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Abstract

This essay addresses the emerging field of Atlantic Studies and questions the status of "the Atlantic" as an object of study. Rather than assuming a self-evident grid where Atlantic cultural phenomena oscillate between such poles as "centers and peripheries," or "the colonizer and the colonized," I consider a different formulation of the Atlantic. Taking as a starting point an analysis of a poem by Tomás Morales, a *modernista* poet from the Canary Islands, my essay outlines the notion of "Atlantic nessologies." Three parallel departures are offered from this analysis: image (or the realm of the imaginary); territory (or spatial and geopolitical inscriptions of the Atlantic in western space-time); and value (or those ethical and political dimensions that can be drawn from Atlantic specificities). Critical engagements with the Atlantic, my essay concludes, can be anchored in "nessological" readings in which neither local, singular perspectives contained in islands, nor wider, more panoramic views of the Atlantic, ought to escape critics. Instead, the work of engaging the Atlantic from multiple perspectives and locations should express itself as a field of critical/political strategies coordinated against perennial re-inscriptions of Eurocentric totality.

Atlantic Nessologies: Image, Territory, Value

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Il n'y a pas au monde d'espace mieux éclairé,
mieux inventorié que celui de la mer Intérieure
et des terres qu'elle illumine de son reflet.
(Braudel, *La Méditerranée* I, 14)

There is surely no region on this earth as well
documented and written about as the Mediterranean
and the lands illuminated by its glow.
(Braudel, *The Mediterranean* I, 18)

What do we mean when we speak of *the Atlantic*? Neither a well-defined object of study, nor the unwieldy result of disciplinary necessities, “the Atlantic” seems to compensate for various institutional deficits. In the aftermath of the melting of area studies, interdisciplinary studies demand access to all available space (Harootunian and Miyoshi). Our world is, as Thomas Richards put it over a decade ago, one “in which armies fund universities, corporations run laboratories, banks sponsor the arts. Power now draws its breath from knowledge, and knowledge exhales in an iron lung” (Richards 8). Historians, economists, art historians, literary critics, and anthropologists who work across institutional and territorial domains find themselves struggling to carve and name new “fields.” Atlantic studies, in its novel and increasingly marketable configurations, should be addressed within the production of such interdisciplinary spaces.¹ The Atlantic evokes well-known trans-historical grids where power is a function of asymmetric transactions between imperial, colonizing, and capital-accumulating centers (Butel; Cunliffe

2001; J. H. Parry). The construction of centers and peripheries is claimed necessary for the production of “Atlantic” spaces.

In my view of “the Atlantic,” a vast, complex field of loci substitutes for uncritical re-inscriptions of the local/universal divide, thus opening up the possibility of thinking critically about multiple versions of the Atlantic. This means engaging Atlantic dimensions that are both singular and simultaneously traversed by those traces of difference that the workings of power deposited in its westward advance toward new territories and markets.² I call this alternative to the local/center construct *Atlantic nessologies*. I take *nessos*, the Ancient Greek word for island, as my departure. Islands are singular spaces, yet they are there in a plurality of ways, thus *nessologies* differ from discourses on insularity and islands.³ One could object that there is much more to the Atlantic and Atlantic studies than just islands! Still, I believe that *nessologies* are an apt metaphor for our activities as critics of such a vast space. As critics, we isolate certain critical preoccupations, we locate and construct our own critical islands and archipelagos of Atlantic knowledge in relation to the work of other Robinsons—and, less often, although increasingly—other Fridays. We also risk that our own critical presuppositions about fields may turn into imperialist *robinsonnades*.⁴

A critical engagement with Atlantic *nessologies* provides an ethical alternative for rethinking Atlantic studies within the larger realm of counter-hegemonic political praxis. I resist the Atlantic as a negative notion, a fantasy of counter-space, and argue instead that a sustained engagement with the ways in which islands are implicated in fantasies and forms of totality—empires, nations, states, and trade networks—is crucial to the task of resisting the totalized Atlantic. In exposing the fantasy of an Atlantic counter-space, I am enacting a set of identifications that define my own location as a critic. I speak as a Caribbeanist and as a Canary Islander whose critical viewpoint (whose text) addresses territorial and libidinal categories such as insularity, gender, and visual culture. I believe the Atlantic can be theorized persuasively (although not exclusively) from this “text.”

Because they exhibit fragmentary, discontinuous insular genealogies, the Canary Islands pose an ongoing challenge to Spanish claims to cultural hegemony and historical continuity, and, I claim,

to totalizing constructions of a coherent Atlantic. My own thinking about the Atlantic begins by asking how the text of discursive totality resonates with the small textured body of a cultural artifact. Below I offer a “nessological” reading of the poem “Los puertos, los mares, y los hombres de mar” (“Ports, Seas, and Seamen”) by Tomás Morales (1884-1921), a late *modernista* poet and one of the Canary Islands’ most celebrated twentieth-century poets. Written from the port city of Las Palmas and published in *Poemas de la gloria, del amor y del mar* (Poems of Glory, Love, and the Sea) in 1908, the poem stands as an example of how Atlantic fantasies express not only a desire for, but also the experience of, multiple identifications.⁵ If dreams unveil the coded depth buried under a psychic surface, then poems, as surfaces superimposed on the drab quantities of Atlantic transactions, may serve as interpretive grids to critique Atlantic totality.

