

WAR AND PLAY:  
EXAMINING JULIO CORTÁZAR'S WAR ON LANGUAGE IN RAYUELA

by

Kayla Cherice Rodriguez

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David Ferris

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Leila Gomez

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Annjeanette Wiese

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Rodriguez, Kayla Cherice (M.A., Comparative Literature)

War and Play: Examining Julio Cortázar's War On Language in *Rayuela*

Thesis directed by Professor David Ferris

Despite his indisputable fascination with words, Julio Cortázar frequently mentioned that he was war with the language he had inherited. This war is nowhere more apparent than in his seminal work, *Rayuela*. Not only do his characters explicitly wage war against language but the text as a whole can be seen as a counterattack. This argument will examine the theoretical complexities that arise from a writer waging a war against his primary weapon. In order to do this, I will use several of Derrida's key concepts and essays to examine both the theoretical issues at stake in this war and the actual modes of retaliation that manifest in *Rayuela*. Although Cortázar and Derrida have different points of departure, they both respond to the same problem in an analogous way. Although Derrida does not wage a war against language, it is my contention that both author and theorist respond to the problem of language by way of *play*. Cortazar is certainly known for his playful experimentation with language but in this argument, I focus on the ways in which Cortázar's text opens up to *play* in the Derridean sense. In this way, *play* becomes his primary mode of retaliation in the war against language.

## CONTENTS

## Introduction 1

Language and Reality .....	8
Understanding Yonder in Derridean Terms.....	11
Two Interpretations: Origin and Play .....	13
Power Play: The Allocation of Power in the Two Interpretations.....	17
Theoretical Tension: Derrida's Interpretations within <i>Rayuela</i> .....	23
The Insufficiency of Language: Declaring War on Language.....	26
Fighting against your weapons: The writer's paradox .....	29
Inhabiting In a Certain Way.....	31
Retaliation.....	34
The Contranovel: There is No Origin, Only Play .....	38
Contra Aesthetic Language and Passive Reading .....	43
Detonating the Sentence to Ignite the Reader .....	45
Labyrinth of Written Texts .....	47
Activating the Reader to Disseminate Authority.....	51
Retaliation: Whundermining the whauthority of language .....	52
Retaliation: Weaving in Undecidability to Necessitate Play .....	53
Conclusion .....	62
Bibliography .....	64

## Introduction

Attempting to define this book is much like trying to firmly grasp onto water – it seems to relentlessly slip out of reach. The difficulty lies in its definitively mutable nature. Indeed, this is beauty of the text. Cortázar began *Rayuela* with a memorable chapter, *el capítulo del tablón*, that would eventually find its place towards the end of the book. He began accumulating various pieces of text that would make up the textual fabric preceding *el capítulo del tablón* in the final text. Responding to the non-linear way in which *Rayuela* emerged as a completed project after many years of writing heterogeneous texts that would precipitate that first chapter, Cortázar says:

Me gusta la palabra precipitado en el sentido químico. Y yo agregaría cristalización, porque montones de elementos que flotaban como en un limbo fueron cristalizando una vez que yo encontré en el camino, la vía.

[I like the word precipitated in the chemical sense. And I would add crystallization, because many elements that floated, as if they were in limbo, were crystalized one time that I found on the journey, the way]<sup>1</sup>

In the chemical sense, crystallization is the process by which a liquid becomes solid. More than simple solidification however, the image of crystallization evokes a certain sense of an object defined by its various facets or planes, edges and undefinable “center” (in the limited, spatial sense of the word). The magic of *Rayuela* is that it presents itself as liquid, allowing itself to be (re)crystallized upon each reading. As we continue, I will attempt to trace some of the contours and facets of the text in my reading but the reader should keep in mind the liquid state of the original text. At the heart of this text is an evasion of any sort of summarizing gesture.

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<sup>1</sup> Prego, p. 111. My translation. Henceforth, all of the translations from this interview are my own. The translations I provide for *Rayuela* will be taken from Gregory Rabassa's English translation of the work with notes for amendments.

*Rayuela* is composed of not one, but many texts in more than one way. First, the novel opens with a "Tablero de dirección"<sup>2</sup> beginning with the following assertion: "A su manera este libro es muchos libros, pero sobre todo es dos libros" [In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all]. The first option given to the reader is to read the text in a linear fashion, from Chapter 1 to Chapter 56. The second option includes all 155 chapters but instead of proceeding linearly from the first page, the reader is invited to start with Chapter 73 and then hop through the book, using the notations at the end of each chapter to direct them to the next one. Although the reader is only given two options, human fallibility gives rise to an infinite number of readings. In the same interview cited earlier, Cortázar remarked how it pleased him to hear of readers making a mistake while attempting to follow the second option, "y que entonces leyeron *Rayuela* de un tercera manera" [and so they read *Rayuela* in a third way]<sup>3</sup>. Returning to the metaphor, the possibility of such a large number of readings shows how the text begins as a liquid and the reader directs the way in which it will crystallize for them. We might also see this active, generative role of the reader in terms of rewriting the text as he reads.

The second way in which *Rayuela* is composed of multiple texts comes from a more common understanding of the word *text*. In terms of its contents, *Rayuela* can be seen as an assemblage of a variety of texts. The first fifty-six chapters occupy the more traditional narrative space of the text, if we can say anything about this text is traditional. The following ninety-nine chapters are grouped under the title and subtitle: "De otros lados (Capítulos prescindibles)" [From Diverse Sides (Expendable Chapters)]. At times, an expendable chapter will serve as a

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<sup>2</sup> Translated to "Table of Instructions" in the English translation by Gregory Rabassa (all of the translations I provide will be from Gregory Rabassa's translation, unless stated otherwise). However, it is significant to note the difference between "instruction" and "direction." Instruction suggests the completeness of the project and eventual fulfillment; whereas "direction" is imbued with movement and incompleteness and deferred fulfillment.

<sup>3</sup> Prego, p. 112.

sort of fold in the story developed in the first fifty-six chapters. By fold, I mean that the it will provide information or a scene that could fit into the fabric of the first fifty-six chapters but to the extent that it isn't necessary, it can afford to be folded into the fabric or unfolded for more information. Other times, an expendable chapter will offer supplemental writing, adding texts on top of the main story. Many of these supplemental texts come from the notes of another fictional writer named Morelli that the Club comes across. These texts are sometimes inserted into the expendable chapters with Oliveira's or members of the Club's commentary and other times it seems as though Morelli's raw text was inserted into the book directly. Other supplemental texts include direct quotes or what seem like news excerpts from authors who are not definitively inside Cortázar's fictional world. Thus, Cortázar's first sentence can be understood in yet another way: this book consists of many books insofar as it is an assemblage of many written texts.

As I discuss later in this argument, the meaning derived from Cortázar's text must be understood in terms of this unique composition. The text doesn't offer a message to be discovered by the reader but rather, the text creates a scene in which the reader's participation is just as important as the writer's intent and the story provided in the first fifty-six chapters in terms of meaning. I will provide a brief summary of what happens in the story with the understanding that this summary is necessarily reductive. I think that it is even more reductive than ordinary summaries because unlike other fictional works, the aim of Cortázar's text isn't to offer a story to the reader so a summary is not only missing events within the story but it is missing the entire point of the text. In any case, the story revolves around a main character, Horacio Oliveira. Horacio is part of a small, pseudo-intellectual group called the Club living in Paris. He lives with his love interest, La Maga, and her child, Rocamadour. The Club meets occasionally and primarily discusses various cultural topics ranging from music, art, literature

and language. In the second half of the first section that is, before the expendable chapters, Oliveira moves back to Argentina and reunites with an old friend Traveler and his wife, Talita.

In one way, this text could be considered somewhat of a quest novel. Although Oliveira doesn't do much in terms of action, in fact his personal philosophy within the text is defined by inaction, he is on a mental and consequently physical quest to reach his "center." This notion of center has many names, among them are both kibbutz and unity. We will return to this notion of the "center" later as it pertains to Horacio's writing but this search for the center is decisive in many ways. Horacio's quest towards his center is something that, in many ways, he spends the entire book attempting to define. Therefore, in addition to being potentially impossible to define it certainly exceeds the scope of this argument. What is important to acknowledge as we proceed is that this approximation of his center is largely a theoretical issue that Horacio is attempting to come to terms with. It is not a quest that he can successfully achieve by way of his conscious actions. Instead, he spends most of his time reflecting and existing on a theoretical sphere in order to get the feeling, even if only fleeting, that he has reached his center. This aspect of living primarily in the theoretical domain and secondly, within everyday reality will be important as we move through what seem like largely theoretical issues. For Horacio, the theoretical is the most important.

Furthermore, we might relate Horacio's unfulfilled quest for the center to the decentered construction of the text more broadly. As I have mentioned, the process of crystallization actively prohibits identifying a center. What is more, the text is perpetually (re)crystallized with every reading so that even if it were possible to locate a "center," the center is destined to be replaced and supplanted, endlessly. This process of de-centering and re-centering is the effect of

the *contranovel* or antinovel<sup>4</sup> impulse. Although the term did not emerge from Cortázar's text, it is useful to understand the *contranovel* as it is discussed in and performed by *Rayuela*. In the interview cited earlier Cortázar explains that the *contranovel* is

que se presenta como una tentativa para empezar desde cero en materia de idioma. Sí, claro yo me serví del idioma como cualquier escritor, pero hay una búsqueda desesperada para eliminar los tópicos, todo lo que nos quedaba todavía de mala herencia finisecular, hay una serie de continuas referencias a la *podredumbre* de los adjetivos. Es una especie de tentativa de limpieza general del idioma antes de poder volver utilizarlo.

[that which presents itself like an attempt to start from zero in the material of language.

Yes, of course, I made use of language like any writer, but there is desperate search to eliminate the clichés, all that remains with us from the bad inheritance from the turn of the century, there is a series of continuous references to the *putrefaction* of adjectives. It's a type of effort of a general cleaning of language before being able to return to using it.]<sup>5</sup>

As we can see, the theoretical thrust of the *contranovel* is directly concerned with how the writer makes use of their inevitable material, language. This brings us to the primary concern of this argument. *Rayuela* is above all concerned with the putrefaction of the language that we have unfortunately inherited. Notably, Cortázar wants to emphasize the putrefaction of language instead of simply, the death of language. Putrefaction goes at least one step further than death; it is what follows death. Cortázar feels as if our language has died and despite its apparent death

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<sup>4</sup> Rabassa's translation translated Cortázar's *contranovel* to antinovel. While I do not disagree with this translation I will preserve Cortázar's *contranovel* henceforth. I think the difference between *contra* and *anti* is significant enough to preserve the original. "Contra" can be translated as "against", amongst other possibilities. As I move forward in my argument I will illustrate Cortázar's war against language and by the same token, against literature. Since I am talking about fighting against language preserving the "contra" is helpful. It preserves the combative nature of the gesture. Although "anti" is similar and probably the best way to translate this term, I argue that it suggests more of a taking leave than a fighting against.

<sup>5</sup> Prego, p. 116. My emphasis.

we refuse to bury it and move on. Instead, as we continue to use it in the same form as before, it is as if we are attempting to utilize a corpse despite its rotting state. Due to its putrefied state, it is unable to align and reflect our true reality. Moreover, Cortázar is extremely aware of the power of language in the construction of our reality. This using language in a way that upholds the disingenuous language is seriously problematic for him. If we have a false language, then the shape of our reality is seriously compromised. For this reason, Cortázar and his characters have declared war on language. Oliveira often ruminates over the dangerous potency of words: "En guerra con la palabra [...] Tambien, a mí, a veces, me parece esta engendrando ríos de hormigas feroces que se comerán el mundo." [At war with words, at war [...] I too sometimes think that I'm engendering streams of ferocious ants that will devour the world.]<sup>6</sup> Of course, words are always already powerful. The other side of this argument would be to praise the power of words and their ability to affect us or the world in a positive way. To be sure, this is not what Cortázar is arguing against. As an author, he is necessarily fascinated by words insofar as he dedicated his life to writing, reading and in his case, translating. If we look at his *oeuvre* specifically, we will notice a particular fascination that, arguably, exceeds even the average writer. Many of his works making writing the central topic and his short stories are known for their playful experimentation with words. So it isn't that he is against language as such. He is against a certain usage as he mentions in the interview with Harss and Dohmann. However, Cortázar feels as if the language he has inherited doesn't coincide with the reality of the world. For this reason, words begin to take on a dangerous potency. To the extent that language constructs the world, in continuing to disperse a false language into the world by way of writing the writer is allowing these words to construct a false reality. Which is to say, that with each word, he releases the force that devours

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<sup>6</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 454/426.

the true reality of the world to make room for the false reality propagated by the false language. Moreover, it is not as if the author is exempt from the devouring force of words. Language just as much constructs his reality as much as the rest of world's reality. For this reason, even though the author is "engendering streams of ferocious ants" these ants dominate the author despite the fact that he is the one engendering them. Thus, Cortázar is arguing against the use of language that doesn't challenge the normative use of language. We might even see his entire *oeuvre* as an attempt to use language in a way combative way – revolting against the putrefied language that doesn't coincide with our reality.

