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MAPPING THE AFFECTIVE SPACES OF EASTERN EUROPE IN GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ' TRAVEL WRITING

MAPEANDO LOS ESPACIOS AFECTIVOS DE EUROPA DEL ESTE EN LA ESCRITURA DE VIAJES DE GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

JOANNA M. MOSZCZYNSKA
UNIVERSITÄT REGENSBURG
joanna.moszczynska@ur.de
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2514-7300

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Abstract

The following article proposes a reading of Gabriel García Márquez *crónicas* from the volume *De viaje por Europa del Este*. By implementing a methodological perspective of an "affective narrative assemblage" (Breger), it is argumented that the narrator's cognitive experience and consciousness of the historical process constructed through literary discourse are fostered and regulated by the emergence of affective investments in the encounter with the space of the Other. Mapping those investments reinforces the idea of the twofold relation between the represented and the exterior world: on the one hand, in a choreographic constitution of spaces in the text and, on the other, in the context of the role of literature in the production of space.

Keywords: Affect, *Crónica*, Eastern Bloc, Space, The Other

Resumen

El siguiente artículo propone una lectura de las crónicas de Gabriel García Márquez del volumen *De viaje por Europa del Este*. Mediante la implementación de una perspectiva metodológica de un "ensamblaje narrativo afectivo" (Breger), se argumenta que la experiencia cognitiva del narrador y la conciencia del proceso histórico construido a través del discurso literario son fomentadas y reguladas por la emergencia de inversiones afectivas en el encuentro con el espacio del Otro. La cartografía de esas inversiones refuerza la idea de la doble relación entre lo representado y el mundo exterior: por un lado, en una constitución coreográfica de los espacios en el texto y, por otro, en el contexto del papel de la literatura en la producción del espacio.

Palabras clave: afecto, crónica, Bloque del Este, espacio, el Otro

In June 1955, the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* sent Gabriel García Márquez to Europe, away from a country oppressed by the dictatorial regime of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. Between 1955 and 1957, that is, during an approximately two-year stay on the Old Continent divided by the Iron Curtain, the writer took various journeys to the communist side of Europe. His main destination was the Soviet Union where he would participate in the 6th World Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow. His journeys resulted in a series of what we may call "travel reportages", or *crónicas de viajes*, published originally in 1959 in the Colombian magazine *Cromos* and the Venezuelan *Momento*. The fragmented structure of the collected reportages is implied already in their journey from the magazines into the book edition, the changes in the title, as well as their open-endedness, as they would appear and reappear, re-written, cut, extended, even lost, and subsequently rediscovered (Gilard 54-58). The picaresque storytelling of an observant and insightful first-person narrator, who bears resemblance to García Márquez himself, unfolds in a series of captivating chronotopes that construct a topography of post-war socialist space.

Most of the secondary literature about the Macondo creator's socialist reportages concentrate on the tensions. For example, Bonano presents the author as a militant writer, Forace interprets textual ethical inquiries as an account for the political and aesthetic positioning of Gabo, while Molina Fernández pursues a dual logic by focusing on the comparisons between Colombia and Europe and between Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the co-existence of fiction and fact in Gabo's reportages. The present article draws upon the main conclusions of this secondary literature, aligning them however, with a focus on affective aspects of García Márquez' texts.

The article attempts to combine affect theory, spatial theories, and literary studies. It proposes a new reading of the *crónicas* from *De viaje por Europa del Este* and arguments that García Márquez' cognitive experience and consciousness of the historical process constructed through literary discourse are fostered and regulated by the emergence of affective investments in the encounter with the space of the Other. Mapping those investments reinforces the idea of the twofold relation between the represented and the exterior world: on the one hand, in a choreographic constitution of spaces in the text and, on the other, in the context of the role of the text/literature/literary journalism in the production of space (Lefebvre). The article consists of three parts. In the first part, I propose "affective narrative assemblage" (Breger) as a methodological approach toward the production of space in the context of García Márquez' reportages. In a follow-up to Molina Fernández' analysis and her reference to the author's "personal geography" (89), "personal" is defined here as both aesthetic and political, because it is manufactured through literary elements that regulate the emergence of the reflection on power relations, the economy of social values, and public interests. Geography is the mapping of spaces, here of the Eastern Bloc, and is understood as an affective process (Pile) that produces an array of intensities: intimacy, estrangement, anger, etc. This process is bound by spatial experience and helps to make sense of the world, here: the encountered reality of communism.

In the second part, I address the established premises of modern Latin American *crónica* as a hybrid genre, which I investigate as a form of travel writing/travel reportage bridging the Latin American and the East European experience, in turn revealing its kinship with US-American New Journalism. The hybrid nature of the genre, as argued here, is what privileges it as an affective space. Finally, a selective reading of García Márquez' *crónicas* will further demonstrate the discursive production of affect-charged spaces in the texts.

The topography of the Iron Curtain: Toward a Method of Affective Assemblage

García Márquez' texts about his visit to the USSR and Hungary appeared in November 1957 in the Caracas-based magazine *Momento*. The reportages about Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, as well as the reorganized versions of the USSR texts were published in a ten-part reportage between July and September of 1959 in the Bogotá style magazine *Cromos* (Gilard 22, 55). They would find their way into a book form in various editions published in Cali and in Bogotá between 1978 and 1986, both as legal and illegal re-prints, under the title *Traveling through the Socialist Countries: 90 Days at the Iron Curtain*.[1] The volume contains eleven texts-pieces of a fragmented experience, which nevertheless constitute a singular journalistic period of the author (Gilard 54).

