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Horizons of Enchantment

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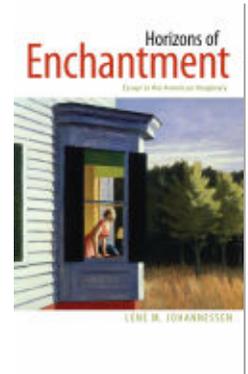
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“RELATIONS STRETCHED OUT” IN THE
AMERICAN IMAGINARY

DOREEN MASSEY’S observation that “The spatial is social relations stretched out” sounds simple, yet when we stop to think through what those words actually mean, the statement presents phenomenal complexities. In light of the remark, the truism that America is a nation of immigrants takes on a more convoluted and intricate significance, since its history is the history of the “simultaneity of stories-so-far,”¹ of the interrelations between spaces and trajectories that have been woven together across continents and centuries, yet have been sustained in actual space, within national borders. The discussion of Whitman and Gonzales from chapter 3 revealed that, on critical, epistemological, and culturological levels, these heterochronistic refractions bring out different and competing representations of the same space. They tie in with the full significance of Massey’s simple phrasing. Consequently, within the American imaginary, there are a number of subimaginaries, feeding precisely on the dynamics of stretched-out relations. These are commonly and most obviously epitomized by second-order institutions such as immigrant and ethnic neighborhoods and organizations, which display varying degrees of customs, language, and practices from places of origin far away. They exist within, and in greater or lesser degrees of harmony with, the flexible and commanding founding ideas of transference and transformation. They are in themselves radical proofs of those very principles. In this chapter I consider the representation of such “relations stretched out” in two different contexts and two different manifestations. Distinct in form and culture as they are, they paradoxically mirror each other, and both

speak powerfully to the transportation and persistence of imaginary institutions. They are Ana Menéndez's short story collection *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* and the cultural history of a small region in southern Norway.

Menéndez's stories are for the most part set in Miami, a city that "considers itself too American to be Cuban and too Cuban to be American."² At once on the inside and on the outside of the American imaginary, the characters in *In Cuba* are thus lodged in a symbolic sphere neither here nor there. The engagement with the American sphere is only nominal and seeps into the narratives mainly as an external gaze. The main catalyst for the institution of this liminal space within the American imaginary is Domino Park, which functions as a small piece of "living" Cuban history. This type of representation or mapping of cultural space operates according to principles of synecdoche and metonymy and is allowed to exist within the powerful metaphorical circumference of the master imaginary's call for progress and transformation. I suggest that the very fact of this metonymic phenomenon reaffirms the accommodating nature of the American imaginary, and that the example here allegorizes other subimaginaries existing on the fringes of the larger one. In the discussion of Menéndez's stories it is pertinent to revisit the "long empty moment" of Richard Ford's *The Sportswriter* in this connection, for not only is metonymy lonely, its mode's capacity for conservation and containment is also markedly potent in real life.

This is certainly the case in the other "case study" of this chapter, even if the history of the Lister region in southern Norway takes on a more synecdochic tinge and spatializing modality. Here we have an instance of a literal, not literary, institution of the American imaginary. The actual case shows the transposition of elements from the American imaginary in a reversed and selective process by which what pertains at the outset to the symbolic sphere is instituted elsewhere as, again, a piece of "living" history. In a faint echo of the triad of translation, transculturation, and transvaluation that we saw manifested in the Lithuanian's grasping of the extended promise in chapter 1, the Lister case divulges something about the capacity for transference that the American imaginary possesses, as well as about the acts of remembering and selecting in processes of

cultural bridging and representation. While in the Lithuanian's case transvaluation takes place in an orientational mode that moves toward the culturological inside of the imaginary, the Lister case elucidates the reverse, the movement of the cultural inside toward spheres of reception and resonance elsewhere. Both Menéndez's short stories and the history of Lister can, ultimately, be read as commentaries on modalities of migration as these are mapped out in memory and in scripture, in fiction or in concrete sociocultural arrangements.

The Cultural Imaginary of "Greater Cuba": Suspended

The eleven short stories in Ana Menéndez's *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* (2001) are highly varied in theme and narrative voice: they relate communication breakdowns in relationships, the sudden overflow of bananas in a backyard, a homecoming party, a boyhood dream of grandeur, dark fears at night before the next surveillance flight, and growing old and lonely, to mention some of the topics. The book reads like a loosely assembled snapshot album, where some characters make appearances in several stories, and others only once. Some, such as Raúl and Máximo in the title story, reappear in two other stories within the same time frame, and so do Raúl's son Anselmo, his wife Meegan, the young girl Mirta, Felipe, and his wife Hortencia, who should have been an actress. Most of the stories are set in Miami, some with Máximo's restaurant as their main reference point. A few are set in Cuba. The details of locations, however, are of less importance, because all the stories are informed by and relate to an imaginary that transcends the actual border between the United States and Cuba. We recall here Castoriadis's definition of the imaginary as: "the unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychological) creation of *figures/forms/images*, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of something. What we call 'reality' and 'rationality' are its works."³ In a manner similar to Américo Paredes's coinage of "Greater Mexico," that is, the culturally shared space on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, the space that constitutes the background for Menéndez's narratives can be construed as that of

“Greater Cuba,” a social imaginary transcending geopolitical boundaries. Regarding the concept of Greater Mexico, Norma Klahn observes that clear-cut demarcations between the spaces of the Mexicana and the Chicana cannot be made; they are too closely linked by and within an imaginary that crosses the border: “Re-adapted to specific circumstances and political realities, [symbols from the Mexican imaginary] acquire new meanings that symbolically destabilize the traditional perceptions of peoples in the new geo-symbolic/imagined space of Mexicanness and outside geographic boundaries.”⁴ This is not to say that there are not differences between the American and Mexican sides of the border (or the American and Cuban). The identification of how these are interlinked, accommodated, and sometimes misappropriated is indeed the focus of Klahn’s essay, and similar caution must also be applied to the consideration of other, similarly shared spaces.

