

# Piglia's Macedonio, Klossowski's Nietzsche: Echoes of Pierre Klossowski's *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* in Ricardo Piglia's *La ciudad ausente*

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**Abstract:** Ricardo Piglia's novel *La ciudad ausente* (1992) depicts a conspiracy set in motion by Argentine writer Macedonio Fernández in the years before his 1952 death. This essay studies how Piglia constructs this conspiracy in dialogue with Pierre Klossowski's landmark reading of Friedrich Nietzsche in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969). Klossowski encounters in Nietzsche's writings a far-reaching conspiracy aimed at the foundations of the nineteenth-century social order. This essay suggests that Piglia's depiction of the Macedonian conspiracy in *La ciudad ausente* emerges from his study of Klossowski's *Nietzsche*. It begins by highlighting similarities between Klossowski's work and Piglia's conspiratorial understanding of the historical avant-gardes. It goes on to read *La ciudad ausente* in dialogue with Klossowski, showing how Piglia harmonizes Macedonio's conspiratorial projects with those of Nietzsche. It concludes with a study of how, in the later essay "Teoría del complot" (2002), Piglia cites figures such as Nietzsche and Macedonio in his reflections on the possible formation of new conspiracies against the neoliberal social order of the twenty-first century. By reading Piglia with Klossowski, this essay illustrates how Piglia's understanding of the relationship between conspiracy, literature, and the modern social order emerges out of his parallel interpretation of Nietzsche and Macedonio.

**Keywords:** Ricardo Piglia, Macedonio Fernández, Pierre Klossowski, Friedrich Nietzsche, Conspiracy

In a 2002 conversation with Roberto Bolaño, Ricardo Piglia makes the following assertion about his compatriot and literary forebear Macedonio Fernández, who passed away in 1952: “Algunos de nosotros pensamos que quizá el siglo próximo será macedoniano” (“Conversación”). He had previously voiced a variation of this thought in Andrés Di Tella’s 1995 documentary *Macedonio Fernández*: “Macedonio está en la ciudad. Él escribió la obra del porvenir. Sus libros transcurren en el futuro. El siglo próximo será macedoniano.” Both of these quotes recall a statement made by Michel Foucault about Gilles Deleuze (and Pierre Klossowski) in Foucault’s 1969 review essay “Theatrum Philosophicum.” Struck by the grandiosity of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, Foucault predicts that Deleuze’s works “will continue to revolve about us in enigmatic resonance with those of Klossowski, another major and excessive sign, and perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian” (343). Both Foucault and Piglia defer the impact and proper comprehension of their peers or predecessors’ works to a future that for Foucault can still be located in the twentieth century, and for Piglia extends into the twenty-first.

Over the final decades of the past century, Piglia undertook a broad-based endeavor to situate Macedonio (who is conventionally referred to by his first name) into a Franco-Germanic philosophical tradition that stretches from key twentieth-century figures such as Foucault, Klossowski, and Deleuze, back to foundational writings by Friedrich Nietzsche. For Piglia, what unites these figures is their critique of the foundations of liberal modernity, and their pursuit of lines of flight beyond the liberal order. Piglia seeks to situate Macedonio in this tradition, but he also, through his re-reading of Macedonio, lays the groundwork for a neo-Macedonian critique of neoliberal modernity at the close of the twentieth century.

This essay studies Piglia’s insertion of Macedonio into this philosophical tradition. It focuses in particular on his dialogue with Pierre Klossowski, the influential French writer and artist whose reading of Nietzsche as a philosopher of the conspiracy in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969; henceforth *Nietzsche*) not only inspired Foucault and Deleuze (among others), but also demonstrates important affinities with Piglia’s work on literature and conspiracy.<sup>1</sup> In *Nietzsche*, Klossowski proposes that in the wake of Nietzsche’s experience of the eternal return, his philosophy takes the form of a conspiracy in which small cells of exceptional individuals cultivate forms of life that would transcend the processes of standardization that, for Nietzsche, govern modern society. Piglia, in a series of reflections stretching from the 1986 volume *Crítica y ficción* to the 2002 essay “Teoría del complot” (where Piglia cites *Nietzsche* and recalls reading it in the early 1970s), gravitates toward a similar understanding of the historical avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, positioning them as conspiratorial cells of artistic and political activity that, like Klossowski’s Nietzsche, charted paths beyond the liberal order of their time.

The centrality of the conspiracy in Piglia’s body of work is well established and is something of a common ground in Piglia criticism.<sup>2</sup> His dialogue with Klossowski, however, has been largely overlooked, apart from a footnote in Bruno Bosteels’ *Marx and Freud in Latin America* where the author suggests that “[t]he key to Piglia’s view [on the conspiracy] ... can be found in the notion of the complot as a combat against culture, which he derives from Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*” (274, footnote). The first part of this essay follows Bosteels’ suggestion, setting *Nietzsche* in dialogue with Piglia’s writings on the conspiracy in the 1990 lecture series recently published as *Las tres vanguardias*, where Piglia outlines his understanding of the avant-gardes as conspiratorial responses to the crisis of liberalism. When read with Klossowski, Piglia’s lectures produce a panorama of the period stretching from Nietzsche’s lifetime into the twentieth century in which the German philosopher coexists with a

1. See Smith (2017) for an introduction to Klossowski’s philosophical project and its influence on thinkers such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard, and Baudrillard.

2. See, among many others, Fornet (2006) for a study of the conspiracy in *La ciudad ausente*; Kelman (2012) for a study of Piglia’s understanding of the relationship between politics, literature, and conspiracy; and Montaldo (2019) for a recent reflection on how Piglia’s notion of the *complot* takes shape against the backdrop of new ideas concerning literature that emerged in the 1970s.

cast of like-minded anti-liberal conspirators, such as Macedonio Fernández, whom Piglia positions in *Las tres vanguardias* as the foundational conspirator of the Argentine avant-gardes.<sup>3</sup>

The second, and longest, part of this essay proposes that Piglia's engagement with Klossowski's *Nietzsche* extends to his second novel, *La ciudad ausente* (1992), which is set in a vaguely futuristic and dystopian Buenos Aires and features Macedonio Fernández as a central character. In its pages, a newspaper reporter named Junior investigates a conspiracy set in motion by Macedonio in the years prior to his 1952 death. The conspiracy revolves around a storytelling machine, imagined by Macedonio and constructed with the help of an émigré engineer named Emil Russo, which translates fictional texts and real-life events into an endless sequence of narratives that would at once preserve the existence of Macedonio's deceased wife, and resist the totalitarian aspirations of a hyper-vigilant state. In its story of Macedonio's conspiracy, *La ciudad ausente* draws on key elements of Piglia's conspiracy-based understanding of the avant-gardes, and actualizes some of the visionary qualities that Piglia alludes to in his comments on the Macedonian century to come. It also, and simultaneously, casts its gaze backwards, situating Macedonio in the conspiratorial tradition that stretches back to Nietzsche.<sup>4</sup> This becomes particularly apparent when the novel is read in dialogue with Klossowski's *Nietzsche*.<sup>5</sup> Macedonio's conspiratorial thought, like that of Nietzsche, emerges in the wake of a particularly powerful experience: a radically depersonalized glimpse of reality unbounded by the self that befalls Macedonio in the wake of his wife's passing, and which has similar effects on Macedonio as the experience of the eternal return has on Nietzsche. In both cases, these intense experiences catalyze the development of conspiracies that take aim, respectively, at the foundations of modern society (in *Nietzsche*), and at the totalitarian aspirations of the modern state (in *La ciudad ausente*).

