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José Lezama Lima's beard  
**the image as phantasma and the truth procedure of a poetic system**

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King's College London

**José Lezama Lima's beard: the image as *phantasma*  
and the truth procedure of a poetic system**

A Thesis submitted for the degree of  
*Doctor of Philosophy*

by  
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A human is that being which prefers to represent itself within finitude, whose sign is death, rather than knowing itself to be entirely traversed and encircled by the omnipresence of infinity.

At the very least, one consolation remains; that of discovering that nothing actually obliges humanity to acquire this knowledge, because at this point the sole remit for thought is to the school of decision.

Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*

## Introduction

José Lezama Lima (1910-1976) lived in a Cuba of significant political, social and cultural unrest. His time was a time of new constitutions, rebellions, executions, dictatorship, protests, and revolutions, a time when the names of Gerardo Machado, Fulgencio Batista, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto Che Guevara acquired the historical significance by which they are known today. Although there are very few direct references to these names and events in José Lezama Lima's texts, this does not mean that he was indifferent to their consequences or that he opted for impartiality to political events. According to Emilio Bejel, during 1959 and the first years of the 1960s, José Lezama Lima supported the Revolution and described it in his publications as 'el triunfo de las mejores aspiraciones cubanas' (Bejel 1994:26).<sup>1</sup> Lezama was a well-known cultural figure at the time, and he was given one of the vice-president posts within the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba. The publication of *Paradiso*, in 1966, increased his popularity but at the same time, it placed him under the scrutiny of public -and political- eye. The complexity of his style and several supposed sexual references in some chapters of his novel started to damage his reputation. The relationship between Lezama Lima and the new Cuban regime got even worse with the famous 'caso Padilla', when the poet Heberto Padilla, talking about his own anti-revolutionary position, 'mencionó a Lezama como uno de los contrarrevolucionarios, lo cual Lezama y sus amigos negaron con vehemencia' (Bejel 1994: 27). According also to Emilio Bejel, this accusation caused that, from this moment on, cultural magazines and journals in Cuba stopped asking Lezama Lima for contributions to their pages, and that even the Cuban government denied him permission to travel abroad, at least in one occasion (Bejel 1994: 27).

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<sup>1</sup> Some authors like William Rowlandson (2010), have even discussed the possibility of including José Lezama Lima's own perception of the Cuban Revolution under his own notion of *era imaginaria*.

José Lezama Lima, and some of his friends, later became involved in various cultural and literary controversies associated with some of their publications. One of these debates involved, on one side, the famous magazine *Orígenes* (1944-1956), of which Lezama Lima was one of the editors, and on the other side, *Revista Avance* (1927-1930), with Jorge Mañach among its founders. According to Ben A. Heller (1997: 28-29), whilst Lezama Lima criticised *Avance* for taking a 'dualistic' position where art has to choose between 'allying itself with culture (as "pure poetry" was supposed to) or with life (as social poetry claimed to do)', Mañach accused *Orígenes* of "first, not owning up to a filial relationship with *Avance*, and second, for producing such difficult texts" (Heller, 1997, p.29). After this, *Orígenes* became not only a serious rival publication for *Avance* but also one of the most influential literary Cuban and Latin American magazines of the time. It published new material from well-known writers like Alejo Carpentier, Octavio Paz, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Virgilio Piñera, Samuel Feijóo, and Luis Cernuda, as well as artwork from influential Cuban artists like Mariano Rodríguez, René Portocarrero, and Amelia Cruz. José Lezama Lima remained as one of the permanent members of the *Orígenes* group (José Rodríguez Feo, Alfredo Lozano and Mariano Rodríguez also worked as editors), and even published the first five chapters of his novel, *Paradiso*, in this magazine.

Jorge Mañach's remark about the difficulty of the texts published in *Orígenes* represents a generalised literary evaluation that will accompany Lezama Lima throughout his life. His writing has often been labelled as obscure, difficult or enigmatic. Whether it is his two novels (*Paradiso* and *Oppiano Licario*, the latter left incomplete and published posthumously), his poetry, his essayistic work, or even his not very well-known short stories, they all share the same same intriguing style that makes of Lezama Lima a recurring subject of study for academics, and a tempting challenge for any reader. Although his writing shares most of the



baroque and neo-baroque stylistic resources mentioned by Severo Sarduy (1999b: 1385-1404), like those of substitution, proliferation, condensation and artifice, Lezama Lima's texts go beyond any genre classification. Reading *Rapsodia para el mulo*, *Enemigo Rumor* or *Dador*, is not like reading any of Luis de Góngora or Francisco de Quevedo's poems, authors who also share with Lezama the labelling of baroque, complex and difficult. Unlike Góngora, for example, whom Lezama Lima admired and wrote about, there is no intentional symbolism hidden underneath a well thought out web of literary figures and rhetoric mechanisms. There is only what Lezama Lima called 'his own poetic system', but such system can only serve as an access to his work, and not as a key to interpretation or as a guarantee of understanding. José Lezama Lima's poetic system, whose main characteristics he outlines in several of his essays, is not, as he pointed out himself, 'a philosophical study *ad usum* about poetry' (1971: 29). On the contrary, as Lezama Lima points out (1971: 29), his poetic system has no other source than poetry itself and its own elements, namely, *poem*, *poet*, *metaphor* and *image* (Lezama Lima 1966: 29), although it is true that there are other concepts in his essays (like those of *vivencia oblicua*, *súbito* and *eras imaginarias*) that are strongly related to such poetic system and which will also be discussed in the following chapters.

Main research questions: what is the image in Lezama Lima an image of? How does his poetic system operate?

The first pages of *Paradiso* (Lezama Lima 1988: 3-9), possibly the most well-known and 'accessible' text written by José Lezama Lima, show a dishevelled and desperate Baldovina trying to respond to the demands of an image which is appropriating the body of 5-year-old José Cemí. 'Ronchas' and 'surcos de violenta coloración' start to appear, to grow, to occupy the whole body of the boy and Baldovina struggles not only to contain her desperation but

also to put into words that 'aparición fantasmal y rosada' placed right in front of her eyes. Two servants come to her rescue (with spells and remedies), but even they are unable to face the threatening image, they see it all through a half-open door, as if they were fleeing from a haunting apparition. Nothing seems to work, and in a complete identification with the image she was trying to make go away, it is now Baldovina who starts to babble and weaken, to disappear, to become an image of herself. She tries fruitlessly to impose her own writing on the boy's body (with alcohol, with candles) but the spots on his skin seem like animals that are about to jump from the bed to her own body. Although the whole nightmare-like event could have been resolved like any other bad dream, by awakening, it actually ends in a totally opposite way: both Baldovina and Cemí fall asleep.

In another well-known passage from it (Lezama Lima 1988: 135-136), José Cemí awakes after having a long and eventful dream and goes to his father, El Coronel, who awaits in his library with a book on his hands. El Coronel takes his son to the sitting room, opens the book and shows him a page with two pictures in it, one next to the other. The first image represents a student in his study room, resting his arms on a desk full of books and papers; in the second image, there is the picture of a knife grinder man, working on a sharpening wheel wrapped up in sparks and lights. An extremely curious Cemí rests his pointing finger on the picture of the knife grinder while he hears his father saying 'the student', and therefore believing that the student was the knife grinder and the knife grinder the student. Days later, when El Coronel asks Cemí to give him a definition of what a student is, the boy surprises his father with his metaphoric ability: 'Un bachiller es una rueda que lanza chispas, que a medida que la rueda va alcanzando más velocidad, las chispas se multiplican hasta aclarar la noche' (Lezama Lima 1988: 136).

These two examples illustrate the two main components or operations that are part of the poetic system delineated by José Lezama Lima in his work, a system that is also the focus of this research. On the one hand, the image, the uncertainty of an appearance whose referent or paradigm seems to escape interpretation. On the other, metaphor, the emergence of an unexpected connection, the opening of a new causality and the subsequent introduction, in a world, of new elements. However, these two extracts from *Paradiso* also show that, firstly, the appearance of the image happens in a body, in a place, that has materiality; secondly, that the occurrence of the image involves a subject, that it demands a decision and an action from an individual, a new perspective; and finally, that the process of metaphor affects the efficiency of signification, that José Cemí's 'metaphoric gift' is a 'misunderstanding' only from the point of view of a given situation. In one case, Baldovina is forced to deal with the inaccessibility and demands of an image that take her to the limits of her own language, of her own subjectivity. In the other case, José Cemí's visual precipitation demonstrates that metaphor, at least as it is conceived by Lezama Lima, is closer to perception than to rhetoric, that it has nothing to do with the communicability and efficiency of everyday language and more to do with the emergence of a new poetic causality, generated in the twist of an instant. Image, metaphor, poet (subjectivity), poem (place, body, materiality) and poetry (signification, language), are the major components of José Lezama Lima's poetic system. They also represent the key concepts that hold the answer to the main questions that have prompted this research:

- 1) What type of image is the image that appears in José Lezama Lima's poetic system and his texts? What is this image an image of? Can this image be delimited and located within the poem and how does it affect its meaning?

- 2) How does José Lezama Lima's poetic system operate? What role does every of the main components of Lezama Lima's poetic system (poet, poem, image, and metaphor) play within the system itself? What is its function of this poetic system and what does it reveal about Lezama Lima's poetry and poetry in general?

To answer the first question, this research explores the different notions of image that appear in Plato's dialogue the *Sophist* (1921), where the contrast between an image that is faithful to its model (*eikon*) and another one that appears to be faithful, but which is not (*phantasma*), is fundamental to understand what type of image is the Lezamian image and why it is so evasive in the poem, and so present at the same time. Plato's *Sophist* will also be important in understanding the connection that both Lezama Lima and Plato, and to a certain extent, Alain Badiou, make between the notion of image and non-being.

Regarding the second question, this research focuses on Alain Badiou's philosophical work and especially, on his concept of *truth procedure*, as it is delineated in his book *Being and Event* (2006). This Badiouian idea of a *truth procedure* will help to understand how the poetic system of Lezama Lima operates and the roles that its main components (metaphor, image, poet, poem) play within it. Badiou's philosophy has been labelled by some as 'decisionist' (Watkins 2017: 189) because of the importance he gives to the notions of *decision* and *undecidability*, both of which are going to play an important part in examining Lezama Lima's poetic hermeticism and the problem of the reception of his work. Badiou gives a special place in his philosophy to poetry and many of his ideas about it coincide with Lezama Lima's views on the subject, especially the fact that both Lezama Lima and Badiou see in the hermeticism of poetry an invitation, not an obstacle.

The research has been divided into three parts. The first chapter describes and explores two notions that are strongly linked to the first set of questions of this research, questions related to the nature of the image in Lezama Lima's work. The first notion is the concept of the *phantasma*, as it appears on Plato's dialogue, the *Sophist* (1921). The second notion is the idea of a *truth procedure*, introduced by the French philosopher Alain Badiou in his book *Being and Event* (2006). The following chapter is dedicated to the other set of questions about Lezama Lima's poetic system and focuses on exploring and discussing several of his essays on poetry, to extract from them the main features and concepts of his poetic system. These features are discussed at the end of the chapter in connection to one of Lezama Lima's poems, *Rapsodia para el mulo*, to illustrate the link between Lezama Lima's poetic system and his poetry. The third and final chapter brings the other two chapters together, establishing a connection between, on one hand, José Lezama Lima's poetic system and his concept of image, and on the other, the notions of *phantasma* and *truth procedure*. Finally, the third chapter also explores the operability and manifestation of these four components in one of Lezama Lima's poems, *Recuerdo de la semejanza*, where the question about the image moves from the referentiality to resemblance. The objective with the inclusion and discussion of this poem in this research is to show that the image for Lezama Lima is not an image of a model or of something, but of resemblance itself, hence its indiscernibility within the poem.

#### Relevant literature review

José Lezama Lima's poetic system has been the object of many books, articles, studies and discussions. The bibliography published by Aracelli García Carranza (1998) gives an idea of the vast amount of texts dedicated to Lezama Lima's work at the time, and which has continue to grow since then. The famous *Recopilación de textos sobre José Lezama Lima* (Simón 1995) is

also an excellent example not only of the amount of academics, critics, and writers who were interested in the Cuban author and his texts, but also of the relevance of their names (Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Juan Ramón Ribeyro and Ángel Gaztelu, for example). Among the most dedicated commentators on Lezama Lima's work is Cintio Vitier, a poet and old friend of his who has written extensively about Lezama Lima's texts and legacy, and who has also overseen an important critical edition of *Paradiso* (Lezama Lima, 1988). In one of his essays, 'Un libro maravilloso' (1995), Vitier proposes the idea that Lezama Lima's poetry invalidates rational causality, because 'the gravity law of the real' is substituted by a 'gravitation of the unreal' where all impossibility is verified (1995: 142). For Vitier, the 'germinative possibility of poetry' can almost reach the absurd, an absurd that is not the lack of sense of existentialism but the overwhelming and inexplicable abundance of it (Vitier 1995: 88). Other important critics and writers from Latin America like Saúl Yurkievich (1978), Julio Ortega (1975), and Severo Sarduy (1968), have seconded Vitier's admiration for Lezama Lima and they also have explored different aspects of his work. For Yurkievich, for example, in Lezama Lima 'el poema instaure un sentido que lo sobrepasa, inapresable pero coexistente' (1978: 124). However, one negative side of many of the studies and texts dedicated to José Lezama Lima's work is that they have mainly focused either on a hermeneutic interpretation of his work (especially of his novel, *Paradiso*), or on a cultural approach to his texts on identity and his 'American expression'. About the first case, Luis Miguel Isava highlights the fact that:

La crítica en efecto no sólo parece haber insistido en recurrir a la singular terminología lezamiana ("el súbito", "la evaporación", "la vivencia oblicua", "las eras imaginarias", etc.) para acceder a sus textos sino que, en cierta forma, parece haber quedado atrapada en la esfera de los pronunciamientos del propio Lezama sobre el origen, fundamento y sentido de

los mismos —pronunciamientos, dicho sea de inmediato, que las más de las veces han sido leídos de forma limitante, cuando no reductiva. (Isava 2015: 200)

The second case, the protagonism of identity approaches to Lezama Lima, has been already mentioned by Brett Levinson in his book *Secondary Moderns: Mimesis, History and Revolution in Lezama Lima's "American Expression"* (1996). There, Levinson mentions the fact that 'Lezamanian criticism has placed Lezama into the long line of Latin American theorists who have dedicated themselves to the exploration of the Latin American cultural identity', alongside other important names like Henríquez Ureña, José Martí, Alfonso Reyes, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Mary Louise Pratt and others (1996: 11). However, as Levinson also highlights, the focus that Latin American studies has put on the topic of identity has also meant that other areas of study such as gender, race, religion, economics, politics, and aesthetics have been relegated and 'subsumed' by the 'master discourse' on identity (Levinson 1996: 11). 'Why', asks Levinson, 'must the discussion of Latin American culture be a discussion of cultural identity (or for that matter, why culture at all, why *cultural* identity?)' (1996: 11). According to him, Lezama Lima's work breaks with this tradition and frames the problem from a different perspective, 'confronting not the multiple responses to the Latin American identity problem, but the problem itself' (1996: 11). To avoid falling into this trap of identity politics, it is important to address and to evaluate its counterpart, what Levinson calls the 'death of the subject' (1996: 12), the deconstruction of a subjectivity that is fundamental for any discourse on Latin American identity, politics, or even ideology. Levinson's *Secondary Moderns* represents an attempt to 'analyze the death of the subject by rereading Western thought via Lezama's writings' and 'to demonstrate how Lezama, in *La expresión americana*, liberates Latin American history and culture from the subject's domination' (1996: 13). Levinson's idea

about the 'death of the subject' is inevitably linked to the philosophical and Nietzschean tradition about the 'death of God', a point that he also discusses in his book and which helps him to 'rethink the most prevalent reading of Lezama, one that portrays him as a transcendentalist' (1996: 13).

*Secondary Moderns* represents one of the most interesting attempts to approach Lezama Lima's work from a new theoretical and critical perspective. The first two chapters of the book discuss the notion of identity itself and its connection to other philosophical concepts like *mimesis*, sameness, otherness and difference, a discussion that is of particular interest for this research and which will be mentioned later in this chapter. Levinson's merit with these two chapters is that he manages to present Lezama Lima not only as a writer but also as a thinker, one whose ideas about metaphor, history and identity are discussed alongside those of other great thinkers like Plato, Derrida, Confucius and Pascal. The rest of the book focuses on placing Lezama Lima on a wider historical and cultural context, examining his particular approach to Catholicism and his special relationship with the Cuba of his time. In the whole, Levinson does succeed in avoiding the politics of identity in his reading of Lezama Lima. His book presents Lezama Lima as a Latin American thinker who reformulates Western tradition and who rethinks the Western concepts of identity, history and culture. However, the emphasis that Levinson puts on Lezama Lima's "American Expression" means that his proposal remains circumscribed to a specific social and historical context, the Latin American one, without integrating the innovation of Lezama Lima's thinking into a wider philosophical, and theoretical tradition, something that this research aims to do.

One of the most recent studies which also tries to distance itself from a traditional interpretation of Lezama Lima's work is *Writing of the Formless*, by Jaime Rodríguez Matos



(2017). As the title suggests, the main objective of the book is to approach Lezama Lima from the standpoint of the *formless*, a conception of time ‘that lies neither in the “order” of a single time nor in the “disorder” of multiple temporal layers that coexist’ (Rodríguez Matos 2017: 22). The first part of the book discusses the presence and interaction of three different times and discourses in José Lezama Lima (state, religion and literature), while the second part takes a more philosophical and detailed analysis of his work. One of the aspects that makes Rodríguez Matos’ proposal relevant for this research is the mention at the beginning of the book, of Alain Badiou. Although Rodríguez Matos focuses only on Badiou’s conception of ‘evental time’, a conception that he criticises because of its simplicity and limitations (2017: 42-43), and not on the rest of his philosophy, *Writing of the Formless* is the only study that considers the philosophical system of Alain Badiou in relation to José Lezama Lima’s work. It is also one of the few serious contributions to a more philosophical approach to the texts of the Cuban author. However, Rodríguez Matos’s overall proposal and his idea about a ‘writing of the formless’ in Lezama Lima are always attached to a political reading of his work, even if it is with the intention of removing all politics and time from it (2017: 172-173).

Among the few texts that concentrate on Lezama Lima’s poetic system and on the question of signification in his work is *José Lezama Lima: bases y génesis de un sistema poético*, by Enrique Márquez (1991). In this book, Márquez presents an interesting proposal about the historic and almost cosmogonic vision present in Lezama Lima, establishing a link between Lezama Lima’s poetic system and the poetics of other Latin American authors like Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz. Márquez is particularly interested in the poetics of the Latin American avant-garde and its connection with Lezama Lima’s poetic system (1991: 1). He also relates Lezama’s conception of metaphor to that of Goethe, Mallarmé, Jakobson and Aristotle, and dedicates two chapters of his book to the discussion of the notion of ‘imagen’. For Márquez,

far from being an allegoric analogy of something, the Lezamian image is a potent dispersive force that goes beyond the Aristotelian causality, unifying dissimilar elements and creating connections where there were none. According to Márquez:

Pocas poéticas hispanoamericanas son tan radicales en la idea de crear un lenguaje voluntarioso y soberano como la de Lezama Lima, que plantea desde su primer poema que todo límite es la fabricación arbitraria, y llegando, en la percepción de muchos, a anular rotundamente toda comunicación lingüística. (Márquez 1991: 18)

However, this is precisely one of the problems with Márquez's proposal, his dependence on a semantic and linguistic reading of Lezama Lima's poetic system. For example, the analysis that he makes of some of Lezama Lima's poems (1991: 106-119) uses the concepts of metonymy and *ekphrasis* as main tools of interpretation, which seems to suggest the idea that both notions of metaphor and image, which are an essential part of Lezama Lima's poetic system, can be seen as mere manipulations of language and not as philosophical or poetical operations. The special mention that Márquez makes, in his analysis, of some recognisable names in the field of linguistics, like Jakobson (1991: 105) and Chomsky (1991: 119), seems to reinforce this last point.

Another well-known book that assumes the difficult task of interpreting Lezama Lima's poetry is *Assimilation/generation/resurrection: contrapuntal readings in the poetry of José Lezama Lima*, by Ben Heller (1997). In this book, Heller studies Lezama Lima's poetic system from three different perspectives: poetry, poetics of individual creation and cultural theory (1997: 12). He also focuses on the concepts of assimilation, generation, and resurrection, 'three issues pertinent to both the act of individual creation and Lezama's theory of culture' (1997:

12). The first of these three concepts, assimilation, refers to the influence in Lezama Lima of other writers and his interaction with external sources. The first four chapters of the book are dedicated to this idea of assimilation in Lezama Lima, of the influence that ancient history, classic literature, philosophy and other contemporary artists and writers of Lezama Lima's time had on his writing. In the last two chapters, Heller focuses on the other two concepts of generation and resurrection, studying and interpreting Lezama Lima's poetry and his ideas about Latin American culture identity. The main accomplishment of the book is to keep Lezama Lima's poetry at the forefront of the study, discussing and analysing poems from all poetry books published under his name. Heller also studies some of Lezama Lima's most important essays on poetry and Latin American identity as well as fragments from his novel *Paradiso*. However, the analysis of those texts is mainly hermeneutical and although Heller attempts 'to use Lezama's own contextual and contrapuntal theory of reading as basis of analysis' (1997: 15), it is hermeneutics what really guides the interpretation of each poem, as the title of the first chapter suggests ('A Contrapuntal Hermeneutics'). Heller's final intention is to try to make sense of Lezama Lima's poetry, to find a key of interpretation that reveals a certain meaning hidden under each poem, a key that draws resources from those who have influenced Lezama Lima's thought (Chapter 4) to the cultural and historic context that surrounded him at the time (Chapter 5). One of the main objectives of this research, as will be shown, is to displace the question of sense and meaning in the poetry and on the poetic system of Lezama Lima in favour of a more philosophical and theoretical approach to his thought.

In this sense, it is important here to mention one of the few texts that aims at moving away from any hermeneutic reading of Lezama Lima's work. It is an article by Luis Miguel Isava titled 'Lo indescifrable que engendra un infinito apetito de desciframiento. Hacia una lectura no-

hermenéutica de la poesía de Lezama', published in *Asedios de lo increado. Nuevas perspectivas sobre Lezama Lima* (Lupi and others 2015). Like Heller's book, mentioned previously, Isava decides to focus mostly on Lezama Lima's poetry, which according to him, has been relegated to a side by most of the studies on Lezama Lima (Isava 2015: 200). Nevertheless, unlike Heller, Isava tries to avoid not only an hermeneutical interpretation of Lezama Lima's poems but also any potential reading that looks for a hidden meaning in them. As he puts it:

Quiero decir que los textos poéticos de Lezama no *dicen algo* que nos cuesta entender y que con toda tozuda e inagotable paciencia tenemos que intentar recuperar sino que *hacen algo*, y eso que hacen es, justamente, mostrar cómo se puede producir una construcción verbal en la que el sentido no determina la dirección de su evolución sino que es, en muchos casos, el resultado de una especulación y, en casos extremos, incluso una ausencia. (Isava 2015: 203-204)

Isava's remarks coincide, up to a certain degree, with the approach that this research assumes in relation to the poetic system of Lezama Lima. As will be seen, the hermeticism and the question of sense in Lezama Lima far from being something to decipher, are a fundamental part of his poetic system and in a general sense, of poetry itself. However, and this is where this research disagrees, Isava criticises the relevance of such poetic system in Lezama Lima (2015: 201) and, following the thinking of Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben, concludes reaffirming the insufficiency of any reading that looks for a 'principio rector' that traverses Lezama Lima's poetry (2015: 242-243). On the contrary, one of the objectives of this research is to demonstrate the importance of Lezama Lima's poetic system for any non-hermeneutical reading of his poetry and the existence of a 'principio rector' (la imagen) that runs through

his poems and which brings not a sense, nor a non-sense, but a 'contrasentido'. In addition, whilst this research agrees with Isava's critique of the excessive and non-productive use of the Lezamian terminology (Isava 2015: 200), it does not see why such terminology should be avoided or even worse, ignored. Many of the terms that Lezama Lima mentions in his texts as part of his poetic system refer to the same idea or are there to act as an extension to an already existing concept. For example, there is a clear connection between the concepts of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* on one side, and those of *metaphor* and *image* on the other. Furthermore, this research will show (in the third chapter) that Lezama Lima's poetic system can be encapsulated in one single sentence, in one maxim, but not without having before explored and discussed (in the second chapter) the terminology to which Isava refers in his text.

There are three other texts that are worth mentioning because of the emphasis they put on Lezama Lima's poetic system. The first of them is *Reading Anew, José Lezama Lima Rhetorical Investigations*, by Juan Pablo Lupi (2012). In this text, Lupi studies the various linguistic and semantic mechanisms (like extreme rhetorical density, convoluted syntax, erudite extravagancies, for example) 'that may displace or overshadow the transmission of substantive content' (2012: 16). These mechanisms are strongly connected to Lezama Lima's poetics, culture and history, which is why Lupi dedicates the second part of his book to the discussion of the ideas of insularity and tradition not only in Lezama Lima but also in Mallarmé, one of the poets that had an important influence on the Cuban author. Lupi's interesting discussion, in the first part of the book, about the 'meaning and genealogy of various terms in Lezama Lima's Sistema poético' and 'the imaginative and peculiar strategies' that 'Lezama uses to connect his theory of poetics to certain ideas from the Western aesthetic and philosophical tradition' (2012: 69), is taken further afield in the rest of the book. Lupi

recognises in Lezama Lima's poetic system -and this is where his approach contrasts with the one presented by this research- an expression of his own 'thinking about history, culture and criticism, and about his own vision of the poetic craft' (2012: 69). In other words, Lupi's study about Lezama Lima moves between a linguistic and rhetorical approach (his analysis of the poem *Dador* is a good example of this) and a cultural and historical one, without completely considering the possible philosophical or theoretical consequences of Lezama Lima's thought.

The other two books that are important to mention are *La escritura de lo posible: el sistema poético de José Lezama Lima* by Remedios Mataix (2000) and *El primitivo implorante: el sistema poético del mundo de José Lezama Lima*, by Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé (1994). The former is an exhaustive analysis by Mataix that studies extensively all the possible sources from where Lezama Lima's poetic system can be drawn and understood (published works, letters, papers, notes and other texts from the Lezamian archive). Mataix main interest is to organise and comment some of the key aspects of a poetic system that is dispersed and never explicitly formulated (2000: 15). Her intention is not to analyse formally Lezama Lima's texts but to approach his work stylistically, tracing the main characteristics of his poetic thinking. Cruz-Malavé, on the other hand, also focuses on Lezama Lima's poetic system but from a very different point of view. Cruz-Malavé is interested not in interpreting Lezama Lima's work but in 'explaining it', in 'remitir el Proyecto totalizador de Lezama a un complejo campo de conflictos y medir (...) la distancia que separa sus diferentes y contradictorios sentidos' (1994: 7). Cruz-Malavé recognises the problem of dealing with a poetic project that is contradictory in its very nature, that tends towards fragmentation and multiplicity while at the same time claims to be systematic and total (1994: 30). To solve this impasse, Cruz-Malavé proposal is to make use of several concepts and ideas from cultural studies to explain some of the tensions and contradictions in Lezama Lima, for example, the concepts of 'insularismo',

‘sensibilidad negra’, paternalism, homosexuality, and mass reception, among others. All these concepts reflect the presence of a certain marginalisation in Lezama Lima, which may explain why it is difficult to unify them under one idea, just like happens with the fragmentation of Lezama Lima’s poetic system. This is an important difference with this research, which avoids recurring to external factors (cultural, historic or political) to ‘explain’ the inherent contradiction present in Lezama Lima’s poetic system.

The last important study on Lezama Lima that is relevant to this research is the well-known book by Emilio Bejel titled *José Lezama Lima: poeta de la imagen* (1994)<sup>2</sup>. The text is of particular importance not only because it focuses extensively on the notions of metaphor and image, but also because it relates Lezama Lima’s poetic system to other philosophical ideas like those from Vico, Nietzsche and Heidegger (1994: 14). Bejel also studies the connection between the Lezamian image, the concept of subject and the idea of a poetic writing in Lezama Lima, discussing the role that these three aspects play in *Paradiso* and *Oppiano Licario*. Although Bejel makes a very interesting analysis of the notions of image and metaphor in Lezama Lima (especially on pages 40 to 49), there are two main points of disagreement with this research. Firstly, his definition of the image, which he says is ‘la potencia creativa que surge de una carencia de orden natural’ (1994: 14), an idea that makes of the image a substitute for a lack, the possible response to a lost nature. As will be seen, the image in Lezama Lima is not a creative response to an absence but a guarantee of sense, and more specifically, of the *contrasentido* of a truth. Secondly, Bejel’s study ‘desemboca en una interpretación de la visión lezamiana sobre la expresión autóctona latinoamericana, donde el sujeto latinoamericano hilvana metafóricamente una historia poética del mundo a base de su

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<sup>2</sup> There are two versions of this book, one in English, published in 1990 by the University of Florida, and another one in Spanish, which is the one cited in this research.

marginalidad' (1994: 14-15). Instead of Bejel's idea of a Latin American subject who joins together, metaphorically, a whole poetic vision the world based on his or her marginalisation, the subject proposed by this research also joins together metaphorical fragments, but these fragments have nothing to do with social marginalisation or local identity, they are the traces left by a universal and infinite truth, by the evanishment of an event (the event of poetry, in Lezama Lima's case).

There have been several collections of essays and articles about Lezama Lima published throughout the years. Among them, *Nueve délficos: ensayos sobre Lezama* (Pico Rentería 2014) and *José Lezama Lima: la palabra extensiva* (Areta Marigó 2011) are two of the most recent publication. The former is a collection of texts from young literary critics with new insights into the work of Lezama Lima. One of those texts is "'Doce de los órficos": una incursión en el sistema poético de José Lezama Lima', by Edith Marsiglia (Pico Rentería 2014: 37-45), where she examines Lezama Lima's poetic system, and his poem 'Doce de los órficos', using some ideas from the Orphic tradition and symbols and concepts from the Tarot. The latter gathers essays that offer new perspectives on the subject, from Lezama Lima as a translator of Saint-John Pierce to the presence of cinema in his work, as well as his relationship with his first vocation, law. One of these essays is 'La poesía de José Lezama Lima: algunas consideraciones' (Areta Marigó 2011: 291-315), where Enrique Saíenz reflects on Lezama Lima's poetic system and on his poetry, focusing on the evolution that both aspects of his work have had since the publication of the first poem, 'Muerte de Narciso', until Lezama Lima's later work, offering a very personal and subjective perspective on such evolution. However, both Marsiglia and Marigó's approaches to the poetic system and poetry of Lezama Lima have few points in common with this research, which focuses on a more theoretical and philosophical perspective of his work.



More relevant for this research is the *Coloquio Internacional sobre la obra de José Lezama Lima* (Vizcaíno 1984a), especially three of the essays that are part of that volume: 'La imagen como sistema' by Rubén Ríos Ávila, 'Imagen y posibilidad en Lezama Lima' by Emilio Bejel, and Benito Pelegrín's 'Tornos, contornos, vías, desvíos vueltas y revueltas de un sistema poético'. In the first text, Ríos Ávila makes a short but important reflection not only on Lezama Lima's poetic system, where he finds a duality between 'la fijeza del ser' and 'la respiración, orgánica, condenada al movimiento' (Vizcaíno 1984: 130), but also and more importantly, on the notion of image, which he describes in the following manner:

La imagen es la estructura que define a la metáfora como una voluntad de concepto y al concepto como una ficción de la metáfora. La imagen es el tejido del simulacro que hace posible el sentido. No se trata de la imagen platónica, aproximativa, lúgubre, pasivamente mimética, sino de "La imagen como un absoluto, la imagen que se sabe imagen, la imagen como la última de las historias posibles". (Vizcaíno 1984: 129)

The idea about the image as a 'simulacro' that makes sense possible and which is not the passive and mimetic image found in Plato, has a strong connection with the notion of image that is discussed in this research. However, Ríos Ávila stops here and does not pursue or explore the 'other' image that Plato also mentions, the phantasma, a more active and less mimetic image that is one of the main focus of this research.

In the second text, 'Imagen y posibilidad en Lezama Lima' (Vizcaíno 1984: 133-142), Bejel explores the concept of image in Lezama Lima but from a Paradisiac perspective, establishing links between Lezama Lima's poetic system and the work of Dante: 'Como en Dante, para Lezama la actividad poética restituye la pureza paradisiaca que las lenguas humanas

perdieron con el Pecado' (Vizcaíno 1984: 134). Although this perspective is very different from the one proposed here, Bejel makes a connection between the Lezamian image and the concepts of imagination and phantasy (Vizcaíno 1984: 135) which, as will be seen, play an important role in this research. In the third and final essay, 'Tornos, contornos, vías, desvíos, vueltas y revueltas de un sistema poético' (Vizcaíno 1984: 225-242), Pelegrín discusses Lezama Lima's poetic system from a discursive and semantic point of view, describing it as the combination of various elements that represent the promise of a sense that never arrives, 'el advenimiento de un sentido que se niega, pues revelaría que tapa un vacío' (Vizcaíno 1984: 239). This is an aspect of Lezama Lima's poetic system that will be studied further in this research, the idea of the image as a promise of a sense that can never be accessed but by means of a subject and his or her fidelity to a truth.

There are also two well-known and important compilations of essays that are necessary to mention. They are Justo C. Ulloa's *José Lezama Lima, textos críticos* (1979) and *Recopilación de textos sobre Lezama Lima*, edited by Pedro Simón (1995). The latter has contributions from famous academics, writers and friends of Lezama Lima, but most of the texts focus on *Paradiso* or in other aspects of Lezama Lima's work that are not completely relevant for this research. In Ulloa's book, on the other hand, there is the essay 'Ordenamiento secreto de la poética de Lezama', by Leonor Álvarez de Ulloa, which studies the complexity of a poetic system that is dispersed and never fully and clearly formulated by Lezama Lima. Álvarez de Ulloa traces the texts (whether it is novel, essay or poetry) where Lezama Lima makes reference to his poetic system and extracts what she thinks are its principal features, among which she mentions *el vacío absoluto*, *la sustancia de lo inexistente*, *la causalidad poética*, *las eras imaginarias*, and *el orbe imaginario de griegos, egipcios y chinos*. The analysis that Álvarez de Ulloa makes of each of these elements offers new insights into the poetics of

Lezama Lima, but the problem is that is also is an attempt to make a system out of a system, adding concepts to a mechanism that is already populated with concepts. This is one of the reasons why in this research Lezama Lima's poetic system will be encapsulated in one single axiom.

Among the dozens of journal papers and articles that have Lezama Lima as their object of study, there are four texts of particular interest to this research because of their contribution to the study of Lezama Lima's poetic system. The first one is 'Acerca del concepto de poesía en Lezama Lima', by Eduardo Urdanivia Bertarelli (1991). As the title suggests, the text studies the concept of poetry in Lezama Lima, but it also reflects on the notions of poem and poet and their role within the poetics of Lezama Lima. Urdanivia Bertarelli affirms that it is impossible to study one of these concepts without mentioning the other two, since they are all connected (1991: 26), and he sees in this 'trinity' the clear presence and influence of Christian tradition on Lezama Lima (1991: 26). He concentrates his analysis on the poem *Muerte de Narciso*, concluding that in Lezama Lima 'la poesía sería el estanque en que Narciso se contempla, y también el escudo de Minerva a través del cual Perseo contempla a Medusa y triunfa sobre ella' (1991: 32). The second paper is Abel E. Prieto's 'Lezama: entre la poética y la poesía' (Prieto 1991). Prieto finds in Lezama Lima 'un mecanismo central', 'la búsqueda de enlaces ocultos entre elementos separados por abismos de tiempo, espacio o sentido' (1991: 18). This mechanism is Lezama Lima's poetic system, in whose centre lies the notion of image, a conciliatory power intermediary between poet and poetry, 'la única vía del hombre para relacionarse con el universo objetivo y con el territorio de lo invisible' (Prieto 1991: 19).

The other two papers are 'Teoría de la imagen y teoría de la lectura en Lezama Lima' by Irleamar Chiampi (1987), and 'Lezama Lima o del fideísmo poético', by Ramón Xirau. On one hand, Chiampi focuses her study on the essay 'Las imágenes posibles', a text that she examines meticulously to extract a possible 'theory of the image', a concept that she finds paradoxical because for her, the image in Lezama Lima 'es portadora del "es" (la identidad) y del "no es" (la diferencia)', at the same time (1987: 496). Chiampi finds a strong connection between the image in Lezama Lima's essay and his own experience as a reader, and she concludes:

Autor de textos difíciles, Lezama es el teórico que nos enseña a leer, al producir la figuración de su misma actividad como lector. En ésta como (debe ser) en la nuestra, la finalidad no es consumir el sentido, sino formar la imagen experimentando como una vivencia oblicua la progresión de las metáforas. (Chiampi 1987: 501)

On the other hand, Xirau's text on Lezama Lima is a reflection not only on the poetics of Lezama Lima, but also on his religiosity, his fidelity. Xirau distinguishes in the Lezamian image three different manifestations: 'la imagen poética', 'la imagen como arquetipo o "coro" de las eras históricas', and 'la imagen (...) en el sentido de que el hombre ha sido creado a imagen y semejanza de Dios' (1977: 6). Lezama Lima's conception of the world is, according to Xirau, paradoxical, because it is founded on an even bigger paradox, resurrection, Christ as God, and Christ as man (1977: 8). The image is a promise, by resemblance to God, of a possible solution to this paradox.

The books, articles and texts that have been evaluated here constitute an important part of the studies on Lezama Lima that have been carried out throughout the years. However, by no

means do they represent a complete picture of everything that has been said and done on the subject. For example, there are many works that concentrate on examining the poetic narrative of *Paradiso* and *Oppiano Licario*, as well as on studying on other aspects of Lezama Lima's writing like the inclusion of his texts into the so called Latin American Neo-baroque style, or his relationship with the political context at the time. The book *José Lezama Lima's Joyful Vision: a Study of Paradiso and Other Prose Works*, by Gustavo Pellón (1989), and also *De José Lezama Lima a Severo Sarduy: lenguaje y neobarroco en Cuba*, by Luis Álvarez Álvarez and Ana María González Mafud (2014), are good examples of some of those works.

Finally, there is also one aspect of Lezama Lima's studies that is important to mention because of the new perspective it offers on the notion of image, which is studied not as a poetic, literary or rhetorical curiosity in Lezama Lima, but as a visual resource. More specifically, this new perspective is the noticeable and increasing interest (in the last twenty years or so) on visual aspects of José Lezama Lima's work, especially within the field of cultural studies. For example, the book *La materia artizada*, by José Prats Sariol (1996), is a collection of essays by Lezama Lima where the Cuban writer reflects not only on one of his favourite subjects, painting, but also on other topics related to visuality, like Cuban art, plastic arts, colours, visual images and art in general. The book is divided into three chapters: 'Antigüedad/Reflexiones', 'Europa/América' and 'Cuba'. Prats Sariol limits his contribution to a preface, in which he discusses the role of Lezama Lima as a critic of art and highlights the fact that even in these texts, Lezama Lima does not abandon his poetic and characteristic style. Despite its brevity, the book is an important contribution to a not very well-known facet of the Cuban writer and, although it leaves out some fragments and references from his novels and essays (Benabdelouahed, 1996), it also brings to the fore the importance of visual images in José Lezama Lima's work. Leonel Capote's *La visualidad infinita* (1994) also explores the same

subject of visuality but from a different perspective. In this book, Capote gathers Lezama Lima's essays on Cuban art, as well as poems dedicated to his Cuban painter friends. The common denominator in this anthology is Cuba, but throughout the texts it becomes evident the interest that José Lezama Lima had not only for art but also for visual images in general. In his introduction to the book, Capote highlights the fact that in Lezama Lima 'la expresión plástica tuvo un lugar relevante y de modo especial la pintura cubana, que también lo acompañó en su hogar y en la más completa soledad de su estudio' (Capote 1994: 15).

More recent texts like Prats Sariol's *Lezama Lima o el azar concurrente* (2010) or Aullón de Haro's *Escritos de Estética* (2010) also offer new approaches to the poetics and texts of Lezama Lima. In the first text, Prats Sariol gives an account of his student-teacher relationship with Lezama and discusses the key aspects of the poetic system developed by his master. Juan Pablo Lupi, on the other hand, examines some of Lezama Lima's texts and ideas from a rhetorical point of view. The third book, *Escritos de Estética* is, just like *La materia artizada*, another prologued compilation of essays on art by José Lezama Lima, with the difference that in this case aesthetics is the main gathering common denominator. In this text, Aullón de Haro also analyses and discusses the most critical aesthetic aspects present in Lezama Lima's essays, suggesting the possibility of the existence of a particular Lezamian aesthetic framework.

Apart from books and compilations, there are also articles and other texts that discuss José Lezama Lima's texts from a visual perspective, some of them with interesting conclusions about Lezama's poetic system and his own notion of the image. One of them is 'José Lezama Lima y su propuesta de crítica literaria para América Latina', by Bibiana Castro Ramírez (2007), where she studies Lezama Lima as a Latin American literary critic and theorist. According to

Castro Ramírez, Lezama Lima's poetic system is more than a statement about the nature of poetry. For him, it is also a cultural theory based on the notion of the image, which also transforms and affects traditional conceptions of history and identity. Castro Ramírez discusses Lezama Lima's perspective on Latin American and Cuban literary criticism, focusing on his poetic system as a philosophical system that could apply to the whole world, with the notions of metaphor and image at its centre (Castro Ramírez 2007: 93). Her observations and conclusions seem to identify the possibility of a poetic system that exceeds the realm of poetry and which can be described more accurately as an aesthetic system. A similar idea is proposed by Reynaldo González in his essay 'Lezama, pintura y poesía' (1987). Here, González explores the influence of painting and plastic arts in Lezama Lima, underlying the fact that Lezama did not have access to good reproductions or to the originals of those images that he mentions in his texts. According to González, most of the time Lezama had to work with low-quality copies and verbal descriptions of paintings and pictures, something that might have influenced Lezama Lima's own ideas about art. According to González:

A la exploración de lo histórico (...) sirven con similar latencia lo poético y lo pictórico. Una poderosa razón se levanta de esas aparentes inconexiones. Triunfa el poeta porque reconoce que lo apoyan por igual diferentes artes. Pinta con imágenes. Con ellas desea alcanzar la gracia y la resurrección." (González 1987: 23)

Another article that makes an original contribution to the visual aspect in José Lezama Lima's texts is 'Escritura-pintura y reproducciones en Lezama Lima', by Javier G. Vilaltella (2002). In this text, he discusses the specific and very particular use of references and names that Lezama Lima made in his work. As was mentioned by Reynaldo González before, Lezama Lima

did not have access to the original artworks that he mentions in his texts, and most of the time he had to rely on reproductions and bad copies of them, which, according to Vilaltella, could have had an important effect on his writing. The conglomeration of works, references and names, sometimes wrongly attributed or even inexistent, can be viewed not only as a representation of the cultural consuming conditions of the Cuba of Lezama Lima's time, but also of the modern world (Vilaltella 2002: 90). Vilaltella also mentions the important fact that in recent years, new areas of study are being explored in the field of theoretical analysis, especially under the influence of slogans like those of 'pictorial turn' (W. J. T. Mitchell) and 'iconic turn' (Gottfried Boehm), which highlights the necessity for a new interpretation of Lezama Lima's concept of the *image* (2002: 87). There are areas in the texts of José Lezama Lima that have been left out in the dark as consequence of a group of descriptive routines about the reception of his work. However, concludes Vilaltella (2002: 87), the appearance of new questions within the frame of cultural studies will hopefully give rise to new incursions in areas of Lezama Lima's work that have been commonly ignored.