In 2015, that is, long after the end of the Cold War and deep into the neoliberal world order, the reportages were re-edited under the title: *Travelling through Eastern Europe*, with the slightly altered subtitle, *90 Days behind the Steel Curtain*, which was dismissed and transferred to the detachable accompanying sleeve.[2] Those editorial changes in the 2015 publication deflect from the specific geopolitical and historical context of the Eastern Bloc by switching to what would seem to the editors as a geographically, historically, and culturally neutral designation "Eastern Europe", which itself is arguably a homogenizing 18th century Western invention (Bracewell 62). Moreover, the customary denomination of "Iron Curtain" in Spanish, *cortina de hierro*, was substituted by *telón de acero*, that is, "steel curtain", a signifier mostly used in Spain. Those semantic changes might have been, on one the hand, a deliberate move in order to retouch the communist past of Europe and avoid outdated anachronisms and, on the other hand, an adaptation to the Spanish readership of the reportage series of the Colombian author. The author himself deals with the meaning of the "iron curtain" in an ironic opening of the first reportage, ascribing the origin of the metaphor to the Western propaganda and thus tackling the subject of the space-producing potential of discourse:

> The iron curtain is neither a curtain nor is it made of iron. It is a pole barrier painted red and white like advertisements of a hairdresser. After having been

[1] In original: *De viaje por los países socialistas: 90 días en la "cortina de hierro"*. There is no English edition of the book. The titles and the fragments cited in this article have been translated by me.
[2] The original title: *De viaje por Europa del Este. 90 días tras el telón de acero*.

> inside it for three months, I realize that it was a lack of common sense to expect the iron curtain to be actually an iron curtain. But twelve years of tenacious propaganda have more power of conviction than a whole philosophical system. Twenty-four hours a day of journalistic literature ends up defeating common sense to the point that one takes metaphors at face value. (9)

The Iron Curtain is prefigurated in García Márquez' reportage as a white and red striped pole barrier. It is also a spatial marker that becomes textually present through the narrator's experiencing, that is, seeing it. It is in the confrontation of the expectation and the reality that the Iron Curtain becomes represented in the text. Whatever it would look like, be it a marking point of the division between the socialist and the capitalist countries of Europe, the Iron Curtain is both a metaphor and a fact that carries an affective dynamic within. By contesting the idea of an "iron curtain" and representing it in spatial categories by "having been inside it", García Márquez' narrator departs on a journey that is not only physical, but also a cognitive exploration of the unknown topography, pre-delineated for him by the Western propaganda. In this way, the narrator admits that the world order is politicized and that it is ruled by a dynamic of affects that circulate, determine, and even preempt the perception of our surroundings. In other words, affects are constitutive of subjective experience resulting from encounters and interactions, while they can also be used to defer facts (Massumi 191).

Examining the importance of the study of affects for narrative theory, Claudia Breger puts forward a conceptualization of "affective narrative worldmaking" (235) that she defines as:

> […] a performative process of configuring affects, associations, attention, experiences, evaluations, forms, matter, perspectives, perceptions, senses, sense, topoi and tropes in and through specific media, including mental operations as well as graphic notations, words and gestures, images and sounds. In the realms of literature, as well as film or theater performance, these processes are firmly anchored in the rhetorical loops of composition (or production) and reading (or spectatorship). […] the process of narrative worldmaking constitutes multidimensional, "multivectoral" assemblages. (242)

Breger states that at the center of narrativity, multiple processes of "connection, association and attachment" (243) take place and are ruled by affects, in a Deleuzian sense, both on the level of reception as well as representation. The notion of affective narrative assemblage can provide a useful perspective in examining the reportages by the Colombian author insofar as it allows for a reading attuned to narrative structures of associations, tropes, and metaphors, to the referentiality and factuality of the text, as well as its place within the global literary journalism tradition. In this sense, I make attempt to move beyond Breger's narratological, focused on the rhetorical processes of narrative composition, conceptualization of affective

assemblage and deploy it as a methodological perspective. Such methodological approach implies developing "a feel for the text" (Ahern) and enables to problematize the notion of spatiality unfolded into textual space by means of emotional immediacy created within the text and the world to which it refers. The assemblage-like character of the elements that make the narrative world possible implies that the narrative, apart from having a plot in a traditional narratological sense, is also composed according to a rhizomatic logic of dispersed parts "of different provenance, which make up, due to an internal system of relations, an unmistakeable phenomenon, a feeling with a verifiable and identifiable structure" (Sharma and Tygstrup 5).

In a similar vein, Raymond Williams defines "Structures of Feeling" (128) in order to describe the emergence of social (revolutionary) and historical consciousness before its systematic and ideological formation. The contradiction between an affect and a structure generates a conclusion that the action of structuring the feelings or affects creates a new thinking and a new understanding. To make the affective narrative assemblage productive for navigating the production of space in García Márquez's reportages, this article conceives the affect as a power of experience in creating ontological consistency of the space and as an agent that takes active part in the production of knowledge and experience. In this sense, affect and discursive practice are not disconnected, but rather intertwined in "the meaning-making contexts and histories that so decisively shape the encounters between bodies and events" (Wetherell 355). Additionally, in reference to Massumi's explorations of the relation between affect and fact, the article arguments that affect plays an important role in stabilizing the storytelling and the information, that is, in the (literary) narrativization of facts in García Márquez texts of the encounter with the Other who habits the actually existing socialism.

Crónica de viajes - Genre as an Affective Space

There are several features of a literary reportage that make it such an interesting case to observe the workings of affective assemblages: factuality, authenticity, and subjectivity. The compromise with the factuality means that the story in literary reportage is dominantly factual. As a journalistic form, the main task of the reportage is to give verifiable information, or at least make the story credible to the reader. Considering Massumi's (267) distinction between the actual-factual and affective-factual level of events, one may say that the matters of fact-representation in a literary reportage are dominantly attuned "to the virtuality that resides within emotional extremes" (Sodano 67). One may say then, that factuality matters, turns eligible, when it is received as such.