The following study of Piglia's novel proposes that Klossowski's basic premise—that “as Nietzsche's thought unfolded, it abandoned the strictly speculative realm in order to adopt, if not simulate, the preliminary elements of a conspiracy” (xv)—echoes throughout the pages of the novel, and that Piglia's Macedonio is constructed via implicit reference to Klossowski's *Nietzsche*.<sup>5</sup> In an essay on another of Piglia's works, “Homenaje a Roberto Arlt,” Bosteels illustrates how a visible story about Argentine literature, in which the novelist employs the figure of Roberto Arlt to reflect on the relationship between Argentine literature and political economy, coexists with a hidden story concerning left-wing understandings of the social function of literature. Bosteels reads this hidden story in terms of two key referents, Bertolt Brecht and Mao Zedong, whose names do not appear in the text but whose ideas have a secret presence in the story's plot (198). The following pages propose that *La ciudad ausente* can be read following a similar logic, with the secret story of Klossowski's *Nietzsche* lying behind the visible story of Piglia's Macedonio.<sup>6</sup>

By focusing on how Klossowski's *Nietzsche* reverberates through Piglia's critical and literary texts, this essay builds on existing readings of *La ciudad ausente* that have highlighted connections between the novel and the works of other key figures in critical theory (most commonly Deleuze and Guattari).<sup>7</sup> It also demonstrates the surprisingly central place that the Nietzsche/Macedonio nexus occupies in Piglia's work on the conspiracy, from the panorama of avant-garde conspiracies that Piglia studies in *Las tres vanguardias*, through to “Teoría del complot,”

3. This privileging of Macedonio stands in contrast to Piglia's earlier work. Famously, the 1980 novel *Respiración artificial* positions Roberto Arlt at the origin of modern Argentine literature: “El que abre, el que inaugura, es Roberto Arlt. Arlt empieza de nuevo: es el único escritor verdaderamente moderno que produjo la literatura argentina del siglo XX” (133). In *Las tres vanguardias*, in contrast, Piglia dates the emergence of avant-garde literature in Argentina to the year 1904, “cuando Macedonio cambia todo” by beginning work on a literary project that, for Piglia, provides the reference point for the subsequent development of Argentine literature (77-78). While Arlt remains a key figure in *Las tres vanguardias*, Macedonio takes pride of place.

4. See Avelar, pp. 101-06, and Salmerón-Tellechea (2019) for studies of Piglia's treatment of Macedonio in *La ciudad ausente*.

5. This pairing of Macedonio and Nietzsche displaces a more traditional tendency in Argentine literary historiography to associate Nietzsche with the novels of Roberto Arlt. See Wells (2013) for an extended study of the relationship between Arlt and Nietzsche. While Macedonio does not engage significantly with Nietzsche in his writings, he was an assiduous reader of one of Nietzsche's key influences, Arthur Schopenhauer. Piglia's strategy might be understood as a positioning of Macedonio alongside Nietzsche, as post-Schopenhauerian conspirators who elaborated parallel conspiracies against liberal modernity at a distance from one another.

6. This is not to say that Klossowski's Nietzsche is the *only* figure lurking behind Piglia's Macedonio. See Morales (2020) for a study of the secret presence of Rodolfo Walsh in *La ciudad ausente*.

7. See Berg (1996), Sánchez Prado (2004), Page (2014), and Rojas (2014) for links between *La ciudad ausente* and the works of Deleuze and Guattari. *La ciudad ausente* invites Deleuzian readings at moments such as the following, where the woman/cyborg/machine at the novel's center is asked, “¿Qué es ser una máquina” (68), and she responds: “Nada ... Una máquina no es; una máquina funciona” (68). The dialogue glosses Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of meaning in psychoanalysis in *Anti-Oedipus*: “[t]he unconscious poses no problem of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not “What does it mean?” but rather “How does it work? How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work—yours and mine?” (108, emphasis in original).

where Piglia utilizes an extended commentary on Klossowski's *Nietzsche* to investigate the possibility of formulating new conspiratorial projects against the triumphant neoliberal order of the end of the twentieth century.

**PART I: "HAY QUE CONSTRUIR UN COMLOT CONTRA EL COMLOT": NIETZSCHEAN AND AVANT-GARDE CONSPIRACIES AGAINST THE LIBERAL ORDER**

Klossowski's *Nietzsche* begins by signaling a possibility that, according to the author, had hitherto been passed over by Nietzsche's readers: the possibility of interpreting Nietzsche's thought as the conspiracy of "an isolated individual" who conspires "not only against his own class, but also against the existing forms of the human species as a whole" (xv). As Klossowski emphasizes, previous Marxist readings had tended to circumscribe Nietzsche's conspiratorial intentions within his own class position. Against that established interpretation, in which Nietzsche's philosophy "necessarily reveals its complicity in a class 'conspiracy'" (xv), Klossowski insists on the expansiveness of the Nietzschean conspiracy: it aspires to reach all of humankind and enact a radical alteration of the "sensibility, emotivity and affectivity ... of each and every person" (200). Its target is equally expansive: it is the totality of modern society, which is understood by Nietzsche as the vast conspiracy of a social herd which he conceives (inspired by the ideas of Darwin) in terms of an overarching dynamic of "*gregarious conformity*" (76; due to Klossowski's heavy use of italics, all emphasis in quotes from *Nietzsche* is in the original). When Nietzsche speaks of gregariousness, he references the way in which the exceptional qualities that may occasionally arise in modern individuals are perpetually leveled down via an evolutionary social process, aimed at the conservation of the human species, in which the rare, the singular, and the exceptional are submitted to the impoverishing logic of standardization that permeates all aspects of social intercourse (76). Human language captures and codifies the unique in terms of the known, and economic exchange, following the principle of general equivalence, reduces all new and singular things to their capacity to be made equivalent to something else. For Nietzsche, modern society is governed by these gregarious processes. His conspiratorial projects aim to overcome this implacable social conspiracy that perpetuates the human species via the smoothing out of the exceptional.

