Afterword

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“Make it so.” Captain Jean-Luc Picard

Star Trek: The Next Generation

Akin to Baltasar Gracián’s baroque definition of “conceit,” the terms *poiesis* and *modernity* compel the reader to consider difficult and surprising relationships between ideas and intellectual practices not immediately collapsible into a single meaning.[1] If the notion of *poiesis* directs the inquiring gaze toward an idealized and intimate space, where the poetic subject exerts mythical or even magical powers over his reality through song, rhythm, and rhyme, *modernity* evokes multiple and problematic landscapes that have been largely evacuated of presence-based experiences altogether, and mark a more self-referential terrain, where subjects test new technologies in their quest to recover what is perceived to be a loss of creative power (Battistini; Castillo, *Baroque Horrors*; Nelson, *The Persistence of Presence*). When the *word* loses its status as the material and univocal expression of God’s, or the gods’, divine will, at the onset of modernity, new linguistic materialities are forged and tested in repeated and often violent attempts to invent and take control over a world that has become, suddenly, foreign and difficult to shape.

Major strategies (see Egginton’s essay in this volume) for resuscitating univocal meaning and institutional control over the activity of linguistic world-making include the invention and legitimization of explicatory and historicizing practices recognizable as precursors of modern Philology. The early modern emblem is a case in point. When biblical exegesis collapses due to improvements in the linguistic education of exegetes, as well as the internal contradictions of its four-fold system for drawing allegorical equivalences, ideogrammatic "languages" are made to anchor allegorically informed reading practices, thus introducing a powerful tool for linguistic and cultural reterritorialization, (Russell; Nelson "Philology"). According to this paradigm, the meaning of signs is transferred from the signs themselves to learned commentaries, which are, in turn, anchored in what Francisco Sánchez has called an emergent "literary republic" in his *An Early Bourgeois Literature in Golden Age Spain*. The subjects who contribute to the construction, legitimization, and expansion of this symbolic order strive to make literary creation a socially relevant practice by linking aesthetics to other emergent "scientific" discourses, thus rationalizing the creative *ingenio* of the artist. In this way, modern literature arises at the same time that material practices for the publication and evaluation of literary works collaborate in making it a recognizable and controllable social activity (Gumbrecht; Rodríguez).

Even more interesting are those *minor strategies* that bring the practice of verbal contradiction and improvisation to heretofore untested limits of sense and nonsense (see Egginton's and Baena's essays in this volume). The dialectical tension between the exploration of uncharted linguistic spaces and repeated attempts to control the reach and influence of artistic creativity reflects analogous institutional antagonisms in science (Nelson, "Signs"), international law (Moisés Castillo), and theology (R. de la Flor). Although all of these discourses will increasingly attempt to tie the notion of poiesis to literary creation (Costa Lima), figures such as Galileo, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Descartes evidence a marked shift in how human creativity is understood and practiced in the modern age. Rather than attempting to fill the ideological vacuum of early modernity in an effort to assert control over the potentially destabilizing irony of self-conscious and even playful uses of poiesis, *minor strategies* for conceiving the relationship between a changing world and increasingly assertive modes of aesthetic and scientific creation return the *major strategies* to a chaotic and violent "plane of immanence" (Deleuze and Guattari).

A curious discovery of the present volume is that the poetic word does not reach its full potential as a creative, world-making force until it loses its status as God's presence-bearing *verbum*, with the fall of the medieval worldview. Cutting against the grain of the widely held perception that a classical concept such as poiesis has little or nothing to do with the epistemological project of modernity, the contributors use the concept as a lever of sorts to lift up and examine contradictory paradigms of being and meaning erected by modern institutions of knowledge and power. Even as Anthony Cascardi and Leah Middlebrook track in their Introduction the apparent reduction of the scope and influence of poiesis to a "specifically *linguistic*" model of creation, their characterization of this loss of poetic power as a "principal structuring *fantasy*" for moderns, as opposed to an unavoidable historical *fact*, signals that our conventional understanding of the place and power of poiesis in modernity is about to be roundly challenged (pp.).