The factuality is further supported by authenticity. The representation of the reality can be made credible by various resources, such as a declaration of the author that they themselves have experienced what they describe; that they were personally present, or a declaration that they draw from reliable sources. The authenticity can be further achieved by integrating official documents, interviews, correspondence, photographs, etc. As factuality refers to the narrated event, authenticity refers rather to the experience of the event. The narrative instance

seeks not only to make sense and therefore establish knowledge situated somewhere between what is already known and what is yet to come, but also to validate the experience and resonate with the reader. Moreover, the relationship between the reader and the author is established within a particular pact that is both literary and journalistic and in accordance with the premise of an authentic record of human experience. Finally, the literary reportage is characterized by subjectivity. Subjectivity implies that the theme of the reportage, as well as its elaboration, are based on the author's views, perspectives, and ideas. Essentially, knowledge, memory, and experience, necessarily depend on how the creatively invested journalist organizes the narrative by choosing what to tell and how to tell it. The subjectivity also refers to the reader who, having their own horizon of expectations appropriates and attributes importance to facts. This also involves the reader's attunement to disruptive moments produced by what remains unsaid and what is nevertheless an endless source of utterance. Furthermore, subjectivity is always constructed in relation to the Other, both existing and represented. Ideally, a literary reportage acknowledges entangled relations between the subject and the object; relations depend on "the capacity for affecting and being affected" (Deleuze 123).

A literary reportage usually stars a first-person, self-assertive narrator. Their credibility and authenticity undergo constant evaluation and hence are bound by productive interpenetrations between two porous worlds: those of fiction and fact. Additionally, documentary, journalistic, witness, autobiographical and biographical contents are –to a certain degree– worldlier since they more readily than any declared fiction make an open claim to be closer to or even to emulate real life. It is widely known to the literary journalism scholarship that the three aforementioned features, that is, factuality, authenticity, and subjectivity, administer the conventions of the genre. However, what is eventually to reconsider in the light of the methodological approach proposed in this article, is that they can be perceived as processes of meaning-construction that depend not only on discourse, but also on affect which has the potential to keep the solipsism at bay and the text aware of reality. In other words, the affect has the potential to produce a sense of connectedness with the real world, and this connectedness is crucial in the narratives of non-fiction.

The reportages by García Márquez can be classified as travel narratives, whereby "travel" may be understood as an indicator of a major chronotope of travel writing. Drace-Francis suggests indicating the impossibility of pinning down travel writing to a concrete genre: "Perhaps the epithet 'travel' functions in the phrase 'travel writing' rather as geocultural modifiers do in food labelling, as a stylistic indicator rather than an assertion of authentic provenance" (7). The modifier "travel" can further imply a series of processes of various kinds, like a passage, a rite, a labor, or a transition, in a transcendental or in a physical sense. According to Jan Borm, travel narrative is:

> […] any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that

> author, narrator and principal character are but one and identical. (qtd in Chirico 39)

Moreover, it is also defined as a discourse of difference (Chirico 39) as it usually includes an encounter with unknown people, places, events, and ideas, through which comparisons result between Self and the Other and between own and foreign.

Travel writing, or travel narrative, can be therefore considered a mode, also used extensively in literary reportage, or any other journalistic text that uses literary devices. The Colombian magazine *Cromos* would promote García Márquez' texts about Eastern Bloc as a reportage in parts. Only posteriorly, with the boom of the new Latin American *crónica* in the second decade of the 21st century (Puerta Molina), have the "socialist" reportages of the author of *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold* been referred to in terms of *crónica*.

It seems like what in other parts of the world goes by the name "reportage", in Latin America is often, and since the 1990s more often than ever, referred to as *crónica*. Located on a spectrum between literature and journalism, a chronicle, or rather *crónica* (also translated to English as "sketch"), is a distinctively modern Latin American genre whose origins are a disputed issue. Susana Rotker, for example, sustains that it is a cultural practice and a writing system rooted in the modernist poetic expression and epistemological rupture that unravels with the urban, industrialized, middle-class context of the end of the 19th and the beginnings of the 20th century (15-20). According to Rotker, subjectivity being defined as an authenticity device and a method of knowledge, is one of the main, if not the very characteristic of the *crónica*, which is also the keyword of the Latin American modernists (41). In definition, *crónica* is a narrative journalistic text that is based on news criteria but moves beyond the informative function, featuring subjectivity, ethical commitment and having an aesthetic value. It is not only a hybrid genre whose characteristics depend on the personal style of each author. Gabriel García Márquez is considered one of the fathers of the modern *crónica*.

Crónica, and even more so its variation, *crónica de viajes* (travel chronicle or travel reportage), has yet another disputed ancestor, namely, the historiographical genre of *crónica* de Indias, considered the forebear of Latin American literacy. Crónica de Indias is the name given to compilations of historical narratives written between 1492 and 1793 (Aguilar Guzmán 24), mainly from the perspective of the Spanish colonizers, during the conquest and colonization of the American continent. The contemporary Latin American chronicle/reportage has little to do content-wise with the narrative accounts by Spanish conquerors, priests, and monks. However, they have been discursively and ideationally bound through the generic name, *crónica*, and the late 20th century attempts by Latin American intellectuals to create historical continuity between them. To cite some examples, in 1979, Alejo Carpentier proclaimed that the new chronicle of Indies (*la nueva crónica de Indias*) would be the future of Latin American literature. In 1982, at the Nobel Prize for Literature speech ceremony, Gabriel García Márquez, by drawing upon the chronicles by the Florentine navigator Antonio Pigafetta, implicitly positioned

himself as a descendant of the world explorers. Already in the first decade of the 21st century, his Fundación Gabriel García Márquez para el Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano, organized two Meetings of the New Chroniclers of Indies, in 2008 in Bogotá and in 2012 in Mexico.[3]