Klossowski explains that the imperative of formulating a counter-conspiracy against this overarching social conspiracy emerges in Nietzsche's thought in the wake of a singular lived experience: the experience of the eternal return, felt by the philosopher in the alpine village of Sils-Maria in the summer of 1881. In Klossowski's reading of this experience, Nietzsche feels himself to fleetingly occupy the place of the singular and glimpses the possible emergence of a new humanity from the ranks of the gregarious herd. This experience persists in his mind with an obsessional force, and impels him to generate a series of conspiratorial projects revolving around the possibility of nurturing and developing a new human type through the isolation of a small group of "rare and singular plants" (166) whose singular qualities make them into a "'race' having 'its own sphere of life,' freed from any virtue-imperative" (166). By secluding such rare breeds into conspiratorial hothouses where their singularities could be cultivated, rather than neutralized, Nietzsche's "conspiracy of the Vicious Circle" (169) becomes a micrological conspiracy to combat the vast evolutionary conspiracy of modern society. Klossowski explains that, if nineteenth-century society "*conspires with gregariousness* by presenting *mediocre* beings as *strong*, rich and powerful beings" (169), the Nietzschean conspiracy aspires to produce "an insurrection of the affects *against every virtue-imperative*" (167). The new humanity cultivated through these conspiratorial activities would "blossom forth" (167) onto the stage of the vast Darwinian social conspiracy, radically altering the life of the nineteenth-century social herd.

In *Las tres vanguardias*, Piglia gravitates toward a similar understanding of how the conspiracy functions in the artistic and political avant-gardes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While Piglia does not directly cite Klossowski in these lectures, his later acknowledgment of the impact that Klossowski's *Nietzsche* had on him invites the possibility of associating the "gregarious" social conspiracy of Nietzsche with Piglia's description of the historical emergence of liberalism, and the Nietzschean counter-conspiracy with the artistic and political projects of the historical avant-gardes. Piglia's lectures highlight how the liberal state functions by way of what Klossowski might describe as its own "gregarious" procedures of consensus, transparency, and public debate, all of which aim to smooth out the rare and exceptional and shape society into a harmonious whole (*Las tres vanguardias* 79-83). The avant-gardes respond by forming conspiratorial cells of experimental action against liberalism's suppression of singularities through the perpetual production of consensus. As Piglia emphasizes, "toda la política de la vanguardia tiende a oponerse al gusto de la mayoría y al saber sometido al consenso," and the avant-gardes can be understood as "una práctica antiliberal ... una versión conspirativa de la política y del arte ... un complot que experimenta con nuevas formas de sociabilidad, que se infiltra en las instituciones existentes y tiende a destruirlas y a crear redes y formas alternativas" (83-84). As in the Nietzschean conspiracy, the emphasis is on processes of seclusion and experimentation in which the artists and writers of the avant-garde identify themselves as so many singular individuals capable of generating new forms of sociality that would burst forth from amidst the existing structures of liberal society. In this light, the avant-gardes are guided by an imperative that echoes the imperative felt by Nietzsche in the wake of the experience of the eternal return: "[h]ay que construir un complot contra el complot" ("Teoría" 4).

In *Las tres vanguardias*, Piglia positions Macedonio Fernández as Argentine literature's foundational avant-garde conspirator, identifying the beginning of the avant-gardes' conspiracies against the Argentine liberal order with the year 1904, when Macedonio began writing his unfinished novel, the *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* (78).<sup>8</sup> He emphasizes the centrality of the conspiracy in Macedonio's novel, stressing that "En el *Museo* se cuentan dos cosas: cómo se escribe una novela y cómo se hace una conspiración" (85), and he inserts this novelistic conspiracy into a series of other conspiratorial activities, such as Macedonio's ludic campaign for president in the early 1920, and a style of writing that reproduces the hermetic, private oratory of conspiratorial circles (83-85). He goes on to position Macedonio's *Museo*, which was posthumously published in 1967, as the foundational work in a conspiratorial tradition that includes the novels of Roberto Arlt, Leopoldo Marechal, and Julio Cortázar, as well as certain short stories by Jorge Luis Borges (85-86). Finally, and importantly, he insists that to comprehend the subsequent development of the Argentine novel, one must begin with Macedonio: "Colocar a Macedonio en ese lugar central es replantear los debates sobre la novela que se dan en el presente" (87). The following pages propose that Piglia, in dialogue with Klossowski, extends this endeavor to understand how "Macedonio cambia todo" (78) to his second novel, *La ciudad ausente*, which utilizes an imaginative retelling of Macedonio's final years and projects to reflect on the legacy of his conspiratorial approach to literature at the close of the twentieth century.

#### PART II: ECHOES OF NIETZSCHE IN *LA CIUDAD AUSENTE*

The plot of *La ciudad ausente* revolves around the storytelling machine invented by Macedonio. The reader learns of the machine (its history, its origins, and its reasons for existing) through Junior's investigation, which eventually leads him to Macedonio's co-conspirator, Emil Russo, who constructed the machine based on Macedonio's instructions in a workshop on a remote island in the Río de la Plata delta. In an extended interview with Russo, which concludes the investigative storyline that

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8. For Piglia's previous work on Macedonio, see also "Notas sobre Macedonio en un diario" (1985, subsequently published in *Prisión perpetua*) and the following texts from *Crítica y ficción*: "Sobre Borges" (1986) and "Ficción y política en la literatura argentina" (1987).

drives the novel's plot, Junior hears how Russo came into contact with Macedonio, and why the two men conspired to construct the mysterious machine at the center of the novel.

The Macedonio Fernández of *La ciudad ausente* is constructed via Piglia's knowledge of Macedonio's biography, but also, and perhaps more importantly, via a synthesis of two prominent interpretations of Macedonio's literary project. The first is the psychoanalytic framework forwarded by Germán García in the early 1970s for understanding the relationship between the 1920 death of Macedonio's wife, Elena de Obieta, and his subsequent literary production. García insists on reading Macedonio's writings as a response to the trauma of Elena's passing. He proposes that texts such as the *Museo*, which García describes as "el eterno museo de un duelo que se abisma en el infinito" (19), can be read in terms of Macedonio's extended endeavor to grant Elena a presence in writing in response to her absence in his life: "[l]a muerte real de Elena abre un abismo imaginario: la rareza del estilo de Macedonio muestra que es en otro lugar, en lo simbólico, donde debería intentarse una respuesta" (16, emphasis in original). Following García, Macedonio's *Museo* can be read to participate in this endeavor via the introduction of a pair of characters—the titular Eterna and a male character named El Presidente—, whose relationship has often been interpreted to reprise that of Macedonio and his deceased wife.<sup>9</sup> The chapters of the novel contain El Presidente and Eterna's metaphysical conversations on their love and its limits, and they also document the discontent that El Presidente feels when he ponders the (im)possibility of an experience of love in full plenitude. These reflections are interspersed with his parallel endeavor to overcome his discontent via the assembly of a group of friends who, in the seclusion of an *estancia* outside of Buenos Aires, conspire to enter into action and conquer the city in the name of beauty. In its interweaving of the story of El Presidente and Eterna's love with that of the conquest of Buenos Aires, the *Museo* invites the sorts of readings elaborated by García, in which the imaginary abyss opened by Elena's death generates a profound discontent that orients Macedonio toward projects which would allow him to respond to this personal tragedy.