In her essay, Middlebrook analyzes Luis Alfonso de Carvallo's contradictory attempt to rescue the power of the poetic word by framing his rationalization of the formal structure and social utility of verse forms within an epic history of poiesis. Analogous to the way in which early modern emblems domesticate the iconophilic potential of hieroglyphic images, Carvallo's stated goal of restoring poetry to its classical greatness ultimately becomes mired in the selfsame philological practices on which he had hoped to erect his poetic monument. In attempting to rescue poetry from the "disrepute" into which it had fallen—due to its having become a highly politicized tool in the construction of legitimacy by aristocratic players, both recent arrivals and entrenched lineages (see Maravall 70-71)—Carvallo leads literary creation toward the same fate that befalls emblematic images in the hands of the proto-philologist. Scholarly commentaries on a poem's relation to a changing literary canon and a prescriptive set of aesthetic values become the space where literary and cultural legitimacy are now mediated. In the words of Luiz Costa Lima, "The old fear of uncontrollable subjectivity and the constant need to temporize with the power of the church made the Renaissance poetologist in fact the enemy of his own field of endeavor" (25). In this scenario, the *letrado* becomes the early modern incarnation of Orpheus in both the creation of a literary landscape as well as the loss of mystical powers in the overwrought effort to surround the poetic voice with scholarly apparatuses of legitimacy and control.

In his essay in this volume, Cascardi locates the modernity of poiesis in the Orphic myth itself, specifically, in the momentary doubt that Orpheus suffers in the efficacy of his poetic powers, as he glances back toward Hades while fleeing with the object of his desire in his (failing) grasp (pp). His study of poiesis in Cervantes's prose identifies this same Orphic consciousness in the modern author *par excellence*, concluding that creative power and the search for truth in modernity can only exist within the knowledge of language's absolute limitations and inexorably fictional status. By fully accepting the *horror vacui* of modernity, Cervantes finds poetic power in a number of oblique strategies: such as viewing emergent philological structures through the same acerbic irony that pervades his most powerful fictional creations (the prologue to *Don Quijote I*); or by providing the reader with simultaneous and not necessarily mutually exclusive explanations for “miraculous” occurrences in works such as “The Dialogue of the Dogs” and *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, what William Childers has called “the ambivalent marvelous” (55-69). Orphic mythmaking and its attendant rituals are revealed as both an archaic residue and modern desire: a rationalist modernity’s *other*, if you will. Christopher Braider reaches a similar conclusion in his study of the contradictory role of poiesis in “state of nature” stories in early modern philosophy. His analysis of attempts by philosophers such as Descartes and Spinoza to overcome a theological understanding of the physical causes of the universe through an immanentist and, finally, mechanistic understanding of causality leads to an analogous claim: namely, that such knowledge as man may discover on his own terms is both made possible and limited by his finite earthly condition. Similar to philology, any attempt to ground these emergent epistemologies historically leads to the reinvention of the assumed tradition it supposedly uncovers.

Marina S. Brownlee and David R. Castillo delve into early modern encyclopedic miscellanies by Antonio de Torquemada and Pedro Mexía, and find a very different tradition, one that reaches toward the pre-Christian, underworld resonances of the Orpheus story. Brownlee locates the modernity of these works, and thus their potential for a relevant poetic power, in the ethical ambivalence that an author like Torquemada triggers when he vacillates between religious and secular explanations for purportedly supernatural phenomena. Neither incipient empiricist, nor conventional religious frames of reference manage to overcome the mystical hold that fantastical paradigms exert over human attempts to understand the world. Thus, Brownlee argues, Torquemada's playful movement between empirical and allegorical epistemologies reveals a Derridean "chasm of difference" at the onset of modernity, a monstrous excess that continues to haunt modernity's accounts of its own emergence and legitimization (pp). Castillo goes one step further by explicitly linking the alternately stimulating *terror* or paralyzing *horror* caused by the uncertainty and disorder at modernity's threshold to more modern models, such as Julia Kristeva's understanding of *abjection* and J. P. Lovecraft's notion of "cosmic terror" (pp). His genealogical study of horror fiction relates the life and death struggle between the modern vectors of ideological freedom and containment to the gothic tale's treatment of the modern subject's curiosity and creative power. Since many canonical representations of gothic horror stage the collision between an ostensibly modern, scientific rationalism and what can be described as more "primitive" ontologies that coexist with modern science, i.e., Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, poiesis begins to shift towards more scientifically and technologically informed practices. Poet becomes *letrado* becomes scientist becomes software engineer becomes… When we connect this development to the self-conscious way in which modern authors understand the fictional, or disenchanted, status of linguistic creation, poiesis in modernity can be classified as *science fiction* in a Gracianesque manner.