It is, nevertheless, compelling to think about the travel reportages by García Márquez as narratives of conquest of the Europe behind the Iron Curtain. The value of a travel reportage as practiced by the Colombian author is the personal yet relational perspective and the capacity of the author to observe things in a perspicuous way, to immerse into the reality, and, by disclaiming the Western narrative, to defamiliarize the gaze laid upon the Other. Alongside the debate on the origins of the modern *crónica*, there are also other historical and generic framings possible. García Márquez' travels to the Eastern Bloc can be without any doubt inscribed not only in a long-lasting tradition of travel writing, but also examined within the much recent context of Latin American intellectuals who travelled to the Soviet Republic as early as the 1920s (García Bonillas), and especially during the Cold War (such as Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda and Jorge Amado). It is important to note, that García Márquez was one of the few who examined socialism through critical lens. As Plinio Mendoza recalls:

> The Latin Americans of our generation had a seraphic version of socialism when they were young, which was revised severely by the reality. The desperate political circumstances of Latin America, its generals in power, its prisoners, and exiles everywhere, revived our sympathies for the socialist world, which we knew only subliminally through all the revolutionary mythology inherited from the heroic times of the October revolution, from Sandino's struggle, from the Spanish civil war, from the old *corridos* [ballads] of the Mexican revolution and from our own liberal guerrillas in Colombia. All that has made us vibrate over the years, created in us a very favorable disposition towards the countries where they had carried out what we called in reverent capital letters the Socialist Revolution. We needed to see what there was on that side of the world, and one morning, absurdly, we went to see it, Gabo, my sister Soledad and I… (27)

The feeling of "absurdity" refers to the unexpectancy of the decision and the lack of any comprehensive reason to leave for the Communist Bloc. Although the feeling comes narrated in a posterior reflection of Mendoza, it resonates with Gabo's narrative that extensively literarizes the events of the 1955-1957. The literarization of the events and of the experience is understood here as an act located on an aesthetic spectrum that does not deny the text its factual premise. It does not deny the journalistic aspect of the *crónica* either, yet adds a further layer to it.

[3] It would therefore seem that the debate about the roots, continuities, and ruptures of the contemporary literary reportage in Spanish America, is based mostly on entangled rhetorical figures and nostalgic investments that, once again, produce an affective space within the genre theory.

Ryszard Kapuściński, whom García Márquez admired and befriended when they first met in 1970 in Mexico City (Domosławski 721-722), touches upon the importance of the encounter with the Other on various occasions:

> Journalism, in my opinion, is among the most gregarious professions that exist, because without others we can do nothing. Without the help, participation, opinion and thought of others, we do not exist. The fundamental condition of this profession is understanding with others: we do, and we are, what others allow us to do. (Kapuściński, Los cinco sentidos 17)

The Other for Kapuściński is both the non-Self and the distant Other, der *Fremde*[4] (The Other). Without any of those two types of Others, journalism is practically impossible. Thus, when García Márquez admits: "I have a professional habit of taking an interest in people" (108), he actually defines the journalistic craft. The encounter with the non-Self, so crucial for both of the authors, might be the key to understand the ongoing relationship between fact and affect, pertinent to *crónica*/literary reportage as a genre. Considering *crónica* as "the reality novel" ("*la novela de la realidad*") (Tercero), García Márquez sought to stay close to reality without renouncing the creative possibilities of fictionalization. His friend and "maestro", Kapuściński has been posthumously accused of not fulfilling the standards of legitimately authentic journalism and even of compromising the journalistic craft (Shotter). In light of those accusations, seems pertinent to resituate the problematic relation of fiction and fact in a literary reportage and measure the implicit documentary claim according to literary means and forms that make the encounter with the Other representable. Moreover, it seems appropriate too, to concentrate not only on knowledge and understanding that journalistic texts mediate, but also on the level of feeling that they address, independently from factual information. The problematic relation between fiction and fact can be, therefore, reassessed rather in terms of reconciliation between mental space, philosophically conceived as evidence of senses, and real, concrete space (Lefebvre 1-7).

Affective Spaces in Gabriel García Márquez' New Journalism

The organization of the *crónicas* in the book respects their order of appearance in the magazine *Cromos* (with an unpublished in *Cromos* closing *crónica* "I visited Hungary"). It suggests that the travels to different socialist countries happened at one time between June and August 1957, as the developments unfold in a sequential and uninterrupted narrative. However, it is in fact a fictional story, as the author's visits to Prague, Warsaw, and Auschwitz actually took place in 1955 on the occasion of the Warsaw International Cinema Congress. Those travels to Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as to Hungary, the author made alone. The rest of his travels, to Berlin, Leipzig, and Moscow, were made together with his good friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza. Plinio's sister, Soledad, accompanied them to Germany.

[4] In German: a stranger, a foreigner.