In my reading of Morales’s poem, I ask how a notion of the Atlantic is reproduced as an effect of fantasies that in turn ground our contemporary definitions and uses of a disciplinary Atlantic. Ultimately, I am interested in understanding how this concept’s totalizing mechanism impedes the intelligibility of singular reason, of cultural difference, of differential value. Finally, I claim that no meaningful critical space can develop, if it is not from the negotiated interaction of singular rationalities mobilized against totalizing reason. My own critical fantasy imagines a space where singular critiques will interpellate those totalizing, colonizing mechanisms that constitute local others, a space that can also think about itself through self-reflective, critical moves.⁶ In what follows, I argue for theorizing against a version of “the Atlantic” that ceaselessly re-inscribes the most obscene forms of Eurocentric totality. I do this by self-consciously performing a number of strategic critical moves, which could be elements in a much larger discussion among critics of the Atlantic. I propose that critics working on Atlantic studies address the naturalization of power and powers in the Atlantic *longue durée* from multiple perspectives and locations, following the sinuous displacements of a range of archives. From my nessological standpoint, I address such notions as insular genealogies, minority/maturity, interiority/exteriority, and mobility, which I see as related to the ideas of image, territory, and value in Atlantic contexts.

The poem, whose title carries vast, panoramic, and plural evo-

cations of oceanic connections and Atlantic cosmopolitanism, is a text on seeing.⁷ The gaze is a singularly insular gaze; but what does this seeing through poetic language reveal about the Atlantic, which we imagine as an effect of totality? From the vantage point of an island location, the sea can be contained in a poetic image (the expression of an insular fantasy) that conveys insinuations of mythical and historical time: “El mar es como un viejo camarada de infancia / a quien estoy unido con un salvaje amor; / yo respiré, de niño, su salobre fragancia / y aún llevo en mis oídos su bárbaro fragor” “The sea is like an old childhood comrade / to whom I am bound by a wild love; / I breathed, as a child, its salty fragrance, / and I carry still in my ears its barbarous clamor” (Morales 1984, 78). This first image rapidly disseminates, in the same gesture in which it expresses its bodily incarnation, through figures of cosmopolitanism. The simile of the sea as a childhood comrade carries ethical resonances, an evocation of symmetry and equivalence. Yet this nostalgic remembrance enunciates the zooming effect of time gone by: the sea as an *old* childhood comrade. At the end of the poem, the poet will reappear as a child—his fantasy will have propelled him to the locus of his identification in childhood. I argue at this point, and throughout my essay, that this seemingly minute, singular, and local identification is important in helping us read “the Atlantic” from an insular viewpoint.

Whitmanesque as the poem may appear, there is no synchronicity (no allegorical evocation of horizontal community) in its consecutive images of the sea. Instead, a complex indexical operation pans across the immediacy of material life, of the present and presence. The second stanza begins: “Yo amo a mi puerto . . .” ‘I love my port . . . ;’ the fourth, “Y amo estos barcos sucios . . .” ‘And I love these dirty boats . . . ’ (78). In the second stanza, a deployment of signs of cosmopolitanism materializes around the wandering, selective viewpoint: a multiplicity of flags (“cien raros pabellones” ‘a hundred rare flags’); “las parlas de todas las naciones” ‘tongues from every nation.’ The indexical maneuver continues, the gaze constantly shifting. There are references in the following stanzas to peaceful trading boats side by side with “navíos de guerra” ‘war vessels’; and the seamen aboard “these dirty boats” appear through a close-up of some young Genoese sailors. The faces figure as a particularly af-

fective instance of the multitude of flags and languages in the busy port—indices of cosmopolitanism—against the backdrop of the poet’s location: “. . . marinos genoveses / de morenos semblantes y ojos meridionales” ‘. . . Genoese sailors / dark-faced, with southern eyes.’ Such displacements of time, youth, and decay signal a transition towards another crucial simile at the end of the fifth stanza: “más viejos que estos lobos que en un huacal sentados, / al soco de los fardos, están tomando el sol” ‘older than these sea dogs who, sitting on a *huacal*, / protected by the stacks, are basking in the sun.’ The “sea dogs” are the old patriarchs around whose bodies the poem frames the objects of its identifications. Their bodies, sitting still in the sun, appear frozen in a timeless pose; poetry suggests photography, time locked in the singularity of an image’s eternal present.