This research does not propose to look for new areas or topics of study in Lezama Lima's work, but rather to approach those that have been explored from a different perspective, not always linked to external factors (cultural or visual studies) or to interpretative analysis (hermeneutics or stylistics). The aim is not to discover a new object of study (Lezama Lima's political views, gender discourse in *Paradiso* or the influence of Hinduism on his poetry, for example), but to focus on aspects that might explain why Lezama Lima's work, despite all the research dedicated to it, continues to be not only enigmatic and hermetic to the reader, but also noticeably absent from the classrooms. At the heart of the problem, as this research suggests, lies a question about meaning, and Lezama Lima's poetic system and his notion of image are a fundamental part of it. This research approaches both José Lezama Lima's notion



of the image and his poetic system from a philosophical and more theoretical point of view. It considers the problem of signification and complexity of his work not as a problem of interpretation but as an inherent characteristic of his poetic system, and of poetry itself.

Instead of seeing in the hermeticism of Lezama Lima's work a semantic (Márquez) or stylistic (Mataix) feature, this research finds in it the single mark of poetry, its invitation. Instead of adding more concepts to an already complex poetic system (Álvarez de Ulloa), this research reduces it to a single axiom, a single sentence. Instead of confronting Lezama Lima's texts by declaring the 'death of the subject' (Levinson), this research reaffirms its resurrection. Instead of approaching the image as a visual or mental representation, this research accepts its lack of referentiality. Instead of making of Lezama Lima's writing a formless and timeless gesture (Rodríguez Matos), this research reaffirms the infinity of its form. Instead of defining Lezama Lima's image as a substitute of nature (Bejel), or dividing it into three different manifestations (Xirau), this research places the Lezamian image in the mist of undecidability.

## Chapter One

‘We are really, my dear friend, engaged in a very difficult investigation; for the matter of appearing and seeming, but not being, and of saying things, but not true ones —all this is now and always has been very perplexing’

Plato, *Sophist*.

The idea of a system within poetry suggests the existence of a rationality and a *logos* behind something that has commonly been associated to instinct and perception, an idea that also recalls the historical opposition between poetry and philosophy. Alain Badiou has written an elucidating essay on this subject, 'What is a Poem?, Or, Philosophy and Poetry at the Point of the Unnamable' (2005: 16-27). In this text, Badiou explores the Platonic 'old quarrel between philosophy and poetry', a quarrel that has been overturned by modernity, which has made 'the poem ideal and the matheme sophisticated' (Badiou 2005: 21). He suggests that the opposition between thought and poetry, perception and intelligibility, has disappeared in the modern poem, where poetry comes with its own thinking, a method that comes from a 'new survey of the resources of language, and not merely the delight taken in a flash of presence' (Badiou 2005: 23). In the same manner, this research argues that José Lezama Lima's poetic system represents a thinking that underlies a poetic corpus that not only presents a 'new survey of the resources of language', but which also takes those resources to their limit, to a new frontier of signification, understanding by signification the production of meaning, 'the property of being significant or expressive of something' (Little et al. 1973: 1994).

In one of his essays, 'La dignidad de la poesía' (1977: 787), José Lezama Lima makes reference to a phrase that he attributes to Roger Bacon, and which reads: 'La poesía es como el sueño de una doctrina.' He then makes an important comment on that sentence:

En realidad, en la expresión de Bacon, al disfrutar la palabra doctrina de la dichosa cercanía de la palabra sueño, se hacía equivalente doctrina a extensión de encantamiento, a dominio con feéricos torreones de aviso, trazando el círculo de los conjuros donde el sueño se aposentaba como una evaporación que se igualaba al relente, al tegumento estofado que rodea a la hoja cuando la iguana interpone su soplo en los consejos del rocío. (Lezama Lima 1977: 787)

Lezama's comment follows Badiou's idea that poetry comes with its own doctrine, with its own thought, a proximity that brings an equivalence between opposites. Even the dictionary definition of the concept itself of 'system' encapsulates the dynamics behind Lezama Lima's poetics: 'a set or assemblage of things connected, associated, or interdependent, so as to form a complex unity' (Little and others 1973: 2227). As will be shown later, José Lezama Lima's poetic system relies on the progressive fragmentation of metaphor and the regressive unity given by the image, on the differentiation of metaphor and the recollection of the image. The Platonic notion of *phantasma* and the Badiouian idea of *truth procedure*, both of which will be explored in this chapter, also reproduce the same structure of a system, of dispersed elements that are gathered together by one attracting point, a movement that seems to be poetic in its own nature, like the one Badiou has found in Mallarmé: 'The poetic act consists in suddenly seeing an idea fragment into a number of motifs equal in value, and in grouping them' (Badiou 2006: 404)<sup>3</sup>. Under this perspective, poetry and system have more in common than expected, which makes the *poetic system* proposed by Lezama Lima not a contradiction anymore, but a tautology instead.

This first chapter focuses on the 'system' part of José Lezama Lima's poetic system, on the theoretical and conceptual aspect of his poetics. Although, at first glance, the conception of system, where several elements or parts are unified at one point by another element, might not sound very complex or innovative, the same idea becomes more problematic when that unifying element appears as absent from the system, as indiscernible. This is the case not only with José Lezama Lima's poetic system, but also with Plato's *phantasma* and with Badiou's

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<sup>3</sup> This statement is part of an important reflection from Badiou on the topics of 'forcing' and 'subject intervention', and it will be further discussed in the third chapter.

*truth procedure*, all of them a fundamental part of this research. Lezama's poetic system is the focus of the second chapter, whilst the other two notions are explored and circumscribed here in this first chapter. On one hand, the Platonic *phantasma*, a concept that appears for the first time in his dialogue *Sophist* (Plato 1921), becomes necessary in order to understand the nature of the notion of image as it appears in Lezama Lima's work, an image that has nothing to do with a visual representation of an object, or even with imagination. On the other hand, Alain Badiou's idea of a *truth procedure*, introduced in his book *Being and Event* (2006), but also developed and mentioned in his other two following books, *Logics of Worlds* (2009) and *L'Immanence des vérités* (2018)<sup>4</sup>, is essential to understand how Lezama Lima's poetic system operates, especially with relation to its four main elements: *poem*, *poet*, *image* and *metaphor*. In addition, some of the components of Badiou's notion of *truth procedure* (a subject's intervention, the forcing of a language within the situation, and the indiscernibility of truths, for example) can explain the hermeticism and the problem of signification in Lezama Lima's work. Other concepts and ideas from Badiou's texts will also be incorporated and explored along the way, like those of *event*, *infinity*, *absolute* and *Other*, all of which bear a vital connection with the Platonic *phantasma*, a connection that takes place through José Lezama Lima's conception of the *image*.

### The image of the *phantasma* and the *phantasma* of the image

Before exploring the presence, the relevance and the effects of the notion of the *phantasma* within the poetics of José Lezama Lima and its connection to his own concept of image, it is necessary first put it into a broader context and to circumscribe its various theoretical

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<sup>4</sup> This book has not been translated into English yet.

manifestations. The objective, for the moment, is not to define what a *phantasma* is or to use it as a possible resource for analysis and interpretation, as part of an academic methodological framework. Why? Because as will be shown, the *phantasma*, like its very close relative *phantasia*, is 'in its essence rebellious against determinacy' (Castoriadis 1997: 214), an indeterminacy that is also shared by José Lezama Lima's notion of the *image*. However, this indeterminacy does not mean that it is impossible to talk about the *phantasma* or to circumscribe its own nature. As will be discussed, if there are two things that the *phantasma* facilitates and enables, according to Plato and especially, to his disciple, Aristotle, those are discourse (*logos*) and visuality. Both notions of *phantasia* and *phantasma* share that 'rebelliousness against determinacy' already highlighted by Castoriadis. The fact that Aristotle and Plato, among other philosophers and thinkers after them, have also recognised such indeterminacy might suggest that the only identifiable feature of both *phantasia* and *phantasma* is their evasiveness. It seems that thinking about the image, and particularly about the image as *phantasma*, as appearance, comes with the inevitable evasiveness and slipperiness of the topic. Nevertheless, the difficulty for defining and identifying the *phantasma* does not mean that any discourse about it is condemned to failure or redundancy. On the contrary, the abundance of studies and texts on the topics of *phantasma*, *phantasia* and imagination (one of the most common translations of the latter), and the current interest in images in general, suggest that it is the indeterminacy of the of the image, of appearances and of perception, what keeps generating interest and motivating discussion. If that is the case, then what is important is not to define, describe or identify the *phantasma* but to go near it, to surround it with *logos*, to 'write around it' (*circum-scribere*); to circumscribe the *phantasma* first, so it can later be inscribed (*in-scribere*) within the writing and poetics of José Lezama Lima.

It is all about appearances: *phantasia/phantasma*

The terms *phantasia* [φαντασία], *phantasma* [φάντασμα] and its plural form *phantasmata* [φαντάσματα] are related to *phainô* [φαίνω] ('to make appear in the light'), to *phôs* [φῶς] (light) and also to the middle-voice verb *phainomai* [φαίνομαι] ('to come into the light, to appear'), to *phantazomai* [φαντάζομαι] ('to become visible, to appear, show itself') and finally, to *phantazô* [φαντάζω] ('to make visible, present to the eye or to the mind') (Lezra and others 2014: 773).<sup>5</sup> Some authors like D. W. Hamlyn make a difference between the verbs *phainesthai* [φαίνεσθαι] more connected to appearances, and *phantazesthai* [φαντάζεσθαι], more related to images (Aristotle 1993: 131). It is important also to highlight the fact that the active mood of the second verb, as in 'to imagine', does not come until very later (Lezra and others 2014: 773), which means that *phantasia* in the first place has to do with 'the fact that something, whatever it is, appears to X or Y as this or that' (Lezra and others 2014: 775). Therefore, instead of being an active producer of images, the subject becomes a receptive point, a perceiver of *phantasmata*, an interpreter, an idea that will be fundamental in Plato's approach to perception, truth and images:

Indeed, the purpose of his' (Plato's) 'coinage (derived from 'phainesthai', 'to appear', meaning appearance in contrast to reality or being) was to embody the confusion of 'it seems to me' and 'it is' and so to show up the fundamental error of those who rely on the senses as revealing reality. To trust the senses as a basis of knowledge opens one to distortion from perspective and the illusory character of objects that never are the same. (Barnouw 2002: 2)

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<sup>5</sup> See also Anne Sheppard, *The poetics of Phantasia: Imagination in Ancient Aesthetics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 2; Jeffrey Barnouw, *Propositional Perception: Phantasia, Predication, and Sign in Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics* (United States: University Press of America, 2002), p. 2 and Alessandra Manieri, *L'immagine poetica nella teoria degli antichi: phantasia ed enargeia* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 1998), pp. 17-18.



The terms *phantasma* and *phantasia* were first introduced by Plato in his dialogues the *Republic*, *Theaetetus* and most importantly, the *Sophist*, where the question about images dominates an important part of the dialogue (Watson 1988: 1; Sheppard 2014: 2-3). Aristotle then inherits these concepts from Plato and develops them further in many of his writings (especially in *De Anima* but also in *De Memoria*, *Metaphysics*, *De Insomniis*, *Rhetoric*, *Nichomachean Ethics* and *De Motu Animalium*), focusing mainly on *phantasia* and making some important variations. According to Anne Sheppard, 'it was Aristotle's usage, particularly in *De Anima*, that was of crucial importance for later thought' (Sheppard 2014: 1).

After Aristotle, the notion of *phantasia* is reformulated by Epicureans, Stoics and Neoplatonists and then incorporated into the Latin world as *imaginatio* by authors like Augustine, Boethius and Thomas Aquinas. The evolution and transition of *phantasia* to the commonly used term of *imagination* has been already studied by Gerard Watson (1988) and more recently by Anne Shepard (2014). Many philosophers as renowned as Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Castoriadis, Deleuze, Ricoeur and Derrida have had their own interpretations not only of *phantasia* but also of the *phantasma* and some of their views will be discussed later in this chapter. The recent publication of articles and books dedicated to the subject reflects that even nowadays both concepts continue to generate interest among academics. However, many of the material and studies published about both concepts are either a reinterpretation of the terms as it appears in Plato and Aristotle, or a historiography of its evolution and usage; very few of them take the notion of *phantasia* out of the domain

of philosophy and try to incorporate it or relate it to other practices like art or literature.<sup>6</sup> Among the exceptions are the texts of D. Thomas Benediktson and Ellen Perry, both of which take into account the role of *phantasia* in Roman and Greek art. William Uricchio, in his article 'Phantasia and Technè at the Fin-de-siècle', discusses the relevance of *phantasia* for modern technologies like cinema and television (Uricchio 2005: 27-42).

The word *phantasia* has always been very difficult to translate and specify, especially because it 'undergoes striking changes in meaning from Plato through Aristotle to the Epicureans, Sceptics and Stoics' (Barnouw 2002: 2). Some authors translate it as imagination, perception, appearances, mental representations, presentations or even impressions. In many cases, the term is left untranslated as an example of its own ambiguity and untranslatability, a decision that shows that even signification and language are at stake in the concept itself. However, if *phantasia* designates a faculty that deals with how things appear, seem or present to someone, then it is understandable that the concept itself looks deceptive, misleading, delusive and ambiguous. The term *phantasma* shares a similar history of ambiguity and interpretation. It has been commonly translated as image, appearance, simulacrum, vision and it has also been left untranslated, especially in recent years. Cornelius Castoriadis opted for a more neutral term, *phantasm*, because to translate it as image or representation is, he says, 'both unfaithful and highly interpretive' and 'it is a source for arbitrariness' (1997: 216). The translatability or not of these terms might not be very relevant for some authors like Castoriadis. It can be argued that the emphasis should be not on trying to clarify or disambiguate the notions of *phantasia* and *phantasma* but on studying their productivity and

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<sup>6</sup> Among them D. Thomas Benediktson, *Literature and the Visual Arts in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Ellen Perry, *The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Visual Arts of Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

functionality in a specific context, examining the different interpretations and uses in certain texts. Nevertheless, there is an aspect that cannot be forgotten within the topic of translation, one which is more than relevant when it comes to the discussion about images: the referent, that point in the distance where language stops and visibility begins, a guarantee of meaning, understanding and beginning. For Plato, such referent is the Idea, the Forms, the Model, the Paradigm and it is the image, especially as *phantasma*, who comes to destabilise this otherwise firm path to truth, and in the case of José Lezama Lima, it is an image that also destabilises signification.

*Phantasia* and *phantasma* share many of their own characteristics and they are interconnected at various points: both concepts have to do with appearances, perception, images and representation. However, the two concepts emphasise distinct aspects of appearances and representation and the use that Plato and Aristotle make of them differs as much as to be sometimes contradictory and ambiguous, not only between the two authors but also within their own texts. Whereas Plato focuses on the *phantasma* as a type of image that deceives the viewer and does not follow its model, Aristotle concentrates on discussing the role of *phantasia* as a faculty strongly linked to perception, producer of *phantasmata*. Such difference of approach does not mean that Plato never mentions or discusses *phantasia* in his texts or Aristotle the *phantasma* in his, on the contrary, both thinkers base their proposals on an explicit interaction between the two terms. Notwithstanding, the notion of the *phantasma*, especially as it appears in Plato's *Sophist*, has a clearer and closer connection to art, poetry and images than that of *phantasia*, which is mostly understood as a mental capacity related to perception. It is an important distinction that even José Lezama Lima wanted to make, when in his essay 'La imagen histórica' (1977: 848), he describes both terms, image and imagination, as 'completely opposed'. This is one of the reasons why it is

*phantasma*, and not *phantasia*, the term that is the main focus of this chapter and the one that has a stronger connection to Lezama Lima's poetics. As will be explained and discussed in the third chapter, within the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, the image acts as a *phantasma* that gives appearance to a referent that is always *an-other*, a very slippery movement of referentiality which justifies its own evasive and ambiguous nature. The problem is that, despite the evident relevance of Plato's notion of *phantasma* for this research and also for any discussion on images, it is impossible to ignore the prominence that the concept of *phantasia* has had not only within academia, but also among philosophers (including among some familiar names like Husserl and Heidegger). The fact that, from the very beginning, both terms have always appeared together and in the same context, not only adds difficulty to the matter but also means that it is easy to confuse one with the other. This is why it becomes necessary, at least for the purposes of this research, to make a clear distinction between these concepts and their possible connotations.

The first of these notions to be explored and circumscribed here in this chapter is that of *phantasia*, particularly as it was described by Aristotle, who was the first to develop, define and incorporate the concept into his thinking. The focus on Aristotle's usage of the notion of *phantasia* will also serve as an introduction to the relationship between the notion of *phantasma* and José Lezama Lima's poetic system, where the image plays a fundamental role. Although Aristotle's *phantasia* is not as closely related to *mimesis*, poetry or art as Plato's *phantasma*, he does find clear connections between *phantasia*, visuality and metaphor, connections that are also relevant for the discussion of the poetics of Lezama Lima. The usages that Aristotle makes and the definitions that he gives of the word *phantasia* across several of his books is often contradictory and rather inconsistent, which happens even within the same book (Sheppard 2014: 9), an issue that makes *phantasia* a more difficult concept to

delimitate and circumscribe than that of the *phantasma*. After all, it was Aristotle who described *phantasia* as ‘that in virtue of which an image (*phantasma*) occurs to us’ (1957: 159) and who first linked visibility, metaphor and appearances. Aristotle’s *phantasia*, therefore, cannot be ignored and it deserves more than just a mention in this chapter.<sup>7</sup>

Bringing *phantasia* before the eyes.

Plato has been largely recognised as the first thinker who used and reflected on the concept of *phantasia* and the fact that ‘there is no example of this word extant in Greek literature before Plato’ (Notomi 1999: 250) supports this claim. According to Noburu Notomi (1999: 250), the term *phantasia* appears seven times in Plato’s dialogues: once in the *Republic*, twice in the *Theaetetus* and four times in the *Sophist*. In the *Republic* (Plato 2013: 382e), *phantasia* is used in its plural form, *phantasias*, and it refers to the deceiving forms, images or apparitions that a god might assume in order to make himself visible to humans. In the *Theaetetus* (Plato 1921: 43) the notion of *phantasia* is said to be an equivalent to that of sensation (*aisthesis*) and it corresponds to the way in which someone perceives or apprehends something by means of their senses. While in the first case Plato connects *phantasia* to falsehood, duplicity, trickery and deception, in the *Theaetetus* the same concept has to do with truth, science (*ἐπιστήμη*), accuracy and reliability. Socrates, in the same dialogue, follows Protagoras’ idea that ‘man is the measure of all things’ (Plato 1921: 41), and he identifies *phantasia* with sensation and sensation with science, with knowledge, which means that *phantasia* shares the same nature as its counterparts: it is accurate, non-deceitful,

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<sup>7</sup> The task of delimiting and interpreting the concept of *phantasia* not only in Aristotle, but also in other thinkers like Augustine, Heidegger or Husserl, or even in some philosophical schools like the Stoics, the Epicureans or the Neoplatonists, all of whom have made use of the term, would definitely exceed the ambition and objectives of this research, one of the reasons why they have not been mentioned or taken into account for the discussion of the concept in this chapter.

true and direct. If a man perceives something as hot then it is hot, if cold then it is cold; appearance and existence are the same thing. *Doxa* or common opinion is built upon a *phantasia* that finds its own veracity on sensation, on the accuracy of senses.

Whether *phantasia* belongs to the realm of appearances and falsehood or to the realm of reality and existence is going to be one of the main topics of discussion in Plato's *Sophist*. In this text *phantasia* is strongly linked to *doxa*, just like in the *Theaetetus*, but Plato's approach here is slightly different from the one mentioned in the *Theaetetus*. Whereas for Protagoras (according to the *Theaetetus*) *phantasia* relies strongly on sensation, for Plato the aspect that decides the veracity or falsity of *phantasia* is *doxa* since it is *doxa* which 'determines the undetermined content of sensations' (Collette 2006: 91). *Phantasia* therefore, as Plato says in the *Sophist*, is 'a mixture of sensation and opinion' (Plato 1921: 443), a definition that has not been overlooked by Aristotle in his *De Anima* (1957: 159, 161). This is the *phantasia* that has been commonly explored by many commentators of Plato and which has been used to establish a connection and a contiguity with the same concept in Aristotle. However, as Notomi affirms, those commentators 'fail to see the true meaning of *phantasia* in this passage because they isolate Passage 44' (from where the definition of *phantasia* comes) 'from the whole argument of the *Sophist*, and instead connect it with other works' (1999: 250-251). Notomi concludes that within the *Sophist* there is an important distinction to be made between two kinds of appearance: non-perceptual (*doxa*) and perceptual (*phantasia*) (Notomi 1999: 267). Plato's *Sophist* not only links the notion of *phantasia* to perception and judgement but also to falsity, truth, inaccuracy, deceptiveness and appearances. In an example that is used by both Plato and Aristotle, the sun, when it is seen from the distance, appears to be small, but common opinion knows that this is not the case, that it is only a perceptual judgement which can be classified as true or false. *Doxa* and *phantasia* are the

result of two identical processes where the soul dialogues with itself: one is a silent dialogue called *dianoia* or thinking, and the other is discourse or *logos*, a voiced dialogue. According to Plato, *phantasia* has a stronger connection to the latter (Plato 1921: 443).

Protagoras and Plato share the idea that *phantasia* is strictly related to sensation (*aesthesis*) but while for Protagoras such connection is indisputable and true, for Plato it can be deceiving and false. *Phantasia* is a judgement that arrives through sensation and the dialectic method can be used to know if that judgement is true or false. As results of similar processes, *doxa* and *phantasia* have a lot in common. However, whilst *doxa* determines, affirms or refutes, *aesthesis* is undetermined, it presents a sensitive content without any judgement or limitation; sensation is *apeiron*, a term that can be translated as ‘boundless’ or ‘indefinite’ (Collette 2006: 97).<sup>8</sup> *Phantasia* is ambiguous, it is placed right between sensation and opinion, between undefinition and determination. By itself, *phantasia* is not true or false because that is the work of *doxa*. It is not totally undetermined either because that is the nature of *aesthesis*, not *phantasia*. It is only a mixture, a combination. *Phantasia* joins, connects, blends, but at the same time confuses, blurs, complicates. In other words, it ‘metaphorises’.

Aristotle inherited Plato’s ideas about the notion of *phantasia* but he saw certain problems with its dependence on *doxa* and *aesthesis*. The critique that Aristotle makes of Plato’s definition of *phantasia* as a mixture of sensation and opinion can be mainly found in *De Anima* (Aristotle 1957: 159, 161), where Aristotle dedicates a big part of his work to the discussion

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou mentions the term *apeiron* at the beginning of *Being and Event*, when discussing Plato’s thought on multiplicity. ‘For the Greeks’, affirms Badiou, ‘the unlimitedness —ἄπειρος— of unrepresentable multiplicity indicates that it is not supported by any thinkable situation’ (2006: 34). This ‘unthinkability’ of unlimited multiplicity, of infinity, is what the image in José Lezama Lima’s poetic system attempts -and succeeds- to present, to make visible, by being an image of the Other. This idea will be discussed in the third chapter, but for the moment, it demonstrates a clear link between *phantasia*, *phantasma*, sensation, indiscernibility and Lezama Lima’s conception of the image.

of *phantasia*. As Gerard Watson has indicated (1988: 14-15), it is difficult to find a unified and consistent Aristotelian theory of *phantasia*, even within a work like *De Anima*, probably Aristotle's most important reflection on the concept. Nonetheless, one of the aspects that does show some consistency in his work is how Aristotle distances himself from Plato's views on the ambiguous notion of *phantasia*. For Aristotle, the problem with Plato's conception of *phantasia* is that, in order for this concept to be a mixture of perception (*aisthesis*) and belief or common opinion (*doxa*), like Plato says, then both perception and belief need to agree on the same object, the same content. If something is perceived as white, common opinion has it as white. It cannot be perceived as white and believed to be good, for example. And yet, seen from afar the sun appears to be small, although common opinion knows that it is larger than it looks. If Plato's conception of *phantasia* is right, then either true belief is suspended in this case or it is at the same time true and false, which is impossible. Perception and opinion can have a different content and therefore they cannot be combined in one concept, *phantasia*.

Aristotle's position on *phantasia* places it nearer the various faculties or potentialities (*dynameis*) of the soul than to the Platonic definition of a midway term between sensation and opinion. The notion is still closely related to the idea of 'what appears' and 'the power to deal with appearances rather than those appearances themselves' (Sheppard 2014: 7). He explicitly defines it as 'a movement taking place as a result of actual sense-perception' (Aristotle 1957: 163). The common translation of *phantasia* as imagination has not helped to clarify things but it has attracted attention from fields like psychology, visual arts and of course, philosophy. Cornelius Castoriadis talks about two distinguishable types of imagination in Aristotle (Castoriadis 1997: 213-245), one that is more radical and productive and which will appear and disappear over the course of the history of philosophy, and another one more



conventional and banal, one that 'still reigns today in fact and in substance' (Castoriadis 1997: 214). The former resists any attempt of translation, its slippery form escapes definition and its nature hides under various aspects of discourse. The latter can be found easily in common language, it is used by a subject who imagines things and who knows that everything coming from this second type of imagination is false, it is fantasy. The complexity and slipperiness that characterises Castoriadis' first type of imagination reflects and, up to a certain point, justifies the lack of consensus among scholars when it comes to finding a unified definition of *phantasia* in Aristotle's work. The confusion generated by the many possible translations of *phantasia* in Aristotle adds even more complexity to the problem. According to Barnouw: 'In some of the applications of the term in Aristotle the translation "imagination" seems appropriate, while in others something like "representation" or "impression" is called for, either in a neutral sense or with a problematic cast akin to the Platonic and Sceptic versions' (Barnouw 2002: 2).

Other academics like Christina S. Papachristou (2013) have found that there are at least three different kinds of *phantasia* only in *De Anima*. As has been mentioned before, this issue with finding a unique conception of *phantasia* is a problem that comes from the fact that Aristotle uses the term with different meanings, not only according to the book in which the term is being discussed but also to the context in which that concept appears, even if it is within the same book.<sup>9</sup> There are, despite this ambiguity, some passages in Aristotle's work that offer a clear definition of what *phantasia* is and of the context in which it might appear:

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<sup>9</sup> This important point has been mentioned by Krisanna M. Scheiter, 'Images, Appearances, and Phantasia in Aristotle', *Phronesis*, iii, 57 (2012), 251–278, p. 252; and Alfredo Ferrarin, 'Colloquium 3: Aristotle on ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΑ', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy*, i, 21 (2006), 89–123, p. 91).

If, then, imagination (*phantasia*) is the faculty in virtue of which we say that an image (*phantasma*) presents itself to us, and if we exclude the metaphorical use of the term, it is some one of the faculties (*dunamis*) or habits in virtue of which we judge, and judge truly or falsely. Such faculties or habits are sensation, opinion, knowledge, intellect. It is clearly not sensation, for the following reasons. Sensation is either a faculty like sight or an activity (*energeia*) like seeing. But we may have an image even when neither the one nor the other is present: for example, the images in dreams. (Aristotle 1907: 125)

The text is important because of several reasons. Firstly, *phantasia* is linked to the concept of *phantasma*, understood as an image that appears to the subject from the outside, and not as something that the subject fabricates or creates -that he imagines-. There is a certain anonymity attached to the concept of *phantasma*, a characteristic that will be explored in the third chapter and which has a strong connection to Lezama Lima's image. Secondly, *phantasia* is here linked to the action of judging if something is true or false, an aspect that in Plato's *Sophist* is reserved for *doxa* and not for *phantasia*. Thirdly, *phantasia* is understood by Aristotle in this extract as an activity separated from sensation, where the action of seeing is independent from the sense of sight, an idea that has been noticed by Debra Hawhee in her article 'Looking into Aristotle's Eyes: Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Vision' (2011: 143). Finally, in this text Aristotle mentions, alongside *phantasia*, two other concepts that are more than relevant for the discussion of José Lezama Lima's poetic system, namely, metaphor and visuality.

In her already mentioned article about the notion of rhetorical vision, Debra Hawhee (2011: 140) also highlights the fact that 'Aristotle had much to say about the unique and

multidirectional relationships among vision, the eyes, and words.’<sup>10</sup> According to her, the presence and interaction in Aristotle of notions like *phantasia*, *bringing-before-the-eyes* and *energeia* shows the evident connection between images and words, a connection that has been studied by other authors<sup>11</sup> and which also can often be found in Aristotle’s works on art and poetry. This link between visuality and poetry should not be a surprise, since Aristotle inherits the concept of *phantasia* from Plato, where it had already appeared in a visual context (images, copies, appearances, painting and vision). The presence of a visual aspect in the discussion of *phantasia* and *phantasma* has been there from the very beginning and it is impossible to deny the important role that visuality plays not only in any discussion about these terms, but also in classical thought.

In Aristotle, *phantasia* seems to have two faces. On one side, it relates to a type of visuality separated from the eyes, from sight (for example when we dream or remember something). On the other hand, when *phantasia* involves the faculty of sight, it is to deal with appearances, delusions and deceitful images (reflections, objects seen from the distance). It is as if *phantasia* acted as a sort of metaphor of reality, distorting the real and making the eyes see something where there is nothing, and when there is, then *phantasia* tricks vision and makes it see it differently, distorted. However, even in these two cases *phantasia* does not have the same meaning that its late cognate, ‘imagination’, especially because for Aristotle other visual events, strongly linked to the idea of deception and illusion, like reflections on mirrors, water or seeing a figure from the distance, are also part of *phantasia*. As in Plato, in Aristotle

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<sup>10</sup> According to her, rhetorical vision ‘considers the visual work of rhetoric and language, the complex ways that words -oral or written- form perception. Put most simply, through rhetorical vision, words come to life’ (2011: 140).

<sup>11</sup> Hawhee mentions among them George Kennedy, Sarah Newman and Ned O’Gorman (Hawhee, p. 140, note 5).

*phantasia* is related to how things appear to us, how they present themselves *before our eyes* (*pro ommaton poiein*), an idea that for Aristotle has relation with two other concepts also related to visuality, *metaphor* and *energeia*. The idea of ‘putting things before the mind’s eye’ or, as Sara Newman (2002) calls it, *bringing-before-the-eyes*, is more than a simple phrase repeated here and there by Aristotle as a colloquialism or a mere illustration. *Bringing-before-the-eyes* works ‘almost as a technical term for visualization’ (Sheppard 2014: 23) and it is associated not only with *phantasia* but also with metaphor and *energeia* (activity).<sup>12</sup> Although the notion of *bringing-before-the-eyes* is used by Aristotle in several of his texts, there is one particular passage in his *Art of Rhetoric* that gives a clearer idea of its connection to metaphor and *energeia*:

Now it has been stated that elegant things are said as a result of metaphor from analogy and by putting things before the eyes (*pro ommaton poiein*), but it needs to be said what we mean by “before the eyes,” and what makes this happen. I mean that all those things that signify activity (*energeia*) put something before the eyes; for instance, saying a good man is a square guy is a metaphor, since both are perfect in their kinds, but it does not signify activity. But there is activity with “having the prime of life coming into full bloom,” and “you, like a free-ranging animal,” and “as the Greeks shot to their feet”; “shooting” is an activity and a metaphor, since it means something is quick. And there is the way Homer has made use of metaphor in many places to make lifeless things come to life. In them all, the way he produces active presence is highly regarded. (Aristotle 2020: 405, 407)

This particular extract from Aristotle’s text has been read and reread many times and interpreted in very different ways, although most of the interpretations agree on the fact that

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in *De Anima* 427b17-20 (Aristotle 1957: 123).

in it Aristotle shows that there is an important link between metaphor, activity (*energeia*) and the notion of *bringing-before-the-eyes*. Other authors like Alfredo Ferrarín (2006), see in this passage a connection between *phantasia* and the notion of *bringing-before-the-eyes* (2006: 96-97). In any case, it is clear that for Aristotle, within *phantasia*, the use of a specific form of metaphor, the one that acts as activity (*energeia*) and makes 'lifeless things come to life', can also make absent things present and it can bring them 'before the eyes'. In other words and to put it in very Lezamian terms, *phantasia* and metaphor act as a type of 'resurrection' of beings, and resurrection is, for Lezama Lima, 'la más grande imagen que tal vez pueda existir' (Lezama Lima 1977: 774).

There are two aspects that should be emphasised at this point: the first one is that Aristotle here is resorting to a metaphor himself to talk about the act of making things appear, that of *bringing-before-the-eyes*, a metaphor which itself falls into the category of activity (*energeia*). The other aspect is that *phantasia* seems to be in an uncertain place between word and image, metaphor and visibility, sensation (sight) and intellect. Even the name *phantasmata* (images, appearances), which according to Scheiter (2012: 260) is the name used for those specific images that are product of *phantasia*, reflects the uncertainty and ambiguity of the term. Aristotle seems to assume that *phantasia* moves freely between image and concept, between what is seen and what is thought to be seen, and he does it 'by treating image, sign and name as continuous and homogeneous' (Ferrarín 2006: 107). However, some authors like D. Thomas Benediktson (2000), have seen in this ambivalence of the notion of *phantasia* a positive aspect of its essence, a proof of the existence of a meeting point between literature and visual arts: 'Both types of art are imagistic; they present to the viewer either an image, as in visual art, or as in literature, a set of moving images that the soul then uses as raw data (*phantasia*) to enable thought to occur' (Benediktson 2000: 170).

When Aristotle says that *phantasia* is ‘the faculty in virtue of which we say that an image (*phantasma*) presents itself to us’, he is emphasising the relationship not only between *phantasia* and appearance but also between *phantasia* and absence, even distance. If Aristotle’s theory of truth can be explained as ‘the greater the contact (howsoever understood) with presence, with the thing, the greater the truth’ (Ferrarín 2006: 101), then the further away from presence, the more *phantasia* comes into action. This is what some authors have called *aesthetic distance* (Givens 1991: 121-136), the ability found in art of turning reality into illusion, of turning real pain into an aesthetic experience; the power of creation and production -not imitation- of art. Metaphor, in this sense, is not a mere comparison or similarity between two concepts, it is the process through which images come to life. It is movement and activity, the act itself of *bringing-before-the-eyes*, a metaphor in itself. Metaphor is not some-thing, it is an activity that helps not only ‘to put things before the eyes’ but also to see ‘connections where previously they had not seen any’ (Mahon 1999: 76).

Finally, there are other two more features about *phantasia* worth noting. The first one is that, according to Hawhee (2011: 148), it can act as a type of *composite photograph*, a unifying faculty where various images are combined into one in order to decide whether to do this or that, a process of amalgamation that Aristotle says is necessary for reasoning and measuring (1907: 434a.6-11). Krisanna M. Scheiter gives a good example to explain this unifying function:

When we perceive an oak tree in our front yard and we store this perception in our memory, the image that we have is of that particular oak tree. When we perceive another oak tree, one in our neighbour’s yard, we retain this sense impression, and so on until we have several

individual impressions of oak trees. At some point, according to Aristotle, these individual impressions of oak trees combine to form a single image. (Scheiter 2012: 263) <sup>13</sup>

The second important feature of *phantasia* has to do with its relationship with *energeia*, metaphor and *bringing-before-the-eyes*. Although it is true that Aristotle sometimes refers to metaphor and the notion of *bringing-before-the-eyes* as resources (mainly rhetorical) that bring ‘clarity and vividness’ to discourse, the emphasis should be on *energeia* (activity) and not on *enargeia*<sup>14</sup>, which is the term used in Aristotle for clarity and vividness<sup>15</sup>. This distinction is fundamental because the interaction between *phantasia* and metaphor should be understood, at least here, under the notion of *energeia* or activity, movement, production and ‘bringing before the eyes the appearance of an image’, not as a rhetorical resource for vividness or clarity and consequently, understanding (in other words, *enargeia*). If the emphasis lies on *enargeia* (clarity and vividness) and not on *energeia* (activity, operation), then *phantasia* becomes *fantasy*, the banal use of imagination which was identified by Castoriadis (1997: 214) and already discussed here in this chapter. This wrong emphasis on *enargeia* would also mean that both *phantasia* and metaphor would become simply rhetorical tools for seeing things vividly and clearly, comprehensively and rationally. Metaphor, particularly, would then lose its etymological sense of ‘transference’, ‘carrying

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<sup>13</sup> This idea of *phantasia* as a capacity for combining or merging various images into one, reminds the story of Zeuxis and Pharrasios that will be mentioned later when discussing the notion of *phantasma* in Plato. Zeuxis, when trying to make a portrait of Helen of Troy, combines the different images of five beautiful sisters into one in order to reflect the real beauty of Helen, which is exactly the idea behind the concept of *composite photography*. For the story of Zeuxis and Pharrasios, see Elizabeth C. Mansfield, *Too beautiful to picture: Zeuxis, myth, and mimesis* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 9-10).

<sup>14</sup> In her study about *phantasia*, Anne Sheppard focuses on this second category of *enargeia*. (Sheppard, p. 19)

<sup>15</sup> Hendrik Birus discusses this confusion between the two terms in his article 'Picturing it. The issue of Visuality in the classical theory of metaphor' (*Arcadia – International Journal for Literary Studies*, ii, 38 (2003)).

something across' (movement and activity). Even Longinus, in his treatise *On the Sublime*, was aware of this issue:

Weight, grandeur, and urgency in writing are very largely produced, dear young friend, by the use of "visualizations" (*phantasiai*). That at least is what I call them; others call them "image productions." For the term *phantasia* is applied in general to an idea which enters the mind from any source and engenders speech, but the word has now come to be used predominantly of passages where, inspired by strong emotion, you seem to see what you describe and bring it vividly before the eyes of your audience. That *phantasia* means one thing in oratory and another in poetry you will yourself detect, and also that the object of the poetical form of it is to enthrall, and that of the prose form to present things vividly, though both indeed aim at the emotional and the excited. (Aristotle and others 1995: 215)

This distinction between enthrallment and vivid description is vital in the discussion of the poetics of José Lezama Lima proposed here. In his case, the poetical image (*phantasia*) is enthrallment, *energeia*, activity, presence; not clarity, illustration or understanding. His poetics are the poetics of the image as an appearance and not as representation. *Phantasia* and metaphor are not a rhetorical resource which can be used to illustrate ideas or to communicate clearly. They are not tools, they are part of a specific *techne*, that of the *Sophist*: the *phantastikē techne*.

### The appearance of the *phantasma*

If, when it comes to the discussion about images, the presence of the notion of *phantasia* in Aristotle is strikingly frequent (Watson 1988: 14-15), in Plato the emphasis seems to lie on the potentiality and ramifications of the concept of *phantasma*. The two concepts are closely



connected in Aristotle (*phantasia* being a cause for *phantasmata*, for example) but in Plato, especially in the *Sophist*, the same notions are not that similar, a difference which is important to consider when discussing the Platonic approach to images and art:

However, '*phantasma*' (apparition) as a semi-technical term in the division of the image-making art should be strictly distinguished from '*phantasia*'; for *phantasma* is a kind of image which does not represent the true proportions of the original, while *phantasia* is said in Passage 44 to be a kind of cognitive state which is either true or false. (Notomi 2007: 252)

It is true that there is an undeniable connection, even etymologically, between *phantasma* and *phantasia*. In dialogues like the *Republic* and the *Symposium* the notion of the *phantasma* is described by Plato as an apparition which presents -not represents- an image of something or someone being other than what they really are. Within the *Republic*, for example, Socrates discusses the possibility of gods assuming various shapes and forms to appear to men but never revealing their true appearance or being (Plato 2013: 211). The last book of the *Republic* also describes the threefold nature of the *phantasma*: it is an image (in this case that of a bed in a painting) which comes after the bed of the artisan, and from the real Form or Idea of bed (Plato 2013: 399). According to Plato, the painter, however, has not only the ability to produce a bed but also to fabricate all the plants, the Earth, the skies, the gods and all the living things on Earth, even himself (Plato 2013: 397). This is possible, says Socrates, because painting imitates a *phantasma*, an appearance, not a reality (Plato 2013: 403). All these examples reinforce the idea of a connection between *phantasma* and *phantasia*, the former being an appearance that takes the place of reality and the latter a capacity for dealing with images through perception and opinion. However, the link and interdependence between

these two concepts will be interrupted by Plato in another dialogue, the *Sophist*, where the notion of *phantasma* detaches itself from the association with *phantasia* and finds a more defined functionality.

#### Plato's *Sophist* and the notion of *phantasma*

On a well-known and commented paper called 'On What There Is' (1948), Willard V. Quine coins the phrase *Plato's beard* to refer to the question that lies at the centre of Plato's text, the *Sophist*: How is it possible to speak about something that is not? How can non-being in some way, be? To illustrate this problem, Quine proposes the example of Pegasus: 'if Pegasus were not, (...) we should not be talking about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be nonsense to say that even Pegasus is not' (1948: 22). In a style that resembles Plato's dialogues, Quine continues discussing in his paper the case of Pegasus with two other imaginary philosophers, McX and Wyman, both of them as real as Pegasus itself. The contradiction of the being of a non-being might be reduced to a confusion between meaning and naming (Quine 1948: 28), but the real issue goes beyond this reduction: 'let us see how', concludes Quine, 'or to what degree, natural science may be rendered independent of platonistic mathematics; but let us also pursue mathematics and delve into its platonistic foundations' (1948: 38). Plato's beard, as the *Sophist* will show, is not easy to disentangle.