It may be useful here to recall Charles Taylor’s general definition of the imaginary as “the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.”⁵ If we read this alongside Cornelius Castoriadis’s emphasis on the “(social-historical and psychological) creation of *figures/forms/images*,” and with a view to shared spaces that cross borders, the question arises, how do such figures and images find expression? One could argue that such “greater” imaginaries are not essentially different from any other social imaginary. However, an extra dimension is added to the dissemination processes in cases of diasporas: cultural groups are separated by sometimes vast geographical and social differences, yet are bound in a temporal continuity of shared expectations and norms. In these circumstances it is not a given that the social imaginary coincides with the cultural one, and the saloonkeeper’s daughter’s conversion to the American imaginary is not always possible. Clearly, given political and social history, the imaginary of Greater Mexico displays a certain amount of convergence between the social and cultural constituents, as the discussion of Gonzales’s “I am Joaquín” in chapter 3 showed. One might object that a distinction between the two categories, social

and cultural, cannot be made, since any given culture creates its forms and images according to moral and ethical underpinnings specific to itself. However, the numerous cultural enclaves around the world that are loyal to and serve as extensions of “mother imaginaries” elsewhere clearly operate on a double level of imaginary relations. If the social imaginary is the manner in which participants in and of a given imaginary co-inhabit their shared space, then perhaps the cultural imaginary infuses this on the level of modality. If the American master imaginary aspires to unify manner and modality into one on the axis of metaphorical transference, then a number of subimaginaries can be localized as metonymically or synecdochically marked by their anchoring in “elsewhere.” However, the divergence between social and cultural as a divergence between manner and modality need not be inherently unbridgeable; in most cases it is not.

In the following exploration of Menéndez’s *In Cuba*, I examine how the creative and re-creative function of an imaginary “elsewhere” generates and upholds figures and forms in narratives outside the social and cultural imaginary in which they are in fact located. Moreover, I pursue this in relation to figurative modes and their prefigurative moments, and suggest that what surfaces in Menéndez’s stories is a consistency of the metonymic mode, with the American imaginary’s core of transference and transformation in the metaphorical as a barely noticeable presence. The persistence of such subimaginaries within the larger American one underscores a factor of cultural life that goes to the heart of debates over multiculturalism and integration and that, regardless of context, perhaps speaks to the particular version of the migratory that is driven by extreme inevitability.

To appreciate Menéndez’s work, however, it is necessary briefly to look at certain aspects of the generic tradition that it can be read into. The interlocking of multiple characters and destinies that characterizes this collection is not uncommon, certainly not in Latino literature. For instance, we find it in Puerto Rican Nicolasa Mohr’s *In Nueva York*, in Mexican-American Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek*, and in Tomás Rivera’s . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*. These are all short story collections that,

because of partially or completely recurrent characters or themes, can also be read as novels. Such snapshot works can furthermore be read as community novels that aspire to narrate and chronicle characters and episodes as they are connected communally. The strategy is to consolidate, socially and culturally, a place for the collective self within the larger society and its imaginary, rather than to focus on the individual subject per se. The thread of coherence that enables these sustained, novelistic readings is generated by a spatial and temporal consistency in terms of narrative space. Mohr's characters, for instance, all exist in the novel's spatially present moment, as do those of Cisneros and Rivera. Despite frequent moments of retrospection, which add narrative depth in all these texts, the reader never loses sight of the continuum that situates the characters within a shared spatial perspective.

The situation is rather different in *In Cuba*. Certainly, as I mentioned previously, there are connections between some characters and stories. And yet relationships that would generate a sense of communality and its assertion within the space of the larger context seem absent, or too weak to create coherence. What instead distinguishes this collection of stories is an orientational predisposition that unsettles spatial and temporal unity. On the one hand, this characteristic frustrates attempts at continuous relations between characters, between cultures and nations, and between what Bal calls the experience of heterochrony within individual characters, in that it "disrupts the traditional linear narratives onto which routine responses and images are grafted, it offers temporal shelter to memories."⁶ In this sense, the short story collection should be read simply as a collection of independent stories, loosely held together by a certain number of reappearances. On the other hand, that very same fragmentation also provides an insistent thematic coherence and emerges as a powerful connecting figure in and of itself, by providing the shelter necessary for remembering "elsewhere," and other times. Since what Castoriadis refers to as "*figures/forms/images*" are created in and by the imaginary, in this case of what we may call Greater Cuba, they exist on both sides of the water, which in several of the stories sometimes makes it hard to say exactly where they are set. Most importantly, the figures and forms

are fuelled by what is elsewhere, or better stated, the memory of that "elsewhere." This absent presence, or present absence, runs through the entire collection of stories and generates only a nominal engagement with actual surroundings, instead consolidating the parameters of its own inside. The function of memory is crucial in forging the aesthetics in both this text and the township in Norway we return to later.

In her analyses of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dianne Thompson observes that "The continuity of memory makes us unite what dissimilarity (spatio-temporal) might otherwise separate; similarity makes us unite what discontinuity in the memory might hold apart."⁷ This is particularly relevant to narratives of the migratory, for while they are not inherently different from other literatures, they uniquely intensify the sensitivity to the temporal and spatial complexities and contradictions embedded in all attempts at representation. The first story in Menéndez's collection is an excellent illustration of this. The story gives the book its title, and I concentrate on it here. It is set in a little park in Miami where older men come to play dominos, hence the name Domino Park. The main characters are Máximo and Raúl, both Cuban, and Carlos and Antonio, who are from the Dominican Republic. The park plays a pivotal role in their lives and is introduced in the first paragraph as follows:

The park where the four men gathered was small. Before the city put it on its tourist maps, it was just a fenced rectangle of space that people missed on the way to their office jobs. The men came each morning to sit under the shifting shade of a banyan tree, and sometimes the way the wind moved through the leaves reminded them of home.⁸

The second sentence refers to the actual history of the park, which was closed down for a period because of drug trafficking. The passage thus hints at and problematizes the park's present status as a gentrified tourist attraction, which has made Máximo reluctant to visit it: "He had seen the rows of tourists pressed up against the fence, gawking at the colorful old guys playing dominos. 'I'm not going to be the sad spectacle in someone's vacation slide show,' he said."⁹ When he becomes a widower with empty days to fill, however, he starts frequenting the park with his old

friend from Havana, Raúl, and after a while they start playing against Antonio and Carlos:

For many months they didn't know much about each other, these four men. Even the smallest boy knew not to talk when the pieces were in play. But soon came Máximo's jokes, during the shuffling. . . . And the four men learned to linger long enough between sets to color an old memory while the white pieces scraped along the table.¹⁰

Máximo gets into the habit of telling jokes during shuffling. They all refer to Cuba, to Fidel Castro; always lingering beneath the laughter is the sadness of no return. We shall look at the jokes more closely later on. On the surface, the plot centers on Máximo's interaction with the small community of domino players. This takes us to the day when his already ambivalent relationship to the park's touristy character becomes a crisis. The park itself is highly ambiguous in its instance as a culturological metaphor. In its previous form, the park existed as a cultural manifestation in its own right, as a synecdochic representation of Cuba. It was there as a part standing for the whole, alleviating its visitors' pain of dislocation and exile, a condition that in Spanish is significantly named *destrado*, "unearthed." Domino Park thus forms an imaginary bridge back into the country that was lost, a figure created by and in the imaginary of Greater Cuba that in turn institutes itself into and as an actual place. This instance, albeit fictionally represented, is an illustration of how the human mind seeks understanding by relating the unknown to what is already known, or, as Michael Seidel puts it, "Imaginative powers begin at the boundaries of accumulated experience."¹¹ Tales from and of the migratory therefore always entail a certain amount of figuration, and the migrant who faces a new world must rely on an ability to map the world that lies in front of him or her so that it becomes inhabitable. These are basic mechanics of comprehension, and they involve a number of cognitive processes. Hayden White writes of:

rendering the unfamiliar, or the "uncanny" in Freud's sense of that term, familiar; of removing it from the domain of things felt to be "exotic" and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded

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adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, non-threatening, or simply known by association. This process of understanding can only be tropological in nature, for what is involved in the rendering of the unfamiliar is a troping that is generally figurative.¹²

Healing the epistemological rifts created by dislocation and relocation, bridging the gaps opened up by spatiotemporal dissimilarities and ruptures, requires the activation and engagement of memory on a fundamental and practical level, in order to project one experiential domain onto another. Consequently, what cognitive linguists call metaphorical mapping and what White calls “troping” in the passage just cited are essentially the same thing: understanding through oscillation between conceptual meanings. From a cognitive point of view, metaphorical mapping is more specifically the mapping of a source domain that differs experientially from the target domain onto which it is mapped. The basic structure of the target domain remains intact.¹³ In other words, the unfamiliar structure onto which a familiar domain is projected does not undergo fundamental change but becomes a coating of new codes and configurations—and hence more or less new meanings.

Cognitive linguistics and tropology enter into this discourse from very different places, but they share the conviction that the faculty of imagination or figuration is the *modus operandi* for orientation in the world. White puts it as follows: “Thought about the physical world remains essentially figurative . . . progressing by all sorts of ‘irrational’ leaps and bounds from one theory to another.”¹⁴ In a similar vein, Antonio Barcelona asserts that “one of the major general abilities is imagination, or in more technical terms, the ability to project concepts onto other concepts.”¹⁵ Both restate Castoriadis’s conceptualization of radical imagination as “the ability to symbolize. . . . to see a thing in another thing.”¹⁶ Troping is essential to maneuvering in the world, and its practice manifests itself culturologically in one form or another, on all levels, wherever people from different cultures inhabit the same space. Language, custom, religion, and tradition all undergo a certain degree of figuration as they travel from one domain to another. The results (with exceptions that are many and tragic) are blends that tend to emerge

as distinct domains with the potential to generate other blends. Sometimes cognition is trapped in a schema of figuration that the imagination cannot escape. Rather than translating and familiarizing the unknown and new, which would create new metaphors, the imagination remains within a tropological model and modality that do not allow such a transfusion.

In the case of Máximo and Domino Park as a culturological figuration, the processes of gentrification and touristification not only have changed the park's surface but have altered its very gestalt. American Miami, which in cognitive terms would correspond to the source domain, has "mapped" its experiential structure onto the park (corresponding to the target domain). What was once a part *for* the whole has been turned into a part *of* a whole, and now of a very different domain. Even if the basic structure of the part (as a place to go and play dominos) is retained, at least on the surface, its synecdochic significance to the Cuban community is profoundly destabilized. The domino players are now outsiders and visitors in a domain that has been appropriated by an outside perspective. Máximo cannot quite reconcile himself to this new gestalt and senses the whole situation as both humiliating and irritating:

The tour groups arrived in later that afternoon. First the white buses with the happy blue letters WELCOME TO LITTLE HAVANA. Next, the fat women in white shorts, their knees lost in an abstraction of flesh. Máximo tried to concentrate on the game.

"You see, Raúl," Máximo said. "You see how we're a spectacle?" He felt like an animal and wanted to growl and cast about behind the metal fence.¹⁷

The analogy to a zoo leaves no doubt that Máximo senses acutely that he is being robbed of both his own and the park's autonomy. Whether it is this emotion or the hot sun that makes him physically sick is uncertain, but, following the sensation of being an animal caught in a cage, he begins to feel strange. This is further exacerbated by the episode that immediately follows, an insertion into the narrative of the perspective of the surrounding American imaginary that is oblivious to nontransference:

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An open trolley pulled up and parked on the curb. A young man with blond hair, perhaps in his thirties, stood up in the front, holding a microphone. He wore a guayabera.¹⁸ Máximo looked away.

“This here is Domino Park,” came the amplified voice in English, then Spanish. “No one under fifty-five allowed, folks. But we can sure watch them play.”

Máximo heard shutters click, then convinced himself he couldn’t have heard, not from where he was.

