

Conscientious Objector: Non-Objects and Indexes in Darío Escobar's Sculpture

Tell Dick to study the history of the five Central American republics. They clearly exemplify the modern fallacy of assuming that the economy is at the bottom of everything. In Central America there is no economy: only bad passions.

— Aldous Huxley, Letter to Naomi Mitchison, 1933.

by José Luis Falconi

It has not yet been confirmed, but there might be not one, but two Darío Escobar's out there, producing for most of the last decade or so some of the most defining works of contemporary art in Central America.

The first one, the most celebrated and known one, is the one who, in the late nineties became an instant success after his irreverent take on the high brow baroque objects of his native Guatemala—usually associated to religious Catholic imagery—as he (re)covered prosaic, “daily life” objects with goldleaf. Thus, the disposable McDonald Cups, Cereal Boxes as well as the running shoes and gym stationary bicycles completely recovered by the shiny aura of the high Guatemalan baroque, followed the most traversed of roads, paving it (almost literally) with gold: the one that goes from fast-food to the gym. Draped—or stamped, one the glitter, the elegantly critique of any third world ruling class was clear at the beginning of millennium: eating American cereal in the morning, wearing Nike running shoes, hitting the stationary bike at the gym, were all symbols of status in the same fashion/way that the baroque altarpieces he has appropriated the techniques had during not only Colonial time but still even nowadays all through Latin America.

This subtle but poignant critical stance to consumerism was taken even further by his next series of works which pushed on the equivalence between sports paraphernalia and religious imagery, as he recovered a number of sports objects— surfboards, baseball bats, basketball hoops, among other objects—with the silverware metalwork proper, once more, of the altars of the high Guatemalan baroque. By drawing out their functionality by covering them with the most sacred of armors, he put his finger on/over an undeniable fact for not only Guatemalan or Latin American societies nowadays, but of global reach: sports is the religion of the new era; sportsmen (in their exaggerated lifestyle, a counterpoint of ascetic discipline and bling-bling studded excess) are the ultimate role models of the youth, and their props are sacred relics worth making altars for.

Such conflation of high and low brow art proved irresistible for a world (the art world, we should say) which was just then expanding its horizons in order of making itself the “global” phenomenon it is now—trying to incorporate as many artists into what we now call “contemporary art.” The nascent body of work of Escobar played, therefore, to the hands of an art system eager to “globalize” itself through the incorporation of artists with not only “global concerns”, but one

who were capable of presenting them by using the same contemporary syntax, sort to speak, while bringing to the table a local vernacular, appropriated for the occasion –especially when such operation came from artists at the fringes of the global economical system, such as Escobar did.

If Central America, as the epigraph by Aldous Huxley that precedes this text points out, has been always seen as a place “outside” the economical system, then the more reason there was to champion (and treasure) the small tokens of contemporariness that even such remote regions were capable of producing. In other words: these Escobar’s works implied by themselves a conflation/cancelation of the critical distance between the modern and pre-modern in the same way “maquilas” did it: their raw material (i.e. themes) were local, but the design and style were “Western”.

Mesmerized by the fact that the once closed world opened up all the suddenly and welcomed them with open arms, the artists of the Escobar’s generation didn’t notice –for a while, at least –the way in which a new type of pigeonholing started to develop –one which became so entrenched with years that is still nowadays very much at play. And the problem with this new type of pigeonholing, as it became more apparent with time, is that it was not a degeneration or error of the “global”, but actually a function of the way in which “global art” was established –a feature inherent to the system itself.

In order to understand how and why such typecasting was not a deviation but a reasonable consequence of the model, we need to remember the way the scaffolding of the “global” was erected as the final/ultimate horizon in the region and the hegemonic order. In other words, it implies to understand how the furthering of the “global” was done by incorporating new thematic and contexts of different places and traditions at the expense of them surrendering other types of expressive possibilities or even techniques that they might have had or favored. As any system, the global art system one required to have only one coordinating set of rules (one lingua-franca) under which the newfound objects, themes, artists could circulate. The acceptance of only one set of values over a number of other competing ones, naturally implied a homogenization of the kind of objects and artists that could be circulated across borders. In order for the world art world to be global, the globe itself needed a little flattening, and such little flattening was done at the expense of several the national or regional narratives and the obliteration of any artistic tradition which could not be align with the major currents championed from the metropolis.