Plato's *Sophist* represents one of the most relevant and interesting classical texts about the relationship between images and reality, not only because this is one of the main topics discussed in the dialogue, but also because the plot itself seems to reflect the consequences of the ambiguity and nature of images. For example, the idea of the ambiguity and double nature of images is introduced from the very beginning of the text, with the appearance of the Stranger of Elea, whose real name is never revealed. Socrates describes him as a god

disguised as a stranger, an idea that Theodorus, one of the other interlocutors, denies, arguing that this particular Stranger is a real philosopher, not a god. Socrates then objects Theodorus' statement, arguing that even real philosophers disguise themselves all the time, sometimes as sophists, sometime as statemen, and of course, sometimes as mad men. A very adequate introduction for a text on images and non-being.

The evasive and illusional sophistic technique seems to have affected even the text where such technique is discussed and criticised. It is in this dialogue where Plato discusses the problem of images, the concepts of *phantasia*, *phantasma* and *mimesis*, and also the role of poets, artists and sophists as makers of *phantasmata*. The main purpose of the dialogue is to define and identify what a sophist is, but on the way Theaetetus and the Stranger from Elea reflect on other subjects, like the nature of images, the being of the non-being, the division method of analysis, the theory of knowledge, the problem of predication and last but not least, the otherness of being or being-other. As has been mentioned before, the discussion about images and appearances comes up in the *Sophist* when the Stranger from Elea engages in a conversation with Theaetetus, about the nature of the sophist and how he could be distinguished from other type of individuals, like philosophers, and statesmen. The sophist is described as an illusionist who, by virtue of a single art, is capable of giving the illusion of being the maker of all things, like a painter who uses his art to create imitations of the real things and then shows his pictures at a distance deceiving and making a fool of everyone. The sophist takes advantage of words to 'bewitch the young' while 'they are still standing at a

distance from the realities of truth', luring them with 'spoken images of all things' (Plato 1921: 329), images that give the impression of being true.<sup>16</sup>

The Stranger then goes on to identify two different types of image making art or mimetic art, although without yet being able to tell in which of these two arts the sophist can be found. The first kind is the *eikastiké techne*, which focuses on the production (*poiesis* [ποίησις], another important concept present in the poetics of Lezama Lima) of images that are similar and faithful to their model. This *eikastiké techne* produces images that respect the proportions, dimensions and even the colours of its model (Plato 1921: 333), a technique that is closer to the property of truth (*aletheia* [ἀλήθεια]) than the second type, the *phantastikē techne*. This second form of mimetic art distances itself from the truth and produces images that do not follow the real proportions of things but only 'those which seem to be beautiful' (Plato 1921: 335). The *phantastikē techne* produces images of things just as they appear to us, as we perceive them, whether they match reality or not (in this sense it is a *techne* that creates an image of an image, not of a real object). This second *techne* is deceitful, false, based on appearances and is used by sophists, artists and poets alike. Both the *eikastiké techne* and the *phantastikē techne* are part of a process of *mimesis* since they present themselves as imitation and alteration of a model and not as the model itself. However, the *phantastikē techne* produces images that are based on a double movement of negation: because of the fact that they are images, and not models or Ideas, there is an inherent lack in their nature, a lack that is the result of not being able to reproduce completely that paradigm that they represent, of not being able to become 'another model'. This is a characteristic that is also

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to highlight the fact that the notion of 'distance', which plays a main role in this Platonic discussion about images, is also mentioned by José Lezama Lima in his essays on poetry, a point that will be discussed further in the next chapters.

shared by the *eikastiké techne*. However, while the *eikastiké techne* makes a real effort to reproduce as faithfully as possible that model of which it is an image of, reproducing the adequate proportions and symmetries of its referent, the *phantastikē techne* only focuses on reproducing an effect of resemblance, beauty, an effect that depends on the unfavourable point of view of the subject (Plato 1921: 335), ‘for if they reproduced the true proportions of beautiful forms’, says the Stranger, ‘the upper parts, you know, would seem smaller and the lower parts larger than they ought’ (Plato 1921: 335).<sup>17</sup>

There are two fundamental remarks about the *phantastikē techne* that are necessary to make at this point. First of all, the image that it produces is called a *phantasma*, a term that, just like *phantasia*, has caused a lot of trouble when it comes to its translation. It is clear, at least from the *Sophist*, that the *phantasma* has to do with appearances, and to be more specific, with something that ‘appears to be beautiful’ (because it is seen from an ‘unfavourable position’) but which, if seen from an ‘adequate point of view’, is not (Lezra and others 2014: 775). Unlike the *eikon*, the image produced by the *eikastiké techne*, the *phantasma* goes beyond the field of likeness and similarity. The other remark worth making about the *phantastikē techne* is that the images that it produces only ‘appear to be’ like their model, but in reality, they are not, because, as it has already been said, ‘they are seen from an unfavourable position’. This means that their inadequacy is not part of their nature or essence but on the contrary, it comes from outside, from a point of view that if changed to an adequate position, then the effect of false referentiality would disappear. In other words, the

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<sup>17</sup> This example given by Plato in the *Sophist*, also recalls a more familiar and modern image, that of Michaelangelo’s *David*, whose right hand is bigger than the left and whose eyes are looking in different directions, all to cause certain effects on the spectator. For more on this effect, see Saad Shaikh and James Leonard-Amodeo, ‘The deviating eyes of Michelangelo’s David’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, ii, 98 (2005), 75–76).

*phantasma* is and is not, it resembles and at the same time, is does not. In this sense, the sophist, the painter and the poet, they all produce images that are an imitation of an appearance and not of a real model, since they only are perceiving something from an 'unfavourable position', something that does not exist and is not beautiful in itself, but which gives the impression of being so. The frustration that the Stranger and Theaetetus feel from not being able to identify the figure of the sophist and place him in one of the two mimetic techniques, comes from the fact that the sophist is himself a *phantasma*, an appearance. He is 'really wonderful and very difficult to keep in sight' (Plato 1921: 337) because of his ability of 'making appearances' and giving being and existence to the non-being of images.

The interpretation and definition in Plato's work of images, particularly those of the *phantastikē techne*, the role of *phantasia* in his reflections about art and the discourse that surrounds sophists, painters and poets in his dialogues, seem to be enough justification to affirm that Plato 'regards images and appearances, and any part of the mind which deals with them, as liable to produce error and illusion.' (Sheppard 2014: 5-6). Nevertheless, other authors have seen in the same Platonic ideas and concepts, an opportunity to explore a different and more complex aspect of his views on art and poetry. Carlos Másmela, for example, in his book *Dialéctica de la imagen, una interpretación del Sofista de Platón* (2006), discusses a more productive and less mimetic aspect of the *phantasma*, strongly linked to the capacity of seeing things from an unfamiliar perspective, from 'an unfavourable position'. The capacity of contemplation required for the *phantastikē techne* is different from that of the *eikastiké techne*, since the former is not based on the receptive and passive aspect of seeing (that which aims at representing true proportions) but on its ability to apprehend and to seize the beauty of things, their essence, which is only apparent (Másmela 2006: 60). The *phantasma* is not attached to the immediacy of things or to their external relations and

therefore it goes beyond mere perception, it has to do with the production of the visible, with visibility and not visibility, with making things visible and appearing before-the-eyes (an aspect that reminds of Aristotle's approach to *phantasia*). As strange as it may sound, the *phantastikē techne* is a sort of expertise or *techne* on 'unfavourable positioning'.

The reading that Jacques Lacan (1998: 103) does of the classical story of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, already mentioned in this chapter, might serve as a good example to illustrate this difference between the *phantasma* of the *phantastikē techne* and the *eikon* of the *eikastiké techne*. Both Zeuxis and Parrhasios were involved in a competition to see which of the two was a better painter. Zeuxis painted such a realistic bunch of grapes that even birds were tricked by the painting, trying to pick on those painted grapes. Parrhasios, on the other hand, opted to paint a veil, only, a choice that would have unexpected consequences for Zeuxis:

In the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted the birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of the birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him for having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him said, *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it*. By this he showed that what was at issue was certainly deceiving the eye (*trompe l'oeil*). A triumph of the gaze over the eye. (Lacan 1998: 103)

On one hand there is the realistic power of the *eikon* and its faithful resemblance to reality, respecting the symmetries and proportions of the model. On the other, the *phantasma*, a veil that not only looks like a real veil, but one which also acts like a real veil, hiding its referent and prompting a question on the side of the subject, putting him in 'an unfavourable position'. The question about images remains unanswered, behind the veil there is nothing, it is all appearance, the work of a sophist. What is important for the image-*phantasma* is not what

the veil hides, what it occults (in other words, its referent, its meaning), but the fact that it appears to hide something, its deceitful character. This is the real difference between Zeuxis' painting and Parrhasios' because if Zeuxis' grapes look real, Parrhasios' veil *is* real: the *phantasma* acts like a substitute of the 'real thing' (Collette 2006: 89-106). The *phantasma* is an image that claims to be like its referent, its model, but which in fact is presenting something totally different to that that it claims to be like. In other words, the *phantasma* has as its model an-other, the Other of difference, otherness. It appeals to the resources of resemblance and appearance, but it manages to do it without being faithful to the symmetries and properties of its model. The *eikon*, unlike the *phantasma*, is a faithful copy of its referent and it is always the same from any perspective, it is veridical, which is why it does not need the 'unfavourable point of view' of a subject. The *phantasma*, on the contrary, places fidelity on the side of the subject, not the referent or paradigm: it depends on the existence of a faithful subject who would assume the unfavourable point of view that the *phantasma* demands. The being of the *phantasma* is the impossible non-being of the image, seek by the Stranger in Plato's *Sophist*. It is also the impossible possible of the image in the poetics of José Lezama Lima, an image that is its own referent.

The *phantasma* shows the nature of the other-of-being, of being other than itself, of otherness and difference, and it does so by means of a metaphoric movement from reference to resemblance, from the comfort of meaning that the *eikon* brings to the slipperiness and perplexity of the *phantasma*. The veil looks like a veil (*eikon*, resemblance, likeness) but when it is asked to act like a real veil, it reveals that the referent and model which it claims to be like, is not a veil, but something else, an-other, which in the end, does mean that it was hiding something, that it was, after all, a 'real' veil. The appearance of the *phantasma* is only possible thanks to a metaphoric movement where the metaphor does not work as representation (A



is B) but as the being-other of being (A is A), as presentation: because in the process of *mimesis* the model or *eidos* (A) appears as an image that represents it faithfully (A is A) but which in itself is at the same time different (it is not a mere duplication that creates two models). The image is the only access there is to an Idea, to the *eidos* of the image. While the *eikon* concentrates on perception and sensation, copying the symmetries and proportions of the model, the *phantasma* focuses on appearances, on the point of view of the viewer, on his subjectivity. This confusion between *mimesis* and identity is part of the poetics of José Lezama Lima: 'Thus copy A is in truth A plus its own surplus or sobreabundancia ("la ofrenda"). And therefore, each new copy of A merely has to tap the repressed of A in order to reconstruct that same A differently (but the A remains A)' (Levinson 1996: 91).

If there is no correspondence between image and appearance it is not because the eye has been tricked (like the birds with the grapes) but because the gaze is in an 'unfavourable position', the position of the being of the non-being, the *phantasma*. One of the most singular aspects of the *phantasma* is that although it depends on 'an unfavourable position' there is always the possibility of seeing it appropriately, from a 'favourable position' as it were, which would mean that the *phantasma* has also the power to reveal not only the beauty it pretends to imitate, but also the being itself (Másmela 2006: 132). If it is seen from an adequate and ideal position, the *phantasma* would reveal not how something appears to us but its real being in all its splendour. However, it is worth mentioning the fact that seen from such adequate position, the *phantasma* 'would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like' (Plato 1921: 335), which leads one to think that the being and the way it appears do not share the same form and resemblance does not guarantee identity or being: 'Una posible adecuación supondría, por tanto, la modificación del punto de vista asumido con lo

que aparece. Lo que aparece son los Φαινόμενα, esto es, no falsas semejanzas, sino el aspecto visible de las cosas' (Másmela 2006: 58).

This 'visible aspect of things' is what another author, Christine Buci-Glucksmann (2014), has called 'madness of vision', and, according to her, it is an intrinsic characteristic of the baroque, a term with strong resonances when it comes to Lezama Lima. The important role that the point of view of the subject plays in the visuality of the *phantasma*, connects this concept with the 'anamorphic gaze of the baroque' (Buci-Glucksmann 2014: 8-13) required in paintings like Holbein's *Ambassadors*, where the anamorphic skull of the painting only appears from a certain point of view, a point that forces the viewer to lose the rest of the whole picture in order to see an image that hides inside another image. The phantasmatic image that looks back in Holbein's painting is far from being the well organised and symmetrised image revealed when the viewer steps in front of the painting, passively, looking at the two ambassadors surrounded by all those comforting objects of reason and knowledge. *Eikon* and *phantasma* are not opposites and neither are being and not-being. The *phantasma* is the being-other of the paradigm, its possibility.

The main obstacle for both the Stranger and Theaetetus in Plato's *Sophist* comes from the fact that, to talk about appearances, likenesses and non-beings, there is the necessity of a discourse of the false (*pseudēs legein* [ψεευδής λέγειν]) (Plato 1921: 337), a saying of the 'unsayable', a contradiction (Másmela 2006: 62-63). The absolute non-being is unpronounceable, it cannot be uttered since any saying has to be a saying of something and more specifically, of one thing, a unity (Plato 1921: 341). After using the example of the number to illustrate the impossibility of giving a being to the non-being, Plato's Stranger comes to the conclusion that the absolute non-being is 'a thing inconceivable, inexpressible,

unspeakable, irrational', resistant to *logos* (*alogon*) (Plato 1921: 343). However, in a typical Platonic manner, the Stranger at the same time recognises that he has been talking about the non-being for a while, unknowingly, and that he is still talking to Theaetetus about it, as if it was one thing and as if it really existed. How is it possible to hold a discourse of the non-being without falling into any contradiction? Again, it is the sophist, the poet and the painter who possess the answer to this question: the *phantastikē technē*. In order to talk about the non-being the sophist uses 'spoken images' (*eidōla legomena* [εἰδῶλα λεγόμενα]) (Plato 1921: 329) to deceive and give the non-being an apparent being, using the reality and likeness of the *eikon*. The non-being appears as a *phantasma* and its *logos* is not a false *logos* but as it has already been mentioned, a *logos of the false*, one that gives the illusion of being a *logos* of the truth. This is the only way to have access to the non-being and it is also the only route to have access to the truth being (*alēthinon*, [ἀληθινόν]), the opposite point (Másmela 2006: 83), which cannot either be perceived with the senses or with perception. The non-being and the being share a 'common ground' (*koinonein* [κοινωνεῖν]), the image, the *phantasma*, the place where the being appears as being-other, being image, the only way it can reveal itself.

The division made by Plato in the *Sophist* between the *eikastikē technē* and the *phantastikē technē*, between *eikon* and *phantasma*, depends on the existence of a paradigm, a referent, the ultimate source of all copies. The *eikon* resembles the paradigm and the *phantasma* only appears to be like it, but it is not. The *eikon* respects the symmetries of its model and the *phantasma* only appears to do it, but only because of the unfavourable position of its viewer. While the accuracy and fidelity of the mimetic movement of the *eikon* can be confirmed just by looking at its model, the same thing cannot be said about the *phantasma* because its paradigm, being the ideal of beauty, is inaccessible through perception. Sonja Tanner has underlined this issue saying that the *phantasma* involves 'a metaphorical imitation of its

paradigm' because of the distortion made by the *phantasma* 'to compensate for the perspective of its viewer' (Tanner 2010: 98). How far can this distortion go? How metaphorical can this movement be? It all depends on how accessible the paradigm is, but at least in the case of a statue of Aphrodite or Hercules, such access is very unlikely because both referents in a world that lies beyond the reach of any mortal.

The *phantasma* disputes the existence of a real paradigm, a form, but at the same time reveals it, brings it 'before the eyes'. To use one of Plato's examples in the *Sophist*, the metaphoric movement of the *phantasma* 'weaves' together being and non-being in a sort of 'entanglement' (the term used in the text is *sumplokên*) (Plato 1921: 351). *Logos* or discourse plays a fundamental role in this 'weaving' because later in the dialogue it is said that the power of *logos* comes from the 'interweaving' or 'entanglement' (*sumplokên*) of forms or ideas with one another (Plato 1921: 427). *Logos* entangles ideas, connects and unifies, but at the same time it complicates, confuses and divides. The contradiction and ambiguity experienced by the Stranger and Theaetetus when discussing images is not a direct consequence of the nature of images, but of such discourse about images instead. Both the Stranger and Theaetetus are unable to realise that 'it is impossible to provide an exact or "correct" analysis of the nature of images, and hence of the relation between originals and images' (Rosen 1999: 187). The right or correct discourse, the *ortho-logos* (Plato 1921: 347) about images, is impossible and the aporia, illogicity (*alogos*), absurdity and contradiction of images requires a different discourse, a discourse of the false (*pseudês legein*), 'an-other' discourse. It is as if there were only two options regarding the discourse on images. One, to say nothing. Two, to talk non-sense. Fortunately, in ancient Greek the expression for both is the same: *mēden legein* (Statkiewicz 2009: 121).

The final part of the *Sophist* marks what is probably its biggest contribution of the text to philosophy and to the discussion about images, the fact that beyond the paradox of being and non-being lies the possibility of the other-being of being or to be more precise, the *being-other* of being. 'Otherness' appears in the dialogue as a major genre or form that traverses all other forms (Plato 1921: 409), including that of being, so they can be 'other than' themselves and therefore become distinguishable from the rest. 'Sameness' is also a form or major genre that traverses all the others, including 'otherness' and being, so for example, it is possible to say, without any fear of contradiction, that motion is the same and not the same (Plato 1921: 411). The Stranger takes things further and affirms that if motion is 'other than' all the other forms and being is one of them, then it is possible to say that motion partakes of non-being as well, that it is and it is not. Non-being becomes not the opposite of being 'but only of something different' (Plato 1921: 415). Non-being becomes not the opposite of being but 'only the other of being' (Plato 1921: 421). *Sumplokên*, the interweaving present at the heart of *logos*, seems to have entangled understanding (*dianoia*) once more, a signal that something has been forced into the discursivity of thinking: a truth.

The *eikon*, the image that respects the symmetries of its model, acts passively as a faithful copy of such model and it guarantees not only the existence of a paradigm or referent, but also the possibility of its access, of its visible and tangible manifestation. The *eikon* is, in this sense, strongly connected to *dianoia*, to understanding, to re-presentation (Tanner 2010: 100-101). The *eikon* is transparent, it distinguishes between models and copies, it helps meaning to emerge. The *phantasma*, on the other hand, claims to be like its model but if it could be seen adequately, it would not even resemble that of which it claims to be an image (Plato 1921: 335). The *eikon* depends on perception, on the senses (it follows symmetries, colours, shapes) whilst the *phantasma* relies on the eye of thought (*nous*) (Másmela 2006:

137) and ironically, on seeing beyond appearances. The *phantasma* is on the side of *poiesis*, creation, its real being depends on its otherness, on being other than that which it appears to imitate. It not only makes the impossible visible, like the idea of beauty, but at the same time forbids and confuses its access. The image of beauty that the *phantasma* reveals is very different from the real one and yet, the *phantasma* makes beauty visible. Unlike the *eikon*, the *phantasma* connects and entangles being and not being, it is the otherness of being and consequently, it impedes the fluidity of *dianoia*. Hermeticism and obscurity are part of its nature. Theaetetus and the Stranger know this very well, and their discourse, just like Plato's or even Aristotle's, is full of metaphors that make up for the unnameability and contradiction of the *phantasma*. Poetry is home to a *logos* of the false, to a resemblance of the Other.

In the *Sophist*, the *phantasma* is described as 'that which appears to be like but it is not' (Plato 1921: 335). In other words, the *phantasma* makes itself visible as an appearance, but its true being lies in the realm of the non-being, *it is* and *it is not* at the same time. The 'otherness of being' finds its visibility in the *phantasma* where being reveals itself as an-other. The *eikon* is other than its paradigm or model thanks to the *phantasma* (Másmela 2006: 142), whose appearance, at the same time, relies on the idea of resemblance presented by the *eikon*. How would it possible then to distinguish a *phantasma* from an *eikon*? How to tell the difference between images and paradigms? That is exactly the question that underlies the *Sophist*, the problem that the Stranger is asked to clarify at the beginning of the dialogue, the question of how to distinguish, to divide, to differentiate and subsequently, to understand.

If the answer to this question resides, like Sonja Tanner (2010: 100-103) suggests, in the power of the *eikon* and the so called *eikasia*, something that Plato himself seems to indicate in the *Republic*, (Plato 2013b: 103) then the *phantasma* goes in the opposite direction or, as

it should be said by now, in the *other* direction. It is also in the *Republic* where Plato highlights the ability of the *phantasma* to cause what he calls, using a very poetic expression, ‘true falsehood’ (Plato 2013a: 215), a feature ‘that all gods and men hate’, because ‘anyone intentionally wants to give a false impression to the most important part of themselves about the most important things, but it is there that he is most of all afraid that he will bring it on himself’ (Plato 2013a: 213). The *phantasma* deceives not only the eyes but also the soul, it is the source of total ignorance, the inability to distinguish what is real and what is not, a true god from a disguised one. The ‘unfavourable position’ mentioned before makes the viewer to take an appearance for something real, without even knowing that he is being deceived, in ignorance (Plato 2013a: 215). It is at this point, in the *Republic*, when poetry makes its apparition, because ‘falsehood in words is a copy of the affection in the soul’ (Plato 2013a: 215) and poetry is home to the ‘logos of the false’, to false discourse, to the *phantasma*. There is no place for a poet in an ideal society: ‘There is no lying poet in god’ (Plato 2013a: 217). Whilst the *eikon* is on the side of *dianoia* and reasoning, division, mathematical thinking (Tanner 2010: 117), the *phantasma* is on the side of poetry, literature, false discourse.

#### From a *phantasma* to a truth: Alain Badiou

Alain Badiou would mention the opposition between poetry and *dianoia* in his reading of Plato’s *Republic*. In ‘What is a poem?, Or, Philosophy and Poetry at the Point of the Unnamable’ (Badiou 2005: 16-27), Badiou underlines the fact that the poem ‘forbids any access to the supreme principle’ (2005: 17), it represents an obstacle to the Idea of Truth. However, poetry is not opposed to thought (*nous*), but to understanding, *dianoia*, ‘the thought that traverses, the thought that links and deduces’ (Badiou 2005: 17). Poetry acts like ‘a nonthought that presents itself via the linguistic power of a possible thought’ (Badiou 2005:

18), like the phantasma, it is an appearance that makes visible the invisibility of its being via the presentation of a disguise, of non-being. The poem is, in this context, an affirmation, an offering that 'dwells on the threshold' (Badiou 2005: 17) and whose obscurity opposes the *matheme*, the transparent and thinkable manifestation of the *eikon*, the comforting image where 'the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding' (Jowett 1936: 316).

Alain Badiou will take this idea of mathematics as a direct access to being even further, asserting in his major philosophical work, *Being and Event* (first published in 1988), that 'mathematics is ontology' (Badiou 2006: 4), a statement that, understandably, caused certain commotion within the philosophical world. Although the idea of a connection between mathematics and philosophy is nothing new (Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Hegel, Spinoza and many other philosophers incorporated it into their thinking), the singularity of Badiou's proposal lies not only on the equation *mathematics = ontology*, but on the specificity of the mathematical field that sustains that equation: set theory. In *Being and Event*, Badiou takes the main concepts and ideas from set theory to give them a philosophical interpretation, starting with one statement that is crucial in the understanding of his enterprise: 'the one is *not*' (Badiou 2006: 23). For Badiou, pure being or, as he calls it, *being-qua-being*, is multiple and as such, it can only be thought through the language of set theory, the discourse of multiplicity per excellence. The void, all of the Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory axioms, the relations of belonging and inclusion, the theorem of the point of excess, transitivity, natural and ordinal numbers, cardinality, infinity and many other notions and ideas from set theory become part of Badiou's philosophical system, a system that he would extend and develop in the following years with the publication of the other two parts of his trilogy on *Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds* in 2006 and *L'Immanence des vérités* in 2018.



The complexity of Badiou's philosophical system, plus the dedication needed for the study of set theory, mean that it is very difficult to explain both theories in a few paragraphs, or even in a few pages.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, there are two notions that are necessary to mention due to their relevance and importance for this research, one being that of an *event*, and the other, what Badiou calls a *truth procedure*. Both of these notions play a fundamental part in his philosophical work and they represent his most important contribution to modern philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Alain Badiou describes the *event* as 'the multiple composed of: on one hand, elements of the site; and on the other hand, itself (the event)' (2006: 506). The problem is that the idea of self-belonging, of a multiple that belongs to itself, violates one of the most important axioms of set theory, the axiom of foundation, which, as its name suggests, guarantees the adequate foundation of every set. In other words, the event lies outside set theory and consequently, outside ontology as well, which means that the event, *is not*:

It is not that the event itself is nothing. It has the same (inconsistent) being-as-being as anything else. An event can be only a multiple, but it is one that counts as nothing in the situation in which it takes place. If everything that exists in or belongs to a situation is numbered or counted for one in that situation, an event is 'supernumerary': it is 'something' that evades the count. As something that cannot be recognized as one in a situation, an event is the (necessarily ephemeral) presentation of inconsistency in the situation. Though it thus indicates the true being of the situation, an event must for that very reason count as nothing for this situation. (Hallward 2003: 115)

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<sup>18</sup> Some of Badiou's concepts and ideas will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters, especially those that play an important part in this research. If the reader wants to deepen his or her knowledge about Badiou's philosophical system, Peter Hallward's *Badiou: a subject to truth* (2003) and Burhanauddin Baki's *Badiou's Being & Event & the Mathematics of Set Theory* (2015) are a good place to start.

<sup>19</sup> The following description of both notions is a necessary simplification of what really is a very complicated and intricate philosophical and mathematical proposal.

The evanescence of the event leaves a trace, a mark on the situation, what Badiou calls the *evental site* (2006: 175), a multiple that belongs to the situation, that is presented, but whose members or elements are not. An evental site is recognisable only by its locality, by its appearance, not intrinsically, by its essence or composition. An evental site is 'at the edge of the void' (Badiou 2006: 175), which inevitably raises the question, how is it possible to recognise an event, to know if it has happened or not? It is at this point that Badiou introduces his concept of *intervention*, the 'procedure by which a multiple is recognised as an event' (Badiou 2006: 202). Since the event is undecidable (it is impossible to confirm if it has taken place or not), for it to be named and declared, a subject has to intervene and decide what elements of the situation belong to the evental site, that multiple whose elements are not present in the situation. The contradiction is evident, and Alain Badiou sees in it not a problem, but an intrinsic characteristic of any intervention:

Scarcely has the decision been taken than what provoked the decision disappears in the uniformity of multiple-presentation. This would be one of the paradoxes of action, and its key resides in decision: what is applied to —an aleatory exception— finds itself, by the very same gesture which designates it, reduced to the common lot and submitted to the effect of structure. Such action would necessarily fail to retain the exceptional mark-of-one in which it was founded. (Badiou 2006: 202)

What the event is declared to be, and what it really is, never coincide. And yet, there is a strong connection between one and the other, a connection that, using a Lezarian

terminology, could well be described as *metaphoric*.<sup>20</sup> It all depends on a decision, on the faithful intervention of a subject who declares that the element X, but not Y, belongs to the eventual site left by the evanishment of the event. The result of this whole process is what Badiou will call a *truth procedure*, the ‘gathering together of all the terms which will have been positively investigated by a generic procedure of fidelity supposed complete (thus infinite)’ (Badiou 2006: 524-525). The inclusion of a multiple or an element in a determinate situation is possible because the language of the situation is able to verify this multiple, to limit its features and ratify its unity, to name it finitely. For Badiou, *knowledge* is this capacity of the language of a situation to include and name its elements, to represent them, which results in the production of the *encyclopaedia* of the situation (Badiou 2006: 513). If a statement of the situation can be verified by its knowledge, then such statement is *veridical*, as opposed to *erroneous* (Badiou 2006: 526). However, knowledge ‘does not want to know anything of the event, of the intervention, of the supernumerary name, or of the operator which rules the fidelity’ (Badiou 2006: 332), for the simple reason that these elements cannot be named by the language of the situation, they threaten the stability and veracity of the situation. Because a truth escapes the encyclopaedic nomination of the situation, it is said that a truth ‘bores a hole in knowledge’ (Badiou 2006: 525), it is a being and not a statement, it is a multiple that introduces a new present within the situation. The elements that a faithful subject classifies positively as connected to an event, are there in the situation, they belong to it (otherwise they could not be classified by such subject), but their referent, the truth that

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<sup>20</sup> As it will be shown in the next two chapters, the notion of *metaphor* in Lezama Lima has nothing to do with a rhetorical figure based on a similarity between two points, *tenor* and *vehicle*, for example.

gathers them all together, is indiscernible within the situation, which is why its veracity has to be forced<sup>21</sup> by the intervention of a faithful subject.

In the next two books that belong to the trilogy on *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou will continue to develop and extend his ideas on the notion of *event*, and on the mechanism of a *truth procedure*. In *Logics of Worlds* (Badiou 2009), Badiou focuses on the appearance and manifestation of beings in a specific world -he no longer talks of 'situations'-, using for this purpose not set theory, but topology and logic categories. In his third book, *L'Immanence des vérités* (2018),<sup>22</sup> Badiou goes back to his concept of *truth* and on the possibility of their absoluteness, the existence of an ascendant hierarchy of truths whose final point, the absolute, cannot be accessed but by resemblance. Badiou incorporates in this case the theory of big cardinals and infinities, with the unsurprising inclusion also of some very complicated and specialised mathematical theorems and examples. The basic idea is that there is a certain correspondence between the absolute place of  $V$ , the *locus* of all and any mathematical manifestation, and its attributes, the big cardinals, immense infinities that share the properties of the absolute but which at the same time, differ from it (Badiou 2018: 405). Resemblance is in this respect, a double operation that on one hand, permits the appearance of the absolute, but on the other, denies its total manifestation. Resemblance opens the impossible possibility for the absolute  $V$  to appear as an-other, the Other, a *phantasma*.<sup>23</sup> Absoluteness is an immanent property that any truth has and a truth manifests itself in a specific world under the form of an *oeuvre* (a work, as in a 'work of art'), a new term that

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<sup>21</sup> *Forcing* is a very complicated technique designed and proposed by the famous mathematician Paul Joseph Cohen in 1963-64. Alain Badiou adopts Cohen's idea and his *truth procedure* is a philosophical version of Cohen's *generic procedure*. For a more detailed explanation about both procedures, see Burhanuddin Baki's *Badiou's Being and event and the mathematics of set theory* (2015: 169-194).

<sup>22</sup> Not yet translated into English.

<sup>23</sup> This idea will be discussed in more detail in the third chapter, in relation to Lezama Lima's notion of *image*.

Badiou introduces in this book and which he opposes to the concept of *déchet* (remainder, rest, waste) (Badiou 2018: 515-516). In the same way as a truth resembles the absolute, but does not copy it, an *œuvre* differs from a *déchet* by the fact that it is linked to a truth, not to the world in which it appears, and although it is present in a world, it maintains the mark of a truth: an *index*, the trace of the infinite among the worldly dominance of the finite.

In this book, *L'immanence des vérités*, Badiou himself summarises the philosophical proposal of each of his three books on *Being and Event*:

J'ai fait dans *L'être et l'événement* la théorie du *type d'être des vérités*, à savoir qu'elles sont génériques, c'est-à-dire universelles. Dans *Logiques des mondes*, j'ai fait la théorie de ce que j'ai appelé *l'apparaître des vérités* – à savoir que leur création est située dans un monde particulier – ainsi que des matériaux de leur construction tirés de cette particularité. C'est donc *particulièrement que les vérités sont universelles*. Dans la présente *Immanence des vérités*, je cherche à penser les vérités du point, non pas de l'être, ni du monde, mais de leur immanence propre à quelque approximation de l'absolu. Et je suis en train d'établir, laborieusement, que le travail d'une vérité se structure subjectivement dans la tension entre le jeu dans l'être d'infinités distinctes, et le résultat, qui est certes une œuvre finie, mais dont l'absoluité tient à ce que cette finitude, au lieu d'être, comme communément, le simple déchet des infinis, conquiert le statut d'une œuvre, c'est-à-dire d'un *résultat « fini » qui est à la hauteur de sa causalité infinie, parce qu'il vient s'inscrire dans un attribut de l'absolu*. (Badiou 2018: 392-393)

Badiou / Plato / Lezama

Despite Plato's best efforts to keep poetry out of the boundaries of the city, Badiou notices an important irony in his discourse, one that the Stranger in the *Sophist* had already noticed as well. When Plato explores himself the limits of *dianoia*, of discursive thought and tries to

get closer to the supreme principle or to the Good, he himself ‘must resort to images, like that of the sun; to metaphors, like those of “prestige” or “power”; to myths, like the myth of Er the Pamphylian returning to the kingdom of the dead’ (Badiou 2005: 19). Unlike the *eikon*, whose evident resemblance to its paradigm does not require a reaction from its viewer, the *phantasma* comes with a particular mechanism of appearance and a specific *techné*, it comes with its own demand from a subject. In order to make itself visible, the *phantasma* needs an ‘unfavourable position’ from the subject, the proportions of the image have to be asymmetrical to create an effect of reality, to appear to be beautiful. The *phantasma* comes with its own *logos*, its own discourse, with its own *poetics*. In some poets like Mallarmé, for example, to whom Lezama Lima dedicated several texts, the poetic discourse becomes a form of thought, and his poetic figures and metaphors conform a ‘*dispositif*’ in which the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought: subtraction and isolation for Mallarmé, presence and interruption for Rimbaud’ (Badiou 2005: 20). In these poets, poetry comes with a whole conceptual mechanism (*dispositif*, in Badiou’s terms), a poetic discourse that opens the possibility of appearance, a *logos of the false* without which it would be impossible to talk about the *phantasma*. In the case of Lezama Lima, the poetic mechanism takes the form of what he has called his ‘*sistema poético*’, a system which relies on the dynamics of notions like those of *imagen*, *metáfora*, *vivencia oblicua*, *súbito* or *causalidad incondicionada*.

The poem becomes then a space, a *tópos* [τόπος] where *logos* confronts its own unnameable or, as it is named in Plato’s *Sophist*, its own *unpronounceable* (Plato 1921: 343). The poem is the place where the *phantasma* appears, where it makes itself visible and where truth lies in the limits of language. Whether it is Aristotle, Plato, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Lezama or even the *Sophist* himself, they all recur to a poetic discourse when they need to ‘speak about the

unspeakable', a metaphoric dispositive which gives the impression of being able to name the unnameable, of bringing it *before-the-eyes*. In Badiou's words, the poem 'dissolve the referent (...) to give timeless existence to the temporal disappearance of the sensible' (Badiou 2005: 22). The image or *phantasma* that the poem brings to light using the power of language also comes with its own poetics, its own method, its own system: a discourse (the false *logos* of the *Sophist*) that appears to bring all the pieces together, that seems to open the possibility of being able to talk about that which cannot be pronounced or named.

Poetry acts like the veil painted by Parrhasios, it hides nothing but at the same time makes concealment visible, it gives being to the non-being by revealing the otherness of being. The limitation of poetry is the limitation of language, 'every poetic truth leaves at its own centre what it does not have the power to bring into presence' (Badiou 2005: 23). Poetry points out at a lack, an empty space that can only be visible if it is surrounded by language. Yet again, like Parrhasios' veil, poetry hides and at the same time gives away the power of language of 'eternally fastening the disappearance of what presents itself' (Badiou 2005: 24-25). Within the poem there is a discourse that *brings before the eyes* that which cannot appear in any other way but through the veil of the *phantasma*, a veil that is always threatening with its own disappearance. Poetry is the place of activity (*energeia*) and production (*poiesis*) where being presents itself in the form of an-other, a metaphoric causality which is the only resource being has to make itself visible. Within the poem, metaphor and image are to be seen always as something else, a locus where meaning is only an effect, a consequence, not a precondition or an obligation. On the contrary, it is the *eikon* who is on the side of meaning, clarity and fluid communication. The *phantasma* only entangles and deceives, which does not necessarily mean that it becomes absurdity or total silence. It is important to remember that the *phantasma* has an appearance, it looks like something, it seems to make sense but this sense

relies on the unfavourable position of a viewer who, inadvertently, takes an image for 'the real thing'. Paraphrasing Longinus, who was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the *eikon* is the source of rhetoric and *enargeia* (clarity, vividness); the *phantasma*, the cause of enthrallment.

The poem, an appearance that 'embodies' a *phantasma*, is far from having a referential function or from being an unusual way of representing an object, an idea. That's how the *eikon* works, not the *phantasma*. Poetry offers access to being but it does so through its negation, its otherness, not by grasping it as an object, a thing (Badiou 2014: 29). According to Badiou, the poem relies on two operations to perform this de-objectification of being. The first one is *subtraction*, the assembling of the poem 'with the direct aim of a withdrawal of the object' (2014: 29). The second operation is called *dissemination*, the dissolving of the object 'by way of its infinite metaphorical distribution' (Badiou 2014: 29). This second process is present in José Lezama Lima's poetic system, where metaphor becomes not a referential figure but a disseminative and distributive action, an 'unconditional causality'. Both operations can easily be identified in the activity of the *phantasma*, where the paradigm or model is not only subtracted from a referential gesture but also disseminated by (dis)appearing as other.

Resemblances, says Plato, are a very slippery subject (Plato 1921: 316) and there is no better testimony of that than that of the *phantasma*. The entanglement (*sumplokên*) of non-being and being occurs nowhere, it is *atopos* (Plato 1921: 351), which is why it always slips away. The *eikon* differentiates appearing from being, image and paradigm are clearly discernible and the process of mimesis secures the survival of an original, a reference and of its contrary, a copy. The *phantasma* not only opposes division, classification and *dianoia* but it also eludes



interpretation, meaning. The poem, like any other work of art according to Badiou, represents 'a point where appearing and being are indiscernible', a point reluctant to signification and ultimately, to reading. The hermeticism and obscurity with which the poetry of José Lezama Lima has been labelled is only the result of a poetic mechanism proper of the *phantasma*, a necessary operation of the poem:

What has been christened as "hermeticism" is nothing but the poem's momentary being that is accessible only by way of an obliquity, an obliquity that is itself signalled by the enigma. The reader must enter into the enigma in order to reach the momentary point of presence. Otherwise, the poem does not operate. (Badiou 2005: 29)

The poetic system proposed by José Lezama Lima in his work circumscribes the obliquity of the poem, an obliquity that is the product of the interaction of metaphor and image. It is a theoretical exercise on the being of poetry, on the enigma of the image as *phantasma*, not as *eikon*, a discourse of the false (*pseudēs legein*). However, before exploring how does a poetic system based on the notion of the image as *phantasma* operate, it is necessary first to define the features and components of that system which, in the case of José Lezama Lima, is not an easy task. This is the objective of the following chapter.

## Chapter Two

As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Corinthians 4:18

The intimate connection between poetry and sophistry suggested by Alain Badiou in his essay 'What is a poem' also reveals the *phantasmatic* nature of the poem: it is a 'nonthought that presents itself via the linguistic power of a possible thought' (Badiou 2005: 18-19). The indiscernibility proper to the *phantasma* is also the indiscernibility of the poem, the conjunction of being and nonbeing, the trace of a presence that appears as an absence. However, this apparent contradiction present in the poem is sustained by what Badiou calls a 'set of operations', a mechanism in which, as mentioned before, 'the role of the poem is to engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought' (2005: 20). It is important to remember here that even in the case of Plato's *phantasma*, there is also a whole dispositive that organises its own appearance, its own power. Those large works of sculpture and painting, given in *The Sophist* as examples of *phantasmata* (Plato 1921: 335), have disproportionally the upper parts smaller and the lower parts bigger in order to 'engineer the sensory presentation of a regime of thought', that of the *phantasma*. There is an apparatus that not only holds but also makes visibility possible, a device that places the subject in an unfavourable position. The main objective of this second chapter is to circumscribe and explore the set of operations that conform what José Lezama Lima calls his 'poetic system', one that he explicitly introduces and develops in his essays, especially those on poetry. As it will be shown by the end of this chapter, such poetic system can be reduced to two operations (image and metaphor) and one single sentence: 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'.