In the reportages, Soledad and Plinio take on fictional characters, Jacqueline, "a French of Indochinese origin, and a layout designer of a Parisian magazine", and Franco, "a wandering Italian and an occasional correspondent of Milan's periodicals" (García Márquez 9).[5] In the very first *crónica*, "The iron curtain is a pole painted red and white", the participative narration opens with a staging of an adventurous character of an incidental journey that awaits the three travel companions (García Márquez 9). The spontaneous decision to "go and see what is behind the iron curtain" is the motor of the experience shared by the trio, displayed according to the journalistic rule of the five W-questions, that is: who, where, when, what, and why:

> There were three of us on an adventure. […] The things started in a café in Frankfurt, June 18, at 10 in the morning. Franco has just bought a French car for the summer and did not know what to do with it, so he offered us to 'go and see what's behind the Iron Curtain'. (García Márquez 9)

The opening arguably is reminiscent of US-American road novels, including *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, or Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Cool-Aid Acid Test*; the two latter are frequently cited examples of the New Journalism.

According to Kallan, Wolfe refers to main devices common to New Journalist writing: third-person point of view, scene-by-scene construction, extensive dialogue, and recording of status-life symbols (54). García Márquez' eleven *crónicas,* written as early as the 1950s, not only pioneer the Latin American "new" *crónica* but can be also considered a precedent within the global literary journalism, bearing both stylistic similarities and differences with the writing examined by Tom Wolfe in his 1973 *The New Journalism.*

Wolfe's third-person point of view is a technique "of presenting every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he experiences it" (qtd in Kallan 54). This device that creates an experience similar to that of a television, seems highly influenced by behavioral theories and realism. In contrast, García Márquez' reportages characterize a presence of the first-person narrator, which is a feature of Latin American *crónica* applied to represent a subjective positioning and to emulate the authenticity of experience. He is both the storyteller and the main character of the narrative, hinting scarcely yet playfully at his real-fictional identity. As he introduces the protagonists of the trip, he presents himself in an ironic commentary: "The third one was me, as written in my passport" (7), thus insinuating the fictional status of his persona and the ambiguity of a subjective existence. Further on, he reveals his, that is, García Márquez', place of birth, "Aracataca" (12), a toponym that causes difficulties to a German soldier filling in the documents at the border between the West and the

[5] As Angulo Daneri observes, the author has never revealed the names of his friends in order to avoid the risk of possible political consequences.

East Germany. The acknowledged difference continues when the narrator is impelled to recognize his exotic appearance within the socialist space he acts upon: "I, who have very little awareness of my moustaches and my red and black checkered jacket […]" (17). According to Molina Fernández, this is the moment when García Márquez coins the "myth of Caribbean carelessness" that he would subsequently explore in his novels (112). In the *crónica*, this moment of self-awareness is accompanied by an estrangement and a sensation of unpreparedness for the reality that awaits them behind the doors of a gas station restaurant on a highway somewhere in GDR: "It was like bumping into a reality for which I was not prepared" (16). The profoundly depressive atmosphere inside the restaurant is countered not only by a sudden manifestation of collective generosity of the people, but also intensified by an unexpected emotional connection produced by the Latin American music –that will still resound on several occasions– played in the restaurant. The mention of popular songs works as a literary prefiguration of Latin American identity and is a prelude to the astonishing generosity of the locals in offering a cigarette to a stranger. Both events evidence the unpredictable outcomes of a travel experience based on human interaction and forge emotional connection between the Self and the Other.

Although the point of view belongs only to the first-person narrator, the *crónicas* contain dialogues, albeit short, through which the characters' particularities and their humanity are tangibly revealed. In a way, there are no redundant words, only those that reveal the real sense of the encounter. In this anecdotal panopticon, people turn into novel characters.

According to Wolfe, in a scene-by-scene construction, the plot is moving from scene to scene with a rapid-flow immediacy and no historical distance. This effect is usually achieved by present tense narration where actions speak for themselves. In García Márquez, however, there are two modalities. The events are narrated in past tense, which is a classic novel device, and present tense is used to comment on the social, political, and cultural situation in the Eastern Bloc. Such a combination serves the purpose of a travel reportage, where the novelesque narration is preserved and the process of writing is posterior to the experience. What for Wolfe would seem like a distance between the experience and the written word (Kallan 55), that is, a recreation rather than an instant creation, does not, however, belie the witnessing of the immersed narrator to the real socialist chronotope that comes to life through the embodied narrative perspective, where with each character a story is related. The encounters made by García Márquez are anecdotal and novelesque and bring unexpected insights into the absurdities and struggles of life in the Eastern Bloc. The narrative depends on the corporeal presence and witness accounts of the local informants. Individual lives stay individual, but they unravel the truths about the community.

The last characteristic of new journalism are the status-life symbols that an author should reveal, that is, provide descriptions of the settings and the objects that people surround themselves with, as well as:

> […] everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene. (Wolfe qtd in Kallan 56)

Such life-status details are items that serve as "tools for a social autopsy" in Kracauer's words (216).[6] However, they neither necessarily validate the readers' worldview nor mirror their preconceptions of reality. Contrary to what Kallan suggests, in García Márquez and possibly in other types of literary travel reportage, they create the represented reality in a credible yet also possibly de-automatized way.