In his interview with Junior, Russo echoes this perspective, explaining that Macedonio's machine was invented in the years after Elena's death, during a time when "todo lo que Macedonio hizo ... (y ante todo la máquina) estuvo destinado a hacerla presente" (46). Following García, the construction of the machine at the heart of *La ciudad ausente*, like the composition of the *Museo* in the final decades of Macedonio's life, provides Macedonio a means of preserving the existence of his beloved. García cites a verse written by Macedonio: "Yo todo lo voy diciendo para matar la muerte en ella" (qtd. in "Por Macedonio," 18). This verse could be read to express Macedonio's aspiration to construct a machine that, in the words of Idelber Avelar, "attempt[s] to cancel out death in a virtual world" (111). Via its endless stream of stories, the machine "todo lo va diciendo" in order to protect the memory of Elena from oblivion, and Macedonio's project becomes legible in terms of García's structure of personal loss and symbolic restoration.<sup>10</sup>

*La ciudad ausente* adds a second set of motivations for Macedonio's machine that draw on Piglia's own studies of Argentine literature. In the novel, Macedonio assumes the basic role of foundational anti-liberal conspirator that Piglia outlines in *Las tres vanguardias*, and his work on the storytelling machine is set against the backdrop of an Argentine literary field that demonstrates key points of contact with Piglia's critical texts. Leopoldo Lugones, for example, whom Piglia had considered in *Las tres vanguardias* as the leading figure in nationalist responses to the crisis of liberalism, reprises this role when he is referenced in the novel as the "enemigo principal" of Macedonio, and also as the founder of a tradition of "literatura policial" (abhorred by Macedonio) that is

9. See Bueno (2015) for a study of the figure of Eterna in Macedonio's novel. The connection of Eterna to Elena de Obieta is complicated, however, by Macedonio's later long-term relationship with another woman, Consuelo Bosch, whose presence in his life also seems to manifest itself in the novel's pages. See Camblong (2022) for a discussion of the Bosch-Macedonio relationship and how it affects a series of critical commonplaces regarding Macedonio's literary project and its relation to his wife's death.

10. As Piglia explains in "Notas sobre Macedonio en un diario," this structure also characterizes many of the central texts in the Argentine tradition, such as Jorge Luis Borges's "El Aleph," Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*, and the tangos of Enrique Santos Discépolo, where "[l]a pérdida de la mujer es la condición para que el héroe ... adquiera esa visión que lo distancia del mundo y le permite filosofar ... El hombre herido en el corazón puede, por fin, mirar la realidad tal cual es y percibir sus secretos" (*Prisión* 95, emphasis in original). The present essay suggests that *La ciudad ausente's* contribution to this tradition, developed in dialogue with *Nietzsche*, consists in linking this epiphanic vision of reality to the elaboration of conspiracies designed to act directly on the socially- and politically-constructed criteria that define "reality" at a given historical moment.

intertwined with the procedures of torture and interrogation of an authoritarian state that counted Lugones's son among its ranks (160-63). The novel also transposes Piglia's prior consideration of how Macedonio rearranges the general relationship between literature and politics that was established in the foundational texts of Argentine liberalism. For Piglia, liberal authors such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento tended to position political and literary language in a relationship of mutual exclusion: the political language of the State was linked to "la verdad, con todas sus marcas: responsabilidad, necesidad, seriedad, la moral de los hechos, el peso de lo real," and the language of literature was associated with "el ocio, la gratuidad, el derroche de sentido ... con el exceso, con el azar, con las mentiras de la imaginación como las llama Sarmiento" (*Crítica* 121). To the extent that, as Piglia emphasizes, women remained distanced from spaces of political power, fiction was furthermore associated with femininity, becoming "una práctica femenina, una práctica, digamos mejor, antipolítica" (121). Piglia positions Macedonio against this tradition, as "la antítesis de Sarmiento" (121), who unites (rather than separating) politics and fiction by demonstrating that the one is necessarily grounded in the other: "Porque hay novela hay Estado. Eso dice Macedonio. O mejor porque hay novela (es decir, intriga, creencia, bovarismo) puede haber Estado" (122). When Russo describes Macedonio's machine in *La ciudad ausente* as "una réplica microscópica, una máquina de defensa femenina, contra las experiencias y los experimentos y las mentiras del Estado" (142-3) he is glossing Piglia's argument. The machine, by occupying the "feminine" position of literary language, undermines what in Macedonio's time were still-prevalent distinctions between literary and political uses of language, and its capacity to resist the encroachments of the state is underwritten by Macedonio's epochal re-arrangement of fiction and politics.<sup>11</sup> In these and other moments of *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia draws on his studies of Argentine literature, extending them forward in time into the vaguely futuristic Buenos Aires where Junior investigates Macedonio's conspiratorial machine.

The Macedonio Fernández of *La ciudad ausente* is the grieving writer profiled by García and the anti-Sarmentine, avant-garde conspirator studied by Piglia himself. Yet, as the following paragraphs propose, Klossowski's *Nietzsche* might also be understood to echo throughout Piglia's depiction of Macedonio. Interestingly, when Piglia recollects reading Klossowski, he positions himself in dialogue with García, explaining that in the early seventies *Nietzsche* was a book "que discutíamos mucho con Germán García, con Oscar del Barco, con Ruth Carranza y con otros amigos, en los tiempos del grupo 'Literal' y de la revista 'Los Libros'" ("Teoría" 12). For Piglia, this early reading of Klossowski may have allowed him to glimpse possible ways of combining psychoanalytic interpretations of Macedonio's writing such as García's with the comprehensive reevaluation of the relationship between literature and politics that Piglia would pursue over the course of the following decades.