The present (an insular viewing and standing point) recedes into a series of spatial and bodily demarcations: the port and boats, dark-faced Genoese sailors, and old seamen. From this coastal vantage point the Atlantic seascape appears as a fantasy of cosmopolitan fraternity and oceanic connections in an age of international mercantilism. The poetic voice declares multiple identifications with the old and younger seamen, or with the young men that the patriarchs once were. Identification with the old sea dogs is rendered explicit through the poem’s staging of the act of seeing them seeing. They are not exactly looking into the sea, but observing the movements of boats on the harbor—their own movements, proleptically projected onto the bodies of the boats they see. In the sixth stanza “contemplan las viajeras / naves” ‘they are watching the traveling / vessels,’ and looking at the boats; they are perhaps mirroring themselves, narcissistically, as they used to be—“naves, que hunden sus torsos de hierro en la bahía” ‘vessels sinking their iron torsos in the harbor’—for narcissism, as Jacques Rancière suggests, might be one of the triggers of sea adventures and the desire to bridge oceans.⁸ The sea dogs recall the tales of their own lives at sea, “y relatan antiguas andanzas marineras / en las que acaso fueran los héroes un día:” ‘and they recount old seafaring ramblings / in which perhaps they were once the heroes.’ The colon expands the complex visual structure, once the first six stanzas have provided a starting point and inscribed a singular location. The following seven stanzas contain a series of mobile enumerations and descriptions (Nuez Caballero, II,

189-97). The still image now unfolds into a narrative, an imaged tale of time in Atlantic space. Figures of masculine prowess and mobility permeate the second half of the poem, as the “daring” and “expert” seamen “en la noche sondaron los más distantes lares” ‘probed at night the most distant parts’ (78). The dynamism of the seamen from many different nations stands as an amplified structure of visual identifications, extending through the routes of trade and war in a-historical time, or in the time of the mythical Atlantic.

The poetic voice is child-like in the hyperbolic last stanzas. Effectively contrasting a “gigantic epic” to “people of stiff muscles, gigantic hearts,” the poet speaks about his soul and expresses his desire to be another in an identificatory sense (“I wish that my soul were like yours!”).⁹ He expresses a desire to travel on those “great vessels,” whose “costados enormes y estupendo avanzar” ‘enormous sides and wonderful push’ (79) resonate with the dynamic, phallic strength of those other “viajeras / naves, que hunden sus torsos de hierro en la bahía” ‘traveling / vessels sinking their iron torsos in the harbor’ (78) that analogically link the present of the gaze with the a-temporal time of Atlantic seafaring mythologies. In the dream-like, visionary second half of the poem, a few strategically chosen cosmopolitan signs further dislocate the wanderings of identifying desire; the poet imagines himself as a helmsman in a Greek corvette, or as the Norwegian captain whose boat just set sail for Liverpool. Seemingly, he not only wants to be like these seamen, but to be one of them. But how?

Being another—not only a spectator and a dreamer—outside present time requires being without becoming. Yet being (like) another would involve mobility, the capacity to move across the sea, and the power to leave. The impossibility of accomplishing this material condition surfaces in an (anti)climax in the sentimental last stanza (79): “¡Hombres del mar, up os amo! Y, con el alma eutera, / del muelle os gritaría al veros embarcar: / ¡Dejadme ir con vostoros de grumete siquiera, / yo cual vosotros quiero ser un Lobo de Mar!” ‘Seamen, I love you! And with my entire soul / I would cry out to you from the port / when I see you embarking: / Allow me to go with you even as a cabin boy, / I, just as you, want to be a Sea Dog!’ The nostalgic young poet (Morales was twenty-four when he published this poem) imagines himself standing at the port in his native

island of Gran Canaria, wishing that he could become a cabin boy, and dreaming of becoming a “Sea Dog.” Through his childhood pledge, the poet also inscribes his distant love objects. Their differences figure here in the form of material presence and bodily intelligibility. This is where the Atlantic can be imagined as a *nessological* situation.

As my reading of Morales’s poem indicates, there is no innocence in images—only fantasies of innocence desired through identifications and projections whose ultimate consequences escape both subjects and objects of imaging games. For this very reason, Atlantic imaginaries are performative both in terms of the production of “Atlantic” knowledge and with regard to this knowledge’s effects on Atlantic spaces. Our fantasies, dreams, and projections of other spaces-times, other bodies, other love objects, have consequences in the realm of the material and “the real.” Hence, our own critical staging of the vague field of Atlantic studies is also a *spectacle* of the interplay of colonial and colonizing sites.¹⁰ The Classical Greek verb *theōréō*, meant “to behold, to observe, to look at, to perceive and examine.” I cannot dissociate these semantic chains from their Atlantic resonances, linking a trafficking in images and a trafficking in bodies, cultural artifacts, narratives, and the bountiful plenty of trans-Atlantic commerce. Theory, “a looking at, a beholding or viewing,” also stands for “curiosity, presence at a festival.” Theory contains—or is contained by—an insistence on seeing rather than being seen, on examining rather than lending itself to examination, and on making itself present at the site of spectacle in order to watch and see. Consider, then, the (imaginary) Atlantic; or think of what theorizing from spectacular, symbolic, geographical, and ethnographic sites can reveal about the making of an Atlantic World, and about our own stakes in the act of examining a spectacle that offers itself in the form of *subjects* of critical analysis. Undoubtedly, we reproduce the Atlantic in our own critical praxis through various deployments of textual and visual images for continental and trans-Oceanic consumption. Much of our theoretical trafficking in Atlantic signifiers is a trafficking in graphic representations of some kind: cartographic, iconographic, ethnographic, pornographic.