The idea of condensing a whole poetic proposal into one or two sentences and a few operations has already been explored by Alain Badiou in his book *Being and Event* (2006). There, Alain Badiou studies the poetics of Stephan Mallarmé, not only one of the most influential and important French poets of the XIX century, together with other names like

Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Victor Hugo and Valéry, but also a poet whom José Lezama Lima admired and to whom he dedicated several essays, a poet of whom Lezama Lima said that 'sus páginas y el murmullo de sus timbres, serán algún día alzados, como en un facistol poliédrico, para ser leído por los dioses' (Lezama Lima 1977: 529). The connection between the poetry and ideas of Mallarmé and Lezama Lima becomes even stronger in the analysis that Badiou makes of one of Mallarmé's maxims, one that summarises his poetic proposal and which is surprisingly similar to José Lezama Lima's approach to poetry: 'The poetic act consists in suddenly seeing an idea fragment into a number of motifs equal in value, and in grouping them' (Badiou 2007: 404). According to Badiou, this sentence underlies Mallarmé's work and especially, his poem 'Un coup de dés', a poem that would demonstrate the veracity of the aforementioned maxim. In the case of José Lezama Lima, the operations of fragmenting and grouping would correspond, respectively, to those of the progression of metaphor and the retrospective movement of the image, the two fundamental operations of his poetic system. The texts that are going to be discussed here in this chapter have been chosen because, in them, Lezama Lima offers a detailed description of the interplay of those two operations (fragmenting/metaphor and grouping/image) and the possible consequences for poetry that they might have. If in Mallarmé the two main operations are subtraction and isolation, and in Rimbaud presence and interruption (Badiou 2005: 20), then in the poetic system of José Lezama Lima the set of operations is constituted also by two very distinctive elements: metaphor and image. The presence of these two elements within the poem is what makes poetry visible, accessible, and it is also what links poetry to non-being. José Lezama Lima himself explains this link, in his own way, in an important extract from one of his essays, a text that is worth citing in its full length:

Así como Platón no pudo llegar en el Parménides a una definición de la unidad, podemos seguir pensando en la continuidad misteriosa, casi diríamos anteriormente resuelta de la poesía. Discontinuidad aparente; enlace difícil de las imágenes. Continuidad de esencias; prolongación del discurso y solución incomprensible de los enlaces [...]. ¿La poesía tiene que ser discontinuidad o un ente? ¿Es lo más valioso de ella el momento en que se verifica su ruptura? ¿Es posible una adaptación al no ser y después constituirse en ente? Si acaso existiera una proliferación incesante de lo discontinuo, no sabemos si tendríamos la suficiente fuerza óptica y si ello pudiera nacer con una imantación coincidente. [...] Por eso creemos que algún día tendrá una justificación óptica el tamaño de un poema. Es decir, el tiempo que resiste en palabras la fluencia de la poesía, puede convertirse en una sustancia establecida entre dos desemejanzas, entre dos paréntesis, que comprende a un ser sustantivo, *que hace visible en estática momentánea una terrible fluencia, limitada entre el eco que se precisa y una coincidencia en el no ser*. [emphasis added] (Lezama Lima 1977: 146-147)

The poem, and in particular Lezama Lima's, appears as fragmented, with an 'apparent discontinuity' caused by what Lezama will later call the 'progression of metaphor', the 'metaphoric causality'. Poetry, through the 'descendance' of the image, brings a mysterious continuity, an 'incomprehensible solution' which although being in itself non-evident, makes a 'terrible fluency' momentarily visible, 'una coincidencia en el no ser'. There is an apparent discontinuity in poetry, a lack of unity (a multiplicity, in Badiou's terms) which can only be verified by a mysterious continuity, an incomprehensible solution of the 'enlaces'. Is it possible, as Lezama puts it, for poetry to take part of nonbeing and being at the same time? Is this necessary? If it is not, then the 'incessant proliferation of the discontinuous' mentioned in the previous text by Lezama would definitely have a negative effect visibility, on 'our optic force'. It is at this point where the poem finds its 'ontic justification', resisting the fluidity of poetry, becoming a substance between two parenthesis and making visible (although only

momentarily) a terrible 'fluencia', 'una coincidencia en el no ser'. Both the poem and the *phantasma* act like a mathematical set, where real ontology should be found according to Badiou, in the sense that they organise (between two parentheses as Lezama affirms) a set of operations whose power is to render visible the invisible, to bring to light the non-being through the resources of the otherness of being.

Poetry in the poem, is it possible?

In one of the first essays dedicated in its entirety to the subject of poetry and to the concept of the image, 'Las imágenes posibles' (written in 1948), Lezama Lima already makes reference to the poetic operations of the poem, the duality of metaphor and image. However, as it is the case with most of the terminology employed by Lezama, both concepts appear to have a different meaning than the one they have in other fields or contexts, whether they are literary, rhetorical or within visual studies. Such a twist in signification is consistent with the mechanisms of the *phantasma* and of poetry, a façade that hides the infinite possibilities of language. It is near irony that a poet who has always been labelled as obscure and hermetic has chosen two terms as recurrent and common as metaphor and image. Appearances, after all, are deceiving.

The first part of 'Las imágenes posibles' (Lezama Lima 1977: 152-154)<sup>24</sup> defines the image as an absolute, as 'la imagen que se sabe imagen', the last of the possible stories. This is not an ordinary image and is far from being a mere visual representation of an object or an idea. The image in this text is conceived as an unruly power ('poder díscolo') inevitably attached to

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<sup>24</sup> All extracts and quotations from José Lezama Lima's essays come from his *Obras Completas II* (México: Aguilar, 1977). In this second chapter, future references to this text will be presented in an abbreviated form, with the page number, for example: (OC 2: 153).

resemblance but trapped in an ambiguous place between ‘el inicio y la despedida’ (Lezama Lima 1977: 152), between a Form (Plato) and a resemblance. According to José Lezama Lima, the closer someone gets to an object the more it becomes impossible to reach, ‘una ruptura sin nimósine de lo anterior’ (again, a reference to Plato). Similarly as with the notion of the *phantasma*, the question here is how much of the paradigm is present in its appearance, and the answer, as well as with the *phantasma*, is very slippery: ‘Y como la semejanza a una Forma esencial es infinita’, continues Lezama in the same essay, ‘paradojalmente, es la imagen el único testimonio de esa semejanza’ (1977: 153). This is a fundamental remark that will be explored and discussed in the next chapter, however, it is important to highlight for the moment the fact that image and resemblance are tied together and that their separation would imply ‘un cuerpo bordeado como un ejercicio en sus límites imposibles.’ (Lezama Lima, 1977: 153) The double manifestation of the image as *eikon* and as *phantasma* is based not on a question of resemblance but of identity because whilst the former identifies itself with the paradigm, as a copy the latter identifies itself with itself, ‘una imagen que se sabe imagen’.

There are two significant aspects to consider until now. The first one has to do with the recurrent mention in ‘Las imágenes posibles’ (and in other essays of Lezama as it will be shown later) of a particular position of the subject, a specific perspective and localisation in space that reminds that ‘unfavourable point of view’ of the *phantasma* in Plato’s *Sophist* (1921: 335). ‘Tanto la brutal cercanía como el más progresivo alejamiento’, says Lezama (1977: 154), ‘forman un inmediato capaz de endurecer y resistir la imagen.’ The image always is to be found in an intermediary place, an interposition whose reference to two points leaves as a result ‘una distancia vacía evidenciada en la metáfora.’ What this interplay of perspective and visibility reveals is the volatility and lack of objectivity of the image, its tendency to disappear or, in Plato’s own words, its lack of being: ‘for the matter of appearing and seeming,



*but not being*, and of saying things, but not true ones (...) is now and always has been very perplexing' [emphasis added] (Plato 1921: 337). Inevitably, as will be discussed later, the inclusion within the *phantasma* of an 'unfavourable position' and a topology of visibility also demands a certain ethic responsibility from part of the subject, a fidelity to the image.

The other significant aspect is related to the self-recognition of the image. The potency, productivity and possibility of the image comes from its absoluteness ('la imagen como un absoluto'), from the fact that although it is inevitably attached to resemblance, it is so only in appearance and not in being. The image as *phantasma* retains a mark of copy, of imitation, of a long-lost referent, but it is only a mark, a trace, a nostalgia. The effect of a paradigm or referent disappears as soon as the subject moves to a more 'favourable position', when he realises that in order to subdue the image to the dominance of understanding, visibility has to cede to *dianoia* and as a consequence, the image disappears. In the end, the only referent of the image is itself ('la imagen que se sabe imagen') and its *potens* or *dynamis* is a result of a non-dependence on a paradigm, of it being more than just a mere 'true imitation'. However, to support the opposite idea, as Deleuze does in *Logic of Sense* (2004: 295), and to claim that the *phantasma* (or *simulacrum* according to Deleuze's use of the term) is an image without resemblance is, ironically, to ignore its own appearance and to fall into the hopelessness trap of postmodernity. The poetic image resembles something, but that something is itself, which places meaning and signification in a very 'slippery situation': instead of disappearing totally due to a lack of referentiality, meaning insists in the poem, it shows itself by slipping away. The hermeticism and obscurity ascribed to Lezama Lima are in fact a symptom of poetry.

The only access to the realm of poetry is through the enigma and complexity of the power of the image: 'Y la imagen, al verse y reconstruirse como imagen, crea una sustancia poética'

(Lezama 1977: 153). Poetry is not a cause that grants being to an object (the poem in this case) but an effect, a consequence of an operation and in some sense, a by-product. Poetry is not an objectifiable concept from which the poem withdraws its resources nor an abstract Idea at which the poem aims. In Badiou's words, poetry 'is the poeticization of *what* comes to pass' and the poem 'is itself the place *where* it comes to pass, or the pass of thought.' (Badiou 2005: 29) Defining poetry as poeticization just echoes the self-identification of the image, a redundancy proper to a mechanism of auto-inclusion. However, it is important to differentiate the self-recognition of this poetic mechanism from a possible structuralist interpretation of the same phenomenon, which would classify it as meta-literature or auto-referentiality, two very common concepts within the field of literary theory. It is not a matter of reference but of immanence and to a certain point, of impossibility.

In order to distinguish between the immanence proper to the Lezaman image from any auto-referential interpretation of it, it is necessary to recall Alain Badiou's philosophical work already mentioned in the first chapter. In his book, *Being and Event* (2006) he describes the concept of the event as a 'one multiple made up of, on the one hand, all the multiples which belong to its site, and on the other hand, the event itself.' (Badiou 2005: 179) There are several considerations to be taken into account when reading this definition. First of all, the idea in set theory of a set that belongs to itself is controversial if not paradoxical, which in some way is consistent with the nature of the event itself. All sets are subsets of themselves (they have the same elements as themselves) but cannot be an element of themselves because this would lead to contradiction<sup>25</sup>. However, when Badiou develops his famous

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<sup>25</sup> A simple explanation about this topic and the difference between inclusion and belonging can be found in *Naïve Set Theory*, by Paul R. Halmos (2017: 9-10). Alain Badiou also comments on this difference in *Being and Event* (2005: 81-84), although obviously from a more philosophical point of view.

*matheme* for the event, written as  $e_x = \{\chi \in X, e_x\}$ , he returns to this paradox and describes the event as an element of itself. The event ( $e_x$ ) is composed not only of all the elements that belong to its site ( $\chi \in X$ ) but also of the event itself. In fact, the multiple ' $e_x$ ' is to be read as 'eventual site' and it should not be taken for the event, since the event 'can only be thought by anticipating its abstract form and it can only be revealed in the retroaction of an interventional practice which is itself entirely thought through'. (Badiou 2005: 178) The event can only be revealed as other, the revelation of an event depends on the retroactivity of what Badiou calls an 'intervention' of a subject, the metaphoric naming of 'the arrival in being of non -being, the arrival amidst the visible of the invisible' (Badiou 2005: 181) and such revelation takes place on a site, the site of the event. This last point will be further developed in the next chapter.

This is the same operation or mechanism that it is possible to find behind the concepts of image and metaphor within the poetic system of José Lezama Lima. 'Es posible entonces la *poesía* en el *poema*', continues Lezama Lima in *Las imágenes posibles*, 'es posible que la visita en el tiempo pueda reconstituirse, permanecer, repetirse.' (Lezama 1977: 178) As for Badiou, for Lezama the poem constitutes a place for the pass of thought, the thought of poetry. 'La *poesía*, que es instante y discontinuidad ha podido ser conducida al poema, que es un estado y un continuo.' (Lezama 1977: 178) What seals and maintains the liaison of poetry and poem is not a visible mark of resemblance or a transcendental emanation, it is rather an irreproducible element, an 'impossible duality', as Lezama names it (1977: 179). The paradox found in the *matheme* of the event is also the paradox of the image as *phantasma*, the Lezamian image, an impossible possible that goes not only beyond contradiction but also beyond representation. It is as if the poem were the site of an event, the event of poetry, a type of *matheme* for the presentation of all the elements of the evanishing event. While the

metaphor presents the fragments and traces left by an event, the image unifies them retroactively under the condition and *potens* of the 'impossible possible' of poetry.

Another important concept mentioned by Lezama Lima in *Las imágenes posibles* is that of 'body'. In this essay, poetry is said to be 'el más cambiante instrumento de aprehensión' and from poetry derives a substance that has 'un cuerpo de la más permanente resistencia.' (Lezama 1977: 178) This 'body' is not only the body of the poem but also that of a subject under the pair 'ser/cuerpo', being and body:

Ninguna aventura, ningún deseo donde el hombre ha intentado vencer una resistencia, ha dejado de partir de una semejanza y de una imagen; él siempre se ha sentido como un cuerpo que se sabe imagen, pues el cuerpo, al tomarse a sí mismo como cuerpo, verifica tomar posesión de una imagen. (Lezama Lima 1977: 153)

The 'desdoblamiento' of body and being comes from the interposition of the image and can only be testified by the image itself. (Lezama 1977: 153) The interplay of image and metaphor has fundamental consequences not only for poetry but also for subjectivity and furthermore, for a whole world. While the concept of 'cuerpo' in Lezama incorporates the subject into the poetic apparatus of image and metaphor, the notion of 'vivencia oblicua' takes it even further and shows its possible manifestation in a world: 'El hombre y los pueblos pueden alcanzar su vivir de metáfora y la imagen, mantenida por la vivencia oblicua.' (Lezama 1977: 159) The notion of 'vivencia' introduces in a world the possibility of a metaphoric incarnation, the presentation of a subject-metaphor who finds his recognition on the retroactive power of the image. José Lezama Lima cites the case of Luis XI as one of the examples of a 'vivencia oblicua', who lived 'frente al pueblo como una metáfora, y la imagen, favorable a los reyes

medieval, formaba la sustancia donde el pueblo veía su jerarquía interpretada.’ (Lezama 1977: 158). Both notions of ‘cuerpo’ and ‘vivencia oblicua’ share some similarities with the ideas of ‘subject’ and ‘situation’ within the philosophy of Alain Badiou, a point that will be later explored in the third chapter once the poetic system that José Lezama Lima has taken a more delineable shape.

For the moment, as has been shown, in ‘Las imágenes posibles’ Lezama Lima presents several poetic operations that will also be found in other essays and which constitute a fundamental part of his ‘sistema poético’. In summary, these operations are: firstly, the fact that the image recognises itself as image, the image as absolute, an operation whose result is a ‘poetic substance’. Secondly, there is an undeniable link between image and resemblance. However, resemblance to a Form is infinite and paradoxically, it is the image the only testament to that resemblance. This idea constitutes one of the most important aspects of the poetic system delineated by José Lezama Lima, because it confirms the existence of a ‘beyond the image’, of a given referent of which the image would be an image. This referent, as will be shown in the next chapter, is always ‘an-other’ referent, the Other of being, the cause of the slipperiness of signification in Lezama Lima’s poetry, the absolute place of reference.

Another important aspect mentioned in this essay is that the image reconstructs or at least directs itself towards a body, otherwise it just disappears or fades away. This body knows itself as image, as body, and thus, being is born. Also, the concepts of ‘distance’ and ‘perspective’ are vital to understand the interplay between image and metaphor. Not too close and not too far, the image gives unity and visibility to the distance evidenced by the metaphor. The image as a being of the non-being, as *phantasma*. Finally, in this essay Lezama Lima highlights the fact that between the association formed by the progression of metaphor

and the recognition given by the image comes the 'vivencia oblicua', the possibility of poetic manifestation in a particular world. Poetry, for Lezama Lima, is instant and discontinuity while the poem is a continuum, a condition. The poem tends towards the realisation of an 'impossible duality', a comparison that tries to determine an irreproducible instant, an evanescent element.

There is, however, one last aspect to explore from 'Las imágenes posibles', strongly related to those aspects or operations mentioned before, one that brings to the forth a question that has accompanied Lezama's writing ever since the publication of 'Muerte de Narciso' in 1937: the question about meaning and signification. Why, as Alain Badiou claims (2005: 29), is obliqueness an immanent procedure of the poem and not a mere artifice?

One of the examples given by Lezama Lima in this essay recalls the myth of Iphigenia and Orestes. The part of the story that Lezama mentions corresponds to the text *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, by Euripides (1999). Here, Iphigenia has a dream that makes her think on the possible death of her brother Orestes who, at the same time, thinks that his sister has been sacrificed in Aulis, by their own father, Agamemnon. Orestes has the mission of retrieving the image of Artemis from the temple of Tauris, where Iphigenia, reluctantly, is in charge of presiding the sacrifices of any Hellene stranger who arrives at the land of the Taurians. Orestes and his friend, Pylades, are two of those and Iphigenia is leading preparations for their inevitable sacrifice. However, during such preparations, Iphigenia hears from the strangers that Agamemnon's son is alive in Argos and without realising that he is in front of her, she asks Pylades to take a letter from her to Argos. Upon reading the content of the letter to Pylades, in case the actual letter is lost, Orestes then realises that the woman in charge of his death is his own sister. He reveals his name to Iphigenia who, after asking Orestes for some

evidence of his identity, embraces her brother. Orestes tells his sister that he has come to steal the image of Artemis so he can be freed from a spell cast upon him by the Erinyes. Iphigenia manages to trick Thoas, the king of Tauris, and the three of them escape with the precious trophy in their hands.

Lezama Lima reads the story from a poetic perspective and interprets the transit of the letter as a metaphoric movement towards the recognition of the image:

Va la metáfora hacia la imagen con una decisión de epístola; va como la carta de Ifigenia u Orestes, que hace nacer en éste virtudes de reconocimiento. Lleva la metáfora su carta oscura, desconocedora de los secretos del mensajero, reconocible tan solo en su antifaz por la bujía momentánea de la imagen. Y aunque la metáfora ofrece su penetración, como toda metamorfosis en la reminiscencia de su claridad y cuerpo primordiales, y desconociendo al mensajero y desconociendo su penetración en la imagen, es la llegada primera de la imagen la que le presta a esa penetración, su penetración de conocimiento. (Lezama Lima 1977: 157)

The movement of metaphor towards the recognitive power of the image plays a fundamental role in Lezama's conception of meaning, of sense. Later in the text (Lezama Lima 1977: 175), there is an important reference to the double interpretation of the word 'sense' in Spanish ('sentido'), which also can be translated into English as 'direction'. For Lezama, 'sentido' has to do less with signification than with movement, he highlights the distinction between 'sentido como proyección inicial' and 'sentido como resultante tonal' (Lezama 1977: 167). Every word is taken from its 'coordenada de irradiaciones' to be traversed by another 'sentido' (sense, direction), another succession, another modulation (Lezama 1977: 176). The progression of metaphor acts as direction and not as sense or as meaning, it follows a path towards the image where such progression finds its stopping point, where 'la forma se adquiere o se extingue' (Lezama 1977: 175). Iphigenia's obscure letter 'ignores the secrets of

the messenger', the irrelevancy of its content contrasts with the recognition that it brings, a recognition that is also knowledge and which has nothing to do with the efficacy of communication. The content of the letter and the letter itself never fulfil their intended purpose, they never communicate the message they were intended to. However, it is from this unfruitful enterprise that a new message emerges, a different causality, an unexpected revelation product of the unconditionality of poetry. Iphigenia's letter, oblivious of its own meaning, operates under a similar apparatus as the one anticipated by José Lezama Lima in his poetic system. The role of metaphor is not to clarify meaning or to paraphrase with vivid language but to redirect and even disseminate signification. Iphigenia's letter establishes new and unexpected connections between her and Orestes, it is supposed to follow a defined direction ('sentido') but it ends up responding to a different demand. The letter is intended for Orestes at Argos but finds him at Tauris. It is intended to travel from A to B, to communicate to the people in Argos that Iphigenia is still alive, in Tauris, and that she needs to be rescued from that 'barbarian land'. However, this never happens, and the letter ends up traveling from A to A, fulfilling an obscure revelation and delivering the gift of recognition, not of understanding.

Metaphor progresses towards an end, the revelation and recognition brought by the power of the image. Even after having revealed to his sister his real identity Orestes is not believed, and Iphigenia asks him for some proof, as if the transit of the letter required a final step not dependent upon its content. The metaphor needs to find the retroactive 'contrasentido' (which should be understood here as both 'opposite direction' and as 'nonsense' or 'contradiction') of the image because otherwise its mechanism does not operate, the recognition that it brings never occurs. The proofs that Orestes gives to her sister are just that, images of recognition: the delicate embroidered scene made by Iphigenia about the



encounter between Atreus and Thyestes, Pelops' ancient spear, a trophy obtained by Orestes and which he hid in Iphigenia's maiden room. These are moments where 'el conocimiento poético logra su reconocimiento.' (Lezama Lima 1977: 158) Both Iphigenia and Orestes found themselves dead and alive at the same time, they are who they are and at the same time they are not. At the end of the story, Iphigenia and Orestes succumb to the rapture of the image, an image that Orestes needs to carry across, to transfer, to metaphorise.

The concept of 'metaphor', as it is circumscribed here in 'Las imágenes posibles', signals its etymology as *meta-pherein*, as a 'carrying over' or 'carring across', where the idea of direction and movement -not meaning- is essential, especially within Lezama Lima's poetic system. The image, on the other hand, acts as a *phantasma*, it intervenes and unifies the traces and fragments left by an event (as defined by Badiou) and through an act of fidelity, it appears itself as the image of that event. However, and this is why the operation of the poem is oblique, hermetic and obscure, this image is an image of a disappearance, of an evanescence, of a non-being. The recognition ('reconocimiento' in Lezama, a word that also shares in Spanish the meaning of knowledge or 'conocimiento') that the image brings to Orestes and Iphigenia depends on their 'unfavourable point of view', on being there where they are not supposed to be and being what they are not. Within the poem, there exists a movement, a flux that goes towards a poetic substance, towards the being of a non-being that can be grasped and participated through the possibility of images (Lezama Lima 1977: 180).

The text of 'Las imágenes posibles' can be condensed on the formulation of one single question and its consequent answer, both formulated by Lezama in his text:

¿Luego existe el germen capaz de constituirse en ente de poesía y no en ser o en existencia? Es posible entonces la *poesía* en el *poema*; es posible que la visita del tiempo pueda reconstruirse, permanecer, repetirse. (Lezama Lima 1977: 178)

The poem is the fixation of a disappearance, the retroactive collection of fragments that resulted from an event whose taking place cannot be attested but by a fidelity, the fidelity to a *phantasma*, an image.

#### An a-systematic system

‘Introducción a un sistema poético’ was published in 1954, a few years after ‘Las imágenes posibles’. Both essays share some common ground and many of the ideas mentioned in one text reappear or are somehow developed further in the other. However, in the case of ‘Introducción a un sistema poético’, the first thing that catches the attention, especially if you are familiar with José Lezama Lima’s writing, is the title itself. The combination of two such distinct and often opposed words as ‘system’ and ‘poetic’ is more than unexpected, particularly coming from a poet whose lack of clarity and logical order have always characterised his style. The title also indicates a new presence, the irruption of thinking within poetry, the possibility of the conjunction in the poem of thinking and poetry, the reconciliation between the Platonic excluded and the excluder.

Unsurprisingly, ‘Introducción a un sistema poético’ begins with a reference to Aristotle and more specifically, to his ideas of movement and rest, two concepts that are strongly connected to the notions of metaphor and image in Lezama Lima. As with ‘Las imágenes posibles’, metaphor is described by Lezama as a progression that tends towards the recognition of the image, a definition that inevitably recalls the Aristotelian difference of

movement and rest. However, here in 'Introducción a un Sistema poético' Lezama goes further in his reflexion about these two figures and contrasts the ideal of rest in Aristotle ('a medida que el ser se perfecciona tiende al reposo') with the less positive approach to the same concept in Pascal, for whom 'el reposo absoluto es la muerte' (Lezama Lima 1977: 394). The contrast between these two points of view is reinforced by the introduction of an existential sentence on each side of the *encerado* ('blackboard'): for Aristotle it is 'soy, luego existo' and for Pascal, 'existo, luego soy' (Lezama 1977: 393-394). On one hand, being appears as the realisation of being an image, in constant fluidity and with one universal essence. On the other hand, existing is a by-product of being because the realisation of being an image also involves an existing. Being exists, it manifests itself as appearance, and it does so by existing as an image (Lezama Lima 1977: 393-394). The existing as image is a clear reference to the Bible, where God is said to have created man in His own image. The fact that in the Bible God always uses a plural form to talk about himself ('Hagamos al hombre') is, for Lezama, a possible cause of incompleteness and the reason why man is 'un plural no dominado, de que esa conciencia es un existir como fragmento' (Lezama Lima 1977: 394), and consequently, existing as fragment is existing as image.<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between Aristotle and Pascal, their different perspectives on the topic of rest, the opposition movement/rest, the distinction between being and existing and finally, the idea of the image as the fragment of being that corresponds to man, will all help Lezama Lima to introduce in this essay a new notion that constitutes a fundamental aspect of his poetic system: the notion of the *imposible sintético*. The Aristotelian ideal of rest and the more

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<sup>26</sup> The difference between being and existing and the idea of being as a plurality or multiplicity that manifests fragmentarily, are key features present in the philosophic system of Alain Badiou. They will be discussed and related to Lezama Lima's poetic system in the next chapter.

dynamic approach of Pascal, the being of existing and the existing of being, find their unusual combinatory in the *imposible sintético* of poetry (Lezama Lima 1977: 396). It is not about a synthesis of opposites or a mere union of antinomies, it is about the concurrence in poetry of the ineffability of differentiation, the progress of the unreal towards the real:

Esa momentánea homogeneidad lograda tan solo para integrar la corriente que se dirige hacia el sentido, se deshace antes de tocarlo o disminuirlo visibilizándolo, pues aunque parece que ese sentido va a ser su devorador metagrama, solo reaparece como sentido primordial del cual se partió si se integra como símbolo de su absoluto. (...) Semejante a la incesante y visible digestión de un caracol, el discurso poético va incorporando en una asombrosa reciprocidad de sentencia poética y de imagen, un mundo extensivo y un súbito, una marcha en la que el polvo desplazado por cada uno de los corceles coincide con el extenso de la nube que los acoge como *imago*. Marcha de ese discurso poético semejante a la del pez en la corriente, pues cada una de las diferenciaciones metafóricas se lanza al mismo tiempo que logra la identidad en sus diferencias, a la final apetencia de la imagen. (Lezama Lima 1977: 396-397)

The double interpretation of the word *sentido* as 'sense/meaning' and as 'direction/course' introduced by Lezama in 'Las imágenes posibles' is reiterated here in this extract. The *imposible sintético* of poetry integrates into its course the differentiations and contradictions and gives them another sense, another direction. The poetic discourse homogenises contraries without making a synthesis out of them, it redirects them towards a new *sentido* that ironically, it never manages to reach. It is a discourse that assimilates through the reciprocity of two elements, the poetic sentence (metaphor) and the image, and whose metaphoric differentiations find their identity in their own differences. The poetic discourse integrates but at the same time disperses, it destroys the accumulations of a *sentido* only to

reconstruct it again and surrender, as prisoner of such *sentido*, to the final appetite of the image (Lezama Lima 1977: 397). The metaphoric progression carries over, transfers, intertwines and weaves together, it is an operation that finds its resolution or *sentido* (direction/sense) on the retroactive movement of the image.

Another concept introduced by Lezama Lima in this essay is what he calls the *duda hiperbólica* ('hyperbolic doubt'), a clear reference to the *methodic doubt* in Cartesian philosophy. However, if for Descartes the main function of this doubt is to secure the certainty of a truth, for Lezama, the *hyperbolic doubt* lies at the beginning of all poetry (Lezama 1977: 398). Descartes' famous example of dreams, his inability to distinguish between being awake or being asleep and which he thinks is the principal reason for doubt (1988: 122), is also mentioned by Lezama Lima but with a completely different purpose: to highlight the potentiality and fecundity of the *duda hiperbólica*. 'El enlace y sucesión en las manifestaciones vigílicas', says Lezama, 'no bastan para diferenciarlos de los fenómenos del sueño, pues no podemos estar muy seguros del contrapunto y continuidad de lo vigílico, como de lo incoherente y deslavazado de los hechos del sueño' (Lezama 1977: 398). The *hyperbolic doubt* opens the possibility of poetry, the inclusion and interweaving (not the synthesis) of *vigilia* and *sueño* into the current of poetic discourse. However, 'la duda hiperbólica', continues Lezama (1977: 399), 'está en directa proporción (...) en la *situación hiperbólica*' (emphasis added). The *potens* of poetry requires the existence of an extension, a space where the incomprehensible differentiations (*vigilia/sueño*, in this case) are possible within the 'homogeneidad de la corriente' (Lezama Lima 1977: 399).

The *imposible sintético* of poetry, the progressive metaphoric movement and the retrospective recognition of the image find in 'Introducción a un sistema poético' an

unexpected manifestation: numericity. The idea of a numerical presence within poetry is suggested in this essay by Lezama Lima mainly through the introduction of two concepts, those of *ascendit* and *descendit*, one related to the metaphoric movement (*ascendit*) and the other to the incidence of the image (*descendit*). The first example that Lezama gives is the Biblical story of Jacob's ladder: 'Ascienden los números en su escala de Jacob, impulsados por su aliento, por su ánima, para después regresar -no sin una pausa donde situar variadísimas situaciones hiperbólicas, a su unidad primordial' (Lezama Lima 1977: 400). After this brief reference, Lezama mentions other two examples, the *uno primordial* of the Greeks (which is associated with the concept of *dyad*) and the *uno indual* of the 'Chinese wisdom' (associated, according to Lezama, with the notion of *double*). The ancient Greeks would make an important distinction between the dyad and the double, abandoning the former and choosing the latter, placing the idea of number in 'la ascensional de su escala' (Lezama Lima 1977: 401). They also linked the 'ascending of forms' to the *uno primordial* and the descending, to total absence, to the image.

The *ascendit* movement advances from the one to the dyad, to the ternary and to the quaternary to finally reach the 'septenario' or rhythm, where there exists a pause, an empty space which is the one that poetry fills (Lezama Lima 1977: 403). Between the operations of an *ascendit* and a *descendit* there appears a gap, a void or as Lezama calls it, *vacío extensionable*, a space of potentiality. The presence at this point of an idea of extension, of space, is illustrated by Lezama with the importance of geometry, not only in Ancient Greece but also in the architecture of Medieval cathedrals. However, while the Greeks made of numbers and geometry an abstraction for the proportionality of the Forms, isolating from the triangle its quality of triangularity (Lezama Lima 1977: 404), the old Egyptian world filled geometry and numbers with hypostatic allusions and symbols. The numericity of poetry

dismisses the abstraction of thought in order to find its own *hipertelia*, a manifestation that goes beyond any causality or teleology.

The double movement of progression and regression (*ascendit* and *descendit*) generates an extension, a site for the event of poetry to manifest and to appear. The poetic discourse advances and seems to be reduced to an errant point 'que se mueve como una luciérnaga dentro del sentido ocupado por aquella sentencia poética' (Lezama Lima 1977: 405). From the other direction (*sentido*) comes the poetic *imago*, an image that descends over the ascension of the poetic sentence and which brings with it the 'otro sentido' (another sense but also another direction) for poetry (Lezama Lima 1977: 406). Lezama Lima himself makes a good summary of this double movement:

Es el primero, el sentido de la sentencia poética al incorporar el *quanto* fragmentario de cada palabra como signo o como sensación interjeccional. Pero esa suma de sentencias poéticas, cada una de las cuales sigue la impulsión discontinua de su primer remolino, recobra su sentido tonal cuando la *imago* desciende sobre ellos y forma un contrapunto intersticial entre los enlaces y las pausas. (Lezama Lima 1977: 406)

It is in this extract where the double interpretation of *sentido* (sense/direction) finds a clear functionality. On one hand, the progression of metaphor integrates, in its ascending movement, words and fragments to give them a new course, a new direction. On the other hand, the regression of the image brings a second sense/direction to the poetic discourse, unifying the metaphoric dispersed fragments. The role of metaphor is to disseminate meaning, to intervene in language and disperse signification, to carry across a new causality, but the *ascendit* of metaphor is attached to the *descendit* of the image, to the unity given by

the *imago*. Poetry comes to be a universal being, an absolute where metaphor is an operation that acts over the infinite seriations of a poetic discourse and the image is the site of a continuum (Lezama Lima 1977: 421).

Alain Badiou affirms that the limit of poetry, that point where it finds its own impossible, is the infinite of language: 'Let us say that language as infinite power articulated onto presence is precisely the unnameable of poetry' (Badiou 2007: 55). Lezama Lima seems to agree with Badiou when he says that 'las infinitas seriaciones sobre las que actúa la metáfora para provocar la causalidad de cada sentencia poética dentro del continuo aportado por la imagen' (1977: 421). Metaphor acts upon an infinite number of series (seriations), an idea that will be discussed later in the next chapter. However, it is important to mention here that the idea of introducing a numerical order into an infinity is, according to Badiou<sup>27</sup>, one of the possibilities of naming the indiscernible. The interplay, in Lezama Lima's poetic system, of metaphor and image constitute a mechanism, the poem, whose aim is to nominate the unnameable, to serve as testimony of the possibility of the impossible, 'the power to produce presence itself as Idea by the poetic restraint of its disappearance' (Badiou 2007: 55).

The *potens* of metaphor also resides in its capacity for distinguishing and differentiating the homogenous, the indistinct (Lezama 1977: 421) or, in Badiou's terms, the indiscernible. It does so by a declaration, a formula that Lezama rescues from Aristotle's *Poetics*: *este es aquel*, 'donde es posible reemplazar el escudo de Aquiles por la copa de vino sin vino, este árbol por aquella hoguera' (Lezama 1977: 421). The etymological reading of metaphor (already mentioned in 'Las imágenes posibles') as a 'carrying across' is present here as transference, the capacity not only to generate another meaning, another *sentido*, but also to blur previous

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<sup>27</sup> See Meditations 33 and 34 of Being and Event (Badiou 2007).



significations, the ability to intertwine and obliterate the fluidity of language. The work of metaphor goes beyond its traditional conception as a rhetorical figure based on similarity and identity. Brett Levinson, in his book *Secondary Moderns* (1996: 91), has identified the particular interpretation that Lezama does of Aristotle's definition of metaphor:

Transformation, Lezama is saying, takes place not when A is changed into B (as in parody, for example), but when A becomes A: when things turn into their own other, when the identical and the nonidentical merge and, by extension, when history and language become the groundless metamorphoses of themselves. (Levinson 1996: 91)

Metaphor uses the resources of a language that is already there, present, to introduce what seems to be a contradiction, a new 'naming'. Metaphor announces 'una nueva especie que avanza' (Lezama 1977: 421) and it presents a cosmos of 'paradojales sustituciones equivalentes' (Lezama 1977: 422) where poetry is the only access to a universal being. Poetry is not the promise of the advent of being, on the contrary, it is the isolation of its fragments, the trace of its disappearance, 'cuando los hombres a través de lo visible conjurado en la poesía intentan acercarse al risueño desconocido de los dioses' (Lezama 1977: 427). However, the metaphoric progression of poetry requires the regression of the image in order to reach the functionality of its operations, otherwise there would be only fragments and the *phantasma* would not be able to find the visibility of 'an unfavourable point of view'. The idea of a regressive movement of the image will become clearer in other essays from José Lezama Lima also discussed in this chapter, essays where the emphasis discretely moves from the notion of metaphor to that of image.

In the end, 'Introducción a un sistema poético' leaves unanswered the question about the possibility of the existence of a system in poetry. The only hint that Lezama Lima offers regarding the being of such system is when he uses the word 'theory' to refer to his own exposition in this text (1977: 406). There, he gives a very enigmatic poetic example that resumes, in a certain manner, his proposal: 'cuando la capa cae del cielo forma un cono de sombra que se puede decapitar con el filo de la manga' (Lezama 1977: 406). His interpretation of this sentence is just as enigmatic as the example itself, although it does establish a connection between the *imago*, poetry and reality.

Despite the ambiguity in the exposition of a poetic system, it is possible to summarise the main aspects that are mentioned in this essay and which might be part of a potential poetic system: in first place, the notion of *imposible sintético* is not a synthesis of opposites or a union of antinomies. It integrates opposites into a poetic discourse without contradiction. In second place, there is a double reading of 'sentido' as sense but also as direction, the 'other direction' that comes with the intervention of the image. Thirdly, the adaptation of the Cartesian idea of *duda hiperbólica*, a doubt whose objective is to secure the ineffability of a statement but which Lezama Lima interprets as the opening of possibility, the indistinguishability between *vigilia* and *sueño*. The methodical doubt is related to a location for poetry, a *situación hiperbólica*, the site for incomprehensible differentiations. Finally, the *ascendit* of metaphor, a progressive movement that advances and introduces a certain numericity in poetry, receives the recognition of the *descendit* of the image, a movement towards the void of the image. It is important to mention that in this essay the interplay between the *ascendit* of metaphor and the *descendit* of the image causes the appearance of an extension (*vacío extensionable*), a site for the manifestation of the event of poetry. Metaphor acts over the indistinct, infinite serializations, it is differentiation and an opening of

new identities (A=A instead of A=B). It installs a new naming and with it, a new *sentido*. However, in order not to succumb to a complete *sinsentido*, the metaphoric act requires the intervention of the image, a *contrasentido* (as opposite direction).

If the poetic system that José Lezama Lima outlines in this essay seems to lack systematicity or structure, it is precisely because, from his point of view, any system is poetic in its essence. The progression of metaphor differentiates fragments and the regression of the image collects those fragments under its current, it unifies them and makes them visible. That is what a system does, it joins together and proposes a whole made from parts. José Lezama Lima's poetic system is not a contradiction of terms, it is a redundancy.

#### Beyond a system... ethics of poetry

If the previous texts 'Las imágenes posibles' and 'Introducción a un sistema poético' revolved around the question of the possibility of poetry within the poem and of the existence of a system in poetry, respectively, 'La dignidad de la poesía' introduces a new problem: Is there a conduct specific to poetry? Does poetic discourse (the progression of metaphor and the retroaction of the image) demand a particular ethics from its recipients? Is the poem the manifestation of an *ethos* as well as of a *potens*? These are some of the questions that José Lezama Lima addresses in this essay, one of the densest but at the same time most illuminating from his texts on the matter of poetry.

The essay starts with two references on the topic of killing, which is an unexpected way to start an essay on ethics and poetry. The first example is that of Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571), an Italian sculptor, artist, writer and goldsmith who is also known for having committed several crimes (murder included) during his lifetime. The other reference is a biblical one,

Judith, who decapitated the Assyrian general Holofernes, a scene that has been interpreted many times by various famous painters. Lezama Lima's reading of both examples focuses on some details of the story and not on the act of killing itself, which he tries to disregard as the cause or finality of actions: 'Se trata de trazar otro canon, de otra región donde lo primigenio indistinto sea la pieza de apoderamiento' (Lezama Lima 1977: 760). The shout that Cellini gives before 'heading to kill' and the correspondent smile of the Pope are 'freed from the act of killing' (Lezama 1977: 761), they would keep their value even if that act did not happen. A similar conclusion is reached with Judith's story, where nor the betrayal of the king, nor the knife, can be interpreted to kill (Lezama 1977: 761). Judith walks like in dreams, floating, her grace decapitated nature in its sleep, not the king. In both examples Lezama Lima pursues new finalities, new causalities within the indistinct, another region that separates nexus only to unify them again.

After these two references Lezama Lima poses the main question of the essay: Is the conjunction of *poiesis* and *ethos* ever possible? Is there a space where both concepts coincide? Ethics, according to Lezama, has always been associated to the most visible, exterior and vulgar part of behaviour (Lezama 1977: 761). However, there is a conduct in poetry, an *ethos* of creation that sometimes can be interpreted and other times escapes unnoticed. It is the region of the *sobreabundancia*, a space where all contradiction is annulled and where the connection between 'previous motivation' and 'consequent conduct' does not apply (Lezama 1977: 762). Poetry comes to fill in the gap of a new causality, it is what Lezama Lima calls a *punto bisagra*, a space that appears between the 'contractions of its circumstance' and the 'void of its own identity' (Lezama 1977: 762). Poetry oscillates between two points in a movement of respiration, creating a new region, extending a new dimension, a 'secret quantity not perceived by the senses' (Lezama 1977: 762). The idea of the elaboration and

emergence of a new extension to refer to this new space created by poetry or where poetry acts has been mentioned by Lezama in the other essays discussed here. The concept of extension is of particular importance, especially in the next chapter, because of its resonances in the field of set theory and Alain Badiou's philosophy of the event.

José Lezama Lima offers in 'La dignidad de la poesía' various examples related to the conception of a different causality in poetry and the appearance of a new poetic region that comes with its own ethics. He cites the behaviour of a microorganism (a type of worm that he calls 'convolutas' or 'vermes ciliados') who lives by the sea, near the beach. This organism seems to make itself visible during low tide and it hides under the sand when the tide is high. However, when they are moved to an aquarium or to a different environment without tides, they keep their habit of appearing and disappearing. This fact, concludes Lezama, shows that their behaviour is the result of an assumed rhythm and not a derivation of their circumstances, their conduct is non-causal and non-determinist (Lezama Lima 1977: 763). The *ethos* of poetry is disconnected from any finality.

Other examples in the text emphasise the same idea. After the example of the microorganisms, Lezama mentions a story by Pindar where a queen shows the course of a river to 'the powerful Adrastus'. While she does this, a snake bites her son and kills him. According to Lezama, there is an undecipherable connexion, in form of a curse or a punishment, between these two apparent unrelated acts, 'una especie de enemistad secreta entre el curso de un río y la teoría de una serpiente' (Lezama Lima 1977: 763). After this reference, Lezama Lima mentions a Brazilian story where the head of a dragon is severed by the tail of a small lizard. How is this possible? Did the lizard know, asks Lezama, about the 'devouring absorption' of the dragon? Was it aware of its own destiny in the story and decided

to play its role knowing that its tail would be enough to confront the dragon? These questions are not relevant neither for the lizard nor for the story. Oblivious to its role in the legend and to its own fate, the lizard's only duty was to respond to a mystery more than to the threat of a dragon. The act of an *ethos* is the interpretation of two polar points: *acto primigenio* and *configuración de la bondad* (Lezama 1977: 764). The former breaks away with any conception of finality, it is an act of *poiesis* that goes beyond any teleology (or *hipertelia*, the term that Lezama uses to refer to this characteristic of poetry). The latter, *configuración de la bondad*, as its name suggests, arranges and disposes the fragments according to an act of kindness or, as Lezama sometimes calls it, *soberano bien* (Lezama Lima 1977: 764), a concept of important philosophical resonations.

The mention by Lezama of a *soberano bien* in this essay is important because it plays a fundamental role within the relationship between ethics and poetry. Although the idea of a 'supreme good' or *summum bonum* has been a recurrent topic in the history of philosophy, it is Plato who, unsurprisingly, suggested it for the first time in one of his most studied dialogues, the *Republic*. There, in Book VI (Plato 2013b: 87-93), Socrates and Glaucon discuss the relationship between visible things, which can be seen but not perceived by the mind, and the Ideas or Forms, which cannot be seen but only perceived by the mind. According to Socrates, besides the participation of sight and the visible, visibility needs the intervention of a third element, one without which the eyes would see nothing and the colours would be imperceptible: namely, the light of the sun. The sun is the cause of sight but at the same time, it can be seen by sight itself. The Form of the Good works in a similar way but within the intelligible world, not the visible one: it is the cause of knowledge and truth but it can also be known and accessed by the same knowledge it produces. However, Socrates goes even further with his description of the power of the sun and of the Good:

Socrates: "You will agree, I think, that the sun not only gives things that can be seen the ability to be seen, but also their generation, growth, and nurture without being the generation itself."