Given the heterogeneity between the world and language I argue that we will always be at war with language. However, the allocation of power within the war can shift from side to side. What does it mean to have power in the war against language? Since the primary function of language is to convey meaning, I argue that the authority over meaning is at stake in this war language. How do we generate meaning from language? Do we turn to an authority outside of us, outside of language for meaning? In which case, we would be relinquishing our authority and allowing ourselves to be dominated by language – which is to say, we would be losing in the war. Are we active agents in the process of generating meaning? To the extent that it is unthinkable to strip language of all of its power, we will always be in this war. Which is to say, neither us nor language will ever hold all of the power over meaning. However, if we are active agents in the construction of meaning, the authority is disseminated and in our agency we refuse to be completely dominated by language.

This argument will trace the allocation of authority in Cortázar's war against language. First, I will consider this issue on the theoretical plane because Cortázar and his characters are highly aware of the theoretical side of this war. Thus, it is helpful to consider how one might first

renegotiate one's position in the war by shifting one's interpretation of the problem on the theoretical plane. After I outline some of the theoretical issues involved in the war against language I will move to discussing the ways in which Cortázar uses language and literature in order to deplete and transfer the authority that has been given to language.

To do this, I employ many of Derrida's concepts mainly from his essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" and his lecture, "The Double Session." Although Derrida is not emphatically at war with language, he is aware of the insufficiency of the structures that have prevailed throughout the course of Western history and dedicates his career to inhabiting these structures in a way that undermines their authority. For as much as they approach the problem of using language to critique language from different angles – theoretical and literary – Derrida and Cortázar arrive at a similar conclusion. Both suggest *play* as a way to cope with the problematic of language. It is helpful to put both author and theorist side by side to see how across fields and cultures they both respond to a significant problem in the same way.

### **Language and Reality**

Above all, *Rayuela* is an investigation of language. The characters are overwhelmingly concerned with the relationship between language and reality and by the same token, literature and truth. In addition to being the thematic focal point, the text itself is a realization of the philosophical inquiries taking place at the content level. Which is to say, Cortázar, his characters and the reader are all participating in an investigation of language and literature. The text does not offer an explicit theory of language in the way that it does for literature (by way of Morelli's notes). In fact, many of the theoretical inquiries regarding language arise from conversations amongst the club members and their viewpoints often contradict each other. What they have in

common, however, is that they all feel like they must wage a war against language. Which is to say, Cortázar is explicit in presenting the problem but he uses his characters to represent complexity of it without reducing it to an easily resolvable issue. The dialogue<sup>7</sup> amongst club members allows him to present various facets of the problematic of language without offering up a clear answer or perhaps, showing the irresolvable nature of the issue.

Thus, in light of the ambiguous and contradictory nature of Cortázar's representation of the problem, it is helpful to put Cortázar's literary text in conversation with Derrida's theoretical concepts. Both Cortázar and Derrida see language as similarly problematic. Derrida's theoretical concepts bring us out of Cortázar's fictional world, in which the characters emphatically declaring war on language and find a way to cope with this problem that undoubtedly has implications beyond the fictional. I argue that Cortázar responds in a way that is analogous to Derrida's theoretical response despite the fact that he does not provide the explicit theoretical insight that would outline the subsequent moves in this war. Both the author and the theorist identify *play* as the way to cope with the problems that the existence of language presupposes. I will begin by using Derrida's seminal essay, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," to outline at least two of interpretations of language that are in tension throughout *Rayuela*<sup>8</sup>. After considering what is at stake in both interpretations, I will then examine a few moments of the text that reveal the tension between the two theoretical interpretations of language. As I have mentioned, this tension is not resolved but rather, explored in *Rayuela*.

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<sup>7</sup> In a way, this is similar to German Romanticism's employment of the dialogue as a theoretical form. I am specifically thinking of F. Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry* where he offers a sort of kaleidoscope perspective on *poesie* in order to investigate the nebulous idea without giving an explicit definition to a concept that evades that gesture.

<sup>8</sup> I am aware that this essay is a direct attack on Structuralism however, I would like to use this essay in conjunction with his theories in *Of Grammatology* to extend the domain of these two interpretations. Which is to say, I want to use these two interpretations to look at language more broadly rather than specifically criticizing structuralism.

Finally, I will investigate the war that has been waged by Cortázar and his characters and move away from the theoretical to explore their actual modes of retaliation.

As mentioned, the characters seem particularly interested in the relationship between, language and reality and in particular, the role of literature within this larger dynamic. Chapter 99 is a crucial chapter in which the characters discuss the role of the writer, literary language and language as such with Morelli's notes at the center of the conversation. As they debate over the job of the poet or novelist, Ronald redirects the conversation away from the literary activity to the purview of language more broadly:

–Todo eso es oficio–dijo Ronald–. Pero detrás, detrás...

–Una poeta– dijo Oliveira, sinceramente conmovido–. Vos te deberías llamar Behind o Beyond, americano mío. O Yonder, que es tan bonita palabra.

–Nada de eso tendría sentido si no hubiera un detrás–.

["That's all part of the trade," Ronald said. "But behind it, behind...."]

"A poet," Oliveira said, sincerely moved. "Your name ought to be Behind or Beyond, my dear American. Or Yonder, that's such a pretty English word."

"None of it would make any sense if there weren't a behind–"]<sup>9</sup>

In this moment one of the most important reoccurring concepts makes its debut – the concept of Yonder. For a precise definition of Yonder we will turn to Etienne who defines it shortly after Ronald's initial comment:

lo que llamamos realidad, la verdadera realidad que también llamamos Yonder (a veces ayuda darle muchos nombres a una entrevisión, por lo menos se evita que la noción se cierre y se acartone), esa verdadera realidad...

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<sup>9</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch* p. 472/444.

[What we call reality, the true reality that we also call Yonder (sometimes it helps to give a lot of names to a partial vision, at least it prevents the notion from becoming closed and rigid) *that true reality...*]<sup>10</sup>

Using Etienne's definition, we can understand Ronald's comment better now. Ronald wants to stress the importance of *that true reality* that lies behind language and literature. He says, "[n]one of it would make any sense if there weren't a behind" which is to say, significance comes from a pure reality that is distinct from language and our everyday reality. As the other characters discuss the issues involved with aesthetic language and the duty of the writer, Ronald dismisses those issues of language as being "part of the trade" and wants to bring the conversation to something greater - the reality behind language. For Ronald, to the extent that reality is beyond the petty issues of literature, this realm is distinct from language. For him, language is then a medium by which we attempt to convey *that true reality*: Yonder. Put another way, language is the mediating veil between us and Yonder, the latter of which maintains the authoritative position over meaning – Yonder is what precedes language and it is what gives language its meaning. In this conception of language, signs are always signs of something that exists prior to and beyond the mediation of language – beyond what Derrida calls the *play* of signification. As we continue, it is important to acknowledge that the characters' attitude towards Yonder is contradictory and varies from character to character. As I have mentioned, *Rayuela* doesn't offer a cohesive understanding of these concepts but rather, presents them as issues at stake when considering the problematic of language and reality.

### **Understanding Yonder in Derridean Terms**

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<sup>10</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch* p. 474/445. (my emphasis)

In order to better understand this concept of Yonder it is helpful to engage with, what I see as, Derrida's counterpart(s) to the concept. Admittedly, in doing this I am imposing the weight of Derrida's critique on Cortázar's representation of the issue. However, it is my contention that we can associate Ronald's Yonder with what Derrida refers to as the *center* in "Structure, Sign and Play" and "transcendental signified" in *Of Grammatology*. As with most Derridean concepts, multiple names are given to a concept to avoid allowing any one sign to hold prevalence over the others. As we can see both Derrida and Etienne prefer to "give a lot of names to a partial vision," to use Etienne's terminology. In both texts, *Of Grammatology* and "Structure, Sign and Play," Derrida argues that throughout the course of Western history, there has been a demand for philosophical structures organized and defined by a center, "referring to a point of presence, a fixed origin."<sup>11</sup> As Derrida describes, the center is the organizing point which both permits and delimits the *play* within a structure. In its simplest form, Derrida's concept of play is defined as "the play of its elements inside the total form" or "play of signification."<sup>12</sup> In terms of the structure of language, play is the condition of relation amongst the elements that signify. In other words, play is the way in which meaning is produced by way of relation.

As in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's argument in "Structure, Sign and Play" hinges on his belief that the history of Western philosophy has been governed by a persistent desire for "full presence which is beyond play."<sup>13</sup> Although the center is not permanent and is always being replaced by another, Derrida argues that the desire for the center has persisted through time.

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<sup>11</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference* p. 352.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353

Some of these centers include: "eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject), alētheia, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth."<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, we can understand Ronald's Yonder as this notion of an unmediated presence that is beyond the play of signification. As in Derrida's notion of the center or transcendental signified, Yonder is a realm that is beyond language but simultaneously seems to precede and dictate play within the structure of language. To be sure, what I will be referring to as the center, point of presence, origin, transcendental signified, *that true reality* and Yonder are all references to the same concept. They all refer to a point or a realm that is beyond the play of signification and insofar as they permit and limit signification, they are figures which hold authority over the structure. However, in order to preserve Derrida's (and Etienne's) theoretical impulse, I will be alternating between terms, depending on which seems syntactically appropriate.

### **Two Interpretations: Origin and Play**

Regarding the structure of language, we can see this center as *that true reality* that supposedly lies behind language and that language is then attempting to represent. Derrida's essay is an attempt to mark out or define a rupture. This rupture disrupts the full presence (in Derrida's terms, or that true reality if we permit the connection to Cortázar's text). Notably, this rupture isn't something new but it is a condition that was always already there. In any case, this rupture destabilizes the exalted position of *that true reality* that gives meaning to language. Accepting Derrida's elaboration of the notion of rupture, this means that at the time that both Cortázar and Derrida are writing there is a sense that there is a disparity between the philosophical demands and the structures available and perhaps, they are in a time where

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<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 353

rereading these structures is more available. It is my contention that we can find this tension throughout Cortázar's text which would support Derrida's argument. Moreover, despite the fact that they are coming at it from different sides, literary and theoretical, they respond to the problem in comparable ways. Whether we fully accept Derrida's argument, it is nonetheless helpful to use Derrida's critical vocabulary to mark the tension involved in the problematic of language throughout the text as we work towards understanding why the characters are at war with language and what, if anything, can be done in this war.