First and foremost, the Nietzschean conspiracy studied by Klossowski, like the Macedonian conspiracy of *La ciudad ausente*, is driven by dual affective and political motivations. The Nietzschean experience of the eternal return, and the imaginary abyss that is produced in Macedonio by Elena's passing, catalyze the subsequent formulation of conspiratorial projects that take aim at the foundations of the modern sociopolitical order. Nietzsche and Macedonio furthermore share a common emphasis on how sociopolitical modernization leads to a general impoverishment of human life. Where Klossowski emphasizes that, for Nietzsche, "equalization (in the guise of the democratization practiced by industrial society) implies ... a reduction of the human being" (165), Macedonio's political writings repeatedly emphasize how the modern state's drive to codify and legislate all aspects of human life impoverishes human existence.<sup>12</sup> In Junior's conversation with Russo, this vision of the impoverishing logic of modernization is extended

11. See Jagoe (1995) for a critique of Piglia's treatment of the feminine voice in *La ciudad ausente* as the "receptacle of memories, of masculine cultural histories" (13).

12. As Macedonio puts it: "[c]ada ley, cada orden nuevo de actividad que asume el Estado, es un nuevo empobrecimiento del individuo y cada fracción de libertad o iniciativa arrebatada al individuo, es todo un nuevo capítulo de empobrecimiento" (*Obras III*, 132).

forward in time as the engineer describes how Macedonio views the rise of Japanese industrial production as an indication of a new historical condition in which the entirety of humanity has been aligned with the examples of conformism and corporate duty that are embodied in the Japanese executives, workers, and technicians who have come to constitute “los representantes ejemplares del hombre moderno” (142). This emergent Japanese model is, for Macedonio, concretized in the story of a Japanese soldier who was marooned on a desert island and spent thirty years on guard against the enemy, mechanically following his long-ago-received orders without modifying his actions to fit his new, solitary reality. This reference to a sort of anti-Robinsonian man who can do nothing but perpetually obey the orders he has been programmed to carry out functions as a negative example for Macedonio, and it allows Piglia to build a bridge forward into the later decades of the twentieth century from the social conditions that Nietzsche and Macedonio critiqued in their writings.<sup>13</sup>

Both Nietzsche and Macedonio envisage the possibility of resisting this new situation in the isolated activity of groups of exceptional individuals, and they come to focus specifically on a potential alliance between scientists and artists. Klossowski explains that for Nietzsche, while science seems to be completely integrated into the gregarious conspiracy of perpetuating the human species, there nonetheless remains the possibility that it could be decoupled from, and turned against, the social herd. In this case science and art would become “sovereign formations” establishing themselves as “dominant powers, on the ruins of institutions” (145). In *La ciudad ausente*, Macedonio envisages a similar de-coupling of science, based on a mid-century situation in which politicians had come to place their faith in scientists, and scientists in turn placed their faith in novelists such as James Joyce, naming the basic particle of the universe the *quark* in homage to *Finnegans Wake* (141). This chain of alliances leads to a logical conclusion: the artists who conspire against society must ally themselves with the scientists: “[h]abía que influir sobre la realidad y usar los métodos de la ciencia para inventar un mundo donde un soldado que se pasa treinta años metido en la selva obedeciendo órdenes sea imposible” (142). In this way, the novel orients Macedonio toward the possibility of a similar sort of alliance between modern artists and the scientists to that envisaged by Nietzsche.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Nietzsche and Macedonio define the conspiracy in terms of a process of leaving the realm of theoretical discourse and acting directly on reality. In the conspiratorial activities envisaged by Nietzsche, “creation ceases to be a game at the margins of reality; henceforth, the creator will not re-produce, but will itself produce the *real*” (129). Macedonio, for his part, sees that the “cerebro japonés” (142) that guides the modern State has become a vast “mecanismo técnico destinado a alterar el criterio de realidad” (142). His conspiracy in *La ciudad ausente* is guided by the conviction that any act of resistance must directly influence, and alter, the criteria through which the modern State defines reality.

This harmonization of conspiratorial horizons is complemented by a similarly complex process in which Nietzsche and Macedonio’s conspiracies are articulated around prior experiences of a reality unbounded by personal identity. For Klossowski, the eternal return is experienced by Nietzsche at Sils Maria as an affective force, the “*hohe Stimmung*, the high tonality of [the] soul,” (59), which subsequently takes the form of a recurring thought in which the philosopher’s identity is perpetually dissolved and re-constituted in the circular recurrence of all things. As Klossowski puts it, “the metamorphosis of the individual is the law of the Vicious Circle,” and to adhere to this law is to commit to a perpetual “re-willing [of] all experiences, and all one’s acts, but not as *mine*: this

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13. This reference to Japan might be read as an echo of the well-known footnote on Japan found in the second edition of Alexandre Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, where Kojève elaborates a vision of a “Japanese” end of history, not as the harmonization of Man’s activities with Nature, but as the absolute separation of Man’s activities from nature into the pure form evidenced in Japanese tea ceremonies and flower arrangements (*Introduction* 158-62, footnotes).

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14. See Chiani and Bastile (1995) and Page (2015) for studies of Piglia’s treatment of science in *La ciudad ausente*.

*possessive* no longer has any meaning, nor does it represent a goal” (70-71). Macedonio includes in his metaphysical writings frequent descriptions, such as the following, of the universe as a universal sensibility, or “almismo ayoico,” that hews very close to this vision of the eternal return:

[Llamo] al Ser un almismo ayoico, porque es siempre pleno en sus estados y sin demandar correlación con supuestas externalidades ni sustancias ... Ayoico, o sin yo, porque es una, única la sensibilidad, y nada puede ocurrir, sentirse, que no sea el sentir mío, es decir, el místico sentir de nadie ... El ser es místico, es decir, pleno en cada uno de sus estados; esta plenitud significa: no radicación en un yo y no dependencia o correlación con lo llamado externo y lo llamado substancia. (*Obras* 8, 243)

This understanding of existence, in which the *yo* is dissolved into a universal sensibility, might be thought to underpin Macedonio’s conspiracy in *La ciudad ausente* and form its necessary precondition. The very possibility that a storytelling machine could preserve Elena’s existence from death is grounded in this vision of a reality that, as Russo suggestively puts it, “es interminable y se transforma y parece un relato eterno, donde todo siempre vuelve a empezar” (155). Macedonio’s machine aims to reproduce this reality by generating an infinite universe of stories, following a logic of translation that was set in motion when it was fed a single story, the Edgar Allen Poe story “William Wilson,” and subsequently emitted a new variation that bore the title “Stephen Stevensen” (41). From this initial transposition, its emissions have expanded to form an infinitely-proliferating series whose source materials include not only literary texts, but also the lived experiences of all of the city’s inhabitants. The machine is thought to function in perpetuity, such that versions of these stories—*all* stories—will cyclically recur in its transmissions. To incorporate Elena’s name, and her story, into the machine is to dissolve it into this universe.