“Most of these men are Cuban and they’re keeping alive the tradition of their homeland,” the amplified voice continued, echoing against the back wall of the park. “You see, in Cuba, it was very common to retire to a game of dominos after a good meal. It was a way to bond and build community. Folks, what you are seeing here is a slice of the past. A simpler time of good friendships and unhurried days.”¹⁹

Máximo’s unease is palpable, and, thinking that “he could no longer sit where he was, accept things as they were,” he has a fit of uncontrollable anger and tries to attack the guide.²⁰ The scene conjures up complex and painful cultural interactions, reactions, and finally actions. On the one hand, the domino players are enacting a ritual that at the outset seeks to ignore the framework of American Miami and retain the symbolic and instituted meanings of Cuba, of home. Upon hearing the guide talk, however, an absurdly similar point of perception sneaks in as a twisted echo of Máximo’s own framework. The guide correctly presents the park—and Máximo—in terms of their roles within Greater Cuba, but does so from outside its imaginary and corresponding institutions, approaching them instead as dead objects, musealized parts of the whole.

As a reversed process of figuration, this takes its cue from an external point of view literally looking in, construing the scene as a “slice of the past,” a synecdoche again, but in a different sense. This point of perception appropriates as its own the right (and rite) of troping. It may be that the guide’s discourse reflects an aestheticization of the park and its ritual as emblematic of a specific culture’s practices, but this is ultimately an act of objectification that robs the object of its own perception and its own seriousness. In other

words, this mapping projects a perspective that retains its object of perception as fundamentally other and alien to its own culturological inside.

What is striking about the transformation of the park is that, even if the point of perception changes and the direction of troping is reversed, the untranslatability of the two referential domains remains constant. Neither points of perception nor their interactions with their objects are instances of metaphorical mappings in the sense of domain *crossings*. Synecdoches are not transgressional; they insist on keeping intact their miniature versions of the larger phenomenon they seek to represent. Instead, the park, in both its earlier and its present forms, is the manifestation of a different kind of border crossing that is more reminiscent of, for instance, Chinatowns. These phenomena do not illustrate troping as a process that produces new metaphors and icons such as La Virgen de Guadalupe or ethnically blended neighborhoods. Chinatowns (and Domino Park) exist in an imagined, one-to-one correspondence between old and new, between past and present, even if they become ossified, archaic versions that, paradoxically, are exotic to their mother imaginaries. The main characteristic of such demonstrations of figuration remains that they do not *significantly* traverse their own domain boundaries conceptually. What Thompson calls “spatio-temporal dissimilarities” are here cancelled out.

In his discussion of exilic writing and the *Odyssey*, Michael Seidel describes this dynamic as one whereby “the expression of the desire for home becomes a substitute for home.” Odysseus’s exilic adventures, he continues, “[are attempts] to dim the hero’s homeward compulsion by making exilic space a substitute for the home island.” By replacing home with its replica, Odysseus “displays not only the full range of exilic course, extension and return, but the full power of exilic imagining, *extension as return*.”²¹ Troping, as we see it played out in the relationship between Domino Park and its surroundings, is an expression of precisely such a desire for replication and extension, not for transformation. It therefore bears the mark of metonymy rather than metaphor.

Metonymy has been granted less attention than metaphor by cognitive linguistics. This may be because metonymy quickly runs

up against its own borders; unlike metaphor, metonymy carries a certain finality. In Barcelona's definition, metonymy is "[a] conceptual projection whereby one experiential domain (the target) is partially understood in terms of another experiential domain (the source) included in the same common experiential domain. Metonymy is . . . activation."²² This description bears on Domino Park and its role, from the perspectives of both the tourists and the Cubans. Metonymic figuration rejects significant experiential domain crossing and retains a preference for the contiguity of parts closely relating to wholes. Metonymic memory in turn selects what it remembers along a continuous line on which one can imagine one item or function standing very close to another.²³

This is a relation, a mode of ordering, whose structure is located in a prior discursive operation, in processes of prefiguration that come before mental activities of troping. We can suggest that exile's orientation is not to make the new and unfamiliar home and familiar; home is forever lost somewhere else—a frozen image that obsesses memory. As a circumstance that prefigures and orders discourse, exile therefore falls into a specific tropological structure whose main component cannot be metaphor: domain crossing is not an adequate mode for constituting its object of discourse. The orientation remains toward the past, and the obsession is not only with remembering but also with oblivion—or rather, the fear of oblivion.²⁴ The park and the scene that unfolds are refracted in Máximo's discourse as the mirroring of a certain kind of prefiguration along the general lines just described. This is circumscribed metonymically, and it constitutes and is constituted by the mode of exile: "The here of one in exile persistently recalls the space of a there, and vice versa. . . . Nothing in the land of exile seems to have its own self-contained unity. . . . the exile is by definition incomplete without the memory of a former existence, the necessary yet deceptive proof of his or her being."²⁵ It is therefore essential that memory stay with the same figure, a figure that describes and secures home, so as not to be lost altogether. Exile's obsession with the frozen image of somewhere else thus engages in a process of metonymically reproducing, or as Seidel puts it, extending, the figure (the memory) of home in an endless line of extensions.

As discussed in chapter 1, the social imaginary needs a multiplicity of encounters to stay vital, lest it become, as Bakhtin observes in relation to cultural domains in general, “vacuous, arrogant, degenerat[e] and d[ying].” We saw that the main forces driving the American imaginary are, roughly speaking, transference and transformation, the future orientation of a new cultural and social space that is created in and creates its own image, so to speak. This is, I have suggested, nowhere more evident than in the ideological currents that carry Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” which institutes the imaginary’s promise safely within the myth of progress. In the very few encounters that appear in Menéndez’s stories, there is a marked distance and even impossibility of interaction between the two domains. The meeting between the guide, with his tourists, and the players in the park, serves as an example: by identifying the gestalt of the park as quaint and musealized, the guide’s words locate the park firmly on the outside of the American imaginary from which he speaks. This is an encounter between metaphorical transference and metonymic detachment, between future orientation and the backward gaze.