If we look at the scattered iconographic archive, we see that the Atlantic is a “place” of wondrous, enchanting obscenity (Greenblatt,

119-51; Mignolo; and Shelton). As I have suggested in my reading of Morales's poem, representation is not impervious to value; in fact, the contrary is the case, if by representation we mean discourses on the Atlantic, including territory, natural resources, potential, bodies, and cultural differences. In Tomás Morales, such images pose the problem of imaginaries in the context of value and lead us to ask how singular images of the Atlantic become organized into complex imaginaries. How do imaginaries, in turn, function in relation to totalized forms of knowledge? How are political and cultural meanings produced out of particular arrangements of isolated images? These are some of the questions that link images and value. I will return to them at the end of my essay, after a discussion on Atlantic space.

Not unlike other "fields," Atlantic studies presuppose archives where "reason" is constructed and reproduced through well-known techniques of classification, exhibition, and knowledge demarcation. Arguably, these techniques have become increasingly organized around the photocentric experience of trans-Oceanic spectacles. If modernity implies increased applications of technologies of seeing (of territorialization and control), then the construction of Atlantic spaces is in itself an "archive" where these technologies can be analyzed.¹¹ Thus, Atlantic knowledge can accurately be described as modern knowledge. However, such "modern knowledge" is not only the result of empirical or scientific classifications, but is predicated on references to a pre-critical, pre-encyclopedic imaginary. In fact, Atlantic archives reveal "pre-modern" genealogies at the basis of the production of Atlantic spaces; Atlantic knowledge stands in excess of modern knowledge. In saying this, and as I tried to show in my reading of Tomás Morales's poem, I am evoking long-standing mythical and regional imaginations of an Atlantic linked to "the Mediterranean world" (Cunliffe, 2001, 1-18; 30-63).

Mythological referents such as the titan Atlas or the island continent of Atlantis imply pre-critical modes of territorialization and should not be divorced from their spatial contexts—for instance, the place where Atlas stood at the threshold of the Mediterranean. Indeed, Atlas stood on the northern fringe of Africa, or Libya, very close to the physical location of the Canary Islands. Beyond these regional anchorages of the myth of Atlas is the island continent of At-

lantis. From its presumed origins in these mythical and catastrophic locations, the Atlantic has been “taking place” as an imaginary space on the western fringes of Mediterranean culture for the past thirty centuries. Building upon the fragmentary, imaginary (oral and visual) traditions of knowledge produced during the classical period, a new vision of space beyond the Mediterranean emerged toward the end of the so-called Middle Ages.¹² At this point I lay out the mytho-historical location of the Canary Islands in relation to the deployment of Atlantic imaginaries in order to understand how early Atlantic territories are articulated with their imaginary projections. This brief genealogical detour should further complicate some of the denotative gestures I underlined in my reading of Tomás Morales’s poem.

The Canary Islands appear in Western textual and geopolitical imaginaries as an Atlantic location as early as the first century of the Christian era in the writings of Pliny the Elder and Strabo (Martínez Hernández, 74, 76; and Fernández-Armesto, 1987, 1-8). In some cases, an identification with the submerged continent of Atlantis was explicit; the Islands of the Atlantic would have been the remnants of an ancient, mythical civilization.¹³ Around the ninth century of the Christian era, an Irish monk wrote a chronicle describing the seafaring adventures of Saint Brendan, the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (Trousson, 38-9). Alongside descriptions of islands in the North Atlantic, this chronicle of an imaginary voyage expresses a renewed interest in islands as meaningful repositories of religious, symbolic, and spatial knowledge, which, as in the Greek case, allowed for recognition and inclusion on the edges of the known world. That the myth of the island of St. Brendan continued to reverberate across the fringes of northern European culture for centuries, and to this day in the Canary Islands, is a symptom of the latent vitality of cultural identifications with the mythic lineages of islandness across the pan-European Atlantic. The story continues with the late Medieval “rediscovery” of the Islands by Genoese and Portuguese explorers in a period that Felipe Fernández-Armesto has called “the early phases of Atlantic navigation” (1987, 151). Finally, after the volatile establishment of a Norman colony on the Eastern Canaries at the turn of the fourteenth century, the Canary Islands were re-invented as spatial points in the mappings of territorial sov-

ereignty whose terms were agreed upon by Portugal and Castile in the Treaty of Alcaçovas-Toledo (1479-1480).¹⁴ This moment is crucial in the reorganization of protracted traditions of island imagining. A “territorial peace” (however provisional this codification of “peace” would prove in the next centuries) allocated the seas and lands of the Western hemisphere to the two Christian maritime empires. Thus the Canary Islands appear as connected with European territory, and are fully identified with European culture and early-modern historical time through cartographic, imperial, and papal incorporation, as well as through colonial violence. Read from this relatively “remote” territorial configuration of the Islands, Tomás Morales’s poem gains new meanings, and so does our understanding of the complexities of insular and local attempts at imagining a cosmopolitan, modern Atlantic.