Glaucon: "No, for how could it be?"

"And that therefore in objects of knowledge, not only is the ability to be known present, thanks to the Good, but also being and reality is in them because of it, *although the Good is not being, but reaches even farther beyond it in rank and power.*" [emphasis added] (Plato 2013b: 91-93)<sup>28</sup>

There two fundamental aspects from the Good that need to be emphasised here. Firstly, that the Good is a third element that intervenes as causality in an otherwise dual dynamic between two elements, joining knowledge and knowledgeable in this case, just like the light of the sun acts between the visible and sight. Secondly, the Good has a special rank beyond the world of Ideas and even beyond Being itself, it is the presentation of an absolute. These two aspects are also present in José Lezama Lima's conception of what he calls *soberano bien* or *acto de bondad*. In another example, Lezama mentions an ancient story that says that when a god copulates with the human representation of a goddess, it begins to rain. Between these two points there is a sequence of connections that despite being undecipherable, they suggest a potential for interpretation: 'Es indescifrable, pero engendra un eloquecido apetito de desciframiento' (Lezama Lima 1977: 765). The union of a god and a human body is an event impenetrable for any mortal, inscrutable, but the slow intervention of the rain represents an almost 'primordial' attempt of interpretation of that symbolic act, it becomes 'infinitamente

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<sup>28</sup> This particular extract from the *Republic* is mentioned by Alain Badiou in his book *L'immanence des vérités* (2018) and it will be discussed later in the next chapter in relation to Lezama Lima's poetic system.

descifradora y descifráble’ (Lezama 1977: 765). Born out of *sobreabundancia*, the fall of the rain is an ‘act of goodness’ (*acto de bondad*), an act of *ethos* whose configuration allows for an instant of knowledge and sense, a momentary interpretation of events.

The act of goodness or supreme good appears in this dimension as the only possible link between two apparent disconnected and dissimilar points. The role of man in this symbolic situation is to intervene as metaphor, as *contrasentido* and *contrarréplica*, an ephemeral flare that brings a brief clarity and decision to an undecipherable state of affairs. The participation of man as metaphor helps to reconstruct a series of points placed between two referential ambits: *acto primigenio* (where the metaphor originates) and *configuración de la bondad* (where the metaphor stops). A movement which acts in A to find its configuration in B. This is the region of *ethos*, of the supreme good, where man becomes a pure *vivencia oblicua*, a metaphor that generates an incessant mobile point between A, *acto primigenio* or symbolic situation, and B, configuration or ‘espacio de encantamiento o hechizo’ (Lezama Lima 1977:766). The act of *ethos* arises from these two points.

Lezama Lima illustrates the idea of *vivencia oblicua* with several references. The first one is to Matthew: ‘Siego donde no sembré y recojo donde no esparcí’, a sentence that breaks all causality in conduct and which represents an exception, an ethical imperative. This is also the imperative that guided Napoleon’s military strategy, the second example of *vivencia oblicua*, when he decided to use naval movements for his terrestrial battles, maritime tactics displayed on the firmness of the ground. The third reference is to an old Persian theogony where the idea of visiting is intimately related to that of absence, to the dead of a relative who comes from beyond and suddenly appears at the door (Lezama 1977: 767). However, the one who comes is not the one who is expected, the absent is represented by the image of a horse



knocking at the door with its hooves. Both of these things (the dead visitor and the horse) are impossibles, says Lezama, but the simple potentiality of the image makes them gravitate and exist: 'Esperábamos al muerto, que desde luego no vendrá, pero el caballo comienza a golpear la puerta con sus cascos, cosa que tampoco sucederá, pero en ambas inexistencias es posible crear la realidad del terror del caballo como mensajero o trasladador de las dos esferas' (Lezama 1977:767). The duty of the horse is to knock at the door, to fulfil a requirement, to appear without its rider or better yet, to appear with the 'absent absent', with absence itself. An ethical movement from the unreal to the real and then back to the unreal again. The duty of the image.

What Lezama Lima has called *sobreabundancia* is, as the name suggests, a surplus, a overabundance, an excess. It is a surplus of unreality, a surplus of inexistence (Lezama Lima 1977: 768) that makes the unreal and inexistent appear, come to be. In the previous example of the Persian theogony, the surplus is the result of the connection of one impossible, the dead visiting person, to another, the horse knocking on the door. The dignity of metaphor, its *ethos*, lies in its power to unify these two impossible extremes, 'como el rayo que une las dos refracciones en las dos cámaras distintas' (Lezama Lima 1977: 769):

Su presencia entre dos adensamientos que se desconocen, logra desde el secreto ente de penetración hasta las épocas imprescindibles para aclarar hechizos de regiones desconocidas, extraños mundos saturnianos, donde el hombre justifica la hostilidad que lo devora. (Lezama Lima 1977: 769)

The 'double refraction' of the overabundance also generates what can be seen as a contradictory metaphoric effect: the equivalence of the homogeneous, the absolute of faith.

The two extremes which were unified by the *ethos* of metaphor now have become one and the same by the power of faith, by an act of belief. Lezama exemplifies this second movement with two quotes from the Bible (Lezama Lima 1977: 771). Firstly, another reference to St. Mathew: 'A cualquiera que tuviese, le será dado y tendrá más; y al que no tuviese, aun lo que tiene le será quitado.' Secondly, one from the *Letter to the Romans*: 'El que no come por fe, el que hace diferencias es el culpable.' Abundance will be rewarded with abundance and scarcity with scarcity, both extremes will be treated equally. The one who makes differences, who does not eat out of faith, is the one to blame. Even negative or opposite statements, when they are taken by the 'solución visible del ethos de la poesía' (Lezama 1977: 771), by its 'double refraction', they develop what Lezama calls 'una gravitación inversa', an operation that goes from negation to possibility and from possibility to the being of the inexistent (Lezama 1977: 772). Luke's sentence, 'a nadie que pide un pescado se le da una serpiente', is seen by Lezama Lima as another example of the double refraction of poetry, a gravitation that makes an equivalent from two dissimilar terms (pescado/serpiente): 'Es decir, pez, flecha de los líquidos; flecha, serpiente de los aires' (Lezama 1977: 772). From contradiction and prohibition to possibility and equivalence.

The role of the poet within this process is to be the guardian of what Lezama calls the 'sustancia de lo inexistente como *posibiliter*' (1977: 774). The inexistent has a substance, a materiality, of which the poet is the eternal custodian. Lezama Lima reiterates this point throughout all his reflexions on poetry: there is a substance of the inexistent, a formalism that goes beyond any idealism or abstractionism. For Lezama, there are only three worlds that have been able to localise the historic possibility of the image: the Etruscan, the Catholic and the feudal Carolingian period. However, it is the Catholic world the one that represents the plenitude of poetry, with its two main themes, where it is possible to find 'the origins of all

poetry' (Lezama 1977: 774): 'la gravitación metafórica de la sustancia de lo inexistente, y la más grande imagen que tal vez pueda existir, la resurrección.' The poet, continues Lezama, is in this conception the guardian of the three greatest 'efficacies' or 'temerities' ever conceived: the conversion of the inorganic into the living, of substance into spirit; the hypostasis of the inexistent into substance and, finally, the total exigence obtained by the overabundance in resurrection. (Lezama Lima 1977: 774-775)

Poetry appears here as the testimony of the sentence to which the new substance confines itself. According to Lezama, what characterises the first two centuries A.D. is the appearance of a synthesis of Occident and Orient, mainly due to the ideas from both Epicureanism and Stoicism. Then came Paul with his substance of the in-existent, his conviction that it was necessary to go even further than a mere synthesis, than just the union of two very different points of view. The poet was the first to recognise the power of this new substance and its temporal plenitude that will define the historicity of several ages. From the hymns of Orpheus to the texts of Pindar, from the gods of the Greeks to those of the Romans, from kings and monarchs to Lucretius' nature. Even the notion of an *ethos* in poetry was a Doric ideal, where only those related to the gods (mostly nobles or aristocrats) received the gift of poetic songs. Poetry was a justification of their *Areteia*, of their superiority privilege. (Lezama 1977: 778)

However, it is in the image of the resurrection where poetry will find its own sentence, its own substance and inexistence, freeing itself from the ancillary mark that had accompanied it until then: 'La poesía podía alcanzar la plenitud de la doble refracción, de las series causales suprasensoriales pero regidas por la identidad de su gravitación' (Lezama Lima 1977: 777).

The resurrection not only of a God but of a whole nation, of the homogenous that results from the double refraction of poetry.

The double refraction of metaphor, its power to exceed any causality, also allows man's participation in the overabundance of poetry, the penetration of mortals in a region where the substance of the inexistent wouldn't be otherwise accessible. But the poetic dynamic does not stop here because the 'successive causality of metaphor' is followed by a body, a totality, the associative or contrapuntal causality of the image (Lezama Lima 1977: 787). This is the poetic system that allows a primitive fisherman, says Lezama, to connect a family argument with the unsuccessful catch of the following night, producing in this way, 'la deslumbrante causalidad de una discusión submarina ante el malicioso asombro de los peces, que se resguardan' (1977: 787). It is in this last sentence where the Lezamian poetic system truly lies, where both the progression of metaphor and the regression of the image make themselves visible, in the fugacity of the inexistent. Lezama Lima's poetic system consists in making the inexistent appear within a world of appearances and causalities. A phrase like 'poetry is the dream of a doctrine', which Lezama attributes to Bacon, becomes a commentary that also illustrates that *potens* of the 'sustancia poética' in Lezama Lima's discourse:

En realidad, en la expresión de Bacon, al disfrutar la palabra doctrina de la dichosa cercanía de la palabra sueño, se hacía equivalente doctrina a extensión de encantamiento, a dominio con feéricos torreones de aviso, trazando el círculo de los conjuros donde el sueño se aposentaba como una evaporación que se igualaba al relente, al tegumento estofado que rodea a la hoja cuando la iguana interpone su soplo en los consejos del rocío. (Lezama Lima 1977: 787)

The final purpose of poetry is 'establecer la gravitación de la sustancia de lo inexistente' and a poet's duty, his *ethos*, is to be the 'engendrador de lo posible, el rotador de la unanimidad hacia la sustancia de lo inexistente' (Lezama Lima, 1977: 788). All that can be imagined has a

gravitation, a possibility, the 'body of an *eidos* and of an *imago*' (Lezama 1977: 791). The work of metaphor is not one of univocity of meaning, of clarification and even less one of comparison, at least not in Lezama Lima's poetics. What the aforementioned Lezamian examples of the 'primitive fisherman' and Bacon's sentence reveal is poetry bringing the inexistent into existence, making it visible through the advances of metaphor and the regression of the image, a dual movement the result of which is not the production of new meaning or the expansion of language's rhetorical resources, but rather the appearance of a poetic body, of a poetic truth. What epitomises Lezama Lima's poetic discourse is the overabundance of poetry, a surplus in language that requires acceptance and dignity, not comprehension. That's where the real *ethos* of poetry can be found. The ascension towards the image is also the descension of a *contrasentido o contrarréplica*, the participation in the 'infinito posible de la poesía' (Lezama Lima 1977: 792), the substance of the inexistent.

'La dignidad de la poesía' is a text that hides within its pages one of the few explicit references and descriptions, made by José Lezama Lima himself, of his own poetic system. It is an extract that is worth mentioning here whole because it offers a rare glimpse into what can be, otherwise, a very disperse and blurred poetic system:

...pero el intento nuestro es un sistema poético, partiendo desde las mismas posibilidades de la poesía y no un desarrollo dialéctico. Es decir, la poesía partiendo de la metáfora como superadora de la síntesis; de la diferencia entre corpúsculo y germen; de la resistencia del cuerpo de la poesía; de la sentencia poética como unidad de la doble refracción; de la dimensión o extensión como fuerza creadora, es decir, la energía en la extensión tiene que crear el árbol; del *posibiliter* infinito; de la nueva sustancia; de las nuevas leyes de la gravitación de la sustancia de lo inexistente; de la mayor exigencia conocida hecha a la

imaginación del hombre, es decir, la resurrección; pueden rendirnos los ordenamientos del nuevo tiempo paradisíaco. (Lezama Lima 1977: 788-789)

This is a concise summary of José Lezama Lima's poetic system, especially as it is formulated in 'La dignidad de la poesía'. Most of the aspects from the essay discussed until here are mentioned in this extract. However, there are also a few missing points that are worth adding and recapitulating before moving on to the next essay. For example, the notion of *sobreabundancia* represents a surplus, a space where all contradiction is cancelled and where the causality established between a 'previous motivation' and a 'consequent conduct' does not exist. It is a surplus of unreality, a surplus of inexistence. Another important point made by Lezama Lima in this essay is that poetry is the region of a new causality, a 'punto bisagra' that creates a new region, a new dimension. The *ethos* of poetry is the interpretation of two polar points: *acto primigenio* (which breaks away with any conception of finality, an act of poiesis that goes beyond any teleology) and *configuración de la bondad* (which arranges and disposes fragments according to an act of kindness, a 'supreme good').

Finally, there are several connections between poetry and ethics made in this essay. Firstly, that the act of *ethos* arises from two points: *acto primigenio* or symbolic situation, and configuration or 'espacio de encantamiento o hechizo'. This is also the region of the *vivencia oblicua*. Secondly, the dignity of the image is an ethical movement from the unreal to the real and then to the unreal again. The horse that knocks on the door brings no visitor with him. The 'double refraction' of the overabundance is also the equivalence of the homogeneous, the absolute of faith. Even negative statements can be inversed by an operation that goes from negation to possibility and from possibility to the being of the inexistent. Thirdly, the poet is the guardian of the 'sustancia de lo inexistente como posibiliter' and such inexistent

has a substance, a materiality (there is a substance of the inexistent). Metaphor exceeds any causality and allows participation in the overabundance of poetry. As a result of this, the 'successive causality of metaphor' also produces a body, a totality, the contrapuntal causality of the image. The dignity of poetry resides in its overabundance, a surplus that is the result of a movement from A to B but which has no finality, no causality. Ironically and against its own etymology, the Lezamian concept of metaphor does not carry or transfer any meaning, it is an operation and not a rhetorical tool. Such an operation flows into the body of the image.

The three essays studied so far can be summarised in one sentence: yes, there is poetry in the poem, it is part of a system and it comes with an *ethos*.

#### Prelude to the image

'Preludio a las eras imaginarias' (1958) opens the essay collection called *La cantidad hechizada*. It is a text that reiterates and further develops many of the ideas found in 'La dignidad de la poesía', with a particular emphasis on the notions of image, causality and what Lezama calls 'the unconditioned' (lo *incondicionado*). Although the title of the essay may suggest otherwise, the concept of *era imaginaria* does not dominate the content of the text, being only introduced in the very last paragraph. However, the idea of the image acting upon history, of poetry making itself visible in time, is explored and illustrated with plenty of examples. In many respects, the three worlds mentioned in the previous essay, 'La dignidad de la poesía', where Lezama sees the historic possibility of the image (the Etruscan world, the Catholic one and feudal Carolingian period), are renamed here with a new label: *las eras imaginarias*.

‘Preludio a las eras imaginarias’ begins with the irreconciliation of two concepts, *causalidad* (causality) and *incondicionado* (unconditioned). Lezama focuses on causality first, connecting it to another important concept in his poetic system, that of *finalidad* (purpose, objective). Causality, says Lezama Lima, prefers the most visible connections and its relationship to purpose can be seen in two directions: from causality to purpose or from purpose to causality. He opts for exploring the ramifications of the first direction, an *ascendit* or ‘ascendant projection’ (Lezama Lima 1977: 797). In this ascension, there are several variants, an order or code and an equivalent movement where those variants find their identity, an identity whose extension is being, a causal being: ‘La causalidad es como un bosque... dominado. El ser causal es como un bosque dentro del espíritu de la visibilidad’ (O.C.: 798).

As usual, Lezama Lima offers various examples from very diverse sources. One of these examples is the reference to the *experimenti sortes* of Francis Bacon, one of the several forms for extending experimental knowledge (the others are *variatio experimenti*, *productio experimenti*, *inversio experimenti*, *compulsio experimenti*, *applicatio experimenti* and *copulatio experimenti*). *Experimenti sortes* is the last of Bacon’s experiments of knowledge and it can be translated as ‘the experiment of chances’. While the other experiments involve a specific methodology, rigour and purpose, the *experimenti sortes* ‘involves trying experiments so outrageous and outlandish that no one has thought to try them before’ (Jardine 1974: 146). The connection between this reference and the idea of causality in Lezama Lima’s essay is clear, since the intention of Bacon with his *experimenti sortes* is to find a hidden causality there where nobody was expecting one. The ‘experiment of chances’ goes against any causality of visible and accessible connections, it seems to introduce the existence of a different causal source where chance becomes something else than an accident or sheer luck. Lezama finds in Kant another example of a link between causality and the unconditioned.



In Kant, the unconditioned comes from the conditioned, they are not two separate and opposed ends but two parts of a same movement. Kant's idea that 'if the conditioned is given, the whole of the conditions, and consequently the absolutely unconditioned, is also given' (Kant 2004:399), is used by Lezama Lima to reveal the existent *continuum* between the conditioned and the unconditioned. This *continuum* will play a fundamental role in the thinking of Lezama Lima's poetic system, especially because it introduces the notion of location and extension (a topology) within two extremes or points: 'En realidad, los nexos causales, las formas aristotélicas, la causa noumenon, presuponen el continuo, que viene siendo como el espectador, la naturaleza cogitanda, lo extensivo. Aquí el continuo es lo condicionado y su misma posibilidad condicionante.' (O.C.: 801) If there is a *continuum* in Bacon's *experimenti sortes* then fate or chance disappear to give way to a new unconditioned causality.

The relationship between causality and *continuum*, according to Lezama, is the same as the one that exists between substitution and identity (O.C.: 801). For a substitution to fulfil its promise of purpose and causality a background of identity is necessary, a point where the continuity of substitutions can flow into, or otherwise chance would triumph 'desfigurando indescifrablemente la cara de los dioses' (O.C.: 801). The unity given by the existence of what Lezama calls 'sustancia idéntica' (O.C.: 801) enables the deciphering of a causality, of a causal succession. Identity brings the possibility of signification in substitutions, a guarantee of continuity in causation, just like the image descends over the progression of metaphor. The result of this movement between causality/identity and *continuum*/substitution is not -and this is a fundamental remark- knowledge or understanding, not even meaning. What the existence of a continuity in causation or of an identity in substitutions produces is a response,

an *ethos*, a fidelity: 'La respuesta es la única condicionante fatal, de imposible escapatoria, de ese espacio donde la causalidad se hace esperada' (O.C.: 801).<sup>29</sup>

In Ancient Greece, causality was linked to metamorphosis. When Io was turned into a cow by Juno, according to Lezama (O.C.: 804), the configuration suggested a certain causality, the work of an operation that remained hidden, independent from visibility and it normally involved sleeping or dreaming. However, identity played an important role in this process of transformation because it was the only condition required for metamorphosis to happen. Causality was substitution and metamorphosis image. The persistence of identity and its subsequent effect of reproduction grant the possibility of extension, they facilitate expansion: 'Yo diría que la sustitución o metáfora es posible en la identidad, porque la identidad es posible en su prolongación, que es la extensión' (O.C.: 805). The process of metamorphosis hides a causality but reveals an identity (Io = cow), an identity that can also be that of the same, the indistinct, the double (O.C.: 805-806). Within the extension and expansion that identity brings also appears what Lezama calls *lo saturniano*, the presence of the Roman god of agriculture, a space where appears a tree and the tree attracts a lightning. From identity to expansion, from expansion to tree and from tree to lightning: the advance of a causality with a more accessible connection.

The Catholic world, on the other hand, relegated the notion of causality in favour of the unconditioned, a 'momentaneous and just glimpsed relationship between creature and divinity' (O.C.: 805). When Job tries to find a solution to his own torment, questioning God and begging him for an answer, what he receives in response is not an explanation but

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<sup>29</sup> This point will be further discussed in the following chapter, in relation to Badiou's concepts of identity and faithful subjectivity.

another question: ““quién hace llover sobre la tierra deshabitada y sobre el desierto donde no hay hombre”” (*O.C.*: 806). With this response/question, questions without answers, God breaks with the identity of the ‘Saturnian extension’ and introduces a new causality, a ‘questioning interpretation’ (*O.C.*: 806). The notion of ‘overabundance’ offers its possibilities again, it adds a question to another question, an impossible to another impossible, incorporating an excess without the need of any identity. The human being is part of this overabundance, he participates as astonishment, he is also a ‘monster who asks questions with no answer’ (*O.C.*: 807-808).

The interaction between causality and unconditioned produces a result, a remainder, a by-product: poetry: ‘Lo que ha quedado es la poesía, la causalidad y lo incondicionado al encontrarse han formado un monstruosillo, la poesía’ (*OC* 2: 809). And a few lines later, Lezama adds: ‘Sentimos que se ha creado un órgano para esa batalla de la causalidad y lo incondicionado (...) Ese órgano para lo desconocido se encuentra en una región conocida, la poesía’ (*O.C.*: 809). The most striking aspect of this encounter between causality and unconditioned, according to Lezama Lima, is that it also offers a testimony of the unconditioned region of poetry: the poem. The poem is an offering, a sign, a letter and a register that ‘can be transmitted like the fire’ (*O.C.*: 810), a trace of the event of poetry: ‘Ese combate entre la causalidad y lo incondicionado, ofrece un signo, rinde un testimonio: el poema’ (*O.C.*: 810). Lezama Lima finds in Pythagoras evidence of this interplay between causality, unconditioned and poetry (*OC*: 810). Pythagoras distinguished a triple word: the word simple (which is the one that expresses), the word hieroglyphical (the word that conceals) and the word symbolic (the one that signifies). The transparency of causality corresponds to the word that expresses, the word that conceals is the word of the

unconditioned, its hermeticism. Finally, the symbolic word is the sign of poetry, the word that signifies, 'oscuro oculto que se expresa' (OC: 811).

A few pages later Lezama Lima introduces two other new concepts, strongly linked to those of causality and unconditioned. The first one is what he calls *vivencia oblicua*, which appears as the result of an operation of causality over the unconditioned (OC: 815). As an illustration, Lezama mentions the city of Tsien Chen Fu, in which centre there were built two immense pagodas to counteract the bad influence of another city, Yung Chun. The apparent lack of connection between these two points, a pagoda and the bad influence of a city, disappears when it is revealed that in China, there exists a belief on the possible subjugation of one city by another based only on their shapes. To a city with the form of a tent corresponds another in the shape of a net. The idea with the construction of the two pagodas was to frustrate the prospect of capture by a city-net and therefore break a formal spell and the subjugation that might have come with it. The notion of *vivencia oblicua* defines the possibility of an impossible situation generating an equally impossible reality, to the possible capture of a whole city by a net corresponds the real construction of two pagodas.

The second concept is what Lezama Lima names as *súbito*, which represents the reverse movement of the above mentioned *vivencia oblicua*, not from causality to unconditioned but instead the unconditioned acting upon causality, when 'todos los torreones de la causalidad son puestos al descubierto en un instante de luz' (OC: 816). Lezama takes as an example the German word *vogelon* which, according to him, has the meaning of 'sexual act'. However, the obscurity of *vogelon* is only overcome when two other related words are revealed, *vogel* (bird) and *vogelbauer* (bird cage), a sudden exposition that shows, in an instant, the real

power of its symbols. In the fulguration of the unexpected the *súbito* penetrates the accumulation of causalities (OC: 816).

The interaction between *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* produces what Lezama Lima calls ‘incondicionado condicionante’, the infinite possibility of poetry, a *potens* that allows a germinative movement from nothing to seed (‘germen’ in Lezama Lima’s vocabulary) and from seed to act. This is a crucial aspect in the poetic system of José Lezama Lima because the infinite possibility of poetry is nothing else than a *locus* of operations, the generator and at the same time the result of an operation: from causality to unconditioned and from unconditioned to causality, from ‘seed’ to act and from act to seed, from *vivencia oblicua* to *súbito* and vice versa. Poetry is the infinite *potens* of language, the unconditioned causality of metaphor as a bridge that links two shores without resorting to any justification of resemblance or similarity (like a *vivencia oblicua*, it only departs from one impossible to another). The ascendant movement from A to B is also a descendent movement from B to A, a return that brings a new *potens* with it, a ‘new possible in the infinitude’:

Ese reobrar del acto sobre el germen engendra un ser causal, nutrido con los inmensos recursos de la vivencia oblicua y un súbito, que hacen la extensión creadora, dándole un árbol a esa extensión, haciendo del árbol el uno, el *esse sustancialis*, y aquí comienza la nueva fiesta de la poesía, el *potens*, el posible en la infinitud. Es decir, el hombre puede prolongar su acto hasta llevar su ser causal a la infinitud, por medio de un doble, que es la poesía. (OC: 817)

The double act of poetry affects even its own potentiality, where there is a *potens* that is accessible or known, from causality to unconditioned, and another *potens* ignored, inaccessible, from unconditioned to causality (OC: 817). In other words, the infinite poetic

operation from A to B is also an operation that links known with unknown, possible with impossible or, in Badiou's terms, the finite with the infinite. However, this double movement would be -as Lezama puts it- of a 'cruel difference' if the incarnation, the *oikonomía*<sup>30</sup>, and subsequently, the appearance of the image, did not exist (OC: 817). The double operation incarnates in a perfect image where causality becomes unconditioned and unconditioned becomes causality. The reign of the image is that of the unconditioned as causality, the reign of resurrection: 'la poesía había encontrado letras para lo desconocido, había situado nuevos dioses, había adquirido el *potens*, la posibilidad infinita, pero le quedaba su última gran dimensión: el mundo de la resurrección' (OC 2: 819).

The image of the resurrection introduces a causality within the unconditioned, opening at the same time a vast extension of possibility and the poet exposes the totality of this extension to the comparative operation of metaphor: 'el poeta es el ser causal para la resurrección' (OC: 819-820). The poem becomes a testimony of that operation, of that new unconditioned causality where the visibility of poetry, its tangibility and hypostasis, receives the name of *era imaginaria*... and the prelude ends. 'Preludio a las eras imaginarias' offers some of the most precise insights to the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, like the introduction of the concepts of causality, unconditioned, *vivencia oblicua*, *súbito*, and finally, the conception of poetry as operation and result, as excess and infinite causality. There are also two essential notions introduced in 'Preludio a las eras imaginarias', those of *causalidad* and *incondicionado*. The first one, causality, is the visible part of a connection, its purpose (*finalidad*). The second concept, that of unconditioned, breaks the clarity of causality and presupposes a continuum between the visible and the invisible, a continuum that creates a

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<sup>30</sup> *Oikonomía* understood here as the work of God in the physical world and even more precisely, as the becoming man of God in Jesus.

new extension for poetry. The relationship between causality and incondicioned is another important aspect that Lezama Lima mentions in this essay. Causality and unconditioned are also linked to the ideas of substitution and identity. The purpose or causality of a substitution can only be productive if it receives the recognition of identity. The interaction between *causality* and *unconditioned* on one side, and *substitution* and *identity* on the other, introduces also the interaction between the two most important concepts in the poetic system of Lezama Lima, those of *metaphor* and *image*.

There are several concepts mentioned in this essay that are also related to Lezama Lima's poetic system. Firstly, the notion of overabundance (*sobreabundancia*), which represents an excess in poetry, the possibility of moving from one impossible to another impossible, of answering a question with another question (God and Job). Secondly, the idea that the encounter between causality and unconditioned produces a result, an excess, a 'monstruosillo': poetry. The poem appears as a testimony of that encounter between causality, unconditioned and poetry, a testimony that can be transmitted 'like the fire'. Thirdly, the fact that Lezama Lima finds in the 'triple word' of Pythagoras a correspondence with his own 'triple word': the word that expresses is that of causality, the word that conceals is that of the unconditioned, and the word that signifies is that of poetry, 'oscuro oculto que se expresa'. Finally, there are two concepts connected to the interplay between causality and unconditioned: *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito*. The former is the result of causality acting upon the unconditioned, the latter is an operation that goes in opposite direction, from unconditioned to causality. *Vivencia oblicua* presents a causality that departs from an impossible situation to produce an equally impossible reality. *Súbito*, is a momentaneous revelation of the unexpected. The dialogue between *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* produces what Lezama Lima calls the '*incondicionado condicionante*', the infinite possibility of poetry,

a movement from nothing to seed (*germen*) and from seed to act, an operation and at the same time the result of that operation. The double movement of causality and unconditioned culminates in the incarnation of poetry, the infinite possibility of resurrection.

‘Preludio a las eras imaginarias’ introduces the idea of poetry not only as a result of a process but also as an infinite possibility, as unconditioned causality. It also circumscribes poetry as an operation that takes place between two points, a movement from A to B and then back from B to A and a result of which is the appearance of an extension, a region and a locus for poetry: the poem. The visibility of poetry manifests itself in the world as ‘era imaginaria’, a notion that will be further developed in the next essay, ‘A partir de la poesía’. All these ideas will appear again in the next texts to be discussed.

### Manifestations of the image

The title of this essay, ‘A partir de la poesía’, suggests, like many other of José Lezama Lima’s essays on poetry, the idea of a starting point, an introduction, a prelude, an opening. The text appeared in 1960 and therefore, many of the concepts and ideas already exposed in previous essays are reintroduced and reworked here, especially those of *image* and *eras imaginarias*. The first lines set the tone of the reflections to come: ‘Es para mí el primer asombro de la poesía, que sumergida en el mundo prelógico, no sea nunca ilógica’ (OC 2: 821). There is an alternate route, another *logos*, but its access is concealed and its causality unknown. Like the double movement between causality and unconditioned discussed in the previous essay, here the effects and existence of another *potens* can only be proven retroactively. The difficulty in



accessing this other region of poetry lies not on its concealment but on the fact that it requires what can be described, not only metaphorically, as a 'leap of faith'<sup>31</sup>:

Si decimos, por ejemplo, el cangrejo usa lazo azul y lo guarda en la maleta, lo primero, lo más difícil es, pudiéramos decir, subir a esa frase, trepar al momentáneo y candoroso asombro que nos produce. Si el fulminante del asombro restalla y lejos de ser rechazados en nuestro afán de cabalgar esa frase, la podemos mantener cubierta con la presión de nuestras rodillas, comienza entonces a trascender, a evaporar otra consecuencia o duración del tiempo del poema. El asombro, primero, de poder ascender a otra región. Después, de mantenernos en esa región, donde vamos ya de asombro en asombro, pero como de natural respiración, a una causalidad que es un continuo de incorporar y devolver, de poder estar en el espacio que se contrae y se expande, separados tan solo por esa delicadeza que separa a la anémona de la marina. (OC 2: 821-822)

This extract from the essay illustrates the dynamic at play in the relationship not only between causality and unconditioned but also between metaphor and image. What Lezama Lima calls the 'other causality of poetry' is the prolonged extension created by the nexus of metaphor, an *ascendit* that inevitably directs itself towards the *descendit* of the image. The duration and the space created by the causality of metaphor and the continuum of the image is the region of poetry, a new extension where the progression of metaphor has to find the regression of the image, or otherwise 'aquella fantasía en el sentido platónico no puede realizar la permanencia de sus fiestas' (OC 2: 822). The *sentido* produced by the advances of metaphor is received with the '*contrasentido*' of the regression of the image. The example of the 'crab with a blue tie and a suitcase' shows that at the beginning of poetry there is a decision to

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<sup>31</sup> Or, in Badiou's terms, a *faithful decision*.

make, an ethical choice that needs to be maintained by a fidelity to the duration of the poem, to the trace of the event of poetry.

If the notions of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* presented in 'Preludio a las eras imaginarias' gave poetry a certain tangibility and visibility in the real world, here in 'A partir de la poesía' José Lezama Lima takes this idea even further with the continuation of a concept that was only introduced at the very end of the previous essay, the concept of *era imaginaria*. As he explains (OC 2: 832-833), it takes more than just the work of the image over a moment in history for an *era imaginaria* to appear, nor is it enough that the causality of metaphor becomes present and alive. An *era imaginaria* goes beyond the occurrence of a *vivencia oblicua* and the flash of a *súbito*, it needs a long background of time, hundreds or even thousands of years, archetypal and exceptional situations that are captured by the potens of the image. As examples of these situations, Lezama Lima offers a characterisation of the main *eras imaginarias* that can be found in the history of humanity (OC 2: 835-840): the first *era imaginaria* is named by Lezama Lima as the 'filogeneratriz', in which Lezama Lima places some 'mysterious tribes' like the Idumeans, Scythians and Chichimecans. This is the age of a mythological approach to the idea of reproduction, of sex, where a tree can grow from the side of the body and from the branches of that tree, another new creature grows like a fruit. The second era is the culture of the death in the Egyptians, the presence of Thanatos. This is the time of the pyramid as penetration in the desert, as meditation about death, where the wind that brings the voice of the dead brings also the seeds of fecundation. The third era is the one of Orpheus and of the Etruscans. Orpheus with his double nature, descending into the darkness, a prefigure of Christ, a mortal deity playing songs for the humans, an ethical imperative: "'Sólo hablo para los que están en la obligación de escucharme'" (OC 2: 836). The Etruscans with the fire, the *potens* of possibility: if possible, it is believable. Another *era*

*imaginaria* is the notion of being emanating from a divinity, before even existing. This is the mark left by the Oriental mysticism. It is also the study of poetry in Valéry and Parménides. It is Aristotle. One of the most significant *eras* is the age of the kings as metaphors, where it is possible to find figures like Caesar, Edward the Confessor, Alfonso X El Sabio, the Habsburgs. The idea of the library as a dragon and the wisdom of the Taoism are also *eras imaginarias*. The cult to the blood in the Aztecs, also in the Druids and the stones and primitive constructions of the Incas. The Catholic concepts of grace, charity and resurrection represent another *era imaginaria*. The power of charity equals that of grace, and through resurrection it is possible to participate in the reign of God. The final *era imaginaria* mentioned by Lezama in this text is the one linked to the idea of infinite possibility, exemplified in the person of José Martí and his spirit of poverty as a door to the unknown, to overabundance. Controversially, José Lezama Lima connects this last era to the positive consequences of the Cuban Revolution, the dissipation of the 'false wealth', one of the very few political statements that can be found in Lezama's writings: 'La Revolución cubana significa que todos los conjuros negativos han sido decapitados. (...) Comenzamos a vivir nuestros hechizos y el reinado de la imagen se entreabre en un tiempo absoluto' (OC 2: 839).

The history of poetry, declares Lezama, cannot be anything else than the study and expression of those *eras imaginarias* (OC 2: 833). As will be seen in the next chapter, 'A partir de la poesía' is an essay that shows many points in common with the philosophy of Alain Badiou and particularly with his notion of *event*. It is an essay in which José Lezama Lima explores the possible appearance in the world of the *potens* of the image and of metaphor, their historicity, an event that he condenses in one single sentence: 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible en la infinidad' (OC 2: 839, 841). In Badiou's own terms, this is the infinite acting upon the finite, revealing and generating the infinite possibility of the event.

‘The only certainty resides in what exceeds and surpasses us’, concludes Lezama (OC 2: 842), and the only thing that exceeds is the infinite *potens*, the absolute of poetry, the event.

To recapitulate, this essay focuses on the idea that although poetry belongs to a ‘prelogic’ world, in itself, it never is ‘illogic’. In relation to this, Lezama Lima highlights the fact that at the beginning of any poem lies an ethical imperative, a belief in the resources of the poem where the possibility of advancing through the progression of metaphor and the regression of the image depends on a faithful decision, an act of poetry. The causality of poetry is a continuous of contraction and expansion, assimilation and returning, the *sentido* produced by the advances of metaphor is received with the *contrasentido* of the regression of the image. What Lezama Lima calls an *era imaginaria* does not depend on the causality of a *vivencia oblicua* or on the flash of a *súbito*. It happens with the passing of time, hundreds or even thousands of years, an exceptional situation that is captured by the *potens* of the image and the history of poetry is the study and expression of the *eras imaginarias*.

### The history of the image

‘La imagen histórica’ (1959) begins with a reference to Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Treatise on Painting* (1877), more specifically, to a passage on perspective and distance. The cited text by Lezama talks about the optics of objects and how they seem to appear smaller at a distance, when observed through a pinhole (Da Vinci 2007: 396). It also mentions the impossibility of recognition of a figure that is standing further away from the observer, who is incapable of distinguishing the features and details of that distant figure. The first obstacle that the image needs to overcome, comments Lezama after this reference, is the absence of diversity, of multiplicity (OC 2: 843). However, the other extreme, an excess of differences and diversity,

can also ruin the poem (OC 2: 844). The topics of image, visuality, perspective and parts or members of a body, as well as their possible unification, are constantly present in this essay. A few lines later, Lezama Lima alludes to an extract from Lope de Vega, where the Spanish writer talks about the excess in the use of rhetorical figures, in what he calls *enigmas*<sup>32</sup>, and compares such pretension to a woman who wants to apply some blusher on her cheeks but instead puts it on her nose, her forehead and on her ears (Vega 1983: 873-874). Lezama Lima seems to take this critic personally and he adds later that the image, as counter example of what Lope says, ‘actúa sobre la diversidad más pintarrajeada, sobre la *hybris* más hidrópica’ (OC 2: 844). The image goes beyond any ideal of proportion, restraint or moderation. The image is more than a mere symbol and it is not imagination either:

Una rama puede ser un símbolo de la fertilidad, si con esa rama penetramos en los infiernos, como en *La Eneida*, quien la porta la trueca en imagen. La imaginación que nace, gorgonas, centauros, de la comparación de dos formas reales. Por una fácil paradoja en la aceptación que le damos a la imagen, es ésta totalmente opuesta a la imaginación. La imagen extrae del enigma una vislumbre, con cuyo rayo podemos penetrar, o al menos vivir en la espera de la resurrección. (OC 2: 847-848)

The image is possibility, *potens*. Through the work of an operation, the image makes accessible the impossible, the unreal and the disproportionate, it is an act of charity (*‘charitas omnia credit’*) (OC 2: 848). If Lezama says that it goes beyond symbols and imagination it is because the power of the image does not lie on being only an allegory or a fiction, an abstract creation or a mental representation. The image has a tangibility, a reality, a presence and

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<sup>32</sup> One of the other words that Lope de Vega mentions in his text is the Latin word *scirpos*, which can be translated literally as ‘rush plaiting’ but more generally as ‘riddles’. The word seems to come from Latin, although Lope de Vega refers to it as Greek.

which is why Lezama Lima bases the historicity of the image on three precepts or maxims (OC 2: 848): first is 'Lo imposible creíble', a phrase attributed to Giambattista Vico. Belief is the access to a possible impossible, to a tangible irreality. Secondly, the sentence 'Lo máximo se entiende incomprensiblemente', a notion present from Saint Anselm to Nicholas of Cusa. Despite a whole philosophical tradition that states the opposite, Being can be accessed, it becomes a reality, an existence that is only possible to reach incomprehensibly. Finally, a quotation from Pascal: 'No es bueno que el hombre no vea nada; no es bueno que tampoco vea lo bastante para creer que posee, sino que vea tan solo lo suficiente para conocer que ha perdido. Es bueno ver y no ver; esto es precisamente el estado de naturaleza.' This is the 'unfavourable position' of the *phantasma*, where it is possible to see and not to see at the same time, to see something other than what it is seen. To these three maxims Lezama Lima adds his own: 'El imposible, al actuar sobre el posible, crea un posible actuando en la infinitud' (OC 2: 849). The impossible, the absurd, have their own *logos*, their own possible. The impossibility of finding a justification for death makes resurrection, the image per excellence, a possible, a real. What is not true nor false, it is then perceived by an individual as a truth, a reasoning where the division between subject and object disappear (OC 2: 849). Two acts in appearance disconnected and dissimilar can both receive the illumination of another reality, another causality, one that exists within the invisible, the non-evident.

As has been shown, one of the most important concepts mentioned by Lezama Lima in this essay is that of image, the idea that the image acts upon differences, diversity and that it does not depend on any ideal of proportion or measure. The image is not a symbol, and it cannot be confused with imagination. The image is possibility and Lezama Lima mentions three maxims for the historicity of the image: 'Lo imposible creíble'; 'Lo máximo se entiende incomprensiblemente', and finally, Pascal's idea that 'No es bueno que el hombre no vea

nada; no es bueno que tampoco vea lo bastante para creer que posee, sino que vea tan solo lo suficiente para conocer que ha perdido. Es bueno ver y no ver; esto es precisamente el estado de naturaleza.' An extra and fundamental maxim is added by Lezama Lima: 'El imposible, al actuar sobre el posible, crea un posible actuando en la infinitud.' What is not true nor false, it is perceived as true, a point where the division between subject and object ceases to exist.