In one of the reportages about the USSR, García Márquez states his inclination for the human dimension of experience:

> I must honestly admit that in that fifteen-days' jumble, without speaking Russian, I could not get anything definite out of it. But on the other hand, I think I realized many fragmentary, immediate, superficial things, which in any case are more important than the square fact of not having been to Moscow. I have a professional habit of taking an interest in people. (108)

Norman Sims sees in this interest of García Márquez in the everyday life, also everyday drama, as the center of gravity of his work. He further comments:

> Human society corresponds to the carnivalesque space, but García Márquez does not protect it from the incursions of the official world that always threaten to transform and control it. These incursions can be religious, political, economic, social, or natural. For García Márquez they are part of reality, and we must be aware of them, incorporate them and fight against their corrosive power. (53)

One of the examples for a tool for analyzing the socialist society are nylon stockings, entangled within the ideological battle of two political systems in the Cold War Europe. In the *crónica* "Nylon stockings are a treasure for a Czech woman",[7] Franco and the narrator are fascinated by the capital of Czechoslovakia that is buzzing with life and joy in the middle of a rainy night. Prague unfolds itself as a convivial, well organized, and carefree place that is not only unspoiled by the communist regime vilified by the West, but even reminds of the Western capitalist societies: "I can find no indication of the difference in system" (García Márquez 49). While in Western Europe nylon was considered a common and popular material to produce pantyhose, in the Eastern Bloc it would become a coveted treasure on a national scale: "a torn stocking is a national catastrophe" (50). Unraveled, torn nylon

[6] In original: "Werkzeug der Wirklichkeitsanalyse".
[7] In original: "Para una checa las medias de nylon son una joya".

stockings of a singer in a Prague bar serve as the only clue of the space under the Soviet influence. It is a measure of human dignity and of the ultimate threshold of social justice. As such, it prefigures poverty and shame, not only as a sexual connotation of an indecent lifestyle of a working woman as it would be perceived by the prudish and conservative West, but also in the sense of a failure of the communist regime. The opulence of Prague's Habsburgian facades and its architectonical integrity, which emanate a natural and sane order of things, contrasts with the plight of the people, such as a young Czech woman who on a night out would rather spare her nylon stockings by carrying them in a purse than actually wear them:

> —You must take care of them –she said–. Nylon stockings cost a fortune. Happy as a clam, Franco slapped me on the back. I understood him. It was the same exhilaration I experienced in Nice -the most expensive beach in Europe- when I discovered that at high tide the detritus of the city floats out into the water where millionaires swim. (García Márquez 50-51)

This imagery of contrasting elements on both sides of the Iron Curtain: torn pantyhose versus Prague's imponent antique architecture, as well as rubbish versus glamorous beaches of Nice, serve not only to testify to the paradoxes of everyday life in the lived socialist utopia that once promised a conception of a society based on common sociality, humanity, and equality. It further implicitly underscores the equalities among inequalities existing within one, albeit divided, Europe and forges instantaneous and uncontrollable sense of revelation that seizes the narrator.

García Márquez makes a case for the particularities of Prague. The entertaining game on a tram of observing people's reaction to seeing his wristwatch set to an hour forward, and displaying it to them on purpose, turns into a social experiment that unveils the city's in-betweenness. The anxious reaction of a Prague man after realizing that his watch might be late, is compared to reactions both in the West and in the East:

> In Paris and in Rome the reaction is the same. In Moscow I had the watch set at the most arbitrary hours, I walked with it everywhere and people came to examine it, but with a different curiosity. […] What struck them about our [wristwatches] was their golden appearance, their shape, their quality, but it seems to me that no one ever thought to look at the time. The Soviets paid whatever you asked for a wristwatch. In the trams of Prague people live their little problems [...]. (56-57)

Nevertheless, the wristwatch episode is not only about Prague habitants. It is also a scintillating comment on Soviet people's relationship with the clock's time. Clock time corresponds to the discipline and organization of labor in capitalism (Hughes 133-134) and is associated with the linear continuum perceived "as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression and

arrival - in other words, the time of history" (Kristeva 192). In the particular context of Soviet state socialism, Yurchak provides an insightful exploration of the paradoxical nature of Soviet discourse and ideology. He observes, for example, that whereas wristwatch was considered a bourgeois pleasure it also would be performed as a prefiguration of "cultural life" and a reward for hard work (Yurchak 288). The clock's time in a sense, did not matter, as the Soviet space had its own shifting temporalities that would continuously deterritorialize the temporal parameters of life: "It has been argued that socialist states monopolized citizens' time […], and that citizens employed various counter-measures to slow time down […]" (Yurchak 265). The wristwatch episode shows García Márquez as an insightful but also intuitive semiotician that attempts to decipher the Other. It is less the fact that matters –whether this experiment even took place– but the affective-factual potential of the described event. In the two Prague *crónicas*, the experienced reality epitomized in every-day details, is larger than ideological convictions and imposing power systems. Furthermore, it discloses both the impossibility of considering neither the communist nor the capitalism in monolithic terms as well as the loops that transcend the Latin American readers' expectations. With his intuitive ethnological observations of life status symbols encapsulated in artifacts, the narrator concludes that "people in Prague react as in any capitalist country" (García Márquez 56) and the Soviet influence is barely noticeable.

Interestingly enough, the scholarship on communist Czechoslovakia would disagree with the author:

> […] there is little doubt that by the time of Stalin's death Czechoslovakia had gone much farther than any other East European country in adopting and absorbing the Soviet political and economic model. […] Probably no other country in the Soviet bloc managed to elevate the official ideology to a position of absolute supremacy. (Korbonski 61)

However, to García Márquez it seemed as if there was no terror like in Hungary, no sign of East German voluntary servitude, neither any sign of Polish discontent. He could not possibly foresee that in thirteen years the situation would deteriorate drastically when the forces of the Warsaw Pact would attack Czechoslovakia in response to the Prague Spring.