The possible experience of the “Macedonian eternal return,” which would correlate to what Nietzsche experienced at Sils Maria, remains open to interpretation in *La ciudad ausente*, but Russo does describe one moment when it might have occurred. He explains that on the day after Elena’s passing, Macedonio, after remaining in a state of contemplative silence for various hours, suddenly began speaking with an odd, wavering voice, as if he had just been affected by a particularly intense experience. It was at that moment that Macedonio fixed his attention on the thought of a machine that could save Elena from oblivion by dissolving her story into a “relato eterno” whose general form would be that of “[un] río que fluye, manso, en el atardecer” (154). Ultimately, the question of whether *this* was the moment in which Macedonio experienced something like the Nietzschean eternal return is less important than the structural necessity that such a moment must have occurred at some point prior to the construction of the machine. For Macedonio’s invention to do what it proposes to do, its inventor, like Nietzsche in Sils-Maria, must have been affected by an experience of a reality unbounded by the self, which would then persist in his psyche as the obsessional thought driving his conspiracy.

Beyond its depiction of Macedonio’s conspiracy, *La ciudad ausente* demonstrates a second thematic point of contact with Klossowski’s *Nietzsche* in its treatment of the interplay between delirium and lucidity. Klossowski emphasizes that previous scholarship tended to misunderstand this relationship in Nietzsche’s writings. Due to the fact that Nietzsche’s philosophy obsessively revolves around the experience of the dissolution of personal identity, for many readers he seemed to fall prey to the excesses of “an interpretative delirium that seemed to diminish the ‘responsibility of the thinker’” (xv). If previous

readers had tended to attribute this “irresponsible” tendency to extenuating psychic circumstances (which would then be confirmed by Nietzsche’s 1888 mental breakdown), Klossowski refuses to situate delirium outside of Nietzsche’s thought. He insists instead that Nietzsche’s philosophy “revolved around delirium as its axis” (xv). In the wake of Sils Maria, Nietzsche’s work was defined by a perpetual tug-of-war between the lucid thought of the philosopher and the delirium of the eternal return: “his every effort was directed toward fighting the irresistible attraction that Chaos (or, more precisely, the ‘chasm’) exerted on him” (xv), and his conspiratorial projects take shape in the context of this conflict between the lucid thought of the philosopher and the delirious breakdown of personal identity.<sup>15</sup>

This effort reaches its culmination in the months leading up to the 1888 breakdown. In a series of letters written to friends such as August Strindberg, Jakob Burkhardt, and Cosima Wagner, the scales tip toward delirium as Nietzsche’s personal identity dissolves into a constantly-shifting series of signatures saturated with personal, historical, and philosophical resonances, including “Dionysus,” “Nietzsche Caesar,” and “The Crucified.” For Klossowski, this play of names marks the culmination of the cycle that began in Sils Maria: the “miraculous irony” (252) of Nietzsche’s letters marks the success of his philosophical project, but it equally marks the collapse of his lucidity: “[n]ow that the agent ‘Nietzsche’ is destroyed, there is a festival for a few days, a few hours, or a few instants—but it is a sacrificial festival” (253). *Nietzsche* concludes with this image of the sacrificial festival: the flow of names in the letters marks the culmination of a project in which the philosopher’s exercise of a “thought that was lucid to the extreme” (xvi) leads to the “jubilant dissolution” (252) of the personal identity marked by the proper name “Nietzsche.”

A similar process of dissolution takes place in the pages of *La ciudad ausente* via a story that complements Junior’s investigation of Macedonio’s machine, and which centers on a character named, precisely, “Elena Obieta.” Elena’s status in the novel is open to at least three interpretations. She may be the story-transmitting machine itself, an automaton that is animated by the spirit of Macedonio’s deceased wife. Alternately, she may be a psychotic patient at a Buenos Aires psychiatric clinic who *imagines* herself to be the machine created by her now-deceased husband to save her from death. Finally, she may also be a political operative sent to infiltrate that clinic and expose the nefarious activities carried out within its walls (the torture of political prisoners, perhaps), who is *pretending* to be a psychotic patient in order to gain access to the clinic which, in this reading, becomes a clandestine site of state-sponsored torture.<sup>16</sup> Without resolving Elena’s status, the novel concludes with a delirious monologue spoken by her, which is readable, alternately, as an additional emission of the machine, as the ongoing manifestations of Elena’s psychosis as she lies bound to the hospital bed, or as the delirious thoughts of a woman submitted to the inquisitorial procedures of a torturer who demands “nombres y direcciones” (79) and threatens to “deactivate” her unless she provides the information he is requesting. In this monologue, Elena’s discourse slowly breaks down into a stream of feminine names that recalls the “jubilant dissolution” of Nietzsche’s thought in his letters:

He sido lo que he sido, una loca argentina a la que han dejado sola, ahora, abandonada para siempre ... Yo soy Amalia, si me apuran digo soy Molly, yo soy ella encerrada en la casona, desesperada, la mazorca, soy irlandesa, digo, entonces, soy ella y también soy las otras, fui las otras, soy Hipólita, la renga, la cojita ... soy Temple Drake y después, ah viles, me hicieron vivir con un juez de paz. (163-4)

15. See Wells (2013) for a study of Nietzsche and Arlt from the standpoint of delirium (and its eventual triumph in their writings) that resonates with the current reading of *La ciudad ausente*.

16. On the relationship between the novel and the political violence of the Argentine military dictatorship, see, among others, Avelar (1999) and Rojas (2014).

Through her repeated affirmation of identities that are not “hers,” Elena’s monologue repeats the Nietzschean sacrificial festival, and if she is taken to be the “soul” of Macedonio’s machine, then these final pages might be understood to at once dramatize the machine’s functioning and mark the success of the conspiracy. Elena’s story flows into those of Amalia, Molly Bloom, Temple Drake, and Hipólita, and each of their stories will flow back into hers in future transmissions of the machine.

Klossowski, however, resists straightforwardly reading Nietzsche’s final letters as indications of the success of his philosophical project. While Klossowski’s language is affirmative—he speaks of “jubilation” and of “euphoria”—, his interpretation is equally disturbing, due to the fact that, as he repeatedly emphasizes, Nietzsche’s euphoria is only attained at the price of his mental collapse. In the pages of *La ciudad ausente*, Elena’s delirium can also be understood as equally extraordinary and disquieting, due to the way her euphoric resistance to both oblivion and the totalitarian state is superimposed with depictions of psychosis in the psychiatric clinic and with clandestine scenes of torture. Moreover, when the three possible storylines concerning Elena are unified under the sign of the Nietzschean delirium studied by Klossowski, a dark shadow falls over even the most “jubilant” of these possibilities, according to which her delirious discourse would mark the success of the machine as a means of perpetually resisting the machinations of the state. While in the closing paragraphs of his interview Russo broadly acknowledges this success, he then proceeds to identify it with a *crime* whose victim is none other than Elena herself: “[!]a realidad es interminable y se transforma y parece un relato donde todo siempre vuelve a empezar,” he tells Junior, but he goes on to add that “[s]ólo ella sigue ahí, igual a sí misma, quieta en el presente, perdida en la memoria. Si hay un crimen, ése es el crimen” (151). In Elena’s divagations and in the final letters of Nietzsche, the individual’s lucidity is sacrificed to the delirium of an unmoored discourse in which the self is dissolved into the flow of an eternal *relato*.