So if the rupture is marking a break from traditional demands for a Yonder that exists beyond language, what does Derrida outline as an alternative to this line of thinking? At the end of "Structure, Sign and Play", Derrida arrives at a crucial moment in which he defines two, irreconcilable sides of the rupture:

There are thus two interpretations of interpretations, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism...<sup>15</sup>

If we accept the equivalence of Yonder and the center or transcendental signified, then Ronald seems to be aligned with the first interpretation. Ronald maintains that language and literature are only meaningful because of that which is behind it all. He emphasizes the critical importance of the sphere that lies behind language - *that true reality* beyond language and insofar as it is beyond language, it "escapes play." Whereas Ronald seems to be clearly turned towards this Yonder, Horacio questions the exaltation of this supposed Yonder. Although I wouldn't say that

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<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 370

Horacio has fully embraced the second interpretation, at times he seems to sense the rupture that Derrida speaks of. In response to Ronald, Horacio says: "Sigamos en busca del Yonder, hay montones de Yonders que ir abriendo uno detrás de otro." [Lets keep on looking for the Yonder, there are plenty of Yonders that keep opening up one after the other]<sup>16</sup>. In saying that there are multiple Yonders he is implicitly questioning the authority of the originary Yonder. Without relegating it to an illusion he strips it of its unique power. Moreover, in his assertion that Yonders keep opening up one after another we are reminded of Derrida's description of the substitutability of the center: "the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of center."<sup>17</sup> Like Derrida, it seems that Horacio is aware of the chain of Yonders or centers that keep opening up one after the other – taking the place of the former only be replaced by the subsequent. This is all to say that Horacio questions the idea of a pure, singular, unmediated presence that exists outside the play of signification, outside language.

We must now address the following questions: Why do either of these interpretations matter? What implications do these interpretations have on our relationship to language? In order to answer these questions let's turn to Etienne's lucid reflection on the relationship between language and reality:

Lenguaje quiere decir residencia en una realidad, vivencia en una realidad. Aunque sea cierto que el lenguaje que usamos nos traiciona (y Morelli no es el único en gritarlo a

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<sup>16</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 473/444.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 353.

todos los vientos) no basta con querer liberarlo de sus tabúes. Hay que re-vivirlo, no re-animarlo.

Language means residence in a reality, living in a reality. Even if it's true that the language we use betrays us (and Morelli isn't the only one who shouts it to the four winds), wanting to free it from its taboos isn't enough. We have to relive it, not reanimate it.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, if language means living in a reality then put another way, language constructs our reality – language is the structure of reality that we inhabit. So to respond to the aforementioned questions, if the characters are waging a war against the structure they inhabit then it is necessary to understand how they interpret the composition of this structure. Which is to say, it is necessary to conceive of the possibilities for constructing this structure so we might understand how to go about deconstructing<sup>19</sup> this structure in our retaliation. In the upcoming section I will address the second half of this excerpt as I trace a few of the reasons the characters in *Rayuela* feel as if they are obligated to wage a war against language and how Cortázar would prefer to retaliate.

It is my contention that the way in which we interpret the structure we are inhabiting determines the allocation of power in this war against language. As Nietzsche argues in his posthumously published essay, "On Truth and Lying in the Non-Moral Sense", humans construct a conceptual edifice from language and then allow it to govern their lives. If we are unhappy with this edifice of which we were the original architects, we need to examine the way in which we constructed it in order to identify its weakness. This is all to say that Derrida's two

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<sup>18</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch* p. 470/441.

<sup>19</sup> The word 'deconstruct' is here used purely for the syntactic symmetry with the aforementioned "construct" it is not meant to carry with it all the Derridean notions of deconstruction. To be sure, I do think that Cortázar intended to deconstruct the structure of language nor do I intend to provide a strictly speaking deconstructionist reading.

interpretations of structure will help us identify how to theoretically conceive of our position in Cortázar's war against language and moreover, how we might re-conceive our position in order to determine the best way to deal with the seemingly futile writer's paradox – using words to fight against words. If we can't renounce the language in its entirety, then we need to renegotiate our interpretation of it.

### **Power Play: The Allocation of Power in the Two Interpretations**

I've mentioned that Derrida's two interpretations suggest different allocations of authority, I will now unpack that assertion by looking at both interpretations more closely. The first interpretation "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile."<sup>20</sup> As I have mentioned, according to Derrida this interpretation has prevailed throughout Western history. In this interpretation, the true reality that lies behind language maintains authority over the meaning because it is what precedes language; it is what language is attempting to recuperate or decipher. Moreover, Derrida asserts that he who aligns with this interpretation "lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile." This is because *that true reality* or Yonder is inconceivable outside of language. Derrida argues that mediation and difference go all the way down to the origin which is why any attempt to reach "an origin which escapes play" will be inevitably be unsuccessful. Moreover, interpreting language in this way that exalts Yonder, as Ronald does, we surrender our authority over meaning to a force beyond language, beyond us. To better understand how this conception of language puts us in a position of subjugation, I will now turn to Nietzsche. Although Derrida criticizes Nietzsche's expansive employment of the

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<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 353.

word 'metaphor', he explicitly credits him for being one of the precursors in the move towards decentering the structure – in other words, prefiguring the second interpretation.

In his essay, "On Truth and Lying in the Non-Moral Sense", Nietzsche investigates the human *drive to truth*. Given their innate aptitude for dissimulation and deception, Nietzsche says that it's surprising that humanity should be so disposed to the idea of truth. He traces the drive to truth back to the formation of language. In a notable passage, he describes the genesis of words as such: "The stimulation of a nerve is first translated into an image: first metaphor! The image is then imitated by a sound: second metaphor! And each time there is a complete leap from one sphere into the heart of another, new sphere."<sup>21</sup> Which is to say, words are simply a consequence of translating a nervous stimulus into an arbitrary articulation. By the time we reach the domain of the word, the word is twice removed from the original stimulus. He emphasizes the fact that words are products human intellect prompted by our experience with things outside of us but in the end, they are twice removed from the things-in-themselves. Like Derrida, Nietzsche wants to emphasize the irreconcilable difference between language and *that true reality* occupied by things-in-themselves. For Nietzsche, it is this heterogeneity that presupposes the unstable foundation on which language was originally formed. Whether we agree with Nietzsche's theory on the formation of language, I think we can agree on the arbitrary nature of language and the irreconcilable difference between Yonder, the realm of pure truth, and language – both of which illustrate the instability of the foundations of language.

In light of this unstable foundation it is surprising that language becomes so dominating. In what has just been described, humans maintain total control over language. In the next stage, the process by which words become concepts, the power tilts over to the side of language.

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<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, p. 144.

Nietzsche explains that each word immediately becomes a concept and that "[e]very concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent."<sup>22</sup> He uses the example of the leaf to illustrate his point – we forget the individual differences between leaves in order to situate them under one, shared concept of *leaf*. Once we get to the stage of shared concepts, the random nervous stimulus from which the word was born turns to stone for future shared use and "[a]s creatures of *reason*, human beings now make their actions subject to the rule of abstractions."<sup>23</sup> In other words, Nietzsche is interrogating the unstable foundation on which we build the concepts that we allow to govern over our lives. The instability can be mapped out as follows: first we represent the thing-in-itself as an image which is utterly heterogeneous to the reality of thing (first metaphor); second we translate that image into an articulation which is now even further distanced from the true reality of the thing; third, we forget the differences of the unique occurrence of the thing in order to make them fit into a concept and by now, it is clear how far we are from the thing-in-itself. What's more, we forget the instability involved in these three operations and because of our forgetfulness, concepts become rigid structures that rule over our existence. Which is to say, first we construct the conceptual edifice then, forgetting we constructed it and the original unstable foundation we on which we constructed it, we move in and follow its house rules. Nietzsche illustrates the lunacy of this human condition nicely:

Here one can certainly admire humanity as a mighty architectural genius who succeeds in erecting the infinitely complicated cathedral of concepts on moving foundations, or even, one might say, on flowing water; admittedly, in order to rest on such foundations, it has

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<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, p. 146.

to be like a thing constructed from cobwebs, so delicate that it can be carried off on the waves and yet so firm as not to be blown apart by the wind.<sup>24</sup>

This excerpt illustrates the perversity of the situation — that something so delicate and unstable would become so rigid and dominating by way of the human penchant for forgetting. Despite the absurdity of it, for Nietzsche, this is an insurmountable human condition. Which is to say, we will always have to submit to language in order to be a functional human being in the world. Stripping language of all of its power is unthinkable. However, if one feels as if they are being dominated by language, like Cortázar's characters, they must find ways to reduce the authority of language. Reminding oneself of its unstable foundation can begin to deflate the power that is being unintentionally funneled into language. It is only because we forget its precarious origin that "the great edifice of concepts exhibits the rigid regularity of a Roman *columbarium*."<sup>25</sup> Importantly, the edifice of concepts *exhibits* fortitude despite the fact that its made out of cobwebs rather than stone. Moreover, the significance of this metaphor of the columbarium to my argument is twofold: first, it further illustrates the absurdity of the situation: quite literally, it is as if we build a columbarium to live in and then take orders from the dead; second, in introduces an element of death into the understanding of language that we have seen is shared by Cortázar. As we I have already discussed, Cortázar thinks the language he has inherited is putrefied – which is to say that Cortázar has gone one step further, not only is language dead but it has long since died and now we are attempting to use it in its rotted condition. In addition to noting the putrefaction of language in the aforementioned interview, language is likewise associated with death in *Rayuela*. Horacio flips through the dictionary and invents games to play

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<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, p. 147.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 146-147.

with the dictionary, he calls these games "juegos con el cementerio." Notably, both Nietzsche and Cortázar represent language as places in which corpses are stored. I will return to the significance of representing words as corpses after I further delineate the theoretical issues at stake.

Neither Nietzsche nor Derrida advocate for the non-existence of the pure reality that exists beyond play but rather, both insist on the fact there is an irreconcilable difference between the world of things and language. Nietzsche's argument beautifully shows the absurdity of our subjugation to the structure that we created. We think that the structure creates itself from *that true reality* that lies beyond it so we unwittingly oblige to subjugation because that is the nature of humanity. However, Nietzsche shows us that the originary formation of language is an attempt to bridge and utterly irreconcilable difference between the world and language and reminds us that it is indeed a product of our intellect rather than a natural product. Moreover, Nietzsche reminds us of our original authority over the structure – in forgetting that we were the original architects of the structure, we relinquished our authority over it and transferred it over to a point of presence, center, or Yonder. Despite the fact that the figure occupying that central position is succeeded by another, what is important is that the authority is always given to that figure and never us.

Let's now briefly unpack the second interpretation proposed by Derrida. The second interpretation is when one interprets a structure in a way that "is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism..."<sup>26</sup> When one is no longer turned toward origin, one extinguishes the authority previously given to that originary center. One might even say that in turning away from origin, authority is disseminated. If meaning is no

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 370.

longer determined by the way in which language coincides with a preceding truth but instead, determined by the relation between elements then the authority is disseminated among the elements. I will return to how this actually manifests in literature in the second half of this argument. However, it is now possible to understand the implications that Derrida's rupture would have in a war against language. The interpretation one makes about the structure of language determines how one interprets the relationship between structure and language. This may seem like a purely theoretical issue because well, for the most part it is. However, Cortázar's characters are all pseudo-intellectuals who place a great deal of value on the theoretical. Horacio, especially, prioritizes the intellectual over the actual. His daily decisions are first made in the theoretical domain before they reach the actual. Thus, for Horacio, reevaluating the allocation of power on the theoretical plane necessarily precedes his attacks in the actual plane. To clarify, what I mean by actual attacks is the way in which Horacio (or rather, Cortázar) makes actual decisions in the way he uses language and literature in order to attack language. I will be unpacking these actual maneuvers in the latter half of this argument. For now, we need to further expound the theoretical issues at stake.

In the next section I will first outline some of the issues the characters have with language. As I trace a few of their theoretical issues, using examples from the text to provide clearer examples of these issues, I will refer back to the two interpretations of structure to show the tension between these two interpretations throughout the text. In any case, understanding the various interpretations of the structure of language will help us understand the modes of retaliation possible in this seemingly futile war – Why are Cortázar and his characters at war with language? How can one possibly retaliate when your instrument is simultaneously your enemy?

### **Theoretical Tension: Derrida's Interpretations within *Rayuela***

Although the characters have many issues with language, exploring all of them is outside the scope of this argument. I will outline two recurrent concerns before I discuss why they might feel this way. First, language is seen as a barrier to Yonder and second, language is deceptive insofar as it masks the truth. Horacio reflects on the former as he describes the peculiar experience of being between sleep and wakefulness and says,

Cuando te despertás, con los restos de un paraíso entrevisto en sueños, y que ahora te cuelgan como el pelo de un ahogado: una náusea terrible, ansiedad, sentimiento de lo precario, lo falso, sobre todo lo inútil. Te caes hacia adentro [...] Sí caes por un momento hacia adentro, hasta que las defensas de la vigilia, oh la bonita expresión, oh lenguaje, se encargan de detener.