Similar meetings between cultural, if not social, imaginaries also take place in Menéndez’s “Hurricane Stories,” which stages a conversation between two unnamed protagonists, a man and a woman, one late afternoon on a beach. As the woman speaks from inside the imaginary of Greater Cuba, her discourse is fraught with a poetics of memory that structures her part of the conversation, the story she is telling, and the associations that well up as she is remembering. By narrating stories, the young woman tries to hold on to her place in the man’s life and mind: “I’m afraid if I stop talking, if I say something that makes his eyes narrow, that his love will disappear back into the folds of all those stories he hasn’t told me.” The two may be sitting next to each other; they may be in a relationship, but the woman’s efforts seem futile: “He says he understands. But he grew up with snow in the winter and fir trees against gray skies. I had Florida.”²⁶ Florida and Havana are blurred, however, and hence in reality the unnamed woman refers to the present absence so tangible in all of the stories, and to which there is little access from the outside.

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That “to be displaced is to be obsessed with memory” is also made amply clear in other parts of Máximo’s story.²⁷ Consider for instance the following passage:

After several glasses of wine, someone would start the stories that began with “In Cuba I remember.” They were stories of old lovers, beautiful and round-hipped. Of skies that stretched on clear and blue to the Cuban hills. Of green landscapes that clung to the red clay of Guines, roots dug in like fingernails in a good-bye. In Cuba, the stories always began, life was good and pure. But something always happened to them in the end, something withering, malignant. Máximo never understood it. The stories that opened in the sun, always narrowed in a dark place.²⁸

There are two principal figurations here. The first is the simile “roots dug in like fingernails in a good-bye,” wherein the latter part is itself a metaphor that conjures up the despair of departure. The second is a figuration of story as movement, likening the narrativization of memory to a journey and spatializing and localizing its beginning and end. Figuration is, however, inherently unstable and inaccurate, if for no other reason than that absence of figure does not exist. No language is neutral, and even what is referred to as the zero-degree style is, as Genette puts it, merely “a sign defined by the absence of sign, the value of which is perfectly recognized.”²⁹ In a wider sense, all figuration is “both a deviation from one possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation towards another meaning, conception, or ideal of what is right and proper and true ‘in reality.’”³⁰ Its more specific operation, writes Genette, means that:

Between the letter and the meaning, between what the poet has written and what he thought, there is a gap, a space, and like all space it possesses a form. This form is called figure, and there will be as many figures as one can find forms in the space that is created on each occasion between the line of the signifier . . . and that of the signified.³¹

The figure that surfaces in Máximo’s description of storytelling after closing time can be named suspension, capturing a Janus-like obsession with memory and oblivion: it both connects Máximo

with and separates him from his old home, and its figural presence is what Roland Barthes compares to “the motif of a hovering music.”³² Furthermore, suspension, prefigured by the exilic mode, finds its place in a metonymic architectonics of memory. By naming exile’s desire and its opposite, loss, the figure of suspension also spatializes the tension between the increasingly frequent dreams and daydreams Máximo has and his actual, everyday life. These (day)dreams all center on his dead wife Rosa, and his recollections of when they were young. Sitting alone at the pine table in his small apartment, Máximo finds his mind increasingly drifting back to when they met, when their children were little, their years in Havana, when they were first living and working together in Miami. The intensity of these dreams is such that “he’d begun to see her at the kitchen table as she’d been at twenty-five.”³³ Máximo spends more and more of his time living in a recuperated absence, thus creating for himself an existence that analogizes the inherent fictitiousness of exile itself:

He saw her at thirty, bending down to wipe the chocolate off the cheeks of their two small daughters. And his eyes moved from Rosa to his small daughters. He has something he needed to tell them. He saw them grown up, at the funeral, crying together. He watched Rosa rise and do the sign of the cross. He knew he was caught in a nightmare, but he couldn’t stop. He would emerge slowly, creaking out of the shower and there she’d be, Rosa, like before, her breasts round and pink from the hot water, calling back through the years. Some mornings he would awake and smell peanuts roasting and hear the faint call of the manicero pleading for someone to relieve his burden of white paper cones.³⁴ Or it would be thundering, the long hard thunder of Miami that was so much like the thunder of home that each rumble shattered the morning of his other life. He would awake, caught fast in the damp sheets, and feel himself falling backwards.³⁵

The dream images are evocations of “somewhere else” and can be read as a series of synecdochic representations of that. In this sense they illustrate Jacobson’s assertion that “the development of a discourse may take place along two different semantic lines: one topic may lead to another through their similarity or through their

contiguity."³⁶ The images in the last part of the passage are particularly conspicuous in this respect. Rosa "calling back through the years," the "smell [of] peanuts roasting," the "call of the manicero," and "the thunder of home" are all parts of a whole, projections evoking pieces of Havana in the present spatiotemporality of a present absence, or an absent presence. This accumulation of synecdoches furthermore illustrates how "an exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another."³⁷ The double orientation in Máximo's discourse generates a discursive tension that ultimately results in a conflation of the distinctions between Havana and Miami—then and now. For instance, in the phrase "each rumble shattered the morning of his other life," it is unclear what, precisely, "other" refers to. Máximo's "other life" is, consequently, his present life, but one constituted by suspension between places and between times, never quite coinciding with itself—and therefore never quite real.

This dissonance can also be heard in the story "The Perfect Fruit." The two protagonists here are Raúl, whom we recognize from *Domino Park*, and his wife Matilde. The story takes place in their house, interrupted by numerous regressions into a past that, we understand, haunts Matilde. It begins as she is trying to digest the probability that her son is going to marry a woman Matilde does not care for. She is standing in the kitchen, contemplating the banana trees in the backyard that Raúl planted eight years ago, foolishly, in her opinion. She had been angry with him at first, since the trees ruined the green of her nice even lawn, but "each day after that she thought less and less about the trees until they passed into a deep part of memory that was almost like forgetting."³⁸ The image of the trees receding into the dark shades of oblivion will become central, and, in fact, a prefiguration of a moment of collapse not entirely unlike Máximo's in "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd." Just as the trees after all this time suddenly begin bearing fruit, Matilde's own past rushes in to haunt her in a different kind of offering.