### Confluences

The last essay to be discussed is called 'Confluencias', from 1968, a text that is very different from the previous because of its style, written in a more personal tone that makes it look more like a confession or a memory. It starts with memories from his childhood and some anecdotes related to his early family life or what he calls 'la espera de la mano' (OC 2: 1208-1212). The special place that words have always had in his life and the awareness he has showed since little to the power of their various meanings and possibilities, help Lezama Lima to find 'en cada palabra un germen brotado de la unión de lo estelar con lo entrañable' (OC 2: 1211). He incorporates into his poetics the Augustinian notion of *logos spermatikos*, also present in the thinking of the Stoics and which Lezama describes as the participation of every word in the universal verb, participation that also unites the visible with the invisible (OC 2: 1212). Lezama Lima makes an important remark at this point, related to the generative power of words and of poetry. The 'seed' or *germen*, as he calls it, comes with an ethical duty, that of having to choose, of having to decide. These two extremes are equally mysterious, because a decision entails as well the beginning of a new seed, the potentiality of the new, the generation of an act (OC 2: 1212). Within poetry the duty to act and the duty to choose are a prolongation of the initial seed, of the initial *potens*:

Es un acto que se produce y una elección que se verifica a contracifra en la sobrenaturaleza. Una respuesta a una pregunta que no se puede formular, que ondula en la infinitud. Una incesante respuesta a la terrible pregunta del domingo del demiurgo ¿por qué llueve en el desierto? Acto y elección que se verifican en la sobrenaturaleza. (OC 2: 1212)

Lezama Lima defines the concept of *sobrenaturaleza* as the work of the image over nature and links it to Pascal's idea that if all true nature has been lost, then anything can be nature (OC 2: 1213). The image comes to take the place of nature, a reconstruction and at the same time a reminder of what has been lost. However, the real power of the image lies not in being only a substitute or a modified copy of an original, in this case nature, but in being an intermediary process through which nature becomes *sobrenaturaleza*, a filter that brings nature closer to its own essence. The 'analogue of metaphor' participates in this process as a 'relacionable genesiaco, copulativo', an operation that 'despierta también la nueva especie y el reino de la sobrenaturaleza' (OC 2: 1214-1215). The interplay of image and metaphor summons the unconditioned and produces a new causality between two points apparently disconnected, where a key that a man holds in his hand opens other doors somewhere else, where a sword guides another army in another desert, where a pack of cards serves to play a game in a different region (OC 2: 1215). The support of the image goes beyond any finality, a manifestation of 'hyperthelia', what Lezama Lima calls 'éxtasis de participación en lo homogéneo' (OC 2: 1215). Seed, act and *potens*, the image is the only resource that can offer a momentaneous visibility of overabundance. Poetry has a secret relationship between *germen* and *acto*, it is a '*germen acto*' (OC 2: 1216).



Although 'Confluencias' is biographical and personal testimony more than an essay on poetry, there are some important remarks that are worth taking into account because they will help to delineate the final form of a poetic system in José Lezama Lima. For example. The idea that the potens of poetry, its seed (*germen*), also entails an *ethos*, a decision, an election that is also the beginning of a new seed, of an act. To act and to choose are both part of the same operation in poetry. Both act and election find their verification in the '*sobrenaturaleza*' of the image. Another important aspect mentioned in this essay is that the infiltration of the image in nature engenders the '*sobrenaturaleza*', the reconstruction of an initial nature through the intervention of the image. The work of the image over a lost nature introduces a new potentiality, a new possibility by which anything can be nature: *sobrenaturaleza*. The interplay between image and metaphor produces the unconditioned, a new causality between two points apparently totally unrelated. Finally, according to Lezama Lima, poetry can also be understood as a 'germen acto', as a potentiality.

'Confluencias' is a testimony of José Lezama Lima about his own role as a custodian of the *potens* of poetry, as a *possibiliter*. However, being a later text than the rest of essays explored in this chapter, it is also a retrospective evaluation of his own poetic system and of the main concepts that form part of it.

### The components of a poetic system

The texts discussed in this chapter have been selected because they present a direct, extensive and clear reflection not only on the matter of poetry, but also on the various poetic operations and elements that are part of the poetic system proposed by José Lezama Lima, a system that is born out of the possibilities of poetry itself (OC 2: 788). Each of these essays

introduces and develops new concepts, examples and ideas about poetry that help to delineate a very evasive poetic system that is never explicitly or formally outlined by Lezama Lima. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify four main focal points that keep reappearing in every essay that Lezama Lima dedicates to the topic of poetry and to his poetic system, four elements that he explicitly outlined in an interview made by Armando Álvarez Bravo (1968):

Algunos ingenuos, aterrorizados por la palabra sistema, han creído que mi sistema es un estudio filosófico *ad usum* sobre la poesía. Nada más lejos de lo que pretendo. He partido siempre de los elementos propios de la poesía, o sea, del poema, del poeta, de la metáfora, de la imagen. (Álvarez Bravo 1968: 29)

The essays that have been discussed here illustrate the dominant presence that the concepts of *poem*, *poet*, *metaphor* and *image* have on José Lezama Lima's poetic system —besides the obvious inclusion of poetry, which Lezama Lima conceives as a result or surplus of a process, of the interplay between metaphor and image. These four elements constitute five different nodal points of the one procedure, the procedure of a truth, the appearance of the impossible through the intervention of the possible. All the other poetic notions and ideas introduced by Lezama Lima in his essays (*vivencia oblicua*, *súbito*, *incondicionado* or *causalidad*, for example) are somehow related to or dependant on these four elements, hence the necessity to recapitulate and circumscribe each one of them —plus the notion itself of poetry—according to the texts that have been discussed until now.

#### Poetry / Poet / Poem

Poetry is a contradiction, a mysterious continuity in an apparent discontinuity. It is instant and discontinuity presented in the state of continuity of the poem: 'dualidad imposible',

‘imposible posible’ of poetry. The visit of time reconstructed, repeated. The ‘imposible sintético’, a result of the confluence of the metaphoric differentiations and the regression of the image. Integration and disintegration of a ‘sentido’ (sense, direction). At its heart is the *hyperbolic doubt* of Descartes, the impossibility to distinguish between being asleep and being awake. It is also *hipertelia*, it goes beyond any finality of causality. The possibility to get closer to the ‘risueño desconocido de los dioses’. Poetry comes with its own ethics, an *ethos* which is the region of overabundance, a region where the link between motivation and conduct does not exist because in poetry conduct cannot be justified, explained or proved. Poetry comes to fill that absence of a link, a new causality, it is a ‘punto bisagra’. The poetic *ethos* is the interpretation of two extremes: *acto primigenio* (which goes beyond any finality or teleology) and *configuración de la bondad* (an act of kindness and of charity that rearranges fragments, a ‘supreme good’). Poetry demands a response and acceptance is the requirement before advancing through the progression of metaphor and ending with the recognition of the image. It is a result of the interaction between causality and unconditioned and its testimony is the poem.

Poetry can also manifest itself in time, in history, having a tangible appearance in the form of *eras imaginarias*, *vivencia oblicua* or *súbito*. A ‘vivencia oblicua’ is the result of the operation of causality over the unconditioned, an impossible situation that causes an also impossible reality. The ‘súbito’ goes in the opposite direction, from the unconditioned to causality, an instant of revelation of the nexus of causality. The interaction between these two concepts produces an ‘incondicionado condicionante’, the infinite possibility of poetry. An ‘era imaginaria’ requires the work of time, of history, it goes beyond the occurrence of a *vivencia oblicua* and the flash of a *súbito*. An *era imaginaria* is an exceptional situation captured by the *potens* of the image. There are several of them in the history of humankind, like the presence

of Thanatos and the rituals of death in the Egyptian culture, the hymns to Orpheus and the Etruscans, the mysterious tribes of the Idumeans, Scythians and Chichimecans, the monarchs and kings as metaphors, the Oriental mysticism, the cult of blood in the Incas, the notion of the library as a dragon and finally, the Catholic belief in grace, charity and resurrection.

*Causality* in poetry is the visible part of a connection, its purpose (*finalidad*), it is metaphor. The *unconditioned*, on the other hand, breaks away with the clarity of causality and presupposes a continuum between the visible and the invisible, a continuum that creates a new extension for poetry: the image. Although submerged in a pre-logic world, poetry is never illogic, it requires a different *logos*. Poetry comes with a demand to be believed, an imperative of acceptance from a subject, a request to act and to decide, a leap of faith in order to enter into the poem. Poetry is possibility, a seed ('germen') that comes with a duty to act, an *ethos*, a response to a question that cannot be formulated. Poetry is a 'germen-acto' and it is the infinite possible, a surplus where all contradiction is cancelled. The poem acts as a limit to poetry, it makes poetry visible, it acts as a body of resistance to the fluence of poetry, a substance defined between two parentheses. It is a whole that makes visible the terrible fluence of poetry, a coincidence in non-being. The poem is continuity, it is a state, an offering, a sign and a testimony. The poet is the custodian of a 'substance of the inexistent as possibility', the introduction and recognition by Lezama Lima of the role of the subject within a poetic process, the subjective part of a system. As it will be shown in the next chapter, this subject is fundamental for a truth to manifest in a world.

#### Image / metaphor

The image recognises itself as image, it represents a double movement of knowledge and recognition: 'reconocimiento'. Conscious of its own nature, the image within the poetics of

Lezama Lima presents itself as image and not as a copy (as a *phantasma* and not as an *eikon*). It is 'testimony of an infinite resemblance to a Form' (the Platonic concept of participation), an idea that will be further explored in the following chapter and which will become essential in the understanding of the nature of the image for Lezama Lima and the not less essential role that it plays in his poetic system. The image also demands an 'unfavourable point of view' from the subject, its visibility depends on a specific position, on an ethical decision. The image appears as absolute and its absoluteness comes from its infinite resemblance, from its participation in an essential Form: the absolute place of poetry. It unifies fragments and it can take the form of a body, the body of the poem.

Resurrection is, for Lezama Lima, the most powerful image in human history. The image brings a *contrasentido* that saves the progression of metaphor from any 'sinsentido'. It is an intermediate stage between the causality of metaphor and the infinite of poetry. Not too close and not too far, the image requires a specific point of view, it incorporates a subject into its operation. Not an excess of differences but not a complete absence of them either. The image is identity within substitution, but it cannot be thought of as a symbol nor as imagination. The image is the possibility of a glimpse into an enigma, an access to the impossible, the unreal and the disproportionate, it is an act of charity ('*charitas omnia credit*'): 'if it is not true nor false, it must then be true' (OC 2: 848-849). Within the *potens* of the image the division between subject and object disappear. The image acts on nature to create a 'sobrenaturaleza', an overabundance where anything can be nature, where A = A. The image is not a copy of an original, it does not substitute nature. However, the real power of the image resides in its capacity to make nature out of anything (Pascal): *sobrenaturaleza*.

Metaphor, on the other hand, is an ascendant movement towards the image, where it finds its recognition and its knowledge ('reconocimiento'). More than a rework of sense and meaning, it is a work of direction ('sentido'), of 'going towards' the 'contrasentido' of the image. A movement of ascension that later receives the descension of the image and which as a result, produces a space of possibility, a 'vacío extensionable'. An operation that acts over the infinite seriations of a poetic discourse where the image is the site of a *continuum*. It differentiates and separates the homogenous, the indistinct. Metaphor generates an incessant mobile point from A, 'acto primigenio', to B, 'espacio de encantamiento o hechizo': *vivencia oblicua*. Metaphor unifies two impossible extremes, it gives substance to the inexistent. It is more than a mere synthesis, it is a movement from one point to another and which as a result, produces an extension, a *continuum*, a space, a site for poetry to appear under the recognition of the image. In order to 'realizar la permanencia de sus fiestas', the causality of metaphor needs to succumb to the reciprocation of the image. The 'sentido' of metaphor needs to find the 'contrasentido' of the image. Metaphor is, in this case, not a rhetorical figure for substitution by similarity, but rather 'a labour of language deprived of any vectorization: it moves from one term to another only in a circular and infinite fashion' (Barthes 1989: 258).

#### Stitching all together: 'Rapsodia para el mulo'

Before moving on to the last part of this second chapter, it might be useful to turn our attention to one of Lezama Lima's most well-known poems, 'Rapsodia para el mulo' (2016: 251-257), to clarify and illustrate some of the poetic concepts that have just been discussed. Etymologically, the term *rhapsody* is connected to the idea of stitching, sewing or piecing together: 'to relate disconnectedly' (Little et al. 1973: 1824), an idea that encapsulates, from

the beginning, Lezama Lima's notion of image as a union of metaphoric fragments. The first part of the poem also suggests an idea that is reiterated throughout the poem:

Con qué seguro paso el mulo en el abismo.

Lento es el mulo. Su misión no siente.

Su destino frente a la piedra, piedra que sangra

creando la abierta risa en las granadas.

Su piel rajada, pequeñísimo triunfo ya en lo oscuro

pequeñísimo fango de alas ciegas.

La ceguera, el vidrio y el agua de tus ojos

tienen la fuerza de un tendón oculto,

y así los inmutables ojos recorriendo

lo oscuro progresivo y fugitivo.

The constant and relentless progression of the mule in the abyss is also the relentless progression of metaphor, in the poem, a continuous advance directed towards the collective power of the image. The mule walks towards the abyss, there is no causality or justification in its task, in its advances: the abyss has no end, the mule seems to be always or falling or walking, but never arriving. However, it is in this constant progressing that the mule finds its own fertility, its own *potens*:

Su don ya no es estéril: su creación

la segura marcha en el abismo.  
Amigo del desfiladero, la profunda  
hinchazón del plomo delata sus carrillos.  
Sus ojos soportan cajas de agua  
y el jugo de sus ojos  
-sus sucias lágrimas-  
son en la redención ofrenda altiva.

In Lezama Lima's poetic system, the poem is a mechanism that moves from the causality of metaphor to the non-conditioning power of the image. This is the *vivencia oblicua*, the progression of poetry within the poem, the advances of a reading that, just like the mule, does not question the meaning of each step, or the threat of the abyss, but rather finds in them the potential for a new causality. At the end of the poem awaits the *súbito*, the sudden inverse movement from *incondicionado* to causality, the flashing appearance of an image that only reveals and collects, that stitches and pieces together, but which does not explain or clarify anything:

Tu final no siempre es la vertical de dos abismos.  
Los ojos del mulo parecen entregar  
a la entraña del abismo, húmedo árbol.  
Árbol que no se extiende en acanalados verdes  
sino cerrado como la única voz de los comienzos.  
(...)



Paso es el paso, cajas de agua, fajado por Dios  
el poderoso mulo duerme temblando.  
Con sus ojos sentados y acuosos,  
al fin el mulo árboles encaja en todo abismo.

The end of the poem is not a revelation, there is no key to the meaning of the poem. The regression of the image does not explain or justify all the fragments collected up to this point. To the abyss, the image responds with a tree, with a new potential for creation. The poet is the bearer of this new *potents*, 'un mulo con una carga de plomo en la entraña' (2016: 252). 'Rapsodia para el mulo' is a poem about the power that comes with advancing without questioning, the power of suspending one causality to find in such suspension another causality, the 'incondicionado condicionante' of poetry. Lezama Lima's poetry demands from a reader a decision, an ethical compromise, the *acto primigenio* that goes beyond any finality or teleology. Confronted with a poem like 'Rapsodia para el mulo', a reader has to act persistently, like the mule, 'without knowing its own mission'. Once this first step has been taken, the metaphoric progression brings the *configuración de la bondad*, an act of charity and faith (a mule 'fajado por Dios') that receives the regression of the image, the response of the mule to the abyss: 'húmedo árbol'.

A whole poetic system condensed in one maxim

In addition to the already mentioned elements of his poetic system, José Lezama Lima confers particular importance to several sentences or maxims that help to explain the existence of an *ethos* in poetry, of a specific conduct based on the faithfulness of a subject. Those maxims, which have been mentioned before in this chapter, are:

- 'Lo imposible creíble', Giambattista Vico. It is possible because it is impossible, the access to impossibility and to the infinite is through an act of faith, of charity.
- 'Lo máximo se entiende incomprensiblemente', Saint Anselm to Nicholas of Cusa. The understanding of the prelogic world of poetry lies not in the common rationality of thinking but in another *logos*, in a different form of thought.
- 'No es bueno que el hombre no vea nada; no es bueno que tampoco vea lo bastante para creer que posee, sino que vea tan solo lo suficiente para conocer que ha perdido. Es bueno ver y no ver; esto es precisamente el estado de naturaleza', Pascal. The contradiction of the image as *phantasma*, the image that makes visible the non-being of being, its other-being, seeing and not seeing at the same time. An image that can only be seen from an unfavourable point of view.

To these three maxims, Lezama Lima adds his own, one that summarises his whole poetic system: 'Lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'. The poetic system delineated by José Lezama and which relies on the gravitation of the notions of poet, poem, metaphor and image, can be understood as 'the impossible of the image' descending on 'the possible of metaphor', a movement that causes the appearance of a new possibility in infinitude, the infinitude of poetry. The 'poetic impossible' acts upon the 'poetic possible' and generates as a result an infinite possibility, an idea that will be discussed widely in the next chapter, alongside Badiou's notion of a 'truth procedure', where an infinite and indiscernible truth appears in a given situation thanks to the intervention of a faithful subject and the gathering together of a fragmented language that has been forced into his/her world.

The poetic system of José Lezama Lima shows that 'the poetic saying not only constitutes a form of thought and instructs a truth, but also finds itself constrained to *think this thought*' (Badiou 2014: 5). In other words, that the poem not only is a testimony about the event of poetry but that it also comes with a method, with a set of operations and maxims (Badiou 2014: 5). In the case of Lezama Lima, such method depends on the operations of poem, poet, metaphor and image, a very particular poetic procedure whose truth is forced in one single statement: '*Lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud*'.'

## Chapter Three

De la misma manera que el flujo no es el continuo temporal, la *imago* no es la imaginación, ésta es, pudiéramos decir, la intención arribada, la *imago* es un potencial, una fuerza actuante, una superación del espacio y del tiempo. La vieja pregunta aristotélica, que jamás aminorará su enorme enigma interrogante ¿cómo puede ser algo que se compone de lo que no es? La única respuesta posible no está en el tiempo ni en el espacio, sino en la *imago*. La expresión de Heidegger *salir al encuentro*, sólo puede tener sentido acompañada de otra, *nos vienen a buscar*, la instantaneidad coincidente de ambas expresiones es la *imago*.

José Cemí, *Oppiano Licario*

The first chapter of this research dealt with the necessary theoretical framework (Badiou, Plato) to analyse and validate the main proposal of the current research. The second chapter explored the corpus of texts where José Lezama Lima introduces and describes his poetic system. This third chapter brings together those two previous parts, connecting Lezama Lima's poetics with Badiou's ideas about a 'truth procedure' and Plato's notion of the *phantasma*. It explores to how the poetic system proposed by José Lezama Lima represents a thinking about the thought of poetry, an attempt to establish a method that would define the operations that are put into work within the poem. In Badiouian terms, Lezama Lima's poetic system affirms that 'the poetic saying not only constitutes a form of thought and instructs a truth, but also finds itself constrained to *think this thought*' (Badiou 2014: 5). On this basis, José Lezama Lima's poetry belongs to a tradition named by Alain Badiou as 'The Age of the Poets', a tradition of poets like Mallarmé, Pessoa, Trakl, Rimbaud, Celan and Mandelstam, poets whose 'discourse on method is followed by the poems of method' (Badiou 2014: 12).

José Lezama Lima's poetry mobilises a truth or, more specifically, what Alain Badiou calls a 'truth procedure', and the maxims and operations defined by José Lezama Lima in his poetic system (metaphor, image) are an attempt to think and determine such procedure. The hermeticism and obscurity ascribed to his poetry and to his style are justified by a poetic truth procedure where 'statements are devoid of sense' and where 'a statement made up of the names of a subject-language has merely a hypothetical signification' (Badiou 2006: 400). Meaning, or in Lezama Lima's case, the image, is always something that 'will have happen', a future anterior on whose fidelity a subject, a militant of poetry, depends. The image as *phantasma* (as opposed to the image as *eikon*) acts within the poem as a guarantee of signification ('contrasentido') and visibility, but not of understanding. It unifies fragments that

otherwise would end up dispersed and incomplete. The image is affirmation, it holds together the progression of metaphor and declares: 'Yes, something has happened here, an event, and although it has vanished as soon as it has appeared, I am the bearer of its trace, I am its *phantasma*'. Using the terminology from Badiou's *Les immanence de vérités* (2018), it is possible to say that the image acts as the *index* of the *oeuvre* that the poem is. Nonetheless, before passing on to discuss all these ideas in detail, it is necessary to expand on the aforementioned statement about José Lezama Lima belonging to an age described by Badiou as *The Age of the Poets*. According to Badiou (2014: 12-13) 'these poets set up a method of the poem qua poem' and propose several operations within it, among which it is possible to identify three: *counter-romanticism*, *detotalization* and the *diagonal*. Each one of these operations can be found in the poetry and work of José Lezama Lima and furthermore, their processes are somehow recognised, with a different terminology, by Lezama in his poetic system.

#### The Age of the Poets: counter-romanticism in José Lezama Lima

This first operation subtracts the poem 'in its role as thought' (Badiou 2014: 13) from any romantic definition, centring the poem 'on a tacit concept rather than on the power of the image' (Badiou 2014: 13). Although it might look as a direct reference to Lezama Lima's poetic system, the 'power of the image' that Badiou is referring to here is the one found among the Romantic poets, one strongly linked to the concept of *imagination*. The poems from the Age of the Poets interrupt the dream of the romantics, the allegories and symbols of an idealised world become stranded on the earth, 'the imaged subtraction of the image' (Badiou 2014: 13). The nostalgic and accessible world imagined by Romanticism is confronted with the rigour and hermeticism of metaphor.

The gap between imagination and José Lezama Lima's own use of the term 'image' has been mentioned in his essay 'La imagen histórica', where he describes both concepts as 'completely opposed' (OC 2: 848), especially because one, imagination, is born out of the comparison of two real forms whilst the other, the Lezamian image, is a sort of token that grants an ephemeral access to the enigma. This distinction has been noticed by other critics of Lezama Lima's work, like Emilio Bejel in his book *José Lezama Lima, poeta de la imagen*, where he affirms that:

The imagination is similarity, and the metaphorical process is the human faculty by which similarity is perceived. Poetry is thus an expression of the imagination. For the romantic, imagination is a product of individual genius, a concept that differs from Lezama's definition of Image. Far from being an individual faculty of mind, Lezama's Image is the possibility of all combinations that stem from an absence of natural order. This absence is the vacuum that constitutes the 'substance' of creative potential. Thus Image is the void that creates everything. In this sense Lezama is more medieval than romantic. (Bejel 1990: 27)

The image of the romantics is accessible, visible, it represents a scene or an idea created by the imagination of a subject and constructed out of resemblance, similarity. Nothing expresses more adequately this romantic notion of poetry as imagination than William Wordsworth poem 'Daffodils' (1994: 187) and its famous line 'they flash upon that inward eye', the mental recreation of an idyllic memory. For Lezama Lima, on the contrary, the image rather than being accessible or visible is access and visibility, it is a poetic operation that has nothing to do with an 'inward eye'. In the poems of the Age of the Poets, the nostalgic imagination of the romantics, an *eikon* accessible from any perspective because of its similarity and fidelity to a model, encounters the conceptual work of a *phantasma* whose



appearance depends on an unfavourable point of view, not on the existence of a referential object. While Romanticism brings an image identifiable, apprehensible and with a referential work of comparison, José Lezama Lima's is anything but discernible, comprehensible. Even a poem like 'Ah que tú escapes' (Lezama Lima 2016: 23)<sup>33</sup>, one of the most 'accessible' and well-known poems from Lezama, contradicts the idea of a final romantic image in the poem that can be clearly recognisable and efficiently formulated. On the contrary, the metaphoric fragments of the poem are collected by an image whose main operation is to define the undefinable, to catch a glimpse of an Idea that is elusive and slippery, the Idea of definition itself.

#### The Age of the Poets: detotalization and diagonal in José Lezama Lima

These two operations are interconnected, and they are explained by Badiou under the same movement of fragmentation. The first notion of *detotalization* has to do with the inconsistency of the multiple, the absence of a Whole that would congregate signification and act as the final cause of the poem. Badiou defines the poetics of the Whole as a tradition that comes from the works of epic and great lyric, and which 'proposes to cross in ordered fashion the strata of signification, to unfold, as story or initiation, an order that would appease the chaos and console lamentation' (2014: 15). In order to avoid totalization, the poets from the Age of the Poets 'draw a line in language that would trace a diagonal stroke through whatever classification one imagines for it, to produce a short-circuit in the circulation of linguistic energy' (Badiou 2014: 15).

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<sup>33</sup> All references to Lezama Lima's poems from now will come from the book *Poesía Completa* (Lezama Lima 2016), published by Sexto Piso and compiled by César López. Its reference will appear as 'PC' from now on.

The tradition of totalization recognises not only the idea of a wholeness, but also that of an elemental chaos on which that wholeness imposes a certain order, a meaning. To distance themselves from this totalization, the poets of the Age of the Poets intercept and interrupt the fluidity of language and discursive thought, *dianoia*. However, their resources for achieving that interruption go beyond the use of a paradoxical, illogic or meaningless metaphoric language because this would only assert the existence of a chaos already proposed by the thought of the Whole. Like Lezama Lima, the poems from the Age of the Poets draw a *diagonal*<sup>34</sup> of a different metaphoric causality, of a ‘contrasentido’ which introduces another *logos* of signification, an *other* signification. As an example, Badiou quotes a verse from one of Georg Trakl’s poems, ‘Psalm’: ‘It is a light, which the wind has blown out’ (Badiou 2014: 15). The existence of an inexistent light.

The poetic system of José Lezama Lima implements the operations of detotalization and diagonal through its own two main mechanisms, metaphor and image. On one hand, the progressive work of metaphor differentiates and fragments (OC 2: 396), it separates but at the same time conjoins the unrelated, starting a new causality where there was none. On the other hand, the regressive power of the image collects those fragments and makes them visible, possible, but without appealing to the completeness of a Whole. Just like the procedures of detotalization and diagonal, both operations of image and metaphor act together to break the fluidity of discursive thought and introduce the multiplicity of being, the Lezamian ‘impossible possible’ acting on the infinitude. The poem responds to this double dynamic of fragmentation and obliquity by being a “nonthought that presents itself via the

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<sup>34</sup> Badiou uses the word *diagonal* in both a mathematical and philosophical sense. He defines it as ‘a line drawn from one paradoxical multiple, which is already circulating, to the circulation of another, a line which scratches out’ (2006: 210). It can be understood as a line that connects two points that are not on the same level which, in a sense, resembles Lezama Lima’s own notion of *metaphor*.

linguistic power of a possible thought' (Badiou 2005: 18-19). Many of José Lezama Lima's poems are a clear proof of that 'phantasmagorical' aspect of poetry, poems like 'Ah que tú escapes' (which has already been mentioned), 'Inalcanzable vuelve', 'Se te escapa entre alondras', 'Invisible rumor', 'Puedo mirar', 'Recuerdo de lo semejante' or 'Aquí llegamos'. These are poems that draw a diagonal in language to interfere with the efficacy of a Whole, of imagination and causality. This is how 'Aquí llegamos' (PC 2016: 663) begins:

Aquí llegamos, aquí no veníamos,  
fijo la nebulosa,  
borro la escritura,  
un punto logro y suelto la espiral.  
Aurora del contorno y baila el remolino.

These lines introduce a recurrent idea within the poetics of Lezama Lima, one that has been already explored in the previous chapter and which forms an important part of his poetic system: the possibility of another causality, a 'vivencia oblicua', a metaphoric gesture that crosses thinking and abolishes any expected intentionality. Instead of a Whole there is a nebula, a whirlwind, and the never-ending continuity of a spiral.

José Lezama Lima belongs to the Age of the Poets not because his poetry is complicated or difficult, but because it succumbs to the demands of the *phantasma* and not of the *eikon*: to be seen, it requires the visibility and fidelity of an unfavourable point of view. His poems, like those of Celan, Trakl, Mallarmé, Pessoa and Mandelstam, come with a mechanism of thought, with a system that traces a diagonal within the totalization of discursive thinking, of the

Whole. The mechanism by which this diagonal thinking takes place has been described by Alain Badiou in his book *Being and Event* (2006) and it is fundamental for understanding the three capital statements made at the beginning of this chapter. Badiou has named such mechanism a *truth procedure*; José Lezama Lima, a *poetic system*.

### The truth procedure of a poetic system

Alain Badiou dedicates Meditations 31, 33 and 34 from his book *Being and Event* (2006) to explore and detail the mathematical concept of *forcing*, also known as *generic procedure*. This mechanism, as it was mentioned in the first chapter, is adopted by Badiou and renamed as *truth procedure* and it lies at the centre of his philosophical theory of the event. The technique of forcing and generic sets was discovered by Paul Joseph Coehn in the years of 1963 and 1964, making him one of the most important figures in mathematics in the 20th century. As expected, the mechanism is a very complicated one, full of mathematical formulas and references to other theorems not less difficult, all of which Badiou, being a mathematician himself, details carefully in *Being and Event* (2006: 355-387). However, Badiou does offer a simpler version of the process, adapted to his own philosophy of the event:

If a statement of the subject-language is such that it will have been veridical for a situation in which a truth has occurred, this is because there exists a term of the situation which belongs to this truth and which maintains, with the names at stake in the statement, a fixed relation that can be verified by knowledge, thus inscribed in the encyclopaedia. It is this relation which is termed forcing. It is said that the term forces the decision of veracity for the statement of the subject-language.

A situation has its own verified language, an encyclopaedia of terms that are part of the situation and which reassure the functionality and normality of such situation. When an event happens, it generates a set of elements (a truth, a 'new' language) that is built from the already present elements of the situation but whose referent is indiscernible, new to the situation. These 'new' elements that is not only 'alien' to the situation, but which also threatens the functionality and even the existence of it. However, for these new elements to be recognised as part of the event that brought them, it is necessary the intervention of a faithful subject, someone who can identify which elements are traces of the event and which elements are not, helping to the incursion of a truth (the effect of an event) within the situation. However, for a subject to be able to do this, it is necessary that these 'new' elements can be not only 'read' by the subject, but also articulated in the language of the situation, that they can be not only 'uttered' but also 'meaningful'. This means that there is at least one element that act as intermediary between the situation and the event, that can be 'forced' into the situation and give rise to the new possibilities of a truth, the real consequence of an event.

There are several aspects of Cohen's discovery that are worth mentioning before moving on to discuss the importance of this forcing technique for Badiou and for the poetic system of José Lezama Lima. Kurt Gödel had published in 1939 his 'consistency proof' where he showed that the existence of the Continuum Hypothesis was consistent with all the axioms of ZFC. Cohen wanted to prove that the negation of the Continuum Hypothesis was also consistent with ZFC. He developed the mechanism of forcing and generic sets to achieve his objective and managed to do not only this, but he also provided a new technique for discovering new 'universes' in mathematics, a technique that is still in use nowadays. The idea was to extract a new model from a model already given, with the difference that such extraction happens in

an intuitive manner, without following the laws of common logical inference thinking. The process also ends up affecting the nature of the original model without changing its consistency. In summary, Cohen's discovery shows firstly, that both the negation and the affirmation of the Continuum Hypothesis are consistent and at the same time undecidable with respect to ZFC. Secondly, that the generic set (the 'new set') contains a language with new propositions that are built using elements from the original ground model, which helps with the consistency of the situation and 'disguises' the new statements or propositions that are forced into the ground model itself (in Cohen's case, one of the propositions that are forced into the ground model is the negation of the Continuum Hypothesis). Finally, Cohen demonstrated that every sentence from the language in the ground model (situation) can be translated into an equivalent proposition in the generic language (truth, event). The names that have been forced into the ground model have a referent in the generic set. Every proposition created using the forcing language translates into a proposition that is either veridical or erroneous in the generic extension. From the ground model's point of view, the names from the forcing language have no referent, no meaning, but because they have been built using elements from the ground model itself, they are not illogical or completely alien.<sup>35</sup>

These aspects are going to be essential for Badiou, who sees a certain equivalence between the mechanics of forcing and his own philosophy of the event. The ground model functions as a specific world or situation, in which an inhabitant lives. Then 'something happens', an event, which leaves only its traces because it disappears as soon as it has appeared, and it can only be affirmed retroactively. The inhabitant of the world begins his truth procedure

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<sup>35</sup> These examples have been adapted from Burhanauddin Baki's book *Badiou's Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory* (2015: 202-203). There are many details that have been omitted here because of their technical difficulty and because they are not all relevant for the purposes of this research.

establishing a faithful connection between the traces of the event and 'another world' (an infinite generic set) using a new language (forcing), a new causality. It is at this point when the truth inquiry begins, when the inhabitant of the ground model decides intuitively (like in Cohen's forcing procedure) which statements and propositions belong to this new world (generic set) and which do not. While veracity corresponds to the erroneousness or correctness of a proposition in the original world, the ground model, truths have to do with the same duality but in the generic universe, the infinite 'other' universe. A subject is the result of this process, a faithful connection to a truth, not the pre-existent producer of a truth:

The construction of the generic extension properly constitutes a rupture and is instigated by a rupture. This is what Badiou calls an event. In particular, Badiou will link the faithfulness of a militant subject to the fidelity towards the name of an event that has erupted within the situation *S*. (Baki 2015: 205)

The ethical side of a truth procedure is evident and many of its operations involve a decision, an intuitive approach to the event. The subject relies on a faithful connection to the event. 'To be faithful', says Badiou, 'is to gather together and distinguish the becoming legal of a chance' (2006: 232). Even the generic procedure developed by Cohen includes an ethical aspect where the veracity or not of the propositions that are going to be forced into the ground level depends on intuition, on a decision whose final consequences are not known at the time when it is made. A truth also relies on certain fidelity for its existence. The generic set (the site of a truth) is constructed using elements from the ground model (an original situation or world) with the particularity that there is at least one element that fails to belong to this last model, which means that from the point of view of the inhabitant of the ground

model, the generic set is indiscernible, aleatory, unpredictable, universal, infinite and excrescent, since it is included in the situation but it does not belong to it (Corcoran 2015: 142); and so are truths. The veracity of a truth within the ground model or situation always comes in the *future anterior*: it will have been verified (Badiou 2006: 400).

Alain Badiou uses a proposition from Mallarmé as an example of a generic procedure. The proposition, which has been cited in the previous chapter, reads: 'The poetic act consists in suddenly seeing an idea fragment into a number of motifs equal in value, and in grouping them' (Badiou 2006: 404). This statement is formulated with the forcing language of a generic procedure, using elements from the situation where it appears (ground model) but where some of these elements escape the referentiality of this situation (Badiou highlights 'idea' and 'motifs', for example). Forcing Mallarmé's statement into a situation means that the veracity or not of such statement 'will have been confirmed' (the use of the future anterior plays an important part here), retroactively and only by the fidelity of a subject to a truth, a truth that belongs to a generic set and therefore, is indiscernible. However, according to Badiou, Mallarmé's poems (especially *Un coup de dés*) are enquiries of a subject and consequently, in this case, they manage to establish a connection between themselves and those words like 'idea' and motif, generating a referentiality that was lacking in the original situation. The veracity of Mallarmé's proposition is 'presented and not merely announced' (Badiou 2006: 405).

The mechanism of forcing is for Badiou more than just a mathematical tool for proving a proposition. It *forces* a subject to make a decision about an event and to remain faithful to its truth, a truth that will have been constructed enquiry by enquiry and which also involves a problem of signification and language. This last point about signification is fundamental for



poetry and particularly in the case of Lezama Lima, whose obscurity and hermeticism have always been a cause of controversy. It is important then, before moving on to discuss Lezama's poetic system, to reiterate the relationship between the language of veracity and that of a truth:

Since the language with which a subject surrounds itself is separated from its real universe by unlimited chance, what possible sense could there be in declaring a statement pronounced in this language to be veridical? The external witness, the man of knowledge, necessarily declares that these statements are devoid of sense ('the obscurity of poetic language', 'propaganda' for a political procedure, etc.). Signifiers without any signified. (...) A subject always declares meaning in the future anterior. What is *present* are terms of the situation on the one hand, and names of the subject-language on the other. Yet this distinction is artificial, because the names, being themselves presented (despite being empty), are terms of the situation. (Badiou 2006: 400)

This is precisely where the hermeticism and obscurity of José Lezama Lima's poetry come from and his poetic system is an attempt to think this enigma, this procedure. The proposition that Lezama Lima 'forces' into the situation, the equivalent of Mallarmé's statement, has already been mentioned in the previous chapter and it encapsulates all of his poetic system: 'Lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'. It is a statement that has been constructed with terms of the situation but whose sense depends on a missing referentiality, on a generic universe or, to put it in more Lezamian terms, on the 'contrasentido de la imagen'. Lezama Lima's statement cannot be 'verified' by an inhabitant of the situation, of the world in which such statement appears. An element is veridical if it can be defined or incorporated by the encyclopaedia of the situation, by its language; in other

words, if it 'makes sense'. However, Lezama Lima's poetic system forces a non-veridical statement (non-sense) into the situation, the manifestation of a truth (a Badiouian truth) that opens a new and infinite veracity in the world. Although terms like 'impossible', 'possible' and 'infinitud' belong to the encyclopaedia of the situation, their referent is indiscernible from the situation itself, its veracity lies in the power of a decision, of fidelity.

If the analysis that Badiou makes of *Un coup de dés* shows that Mallarmé's text has encountered a term (the name 'idea', the idea of the event) which, 'at the very least, forces Mallarmé's statement to be veridical' (Badiou 2006: 405), then the enquiries that are the texts of José Lezama Lima should also 'force' the veracity of his own proposition. However, the poets from the Age of the Poets do not content themselves with presenting the enquiries that are their texts, the thought that are their statements, they also think this thought (Badiou 2014: 5), they introduce a method (or a system, in Lezama Lima's case), a thought of the thought, which is in the end what makes them part of the age to which they belong.

Towards a poetic system: the generic nature of the image and the forcing language of metaphor

Alain Badiou has defined poetry as 'a forcing of language enacted by the advent of an 'other' language that is at once immanent and created' (2005: 23). In José Lezama Lima, this 'other' language takes place through the work of metaphor, a progressive movement within the poem of names that come from the situation but whose referentiality and meaning is imminent, not given. The role of the image in this process is to act both as a 'treasure of sense' and referentiality for the work of metaphor and as a site of congregation of those names forced by metaphor. The only problem is that this 'site' where the Lezamian image resides,

its 'reign' as it has sometimes been called,<sup>36</sup> is not only indiscernible by the language of the situation but also it is non-transcendent, it is not an imaginable place that lies beyond or outside the ground model of the procedure. The image is not imagination. The reign of the image is *immanent*<sup>37</sup> and, because a truth can only be expressed in the future anterior as something that will have taken place, it is *imminent* as well.

The interdependence and dynamic between metaphor and image, discussed in the previous chapter, becomes even stronger as a truth procedure. The names and statements that are forced in the situation (the work of metaphor for Lezama Lima) find their signification in another generic set, an immanent and yet indiscernible universe (the reign of the image). However, the existence and possibility of this other universe is only known thanks to the names and statements that are forced into the situation, where 'it is the names which create the thing' (Badiou 2006: 510). In the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, this means that the progression of metaphor is directed towards the abundance of the image and that retrospectively, the image appears and becomes accessible, although only by the fidelity of a subject, because of the metaphoric movement. The lack of sense that the language of poetry has, for an inhabitant of the situation, is due to the fact that such language depends on the procedure of a truth, not on veracity. This is the distinction that Lezama Lima makes between 'contrasentido' and 'sentido':

Contrasentido, un misterio; sentido, un secreto, o tal vez una razón poética, un sentido derivado de las asociaciones momentáneas. Preguntas y respuestas que se anulan y destruyen por esa persecución de un contrasentido incesante que le presta la nada. Misterio

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<sup>36</sup> See *El reino de la imagen* (Lezama 1981), especially the prologue by Julio Ortega.

<sup>37</sup> The notion of *immanence* is the subject of Badiou's third book on the series of *Being and Event*, called *L'immanence des vérités* (Badiou 2018).

y secreto escindidos, irreconciliables. Una sentencia poética tan inundada de sentido que se hace inapresable, como una trucha en una mano oleaginosa, cobra su misterio. Se hace tan exterior, tan desprendida, que se constituye en un alimento monstruoso, inabarcable. (OC 2: 264)

‘Contrasentido’ of a truth, ‘sentido’ of a situation. The former is a mystery, overabundance of sense, it is inapprehensible, exterior and unmeasurable, like any generic truth. The latter is a secret to be revealed, it can be accessed, it conceals a meaning. The image, being of the order of a truth, has no equivalent name on the situation, it cannot be said, it escapes nomination and representation: it is generic and therefore, indiscernible. One of the constant remarks about the image that Lezama Lima makes in his essays has to do with its nature, an image that recognises itself as image and it is conscious of its own essence, ‘la imagen que se sabe imagen’ (OC 2: 152). The complete identity of the image means that it cannot be substituted, defined or even explained by the language of the situation. The only possibility for thinking the image is ethical, it demands the fidelity from a subject, another aspect about the image that Lezama Lima emphasises in his poetic system (the commentary that he makes of the sentence ‘el cangrejo usa lazo azul y lo guarda en la maleta’ or his use of the maxim ‘*charitas omnia credit*’ are only two examples). The poem ‘Se te escapa entre alondras’ (PC: 36-37) reflects this evasive and inapprehensible character of the image. This is how it begins:

Se te escapa entre alondras el ruido de sienes  
para el agua desoída en las primeras horas  
que existen o no existen pero siempre aletean  
buscando la compuerta de un ruido virado

por el exceso de trabajo, por la risa.

The language is fragmented and signification in the poem escapes grasp, although not as much as for it to be completely senseless, illogic. However, it is the idea of existence what is put into doubt, the possibility of being for 'the first hours' that might 'exist or not'. The second strophe develops even further this idea:

Que existen o no existen  
si tú fueras el primero  
a cazar en la nieve  
los insectos sin ojos  
que ruedan por la nieve

'Eyeless insects rolling on the snow', the sort of insects that do not exist in the situation but that are forced into it by an 'other' language. Their existence (or not existence) depends on a decision, on a faithful procedure constructed piece by piece, fragment by fragment. The unification of these fragments resides on the power of the image, an image that despite the fact that as a concept, is frequent in Lezama's poetics system, it is very difficult to place in his poetry and more specifically, in his poems. These are the first lines of one of Lezama Lima's most well-known poems, 'Ah, que tú escapes' (PC: 23):

Ah, que tú escapes en el instante  
en el que ya habías alcanzado tu definición mejor.

Ah, mi amiga, que tú no quieras creer  
las preguntas de esa estrella recién cortada,  
que va mojando sus puntas en otra estrella enemiga.

Where is the image in these verses? Where is it in the poem? Where is it in 'Se te escapa entre alondras'? Is it at the end of the whole poem? Is it an abstract and general notion that comes after reading the text? The answer is as evasive as the image itself. Why? Because of two reasons: firstly, as it has been mentioned, the nature of the image lies on the side of truth and not of veracity. The image is part of a truth procedure, it is generic, infinite and it does not belong to the situation. Secondly, a truth procedure is triggered or activated by the event and the event itself resides outside ontology, it is mathematically inexpressible (in set theory a set cannot belong to itself). For Badiou, it is precisely a non-being, the event, the one that facilitates access to the inaccessible, not by being the opposite of being but by being, literally, a non-being: the event is not, it happens and when it does, all that it leaves are the traces of its evanishment. These traces appear as alien to the situation and although they have been built with elements of the situation itself, their references lie in another extension, in an immanent generic universe. A subject decides to intervene and to classify which of these elements belong to the situation and which of them belong to the possible site of an event, building in this manner, point by point, the finite manifestation of the infinity of a truth. It seems, after all, that what truly escapes the grasp of thought is the sheer idea of the event, its being; and yet, it is only by escaping that the event becomes accessible.