In addition to the story of Macedonio’s machine and the drama of Elena’s delirium, *La ciudad ausente* exhibits additional points of contact with Klossowski’s work in its vision of how language, and works of art, relates to the bodily processes at the root of human experience. Early in his interview with Junior, Russo provides a brief definition of the *relato*. “Un relato no es otra cosa que la reproducción del orden del mundo en una escala puramente verbal. Una réplica de la vida, si la vida estuviera hecha sólo de palabras” (139). He then adds an important caveat: “[p]ero la vida no está hecha sólo de palabras, está también por desgracia hecha de cuerpos, es decir, decía Macedonio, de enfermedad, de dolor y de muerte” (139). When Macedonio highlights the fraught nature of the *relato* (it inevitably elides the body, as well as the sickness, pain, and death that define life), he approaches what for Klossowski is a key distinction in Nietzsche’s thought. Nietzsche understands the translation of bodily experience into symbolic language according to a logic of deception: “[w]e are only a succession of *discontinuous states* in relation to *the code of everyday signs*, and about which *the fixity of language* deceives us” (41). The entirety of his philosophical project is aimed at overcoming this gulf separating the body’s states from the code of signs: “Nietzsche’s obsessive thought had always been that events, actions, apparent decisions, and indeed the entire world have a completely different aspect from those they have taken on, from the beginning of time, in the sphere of language” (251). The delirium of Nietzsche’s final letters marks the ironic success of his project: “*the fixity of signs ... no longer exists*” (252) as the philosopher lives the absolute coincidence of the bodily intensities and a now-unmoored linguist sign.

Klossowski studies Nietzsche's endeavor to overcome the opposition between the fixity of language and the fluidity of the body's states via a conceptual framework that is structured around the concepts of the *impulse*, the *phantasm*, and the *simulacrum*.<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche situates the fluctuating impulses that govern the human body at the heart of existence. These impulses, which are incommunicable in nature (the fixity of language betrays them), generate obsessional images that Klossowski calls phantasms, and which include the phantasm of the self—the substance supposed to unify the body's chaotic play of impulses, which both Macedonio and Nietzsche critique in their philosophical writings—, and the image of the eternal return as it irrupts in Nietzsche's life experience. The simulacrum, finally, is defined as "the *willed* representation of non-willed phantasms" (133) and is akin to a mask that relies on visual and/or verbal signs to clothe the phantasm in a communicable form. Klossowski distinguishes between two categories of simulacra: first, the disavowed simulacra of the intellect, which submits its phantasms to the reality principles of science and morality and passes them off as "objective" or "real"; and second, the artistic simulacrum, which, by passing the phantasm through the principle of form, "essentially reconstitutes in its own figures the conditions that have constituted the phantasm, namely, the intensities of the impulses" (134). Whereas the simulacra of the intellect are ultimately gregarious in nature, smoothing out the turbulence of the impulses for the good of the social herd, the simulacra of art can potentially remain faithful to what Nietzsche identifies as the primordial function of the simulacrum: "to *lead human intention back to the intensity of forces*, which generate phantasms" (140). For Klossowski, Nietzsche's philosophy unfolds on the interior of this understanding of reality, in which the perpetual production of simulacra at once falsifies the impulses of the individual, but also offers the only path back to the intensive forces at the heart of human existence.

In a text titled "El otro país," written in the years when Piglia began preparing materials for *La ciudad ausente*, the story of the life of a North American expatriate named Steve Ratliff gives way to a sequence of *relatos* narrated by a machine-like entity that presages the storytelling machine in *La ciudad ausente*. That entity defines its process of narration in the following terms:

[n]unca sé si recuerdo las escenas o si las he vivido. Tal es el grado de nitidez con la que están presentes en mi memoria. Y quizá eso es narrar. Incorporar a la vida de un desconocido una experiencia inexistente que tiene una realidad mayor que cualquier cosa vivida. (*Prisión* 43).

Glossing Klossowski's terminology, the machine-narrator defines narration as the exteriorization of a phantasm: an incandescent "something" is experienced with an uncanny clarity, and to narrate is to incorporate this phantasm into the life of another via a simulacrum that reproduces its invisible power. It is perhaps this model of narration that Piglia articulates into the heart of *La ciudad ausente*. Junior's investigation leads him to the story of Macedonio, an artist-inventor driven by his own personal phantasm: the experience, felt in the wake of his wife's death, of a reality unbounded by the (equally phantasmatic) notion of the self, which drives him to construct a machine that would at once preserve that experience in an endless sequence of artistic simulacra, and combat the reality principle of an increasingly totalitarian modern state.<sup>18</sup>

In this light, one additional *relato* in *La ciudad ausente* takes on special significance due to how it thematizes the Nietzschean phantasm of an existence beyond the fixity of language. This story, transmitted in the form of an anthropological report written by a man named Boas, recounts life on an island where language is subjected to random un-moorings in which the words utilized by the island's inhabitants rearrange themselves in alterations that should not be

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17. See Smith (2005) for a detailed study of Klossowski's use of this terminology.

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18. See Castañeda (2008) for a reading of *La ciudad ausente* in dialogue with Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum

thought of as distinct languages, but rather as “*etapas sucesivas de una lengua única*” (120; emphasis in the original). In its depiction of a world characterized by the non-fixity of the linguistic sign, the *relato* inverts the Nietzschean pursuit of an unmoved language. The inhabitants of the island, like Nietzsche, are gripped by the obsessive thought of a reality existing outside of their language, and they are just as convinced that their language falsifies this reality. While their ancestors have dreamt for generations of “un tiempo en que la lengua era un llano por el que se podía andar sin sorpresa” (127), the inhabitants of the island remain trapped within a sign system that passes through an endless cycle of intensive, fluctuating states. To attain the fixity of the sign would be to fall into a state of delirium that stands opposed to, yet mirrors, the delirious culmination of Nietzsche’s philosophical project. Idelber Avelar emphasizes the way in which the embedded *relatos* in *La ciudad ausente* take on an allegorical signification as “encrypted emblems of [Junior’s] interpretative struggle facing Macedonio’s machine” (110). In this light, the language spoken on the island might be taken to allegorize the functioning of the machine: it annuls death (the idea of a dead language is impossible) in the same way that the machine annuls the death of Elena by submitting her story to its endless permutations.