Case and point: by the time the latest “global” impulse first arrived to the shores of Latin America in the mid to late nineties, the hegemonic narrative that articulated the way in which the region understood and organized its own cultural production was one predicated on the critical difference that the region’s identity had with its European and Anglo-American counterparts. If on the whole we, Latin Americans, were part of the “West” (whatever that could mean), we were different enough to claim that “our tradition” was organized under a different set of values,

critically different from those espoused and promoted in Europe. The central reason tantamount to such difference: modernity. Heirs of minor gods (Portugal and Spain) within the European pantheon of nations, Latin American were hardly Western because they were dubiously Modern.

Thus, as the “celebration” (sic) for the five hundred years of the “discovery” of the continent in 1992 rolled in, Latin America was deeply set in a cultural paradigm which made its subaltern position within the West, the crucial mark of its cultural independence/autonomy for which what was stressed were their differences. Situated as the very limits of the West itself, Latin America played faithfully the role of its (deformed)inversed mirror: if the West was rational, Latin America was naturally irrational; if the West was industrialized and materialistic, Latin America was earthy and mystical. In the binary reduction between the Modern West and its uncivilized outskirts, Latin America served (proudly) as the ultimate frontier space: the locus of the West’s dreams (both, grandiose and disastrous), the place where the most farfetched dreams were actually naturalized, the place where even the craziest metaphors became concretized. The most celebrated and perdurable one of these formulas was, no doubt, the one proposed by Cuban writer Alejandro Carpentier by which Latin Americans were naturally that which Europeans had dreamed off and therefore were constitutive better than them: if it took centuries to Europeans to dream up the Surrealist deliriums, Latin Americanwere naturally, at the avant-garde because we were ontologically surrealists. That is how the sub-continent, all the sudden, ended up living in a “magical realist” realm.

This is not the place for a detailed reconstruction of/on how this self fashioning came to be the hegemonic version of what Latin America was—i.e. the way in which it understood itself culturally for over fifty years—what is important to understand is that, at its core, the “magical realist” definition, which by the late nineties felt so restrictive in its modernist militancy, and unfair in its provincialism, was at some point the most effective way of linking Latin America with the Western canon. Carpentier’s formula was powerful because it managed to transform the backwardness and belatedness of the region into an asset: it implied one of the first effective declarations of independence from the European mold because it proposed a particular positioning in relation to such tradition. Because we could not make the case to be part of the foundations of such tradition—how could we!—we were inserted at the other end, at the one of their ultimate dreams and desires. In fact, if by the mid nineties, the formula felt too modernist and old it was because it was, alas, old and modernist.

Thus, to one to become part of the hegemonic global discourse, and latch their wagon to the engine of “contemporariness” (that is, of recognition, biennales, symposia, colloquia and retrospectives across the globe), young artists started to produce works in the discourses and currents championed by what trendy in Berlin, London or New York, but critics and art histories started to revise national histories to make them to centered not on the differences but on the similarities with the hegemonic Western canon.

The problem with some Identitarian dilemmas proper to our corner of the periphery is that they are as perpetual as they are nonexistent. That is: one cannot overcome them because it is precisely in one's effort that suddenly they are substantiated and appear appallingly concrete.

Unfortunately, even if poorly understood, their recurrence is not simply a mere problem of semantics, and thus, because engaging in their dissolution is both futile and counterproductive (as they come to being only when one is trying to dismantle them), a better way to deal with them might start by gauging the pervasiveness of a number of seemingly insurmountable false dichotomies.

Indeed, anyone who has ventured into the handful of roads that a few (historically based) academic disciplines have forged in an effort to reduce the critical gap between the margins of civilization to the cultural metropolis, knows that the cumbersomeness of its routes is almost entirely caused by falling into, over and over, the same false leads produced by the same recurrent false dichotomies it has tried to bulldoze over and over. It is a maddening trail: Just as one thinks they are "solved" and behind us, they reappear in the horizon, disguised with the flashiest newest costume of the time.