[When you wake up, with the remains of a paradise half-seen in dreams handing down over you like the hair on someone who's been drowned: terrible nausea, anxiety, a feeling of the precarious, the false, especially the useless. You fall inward [...] Yes, you fall inward for a moment, until the defenses of wakefulness, oh pretty words, oh language, take charge and stop you.]<sup>27</sup>

In this experience, in this moment between sleep and wakefulness, he is on the brink of "falling inward" or experiencing the depths of his true self. It is my contention that this idea of falling inward correlates to the notion of approximating Yonder, the true reality that is unmediated and outside language. Yonder is closest for Horacio before he has fully arrived in the conscious, waking moment. For once he reaches a state of absolute wakefulness, language catches him in

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<sup>27</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 380/354.

her net – preventing further approximation to his deepest and truest self. In this way, language is an insuperable barrier to this truer state.

Likewise, Morelli mentions the authentic self in the dream state when he writes, "Sólo en sueños, en la poesía, en el juego– [...] nos asomamos a veces a lo que fuimos antes de ser esto que vaya a saber si somos." [Only in dreams, in poetry, in play [...] do we sometimes arrive at what we were before we were this thing that, who knows, we are]<sup>28</sup>. The ontological tension in this excerpt is analogous to Horacio's experience. In both Horacio and Morelli's comments there is a sense that there are certain states of being that are more hospitable for the authentic self. Again, I am equating the idea of the authentic self to the idea of Yonder but for Morelli, that idea starts to look a little different. Morelli extends the domain of the authentic self (Yonder) by adding poetry and play. For Morelli, Yonder is something that can be accessible by way of conscious decisions, despite and perhaps as a consequence of, the mediating net of language. Which is to say, Morelli doesn't consider Yonder, or the domain of truth and authenticity, wholly divorced from language or beyond the play of signification. If one can access Yonder via poetry and play, then Morelli seems be inclined towards Derrida's second interpretation – he is affirming play (in the Derridean sense and in the ordinary sense) rather than submitting himself to the fruitless enterprise of deciphering truth that lies beyond language. Put another way, Morelli is not trying to bypass play in order to approximate Yonder but rather use play as an entrance point. In this interpretation, the notion of the authentic self is now something different from the pure, unmediated realm of Yonder.

So which is it? Does language prevent us from approximating Yonder or does it provide an entrance point by which to access it? It is important to note that Morelli indicates a certain

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<sup>28</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 488/459.

usage of language that allows us to arrive at our authentic self – poetry. Even though Morelli doesn't specify what kind of play he is referring to, we might even consider play a certain mode of using language as well. For Morelli, it isn't language as such that provides an entrance point to Yonder, but rather a specific way of using it. We will return to this idea after we look at the second major issue.

Similar to its role as a barrier or obstacle, the characters see language as a deceptive veil – masking and distorting the truth beyond it. Once again, language and reality occupy two distinct dimensions - if Yonder is subject to the mischievous filter of language it must have a pure state outside of language. The aforementioned chapter, Chapter 99, opens with Étienne commenting on Morelli's text:

–No es la primera vez que alude al empobrecimiento del lenguaje–dijo Étienne–. Podría citar varios momentos en que los personajes desconfían de sí mismos en la medida en que se sienten como dibujados por su pensamiento y su discurso, y temen que el dibujo sea engañoso. *Honneur des hommes, Saint Langage...* Estamos lejos de eso."

["It isn't the first time that he's referred to the erosion of language," Étienne said. "I could mention several places where characters lose confidence in themselves to the degree in which they feel they've been drawn through their thought and speech, and they're afraid the sketch may be deceptive. *Honneur des hommes, Saint Langage...* We're far away from that.]"<sup>29</sup>

As I have mentioned, this chapter is a crucial insofar as it is a concentrated sample of the investigation of language sprinkled throughout the rest of text. Thus, it is notable that it opens with the notion that language is deceptive which means that not only is there a gap between the

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<sup>29</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 467/439.

reality of the characters and the language that depicts them but their translation into language denatures the truth. The transformation is deformation because they see language as eroded and thus, inherently deceitful. Additionally, there is an added layer of complexity insofar as this scene is one in which fictional characters discuss the feelings of other fictional characters and the deception of fictional language. We might see this as one of the many ways *Rayuela* makes itself its own subject.

Before I explain why the characters feel as if the transformation is necessarily deformation it is helpful to at least give one more example of this in the text to show that it is a recurrent sentiment. The characters repeatedly condemn language as the "reflejo de una óptica y de un *Organum* falsos o incompletos, que nos enmascaran la realidad, la humanidad" [reflection of a false or incomplete optic and *Organum* that mask reality and humanity for us.]<sup>30</sup> This is why Horacio refuses to talk about his new lover, Pola, with La Maga, he says, "no quiero convertirla en palabras, ni siquiera con vos" [I don't want to turn her into words, not even with you.]<sup>31</sup> Once again this excerpt shows the apprehension towards the process by which reality is translated into words. Horacio is unwilling to translate Pola into words because they would inevitably be unjust to her reality.

### **The Insufficiency of Language: Declaring War on Language**

But why is it that words would necessarily be deceitful? Isn't it possible that words could be beneficial to Pola's true self in some way? By the same token, why does Horacio feel as if language is a barrier, preventing access to Yonder? Which is to say, why do Cortázar and his

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<sup>30</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 467/439.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495/466.

characters feel like it is their duty to wage a war against language? In one of the expendable chapters, a couple of the quotes Morelli uses appear in their full form and without much commentary on the part of the Club. Despite its arguably unstable position within the textual fabric<sup>32</sup>, a topic I will address in the second half of this argument, this excerpt responds to the aforementioned questions.

Lo único que prueba mi lenguaje es la lentitud de una visión del mundo limitada a lo binario. Esta insuficiencia del lenguaje es evidente, y se la deplora vivamente. Pero qué decir de la insuficiencia de la inteligencia binaria en sí misma? La existencia interna, la esencia de las cosas se la escapa. [...] lo admite, pero no puede comprenderlo, no puede incorporar a su propia estructura la realidad de las estructuras profundas que examina. Para conseguirlo, debería cambiar de estado...

[The only thing that my language proves is the slowness of a world vision limited to the binary. This insufficiency of language is obvious, and is strongly deplored. But what about the insufficiency of binary intelligence itself? Internal existence, the essence of things, escapes it. [...] it accepts it, but it cannot understand it, it cannot incorporate into its own structure the reality of the profound structure it examines. In order to do that, it would have to change its state ...]<sup>33</sup>

The insufficiency of language seems to be based on the belief that our language is saturated with the conceptual baggage of Occidental thought. We have long since been aware of the inadequacy of binary logic and yet, we don't have a language to reflect that progression. Instead, we are forced to use a language that is limited to the eroded conceptual scheme of the past which doesn't

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<sup>32</sup> Horacio referencing the Club, the Club referencing Morelli and Morelli referencing Pauwels and Bergier.

<sup>33</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch* p. 436/410.

correspond to the essence of things as they are now. Recognizing this insufficiency, Cortázar would like to change its state. For this reason, he and his characters have declared war on language. Horacio asserts that

[e]stá muy bien hacerle guerra al lenguaje emputecido, a la literatura por llamarla así, en nombre de una realidad que creemos verdadera, que creemos alcanzable, que creemos en alguna parte del espíritu, con perdón de la palabra. Pero el mismo Morelli no ve más que el lado negativo de su guerra. Siente que tiene que hacerla, como vos y como todos nosotros. ¿Y?"

[it's O.K. to declare war on language turned whore, literature, as it were, in the name of a reality we think is true, that we think we can reach, that we think is there somewhere in the spirit, if you'll pardon the expression. But Morelli himself sees only the negative side of his battle. He feels he has to wage it, like you and like all of us. And..?]<sup>34</sup>

As Horacio explicitly says, he, Morelli and the rest of the Club feel like they have a duty to declare war on language. In Horacio's and Morelli's case, they wage it by way of literature and in this way they are simultaneously declaring war on language and literature. However, as the final word of the excerpt (¿Y?) suggests they know they must wage it but they are less certain of the subsequent step. Moreover, Cortázar also explicitly implicates himself in this war against language in an interview:

There's a terrible paradox in being a writer, a man of words, and fighting against words. It's a kind of suicide. But I want to stress that at bottom I don't fight against words as a whole or in essence. I fight against a certain usage, a language that I think has been falsified, debased, made to serve ignoble ends. [...] Of course, I have to fight by means of

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<sup>34</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 471/443. Rabassa's translation ends with "So?". I have modified the translation with a more direct translation of "And?"

words themselves. That's why *Rayuela*, from a stylistic point of view, is very badly written.<sup>35</sup>

In the final sentence of this excerpt he briefly mentions one of his modes of retaliation or rather, modes of coping in the war - writing very poorly. We will examine the choice of non-aesthetic language in the second half of this argument. For now, let's focus on the crux of the author's dilemma well – how can you fight against words when your only artillery are the words you are fighting against?

### **Fighting Against Your Weapons: The Writer's Paradox**

In the same interview, Cortázar asserts that he would prefer to completely abandon the putrefied language that he has inherited. He says, "[i]t may be absurd for a writer to insist on discarding his work instruments. But I think those instruments are false. I want to wipe my slate clean, start from scratch."<sup>36</sup> This sentiment comes through in the text as well, specifically in an excerpt we have already looked at:

Lenguaje quiere decir residencia en una realidad, vivencia en una realidad. Aunque sea cierto que el lenguaje que usamos nos traiciona (y Morelli no es el único en gritarlo a todos los vientos) no basta con querer liberarlo de sus tabúes. Hay que re-vivirlo, no-reanimarlo.

Language means residence in a reality, living in a reality. Even if it's true that the language we use betrays us (and Morelli isn't the only one who shouts it to the four

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<sup>35</sup> Harss and Dohmann, p. 234.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

winds), wanting to free it from its taboos isn't enough. We have to relive it, not reanimate it.<sup>37</sup>

Nietzsche's metaphor of the columbarium seems particularly appropriate now. Let's explore the possibilities of this metaphor in an effort to connect all of the concepts and metaphors employed thus far. Étienne comments on the constructive force of language: language constructs our reality to the extent that it becomes the edifice that we inhabit. Likewise, Nietzsche discusses language in terms of a conceptual edifice whereby humans are the architects. For Nietzsche's part, the significance of understanding the conceptual edifice in terms of a columbarium rather than a different type of structure is that it connotes the life cycle of the word and its death once it becomes hardened into a concept and for this reason, it is likened to a corpse. For Nietzsche and Cortázar then, words are related to corpses that have anything to do with the reality they are supposedly representing. Cortázar's concern lies primarily in the fact that the architects of this columbarium are so far removed from our reality. In continuing to reside in the columbarium that they erected and which still holds their corpses as authorities of meaning, we are reifying these outmoded systems of power.

If humanity is doomed to inhabiting one columbarium or another as Nietzsche suggests, Cortázar wants to move into a different one, he wants to "re-vivir" it, not "re-animar" it. Here, the Spanish is much more helpful than the English counterpart. The Spanish "re-vivir" connotes a fresh, new life, living and feeling again, perhaps best understood as the subsequent stage in a life cycle. Where as "re-animar" connotes a sort of bringing back to life, perhaps in a zombie sense – reawakening the corpse without changing its form. If we are living in a columbarium, Étienne and Cortázar are specifying that we do not want to bring these corpses back to life, but

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<sup>37</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 470/441.

rather find a way to start anew and do away with the putrefied language that we have inherited. But of course, we are in no position to simply do away with language and start again. So what then are we to do in light of this impossibility?