#### CONCLUSION: CONSPIRING AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM AT THE CLOSE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In *La ciudad ausente*, the stories of Macedonio, Elena, and the island visited by Boas flow into each other like communicating vessels, and are interspersed with a series of other vignettes that are generally understandable as additional transmissions of Macedonio’s machine. While Junior’s investigation links these stories together, it is not interpretable as a meta-story that would frame the interspersed transmissions due to the fact that the novel repeatedly broaches the possibility that Junior’s story *itself* may be nothing more than one additional series of transmissions. *La ciudad ausente* is a bundle of stories that are relayed to the reader as if they were all transmissions of the machine, and the figure of the machine (rather than that of the author) is positioned as the entity behind the stories told in its pages. This double status of *La ciudad ausente*, as a novel that is about a conspiratorial machine but that can also be understood as the transmissions of that machine itself, positions its creator (that bundle of impulses designated by the proper name “Ricardo Piglia”) as a neo-Macedonian conspirator whose novel-machine extends the conspiracy depicted in its pages. To fully understand the stakes of this extension, it will be necessary to return once more to the pages of *Nietzsche*, in order to set Klossowski’s actualization of Nietzsche’s philosophy in 1960s France in dialogue with Piglia’s own work on the Macedonian conspiracy in the final years of the twentieth century.

Throughout *Nietzsche*, as Klossowski reconstructs the historical conditions of Nietzsche’s conspiracies, he also relates Nietzsche’s writings to the social context of his own time. Klossowski views the 1960s in terms of industrialism, which he defines as “a concrete form of the *most malicious caricaturization* of [Nietzsche’s] doctrine” in which “the regime of the Return has been installed as the ‘productive’ existence of humans who never produce anything but a state of *strangeness* between themselves and their life” (171). The decades following Nietzsche’s experience at Sils-Maria did not, as Nietzsche prophesied, see the emergence of a new human type. Rather, industrialism came to dominate humanity through the infinite proliferation of industrial methods of producing commodities. This delirious expansion of industrialism produced “a new and totally amoral form of gregariousness ... the ‘super-gregarious’—the Master of the Earth” (171). In this sense, while Nietzsche spoke of the superhuman, industrialization demonstrates that, as Klossowski puts it, “[he] should have said: the *inhuman*” (171). The fate of Nietzsche’s

conspiracy is ultimately a tragic one as the phantasm of the eternal return is caricatured in the triumph of industrialism.

In *La ciudad ausente*, Piglia repeats this process of actualization, positioning the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s and the global resurgence of liberalism as events that mark the potential catastrophe of the conspiracies of Macedonio and the historical avant-gardes. Where Klossowski focuses on industrial society, Piglia focuses on a modern state which in the novel is an amalgamation of the liberal state targeted by Macedonio's anti-liberal conspiracies, the totalitarian state whose rise Piglia witnessed in the 1970s and 80s, and the neoliberal state of the 80s and 90s. These three state-forms are united under what might be thought of as liberalism's arch-conspiracy to enact absolute consensus through the suppression of exceptions to its logic. If Macedonio recognized this aspiration and envisaged the machine as a means of resistance, he did not foresee the state's later triumph, as the military regimes of the seventies and eighties paved the way for the contemporary neoliberal state. In the novel, the state's delirious application of methods of torture marks a vanishing point where the state has become, like Macedonio's machine, a machine for infinitely reproducing the stories of its citizens: "[e]l Estado conoce todas las historias de todos los ciudadanos y retraduce esas historias en nuevas historias que narran el Presidente de la República y sus ministros" (143). *La ciudad ausente* thus re-occupies the position occupied by Klossowski in Nietzsche: both books are written in the wake of a "super-gregarious" triumph (Klossowski's "industrial society," Piglia's "Estado"), and both seek new means of resisting that triumph.

When Piglia turns to Klossowski's *Nietzsche* in the final pages of "Teoría del complot," he addresses these issues directly, taking as his starting point Klossowski's interpretation of Nietzsche's breakdown as "el anuncio de la inminencia de una catástrofe" (12). The catastrophe, for Piglia, is that of the global triumph of neoliberalism, which threatens to eclipse the conspiracies of Nietzsche and the historical avant-gardes. The Nietzschean conspiracy of experimentally isolating exceptional individuals to work toward "la constitución de una nueva clase de sujeto" is betrayed, as Piglia emphasizes, by a neoliberal economy, "[que] se ocupa de hacer eso de un modo invertido, esto es, de extirpar a esos mismos sujetos y de anularlos" (13). In this light, as Piglia puts it,

ese anuncio que Klossowski lee en la enfermedad y en el aislamiento extremo de Nietzsche en Turín es un efecto del triunfo del cálculo económico por encima de cualquier poder, la maquinación económica como práctica que se realiza en otra dimensión e invierte las predicciones de Nietzsche. (12)

For Piglia, the recent success of neoliberalism necessitates a reconsideration of the conspiratorial projects of Nietzsche and the historical avant-gardes, whose reaction to the possibility of the imminent victory of economic calculation seems particularly pertinent at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Piglia searches for the bases of a renewed, anti-(neo)-liberal conspiracy in a series of texts that, following in Nietzsche's wake, critiqued the economic processes of liberalism by revealing the libidinal dynamics of desire that secretly drive the purportedly rational decisions of economic actors. While the economic rationality of liberalism tends to position "el beneficio, la circulación del dinero, la ganancia, como formas visibles de su funcionamiento," these visible forms, as Piglia explains, conspire to obscure a hidden libidinal core, "[una] red hecha de adicciones y de ideas fijas y fetiches, de bienes sagrados y de carencia absolutas" (15). If the liberal economy can be understood as a vast conspiracy to impose the principle of

general equivalence onto all aspects of life, desire conspires against this infinite application of economic rationality, generating counter-economies that lay bare the disavowed networks of addictions, fetishes, and sacred goods that exist at the liberal economy's core. The final pages of "Teoría del complot" re-situate twentieth-century art, literature, and theory within this framework. Piglia ultimately aligns himself with writers in the Argentine tradition, such as Macedonio, Roberto Arlt, and Witold Gombrowicz, who conceive of art as a conspiratorial activity of constructing works that generate "una economía propia" (15), driven by libidinal dynamics of desire and excess. To recur once more to Klossowski's vocabulary, they produce so many artistic simulacra that give form to the phantasm of the "body" whose impulses secretly govern the visible functioning of the economy. Piglia's theory of the conspiracy, and his dialogue with Klossowski, thus concludes with the thought that, as long as liberalism's triumph is never fully consummated and the possibility remains for cracks to emerge in the liberal order, the series of anti-liberal conspiracies would seem destined to remain as open-ended and interminable as the transmissions of Macedonio's machine.

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