When it comes to poetry, 'the poem offers itself as a thing of language, which one encounters each time as an event', says Badiou (2014: 24). The poem is not the event *per se*, but it is the

site where it happens. The poem happens in language, it triggers a truth procedure and it involves a faithful subject (the 'one' that encounters the poem in Badiou's phrase). This is exactly what José Lezama Lima proposes with his poetic system: the poem as an extension where the progress of metaphor flows into the regression of the image. Poetry results from this encounter, a 'monstruosillo' that is the product of the interaction between causality and unconditioned (OC 2: 809). Both poem and poetry are built from the impossible nomination of an event, by forcing a language within the situation. The poem, being a thing of language, cuts through signification and induces a 'contrasentido', the mystery of the impossible acting upon the possible to generate the infinite possibility of poetry. Both poems 'Ah, que tú escapes' and 'Se te escapa entre alondras' sacrifice the referent, the object, to set the emphasis on the site, on the traces that are left by the evanishing event: in the first case, it is 'en el instante en el que ya habías alcanzado tu definición mejor'; in the second, 'entre alondras'.

Another poem that testifies to the disappearance of the event of poetry is 'Inalcanzable vuelve', included in the book *Fragmentos a su imán* (1977). The poem is less accessible than 'Ah, que tú escapes' or even 'Se te escapa entre alondras', in the sense that its language is less attached to the situation (less veridical) than the other two. The title of the poem is eloquent, demanding the return of something that has never been reached, possibly one of the best descriptions of Badiou's notion of event. Like Trakl's 'light that the wind has blown out' mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, 'inalcanzable vuelve' is a nomination that interrupts signification in order to localise a thought (Badiou 2014: 15), the thought of the return of something that has never left. The poem creates the *idea* of a returning without anything to return. These are some of the first lines of the poem (PC: 626):

No importa la reducción  
entre el índice y el pulgar  
que se mueve como un azogue  
casi dormido.  
La imagen brinca con el árbol,  
que engaña con su tronco  
contorneado y lucha con alfileres  
de provocación verde  
que le recorren la espalda  
cuadriculada como un mapa.  
El árbol no termina,  
el aire le llena su lenguaje.  
Los relinchos entre su copa y el revés  
de la copa, lo aproximan al saurio de las llamas.

What sense can an inhabitant of the situation, of the ground model, make of these lines? How to interpret the names and language presented in this poem? Where do all the statements and propositions come from? Unlike 'Ah, que tú escapes' or 'Se te escapa entre alondras', also part of a truth procedure, this poem, from the very beginning, demands a fidelity from a subject that goes beyond veracity and interpretation. 'Inalcanzable vuelve' appears as fragmented, discontinuous and the only possibility of continuity or signification comes from an image that is indiscernible, an image that *is not* but which *will have been*. The progression



of metaphor, the enigmatic metaphoric connections that the poem presents are constructed in a forced language that uses elements from the situation but whose veracity or referentiality is to be found in a place that is not included in the situation. Within the poem, the name 'árbol' becomes a consistent reference, linked to the notion of *image* ('la imagen brinca con el árbol') and described as infinite ('el árbol no termina'). The rest of the poem continues to reinforce the idea of an 'inalcanzable', of an indiscernible that nevertheless can be named:

Uno sólo logra que su aliento sea descifrable  
y la rama como en un circo nos da un manotazo.  
Hacia allí vuelan los escuadrones de arena colorante  
y el cangrejo sonríe la pulpa, de un calaverón.  
Blancos roedores entre sus raíces  
y el infierno central  
saltan indistintos pero todos reconocibles.  
El árbol no termina, siempre  
está completo. Blancos roedores  
entre las raíces que se hunden,  
copulando con los reflejos.

'Indistinct but recognisable', 'endless but complete', these are the names of a truth, of a generic universe, of an image. A subject encounters the poem as an event (Badiou) and decides 'cabalgar esa frase y mantenerla cubierta con la presión de las rodillas', like Lezama's example of a 'cangrejo con un lazo azul en la maleta' (OC 2: 821-822), to then go from

‘asombro’ to ‘asombro’ being himself faithful to a truth that is itself indiscernible, the truth of the image and the emergence of a new possibility in a world. Lezama Lima’s statement, ‘lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud’, becomes veridical in his poems, texts that open a new universe of possibilities within the language of a situation.

It is worth mentioning, as Badiou does in his *Logics of Worlds* (2009: 38-42), that a subject does not have to attach to a truth. A subject can either opt for denying it (a *reactive subject*) or even for occulting that truth (obscure subject). In fact, in the particular case of José Lezama Lima, the last two instances are not very uncommon. An inhabitant of the situation can perfectly decide that Lezama Lima’s poetry is just an unnecessary twist in the language of the situation and discard it as ‘gibberish’. Or, even worse, an obscure subject could also try to prevent the appearance of a forced language, whether it is seen as a threat to the situation or because it does not follow the norms of the world in which it appears. The controversy about some of the passages in *Paradiso* and the supposed censorship this novel was victim during Castro’s regime (Pellón 1989: 91), might be a good example.

Whether it is a faithful, a reactive or an obscure subject, what the procedure of a truth reveals is that it all depends on a matter of choice, on a decision. The act by which a faithful subject recognises something as an event and not as a mere happening or fact, is called by Badiou an *intervention* (2006: 513) and it is strongly related to a mathematical concept, that of the *axiom of choice*. This axiom states that it is possible to compose a set with ‘representatives’ of the elements of another set, that there is a function through which it is possible to take an element from each of the multiples of a set, to form another set. However, and this is where the link with the idea of intervention and of the event becomes clear, the function that allows

the selection of elements, the criteria used to choose A and not B, cannot be known, it remains hidden: 'choice is thus illegal (no explicit rule for the choice) and anonymous (no discernibility of what is chosen)' (Badiou 2006: 499). A subject decides to 'intervene' in a situation and force a language, using names presented in the situation, to name an element that is not presented within the situation, a referent that is not but which 'will have been'. The function, the causality behind the subject's decision to 'intervene' is inaccessible and although there exists one, it escapes formulation. The reason why a subject chooses 'this name' and not another remains a mystery, an enigma. Why? Because 'this nomination is both illegal (it does not conform to any rule of representation) and anonymous (the name drawn from the void is indistinguishable precisely because it is drawn from the void)' (Badiou 2006: 499). The decision to classify an element as belonging to a truth and not another one is anonymous, it comes from outside and the subject is the bearer of this truth, not its cause or maker. There is a subject because there is a truth, not the other way around.

The general idea behind a truth procedure is the possibility of a connection between a given situation (veridical, possible) and a generic extension of this situation (an indiscernible truth) that 'forces' new statements or elements previously inexistent within the situation itself. In Lezama Lima's words, the impossible (generic) acts on the possible (situation) and generates a possibility in the infinitude (a truth). This is Lezama Lima's statement mentioned before and which summarises his whole poetic system, a system that gravitates around two main concepts: metaphor, the operation by which new statements are forced into a situation and the image, the indiscernible *potens* that provides the referents to those statements, referents that are indiscernible as well. However, other notions like those of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito*, which are also an important part of Lezama's poetic system, reiterate and illustrate the idea of the generic procedure of a truth. As described in the previous chapter, a *vivencia oblicua*

creates an oscillation between A (*acto primigenio* or symbolic situation) and B (configuration or 'espacio de encantamiento o hechizo') (OC 2: 766). Lezama Lima gives several examples of a *vivencia oblicua*: Matthew's sentence 'Siego donde no sembré y recojo donde no esparcí'; Napoleon's military strategy, when he decided to use naval movements for his terrestrial battles; the Persian belief about dead relatives who suddenly appear at the door in the form of a horse messenger; and finally, the hidden connection between the cities of Tsien Chen Fu and Yung Chun.<sup>38</sup> The common denominator to these references is the existence of a hidden metaphoric causality between A and B, between two extremes apparently unrelated.

Lezama Lima emphasises the fact that the interaction and dynamic between two points always generates an extension, a topological space of manifestation. The operations of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* produce an 'incondicionado condicionante', the infinite possibility of poetry (OC 2: 816); as a result of the encounter between causality (visible) and unconditioned (invisible) comes the 'monstruosillo' of poetry (OC 2: 809) and finally, the fundamental relationship between the ascendance of metaphor and the descendence of the image brings the appearance of an extension, the site of poetry: 'Así la poesía se extiende a lo extenso de ese retiramiento entre esa progresión tonal de la sentencia poética y el *descendere* órfico de la *imago*' (OC 2: 407). The poem is the palpable testimony of such extension, the place of the poetization of 'what comes to pass' (Badiou 2005: 29). The conjuncture of the four principal components of José Lezama Lima's poetic system (metaphor, image, poetry and poem) delineated at the end of the previous chapter, begins to take shape. Within the ordinariness and efficacy of the language of a situation the poem appears as interference, discontinuity and *in-signification*. Being a 'thing of language' (Badiou

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<sup>38</sup> All these examples have been discussed in Chapter 2.

2014: 24), the poem has been built (anonymously) with elements from the situation itself but whose references are indiscernible, whose signification lies in a future anterior (it will have been). This new language that has been 'forced' into the situation is, in the case of Lezama, a metaphoric operation, a fragmentation of language that is the product of a new causality where the possible is coupled with the impossible, the finite with the *potens* of the infinite. However, this intrusive forced language needs to be recognised as such by a faithful subject who sees in it the trace of an event, the possibility of a truth. If this does not happen, the poem runs the risk of ending up as mere non-sense and then 'aquella fantasía en el sentido platónico no puede realizar la permanencia de sus fiestas' (OC 2: 822). The endless possibilities of the progression of metaphor (a forced language within the situation) can only be exploited if the image descends over them, if there is a truth to which to be faithful.

In *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Badiou goes further in the delimitation of a truth procedure, introducing the topological concept of 'points'. A point, says Badiou, 'dualizes the infinite, concentrates the appearing of a truth in a place of the world. Points deploy the topology of the appearing of the True' (2009: 220). Confronted with the traces of a possible event, a subject needs to make a decision: does a trace, a forced element, belong to the situation or does it belong to a truth to be? The decision is crucial for a truth to have any effect or manifestation in a given world because the subject constructs, point by point, the visible topological figure of a truth. In Lezama Lima, it is the progression of metaphor what makes possible, point by point, the visibility of the image. However, such visibility can only be perceived by a faithful subject, by the same being who makes it possible. 'A truth', affirms Badiou in *Being and Event* (2006: 524), 'is the gathering together of all the terms which have been positively investigated (+) by a generic procedure of fidelity supposed complete (thus infinite). It is thus, in the future, an infinite part of the situation.' This definition of a truth has

remarkable similarities to what Lezama Lima proposes with his poetic system, where the image gathers together fragments left by the progression of metaphor and opens a new source of possibilities. It is the impossible working on the possible to create a new possible in the infinitude. The impossible possible of poetry or, as described before by Lezama in 'Inalcanzable vuelve', 'el árbol no termina, siempre está completo'.

In an extract from one of his essays (OC 2: 146-147), discussed in the previous chapter, Lezama Lima mentions that the apparent discontinuity of poetry and the difficult connection of images are resolved incomprehensibly, that poetry adapts temporally to non-being only for later to become a whole entity. However, and this is an essential remark from Lezama, the 'incessant proliferation of the discontinuous' might overwhelm a subject, who would not be able to perceive it, to assimilate it. Just like the infinite potency of a truth needs to be topologically delimited, within a finite situation and point by point, by a subject, in the same way, the discontinuous proliferation of poetry has to be resisted by a being 'que hace visible en estática momentánea una terrible fluencia, limitada entre el eco que se precisa y una coincidencia en el no ser' (OC: 147). An infinity presented as a finity, 'an endless tree that is complete'. José Lezama Lima's wish of 'giving an ontic justification to the size of a poem' (OC 2: 146) becomes real when the poem is seen as the result of a truth procedure triggered by the evanescence of an event. Only then, 'la poesía, que es instante y discontinuidad ha podido ser conducida al poema, que es un estado y un continuo' (Lezama 1977: 178).

An unfavourable point of view: the appearance of the *phantasma*

The Platonic notion of the *phantasma* was introduced and discussed in the first chapter but its relevance for the interpretation of José Lezama Lima's poetic system has not yet been fully

explored. Like poetry (especially when it comes to Lezama's), the *phantasma* represents an obstacle to discursive thought (*dianoia*), it poses a threat to the normality of the situation which has to do with the question: How is it possible to think what is not? How to discern the indiscernible? Lezama Lima responds to these issues with his poetic system, the implementation of a mechanism that forces the veracity of poetry within the situation. Alain Badiou, on the other hand, introduces his own system of a 'generic procedure of truths' as an attempt to address the same problem, an attempt that, as has been shown before, is based on Cohen's mathematical mechanism of *forcing*. What is then the link between José Lezama Lima's poetic system, Badiou's idea of truth procedures and the Platonic appearance of the *phantasma*? That link is the image, the image as the truth of poetry.

Although the name *phantasma* is not explicitly mentioned by Alain Badiou in any of the books of his trilogy *Being and Event* (*Being and Event*, *Logics of Worlds* and *L'Immanence de vérités*), the idea behind the concept of the *phantasma*, as it appears in Plato's *Sophist*, is definitely present in each of those books and it has a strong connection with the mechanism of a generic procedure. *Being and Event* (2006: 31-37), for example, begins with a reflection on Plato's *Parmenides* and the idea of the One. For Badiou, the inexistence of the One is an axiomatic thought of his philosophy and he finds in Plato the first manifestation of this idea. Multiplicity, which for Badiou is the pure presentation of what he calls *being-qua-being*, cannot be thought as one, as a united idea, precisely because multiplicity is inconsistent (*in-consists*) and it is 'anterior to any one-effect, or to any structure' (Badiou 2006: 33). The multiple is dissemination, it is unthinkable as such and what Plato argues in his dialogues (especially in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*) is that 'there is no form of object for thought which is capable of gathering together the pure multiple' (Badiou 2006: 34). Pure multiplicity escapes *dianoia*, discursive thought. The fact that in the *Sophist* Plato does not include the One as a sixth

supreme genre (after being, movement, rest, the same and the other), suggests that to conceive an idea of the One is not only impossible but unnecessary, since the One is an operation of thought and not a being. Badiou's posterior formulation in *Being and Event* of what he calls a *truth procedure*, and the inevitable reference to Cohen's notion of *forcing*, are an inevitable consequence of this Platonic idea that the One is not.

In *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Badiou deals with the problem of appearance, of how it is possible for *being-qua-being* to manifest in a world, to make itself visible. The idea of appearing in a world is clearly related to the discussion about images that Plato presents in the *Sophist*, and Badiou recognises the relevance of such dialogue, a text where 'the first transcendental inquiry in the history of thought culminates with the introduction of the Idea of the Other' (Badiou 2009: 63). However, even Badiou fails to assume the 'unfavourable point of view' necessary to perceive the *phantasma*, saying that 'although he [Plato] establishes that the Other allows us to think that non-being can appear, he says nothing about the way in which this appearance is effective' (Badiou 2009: 63). Again, just as happened to the Stranger and Theaetetus in the *Sophist*, the *phantasma* slips away from Badiou's grasp.

*L'Immanence des vérités* (2018), Alain Badiou's third and last volume of *Being and Event*, returns to Plato's *Sophist* but this time with a more modest interpretation of the text. In 'Suite S22', a whole chapter dedicated to Plato, Badiou finds in his 'master' an early indication of the absolutisation of truths. In the *Sophist*, a dialogue of 'rare subtlety, philosophically equivalent to the discoveries, in set theory, of Gödel, of Cohen, of Woodin and some others' (Badiou 2018: 690), Plato introduces 'the Idea of difference as such', the Idea of the Other, the being of non-being. This fifth supreme genre (the other four are Being, the Same, Movement and Rest) is exactly what the *phantasma* presents, not an image of the Same (the



*eikon* would be in charge of this) but of the Other, and the only way to do it is by presenting something that is not.

This is also the thinking behind the concept of *image* in José Lezama Lima. The image is not pure multiplicity, nor the representation of the One, it is rather the operation through which pure multiplicity can be somehow ‘accessed’, proved. The role of the image is to make visible what lies beyond visibility itself and it does so through a metaphoric procedure, one that makes the most of etymology: *meta-pherein*, to carry over, to translate or to transfer. In Lezama Lima’s poetic system, metaphor is an operation that carries over, that progresses from the possible to the impossible, a movement that inevitably flows into the appetency of the image. It is not by coincidence that, within Cohen’s mechanism of *forcing*, the generic procedure by which a term from the generic extension is connected to one of the normal situation has sometimes been referred to as one of ‘translation’;<sup>39</sup> in other words, *meta-pherein*. The fundamental aspect of Cohen’s notion of forcing, which is also fundamental for Badiou’s truth procedure, is that a statement veridical in A can also be veridical in B, despite the fact that A, the generic extension, is indiscernible and even inexistent in the universe of B (the situation). It is a mechanism that connects the impossible with the possible to generate the infinite possibility of truths.

This is also the mechanism that lies behind Plato’s concept of the *phantasma*. Unlike the *eikon*, which respects proportions and dimensions of its model, the *phantasma* presents an appearance that dissents from its point of departure, something that if looked ‘adequately’, ‘would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like’ (Plato 1921: 335). The

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Every sentence constructed by the forcing language can be translated into a proposition about what might be veridical in M[G] after translating the individual P-names in the sentence’ (Baki 2015: 186), for example.

*phantasma* does not represent the true proportions of 'beautiful forms' and if it did, then it would be possible to realise that the 'upper parts are smaller' and that the 'lower parts are larger than they ought', because the former are seen from a distance and the latter from 'near at hand' (Plato 1921: 335). In other words, what the *phantasma* presents is not veridical within the situation because from the point of view of an inhabitant of this situation, the *phantasma* presents a distorted, fragmented, illogical and senseless image. The *phantasma* 'forces' an unfavourable point of view within the situation, a diagonal in thinking and for it to be seen, to be thought, what is needed is faithful subject, an intervention. It is necessary 'to see and not to see', 'not to see nothing at all' but neither 'to see enough to think that one possesses God' (Pascal 1828: 247), one of those maxims that Lezama Lima liked to quote and which has been mentioned in the previous chapter, in relation to topic of the historicity of the image.

In a similar form as does the image for Lezama Lima, the *phantasma* collects discontinuous fragments to present something that, from the viewpoint of the situation itself, is not and which requires the fidelity of a subject to be seen. The image that it constructs is made with elements from the situation, but whose referents are indiscernible precisely because they have been forced from a generic extension, from another infinite site that remains unnameable. The *phantasma* takes random elements from the situation (smaller upper parts, larger lower ones) and assembles an image that, in order to be seen, demands the unfavourable fidelity of a subject, a specific conduct: an ethical (although from the point of view of the situation, *un-ethical*) decision. Seen from the normality of a world the *phantasma* puzzles and intrigues, it is non-veridical and ceases the fluency of signification, hence the gibberish and stuttering between Theaetetus and the Stranger in Plato's dialogue, every time they try to address this 'slippery' subject.

The main problem with Plato's notion of *phantasma* (and for extension, with Badiou's *truth* and Lezama Lima's *image*) is that although it 'links' two very separate and dissimilar points, it maintains the idea of similarity and resemblance between them. In the *eikon*, the image-copy looks like its model, it respects its proportions. The *phantasma* claims to look like its model but in fact, it does not and, if seen adequately, it even looks completely different. The *phantasma* proposes a unique image, one that is its own referent, 'una imagen que se sabe imagen' (Lezama Lima 1977: 152) and not a copy. It creates the dissimilar via the similar. However, just like the notions of *truth* in Badiou and *image* in Lezama, it demands the participation of a faithful subject, it incorporates an inhabitant's point of view into its own mechanism. José Lezama Lima reiterates the idea of a nexus between image and subject when he affirms that 'ninguna aventura, ningún deseo donde el hombre ha intentado vencer una resistencia, ha dejado de partir de una semejanza y de una imagen; él siempre se ha sentido como un cuerpo que se sabe imagen' (Lezama Lima 1977: 153).

The idea of 'a body that recognises itself as image' not only makes reference to an individual or physical body but also to the body of the poem, which is described by Lezama as 'el más cambiante instrumento de aprehensión', 'un cuerpo de la más permanente resistencia' (OC 2: 178). The poem is a body that instead of resisting time, presents itself as time made substance (OC 2: 179). The concurrence of poem, poetry, image and metaphor form a body that is 'una de las más poderosas redes que el hombre posee para atrapar lo fugaz y para el animismo de lo inerte' (OC2: 179). The notion of body is also present in Alain Badiou and it is strongly connected to the ideas of subject and truth, discussed previously. For Badiou, 'a body is the bearer of the subjective appearance of a truth' (2009: 241), it is what makes a subject appear in a world, to be seen. This 'body' has nothing to do with any organic status (Badiou 2009: 242), on the contrary, it is the bearer of a subjective formalism and it is completely

dependent on the occurrence of an event because without it, there is no truth and consequently, neither a subject nor a body for this subject to appear.

It is evident that for both Badiou and Lezama Lima appearance plays an important part in the development of their own systems. In the case of Badiou, a body makes a subject appear in a world; in the case of Lezama, the poem is a body that recognises itself as image, 'una de las más poderosas redes que el hombre posee para atrapar lo fugaz y para el animismo de lo inerte' (Lezama Lima 1977: 179). This is one of the reasons why the Platonic concept of *phantasma* plays such a fundamental role in the understanding of the poetic system developed by José Lezama Lima. It even helps to illustrate the mechanism behind Badiou's truth procedures. The *phantasma* (a cause of ambiguity and uncertainty for Theaetetus and the Stranger) is, in this case, a notion that helps to specify and clarify the dynamics that lie behind José Lezama Lima's poetic system. The familiarity and ordinariness of a situation are interrupted by the appearance of a forced language, fragments built with elements from the situation but whose signification is enigmatic, hermetic and non-veridical from 'an adequate point of view' (Plato). A subject then decides to intervene and separate such elements or forced names from the rest of the situation, attributing to them a referential point that lies beyond the veracity of the world that he/she inhabits. This referential point (a truth), not being veridical (it cannot be defined or explained in terms of the situation), is also indiscernible and undecidable: not only can it not be discerned by the inhabitants of the situation, but its own existence cannot be decided, proved, or verified. A faithful subject relies only on ethics, on making a decision and accepting that the forced statements that are forced in a world are veridical but only within the indiscernible extension to which they belong, the truth that gathers them together. Nonetheless, a faithful subject also believes that those new elements or statements can be potentially veridical within the situation that he/she inhabits,

that a truth 'will have been possible', but only if the point of view of the situation is completely modified from adequacy to inadequacy, from a favourable one to an unfavourable one:

This process gives the subject an additional role which is actually a crucial calling for Badiou's sustained commitment to classical logic, decisionism, dialectic and the law of the excluded middle. For him, as regards the truth of an event through the fidelity of a subject, contra-Derrida, any degree of undecidability is intolerable up to the point that he now defines the subject on terms of its ability to decide: 'that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of the indiscernible. Or, that which forces a veracity...' (Watkins 2017: 232)

For Lezama Lima a subject also forces a veracity within the situation and the *ethos* of poetry demands a response, a decision. When confronted with the indiscernible, with the already mentioned example of a 'cangrejo con un lazo azul que lo guarda en la maleta' (Lezama Lima 1977: 821), instead of trying to understand it or make sense of it ('el afán de cabalgar la frase'), a subject should try be faithful to its truth ('mantenerla cubierta con la presión de las rodillas'). Only then, the subject is able to open a new universe of possibilities in a world, a new *potens* and the undecidable, the impossible ('el asombro, primero, de poder ascender a otra región'), becomes possible, veridical. Intervention is the process through which a subject forces a truth to be veridical within a situation (Badiou), it is the 'unfavourable point of view' that must be assumed in order to have access to the *phantasma* (Plato); it is also the *ethos* necessary for the verification of the *sobreabundancia* and *sobrenaturalidad* of poetry (Lezama):

Pero el hombre no sólo germina sino también elige. Yo subrayaría la semejanza entre esos dos hechos que son para mí igualmente misteriosos, pues al elegir damos comienzo a un nuevo germen, solo que como está en más directa relación con el hombre, le llamaremos

acto. (...) Es un acto que se produce y una elección que se verifica a contracifra en la sobrenaturaleza. Una respuesta a una pregunta que no se puede formular, que ondula en la infinitud. (OC 2: 1212)

A response to a question that cannot be formulated, not an answer but an act, a reaction, a decision to be made. In his novel *Paradiso* (published for the first time in 1966), Lezama Lima illustrates this ethos of poetry with the story of Elektra, in Chapter XIX.<sup>40</sup> When she realised that she had given birth to a monster, she knew that the new-born was crying because it was hungry. Elektra did not hesitate and offered her breast to this unexpected being, mixing as a result milk with blood. The baby monster needed to be fed and her disconcert did not overcome her duty. The greatness of men, concludes Foción, consist in being able to assimilate the unknown: 'Asimilar en la profundidad es dar respuesta' (Lezama Lima 2000: 403). A faithful subject assimilates the indiscernibility and undecidability of a truth.

#### Badiou, Plato and Lezama Lima: truth, *phantasma* and image

For Badiou, a truth gathers together the statements of a forced language. For Plato, a *phantasma* is a conjunction of elements which, seen from the right point of view, are in fact completely asymmetrical. For Lezama Lima, the fragmented progression of metaphor flows towards the *potens* of the image. This relationship between a process of fragmentation and another one of amalgamation is, in these three cases, not only a theoretical proposal but also one that has repercussions in a world, in a situation. *Truth*, *phantasma* and *image* go beyond a mere abstract or idealistic proposition; they appear, and they manifest themselves in a

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<sup>40</sup> This is the famous chapter that has been the cause of much controversy due to its clear reference to the topic of homosexuality.

situation. It has been mentioned that for Badiou, a subject forces a veracity in a world, a truth changes the structure of a situation and introduces a diagonal, a cut in thinking. Whether it is politics, science, art or love, each one of these truth procedures can potentially cause a disruption in the 'normality' of a world. In the case of Plato, the *phantasma* appears to a subject in a situation, it introduces a new visibility and a puzzling game of references where the non-being becomes being. Theaetetus and the Stranger discuss, in the *Sophist*, the example of big statues and other images that appear to be what they are not, images like reflections and shadows.

In the poetics of José Lezama Lima, both metaphor and image find their substantiality and materiality within the body of the poem, a 'sign' and a 'testimony' which 'can be transmitted like the fire' (OC 2: 810). However, the image also manifests in a specific situation, it appears in a world, which is why Lezama Lima introduces the concepts of *eras imaginarias*, *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito*. As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, an *era imaginaria* is not the simple manifestation of an image in a particular time or the presentation in history of the causality of metaphor (OC 2: 832-833), it is also time itself in substance. An *era imaginaria* requires firstly, the passing of time, 'hundreds or even thousands of years' and secondly, it needs the exceptionality of a situation and its subsequent 'capture' by the potentiality of the image. The different *eras imaginarias* that Lezama Lima numbers in his essay 'A partir de la poesía' (OC 2: 835-840) fulfil both of these requirements, whether it is the 'filogeneratriz' era of the Chichimecans, Idumeans and Scytheans, the culture of death of the Egyptians, the rituals to Orpheus, the age of the king as metaphor or the Catholic notions of charity and resurrection, they all have survived the passing of time and they have been fixed by the *potens* of the image, the mark of a new causality. The concepts of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito*, introduced by Lezama Lima in his essays on poetry, particularly in 'Las imágenes posibles' and

‘La dignidad de la poesía’, are also examples of the possibility for the image, and for poetry, to appear and manifest in a world. Matthew’s sentence ‘Siego donde no sembré y recojo donde no esparcí’ or the pagodas of the Chinese city of Tsien Chen Fu are some of the *vivencias oblicuas* that Lezama Lima cites in his texts (OC 2: 766, 815-816), and they encapsulate the thinking of a metaphorical link between the possibilities of a world and the impossibilities of another one, between the givenness of a situation and the indiscernibility of a generic extension. The idea that ‘el hombre y los pueblos pueden alcanzar su vivir de metáfora y la imagen, mantenida por la vivencia oblicua’ (OC 2: 159), is a direct reference to the tangibility of the truth of poetry, to the image and to its materiality and potential accessibility. The counterpart to a *vivencia oblicua*, what Lezama Lima has named *súbito*, is the revelation in a world of a linkage where the possible acts on the impossible, an instant where all the potential of a different causality is laid bare for a subject to be faithful to. It is this subject, the ‘hombre’ to whom Lezama Lima appeals constantly in his essays, the one who would be capable of forcing the veracity of a truth in a world:

Ese reobrar del acto sobre el germen engendra un ser causal, nutrido con los inmensos recursos de la vivencia oblicua y un súbito, que hacen la extensión creadora, dándole un árbol a esa extensión, haciendo del árbol el uno, el *esse sustancialis*, y aquí comienza la nueva fiesta de la poesía, el *potens*, el posible en la infinitud. Es decir, el hombre puede prolongar su acto hasta llevar su ser causal a la infinitud, por medio de un doble, que es la poesía. (OC: 817)

This passage, which has been cited and discussed before in Chapter II, shows that the veracity of the image in a situation is possible. The resources of *vivencia oblicua* and *súbito* generate not only an ‘extension’, a site for poetry to appear, but they also bring the presence of an



object, a body, a tree, an *esse sustancialis* whose oneness and completeness is necessary for poetry to be thought and for the image to be seen, to be veridical. This is what Alain Badiou intended to demonstrate with his second book on *Being and Event, Logics of Worlds* (2009), where he addressed the question of existence, the appearance of a beings in a particular world or 'the logic of the localization for the being-there of any being whatever' (Badiou 2009: 62). It is also one of the most important consequences of José Lezama Lima's poetic system, the idea that the image is more than merely a theoretical proposal, that it can appear and manifest in a specific situation. All of his essays and even his poetry and novels, are full of references and examples taken from the 'real world' which are aimed at demonstrating the perceptibility of the image and the effects that the causality and unconditionality of poetry have in a determinate situation: from Greece and Egypt to Latin America and China, from Roger Bacon to José Martí, from the behaviour of living organisms to the rituals of death in different cultures. Even *Paradiso*, considered by many as Lezama Lima's most important work, and *Oppiario Licario*, its posthumously published sequel, can be seen as an account about the trajectory of the image, and of poetry, through the life not only of José Cemí, the main character, but also of José Lezama Lima himself.

What all these examples show is that the *potens* of the image, like that of the *phantasma* or of a truth, resides in being a vector of *an-other* veracity, of a poetic connection between elements that, from the perspective of the situation, have no relation at all. One passage from *Paradiso* illustrates this last idea perfectly:

El libro voluntariamente muy abierto, sonando la cola aún olorosa del lomo, para ofrecerse en un plano extendido, y el dedo índice del padre de José Cemí, apuntando dos láminas en pequeños cuadrados, a derecha e izquierda de la página, abajo del grabado dos rótulos: el

bachiller y el amolador. (...) La ávida curiosidad adelantaba el tiempo de precisión de los grabados y José Cemí detuvo con su apresurada inquietud el índice en el grabado del amolador, al tiempo que oía a su padre decir: el bachiller. De tal manera, que por una irregular acomodación de gesto y voz, creyó que el bachiller era el amolador, y el amolador el bachiller. Así cuando días más tarde su padre le dijo: —¿Cuando tengas más años querrás ser bachiller? ¿Qué es un bachiller?—. Contestaba con la seguridad de quien ha comprobado sus visiones. —Un bachiller es una rueda que lanza chispas, que a medida que la rueda va alcanzando más velocidad, las chispas se multiplican hasta aclarar la noche—. Como quiera que en ese momento su padre no podía precisar el trueque de los grabados en relación con la voz que explicaba, se extrañó del raro don metafórico de su hijo. De su manera profética y simbólica de entender los oficios. (Lezama Lima 2000: 267)

From the point of view of the situation, José Cemí's definition is a confusion, a misunderstanding, an error. From the point of view of the subject, it is a 'metaphoric gift', another form ('prophetic and symbolic') of understanding, a different and anonymous causality. Metaphor acts as a formula, an operation that links A to B not by their resemblance or common elements but by their participation in a truth which in the case of Lezama Lima, is the truth of the *contrasentido* of the image. A faithful subject accepts this *contrasentido* without questioning its meaning, its provenance or even its existence, since a subject's only duty is to respond and to force the veracity of the indiscernible, of a 'rueda que lanza chispas, que a medida que la rueda va alcanzando más velocidad, las chispas se multiplican hasta aclarar la noche.'

In the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, the generic procedure of truths takes place between the progression of metaphor (forcing language) and the regression of the image (an indiscernible truth that gathers fragments). The image is the promise of a *contrasentido* without which the ascension of metaphor 'no puede realizar la permanencia de sus fiestas'

(OC 2: 822). Without the descension of the image, the forced metaphoric language of poetry, being non-veridical within the situation, runs the risk of being nothing more than *non-sense*, empty nomination. A subject, being the 'finite local configuration of a generic procedure' (Badiou 2006: 522), intervenes and separates those forced elements from the rest of the language of the world, confirming the possibility of *an-other* veracity (or in the case of Lezama Lima, another causality) than that of the situation itself. A faithful subject acts as an intermediary between the indiscernible and the veridical, between a truth and a circumstance. For Lezama Lima, a faithful subject is the one who responds, like Elektra did, to the demands of a monster, the '*monstruosillo*' of poetry, a response that will open the possibility for the tangibility of the image and its manifestation in history, in *eras imaginarias*.

To infinity, and beyond: what is the image an image of?

The descendant movement from image to metaphor, from its indiscernibility to its manifestation in a world, via the faithfulness of a subject, also raises the question of a counterpart, of an ascendance not only from metaphor to image but also from image to something else; in other words, within the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, what is the notion of image an image of? Is there anything else beyond the dynamic between the progression of metaphor and the regression of the image? Is there an Image of images? Lezama Lima himself makes an explicit reference to this issue:

'Y como la semejanza a una Forma esencial es infinita, paradójicamente, es la imagen el único testimonio de esa semejanza que así justifica su voracidad de Forma, su penetración, la única posible, en el reverso que se fija.' (OC 2: 153)

These few lines, which have been mentioned and discussed in the previous chapter, reveal the real paradox that underlies the very nature of the image: for Lezama Lima, the image is an image of an *infinite resemblance*, its *only* possible testimony. The referent of the image, its own paradigm or model, lies in a place that is always further away, reachable only by an infinite resemblance, by testimony, by faithfulness. The logic behind Lezama Lima's assertion about the image is complex and at the same time, revealing. It affirms that by being the testimony of an infinite resemblance, the image assumes the 'voracity of a Form', the appearance of an Idea. How does the image do this? How is it possible to lose the referent, the paradigm, the guarantee of sense, and at the same time, maintain the idea of its resemblance, of its likeness and appearance? The use of the word 'Form', by Lezama Lima, might be a giveaway, since it inevitably brings Plato to the discussion. The solution to the paradox lies with the *phantasma*, an image that uses as a referent the Idea of the Other, of a non-being; an image that affirms that it resembles *an-other*, the infinite and slippery paradigm. This is the reason why Lezama Lima recognises in the image the voracity of a Form, the same nature of an Idea (the only possible access to 'el reverso que se fija'). The referent, to which the image is supposed to resemble and be an image of, is too far away to be reached, it is infinite and multiple. However, Lezama Lima does not give up and he finds a way out of the paradox: the referent of the image becomes resemblance itself, the image is the manifestation of infinite resemblance and it does it by being a *phantasma* and not an *eikon*, by resembling always something else, *an-other* being. Unlike the *eikon*, which is only a faithful copy of a model, the *phantasma*, by being the appearance of *an-other*, maintains the potentiality of an Idea, it not only resembles but it also creates, it maintains the *potens* and the 'voracity of a Form'. In the end, what gathers together the fragments of metaphor is infinite resemblance, the true voracity of the image, a testimony.

The relationship between infinity, resemblance and the Platonic Idea of the Other is explored by Alain Badiou in all of his three books on *Being and Event*. As has been mentioned in the first chapter, Badiou's whole philosophical project starts with the affirmations that 'being is multiplicity' and that consequently, 'the one is not'. A multiple cannot be a unity because if it were, it would be 'one multiple' and it would succumb therefore to the domain of 'the one'. In order to avoid the idea of the one when it comes to multiplicity, it is necessary to recognise the infinity of multiplicity and to be more precise, that there are 'some infinite multiples' (Badiou 2006: 145). The problem is that, as Badiou points out (2006: 145), there is no guarantee that a concept of 'infinite multiples' can be recognised, accessed, simply because the legitimisation of a definition of infinite multiples would imply that these multiples are different from others and therefore, that they conform a unity for thought, a *one*. There cannot be a halting point, 'what must be expected instead is that there be infinite multiples which can be differentiated from each other to *infinity*' (Badiou 2006: 145). However, such *differentiation* within infinite multiplicity means not only that these multiples are different, but also that they are similar, since they share the characteristic of not being 'the last one': they all promise the advent of an-other term, which is what the idea of infinity is based on. The rule by which it is possible to move from one multiple to the other fails to operate on the whole of the multiple, a failure that, ironically, reveals the multiple's real infinity (Badiou 2006: 146). The cause for the failure of the rule, for the inexistence of a halting point within infinite multiplicity, has to lie somewhere else beyond the whole and the domain of the one, it is an element or a being (a multiple) that would be behind the infinite movement and progression of multiplicity but which also, if reached by this same movement, would stop it:

An infinite multiple is thus a presented multiple which is such that a rule of passage may be correlated to it, for which it is simultaneously the place of exercise and limit. *Infinity is the Other* on the basis of which there is —between the fixity of the already and the repetition of the still-more— a rule according to which the others are the same. (Badiou 2006: 147) (emphasis added)

The most important aspect that can be inferred from Badiou's take on infinity in *Being and Event* is that there is an element within it, which in this case receives the name of *Other*, that cannot be imagined or deduced from the rule because it is, literally, the exception to the rule. Infinity for Badiou cannot be thought or defined from a finite world, it is an 'ontological decision', an axiom that demands 'a pure courage of thought' and 'a voluntary incision into the —eternally defensible— mechanism of ontological finitism' (2006: 148). This is exactly the idea behind Badiou's notion of *truth procedures* (already mentioned and discussed here in this chapter) and his adaptation and interpretation of Cohen's mathematical mechanism of *forcing*. It is also the reason why Badiou talks about the intervention of a faithful subject, the point of an ethical decision.

When in an interview José Lezama Lima declares that 'definir es cenizar' (Lezama Lima 1971: 47), he is acknowledging, like Badiou does, that there is an element which is impossible to define from the point of view of the finite language of a situation. Any definition succumbs to the power of the One and infinite multiplicity is, thus, undefinable. The already cited statement that encapsulates the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, genera un posible actuando en la infinitud', and the aforementioned reference to the image as an 'infinite resemblance to a Form', repeat and reinforce the idea of an infinite point besides the impossibility of the image and the possibility of metaphor. Poetry, the 'possible' that results from 'the impossible' working on 'the possible', is itself an

‘acting on infinitude’, an attempt to name the unnameable through the operations of the poem. Only the convergence of metaphor and image can bring ‘la nueva fiesta de la poesía, el *potens*, el posible en la infinitud’, a new possibility where ‘el hombre puede prolongar su acto hasta llevar su ser causal a la infinitud, por medio de un doble, que es la poesía’ (OC: 817). Infinitude for Lezama Lima is not a transcendental entity or an abstract concept reachable only by meditation, pure thinking or with the assistance of a divine being. Infinitude is accessible via the ‘double of poetry’, via the operations of metaphor and the recollection of the image: the body of the poem. The Christian resonance of this latter sentence is not coincidence, since for Lezama Lima resurrection is ‘la más grande imagen que tal vez pueda existir’ (OC 2: 774).

The existence of a notion of infinitude within the poetic system of José Lezama Lima raises the question about the nature and role of such infinitude which, if indescribable, it seems at least to be circumscribable. Alain Badiou explores the paradox and possibility of an Idea of Ideas, of an Infinity of Infinities, in his book *L’Immanence des vérités*, the third and final part of his trilogy on *Being and Event*. There Badiou studies the ontological consequences that the mathematic notion of *class V* has for his philosophy. The universe *V* is ‘un lieu où se tiennent toutes les formes possibles de l’être-multiple (donc de l’être tout court), lieu de pensée constitué par tout ce qui vérifie les axiomes de ZFC et leurs conséquences’ (Badiou 2018: 98). *V* is the very place of thought, the source of all the possible forms of multiple-being, the class where all the mathematical formulations of set theory come from. *V*, which also receives the name of ‘the absolute’, is the cause and possibility of infinitude itself, it is not the place where all mathematical set constructions appear, but rather where they reappear (in retrospective) once they have already appeared in a specific world (Badiou 2018: 99). Needless to say that the absoluteness of *V* is inaccessible, unreachable, indiscernible and undecidable. Why?

Because it cannot be legitimised by all those multiple forms which  $V$  itself legitimises, it literally lies 'beyond all infinities'. However, and this is the aim of *L'Immanence des vérités*, if it is true that the absolute  $V$  cannot be defined and that it cannot subdue to the axioms which  $V$  itself 'houses', it is also true that it can be *approached*, that there exists an ascendant hierarchy of multiples which looms and advances towards  $V$  as close as it is possible. Although the details and technicalities that Badiou describes to prove that  $V$  can be approached, but not reached, are too complex to explain here in detail, it is important at least to sketch a general idea of the procedure.<sup>41</sup> Why? Because, as will be shown, there is an important link between Badiou's *absoluteness* of  $V$  and Lezama Lima's *infinite resemblance* of the image, which explains why the image for Lezama Lima is not an entity that is visible, obvious or that can be clearly identified within the poem.

The whole idea of approaching  $V$  is similar to the already discussed process of *forcing* and to the use of a generic extension, but this time Badiou focuses on infinities (especially on the so called 'big cardinals') and of course, on the inaccessible class  $V$ , the site of every known axiom of set theory and every possible theorem, operation or formula. Trying to reach  $V$  by using mathematical formulas or theory operations is futile, since any of these formulas or operations come themselves from  $V$  and in a sense, they have already been formulated and operated there.  $V$  is immense and even infinities of all sort and size belong to its domain:  $V$  is very big. Nonetheless, within the universe of big infinities and big cardinals, one infinity contains another infinity and the difference between one infinity and another can be, by the strange and obvious fact that they are infinite, very small. In other words, within the infinite universe of infinities, two infinities can be very similar and the properties of one are somehow

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<sup>41</sup> If interested, the reader can consult Suite S17 from *L'Immanence des Vérités*, where many of the main mathematical operations of the book are explained in detail by Badiou.