Another tie game happens in Moscow during the narrator's visit to Stalin's tomb. Stalin died on March 5th, 1953. After the mourning ceremonies, his body was taken to Lenin's Mausoleum situated on Red Square in Moscow. García Márquez' trip to the USSR falls within the period when Stalin's embalmed corpse continued to be (until 1961) exposed in a glass coffin next to Lenin's tomb. Surrounded by monumental marble installments, the stately figure of Stalin emanates a certain familiarity, "submerged in a dream without remorse" (García Márquez 127). There is a lightness to his postmortem appearance that strikes against what one could imagine the authoritarian leader, responsible for mass repressions, purges, show trials and executions, concentration camps would look like. A particular detail attracts attention and defamiliarizes the expectations, namely, Stalin's hands:

"Nothing impressed me as much as the fineness of his hands, with their thin, transparent nails. They are hands of a woman" (128). Here again, the foreign intellectual does not take sides, but relies on his perception and describes what he sees with his own eyes. He adds authenticity to his experience by citing alleged witness accounts that rarely openly criticize the dictator: "there is a myth of the heart that holds the Soviets' heads back. They seem to be saying: 'Whatever you may have against him, Stalin is Stalin. Final point'" (117). The affect is built within the emerging voices and the unsaid: between the reality of the Stalinist terror and the reality of his strikingly and somehow perversely delicate hands. The succinctness and obliqueness of the local informant's comment creates a suspense in the atmosphere, as "certain truths need to be de-dramatized in order to be believed" and "[…] the chronicler must be sparing with the effects that burn; among other things, because reality always has too many matchsticks" (Villoro). In the end, the cult of the leader would persist as silently articulated as the removal of his portraits.

Another example of the affect-charged encounter with the Other can be found in the Polish episodes. The account on the journey to Poland begins in the Prague *crónica* that precedes the Polish one intitled "With eyes open to Poland at the boiling point".[8] The thematic and geographical continuity between the *crónicas* suggests a tight chronological order of events. Trains are a space of particular temporary conviviality. On the train from Prague to Warsaw, the narrator himself becomes the subject of observation. To his constraint, however, the initial incisive curiosity of his Polish fellow train travelers soon turns into oblique exclusionary hostility: "The dialogue was very cordial. However, I have not yet been able to find out where I made a mistake" (García Márquez 61). Polish people display a certain distrust as they are not able to pin down the foreign traveler. The Colombian author becomes the Other. Then, he travels again by train from Warsaw back to Czechoslovakia only this time to taste the absurdness and the weakness of bureaucratic norms dictated by the ideology present symbolically in the dialogue between the authorities and society. In need to liquidate a pretty sum of money in Polish currency after having declared it to the Polish customs agent, the narrator takes the advice of the agent. Without any money and with two hundred packs of cigarettes, he is then obliged by the very same agent who helped him purchase the cigarettes to pay the export duty. What follows is a hilarious buy-and-sell arrangement that turns in vain, as the cigarettes are seized in the neighbor country due to import duty. Although discursively never expressed, a sense of insanity emerges between the lines and reveals how human mind works under communism.

The last example that I would like to invoke is García Márquez' visit to Auschwitz. The narrator is accompanied by a translator, a young nurse and an active member of both Communist Youth and Catholic Action, Ana Kozlowski. Ana impersonates the combination of the communist and the catholic militancy, which seems to García Márquez like a puzzling combination that he soon learns to be a particularity of the overall postwar Polish experience. While on the bus to the

[8] In original: "Con ojos abiertos sobre Polonia en ebullición".

Auschwitz Museum, Ana's nationalist attitude is revealed in an equally curious manner:

> And so, she started examining my shirt with great attention and said word for word – That is the famous nylon. In good faith, I told her that back in the hotel I would gladly give her the shirt and by the expression of her eyes I could see that I have committed a gaffe. 'It's a men's shirt –she said. And then, without interruption–: We still need five years to produce the nylon.' She was convinced that once Poland started producing nylon it would be cheaper and of a better quality. Until then, not using it has become part of national dignity. (García Márquez 81)

Gabo's visit to the extermination camp is an astounding fact that requires some unwrapping. The visit took place in 1955, that is, only ten years after the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and eight years after the opening of the first permanent exhibition at the created museum. In 1955, the territorial coverage of the museum was still a subject of a national debate in Poland, and it falls within a post-Holocaust period referred to by Roskies and Diamant (75-124) as "communal memory". The period of communal memory (1945-1960) refers to a series of events that took place in the post-Holocaust (mostly) European public sphere divided between East and West: "All across Europe […] the trauma of national identity was being forged through ignoring and forgetting." (Roskies and Diamant 10). In the Polish context it referred to the tensions between the Poles and the Jews and the challenges they provoked to the construction of the local Holocaust memory:

> Communal memory, then, was countermemory, contentious memory, fashioned by those who had suffered side by side and now inhabited the same provisional space, but might just as well have been living on separate planets. The two groups of survivors did not know or wish to know of each other's existence. Each labored alone, battling its own ghosts and conjuring its own future. (Roskies and Diamant 82)

By penetrating the social and cultural atmosphere of postwar Poland, García Márquez learns about what he describes as the "principle of confusion" (79), where the emotions are boiling and "it is difficult to understand what is that the Poles want" (76). "You realize […]", as the author ponders, "[...] from the very first moment that life is hard, that people have suffered a lot from major catastrophes and that there is a national drama of tiny domestic problems" (66).

In a cold-blooded way, the narrator emulates the insanity of the Nazi endeavor, as he proceeds with the description of the gas chambers. "The atrocious scientism" (García Márquez 83) of the crime boggles his mind, as it does not conform to the overly cordial and hospitable image of the German people that he made up for himself during the trip. His comment is by no means ironic, but still could be complemented with the idea of a "Good German" that emerged after the

division of Germany in 1949, when "finding 'good Germans' whose record helped legitimize each of the new German states became a core aspect of building a new nation in Germany and of the propaganda battle in this respect between the two German states" (Ó Dochartaigh and Schönfeld 1). The term is used nowadays to refer to those who after the war claimed not having supported the Hitler regime yet can be in fact regarded as complicit due to their silence and lack of resistance. This image shocks with García Márquez perception of the German, more specifically GDR people as he sees them rather as victims of the system and not perpetrators.