### ***Inhabiting In a Certain Way***

Since we know that erecting an entirely new structure is impossible, it is helpful to turn to Derrida who shares the same apprehension towards the antiquated language of Occidental thought. I will first draw parallels between the issue they both have with language and then examine how Derrida deals with the problem on the theoretical plane before we consider how Cortázar responds on the literary plane. In both *Of Grammatology* and "Structure, Sign and Play," Derrida exposes the limits of the structures that have dominated our Western history but insists that we cannot overcome these structures entirely. Derrida recognizes that the logic of logocentrism, or the metaphysics of presence, is embedded into our language and our conceptual schema and because of this, it is futile to attempt to destroy it from the outside because there is no way to be outside the logocentric history. This is the deconstructionist's project - to unravel the structure from the inside. He explains:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it.<sup>38</sup>

Once again, inhabiting structures seems to be an inevitable human condition. However, instead of erecting a new structure, as Cortázar might dream of doing, Derrida recognizes that in order to

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<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 24.

resist these structures one must inhabit them *in a certain way*. Moreover, I argue that the last sentence of the excerpt is an implicit call to be more aware of the structures one inhabits. Since one is inevitably going to inhabit them, two ways of regaining authority in an otherwise oppressive circumstance is to become more aware of the structures and choose to inhabit them *in a certain way*.

While explaining Derrida's, and thus Heidegger's, deconstructive method of writing 'sous rature', Gayatri Charavorty Spivak explains that this method is a necessary reaction to the inevitable issue that comes from "working with the resources of the old language, the language we already possess, and which possesses us. To make a new word is to run the risk of forgetting the problem or believe it solved."<sup>39</sup> As we can see, this is the very predicament affecting Cortázar. One of Derrida's responses to this issue is to transform the word by writing 'sous rature': "This is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)"<sup>40</sup> Spivak explains further, "[i]n examining familiar things we come to such unfamiliar conclusions that our very language is twisted and bent even as it guides us. Writing "under erasure" is the mark of this contortion"(xiv). For Derrida, writing 'sous rature' is one of the ways he responds to the insufficiency or contortion of a language that is necessarily embedded within the logic of logocentrism which has prevailed throughout Western history. Since there is no way out of this history, writing 'sous rature' is one of the ways that he inhabits it *in a certain way*; exposing the limits of language while understanding that he must use it if he wants to expose the fallacy of

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<sup>39</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. xv.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

this logic. Moreover, writing 'sous rature' is a visual mark of the structures – visually emphasizing and reminding the reader of the structures they are inhabiting.

If this is one of the ways that Derrida responds to the impossibility of superseding the putrefied structures of the past on the theoretical plane, how might Cortázar respond on the literary plane? In what I have discussed, there are at least two things that must be addressed: how one goes about inhabiting structures *in a certain way* as well as how one makes the structures we inhabit more explicit. With regards to the first, I argue that it entails both, how we theoretically construct the structure (two interpretations of structure) and what we actually do within the structure (i.e., writing 'sous rature'). This is why I outlined Derrida's two interpretations earlier. Derrida's writing 'sous rature' is only possible because he is aligned with the second interpretation. That is, he is no longer turned towards origin but rather he affirms play. In other words, the second interpretation dethrones the authority of the previous structures and permits play. If one maintains the first interpretation, the freedom to play will always be limited by Yonder, the point of presence, or the transcendental signified. Which is to say, the structure of language will retain its rigid regularity of a columbarium erected by the architects of antiquated Occidental past. However, in the second interpretation the writer is no longer turned towards the nebulous sphere beyond reality; they no longer look to a center beyond language for meaning. Instead the writer turns away from the authority that is beyond language, releases the grip the signifier had on the signified and opens up to *play*. In this domain, the authority over meaning is disseminated amongst the elements. meaning is created relationally rather than being sought in an undefinable realm outside language. In this war against language, Etienne explains that the writer must:

inventar el lenguaje, acabar con las formas coaguladas e ir todavía en contacto con lo que pretende mentar. No ya las palabras en sí porque eso importa menos, sino la estructura total de una lengua, de un discurso.

[set language on fire, put an end to its coagulated forms and even go beyond it, place in doubt the possibility that language is still in touch with what it pretends to name. Not words as such any more, because that's less important, but rather the total structure of language, of discourse.]<sup>41</sup>

This is a call to place in doubt the connection between the total structure of language (that we are inhabiting) and the Yonder that is giving that structure meaning. Which is to say, the writer needs to question the first interpretation of the structure of language. Although Cortázar's doesn't seem to be aligned with either of the two interpretations, it seems apparent that the tension throughout the text is a consequence of the same rupture that Derrida discusses. Both Derrida and Cortázar feel as if the old structure is inapplicable but Derrida, understanding the necessity of the structure as well as its insufficiency, finds a way to inhabit it *in a certain way*: first by aligning with the second interpretation and from there, making decisions based on play rather than origin (i.e., writing *sous rature*). Although there seems to be a tension between the two interpretations within his text, Cortázar has indeed begun to *play*. In the upcoming section I will trace the ways Cortázar makes explicit the structure of language and how he begins to inhabit these structures in a certain, playful way. Both of which are modes of retaliation in the war against language.

## **Retaliation**

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<sup>41</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 475/447.

Hitherto I endeavored to present some of the theoretical issues involved with the war against language waged by Cortázar and his characters. Both Cortázar and Derrida sense that there is a problem with language and they both feel as if they must confront the problem. Since Cortázar is not strictly speaking a language theorist, I have used Derrida's theories to trace the contours of Cortázar's attack. Both are suspicious of the language they must use: language that cannot be divorced from the conceptual baggage of the past. For Derrida, that conceptual baggage comes from a long history of the metaphysics of presence: an overarching demand for presence that has pervaded the whole of Western philosophy. Similarly, Cortázar feels that the language they have inherited is saturated with Occidental ideology that has long since putrefied. It has rotted and its rotten exterior is enveloping our reality; enshrouding our true nature with its dead forms. For this reason, Cortázar asserts that we need to "re-vivirlo" rather than "re-animarlo." As I've mentioned, this distinction suggests doing away with the putrefied structure and starting anew. Although Cortázar is aware of the impossibility of getting rid of the total structure of language, he maintains this dream despite its impossibility. In an interview<sup>42</sup> he deplored the fact that his novel raises many questions without providing many answers. This is where Derrida's theoretical position is helpful. Cortázar's desire to supersede the total structure of language is unrealistic. Cortázar is very clear about the problems he detects – he is waging a war against language and his characters state it often and explicitly. However, as he notes in the previously mentioned interview, his text explores the facets and the issues involved in the problematic of language without much resolution. What I mean is that Cortázar and his characters know they must wage the war, they know that their language is insufficient but they aren't as clear about the theoretical side of retaliation. Derrida's theories and Morelli's notes on

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<sup>42</sup> See Prego, *Fascinacion de las palabras*.

the *contranovel* provide the concepts necessary to identify the ways in which Cortázar copes with the problem of language within the text.

Derrida argues against any attempt to supersede the structure of language from the outside. Not only is that impossible to do but the attempt is unadvisable because it would run the risk of forgetting the old issues and replicating the very thing we are fighting against. Thus instead of erecting a new columbarium to inhabit, Derrida argues that we must begin to inhabit the old structure *in a certain way*. Moreover, Derrida asserts that "one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it."<sup>43</sup> I argue that this points to the fact that we allow the structures to dominate us the more we are unaware of their presence. Which is to say, in our stupor the columbarium gets stronger and stronger. Thus, in the war against language, we must first become more aware of the structure we are inhabiting and then begin to inhabit it *in a certain way*. In the upcoming sections of this argument, I will trace the ways in which Cortázar draws attention to the structure of the text and examine the ways in which he inhabits and makes the reader inhabit the structure in a certain way. As a consequence of both of these operations, authority is disseminated amongst the elements – freeing us from complete subjugation.

As a writer, Cortázar's medium of retaliation in the war against language is, of course, literature. We can see the *contranovel* as Cortázar's way of inhabiting the structure of the novel and by the same token, the structure of language *in a certain way*. The first half of the following excerpt has already been quoted but it is useful to revisit it once more:

Y por eso el escritor tiene que invendiar el lenguaje, acabar con las formas coaguladas e ir todavía en contacto con lo que pretende mentar. No ya las palabras en sí porque eso importa menos, sino la estructura total de una lengua, de un discurso. [...] Lo que él

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<sup>43</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 24.

quiere es transgredir el hecho literario total, el libro, si querés. A veces en la palabra, a veces en lo que la palabra transmite. Procede como un guerrillero, hace saltar lo que puede, el resto sigue su camino.

[And that's why the writer has to set language on fire, put an end to its coagulated forms and even go beyond it, place in doubt the possibility that language is still in touch with what it pretends to name. Not words as such any more, because that's less important, but rather the total structure of language, of discourse. [...] What he wants to do is transgress the total literary deed, the book if you will. Sometimes the word, sometimes what the word transmits. He works like a guerrilla fighter, he blows up what he can, the rest follows in its path.]<sup>44</sup>

What is important here is that the *contranovel* is at once an attack on the typical novel and an attempt to "transgress the total literary deed." This means that the writer is blowing up what he can within the literary structure but he is really aiming grenades at a target greater than the literary deed – the structure of language. For this reason, as this chapter progresses the reader should keep in mind that an attack on literature is an attack on language. Cortázar writes a *contranovel* in an attempt to undermine the structure of language as a whole.

First, I will briefly discuss the *contranovel* broadly to give the reader a sense of its theoretical impetus within the text. Then I will outline the ways in which the text makes the reader more aware of the structures they are inhabiting by emphasizing its own materiality. Finally, I will look at a few ways Cortázar inhabits the structure *in a certain way* which affirms play. By affirming play rather than looking towards the transcendental signified or Yonder for meaning, the power to convey meaning no longer resides in the structure of language or in the

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<sup>44</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 475/447.

realm beyond language. Instead, in the affirmation of play, meaning is generated by way of relation among elements within the structure. This does not necessarily transfer all authority over meaning to us but rather, we become one of the elements involved in the process of generating meaning. In other words, the power doesn't entirely belong to the user nor the medium but comes from the play of relation among all the elements. In the dissemination of power, the sign is dethroned and can no longer dominate the writer.

### **The *Contranoval*: There is No Origin, Only Play**

Throughout the text, Morelli's notes on literature and the *contranoval* are explicitly meta-reflections on the project of *Rayuela*. The sheer amount of these reflections is one of the ways the reader is reminded of the structure in which they are inhabiting. With these metafictional notes the reader is constantly challenged to critically examine how they coincide with the textual artifact in front of them. In any case, Morelli's drive to go against the traditional literary project in favor of the *contranoval* comes from his frustration "que sus armas se han vulto contra él" [that his weapons have been turned against him.]<sup>45</sup> His weapons, of course, are words. We can easily connect this sentiment to Cortázar's own frustration in the aforementioned interviews. Moreover, not only have his weapons turned against him but he is now in a position of subjugation – he feels as if he is being "sometido al lenguaje que le han vendido" [dominated by the language they have sold him.]<sup>46</sup> Thus, the *contranoval* is a violent act *contra* the putrefied language; *contra* the authority that endows that language with meaning. Why is this? Oliveira explicitly answers this question:

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<sup>45</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 473/445.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 475/446.

Lo único claro en todo lo que ha escrito el viejo es que si seguimos utilizando el lenguaje en su clave corriente, con sus finalidades corrientes, nos moriremos sin haber sabido el verdadero nombre del día. Es casi tonto repetir que nos venden la vida, como decía Malcolm Lowry, que nos la dan prefabricada. [...] por la práctica el viejo se muestra y nos muestra la salida. Para qué sirve un escritor si no para destruir la literatura? Y nosotros, que no queremos ser ~~lectores-hembra~~, para qué servimos si no para ayudar en lo posible a esa destrucción?