How did Morales’s investment in a cosmopolitan fantasy of the Atlantic become explicitly articulated with “the modern Atlantic”? Not only is modern knowledge of the Atlantic visual, spatial, and territorial; it is also critical. If I mimic, somewhat cynically, a Kantian viewpoint here, it is because I assume that critique (*Kritik*) is a moral and intellectual position (or perhaps an attitude and a pose) enabling counter-hegemonic discourses (Foucault 263-4). However, Kant’s singular, contingent viewpoint has often been adopted as an embodiment of the self-evident western (rational) perspective, or, rather, as a perfected example of a way of seeing whose implication in Western forms of rationality (self-named reason and totality) cannot be sufficiently emphasized.¹⁵

One of the most effective and successful “proofs” of enlightenment knowledge is the figure of *paidéia*, the Kantian enactment of a minor/mature dialectics.¹⁶ This figure is important for our understanding of Atlantic nescologies for reasons I already sketched in my reading of Tomás Morales’s poem. Let’s fantasize for a moment about standing in Morales’s insular location and enter into dialogue with the idea of Kantian modernity by asking if “the Atlantic critic” should speak as the “immature” (although presumably “authentic”) insular subject, or rather as both the critic *and* the subject? I would venture that the critic could be authentic or inauthentic (i.e., neutral, phallic, devoid of authenticity) at will. Critics might imagine themselves watching Kant thinking about imaginary immature subjects

awaiting entrance into mature citizenship; and, as Morales's poem suggests, they would never attain the desired enlightenment fantasy of perfected, cosmopolitan humankind. Surely, such subjects must have belonged to "the working classes," or even worse. But immature, pre-critical subjects, forced to speak "modern languages," can also return the penetrating gaze (Morales's text should speak for itself here) and articulate their viewpoint (their difference) from the vanishing point of insular self-awareness. Their accounts will strategically contain viewing scenarios, fantasies, elaborate narratives of Atlantic knowledge. These might resemble a scene of men hunting other men on boats, as imagined by Melville (Melville, 2-89); or they may stage the sea as "an old childhood comrade / to whom I am bound by a wild love."

A crucial element in our project of thinking counter to totalized versions of the Atlantic, then, is to think critically about modern and enlightened invocations of "minority," either in Kant or elsewhere. If we take this task seriously, we need to question the epistemological and territorial implications of this moral, biological, and temporal *a priori*. Kant established his *paidéia* as the axis on which other narratives, mounted on the text of political economy and philosophical modernity, also hinge: musings on philosophical or theoretical narratives of difference; on master-slave relations; on the education of youth; on the appropriate control and management of female bodies and reproduction; on interracial relations; on the policing and exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer; on dependent territories and the best (the most productive) administration by metropolitan and local authorities.

Nessological engagements with the Atlantic will render the Kantian idea of minority critically unintelligible in the ethical and epistemological senses of the word. If we assume the position of Atlantic minorities, we can also deny (and not only resist) a totalized notion of the Atlantic because neither the concept nor the totalizing maneuver that imagines it can account sufficiently for our difference and our discontinuity in relation to that imagined totality. In other words, the totalizing move that rationalizes me as a part in the whole, enacts the monological perspective of a single viewing point. True, I am contained by force, and I am also evicted, and so are all other perspectives, other viewing positions and their contexts, which

are not deemed rational, universal, and comprehensive enough. But critical discourses on Atlantic minorities can confront totalizing attacks that invoke “reason,” “knowledge,” and *Kritik*. Such discourses ought to claim minority not as a status predicated by a remote metropolitan thinker, but as a site of resistance. It is crucial that these critical discourses circulate freely between critical maturity and immature disobedience. This concept, in a range of Atlantic contexts, is not a post-structuralist (deconstructionist or other) reinscription of Eurocentric power/knowledge, but the complex account of our cultural experiences as outsiders and only relatively insiders, in both western and non-western time. By teasing a “de-theorized,” critical, self-consciously immature discourse out of Atlantic totality, we may be able to claim a variety of positions from which to account for politically generative, intellectually empowering, and ethically intelligible models of criticism on the genealogies (narratives, histories) and cultures of the Atlantic. The Mediterranean, as suggested in Morales’s poem, might be the right point of departure for the adventure.

The (modern) Atlantic, imagined as the rather vague location of unknown Others, corresponds to fantasies of exteriority. Codifications of the pursuits of reason through images, territory, and value in the Atlantic became more insidious after the technological revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. New uses of political and territorial reason configured the Atlantic as a space of scientific and material possibility. As we have seen, a mytho-historical “destiny”—historical inertia, or “the forces of history” acting as a historical birthmark—stereotyped the Atlantic as external and exterior. Outside the “Interior sea” that Fernand Braudel (I, 13) invoked, a vast ocean without origins in historical time or fixed geopolitical limits unveiled the negativity of its own a-historical truth. Braudel wrote with lyrical inspiration and exquisite sobriety that, “The Mediterranean is not even a *single* sea, it is a complex of seas; and these seas are broken up by islands, interrupted by peninsulas, ringed by intricate coastlines” (I, 13, 17). By locating Mediterranean space in territorial, political, and epistemological perspective, through the themes of continuity and discontinuity, of “multiple life,” of a “dialectics of space-time (history-geography),” of “perspectives” and “illuminations” (I, 12), Braudel built a model for de-totalizing

Mediterranean and, perhaps far more than we think, Eurocentric knowledge.¹⁷ For, arguably, if the Kantian idea of an *Aufklärung* is to be understood literally as a coming of age, the global projection of European imperialisms in turn needed to come to a full awareness of its own immaturity.