We follow her over a few days, as she frantically makes all kinds of dishes from the bananas that overflow in the backyard. All of this is in preparation for the dinner where her son and his future

wife will make the announcement of their engagement, which Matilde dreads. While she cooks she is also drawn back through the years to a past that she may have suppressed but that now returns relentlessly. The catalyst for this process is an old photograph of her and Raúl on their own wedding day. In it, there is also another woman. Minutes before their son and his future wife arrive for dinner, Matilde confronts Raúl with the long-forgotten picture:

“This is my favorite photograph,” Matilde continued, “because in it, for all time, is Adriana Monterrey leaning over you, her black hair spilling across your shoulder like a Spanish shawl.”

Raúl frowned and wrapped his arms about his stomach.

“Do you remember Adriana, Raúl? Oh, she was beautiful. You must remember her. In this photograph, she was kissing you on the cheek. Of course, in friendship. But the camera caught the stars in your eyes. I’ve never seen you as happy since. That smile!”³⁹

The image is frozen in Matilde’s mind in two different ways. The moment that the picture refers to carries a crisis, and at the same time this crisis is eternalized by having been photographed. This reflects Roland Barthes’s observation on photography that “it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Túche*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.”⁴⁰ The absolute Particular in its never-changing form, moreover, embodies what Lacan elsewhere refers to as “the rails of metonymy,” a perpetuation of a moment of encounter when Matilde sees frozen in time and in the mind the interception of her marriage. However, this event is a metonymy of another, more radical rupture that doubles the experience of dislocation. For the real breach comes later, when Matilde arrives in Miami with their infant son to join Raúl, only to discover the distance that has been created between them: “Raúl was in the back, next to the doors. But Matilde didn’t shout out. When he turned, he looked first to Anselmo. They walked toward one another and finally Raúl hugged her, patting her back as someone comforting the sick. Anselmo began to cry.” The gap is not bridged, and the pho-

tograph becomes its emblem: "We live alone in our own core, flitting over the surface now and then, pretending."⁴¹

Tropes of the Imaginary: "Little America" on the Outside

Rendering the unfamiliar familiar through tropological mapping of the kind I have described so far also occurs in more concrete cultural and cultural contexts. One may take as an example the turn Catholicism took in northern New Spain in 1531. The story is that the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego in the shape of a brown Indian woman on the former site of an Aztec temple. The Roman Catholic Church eventually granted the appearance the status of a miracle, and from then on La Virgen de Guadalupe has been Mexico's and Mexicans' patron saint. To the indigenous people, however, the Virgin carried the elements of the ancient Aztec belief system that were necessary for a religious icon. The basic structure of the target domain (Roman Catholicism) was not fundamentally altered, but rather imposed upon and recoded by the source domain (Aztec religion). A similar metaphorization occurred in the transition to Christianity in Norway in the eleventh century, where some of the symbols on early church edifices display an unmistakably pagan character reminiscent of the decorations used on Viking ships. These architectural structures are, literally speaking, unchanged in their basic principles but adorned. Moreover, as hybrids, these new culturological metaphors are logical and successful outcomes of a process of figuration (or troping, or mapping) whereby understanding and acceptance occurs. Indeed, they are quite literal illustrations of transculturation. Domino Park in Menéndez's representation is not among these figurations; that is not its function. It is there to evoke and spatialize an "elsewhere."⁴²

I turn now to the variations of such figuration in a concrete, nonliterary place. Lister is the name of a region in southern Norway, and, as is the case with so many other places around the world where cultures touch, traditions meet, and people live the realities of encounter, the locale illustrates a tropological orchestration influenced by "relations stretched out," strangely echoing the aforementioned choreography of "Greater Cuba" in Menéndez's fic-

tional stories. I return to this peculiar dialectics and its meaning in relation to the American imaginary toward the end of this chapter. What follows now is the story of a “Little America.”

When the shipping and fishing industries in southern Norway collapsed in the 1870s, whole villages left for the New World, as happened in so many other places in Europe around the same time. As a recent memorial in one of the villages in the Lister region reflects, the moment of saying farewell was marked by painful realizations that there might be no returning home. Depending on the weather and the ship, the southern Norwegians had between five and eight weeks to experience the Atlantic crossing as a physical transference in which daily sunsets and sunrises marked the passage of real time. Thus embodied, gazing up from the ship’s deck at the slowly rotating skies, they were slowly distanced from their point of origin. Looking in from the outside gradually became a looking back, until the emigrant had become the immigrant, the change in status reflecting the transition from departure to arrival.

To the migrants from Lister, however, this modality was different, and notions of “home” and “not home” were kept spatially discreet yet temporally unified. These migrants never really left: their gaze was always turned back toward their home on the other side of the ocean, in a now-familiar pattern of work migration. In effect, they avoided having to choose between looking in and looking out, between departure and arrival. Instead, they created a middle space where their position in relation to the boundary between “home” and “away” was inherently temporary. Also, their engagement with and negotiation of the American imaginary as enabling filter were different; they were not aspiring to become full participants in it. In Europe, only Ireland saw more of its people leave for the United States than did Norway, and in this already extreme situation the Lister region, in the Vest Agder province in the south of the country, was among the areas that sent the most. Specifically, the transition from sailing ships to steamships in the 1880s and the ensuing recession in the coastal areas, which aggravated the pre-existing impoverishment caused by population increase and exhausted farmland, finally forced people to leave. Emigration from

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Lister started relatively late in the Norwegian context, but when it really got going, the population in local townships quickly decreased. In the 1920s, 34 percent of people born in Lister were in the United States; in some villages, more than half of the population had at one point or another made the crossing. Even to people who stayed behind and never made the passage themselves, names like Brooklyn, Chicago, New York, and New Jersey were often far more relevant and meaningful reference points in their everyday lives than were Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim, the largest Norwegian cities. Even if most of the sojourners stayed in the United States, many more returned than anywhere else in the country, and work migration continued longer in Lister than in most other places. In 1920, a full 26 percent of the “out-wandered” had returned for good, whereas in other provinces the percentage of remigration was as low as 3 percent. A local historian explains that:

Already at the end of the 1880s it was apparent that the emigration from Agder to America had a different character than the emigration from the inland. The southerners participated in creating a new emigrant tradition that considered the States as a temporary work market, where one could save up money. . . . If it was necessary, the father in the house went over to the U.S. for a period of 2–3 years, while the wife and the kids ran the small farm at home.⁴³

This pattern can to a significant extent be ascribed to a preexisting tradition in these southern areas of sailing and taking temporary work abroad. As early as the seventeenth century, people from the coastal parts of the region had gone to Holland in order to earn better livings as sailors and housemaids, and a tradition and culture of going abroad to work had been established at an early time. Consequently, these seafaring communities could draw on an old and familiar habit and tradition in their journeys to the United States. Already, after the peak in the 1920s, the pattern of work migration had become notorious: men left their homes, determined to come back after a few years, often taking the oldest son with them on their last trip, to set him up before they themselves retired. From that point onward, we can speak of commuter traffic between Lister and, for the most part, Brooklyn and Chicago, even if the

migrants also went to Duluth to work in the forests, to Alaska to work in the gold mines, and to Tacoma and Seattle. Wherever they went, however, few settled on the land, and the following recollection from an elderly remigrant to Kvinesdal suggests that a great many of the emigrants from the Lister region left with a distinct objective of returning:

When I 40 years ago traveled through the large Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Dakota, I could find reasonably pure Vossebygder, Sognebygder, Hallingsbygder and Valdresbygder,⁴⁴ but never did I find entire townships or communities of people from Agder [the province that Lister and Kvinesdal are located in]. They did not put their mark on the village. People from Vest Agder love their homes more than most.⁴⁵

Young men left in the spring and returned around Christmas with a year's salary to show for themselves, much as seasonal workers do everywhere. The former Norwegian consul general in San Diego Oswald Gilbertson was part of this commuter traffic. He recalls in his memoirs that:

Many of the emigrants in the 1960s became commuters. They worked hard for two to three years and saved their money. They returned to Kvinesdal, built a house, a barn, bought farms and land. When the money ran out they took another trip. These commuters had an enormous influence on the community economy.⁴⁶

The traffic between the United States and Kvinesdal continued into the 1960s and 1970s but has since subsided. An economic upswing in the home country and thus in Lister made it unnecessary to leave. Indeed, many who at this point lived in the United States returned to find good jobs at home, especially in the offshore oil industry. However, the legacies of the intimate relationship that once existed between the two worlds remain very much alive. Most families still have close relatives in the United States, and many young men still go over to work with uncles and cousins or more distant relatives for shorter periods of time, especially in the construction business, even now. The local travel agency in Kvinesdal is called, not surprisingly, "The USA-Expert," and the manager

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explains that “It was established in 1969 precisely because of the traffic between America and Kvinesdal. Many of those who had emigrated now returned to the old country. The father in the house, however, would often commute between the U.S. and Norway, since the wages were still higher there and jobs were easier to find.”⁴⁷ The persistent contact between old and new produced a curious and culturally idiosyncratic locale, where architecture, language, habits, and traditions from both places blended into each other over time, as a literal exemplification of “relations stretched out” into a classic example of a contact zone. Because these legacies have continued to exist on intimately personal and individual levels, they have proven strong and enduring, and the past thrives in the present in a variety of concrete, tangible, and, most importantly, dynamic ways. The physical downtown in Kvinesdal may be among the most striking illustrations of the actual institutionalization of symbolic carryover from the history of American sojourns. The typical southern Norwegian town is, by steadfast regional tradition, characterized by small, white-painted, wooden houses lining narrow streets and alleys. This architectural aesthetic is a source of pride and, of course, a tourist attraction, to the occasional despair of innovative people who do not have a cultural or personal connection and commitment to that same tradition. In the township of Kvinesdal, however, what resembles a wide main street runs between two rows of stores and houses, with each side having what seems to have been intended as parking space. This accommodation of vehicles gives away the off-beat identity of this small town, and, whether or not the layout can be traced to a culture of cars, the work migrants did bring all kinds of things American back with them, among them vehicles. As the community thrived on the money brought back from the United States, the development of the downtown presumably adapted to habits related to driving, which the infrastructure of the white-painted classic town could not handle.

Another somewhat related landmark also reveals this influence: overlooking the downtown, from one of the hillsides surrounding the valley, there used to be a medium-sized hotel, which I always suspected was the only real motel in Norway. It was torn down in

2009, but when I began working on this book it was still there. I decided to ask a local historian about its genesis. He turned out to be the original owner's nephew and brought out a little pamphlet in which his uncle had written the story of the hotel. "In February/March of 1961," the uncle writes, "I undertook a journey to the U.S. to visit four siblings and other relatives who lived there. I also wanted to spend as much time as possible traveling around the country to take a closer look at and study something I had only read about, namely the building and running of motels."⁴⁸

These are among the more obvious testimonies to the concrete cultural influences that America has exerted on this small southern Norwegian community. It may be, however, that the less conspicuous ones, the bizarre details, tell us more profoundly how the imaginary travels. I used to live in one of these villages as a kid, and while I did not think much about it then, I remember well the kids who started school each fall. They had names like Mary Ann and Stanley, Samuel and Steven and Arleen, and they sometimes spoke a funny kind of Norwegian. Some only spoke English. But there was nothing unusual about this, about friends who spoke English at home, about their cars with wooden doors, the coming from and going to America of older siblings. More memorable and spectacular, at least to a child, were the amazing Christmas decorations. In the 1970s Norwegian Christmas traditions tended to be modest and simple, but not in Lister. There were reindeer with blinking eyes and noses on the roofs, big fluorescent Santas in the gardens, strings of lights on the trees. I was transfixed, and I never saw anything like that until twenty years later, when I spent my first Christmas in the United States. It was only when I moved away that I realized I was using words that no one outside of my village understood: they were English words phonetically pronounced in Norwegian, "trunk," "sink," "strit" (street), and Norwegian words weirdly diphthongized. Gilbertson calls this mix "Brooklynnesian," describing it as the Norwegian language complemented by English words that received idiosyncratic pronunciation.⁴⁹ He too notes that for years he thought they were normal Norwegian words.