Such is the case with Seth Kimmel's post-philological study of the religious and political struggles over the famously forged Sacromonte lead tablets, in sixteenth-century Spain and Italy. I say 'post-philological' because Kimmel arrives at an insoluble predicament concerning what we might call a Godly poiesis. If, on the one hand, the

Church insists too much on the necessity of scholarly and scholastic commentaries in the production of divine authority, it risks enclosing God's ability to act creatively within earthly, i.e., fictional, literary practices. On the other hand, if a miraculous poiesis is allowed to persist outside of these same institutionalized discursive practices, then the Church surrenders its privilege to decide what is a legitimate expression of faith and what is not. The case is quite similar to the contradictory fate suffered by Copernican astronomy. On the one hand, the Church used Copernicus's heliocentric model to reform the Church calendar; on the other, the theological and philosophical implications of, first, Copernicus's and, then, Galileo's insistence on a sun-centered cosmology were aggressively persecuted (Biagioli 93). A notion used by contemporary Spanish author Manuel Talens which can help classify the alternative religious history proposed by the Sacromonte philologists is *ucronía*, which the RAE on-line dictionary defines as: "Reconstrucción lógica, aplicada a la historia, dando por supuestos acontecimientos no sucedidos, pero que habrían podido suceder" (a logical reconstruction, applied to history, taking for granted events that have not happened, but which could have happened). By denying the legitimacy of "biblical" scholarship on the tablets—an explicatory practice that mimicked exactly ecclesiastical scholarly practices—Church history itself runs the risk of becoming *uchronotopian*.

Elizabeth R. Wright and Leonardo García Pabón map this same phenomenon in opposite poles of the Spanish empire. Wright's study of Joannes Latinus's epic version of the battle of Lepanto considers the first occasion on which a "writer from sub-Saharan Africa publishes a book of poems in a European language," (in Latin, no less; pp). What she encounters is a latent, creative tension between the purported goal of representing a heroic Spanish triumph in all its glory, and moments of disquieting defamiliarization in which the excessive violence and antipathy of modern warfare and imperialism color the triumph over the Other. Here, the *horror vacui* of *unreason* inhabits the very act of attacking the monstrous chaos on the borders of Christendom, as Latinus's marginal poetic power arises like the Lacanian *real* from the limitations and contradictions inherent in the triumphalistic pageants of imperial history. Similarly, García Pabón's study of Luis de Ribera's *Sagradas poesías* finds poiesis in the "material relationship" between Ribera's laboring towards a never-achieved recognition of his poetic *ingenio*, and the unacknowledged sacrifices of Potosí's indigenous miners and *criollo* subjects to Spanish imperial power (pp). Both Latinus and Ribera may be read as Marxian symptoms of modernity's unacknowledged debt to colonization, and the undisguised rapaciousness of imperialism's violent acquisitive practices. Far from the utopian turning-forward of the colonial clock of James Cameron's *Avatar,* we can say that Latinus's and Ribera's poetry, following Walter Mignolo's characterization of colonial humanism, reveals *the darker side* of modern poiesis (*The Darker Side of the Renaissance*).

In this light, poiesis can be characterized as an untamed, perhaps even unconscious creative impulse that resists the tendency of what David Foster Wallace terms "confluential" narrative to domesticate and put in order man's relationship with time and space.[2] This would seem to be the overriding implication of Julian Jiménez Heffernan's observation in his essay in this volume that the genre most readily identified with modern revolution—the novel—proves to be "refractory," and not reflective of revolution in its logical structuring of historical causality. Rather, he argues, it is in the individual believer's direct relationship to the divine, more typical of the lyrical projects of George Herbert and John Milton, where we find the greatest potential to explode the deadening "horizontal conspiracy" of narrative plot and the leveling effect of novelistic irony, which moves Orpheus to take up his lyre once more (pp). Rather than a smooth-running platform, poiesis, here, is more like a computer virus that disturbs the hegemonization of information networks. Its modern wildness refuses the semantic closure of more "rational" epistemological architectures and unidirectional treatments of historical causality. Nathalie C. Hester finds a similar impulse at work in a series of "failed New World epics" written in Italy in the seventeenth century. Roundly criticized for their lack of verisimilitude and excessively fantastical elements, Hester finds interesting, embryonic forms of "Italian" nationalism in these epics, which erect distinct arcs of national identities that upset the integrity and smooth running of Spanish versions of imperial success. Returning to Talens, who's to say which epic history is the real one and which is an *ucronía*?