[The only thing clear in everything the old man has written is that we still utilize language in its current key, with its current finalities, we shall die without ever knowing the real name of the day. Its almost stupid to repeat that life is sold to us, as Malcolm Lowry said, that's given to us prefabricated. [...] the old man shows himself by the way he does it and he shows us *the way out*. What good is a writer if he can't destroy literature? And us, we don't want to be ~~female-readers~~<sup>47</sup>, what good are we if we don't help as much as we can in that destruction?]<sup>48</sup>

In other words, the *contranovel* is an attempt to undermine the prefabricated structure that has been passed down to us because this structure is not true to our reality. It is an attempt to utilize language in a different key, or rather *in a certain way*. Moreover, the *contranovel* is the way out of this prefabricated life. As we I have tried to show by way of Derrida's theories, there is no way *out* of the structure. We cannot exit the structure of language, however perhaps there is a way out of the prefabricated life that the putrefied structure is imposing on us. By using *contranovel* to

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<sup>47</sup> Throughout the text Cortázar uses the term "female-reader" to signify lazy readers that do not wish to wage war against language and literature like their male counterpart. Since its publication, Cortázar has apologized for this misguided patriarchal misnomer. For the remainder of this argument, I will keep and delete this term - marking its inaccuracy with the deletion and keeping it as a visual reminder of the error.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 470/442. (My emphasis, my deletion)

expose the limits of the rotted language, there might be a way out of subjugation and thus, a way out of the cycle of repeating the prefabricated life that is disingenuous to our actual life. Thus, the *contranovel* is an attempt to destroy the structure of literature as we know it and thus, language as we know it. Importantly, the *contranovel* is at once a destructive act on the part of the author as well as an attempt to make the reader an accomplice in the destruction. By implicating the reader into the attack, the writer is able to expand his scope of influence – he is at once inhabiting the structure in a different way and forcing every reader to inhabit it in a different way which makes them both agents in the generation of meaning.

Thus, if the *contranovel* is an act of destruction, an attempt use language in a different way, what is it attempting to destroy? What type of language is it differing from? I understand the *contranovel* as an effort to move away from the type of book that would come out of Derrida's first interpretation of structure, which is turned towards origin, and to move towards the second interpretation, revels in *play*. To make this connection between the two interpretations discussed in the first half of this argument and the typical book versus the *contranovel*, I will turn to Derrida's lecture, *The Double Session*. This lecture is particularly helpful for this argument because Derrida performs a literary analysis comparing two types of books which I argue coincide with the two interpretations of structure proposed in "Structure, Sign and Play." Which is to say, this lecture might be seen as a critical literary manifestation of the theoretical issues in the first half of this argument.

Morelli explains that the *contranovel* impulse comes in opposition to the understanding of the novel that is “content in a closed order.”<sup>49</sup> In opposition to closed book that is above all defined by its “determined message”, the *contranovel* is the operation that “[corta] de raíz toda

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<sup>49</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, p. 396.

construcción sistemática de caracteres y situaciones. Método: la ironía, la autocrítica incesante, la incongruencia, la imaginación al servicio de nadie” [cut[s] the roots of all systematic construction of characters and situation. Method: irony, ceaseless self-criticism, incongruity, imagination in service of no one.]<sup>50</sup> Much like in Derrida's work, the *contranovel* is a critique against the book as a self-enclosed system of meaning. Directly following the excerpt above, Morelli adds that the *contranovel* is an attempt

Así, usar la novela como se usa un revólver para defender la paz, cambiando su signo. Tomar de la literatura eso que es puente vivo de hombre a hombre, y que el tratado o el ensayo sólo permite entre especialistas. Una narrativa que no sea pretexto para la transmission de un 'mensaje' (*no hay mensaje, hay mensajeros y eso ese el mensaje, así como el amor es el que ama*)

[To use a novel in that way, just as one uses a revolver to keep the peace, changing its symbol. To take from literature that part which is a living bridge from man to man, and which the treatise or the essay permit only among specialists. A narrative that will not be a pretext for the transmission of a 'message' (*there is no message, only messengers, and that is the message, just as love is the one who loves*)]<sup>51</sup>

the novel is simply transmitting a message, the message would have needed to precede the representation and novel would be a mere vehicle for transmitting this message after. In opposition to the traditional book or novel, the *contranovel* is one that offers an array of heterogeneous "messengers" that prohibit passage to a single, unified "message." It is here that I think we can find a connection to the mimetic "book" outlined by Derrida in *The Double Session*.

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<sup>50</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch* p.422/396.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423/396-397. (My emphasis)

Derrida frames his text with four qualities of the mimetic book that he draws out of Plato's *Philebus*. Although he has much to say about the mimetic book, the type of book that has dominated the Western world, it is enough to point out that above all, for Derrida, the book is defined by the order of appearance or order of truth. In short, the order of appearance is the “precedence (pré-séance) of the imitated, that governs philosophical or critical interpretation of literature.”<sup>52</sup> In this light, the notion of the book presupposes the preexistence of a “truth” that is then communicated through literature. In other words, the book (imitator) appears on the scene of truth second to the truth (imitated). Returning back to Morelli's notes, this is the type of book that would be the “pretext for the transmission of a 'message.'” Conversely, the *contranovel* is instead, an amalgamation of messengers that do not refer back to a preceding “message” nor do they collectively result in a unified message. In fact, they actively refuse a totalizing gesture that would engender a “message.” It is natural for the reader to read a logic into the text that would connect the heterogeneous elements however as will discuss shortly, the text works to make the reader aware of their role in constructing the message. In other words, since the reader is given such a big role in constructing meaning – the notion of a prefabricated message is rendered impossible. Unlike the authors before him, Cortázar does not use the text in order to approximate a deeper truth (or message); he is not turned towards origin (first interpretation). Instead, *Rayuela* is an assemblage of “messengers” that constantly interrupt, intersect, and redirect each other, which is to say, it is an assemblage of messengers that *play* (second interpretation). This will become more clear when I discuss the ways in which the text inundates the reader in excess articulation.

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<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 192.

### Contra Aesthetic Language and Passive Reading

Aligned with his attack on the typical book, the writer of the *contranovel* is opposed to aesthetic language. To Morelli's view, aesthetic language is the height of deception and trickery. Aesthetic language tricks the reader into comfortably consuming language and not engaging with the war:

Morelli entiende que el mero escribir estético es un escamoteo y una mentira, que acaba por suscitar al lector-hembra, al tipo que no quiere problemas sino soluciones, o falso problemas ajenos que le permiten sufrir cómodamente sentado en su sillón, sin comprometerse en el drama que también debería ser el suyo.

[Morelli understands that the mere writing of aesthetic is a fraud and a lie and ends up arousing the ~~female reader~~, the type that doesn't want any problems but rather solutions, or false and alien problems that will allow him to suffer comfortable seated in his chair, without compromising himself in the drama that would also be his.]<sup>53</sup>

It is this comfortable interaction with language that the *contranovel* wants to challenge. Morelli and Cortázar wants to "quebrar los hábitos mentales del lector" [break the reader's mental habits]<sup>54</sup> to remind us that language is not benign or transparent and implicate us in the war against language. In opposition to this, aesthetic language promotes a zombie-like existence in the structure of language. It allows language to dominate us because it tricks us into uncritical absorption. It sedates our desire to resist by tricking us into thinking that there is nothing to resist. Cortázar asserts that "we use a language that's entirely outside certain kinds of deeper realities we might gain access to if we didn't let ourselves be misled by the *ease* with which

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<sup>53</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 467/439.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471/443.

language explains, or purports to explain everything."<sup>55</sup> Which is to say, easy consumption of language distracts us from its insufficiency and we don't compromise ourselves in the drama of the war. This is why Cortázar and Morelli want to use language in an explosive way, activating the reader into critical reflection by making the act of reading more difficult.

So if the *contranovel* writer is against aesthetic language, what is he for? Cortázar and Morelli advocate for a use of language that makes the reader aware of the mediating and constructive force of language. They are not alone in this endeavor. Other writers like Gertrude Stein have also make this their focus. In a chapter titled "Gertrude Stein, The Structure of Language," Jonah Lehrer references a psychological experiment by William James that describes a method by which the mind becomes aware of the structure of language. Lehrer quotes: "If an unusual foreign word be introduced, if the grammar trips, or if a term from an incongruous vocabulary suddenly appears, the sentence detonates, as it were, we receive a shock from the incongruity, and the drowsy assent is gone."<sup>56</sup> We can see how this aligns with both Stein's and Cortázar's literary method. James perfectly illustrates Horacio's call to "set language on fire."<sup>57</sup>. The writer must find a way to set fire to the sentence, detonate the sentence as it were, to shock the reader out of passive consumption. It is possible to see all of *Rayuela* as a realization of James' illustration. I will now show various ways in which incongruous elements are interwoven into *Rayuela* in order to detonate the entire structure of the book. These elements shock the reader into an active awareness of the structure they are inhabiting rather than the drowsy, or even sedated, existence whereby language continues to dominate the user.

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<sup>55</sup> Harss and Dohman, p. 233. (My emphasis)

<sup>56</sup> Lehrer, p. 146-147.

<sup>57</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, p. 474.

### **Detonating the Sentence to Ignite the Reader**

One way that the reader is shocked out of their "drowsy assent" is by way of the excessive articulation which emphasizes the text's materiality. By articulation I mean the way in which language is interpreted as marks on the page rather than signs of something (signification). The text is enmeshed with threads of different languages, lyrics, authors and artist's names in addition to the layers texts: Horacio's text (*Rayuela*), Morelli's notes and the unaccounted for texts. Oliveira and his troupe constantly discuss authors, artists and music artists to the extent that the references will inevitably alienate the reader at some point throughout the text. Insofar as the reader is alienated from the meaning conveyed by the words in front of them, the words become articulation rather than signification. With all of these dimensions, the reader is relentlessly inundated in articulation. Moreover, I would argue that the references are so pervasive and diverse that the notion of an intended audience is subverted. Which is to say, the intended audience becomes so specific that the category collapses.

Although cultural references are significant, the feeling of excessive articulation comes more from the frequent recourse to song lyrics and even more frequently, French discourse. A reader without an extensive knowledge of French would miss a good amount of signification. In this way the French discourse becomes mere marks on the page rather than signifiers which convey meaning. Just as Cortázar indicates the coexistence of multiple books in the "Table of Instructions," it is my contention that a francophone reader and a non-francophone reader would read two entirely different books. Not only is the amount of French language extensive, but French is effortlessly intertwined with the narrative discourse in Spanish. Oftentimes, the

narrative discourse will change from one language to another or from descriptive discourse to song lyrics, mid-sentence.

*Hay ríos metafísicos. Sí, querida, claro. Y vos estarás cuidando a tu hijo, llorando de a ratos, y aquí ya es otro día y un sol amarillo que no calienta. J'habite à Saint-Germain-des-Prés, et chaque soir j'ai rendez-vous avec Verlaine. / Ce gros pierrot n'a pas changé, et pour courir le guilledou... Por vente franco en la ranura y Leo Ferré te canta sus amores, o Gilbert Bécaud, o Guy Béart. Allá en mi tierra: Si quiere ver la vida color de rosa / Eche veinte centavos en la ranura... A lo mejor encendiste la radio.*

[There are metaphysical rivers. Yes, my love, of course. And you are taking care of your son, crying from time to time, and here it is another day with another yellow sun that doesn't warm. *J'habite à Saint-Germain-des-Prés, et chaque soir j'ai rendez-vous avec Verlaine. / Ce gros pierrot n'a pas changé, et pour courir le guilledou...* Twenty francs in the slot and Leo Ferré will sing to you of his loves, or Gilbert Bécaud, or Guy Béart.

Back in my count: *Si quiere ver la vida color de rosa / Eche veinte centavos en la ranura ... Better turn on the radio...* ]<sup>58</sup>

I am quoting at length to show the ease with which the text flows in a sea of articulation without giving the reader time or space to process all the information in a meaningful way. Without having knowledge of every language spoken, every author or singer mentioned, every artist alluded to (and so on) the reader is bound to be denied access to a large amount of signification. When the reader is unable to process the signs as meaningful elements they become flattened out textual material rather than passages to any signified. There is a surplus of language and a shortage of meaning. Because of this, the reader is brought out of the world that the language is

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<sup>58</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 110/94.

supposedly referencing and instead, brought to the surface of the page. Every time the reader confronts an unknown reference or foreign language they are shocked out of fictional world, brought back to their own reality and reminded that they are reading a written text. Using James' terminology, these heterogeneous elements detonate the narrative discourse and activate the reader, refusing to let them easily consume the language from a place of comfort.