Judging from the place where these roads have inexorably lead us—a dubious "inclusion" at the expense of "exoticization"—one can not help wonder if the whole endeavor is flawed due to the very terrain that they try to cover. It might just be that the inherent shortcomings of these enterprises stem from the simple (but devastating) fact that the peripheral condition is actually logically defined as an endless trapping in a fog of recurrent dilemmas—as a chronic condition which is paradoxically reinforced by some of the most genuine efforts to overcome its limitations. A critical examination of where we stand will reveal to us how dubious it is to declare that "Latin America" (sic) has gained any terrain (aka "made any progress") since the first (and still unpaved) roads for inclusion were forged in order to wedge in some of the most relevant Latin American artistic production (mostly coming from the literary field) into the Western Canon in the 1950s. The whole thing might just be a non-starter

For such reasons, we shouldn't be surprised to recognize the same structural flaws in the latest "autobahn to the metropolis" produced by the Art Historians of the American academic establishment circa 2000 ac. Unveiled with unrivaled bombastic fanfare and in the slickest of styles (after all, false dichotomies have, by definition, the trendiest of appearances), this new route of inclusion into the Western canon not only promised fast lane access, but valet parking at the door of each of the most important museums and collections in the United States. And so, for almost a decade already, one only needed to follow the party trail, one cocktail reception after the other, to be reassured that we were (definitely, finally, inexorably!) in. By all measures, and according to all the reports, we had arrived.

But, amid all the celebration, the question we sort of forgot to ask is: where exactly had we arrived and under what conditions had we been admitted? No bad faith is to blame for such obliviousness. The fact that we came in our own limos, driven by our own drivers, and that we were able to meet the strict clothing etiquette made it

almost inappropriate to inquire about the criteria for the invitation— it would have sounded as if we had a chip on our shoulders, wouldn't it?

After so many decades of just window-shopping museum collections, it is understandable to have been so overtly excited at the prospect of having our “own local narratives” mingling and circulating among those we have learned to admire and recognize as the most fundamental in the fabled saga of Western art. For the first time we were capable of adding a stable cast of characters to a soap opera known as modernity—a program that we know is in serious need of a new script or soon will be a series of tired reruns, but which nonetheless remains the biggest show on the Western marquee.

No doubt we needed to celebrate till we dropped. After all, we didn't need to drive anywhere else, to a suburb on the wrong side of the tracks, once the party was over. We were home. Somehow, our status had changed. And that meant that, finally, for the very first time we were going to move away from merely pointing out incidental biographical trivia of some recognized figures of the avant-garde—the already classic, “You know Roberto Matta was actually Chilean?” inevitably followed by, “and did you know Rachel Welch is Bolivian?”—to truly inscribe a handful of names in the main plot history of the Western canon.

It is in this context that Latin American art achieves its golden status—with a new list of a-listers was almost entirely drafted from the Brazilian and Venezuelan post-war schools, which replaced, the perennial Mexicans (the big three of muralism plus the token woman, Frida Kahlo) and the token tropical specimen, the Cuban Lam. And just as Venezuelan Kineticism and Brazilian Concretism and Neo Concretism became the new hegemonic case studies for the region, Helio Oiticica and Gertrude Goldsmitdt (Gego) replaced Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo as our stellar power couple.

But as this first decade of the new century draws to a close, and the hangover symptoms of a ten year continuous party start to become unbearable for some of us, one starts to wonder where this latest inclusion, despite the form letter in which it was announced, has actually lead us. Have we actually lost the “asterisk” completely or is the valet parking still secretly leaving our car at the handicap spot while we are drinking at the museum gala? And the problem with this is that by simply airing these doubts one is taken as a paranoid party-buster: to even think about it is taken as an unequivocal sign of the provincialism that this effort towards inclusion has tried so hard to overcome.

But just as not being paranoid does not guarantee that one is not being followed, to simply decide not to see certain things does not guarantee they are not there any more. And judging by the dense fog of false dichotomies that are driving some of the allegedly “outstanding achievements” in the Latin Americanist art historical academic circles and the (in)existential dilemmas in which much of the life and work of young contemporary artists are wasting away, the easy dismissal of any skeptical stance might not only be the real emblem of provincialism but, most profoundly, the clearest

case that, once more, we have not moved one inch from place we began. The whole thing might just have been (again) a non-starter.