The disturbing presence of the ethnic other in these works gives way to the presence of the *aesthetic* other in Jean Pierre Claris de Florian's "poem in prose" *Gonzalve de Cordoue ou Grenade reconquise* (1791). Similar to the defamiliarizing effect of Latinus's representation of corporeal carnage at the Battle of Lepanto, Florian's study and poetic representation of the conquest of Granada—written in the midst of the French Revolution—underlines the contradictions and violence of Enlightenment categories and hierarchies of aesthetic and political thought, at the dawn of *high modernity*. According to Fabienne Moore, in Florian's innovative juxtaposition of philological historicism and romance aesthetics, the French hispanophile challenges discursive hierarchies that have become as entrenched as ethnic categories themselves.

Moore's essay focuses on the negotiation of ideals of national identity and Enlightenment categories of rationalist thought, all within the aesthetic space of poiesis. What this suggests is that modern political paradigms, such as monarchical absolutism and liberal democracy, are ultimately aesthetic in nature rather than exclusively economic or political phenomena. Florian's translation of the inherent violence of purportedly democratic ideals into his poetically prosaic study and representation of the conquest of Granada—exposed in the bloody aftermath of the French Revolution—offers a serious challenge to theories of historical evolution in modernity.

The last two essays in the volume, by William Egginton and Julio Baena, further this markedly political approach to poiesis through their analyses of that paragon of postmodern, poetic excess, Luis de Góngora. Although all of the essays approximate Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's thesis concerning the simultaneity of modern and postmodern historical, discursive, and aesthetic lines of confrontation and escape, Egginton and Baena confront head-on what might be called modernity's constitutive characteristic: its inability to avoid deconstructing its own modes of legitimacy in the very act of constructing historical meaning.[3] For Egginton, Góngora's *minor strategy* of poetic expression captures the "essentially metaphorical nature of the real itself," thus turning the *major strategy*'s insistence on the existence of a more substantial reality behind the appearances back towards the reality of the appearances themselves. This strategy serves to unleash the creative power of the poetic word in a way that the major strategy of modern imperialism can neither simplify nor contain. What Góngora's linguistic excesses reveal is how the violent hierarchization of cultural and linguistic communities and identities on which modern affluence and technological progress are constructed leaves traces of its poetic will to power in the aestheticization and rationalization of said violence. For Baena, Góngora's deconstruction and dissolution of verbal meaning into either-or/yes-but complexes of polyvalent play interrupt and/or accelerate the circulation of (capitalistic) exchange value in language as well as in history. Just as the circulation of imperialist rhetoric and tropes in both Old and New World spaces circulates back to the empire in markedly altered forms, so, too, does Góngora's poetic play unveil the sacrifices made in the interest of univalent and stable meaning. Baena emblematizes the march of modern history in the figure of a battleship, a vehicle which requires the conversion-destruction of trees, mountains of precious metals, and colonized labor, in short, sacrifices that its menacing presence and inexorable movement occlude. According to Baena, Góngora deconstructs the modern, imperial *enterprise*, returning the planed and tooled planks to the status of *leño* and, in the process, multiplying sense and non-sense to what Gracián calls a "finite infinity" (*Obras completas* 453).

This strategy produces at least three disquieting effects: in the first instance, by denying the reader an easy solution to the poetic riddle, the reader is made conscious of his or her active involvement in the construction of sense; in the second place, by providing multiple possible meanings, the reader's increasing dependence on the authority of the poet reveals the power dynamic at play in literary practices; finally, by refusing to authoritatively occupy the role of "the subject supposed to know," the poet unveils the myths and rituals that subtend linguistic meaning in the first place, including the construction of his own authority, even as he wields it mercilessly. According to Slavoj Žižek, "the necessary deception consists in the fact that for this movement to take place, the subjects must overlook how their own search created what they 'find' at the end" (171). In this way, semantic "credit" is made to circulate through unauthorized spaces, challenging hegemonized narratives and revealing the violence of their linguistic and cultural machinations.