In one of the exhibitions at Auschwitz, Ana and the narrator look at the photo exhibition of the people, mostly European Jews, murdered in the extermination camp:

> Ana stopped in front of one of the pictures. I looked at the picture: a sexless person, with a bold head, looking severely in the direction of the camera objective. —Is it a man or a woman? –I asked. Ana did not look at me. She pulled me delicately in the direction of the door. —A man –she replied–. It is my dad. (García Márquez 84-85)

At this point, the Auschwitz episode ends abruptly, because there are no words that could possibly express the impact of Ana's response on the narrator. It is a moment where affects come imperceptibly into play. In the silence that persists between Ana's response and the resumption of the narrative, loaded with unspeakable feelings, the many truths of post-Holocaust confused reality in Poland unfold.

Finally, there is also a horrifying mention of the soap made of human fat. Curiously enough, this is a recurring trope in the literature, found also in Latin American literature, that often stage burials of such soap.[9] However, one must carefully address such textual responses to the horror stories about Nazi crime atrocities that would circulate around that time. García Márquez supposedly saw an exhibition of objects made of human remains in Auschwitz Museum. While he admits having seen such a bar of soap elsewhere with his own eyes, he only insinuates its presence among other "such objects" in the museum.

Not only the Auschwitz Museum itself but also many Holocaust historians deny there be any evidence regarding mass production of "human" soap in Nazi concentration camps (Lipstadt; LaCapra 19-20). The way, however, this invention took over the minds of many writers and intellectuals at that time, is a phenomenon, that reminds of "the logic of affectively legitimated fact" (Massumi 191). Allegedly, during World War II, SS guards would intimidate the prisoners in the concentration camps by threatening to turn them into soap (Scheinfeld), and in the face of the bestiality of the crime, the belief in such a fate by the prisoners would not require much imagination for it to become perceived violence, therefore perpetuated as fact. As Massumi observes, albeit in a different context: "It will have been real

[9] Such representations are found, for example, in Zevi Ghivelder's novel *As seis pontas da estrela* (2003), in Mauricio Rosencof's *Las cartas que no llegaron* (2000), as well as in Moacyr Scliar's short story "Na minha suja cabeça, o Holocausto" (1986).

because it was felt to be real. Whether the danger was existent or not, the menace was felt in the form of fear. What is not actually real can be felt into being" (190). To sum up, it might be said that García Márquez' narrator on a trip to Auschwitz in 1955 falls prey to this affectively legitimated "fact". Nevertheless, he becomes one of the first Latin American contemporary witnesses and participates in a historical moment of the formation of a collective Holocaust memory.

Conclusions: "There are instants of sensibility that cannot be reconstructed nor explained"

García Márquez' writing about socialist Eastern Europe is an example of broadly conceived travel literature, and while it belongs to the Latin American hybrid and versatile genre of *crónica*, it can be further classified as pertaining to what has been labeled at the beginnings of the 20th century as literary journalism. It can be thus described as narrative-descriptive journalism that "works on a spectrum or continuum that, if taken to the extremes, results in either an increasingly alienated objectified world on the one hand or, on the other, a solipsistic subjectivity in the most personal of memoirs" (Hartsock 3). The narrative in those *crónicas* is methodized by inductive reasoning, where the narrator learns from others, observes, and describes specific cases of people encountered behind the Iron Curtain, only thereafter to come up with conclusions. The rhetorical ambition is, however, to resist the inclination to abstracting and generalizing, or to give a globalized message. In this fashion, the narrative seeks to bring unknown, hidden realities, nuances, and complexities to light, while at the same time disrupting the ideas circulating about Eastern Bloc in the West. Socialist countries are not perceived as a whole and uniform entity, but as an extremely heterogenous topography, produced by individuals, represented in the text through their testimonies, their points of view, attitudes, objects, habits, gestures; that is, their life status symbols through which a social autopsy is possible. Nevertheless, as García Márquez observes, "[t]here are instants of sensibility that cannot be reconstructed nor explained" (17). In those instants, whose existence is grasped by the narrator, yet cannot be precisely described nor entirely apprehended, visceral "forces of encounter" (Seigworth and Gregg 2) emerge. Those forces, that is, affects, are built through the discursively represented encounters regulated by the economy of local socialist values and power relations that run along a thorough line of poverty, bureaucracy, fear, repression, and trauma.

The part of Europe visited by García Márquez in the 1950s was communist by definition. Yet prior to his trip, this part of the continent was *terra incognita*, a space simultaneously and semiotically emptied and pre-defined by Western dogma. A space which would eventually be filled by his experience. Thus, the space produced by the narrator's investments is apprehended in its assemblage of conundrums and intricacies, which go beyond abstract ideology. In the collection *De viaje por Europa del Este*, García Márquez records his encounters with real, applied socialism. He strolls casually between bizarre conceptions and savage practices of bureaucratic power, consistently frustrated by lack of imagination while

in search for the human dimension of emotion and experience hidden in the everyday life details. The Colombian traveler himself forges affective connections, as he tries to assess how human mind works under real socialism.

The narrative of the *crónicas* produces a profound and historically accurate experience of a geopolitical space of Eastern Europe in the 1950s and its workings of power. Eastern Europe, an edge of the West (Kundera 104), has been historically resistant to being read by the others, what has been also evidenced in some reactions to the recent (February 2022) Russian military invasion on Ukraine. All the more important seems the urge to reread García Márquez' *crónicas* as an affect-thought assemblage of encounters that through aesthetic investments maps the space of the Other and exposes the absurdities of lived reality.

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