The problem is localized at the onset of the route, as their topographers and planners, have tried vehemently to replace one extreme paradigm with its exact opposite, but have missed entirely the point (and the opportunity). The flawed structure still remains intact. If until only a couple of decades ago, one was sick and tired of having Latin American art “exoticized” for its otherness, these days one can only find celebrations of how actually in-tuned we have been with all the developments of European and American artistic practices all along the twentieth century. If the exclusionary side of the dichotomy tried to assert the place in the Western discourse by stressing its “complementary difference”—e.g. the unfaltering “othering” of Mexico as the very definition of the limits of Western discourse—the other, allegedly inclusionary side of the dichotomy is trying to weave Latin American art into the Western discourse by stressing (and trying to find, no matter what) a smooth continuity with it.

Thus, the new hegemonic vision through which Latin American art is now presented is, in what it could be the ultimate performative pun, the (inversely) “utopic” one. Its story line is simple: at the climax of feverish modernism, Europeans were producing “utopic models” left and right—models which promised a modern arcadia, where art and life would be once again rejoined. Then all of the sudden, the war came, and the utopian projects were discarded. The whole thing went astray up in Europe. But somehow, these ideas made their way into Latin America, and especially into South America, and because the region was largely untouched by the war, they sprung up again, albeit in their tropical version. The fertile soil, the warm climate and the naivete proper of the premodern condition made it remarkably easy for the utopias to adapt. If in Europe they were green houses experiments, in this side of the world they grew up wildly. We just needed to add water. In that way, the case for demanding our inclusion in the main story line of the Western art was clear: we needed to be part of the canon because we are the natural inheritors, the bearers of the utopian dreams cooked up at the height of modernism.

The funny thing about this version of history is that one does not need to be philologist to recognize, embedded in it, residues of some of the most arcane views of Latin America as “naturally wild” which are inadvertently reified. From the belief of the American continent as the natural place for Eden, to the depiction of the men natural of these shores as bon savants, the only natural thing about his view it is as much as a projection from the metropolis as all the others we have learned to reject on the basis of the exoticization they have fostered. The whole thing feels foreign because, alas, it is so. After all, it was created here (the U.S.) and has, among other things, the indelible imprint of American identitarian politics.

But these blind spots are precisely such because none of these issues seem to trouble none of the most important gurus and operators who seem happy cruising along, leading the way on the brand new highway, commanding our hordes into the final assault to the metropolis. Instead, they seem to be entrenched in an all out war of whether or not the American public is ready, prepared to understand

the difference between a Gego and a Frida Kahlo. One side of the (false) dichotomy believes that yes, they are ready, and strides to present their collections in what it might amount to the belated unveiling of a visual arts's Esperanto by which every gesture is somehow included (i.e. was always contemplated) in a meta-syntax of visual literacy almost geometrical tightness. After all, we might be only one unique family of (western) men. The other camp, tries to argue that Americans are not ready to understand such inclusion and, at this point in time, it is better to prep up, and dye even darker the stripes of the good old-tiger (i.e. to produce blockbuster shows of colorful inventive), in order make sure that everyone gets it: we are, after all, a whole different creature.

Leaving geometrical hopes aside: why does the American public matters in this matter? Honestly: could that be the ultimate criterion for the ways in which Latin American art is "included" in the (allegedly) universal grammar of visual arts? How come?

It is at this point when it becomes apparent that despite its slickness, the shiny autobahn is built on top of the same beaten paths we have transited forever. That is why the landmarks we are seeing now looked so familiar. The last time we tried this route was circa 1960s, right after the "boom" of Latin American literature, when we believed that the world recognition and celebration of a generation of our novelists who innovated on technique meant that we were finally in the Western canon without the asterisk. It took us some twenty years or so—when we picked up the latest great novel from Latin America at the Berlin airport only to discover that it was one by Angeles Mastretta—to realize that despite Borges we were actually not "in" the way we wanted.

And what failed in the literary field were not the writers, but the historians, cultural promoters and literary critics which came right after them, with their theoretical bulldozers to pave in and unveil the autopista al sur (to Paris) of that time. The disservice to the region was not done when *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published in 1967 in Buenos Aires, rather when at some point, some twenty years of bad literary criticism and historiography transformed a cultural gesture of emancipation into a metaphysical claim and we ended up ontologizing our difference. That is why—until very recently—if one was Latin American, the only way of getting invited to the big publishing houses parties was by getting dressed up in a Carmen Miranda custom.