I began this afterword with Baltasar Gracián, and I think it is appropriate that he also have the last word on poiesis and modernity. In their volume *Rhetoric and Politics: Baltasar Gracián and the New World Order*, Nicholas Spadaccini and Jenaro Talens argue that the baroque philosopher theorizes long before Jean Baudrillard on the relationship between aesthetic simulacra and political gamesmanship. Their postmodern reading of the author of *El oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* concludes that "the media *produce* the meaning of these contents, *establish* the rules of the communication interchange, and create typologies of readers and/or spectators, that is to say, predetermined social individuals" (xv). Occupying the threshold between the sacralized medieval worldview and the modern, secularized circulation of people and goods, Gracián configures a technology of self-representation that takes for granted the lack of substance of all political subjects, aristocratic or *vulgar*, and their power relations in the absolutist court. Nevertheless, the Jesuit thinker also reveals modern rationalism's continued dependence on deeply ingrained (and irrational) strategies of ritualization in its bid to displace religiously based rituals of subject construction and political control (Nelson *Persistence* 167-70).

We might, in fact, offer an analogous conceit to the one offered by the title of this volume by exploring the relationship between modern *technology* and *ritual* structures of ideological coherence. This dichotomy is particularly marked in residual and emergent scientific paradigms in early modernity, even within ecclesiastical institutions, specifically in the concept of *free will*. The Dominicans, for example, held that God's will, knowledge, and power to act are simultaneous and form a closed unity within which man's free will is completely inscribed. The Jesuits, on the other hand, introduce a temporal space, a pause, between God's knowledge and his will to act, which creates the contradictory possibility of hypothetical knowledge in an omnipotent being (Nelson "Signs of the Times" pp). This innovative theological argument lends dignity to human knowledge, which, due to its terrestrial condition, is hypothetical by definition. However, even though the hypothetical theorems of mathematical or astronomical science become valid on the earthly plane, they cannot transcend their ontological status, which Gracián defines as "fictitious" (Nelson, *Persistence* 165). The notion of free will is intimately related to the idea of poiesis in the sense that philosophers, theologians, and, eventually, scientists all attempt to exclude or circumscribe poetic creation (and free will) inside metaphorical salons, or metaphysical and/or rationalist dictums. What the more self-reflexive creations of Gracián, or Góngora, reveal is that attempts to contain poiesis are not prior to the threat posed by human creativity but coterminous with it. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles argues that science fiction "has subversive effects because it confuses and entangles the boundaries we impose on the world in order to make sense of that world" (8). This is the same claim that Egginton makes with respect to *minor strategies* of poetic expression. The point is not that there is a contradiction between poiesis and modernity, or between science and fiction. To the contrary, poiesis *is* the power to create realities out of the symbolic tools at our disposal, and the fact that these tools are not reducible to *the real* is what gives them power over it, for better or worse.

Notes

1. Gracián's definition is well known: "Es un acto del entendimiento, que exprime la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos" (*Agudeza* 33) (It is an act of the understanding, which declares (extracts) the correspondence that is found between objects).

2. I have derived the term "confluential" from the characterization of the cinematic style of James O. Incandenza, the father figure character in David Wallace Foster's sci-fi epic *Infinite Jest*. Incandenza's films are characterized by the fictional film critics in the novel as "anticonfluential": "An après-garde digital movement, a.k.a. 'Digital Parallelism' and 'Cinema of Chaotic Stasis,' characterized by a stubborn and possibly intentionally irritating refusal of different narrative lines to merge into any kind of meaningful confluence" (996n61). The meaning of anticonfluential can be intimated through a selection of titles from Incandenza's fictional filmography: *Baby Pictures of Famous Dictators*;, *(At Least) Three Cheers for Cause and Effect*; *Pre-Nuptial Agreement of Heaven and Hell*; and, even more quixotically, *The Man Who Began to Suspect He Was Made of Glass*: "A man undergoing intensive psychotherapy discovers that he is brittle, hollow, and transparent, and becomes either transcendentally enlightened or schizophrenic" (989 n24).

3. Hardt and Negri write: "Modernity is not a unitary concept but rather appears in at least two modes. The first mode is the one we have already defined, a radical

revolutionary process. This modernity destroys its relation with the past and declares the immanence of the new paradigm of the world and life. […] [T]he second mode of modernity [is] constructed to wage war against the new forces and establish an overarching power to dominate them. […] The second mode of modernity poses a transcendent constituted power against an immanent constituent power, order against desire" (74).

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