construction frustrate man's goal of uniting the thing with its representation just as God traditionally frustrates man's language. In this case, the more precisely one tries to harness language, the more one uncovers the inadequacies of language and the futility of perfect understanding and representation. "They" fear being left in metaphorical pile of rubble of nonsense babbling, and it is clear that whether such a thing as art for its own sake (the flower and the unseen dance) exists, there is always an underlying drive to project meaning on to it or to bitterly resist to unknown consequences.

This alinear path progression, represented internally and externally in the novel, fits appropriately into the scheme of the hopscotch. Ursula K. Heise notes how the image of a hopscotch game becomes a spatially closed, symbolic image for the structure of the universe "predicating a unidirectional and teleological movement from one end of the diagram to the other

which might variously be understood to refer to progress through life toward fulfillment, the transition from earthly labor to heavenly reward, from mortality to eternity, or, less metaphysically, from life to death" (105), the pebble representing the constantly moving moment of the present. However, the players must return to Earth by the same method of hopping and pebble-pushing as they reached heaven:

> […] the journey starts over again toward Heaven, this time starting from square 2, in the next cycle from square 3, and so forth. Once an entire round has been completed without error, additional complications can be introduced: hopping on the other foot, backwards, skipping a square, or other variations. As a consequence, the game has no fixed endpoint and no clearly defined objective: it is potentially infinite. (Heise 106)

This is demonstrated physically in the novel as the reader flips back and forth, towards an end goal signified by the end of the novel. The *lector-activo,* however, finds his or herself in an infinite loop between chapter 131 and 58, and even the traditional *physical* means of closing the book is undermined. Instead it further reveals the "dualism between the closed, unidirectional temporal structure suggested by its spatial configuration, and the reversible time that emerges through the way in which [hopscotch] is played" (Heise 107). And in a final twist, whether the reader believes Horacio commits suicide, is institutionalized, or subscribes to Sharkey's intriguing argument that Horacio's cogito collapses in on itself like a black hole ("Gadamerian" 316), the author, like *rayuela*, brings the shared experience of the novel full circle by transferring the last responsibility to end the novel as well as Horacio's fate and the decision as to when the novel ends to the reader because as long as the reader continues, Horacio and the novels continues to exist.

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