Let us engage the logic of philosophical modernity for a moment and “translate” this observation into the unwieldy expanses of “the Atlantic world.” Through this critical gesture, Braudel’s text becomes exponentially complex, beyond the reach of any single critical or academic project. Through this simple displacement, a naïve dislocation of Braudel’s insights, the character of Atlantic spaces’ relationship to western epistemologies (to knowledge and the archive) becomes apparent. The Atlantic is re-vealed (veiled) as exterior sea—not precisely totalized space, but the outside of space. And after Braudel’s beautiful metaphor for the Mediterranean, “un espace liquide” ‘a liquid space’ (I, 15), we can respond that here lies, at least in part, a possible rendition of the Atlantic: in the dissolution of liquid space into liquid opacity, the possibility of liquid knowledges, or a new critical fluidity. Islands continue to summon complex locative fantasies; they can throw singular light on the opaque sources of knowledge posing as beacons of light. Thus it is crucial to claim location as an epistemic condition for rethinking the Atlantic from the multiple ports of critical fluidity.

There are places of history and places in space that seem doomed by the imaginary weight of their specific locations. Location articulates a dialectics of inside/outside; centers and peripheries; metropolises and all the rest. Cultural location, as we have known for a long time and in ever more articulate ways, predetermines cultural discourses negotiated between the colonizer and the colonized.¹⁸ In an essay entitled “In the Beginning,” George Lamming asked, “How and where is the Caribbean?” (16). Lamming laid out two truly important questions that resonate in critically suggestive ways with Morales’s poem: Where (a loaded question in Atlantic colonial maps and in the maps of political economy) and how? (One could add: through whom, to whose benefit or advantage?) He asked these questions before he moved on to ask a few more through the non-fictional character of “this little English boy”: “But what happened before all those different people went sailing that way?

Who were there before Christopher Columbus lost his way?” (18). Surely these other questions, asked from elsewhere (from a different Atlantic shore and through a different *paidéia*) are also critically important. Lamming’s preoccupation with the material realities of his Caribbean location is clear in his inquiries—place, matter, procedure, the physical Caribbean—as are the meaningful, somewhat anxious queries of the “little English boy” about “what happened before” and “[w]ho were there before.” In other words, what is that outside? Perhaps the greatest advantage that local spaces can claim beyond the relative value of their specific locations is a certain critique-enabling perspective. Who tells the story? Who puts down the record? Who takes the picture? And what are the uses of all of these actions? Unavoidably, authors adopt perspectives (and often perspectives are conflated with method and methodological approach). The historian may wish to underline his position as a scholar, his ideological or institutional allegiances, but no further comment on his location seems necessary (unless s/he has decided that this is indeed very important). Instead of figures of location, of viewing and standing points (say, of one of the port cities in the Canary Islands or the Caribbean), historical narratives of the Atlantic deploy tropologies of virile mobility, what Thomas Richards, thinking about a different context, has called “the fashioning of a vast and mobile zone of knowledge” (Richards 22).

I conclude these reflections on Atlantic territoriality with a word on mobility, linking and contrasting Morales’s fantasies with those of historians. The author’s most useful tool is what we may call “description,” a device that expresses action, reflection, the dynamic thrusting of new light on primeval or virgin territories of knowledge (Pratt, 15-85; Mignolo). When it comes to descriptions of colonial locations, there are not very many metaphors at hand. Freud’s preference for the archaeological reappears in the tradition, sometimes carrying unexpected resonances at various points throughout the twentieth century. However, it was not exactly archaeology (which historians of the Mediterranean must obviously presuppose), but, more precisely, the incendiary combination of seismic and political life in Pompeii that Braudel invoked in the 1946 preface to the first edition of *La Méditerranée*: “this mass of publications buries the researcher as it were under a rain of ash” (I,

18). What is it then, we may ask after Braudel, that obscures the Atlantic, making it all but impossible to “throw light” on its idealized body? Is it smoke, or ashes—the ashes of time, perhaps—or an even greater barrier that impedes the full enlightenment of the Atlantic as a problem, as an object of study, and as political space? Many volcanoes across the vast Atlantic stand as mysterious witnesses to the weaving of an ever-fleeting fantasy of “Atlantic civilization” (a submerged continent, a lack) construed as an outside of “civilization.” Their intermittent smoke is perhaps the first symptom of resistance to fantasies of complete visibility and seamless totalizing.¹⁹