### **Labyrinth of Written Texts**

Another way the materiality of the text is emphasized is through the multiplied and interwoven planes writing events. In opposition to traditional conceptions of literature which may feign a verbal retelling of a story, with *Rayuela* the reader is constantly made aware of the fact that this is a written document. In fact, the text is an assemblage of multiple written documents that constantly reference each other. Although the reader isn't told outright, by the end of the text it is evident that the textual artifact in front of them is, in fact, the written product of Oliveira. What is more, the remaining space of the text is occupied by Morelli's written notes that the characters then read and discuss. As we can see, the space of the text is defined and complicated by the various planes of writing and reading operations. I will now attempt to unpack, or at least expose, the complicated nature of the various narrative planes.

In the first two numerical chapters, Horacio narrates from a distant and thus reflective, first person position. With the exception of a handful of moments, the rest of the text is narrated from what may seem like different voices and perspectives and is grounded by a third person narration with Horacio at the center. Although it is never explicitly mentioned, Horacio's authorial position gradually becomes evident. It might even seem like Horacio is purposefully misleading the reader by writing in the third person. To be fair, Horacio reveals himself as author

in the second chapter. When he begins to discuss Rocamadour and La Maga, he says “No quiero escribir sobre Rocamadour, por lo menos hoy, necesitaría tanto acercarme mejor a mí mismo dejar caer todo eso que me separa del centro” [I don't want to write about Rocamadour, at least not right now, because I would have to get closer to myself, to let everything that separates me from the center drop away.]<sup>59</sup> However, from that point on the narration is primarily in third person, looking at Horacio from the outside. The overall inconsistent perspective and fluctuating voice throughout the rest of the text encourages the reader to forget or be completely unaware of Horacio's authorial posture.

Since Horacio is not universally acknowledged amongst critics as the fictional author of *Rayuela*, it is necessary to provide some evidentiary support for this claim. Moreover, to say that Horacio is the fictional author of *Rayuela* is to acknowledge him as the writer of the text as well as the compiler of Morelli's texts and the supplemental texts that constitute the fabric of this text. The most frequent and most obvious indications that Horacio is the author are the present time, authorial operations woven into the text such as self-conscious word choice:

Al lado del Cerro –aunque ese Cerro no tenía lado, se llegaba de golpe y nunca se sabía bien si ya se estaba o no entonces más bien cerca del Cerro–

[Next to El Cerro– although you never really do get next to El Cerro, you arrive all at once and never know actually whether you're already there or not, near El Cerro would be better–]<sup>60</sup>

As we can see, he is questioning the accuracy of between "al lado" in comparison to "cerca" as he writes. This is one example of the authorial operations of this kind which occur quite

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<sup>59</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 29/15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312/288.

frequently. The reader almost feels as if they are reading the unfinished notes of a novel, rather than a completed work. If these subtle gestures weren't enough to reveal Horacio as the author, chapter 75 further dramatizes Oliveira's writing process as well as the aforementioned movement away from aesthetic language.

*En Buenos Aires, capital del miedo , volvía a sentirse rodeado por ese discreto allanamiento de aristas que se da en llamar buen sentido y, por encima, esa afirmación de suficiencia que engolaba las voces de los jóvenes y los viejos, su aceptación de lo inmediato como lo verdadero, de lo vicario como lo, como lo, como lo (delante del espejo, con el tubo de dentrífico en el puño cerrándose, Oliveira una vez más se soltaba la risa en la cara y en vez de meterse el cepillo en la boca lo acercaba a su imagen y minuiciosamente le untaba la falsa boca de pasta rosa [...]*

*[In Buenos Aires, the capital of fear, he felt himself surrounded once again by that discreet smoothing off of edges that likes to go by the name of good sense and, on top of it all, that affirmation of sufficiency which lumps together the voices of young and old, its acceptance of the immediate as the true, of the vicarious as the, as the (in front of the mirror, with the tube of toothpaste in his closing fist, Oliveira again let a laugh escape his face and instead of putting the brush into his mouth he applied it to his reflection and carefully anointed the false face with pink toothpaste...)]<sup>61</sup>*

The language in the first half of the short chapter is significantly more aesthetic and the second half is visibly more common language of the everyday. Notably, this chapter provides concentrated sample of the complexities that pervade the text. In other words, we might see this as a sample of what the text as a whole is trying to do – Horacio snaps out of the mechanical

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<sup>61</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 414/388.

reproduction of aesthetic language, resurfaces into reality, becomes conscious of the structure he is reproducing and devolves into an act of play. Moreover, the reader need not be too perceptive in noticing the shift in voice because a visual cue is provided with the italics. Keeping both of these cues in mind, we must read this scene as Author Horacio (present) writing about Character Horacio (past) deliberating over the language he will write in the future (present). Already we can see the complexities of the various and overlapping narrative planes that complicates the temporal structure of the narrative. We will return to the problem of temporality to show how Cortázar inhabits the structure of language *in a certain way*.

Hitherto I have endeavored to show a few of the ways in which Cortázar sets language on fire – detonates the text in order to make the reader more aware of the structure they are inhabiting. At every turn, the reader is prohibited from immersing completely into the world of the story in a passive way. Passive emersion is problematic because if we feel as if our language is false and embedded with misguided ideologies of the past then, in our passive consumption we allow these ideologies to plant themselves into our mental soil, blossom within us and with every word we replant the very ideologies that we were opposing in the first place. This is why *Rayuela's* readers are forced to remain active in their language consumption: they are inevitably trying to make logical connections from one chapter to the next, attempting to make sense of the references or the various languages and searching the depths of their mind to create meaning from what become mere marks on the page. They are made constantly aware of the text as multiple written documents – not only are they reminded of the mediating position of the author but they are navigating the labyrinth of narrative planes and becoming increasingly aware of the *multiple* layers of mediation between them and narrative world. In other words, they are

becoming aware of the complexities of the structure that they are inhabiting rather than passively existing within it, which would only further reinforce it.

### **Activating the Reader to Disseminate Authority**

In making the reader an accomplice, an active participant in the process, Cortázar destabilizes the authority of the text. This creates a scene in which the reader is an agent - an active producer of meaning rather than idle consumer. Morelli explains that instead of creating a work with a predetermined message to be read and understood by the reader, he wants

hacer del lector un cómplice, un camarada de camino. Simulaneizarlo [...] Así el lector podría llegar a ser copartícipe y copadeciente de la experiencia por la que pasa el novelista, *en el mismo momento y en la misma forma*.

[to make an accomplice of the reader, a traveling companion. Simultaneize him [...]

Thus the reader would be able to become a coparticipant and cosufferer of the experience through which the novelist is passing, *at the same moment and in the same form*]<sup>62</sup>

By making the reader an accomplice and "simultaneizing" him, he makes the writer, the reader and the text all exist simultaneously in a collaborative act of creating meaning – *at the same moment and in the same form*. In this way, the text is not a vehicle for a prepackaged meaning which would exalt the text and degrade the reader as a mere consumer of meaning. Instead, the reader is arguably just as important in the production of meaning as the text. They are no longer being dominated by structure but instead, they become one of the elements at play, all of which are working together to generate meaning. In other words, they are actively constructing the structure as much as much as they are inhabiting or to use Derrida's terminology, their act of

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<sup>62</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 423/397.

reading is simultaneously an act of writing. Now that I have shown a few of the ways Cortázar makes the reader more aware of the structure they are inhabiting and makes them an agent within the structure rather than passive consumer, I will now outline a few of the ways Oliveira inhabits the structure *in a certain way*. Although Cortázar would prefer to completely destroy the structure and start fresh, we know that this is an impossible dream. Therefore, it is helpful to take a cue from Derrida and learn to inhabit the structure *in a certain way* to expose the limits of it from the inside.

### **Retaliation: Whundermining the Whauthority of Language**

As I mentioned earlier, one of the ways that Derrida inhabits the structure of language *in a certain way* is by writing 'sous rature.' Insofar as writing 'sous rature' is a visual mark on language and a way of maintaining the meaning of the word while inscribing Derrida's interpretation on the work, we might understand Horacio's addition of the "h" along the same lines. When Horacio feels weighed down by his ruminations and the overwhelming power that certain words have him he

agarraba una hoja de papel y escribía las grandes palabras por las que iba resbalando su rumia. Escribía, por ejemplo: "El gran hasunto", o "la hencrucijada". Era suficiente para ponerse a reír y cebar otro mate con más ganas. [...] Usaba las haches como otros la penicilina. Después volvía más despacio al asunto, se sentía mejor. "Lo himportante es no hinflarse", se decía Holiverira. A partir de esoss momentos se sentía capaz de pensar sin que las palabras le jugaran sucio.

[would grab a sheet of paper and write down the grand words over which he went slipping along in his ruminations. He wrote, for example: "The great whaffair," or "the

whintersection." It was enough to make him laugh and feel more up to preparing another *mate*. [...] He use this *wh* the way other people used penicillin. Then he would get back to the matter more slowly and feel better. "The whimportant thing is not to become whinflated," Wholiveira would say to whimself. After moments like this he would feel able to think without having the words play dirty tricks on him.]<sup>63</sup>

Horacio uses the added bit of articulation to retaliate against the oppressive effect words have on his ability to think. He reestablishes his dominance over these words in two ways: First, by writing them down – it is not enough to merely think about them in a different way, it seems as if the words need to flow from his pen to subvert their power. Second, by adding a supplementary piece of articulation – the silent *h*. The efficacy of this addition comes from its humorous effect. The power of the words is only mitigated by the addition of the *h* because he is able to laugh at the marks on the page. This is similar to the aforementioned excerpt in which Horacio is jolted out of aesthetic language and quickly devolves into playing with his toothpaste on the mirror. In both scenarios, Horacio uses humor and play to reduce the oppressive seriousness of language. As he ruminates over these large ideas he exalts these words, endows them with a surplus of meaning and they begin to dominate him. By adding the *h* to the beginning of these words he is reminded of their essential vacuity and their materiality. Which is to say, he is reminded that words in themselves do not contain meaning. He marks them, then re-marks them with an added bit of articulation to show himself that these marks are not exalted vessels of meaning but simply marks on the page.

### **Retaliation: Weaving in Undecidability to Necessitate Play**

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<sup>63</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 441/416.

Both Horacio's *h*'s and Derrida's writing 'sous rature' are visual marks of inhabiting the structure *in a certain way* in order to subvert the authority words. I will now show how Cortázar inhabits the structure of the text in a way that undermines the authority of the text as a prefabricated container of meaning by weaving in a thread of undecidability. What I mean is that in addition to being explicit about his goal to make the reader an accomplice in the generation of meaning, Cortázar embeds a certain temporal undecidability into the text whereby the ambiguity requires meaning to be generated by relation between elements (play) rather than coming from a preconceived message that must be discovered by the reader. Which is to say, the effect of this ambiguity is the same as the other operations we have been discussing: destabilizing the authority of language by conditioning meaning upon the relation between elements. However, this gesture is much subtler than the previous operations.

In addition to turning the reader into a critical, active participant in the creation of meaning by shocking them out of the "drowsy assent," the *contranovel* is an attempt "de escribir una especie de novela prescindiendo de las articulaciones lógicas del discurso" [to write the kind of novel that would do away with the logical articulations of discourse]<sup>64</sup>. As I have already mentioned, there is no shortage of articulation in *Rayuela*. Therefore, this is a call to do away with the *logic* of those articulations. Why would a writer want to do such a thing? To answer this question it is helpful to look at other writers who have likewise made this their project. I will once again return to Lehrer's chapter. Lehrer explains that Stein's language experiment was an attempt to "free language from its constraints" or rather free it from its own logic. However, she soon comes to realize that logic cannot be superseded: "Our language has a structure, and that

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<sup>64</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 458/431.

structure is built into the brain."<sup>65</sup> If we accept her conclusion, it is necessary to admit that we can never do away with the logic of language. However, I argue that an attack on the logic is a way that writers like Stein and Cortázar regain some ground in Cortázar's war against language. Which is to say, although they are not able to completely do away with the logic of language they free themselves from total subjugation in their attempt to do so.