But it is not so much the contemplation of how such quest for showing the cosmopolitan belonging reveals such a narrow minded, provincial anxiety, which makes it just a great contribution to the illustrious history of missing the point that has shaped our quest for identification. The danger lays in the homogenization and reduction of a whole set of issues in favor of an agenda that has, alas, nothing to do with "Latin America". Most importantly: attempting to produce Latin American historiography under this grid is particularly pernicious because it fixes the region into an inherent belatedness which is, effectively, the best way to make sure we never leave the asterisk behind.

Just as it was misguided to put all our marbles in the camp of the “intractable other”, it is also misguided and naïve to construct a story about ourselves which simply stresses the similarities and continuities we have with Western civilization. Typecasting, no matter how nice the mold or fond might be, is limiting by definition, and feels poignantly unfair when it is applied to such a liminal region such as Latin America.

Certainly, a bit more dozen years ago, artists and cultural critics of the region had good reasons to be fed up with the very narrow space opened for Latin American art at (still not so in your face) international scene, and used the last wind of their typewriters (after that, they will switch to computers) to do away with the type, decrying the restraints of the narrow characterization of the Latin American cultural production as “Magical Realist or nothing”. Something, clearly, had gone totally wrong with the negotiation made in the 60s and 70s, but the hard swing to all the other end of the spectrum that we are experiencing these days is feeling just as restraining and unfair. Both ends are ultimately toothless, inadequate to describe the various speeds and versions of modernity that coexist in such vast and heterogeneous region.

What is ironical, nonetheless, is not that they both end up producing the same distortion in the understanding of the vast cultural phenomena in the region, but that they are both the two sides of the same coin—a coin that we have been willing to tender, to give away, in order to be included in the Western Canon by trying to find ways in which we fit: either as the “other” or as the not so distant cousin. At the end, they are equal resultants of thinking, analyzing, and historicizing the production of the region in first and foremost European terms, a framework by which the cultural production of the region is valued insofar they are “contributions” to a larger historical framework in which we should be included.

The problem is, as it has been said, at the starting point: when one starts with Europe as its final destination, one actually starts from Europe too.

But what would happen if we leave the anxiety of inclusion behind? What would it mean to stop writing history, or promoting the understanding of Latin American cultural history as a sequence of periods or movements of “European flavor”—which only differentiation between them is the ways (i.e. closeness, proximity, or utter alterity) in which they relate to European developments.

If it possible to only think history and our legitimacy in those terms? What would that entail? Would that imply to discard the artists which we know hold as great masters of Latin American art because (and only because) they were great contributors to the Western Grand Narrative such Borges, Oiticica and Gego, among others?

Of course not. Nonetheless, it implies to try to find a way by which those artists are relevant to the region and, why not, lets say it, to their own national traditions.

Yes, you heard me right: I said national traditions.

Certainly, all of these artists should always be counted in. But they should always be counted in not necessarily because they are the most accomplished “modern specimens” we have had in our soils. Not only because they represent an interesting “variation” (of the tropical kind) of a European paradigm. This will be effectively assuming a secondary position, an inherently derivative standing, in relation to Europe. This spineless version of history will amount to no more than an uneven collection of epiphenomena and the astonishing subvert condemnation of the continent’s achievements are inherently belated.

What I am advocating here, therefore, is not a new “epistemology”, as some cultural commentators tried to propose in the excesses of the 1990s postcolonial fever. My proposal here does not change the rules of the game, it simply suggests the reasons why we might play it.

In effective terms this means not only to stop believing that the only way of ascribing value to cultural phenomena is by measuring vis a vis a supposedly monolithic Western Narrative. Seen that way, the Grand Canon is, literally, a musical canon: in which one aria/stage of human “progress”, such as “utopia”, is sang first in Europe or the United States and then repeated, three bars (or decades) later in Latin America. I want to think that we are a bit more than just an echo; and that history does not have the form of a cacophony of a Hegelian spirit moving westwards.

It actually implies to have it clear that our legitimacy as a cultural region is not based on the achievement of “universality” only by “western canonization”.

If we start by remembering that to make the case for the “universality” of a particular object is a very different thing from make its case of being canonical, we might be able to start losing the asterisk once and for all.

[In that way, we will be able to drop false dichotomies such as local vs. universal (when has universal not being local)?]