As I have been arguing (in the wake of Levinas, perhaps), structures of encounter are fundamentally ethical, not ontological. In myriad Atlantic texts (from the narrative of St. Brendan, to Norman and Castilian chronicles of the conquest of the Canary Islands and French accounts of Brazilian or North American explorations), we find singular structures reproduced within narratives of colonial encounter. First, values are projected onto the new territory; bodies and territorial possessions are translated into Columbus’s or (these are meaningful reverberations) Prospero’s or Robinson’s varying disciplines of power/knowledge. Subsequently, a new legal order is declared and implemented; material, cultural, historical situations are addressed and transformed; new maps are drawn; and new texts are imposed. In each case, value is projected through a previous, underlying, and referential master text. In the master text of European fantasies of totality, truth and the real antecede the new territory just as the old precedes the new, and just as language precedes aphasia or animality. The new territory will be *seen* and interpreted according to the colonizer’s values. Relative value will be ascribed to the new place, resources, bodies, and the anteceding, underlying and referential origin will necessarily be located elsewhere. This location of value in the genesis of colonizing processes is a matter of organizing another place as an outside. Location will also be reproduced as an outside through what we can call representation (but not self-representation): images, texts, discourses, truths, archives naming and measuring distance, or the relative value of each location with regard to the next, and to the fantasy of total knowledge.

Thus I perceive value, territory, and representation as intersections within Atlantic contexts. In nessological readings of the At-

lantic, image, territory, and value complicate each other in their multiple, discontinuous reproductions of regions of knowledge across the vast, diverse Atlantic “region.” As the space in-between, a traumatic space, a wound space (the space of middle passages), the Atlantic signals a chasm. Its shores do not face each other; rather they interface asymmetrically, not always knowing, yet desiring, each other’s wonders, each other’s riches (Gilroy, 187-223; Chamoiseau; Lamming). Islands and coastal locations, and every other mnemonic repository of Atlantic knowledges, register libidinally charged records of unequal exchanges. Archives suggest the material and symbolic memory of the chasm, signaling dystopias or, properly speaking, Atlantic environments—displaced, altered, and latent space. Discourses, semantic fields deployed around the sign “Atlantic” are performative experiments connecting a certain location (a singularity), a certain point in the grid, with one of the possible reversals of European totality. If “Atlantic” is a performative gesture, a useful, meaningful indicator in a Western economy of totalizing reason, then “Atlantic” does not need to mean anything definite, but to signify indexically. “Atlantic,” therefore, is a locative and relational concept. But the Atlantic is also the inadequate naming of multiple experiences, insular or coastal, in relation to a chasm. This other Atlantic is the non-space (although no utopia) that opens onto the realm of multiple identifications and onto the sinuous contours of continental bodies: Africa, America, Europe? For Atlantic singularities can only be expressed locationally and relationally—read, if you will, relatively (Glissant 8, 111). Tomás Morales’s enactment of oceanic identifications and connections from the port city of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands is but one example of the other Atlantic, only one instance in the elusive realm of Atlantic nescologies.

The crucial questions, then, are: How will critical discourses of the Atlantic account for dystopia, for incommensurability and catastrophe? Can Atlantic Studies be articulated as a vantage point for rethinking imperial, national, and transnational relations across historical and spatial sites? I will remain highly skeptical of this possibility unless we commit to thinking about how local, insular, regional genealogies, and archives (singularities) can figure strategically in the critical work of determining the limits and conditions of Atlantic knowledge production. Taking visual, libidinal, economic

and territorial categories seriously might be the first step, as I have tried to show by loosely anchoring my nessological reflections in a poem where these categories are audibly, denotatively suggested. Clearly, this is where territoriality, coloniality, and critique intersect (elusively), within the spatial, textual, and political categories that determine our own Atlantic investments, and within those cozy fantasies of knowledge that drive our work. What if territory could be wrapped around itself as a notion and exhibit its repressed sites, its reverse, in order to know itself as not itself? Would critical praxis then not come close to being an effective attack on the metaphysics of (post)coloniality that poses as irresistible nature, as the normal/real invoked by fantasies of sameness, reason, maturity? Atlantic difference, which seems to obsess critics invested in constructing new fields and ensuring solid academic boundaries, can be thought through its ambivalent, unstable displacements as both a projection of non-Atlantic desires, and as a practical response to the good old critic's anxious questions: How are you different? How can I make you work for me (for my perspective or my field)? Do we not know whose innocence, and whose immaturity, is at stake in such questions? I dare say that we know this intimately, singularly.

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Notes

1 See, for example, "Atlantic Genealogies," "The Hispanic Atlantic," and "A Colonial Atlantic?: Rethinking Colonial Studies."

2 I refer to the prestigious view of history, reason, and "spirit" we have inherited from the tradition of German Idealism, and from Kantian and Hegelian views of history. See Bourd ; and Legr s.

3 In part I derive my "nessological" fantasy from Gilles Deleuze's thinking on singularities. Although my understandings of difference and insularity are not solely Deleuzian, his nomadic voice is one of the palimpsests for my own reflections on the Atlantic and islands. For an interesting and

inspiring (although limiting) reflection on islands, see Deleuze, 2002. On singularities, see especially Deleuze, 1969; 1988.