Of course, there exists innumerable ways of approaching this project, Oliveira notes that embedding an internal contradiction within the text is one of them. He says, "cuanto más violenta fuera la contradicción interna, más eficacia podría dar una, digamos, técnica al modo Zen" [the more violent the internal contradiction, the more efficiently it would be able to supply a technique, as it were, in the Zen manner.]<sup>66</sup> Whereas Stein's approach is much more blatant, Cortázar's "internal contradiction" operates in a subtler, more zen, way. To understand how this "internal contradiction" operates in *Rayuela*, I will now turn to Derrida's notion of the hymen as explicated in "The Double Session." As mentioned, in this essay Derrida juxtaposes an excerpt from Plato's *Philebus* with one from Mallarmé's *Mimique* in his exploration of the corner "BETWEEN [ENTRE] literature and truth."<sup>67</sup> I have already briefly mentioned the qualities of the mimetic book that he pulls out of Plato's *Philebus* when I discussed the type of book that the *contranovel* is actively against. In the next section of the lecture, Derrida looks at Mallarmé's *Mimique* as an example of a "writing [that] both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke. This double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribed it within its play as one of its functions or parts."<sup>68</sup> This

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<sup>65</sup> Lehrer, p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 458/431

<sup>67</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 177.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 193.

“undecidable stroke” is what he calls the hymen. Fully explicating this concept is outside the range of this argument however, we can understand the hymen as occupying the position of undecidability created by the text itself. It is something that because of the way the text is constructed, the reader is not given the resources to decide. Because of the hymen woven into the text the text "escapes the pertinence of authority of truth" which is to say, the authority of meaning isn't given to the truth that preceded the representation but rather, the generation of meaning is necessarily relational – one of *play*.

As Derrida discuss the layers of representation in Mallarmé's text, he says "[w]e here enter a textual labyrinth paneled with mirrors."<sup>69</sup> Applying this comment to Cortázar's text would not be incorrect. By removing himself as the author, Cortázar sets up a labyrinth of texts that perpetually refer to each other – Oliveira writes his own novel in which he finds Morelli's notes for his novel which undoubtedly refer to the process of creating *Rayuela* and at the same time we get another layer of commentary that is distinct from the Oliveira's narrative discourse in which he comments on and references his own text. We will unpack a few of these layers as we continue but it is important to note that by removing himself, Cortázar deliberately removes the supposed center, around which all the rest of the texts would organize themselves. Moreover, this lack of center extends into the undefinable temporality of the text. Due to the complex labyrinth of texts, it is difficult, if not impossible, to temporally situate much of the discourse in *Rayuela*. In terms of temporality, I am not so much concerned with the order of plot events but instead, the order of writing events. We will look at what I mean by this shortly. We must first look at how this notion of undecidable temporality inscribes a hymen onto the text, Derrida explains: "Thanks to the confusion and continuity of the hymen, and not in spite of it, a (pure

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<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 195.

and impure) difference inscribes itself without any decidable poles, without any independent, irreversible terms. Such difference without presence appears, or rather baffles the process of appearing, by dislocating any orderly time and the *center of presence*."<sup>70</sup> It is this dislocation of the "center of presence" that is particularly useful for us. Derrida explains that "the center of presence is supposed to offer itself to what is called perception or, generally, intuition. In *Mimique*, however, there is no perception, no reality offering itself up in the present, to be perceived."<sup>71</sup> If the center of presence is something that offers itself up to intuition it is safe to say that it is something that we normally take for granted in the process of reading. We take it for granted because we can passively and unconsciously organize the temporality of a text around the center of presence that we intuit. What I mean is, as we read a text there is the temporal distance or proximity of the writing event to the narrated event is usually perceived and unconsciously understood as we read. In *Rayuela*, however, the "center of presence" around which all the events, present and future, revolve and organize themselves is displaced. The lack of temporal index makes it impossible to situate much of the language, further adding to the feeling of disorientation that is actively promoted by the text. By dislocating the center of presence, Cortázar has woven a hymen into his text and by the same token, he has attacked the *logic* of the articulations in the text.

This undecidable temporality is not surprising given Cortázar's own writing process. In the creation of *Rayuela*, Cortázar began with two chapters that would not appear until later in the text. After writing those chapters he began to accumulate small texts that would make up the textual material that would precede those initial chapters. One day, he had the sensation that he

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<sup>70</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 210. (my emphasis)

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

had finally reached a point of reconciliation with the initial two chapters. He acknowledges the fortunate consequence of this unique temporality of his creative process:

Ese salir del futuro para regresar al pasado y aproximarse al presente, todo ese le daba al libro una plasticidad que a mi me pareció que no era lógico hacerla desaparecer, aplastar el libro y ponerlo como cualquier novela habitual en un desarrollo lineal.

[This leaving from the future to regress to the past and approximate the present, all of this gave the book a plasticity that to me, seemed that it wasn't logical to make it disappear, squashing the book and making it like any other habitual novel with a linear development.]<sup>72</sup>

What Cortázar calls the "plasticity" of the text, is a consequence of the hymen that is woven into the text. Cortázar could have rearranged the text to more clearly conform to a linear development but instead, the text defies linear construction because just as Cortázar deliberately removes himself from the center of authority, he dislocates the center of presence to produce the effect of "cutting off all the roots" as noted by Morelli in an earlier excerpt. I will now identify moments that this hymen is particularly apparent. Which is to say, moments in which the temporal index is particularly problematic or undecidable. As we have established, Horacio is both author and character. While this is a complex organization in itself, Horacio's duality doesn't presuppose the dislocation of the center of presence. A text that maintains a clear center of presence with this duality would have author Horacio writing from a defined point in time and writing about past events from this point. Moreover, the narrated events would unfold along their own line. This dual notion of time would not be confusing to the reader as long as the language remained consistent insofar as the time of writing was the same throughout. This however, is not

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<sup>72</sup> Prego, p. 111. (My translation)

the case in *Rayuela*. As Cortázar acknowledges, his multinational and irregular writing parallels the unsystematic temporality of Oliveira's text.

As I have mentioned, the first two chapters are written in first person perspective. Although they are one of the few chapters written in first person they portray a sort of distance from the action. While there is some distance, it is clear that Horacio is still in Paris as he writes because he is talking about meeting up with La Maga in "present" time. This would not be problematic if it weren't for the second half of the narrative taking place later in time, in Argentina. In the first two chapters, it is clear that he has not left Paris and returned to Argentina. If it wasn't for this aspect, we could easily identify Horacio's reflective position as the time of writing for the rest of the text. However, since he has not yet gone to Argentina we are faced with the undeniable fact that there must be at least two times of writing: one while he is living in Paris and one after he goes to Argentina and experiences the rest of the plot events. So not only do we have the complexity that emerges from having both author Oliveira and character Oliveira but we have now multiplied the temporal situation of author Oliveira.

The multiplicity of times of writing may not be significant and at most of the time even unnoticeable; however, they are particularly noticeable in times of authorial commentary. Frequently, Oliveira's commentary appears as parenthetical statements. However, the heterogeneity of these parenthetical statement increases the reader's sense of disorientation when they are unable to identify from where or when these comments were added. At times, they add supplementary commentary as if in the present moment of the scene that they are occur in. Other times, they seem to be commentary from the future writing event to come. Additionally, another dimension of complexity is added by the fact that Horacio's thoughts are also quoted. In other words, when writing about himself in the third person he will often include his supposed

thoughts at time of the narrated event in quotes. A text with a clear center of presence, would easily move between these temporalities without confusion. All of the parenthetical commentary would be uniformly from delivered from one moment, his thoughts at the time of the event would always be in quotes and all of the supplementary authorial commentary would be delivered in the same way as to not disorient the reader. Instead the reader is floating in a sea of language that cannot be attributed to a moment of enunciation, easily or definitively. When Horacio writes, ""los labios de Oliveira que Babs había deseado alguna vez (no ahora) se curvaban apenas..." [Oliveira's lips which Babs had once desired (not now) were curved a little...]<sup>73</sup>, the reader is completely clueless to the "now" of this parenthetical comment.

Another moment of heightened undecidability is in one of the expendable chapters. Horacio provides an "indifferent reflection" in the first person which, in itself, is not particularly unusual. However, within this single chapter he uses parenthetical commentary in at least two ways. As I have mentioned, his parenthetical commentary is inconsistent throughout the text but this chapter is a particularly useful example given the proximity of the two different uses - provoking a heightened sense of disorientation and dislocation for the reader in terms of the center of presence. In one instance, the parenthetical comment seems to serve as an authorial comment of judgment on the reflecting, character Horacio:

Pero vamos despacio (le encanta hablarse así, como un padre a su hijo, para después darse el gran gusto de todos los hijos y patearle el nido al viejo), vamos piano piano, a ver qué es eso de la búsqueda.

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<sup>73</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 65/51.

[But let's take it slowly (he loves to talk to himself that way, like a father to his son, so that later on he can give himself the great pleasure of all children and kick the old man in the balls), let's take it piano piano, let's see what this business of the search is all about.]<sup>74</sup>

We might take the "he" to be the reflecting subject – Horacio within the temporality of the story world. And the one who speaks "he" as the author, commenting on Horacio's reflections. Even though we know now that the fictional author is, in fact, just another dimension to the character Horacio – that they are one in the same person differentiating only in their temporal situation, in this moment author Horacio is feigning complete difference, maintaining the third person perspective in the parenthesis to prove this difference. Shortly after however, he just as easily collapses this difference by writing in first person within parenthesis:

O sea que ya no estamos con los demás, que ya hemos dejado de ser un ciudadano (por algo me savan carpiendo de todas partes que lo diga Lutecia)

[Or let's say that we're no long with the others, that we've already stopped being a citizen (there's some reason for their weeding me out of everywhere, let Lutetia tell about it)]<sup>75</sup>

The fact that he is commenting on the situation occurring outside of the parenthesis while he writes inside the parenthesis is evidence that the two comments should be attached to the same person, in the same temporal situation. In terms of temporality, we might resolve this difference by saying that this parenthetical comment belongs to the temporality of the story and the former example belongs to the temporality of the author, or writing event. While in individual scenes this may not seem like a significant discrepancy, throughout the novel the reader can easily get disoriented without knowing which Horacio, author or character, is commenting on the situation. Moreover, as we have mentioned, the temporality of author Horacio is inconsistent which makes

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<sup>74</sup> Cortázar, *Rayuela/Hopscotch*, p. 526/496.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 526/496.

it utterly impossible to situate the language in his comments around any sort of center of presence. In this way, Cortázar extracts the center of presence just as he extracts himself as the center of authority. We can only immediately understand Horacio's language as it *relates* to the other elements of the text without attempting to raise it out of immediacy and situate along an organized timeline.

By weaving a temporal undecidability that pervades the text the reader is forced into an active posture – the undecidability makes it impossible to sit comfortably absorbing the language of the text. Such a position of comfort comes from the ability to unconsciously organize the logic of the text and reconcile that logic with one's own. When one isn't able to attribute the language to a writing event, one is unable to establish a normative, fictional logic that would serve as the subterranean index for comprehension. Moreover, in their active decision making, the reader is given some authority in the generation of meaning. They need to construct meaning rather than search for it.

## **Conclusion**

In this argument I have endeavored to present the war against language that Cortázar and his characters have explicitly waged. First, I delineated the theoretical issues at stake – using Derrida's two interpretations of structure to shed light on the problem of authority. Second, I examined the ways in which Cortázar retaliates against the oppressive force of language by way of literature. As we have seen, both Derrida and Cortázar have located the counter attack (in Cortázar's war) in *play*. To be sure, the word *play* would suggest different things to both theorist and novelist however their respective versions of play are not heterogeneous to each other. For

Cortázar, play would mean twisting and contorting language using it in an unnatural way and even playing in the physical sense. Indeed, *Rayuela* is framed by the concept of the game. As he has mentioned in several interviews, the text was originally named "Mandala" but he wanted to make the title less serious. In so many ways, Cortázar is known for playing in the way that we commonly understand the word. However, for the sake of economy I focused on the ways in which Cortázar plays in the Derridean sense. Which is to say, how the text opens up meaning to a play amongst elements in order to subvert languages domination. I would argue that in order to play in Cortázar's way, accepting and employing Derrida's concept of play is a prerequisite. In order to assert your dominance over words by way of manipulation and undercutting normative logic, one must be mentally liberated from the prisoner's mindset that yields authority to Yonder. Only once authority has been disseminated by way of Derrida's elaboration of play can the author have the courage to play as Cortázar does.

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