We need to decouple those terms. And the only way of decoupling them effectively is by doing historical analysis, critical history, that attend to our historical needs—those needs need to be our center stage. Only then we will be able to type away our critical history, without being just a type.

II. Mirages

There might not be fancier, shinier, or more futuristic packages than the ones in which nostalgia circulates every now and then.

Take, for example, the way in which once in a while the call of the wild, the allure of pristine, untouched nature, reaches our cities and becomes audible, soothingly tempting—even feasible. Actually, it should come as no surprise that even now, deep

into the postmodern era, when the tribulation of existence oscillates/ vacillates between the concrete solidity of our urban grid and the virtuoso virtuality of our daily existence, the call of the wild remains unusually prescient. And persistent. After all, if the tragedy of the virtual (wherein one can have anything one wants or be in perpetual contact with anyone but without having such interactions mean anything) is the withering of experience, then the return to nature promises just the opposite: its blossoming anew.

Thus, in stark contrast to the Facebook milieu which now engulf us—a medium which promises to potentially connect us with “everyone” (i.e. anyone), regardless of whether we even have anything to say to them; to connect with someone does not mean to communicate with them necessarily anymore—the return to pristine wilderness precludes any experiences but real ones. In that sense, “pristine nature” and “real experience” (as opposed to the virtual, or fake, or limited one) are equivalent, or at least they are logically related. And the outcome of the equivalence is, predictably, couched in terms of authentic selfhood: one should retreat to pristine nature because it is the locus of “real experiences,” and therefore the locus of one’s self-discovery. To be attuned with pristine nature is to be attuned with one’s inner, real self.

This formula is, of course, hardly new. Since it was first penned by Wordsworth and company—in society as a whole, the poet is not only the one who still really feels and experiences, but such emotions must be “recollected in tranquility” in order to be written—the connection has spurred complete generations of Northern Europeans and Americans to try to “find themselves” in nature, developing over the centuries a culture (and its industry) of the “outdoors”. If there is anyone The Northface, Orvis or REI need to thank for their outdoorsy empires in North America, it might not be Lewis and Clark, but Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau, who ended up securing a privileged space for untarnished nature in the American psyche.

In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me in my eyes) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulated through me; I am part of a particle of God (Emerson, 6).

In fact, as it has been proven in other latitudes (most notably in Latin America, as we will see), for all their macho allure and super human prowess, the adventures of explorers are not enough to foster a culture in which selfhood and nature are interdependent. Quite the opposite: the explorer does not try to find himself or herself in nature, but tries to find something for himself in it. A world of difference or, better said, an era of difference is packed in this slight syntactic difference: if the Romantic idealist might prefigure an ecological postmodern conscience, the explorer is the embodiment of a staunchest version of modernity. And it is precisely this antagonistic relation with wilderness embodied by the conquistador (the most primitive version of the explorer) that needs to be brought to the forefront when considering our uncertain tropical terrains.

After all, it was here, amidst the unforgiving vegetation and hardcore terrain, that for more than three centuries explorer after explorer—from Hernán Cortes to José Celestino Mutis—came to find glory (and riches) in their exploits. And it was here that over their vanished shadows a cultural blueprint of two antagonistic loci was established, implemented, and developed: civilization vs. barbarism, the letter (and ordered) city vs. the ungovernable, untamable wilderness. In fact, if there is a defining feature of Latin American culture is precisely its complicated relationship with its natural surroundings.

For that reason, syllogisms that derive selfhood from natural surroundings, as the one exhibited by Emerson and other Romantics, have been seldom articulated on and around these shores. And, when uttered, it has been utterly displaced.

The historical explanation for such a stark difference from North America is multifaceted, and has to do in part with the peculiarities of the “reconquista” of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors—a process that culminated the same year the Spanish set foot in this hemisphere—but mostly with the fact that Romanticism was a first reaction to the project of Enlightenment that swept Northern Europe and the nascent Industrial revolution that it bore. With almost a century of perennial belatedness (Spain did not become industrialized until the late XIX century), the version of Romanticism that reached the Iberian Peninsula was already weakened and anachronistic, for which reason it was almost inexistent when it finally arrived on these shores. Romanticism is perhaps the faintest, most inaudible of the ghosts of modernity that ever visited the continent