4 I am using Marx's critique of "Robinson Crusoe utopias" as "the idea of isolated individuals that served as a starting point for a number of theorists who explain the genesis of social bodies" (Bensussan and Labica 1020, my translation). For a thought-provoking take on the same theme, see Deleuze's comments of Michel Tournier's 1967 novel, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique*. Deleuze's commentary on Tournier's text can also be read as an extension of the former's posthumous piece on desert islands. See Deleuze, 1969, 350-72; 2002, 11.

5 After publishing *Poemas de la gloria* in Madrid, Morales later decided to work on a single book in several parts (Libros) entitled *Las rosas de Hércules* [The Roses of Hercules]. Upon his return to the Canary Islands in 1909, he published the second part (Libro Segundo) of *Las rosas de Hércules* (Madrid, 1919). The Libro Primero (including a revised version of the 1908 book) was only published posthumously in Madrid by some of his friends. Morales barely had time to start work on a Libro Tercero before his untimely death in 1921 (Sánchez Robayna 12-13). A selection of Morales's poems appeared in Gerardo Diego's famous *Poesía española. Antología* (1934). See Soria Olmedo, 264-80.

6 For my varying uses of "fantasy" and "identification," I follow, respectively, Laplanche and Pontalis, and Fuss. See also Deleuze, 1969.

7 "Los puertos . . ." is a long poem or collection of poems. The opening part, on which I comment here, contains thirteen stanzas. The following parts are sonnets, numbered I-XVI, followed by one last sonnet entitled "Final."

8 Rancière playfully imagines the myth as "Narcissus's fascination with the mirror of the ocean" in a short essay on the travels of a Claude Genoux, of Marseilles ("the proletarian Claude Genoux"), who had written his *Mémoires d'un enfant de la Savoie* in 1844.

9 Nuez Caballero speaks of "ese «yo», tan romántico" "This 'I', so romantic" (II, 193). Indeed, we are reminded of some of José María de Heredia's poems here. See Gruesz (39-48) on Heredia's cosmopolitanism, and on his "cosmopolitan and left-Romantic agenda" (44) as an editor. On cosmopolitanism in Morales, see Valbuena Prat. For interesting takes on the uses of Morales's poetry in longstanding debates between "local" and "universal," see Guerra Sánchez, 9-50; 51-88.

10 My references to “colonial” and “colonizing” are also invocations of Albert Memmi’s dialectics of “the colonizer” and “the colonized.”

11 See Mignolo; Richards; and Shelton.

12 I do not take the famed date of 1492 as the self-evident starting point for this change. For my purposes (and from my argument’s singular viewpoint), the deployment of Atlantic imaginaries antedates the era of Atlantic exploration and colonization. See Fernández-Armesto 1987; and Cunliffe, 2001, 1-18.

13 Here islands signify not only remnants but fragments, and, in a sense, the non-monumental ruins of a lost, primitive world. The “Fortunate Islands” appeared in Greek and Roman cartographic imaginaries as meaningful indices of a pre-historic, pre-Greek catastrophe. See Martínez Hernández, 73-85; see also Cunliffe, 2002.

14 On the geohistorical context for this Treaty, see J. H. Parry, 207-27. I am referring to Jean de Bethencourt’s and Gadifer de la Salle’s chronicles of the invasion and interrupted conquest of the Canary Islands. See Fernández-Armesto, 1987, 169 & ff. The Canary Islands were declared fully conquered and thus annexed to the crown of Castile in 1496.

15 In Deleuze (1998) reason takes center stage and overshadows discussions of critique, or rather, critique has become conflated with a critical exercise of reason. In my reading of Foucault, critique is the possibility of resisting reason. Of course, Foucault’s reading of Kant is far more sympathetic than my own (Foucault, 266).

16 Namely, Kant’s famous opening sentences in his 1784 *Aufklärung* essay: “Enlightenment is man’s exit from his self-incurred minority” (135). See also Foucault, 266-7. One wonders what the location of Kant’s “universal” signifier, “man” might be. Which “humanity,” and which forms of authority did Foucault have in mind when he wrote his reflections on Kant’s essay? How are we to interpret Kant’s remarks, furthermore, in his pedagogical essay, *On Education*, that “It may be said with truth that the children of the *working classes* are more spoiled than the children of those of *higher rank*, for the working classes play with their children like monkeys, singing to them, caressing, kissing, and dancing with them” (51)?

17 Unless otherwise noted, translations of Braudel’s text are my own; references to volume and page numbers are to the 1966 French edition. Unfortunately, Reynolds’ translation is far from faithful or attentive to

metaphorical meanings. He translates, for example, “un espace liquide” (*La Méditerranée* I, 15) as “a stretch of water” (*The Mediterranean* I, 19).

18 On this key term in postcolonial theory and studies, see Bhabha. For a controversial discussion of Bhabha’s own ideological “location,” see Benita Parry.

19 As Ian Baucom has argued, the Atlantic extends as the space of negative and “nonsynchronous” knowledge. Nonsynchronous and opaque, the non-space of Atlantic knowledge is, following the logic of certain Enlightenment traditions (from Montesquieu and Voltaire to German Idealism), the space of immaturity awaiting the fertilizing, luminous teachings of virtuous rationality (Kant). This ideal assimilation of Atlantic space into Western knowledge must remain critically elusive. (See Baucom, 8-9)

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