In 2010 the township of Kvinesdal built a bridge across the river, and to celebrate its opening, middle school students and their teach-

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ers performed a line dance to Alan Jackson’s “Good Time.” A fair number wore cowboy hats. As a spectator who is familiar with the feelings and practices that define this community, I was not really surprised, and I rather enjoyed the festivities—hats, music, and all. At the same time the ease and naturalness of the performance itself were quite striking; it did not seem like an artificial staging in any way, or like a performance of forgotten traditions evoked on special occasions, a slice of a musealized past. No, this very much seemed like an integrated production, matter-of-factly looked upon as a suitable way of honoring the opening of a bridge. The event makes a remarkable contrast with similar but reversed commemorations in, for instance, Norwegian communities in Minnesota and Wisconsin, where retrievals of the signatures of the Norwegian imaginary are performed as precisely musealized pieces of symbolism, unhinged from the flow of lived time and often exaggerated beyond recognition.

However, watching the line dance was also a partly unsettling reminder of other, less charming elements of cultural identifications that arise from “relations stretched out” in the township. Among the young dancers, a boy was wearing a t-shirt with the notorious Confederate flag splayed all over the chest, not knowing, one presumes, the associations the image continues to evoke in those who know its history. Or perhaps it was deliberate, for the flag vividly brings to mind instances of local vigilante justice when the police have been run out of town, the episodes of gun violence, the not entirely rare moments when the same Confederate flag has flown on the back of a pick-up truck, the unflinching love of a certain strand of country-and-western music, and a “Texan” self-reliance. Indeed, the master of ceremonies did jokingly refer to the township as “Little Texas,” a further specification of this Little America that I shall return to.

All of these examples present different and varied aspects whose full culturological significance is noticeable only when you have a certain inside knowledge. While all small places everywhere trail shadows of local traditions and practices peculiar to their own genealogies, it is hard in this case to overlook the pressures from such genealogies elsewhere. The tropological orchestration of Domino

Park in Menéndez's story, set against the backdrop of Greater Cuba, is not essentially different from the example of Little America (or Little Texas) in southern Norway. The motel on the hillside that until recently overlooked the main street spatializes into existence the idea or the image of something far away, in the same way that the park performs its role of enacting an imaginary elsewhere. However, in the case of this Little America, the question is, what is being (tropologically) enacted?

Although the majority of the work migrants commuted between southern Norwegian villages and metropolitan centers such as Chicago and New York, what transpires in actual translation is generally an all-American small town, and more specifically one filtered through an interpretation of the Southwest. It is worth repeating Castoriadis's previously quoted observation that "The imaginary has to use the symbolic not only to 'express' itself (this is self-evident), but to 'exist', to pass from the virtual to anything more than this."⁵⁰ In a rather intricate turn of events, the passage between the American imaginary and the Kvinesdal township has followed a pattern of translation, transculturation, and transvaluation that has stayed notably faithful to that imaginary elsewhere. The problem, if we can call it that, is that the passing from virtual to "anything more than this" is the transiting of a particular kind of *interpretation*. This is not as much a mistranslation as a distillation, but, quite unlike the reverse order in the Minnesota example, in which Norwegian customs and traditions are sometimes reenacted almost *ad absurdum*, it corresponds to compatible and lived interpretations on the inside of the imaginary elsewhere. If the concept of the social imaginary enables the oscillation between the idea or ideal as an image of something and the real as it materializes in practices and understandings, then the concrete example of Lister brings that alternation into relief, and it does not matter if the elements do not match actual experience, if the local history is not grounded in Texan specificities.

The idea and ideal of the imaginary are what matters, and as the two travel across the Atlantic they are given a certain shape. If we now add that, as Terence Turner says, "'Synecdoche' may be defined, in general terms, as a specific relationship between metaphor

and metonymy, as when a part of a whole (a metonymic relation) also replicates the form of the whole (a metaphoric relation)," the variance between the example of Little America or Little Texas in southern Norway and that of Greater Cuba in Menéndez's fictional setting is further clarified. It is a transculturated "form" of the American imaginary that passes from virtual (the idea of the small town) into "more than this," but it is the replication on a contiguous line of the Cuban imaginary that occurs in Domino Park. In both cases, the dynamic in the encounter with the American imaginary of transference takes us squarely back to Sacvan Bercovitch's analogy to chess and variations: if "America" is a middle game, and the old world (what is left behind) is an endgame, then the master trope of synecdoche is at once flexible and conceptually resistant enough to enable the kind of translations each example stands for.⁵¹ However, the endgame variation could in this context be said to be carried out contiguously and retrospectively, a modality to which the backward-looking gaze of forced migration more easily conforms and that also shuts off the inherent metaphoricity of what Bercovitch describes as "continual movement toward endings that issues in an endless affirmation of beginnings."⁵² "Beginnings" are not the point. As we saw, it is the return that matters.

The juxtaposition of these two very differently originated and constituted participations in the American imaginary underscores the figure of suspension that dominates the choreography of both as they carve into existence their respective versions of a living past. One is generated from the peculiarity of exile, the other from the increasingly common and global pattern of work migration. Suspension, however, not only shapes the actual institution of the subimaginary (the Cuban and the American out of place) but also determines the (minor) degree to which negotiation with the American imaginary is carried out. In each of these two cases, this occurs for wildly different reasons, but with curiously similar outcomes. In the case of Little America, I suggest that it is the cultural imaginary, not the social imaginary, that has been transposed and its idea and ideal instituted as the small town. In the case of Greater Cuba, it is the other way around: Menéndez's characters exist in the American social imaginary, but not in the cultural one. There is a definite split

between the two, and these representations thus address the routes of other similar participants in the American imaginary (or any other “host” imaginary), who, by choice or by force, are excluded from transitioning into the schema of transference and mobility. This is also a part of the focus of the next and final chapter, which returns to the movie *Sugar* and the larger, more complex issues that center precisely on interpretations of the institution of the imaginary: whose imaginary is it?