‘mirrored’ by the properties of the other one. If some of these infinities could be positioned in an ascendant order, as in fact some theorems suggest, one containing the other, then it would be possible to approach, infinitely, the unapproachable class  $V$  and to have access, by assuming the ascendant order of resemblances between infinities, to some of its properties:

Dans  $V$ , si deux fonctions diffèrent ne serait-ce que pour un seul  $x$ , elles sont absolument différentes. Dans la démarche d’approximation, qui est toujours imposée par la particularité de la situation dans laquelle on pense et agit, on va négliger les très petites différences que l’absolu contient et dissimule à la fois, et construire une approximation qui sera d’autant plus solide que l’ultrafiltre dont nous disposons sera puissant. On manipulera alors comme étant «le mêmes» des fonctions qui, peut-être, diffèrent légèrement dans l’absolu, mais nous avons la conviction (...) ou même la certitude (...) que la considération de leur presque-être-identique valide en fait les mêmes formules (les mêmes orientations, ou mots d’ordre) que leur être-identique supposé absolu. (Badiou 2018: 399)

It is not identity but resemblance that promises the possibility of approaching  $V$ . A total identity is only possible if  $V = V$ , which is what the Platonic *eikon* claims to be. On the contrary, the infinite that approaches  $V$  makes a double and paradoxical claim: it resembles  $V$  but at the same time, it is completely different to it (Badiou 2018: 413-414), like the *phantasma*, it is, and it is not (for the world of set theory, which is the world of ontology for Badiou, if two sets differ by only one element, then they differ completely). Badiou describes the absolute  $V$  as a ‘consistent inconsistency’ (2018: 473), not the transcendent and abstract concept of the impossible (God, for example) but the site of a possible impossibility, a lexicon that sounds more and more Lezarian. What prompted in Badiou his philosophical quest for  $V$  was the universal and absolute character of truths, the question of the plausible existence of a Truth

of truths. However, by appealing to the mathematics of infinities (cardinals  $k$  and *big cardinals*, for example) and their operations on  $V$ , Badiou discards that latter possibility and places instead the infinite resemblance of infinities. A truth (and there is an infinity of them) is that multiplicity that approaches  $V$ , the absolute, and which also manifests itself in a world, in a situation, thanks to the intervention of a faithful subject. While truths *are*, the event *is not*, it only happens and although it is the event itself which prompts the emergence of truths, it is thanks to the intervention and fidelity of a subject, and therefore to the being of truths, that it is possible to know that an event has taken place or, in Badiouian terms, that 'it will have taken place'.

José Lezama Lima says in one of his essays that 'solamente de la traición a una imagen es de lo que se nos puede pedir cuenta y rendimiento' (OC 2: 153). However, to betrayal, Alain Badiou also adds faithfulness, because it is only for being faithful (or unfaithful) to a truth that a subject can be accountable. The language used by Badiou to talk about the absoluteness of truths and the one used by Lezama Lima to talk about the voracity of the image coincide in many points, not only when Lezama defines the image as the testimony of 'an infinite resemblance to an essential Form', but also when he recognises the ethical role that it plays for a subject, for his or her accountability. At the beginning of 'Las imágenes posibles' (OC 2: 152-153), Lezama Lima describes the image as an absolute, as 'la imagen que se sabe imagen', as an entity inseparable from the notion of resemblance: 'la semejanza de una imagen y la imagen de una semejanza, unen a la semejanza con la imagen, como el fuego y la franja de sus colores.' Further ahead in the same essay (OC 2: 180), Lezama Lima reaffirms the existence of a 'flux' that goes towards the 'poetic substance', 'hacia un ente del no ser (...) que puede ser participado y mantenido en imágenes.' The idea of participation by the image in non-being, in a poetic substance, inevitably recalls the Platonic concept of *participation*

(participation in the world of Ideas), a concept that is also explored by Badiou in *L'Immanence des vérités*. According to Badiou (2018: 534-535), it is possible to find in Plato an anticipation of his own theory about the hierarchy of infinities towards the absolute. When in the *Sophist*, Plato talks about the 'supreme genres' (*being*, the *same*, *movement* and *rest*) and then decides to add a fifth genre, the idea of *difference*, he not only breaks with the tradition of his master Parmenides but also anticipates the absoluteness of the Other, the existence of another of being, namely, non-being. The Idea of the Other traverses all other Ideas and at the same time introduces the possibility of movement within them, since every single Idea participates in the Other. Non-being is not just the opposite of being anymore, it is not mere negation but affirmation, possibility. However, the place from where the Platonic Ideas and supreme genres acquire their 'ideality' cannot be, for this very reason, of the same nature as those ideas and genres themselves, which is exactly what Badiou finds in one famous passage from the *Republic*: 'the Good is not being, but reaches even farther beyond it in rank and power' (Plato 2013b: 95). This Idea of the Good, which paradoxically is not an Idea in itself, Badiou renames it as the Idea of the True (2018: 535), and it coincides with the 'poetic substance' aforementioned by Lezama Lima, the *non-being* that can be 'participated and preserved in images'.<sup>42</sup>

For Plato, that place of absoluteness is the Idea of the Good, a point beyond being and which can be participated but not defined or reached. For Badiou, the absolute is the class V, a place where all possible forms of being and all truths are validated and organised, hierarchically (any bigger infinity includes all the previous smaller ones) and retrospectively, but none assuming the total identification and supremacy of the absolute. For Lezama Lima, the

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<sup>42</sup> The reference to images and therefore, to visibility, can be easily found in this passage from the *Republic* (2013b: 91-93) where Plato compares the Idea of the Good to the sunlight that makes all things visible.

absolute is the point of 'infinite resemblance to a Form', a 'poetic substance' and a being of non-being ('un ente del no ser'). It is also the 'substance of the inexistent' that poetry makes gravitate (OC 2: 788), and the image, like a *truth* or a *phantasma*, is a threshold standing between the subject and the unknown (OC 2: 788), a *posibiliter* that also has its gravitation in that *substance of the inexistent* (OC 2: 789). The place of the absolute in José Lezama Lima's poetic system, whether it is called a 'poetic substance', 'an essential Form', 'substance of the inexistent', 'ente del no ser' or just 'infinite' ('...un posible actuando en la infinitud'), is a place that can only be approached, resembled, through the *potens* of the image. The image for Lezama Lima is the only possible testimony and access to an infinite resemblance, the participation and hierarchy of infinities (cardinals), by resemblance, towards the absolute and only approachable place of V. The absolute V, for Badiou, is the place where all possible forms of being 'reappear', in the sense that if they appear in a specific situation, it is only because they have already, and retrospectively, appeared in V. 'C'est un peu', says Badiou, 'comme si l'absolu ne concernait pas la naissance des formes d'être, mais uniquement leur résurrection' (2018: 61), a statement that explains why José Lezama Lima thinks that resurrection is 'la más grande imagen que tal vez pueda existir' (OC 2: 774). What takes the place of the absolute V in poetry? The infinity of language, the power of language which the poem cannot name: 'Let us say that language as infinite power articulated onto presence is precisely the unnameable of poetry. The linguistic infinity is the powerlessness immanent to the power effect of the poem' (Badiou 2014: 55).

Resurrection is one of the most important ideas for Lezama Lima and it is present throughout his work. He describes it as 'la más grande imagen que tal vez pueda existir' (1977: 774), 'la mayor exigencia conocida hecha a la imaginación del hombre' (1977: 789), and as poetry's 'última gran dimensión' (1977: 819). Resurrection for Lezama Lima is also strongly connected

to his own notion of image and to the role of the poet within his poetic system, since the image 'extrae del enigma una vislumbre, con cuyo rayo podemos penetrar, o al menos vivir en la espera de la resurrección' (1977: 848), and the poet is 'el ser causal para la resurrección' (1977: 819-820). Resurrection represents the overcoming of the paradox of the non-being of being, the impossible possible of poetry, which is why it is described by Lezama Lima as the 'greatest image to exist'. Ben A. Heller makes an important remark about this:

The link between faith and resurrection is complex, in that faith invokes a fundamental dichotomy between the visible and the invisible worlds, separated by a gap or wound (death) that resurrection claims to suture. This dichotomy operates in Paul's further definition of faith -one that Lezama quotes in his poetic system- as the 'sustancia de lo no existente' (...). Only through this paradoxical union of substance and nonsubstance can the Resurrection take place, reuniting the spirit (the invisible) with the body (the visible). (Heller 1997: 136)

Resurrection then gives substance to the inexistent, it represents a bridge between the visible and the invisible, between substance and nonsubstance. However, it is important to keep in mind that although resurrection is the greatest image of all, it still remains an image, and it is as image that it finds its own potentiality. The image is the maximum *potents* of poetry, of which the poet is the guardian, just as Paul is of resurrection.

Resurrection establishes an interesting connection between Lezama Lima's work and Alain Badiou's, for whom Paul is also a fundamental figure. In his book *Logics of Worlds* (2009), Badiou defines *resurrection* as one of the four possible destinations of the subject (the other ones being *production*, *denial*, and *occultation*). For Badiou, resurrection 'reactivates a subject in another logic of its appearing-in-truth' and 'generates the context for a new event, a new

trace, a new body' (2009: 65). He gives the example of Spartacus, whose fight against slavery resurfaced several times in history with different manifestations: Toussaint-Louverture in Santo Domingo (Haiti) or the communist insurgents of 1919, who called themselves 'Spartakists' (Badiou 2009: 64). Resurrection of Badiou is not a causal repetition of the same event, it is rather the reactivation of a subject, of a second fidelity to an event that did not exist before: 'resurrection of the inexistent' (Badiou 2009: 466), like in Lezama Lima. It is not surprising that within the Christian world, the apostle Paul represents, for both Badiou and Lezama Lima, the maximum exponent of a new world, the generator of the context for a new event, someone whose fidelity to such event (resurrection) made of him an innovator, a pioneer. For Lezama Lima, Paul goes beyond all synthesis between East and West, he is the one who is responsible for the 'sustancia de lo inexistente', a completely new idea for the world of his time: 'San Pablo intuye que hay que ir más allá de esa síntesis, y lanza su sustancia de lo inexistente, inconcebible para el mundo griego' (Lezama Lima 1977: 775). Badiou, who dedicated a whole book to the figure of Paul (Badiou 2003), seems to agree with Lezama Lima, because the concept of resurrection in Paul 'suspends differences for the benefit of a radical universality, (...) it is address to all without exception. This is precisely what, in terms of the Roman world, constitutes a staggering innovation' (Badiou 2003: 74). Paul's universalism is the suspension of all synthesis, the image of a resurrection that substantiates the inexistent.

The poet, like Paul, 'es el primero que intuye la cobarde cercanía de la síntesis, que hay que abandonarse al nuevo corpúsculo de irradiaciones' (Lezama Lima 1977: 775). The poet is, thus, the 'engendrador de lo posible, el rotador de la unanimidad hacia la sustancia de lo inexistente' (OC 2: 788), the faithful subject whose intervention opens not only the possibility and the visibility of the image but also the truth that comes with it. The role of the poem within this dynamic is fundamental for Lezama Lima, since the poem acts as a being ('un ser

sustantivo') that makes visible, although momentarily, 'una terrible fluencia, limitada entre el eco que se precisa y una coincidencia en el no ser' (OC 2: 146-147). The poem is a materialised being, a tangible substance whose aim is to make visible the 'terrible fluency' that runs between precision and non-being, between metaphor and image. The poem under Lezama Lima's view coincides with what Alain Badiou calls an '*ouvre*' (a work of art), a concept that he also introduces in his book *L'Immanence des Vérités*. For Badiou, an *ouvre* is a visible part of a truth procedure, 'un fragment fini, mais dynamique d'une telle procédure' (Badiou 2018: 515). An *ouvre*, like a poem for Lezama Lima, is a finite element that belongs to the situation, that has a substance and a materiality composed of 'precise' and well-defined elements, but which also carries the mark of non-being (an event), of the absoluteness of a truth, of something that escapes the materiality of its elements. On one hand, an *ouvre* belongs to the situation, it can be inscribed by the language of the world in which it appears. On the other hand, an *ouvre* is 'indexed', it carries the mark of infinity and there is always an element in it that is indiscernible, which cannot be covered by the totality and language of the situation (the *index*). This double nature explains the Lezamian 'terrible fluency' of the poem, the double mark of metaphor, a forced inscription that uses the precise language of the situation, and of the image, the indiscernible referent of the advances of metaphor and the *index* of the absolute. In addition, this double nature also explains the familiarity and perplexity that causes the *phantasma* in Theaetetus and the Stranger, the possibility of a mundane appearance of non-being.

It has been mentioned before, at the beginning of this chapter, that the whole of the poetic system proposed by José Lezama Lima, and which gravitates around the notions of image and metaphor, could be reduced to a single sentence: 'Lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'. Taking into account what has been discussed

until now, that same sentence can be reformulated as follows: the impossible, the generic truth of the image, the indiscernible referent of a new language, works on a given situation, the possible, forcing new metaphoric statements that are composed of elements from the situation itself. As a result of this operation a new possible is 'engendered', poetry, a surplus (*sobreabundancia*) that is directed towards infinitude ('un posible actuando en la infinitud'), and which is no other than the inaccessible place of the Badiouian absolute, 'substancia de lo inexistente', the 'essential Form' that can only be approached by the 'infinite resemblance' of the image.

The generic language that is forced into the situation is senseless from the point of view of an inhabitant of the situation, but not from the point of view of an inhabitant of the generic extension from which such forced language comes. A faithful subject is an inhabitant of the situation who assumes the point of view of the indiscernible generic extension. It is thanks to the intervention of a faithful subject that a truth procedure can be effective in a situation, introducing a new causality within the normality and functionality of a world. This is the dynamic behind Badiou's truth procedures and it is also the dynamic behind the poetic system of José Lezama Lima. In 'Las imágenes posibles', after having introduced and discussed the story of Iphigenia and Orestes in relation to poetry, Lezama Lima concludes: 'Lleva la metáfora su carta oscura, desconocedora de los secretos del mensajero, reconocible tan solo en su antifaz por la bujía momentánea de la imagen' (Lezama Lima 1977: 157). Metaphor, instead of being a rhetoric figure of signification, 'carries over' (*meta-pherein*) an obscure letter, it forces an obscure language whose only referent, the secrets of its messenger, can only be recognisable by the 'momentaneous spark of the image', by a faithful subject who intervenes and recognises the appearance of a truth.



The extension where the operations of the image and metaphor take place is the poem, the site that bears the marks and traces not only of a truth, but also of an evanescent event, of that which 'will have triggered' that same truth. 'Es posible la poesía en el poema' (OC 2: 178), says Lezama Lima, and Alain Badiou seems to agree with him when he defines poetry as 'the poeticization of *what* comes to pass', and the poem as 'the place *where* it comes to pass, the pass of thought' (Badiou 2005: 29). The poem is a collection of traces, fragments of a forced language that have been identified and collected by the intervention of a faithful subject. The hermeticism of the poem, especially in the case of José Lezama Lima, comes from the fact that its language is a language that has been forced into the situation and, although it is constructed with elements from the situation itself, its referent lies in an indiscernible extension, it is non-veridical for an inhabitant of the situation. The poem, as Badiou affirms, is a 'thing of language' (2014: 24), and the case of José Lezama Lima is, by no means, an exception to the rule. The poetic system of Lezama Lima assumes poetry as a generic procedure, as a translation (in its double meaning of 'movement' and 'interpretation') of one language (generic, forced) into another (veridical, situated). The role of metaphor in Lezama Lima's poetic system is to force a language, to introduce a new causality within the normality and apparent efficacy of everyday language. However, as Lezama Lima himself remarks, the advances of metaphor need to receive the regression of the image, their *contrasentido*, or otherwise 'aquella fantasía en el sentido platónico no puede realizar la permanencia de sus fiestas' (OC 2: 822). The Lezamian image gathers together the metaphoric fragments of a poem and presents them with a referent, with signification, with a *contrasentido*. The problem is that because the nature of the Lezamian image coincides in this procedure with that of a Badiouian truth, it means that the image is also indiscernible, it needs the intervention of a faithful subject (the unfavourable point of view of the Platonic *phantasma*)

to be seen, to 'descend'. The image is a decision to be made, the *ethos* of poetry, its truth and like any other truth, it responds to a disappearing event, a statement that leads, inevitably, to the formulation of one fundamental question for the current research: What is, in the case of José Lezama Lima, this event that 'will have triggered' a truth? And even more, what is exactly that truth that lies behind the poetic system and the work of that subject known as José Lezama Lima?

The post-evental truth, to which Lezama Lima maintains himself faithful from the very beginning of his writing, is the recognition ('re-conocimiento', to use a Lezamian favourite) of the *image*, of the *potens* of the *imago* and more specifically, of an image that is not a mere copy or representation of a model, an *eikon*. He recognises in the notion of *image* a diagonal that opens a new universe or possibilities not only for poetry, but, as his notion of 'eras imaginarias' shows it, for the situation itself. The post-evental truth that José Lezama Lima declares is the appearance of the image as *phantasma*, an image that brings into presence not an object but an Idea, the 'testimony of an infinite resemblance to an essential Form'. The concept of image is for Lezama Lima part of a forced language within the situation, and his poetic system is an attempt to give account of a whole truth procedure attached to it, a poetic one. He intervenes and classifies forced elements in the situation that for him, belong to the procedure of an indiscernible truth, terms like *vivencia oblicua*, *súbito*, *incondicionado*, *sobreabundancia*, *contrasentido*, *eras imaginarias*, *acto primigenio*, *configuración de la bondad* or even *metaphor*, all of them mentioned and discussed in the previous chapter. The concepts of *image*, albeit its apparent familiarity, is a fundamental part of what Badiou calls the *fundamental law of the subject*:

If a statement of the subject-language is such that it will have been veridical for a situation in which a truth has occurred, this is because *a* term of the situation exists which both belongs to that truth (belongs to the generic part that *is* that truth) and maintains a particular relation with the names at stake in the statement. (Badiou 2006: 401)

*Image* is that term that belongs to both worlds, that has a very particular and essential relation with the other forced elements of the procedure, and which makes an indiscernible truth veridical for the situation. José Lezama Lima's radical intervention lies in taking the notion of image away from the *eikon* ('it is not imagination', says Lezama) and redirecting it towards the *phantasma*, infinite resemblance, impossible appearance of the absolute Other. When in his essay, 'Prosa de circunstancia para Mallarmé' (OC 2: 265), Lezama Lima introduces the distinction between *misterio* (a *contrasentido*, 'una sentencia poética tan inundada de sentido que se hace inapresable') and *sentido* (a secret, 'un sentido derivado de las asociaciones momentáneas'), and then declares 'Pero, ay, la poesía se alejó de un misterio para cascar un secreto, y lejos de buscar un alimento paradojal, casi monstruoso, se volvió idéntica, sobre sí, espejeante', he is recognising the necessity to take poetry away from sense (*sentido*) and back to its mystery (*contrasentido*), away from the *eikon* and back to the *phantasma*. The image is not a conglomeration of parts that form an interpretation, a visual representation or a faithful copy of a model, of an object. On the contrary, if an object can be defined as 'what disposes the multiple of being in relation to meaning or signification' (Badiou 2014: 16), then the Lezamian image 'de-objectifies', it disposes the multiple of being not in relation to sense ('sentido') —and not to 'non-sense' either—, but to a *contrasentido*. Lezama Lima himself knew that when it come to the relationship between image and resemblance, the referential promise of an object as paradigm and cause of that relationship was an impossible:

El hecho mismo de su aproximación indisoluble, en los textos, de imagen y semejanza, marca su poder discolo y cómo quedará siempre como la pregunta del inicio y de la despedida; pues cuanto más nos acerquemos a un objeto o a los recursos intocables del aire, derivaremos con más grotesca precisión que es un imposible, una ruptura sin nemósine de lo anterior. (OC 2: 152)

José Lezama Lima assumed the necessary and 'unfavourable point of view' required for the appearance of the *phantasma*, not the 'adequate perspective' defended by Theaetetus in the *Sophist* (Plato 1921: 335), where the *phantasma* is described as deception, trickery. In other words, Lezama Lima opted to be faithful to a post-evental truth that appeared as non-veridical within the situation, and his poetic system is an attempt to give veracity to a truth procedure, the gathering together of dispersed fragments forced into the situation. His intervention affirms the existence of a system in poetry, of a procedure, the introduction in poetry of a thinking, the thought of poetry. However, and Lezama Lima is very clear about this point:

El sistema poético no pretende tener ni aplicación ni inmediatez. No aclara, no oscurece, no se derivan de él obras, no hace novela, no hace poesía. Es, está, respira. Lo mismo repasa una superficie muy pulimentada, sigue en una ballena, pone huevos de tortuga en el espacio vacío. Lo que pretendo es un hechizamiento, una dilatación de la imagen hasta la línea del horizonte. (Lezama Lima, 1971: 58)

This research does not pretend to put into practice Lezama Lima's poetic system of use it as a tool of interpretation, as a hermeneutic key to his poetry. On the contrary, what this research does is to show that Lezama Lima's poetic system is an incursion into the enigma of poetry, into the fact that meaning is not a requirement for poetry. Lezama Lima's poetic

system shows how poetry operates, how poetry relies on the expansion of the image', on the expansion of an 'infinite resemblance': 'la imagen como un absoluto, la imagen que se sabe imagen, la imagen como la última de las historias posibles' (OC 2: 152).

This 'absoluteness' of the image mentioned by Lezama Lima, comes from the fact that it approaches the place of the absolute ('an essential Form') infinitely, by resemblance, assuming and sharing all the possibilities and characteristics of that which it resembles, just like the big cardinals share the features of the class V, according to Badiou. It is infinite resemblance what gives the image, according to Lezama Lima, a 'voracidad de Forma' (OC 2: 153), without being itself a Form. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this resemblance is infinite because there cannot be a total identification between image and absolute, between cardinals and V, since anything that appears does so because it has already appeared in the absolute, the place of 'resurrection'. The absolute is not The Referent, it is the Form of Forms which is not a Form, the Other that the *phantasma* presents in the form of the Same. This is why Lezama Lima describes the image as an absolute (OC 2: 152), as 'lo primero que llega' (OC 2: 154), as participation:

La imagen, al participar en el acto, entrega como una visibilidad momentánea, que sin ella, sin la imagen como único recurso al alcance del hombre, sería una desmesura impenetrable. De esa manera, el hombre se apodera de esa desmesura, la hace surgir y reincorpora una nueva desmesura. Toda *poiesis* es un acto de participación en esa desmesura, una participación del hombre en el espíritu universal, en el Espíritu Santo, en la madre universal. (OC 2: 1216).

The poem is the site where this participation occurs, where a truth procedure takes place, and the 'infinity of language' is the absolute that the poem cannot name, the unnameable of poetry (Badiou 2014:56). The image's infinite resemblance, its voracity, makes the impossible possible, it names the unnameable as Other, infinitely. There is no sense (*sentido*) in José Lezama Lima's poetry, there is only *contrasentido*. The causality and visible advances of metaphor of the poem, its 'forced language', are gathered by the *potens* of the image which, because of its indiscernibility, and maybe in Lezama Lima more than in any other poet, requires the intervention of a subject, an unfavourable point of view, an ethical decision: 'The choice that binds the subject to a truth is the choice of continuing to be: fidelity to the event, fidelity to the void' (Badiou 2005: 55). The poem is manifestation, materiality that 'can be transmitted like the fire' (OC 2: 810), an *oeuvre* whose *index* saves it from being a mere object of the situation. In the case of José Lezama Lima, this *index* is the testimony of the image, its trace, the promise of a referent for the progression of metaphor, the mark of a truth. Signification, in José Lezama Lima, is not veridical, the image is not visible within the poem or in the situation and it asks for the intervention of a subject to appear, to happen. The image is a decision, it happens always in the future anterior: Unlike Góngora's poetry, where complexity itself guards the key to interpretation, to an 'adequate point of view', and unlike the free association of surrealism, whose main objective is to avoid the emergence of sense, the poetry of José Lezama Lima is hermetic and enigmatic because it relies on the *contrasentido* of the image and not on the binary dynamic of sense/nonsense.

José Lezama Lima's statement, 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud' (OC 2: 849), which encapsulates his own poetic system, is strongly connected to his other statement about the 'voracity of the image': 'Y como la semejanza a una Forma esencial es infinita, paradójicamente, es la imagen el único testimonio de esa

semejanza que así justifica su voracidad de Forma' (OC 2: 153). The poetic system of José Lezama Lima oscillates between these two sentences, between the voracity of the image as infinite resemblance to the absolute and the progression of metaphor as a generic language that has been forced into a possible and veridical situation. Poetry, results from the convergence of these two extremes, it operates as a possible that acts on the infinitude of language, that unnameable Other that can only be approached, that can only be infinitely named by the supernumerary name of the image, the image as *phantasma*. The poem is an extension where all this procedure of a truth takes place:

The poem's aim is to find, for this void latent under the weight of the world, the supernumerary grace of a name. And the only norm of thought, that which the poem thinks, is to remain faithful to this name, even as the weight of being, which for a moment has been suspended, comes back, returns always. (Badiou 2014: 21)

The image is that supernumerary name that names the unnameable by resemblance to it, by naming it not as the Same but as the Other, infinitely. The image as *phantasma* moves away the attention from meaning, which relies on the reassurance of a referent (a paradigm in the case of the *eikon*) to resemblance itself, to a referent that appears always as an-other, causing an infinite movement of signification: *contrasentido*. In Lezama Lima the production of meaning, signification, depends on the regression of the image and not on a referent, on a paradigm, which explains the hermeticism of his poetry. Meaning is an act of faithfulness from a subject, an ethical decision. It is not that the poem lacks referentiality or even worse, that it is non-sense. In José Lezama Lima the referent is there, but as an-other, as *phantasma*, as remembrance.

## Recuerdo de lo semejante

Alain Badiou, as has been already mentioned in this chapter, has found in *Un coup de dés* an example (although not the only one) of confirmation of the veracity of Mallarmé's statement, 'the poetic act consists in suddenly seeing an idea fragment into a number of motifs equal in value, and in grouping them' (Badiou 2006: 405). This means that the indiscernible referential value of some of the forced elements of the statement (*idea* and *motifs*, for example) has been made veridical in the situation, thanks to the intervention of a faithful subject (in this case, Mallarmé, 'whatever this signifier designates'). In other words, *Un coup de dés* acts as a 'vector of relationships —discernible in the situation— between itself and, for example, those initially empty words 'idea' and 'motifs'. (...) The relation of forcing is here detained within the analysis of the text' (Badiou 2006: 405).

The question that must be asked at this point is, 'What poem, or poems, could assume in José Lezama Lima the role of a vector of relationships between itself and Lezama Lima's statement, 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'? Is there a poem where the idea of the image as 'testimony of infinite resemblance to an essential Form' is 'actually presented and no longer merely announced' (Badiou 2006: 405)? *Recuerdo de lo semejante* (2016: 583-596), one of José Lezama Lima's most intricate poems, included also in one of his most intricate poetry books, *Dador*, in 1960, 're-presents' and to a certain point, validates, the veracity of both statements within the situation, thanks to the intervention of a faithful subject, José Lezama Lima, 'whatever this signifier designates'. *Recuerdo de lo semejante* forces in the situation the possibilities of a truth, the truth of the image as *phantasma*, as *contrasentido*. The purpose with the discussion of this poem is to understand how the image operates in Lezama Lima's poetry, not only in his essays. Lezama



Lima's image is more than just a theoretical concept, it is an inherent characteristic of Lezama Lima's poetry and more importantly, of poetry in general.

The title of the poem, *Recuerdo de lo semejante*, introduces resemblance as absent, vanished, remembered. 'Lo semejante' is what shares the common factor of similitude, likeness, the immanent mark of the absolute present in every truth, it is the old Platonic notion of participation: 'lo semejante' is that which participates in resemblance. The first part of the poem confirms what the title only suggests:

¿Hay una total pluralidad en la semejanza?  
La diversidad multiplica con los siete martillos  
terminando por ladear la lámina regada  
por la luna con el tegumento de lo indistinto.  
Creer que la pluralidad se opone a la semejanza,  
es olvidar que todas las narices forman el olifante  
que convoca a los rinocerontes para la risotada  
crepuscular, la que traslada como Sísifo  
por largos corredores y el escarabajo por las hipóstilas.  
La semejanza no coincidirá con lo homogéneo.

Is there a total plurality in resemblance?, asks the first line of the poem, in a very Badiouian language. The next few lines seem to answer the question affirmatively, suggesting not only that there is no opposition between plurality and resemblance, but that the real contrast happens between resemblance and the homogeneous, the indistinct. In between these two

ideas, the advances of a forced metaphoric language make its first instance: from the second verse to the ninth, elements like 'los siete martillos', 'el olifante que convoca a los rinocerontes para la risotada crepuscular', or 'el escarabajo por las hipóstilas', they all depend on the *contrasentido* given by the image, on the fidelity of a subject whose intervention can demonstrate, retrospectively, that this is more than just non-veridical random association. In fact, like most of José Lezama Lima's work, the rest of the poem shares this dependency on a referentiality promised by the image, a referentiality that is always to come but never achieved: absolute reference.

After a few more lines, the poem then asks:

¿Cómo lo semejante puede crear la copia?

Es lo semejante ancestral que aleja la imagen,  
hasta sentarse en la fuente más allá de los bastiones.

Si la copia destruía la circunstancia de lo semejante  
y los alrededores se alejaban de las contracciones  
del ablandado mármol central.

¿Podrá reaparecer lo semejante primigenio?

¿La indistinción caminadora de las entrañas terrenales?

Sólo nos acompaña la imperfecta copia,  
la que destruye el aliento del metal ante lo semejante.

Is it possible the copy, the *eikon* that respects symmetries and colours of its model? A copy has to do with what Lezama Lima calls here the 'semejante ancestral', which distances the

image and moves away from it. The nostalgia for an origin, the return of the 'semejante primigenio', pure indistinction, is based on the efficiency of a complete system, logically well-structured and whose causality, although lost, can be called back as the main source of being, of meaning. This is the world of finitude, what Badiou calls 'phénoménologie du recouvrement', which consists in 'plaquer sur l'infini potentiel d'une situation une sorte de mosaïque de finitude' (Badiou 2018: 217), where even lack can be appropriated and rationalised, melancholized. Real plurality, multiplicity, on the contrary, relies on the infinite resemblance of the image, which does not depend either on the existence of a stopping point (whether it is called model, paradigm, origin or 'semejante primigenio'), or on its absence, the 'death of the referent', non-sense. Plurality, however, is also number, multiplicity, and just like the progressive work of metaphor, it needs the gathering together of the image to escape complete indistinction with the homogenous:

El número carnavalea sinuoso hacia la unidad,  
pero ya la unidad no puede asirse o deslizarse con el número.  
La unidad saborea la trinidad de la planicie bizantina,  
pero el número que le toca, ¿dónde disfrazó su corporeidad?  
Si el número no se dirige a la unidad,  
se pierde en la indistinción, pues su crecimiento  
se verifica en la semejanza, blanco conejo  
por la nieve, sin el lunar que lo recobra  
de la nieve. Sólo salvable aquel lunar  
de contraseña, pues a veces el número y la unidad,

la semejanza y el lunar, se cierran en carnosos portalón.

Number, plurality, disappears in indistinction if it does not find the unity given by resemblance, the descendant *potens* of the image. The white rabbit on the snow becomes a copy of the snow if it does not receive, on its body, the mark of a spot, a detail that moves the rabbit from copy to resemblance. Nevertheless, and the poem is clear in this respect, the unity towards which plurality directs itself is, in certain form, unreachable, unattainable ('El número carnavales sinuoso hacia la unidad, / pero ya la unidad no puede asirse o deslizarse con el número'). Unity and number are not copies of each other, there is no a final model or paradigm that stops the infinite resemblance of the image. For Badiou all truths are infinite (2006: 525) and as such they cannot be exhausted by the intervention of a subject or by the veracity of a situation. The same happens with the image, whose 'voracity' comes from an 'infinite resemblance to an essential Form', from its *sobreabundancia*. The Lezamian image is an image-*phantasma* because its referent is always an-other, and an-other, infinitely, which is why it 'would not even be likely to resemble that which it claims to be like, if a person were able to see such large works adequately' (Plato 1921: 335). The referent of the image as *phantasma* is only a memory, a 'recuerdo de lo semejante'.

'Sólo nos acompaña la imperfecta copia', affirms Lezama Lima in this poem, because the existence of a 'perfect copy' would imply a complete identity, where there is no resemblance at all, only a total and unproductive identification, which, according to Badiou, is one of the main characteristics of the place of the absolute V: 'L'absolut ne connaît d'autre relation complète à lui-même que l'identité' (Badiou 2018: 481). This is why Lezama Lima gives this place of the absolute V the names of 'lo homogéneo' or 'lo indistinto', the manifestation of total and complete identity, the impossible ideal that guides the image as *eikon*. Any attribute

of the absolute, any infinity that approaches it, does so by resemblance, not by identity, it shares *almost all* the features of the absolute V, but it excludes one, an element that, according to Badiou, is called the *point critique* (2018: 405), difference, the creative and productive part of any truth. The same happens with the notion of image in José Lezama Lima, which does not rely on identity but on resemblance, infinite likeness to a referent that slips away, that is always an-other referent. This is the productive and creative part of the image as *phantasma*, not as *eikon*, because in the *phantasma* the image manages to maintain the mark of resemblance without depending on a specific model or paradigm, on the finitude of referentiality.

‘Recuerdo de lo semejante’ is a poem that forces *the veracity of the voracity of the image*, its infinite resemblance, a poem that not only announces but which also presents the verification of a truth: ‘lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud’. The poem not only progresses, metaphorically, towards the *contrasentido* of the image, but it also requires the intervention of a faithful subject to make such *contrasentido* possible, to make the image visible, veridical. This is a fundamental aspect of José Lezama Lima’s poetic system, the fact that the unity promised by the image, in poetry, can only appear through the intervention of a faithful subject and not as a visible and tangible part of the poem, because otherwise there is the risk that the image becomes an end in itself, a finite element that would be part of the situation and could be verified and, consequently, reached. The poem itself stresses this idea: ‘Lo uno tiene que llegarnos como un bulto / con el cual tropezamos, pues lo uno se acecha/ por exclusión’. ‘Lo uno’, that which participates in the one, can only be chased or found by exclusion, the impossible excluded from the world of the possible. ‘Recuerdo de lo semejante’, as a poem, as an *oeuvre*, exemplifies this necessary exclusion of the image, ‘lo uno’ that comes from the gathering together of the *phantasma*.

The first half of the poem, most of which has been discussed so far, reflects on the relationship between resemblance, plurality and copy, on one hand, and number and unity on the other. This is where the thinking of the poem is revealed, where the poem exposes a thought, the very idea of resemblance ('lo semejante'). However, the rest of the poem gives the impression of being fragmented, hermetic and inaccessible, the *mise-en-scène* of a language that has been forced into the situation and whose referent, the unity given by the regression of the image, has been excluded and can only be encountered as 'un bulto con el cual tropezamos'. The unifying power of the image does not come from a complete absence of signification or from the deciphering of a hidden code. The truth of the image descends as *contrasentido*, as a memory of something that has vanished ('recuerdo de lo semejante), as exclusion and excess (*sobreabundancia*):

La imagen nace de la interposición de las aguas (...)

La imagen de lo hiperbólico llega escondida por las aguas,  
es el adormecerse bruscamente en el destaparse del  
principio (...)

La imagen, detrás de ese espato de Islandia, al ser tocada  
se hace sobreabundancia y el destino sentencioso  
comienza a sustantivarse como música en la intemporalidad (...)

La abundancia es el lleno comunicante, pero la  
sobreabundancia  
es un sacramento, ya no se sabe de dónde llegó, tocaron  
alguien

a quien sin saberlo se dirigieron y le hablaron y de pronto  
se emparejaron sin la interpolación de las aguas.  
El sobreabundante es el poseso que posee, muestra el  
sacramento  
encarnado y dual, dos a dos, prescinde de la vasija de seguir y  
se risota.  
El poseso es el que recibe esa sobreabundancia oscura e  
indual,  
alguien se posa en él y lo exagera y lo comprueba,  
fea sobreabundancia tiende al hombre y lo aúlla.

The image is an image of the absolute ('lo hiperbólico'), it arrives silently, concealed, anonymously. It becomes overabundance (*sobreabundancia*) because it exceeds the situation, it cannot be re-covered by the veracity of a given language, which also means that the image belongs to no one, and to everyone, at the same time. The overabundance of the image comes from nowhere, from an indiscernible and anonymous place ('ya no se sabe de dónde llegó, tocaron / alguien / a quien sin saberlo se dirigieron y le hablaron y de pronto / se emparejaron sin la interpolación de las aguas'). The anonymity of the image means that a faithful subject, what Lezama Lima calls here the 'sobreabundante' or 'poseso', is merely the 'final part of a truth' (Badiou 2006: 523) but never its cause or its author, since a subject only forces a decision and the veracity or not of that decision cannot be proved (empirically) by or within the situation: 'El poseso es el que recibe esa sobreabundancia oscura e / indual, / alguien se posa en él y lo exagera y lo comprueba'. A faithful subject, being, inevitably, an inhabitant of the situation, can only make decisions based on those elements that have been

forced into the situation, a metaphoric language whose referentiality and veracity have also to be forced by the subject, decided upon. A faithful subject takes these elements, these fragments and, one by one, classifies them (or not) as part of a truth procedure whose existence cannot be proved: 'El poseso tiene la justicia metafórica', reiterates Lezama Lima in 'Recuerdo de lo semejante' (2016: 594). A faithful subject, the one possessed by the overabundance of the image, intervenes and classifies those elements that have been forced into the situation, the progression of a poetic metaphoric language in a poem, a language whose reference depends on the indiscernibility of a truth, on the voracity of the image: 'El sobreabundante es el poseso que posee' (Lezama Lima 2016: 594).

'Recuerdo de lo semejante' is, as Jaime Rodríguez Matos points out (2017: 166), a poem with 'very strong Platonic overtones' and 'Lezama's most arresting treatment of the question of the Other and the Same'. It is a poem about participation ('lo semejante' literally means 'what participates in resemblance'), the impossible participating in the possible to generate a possible on infinitude, the image, 'imperfecta copia', participating in the homogeneous, the absolute of 'lo uno' which can only be encountered 'by exclusion', as an exception to the rule of participation, as the Other. The poem, being the site of a truth procedure where a forced language takes place, depends on the intervention of a faithful subject to find the truth that it proclaims, to make it visible, finite and veridical within the situation. The faithful subject is the 'sobreabundante', 'el poseso que posee', the one in charge of the 'justicia metafórica':

'A subject is a local evaluator of self-mentioning statements: he or she *knows* —with regard to the situation to-come, this from the standpoint of the indiscernible— that these statements are either certainly wrong, or possibly veridical but suspended from the will-have-taken-place of *one* positive enquiry.' (Badiou 2006: 404)



In the poetic system of José Lezama Lima, that positive enquiry is the image, the *will-have-taken-place* of the image as *phantasma*. 'Recuerdo de lo semejante' is a poem that relies on the *contrasentido* of the image as *phantasma* and not as *eikon*, it is not based on the veridical resemblance to a model, a referent that appears at the end of the poem to secure the fluidity of meaning and the aesthetical representation of an object, like a poem about a tree, a lover or a sunset. It is not either the complete obliteration of the referent, the free association of a language whose only objective is to make non-sense. Instead of having an object —or the absence of it— as its ultimate referent, as the stopping point of a referential chain, the image as *phantasma* places the Idea of the Other as its referent, it refers always to an-other, which explains the slipperiness of signification that comes with it. The image as *phantasma* resembles something, it brings forward a pre-sense, the presence of the Other, the exception to the rule of language (referentiality, signification) but also what makes the rule of language possible (continuity, creation, the infinite possibilities of language). While the image as *eikon* does not need the involvement of a subject because it is self-evident, it can be seen from any point of view (it is veridical and verifiable), the image as *phantasma* requires the fidelity of a subject, an unfavourable point of view. By resembling the Other, the image as *phantasma* conserves the mark of a referent and escapes the finitude of referentiality, at the same time. It is the Same and the Other, a *contrasentido*. The 'voracity of the image' (its absoluteness) comes from the fact that by always resembling an-other, the Other, it assumes, immanently, the potentiality and singularity of its referent, it becomes an Idea itself, the Idea of the Image, 'la imagen que se sabe imagen' (OC 2: 152), 'testimony of infinite resemblance to an essential Form'. The image becomes a 'copy' of the homogeneous, the absolute:

La imagen reducida a la sentencia, punta de túnica  
entreabriendo la serpiente, hace del bastardo virrey  
en Tánger, fiesta mora entre la rueda de la pólvora  
china y el romano carnaval. *Si la imagen entraña  
la sobreabundancia, el árbol y la distancia  
se entremezclan en una copia de lo homogéneo participado.  
Y la copia de ese homogéneo resguarda la diversidad de cada  
rostro,  
pues sólo la sobreabundancia inunda los rostros y los  
encarna,  
y no los detiene en la correspondencia de los términos,  
entre el Óvalo del Espejo y el Ojo de la Aguja.* (Emphasis added)

‘Recuerdo de lo semejante’ is a poem that gives veracity to José Lezama Lima’s statement, ‘lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud’. Such veracity is not self-evident, demonstrable, and the poem demands the intervention of a faithful subject (the ‘sobreabundante’, ‘el poseso que posee’), of a local evaluator of the metaphoric language that has been forced into the situation, the language of the poem. It is only then that the image ‘will have taken place’, retroactively, bringing the overabundance of a *contrasentido* with itself. ‘Recuerdo de lo semejante’ is a poem about participation in resemblance, it affirms that what gathers the metaphoric fragments of a poem is infinite resemblance, a resemblance whose referent is indiscernible, the image as *phantasma*.

José Lezama Lima saw in the image the possibility of approaching the indiscernible, the unnameable of poetry, the infinite power of language ('lo homogéneo', 'lo primigenio', 'la sustancia poética'). However, he knew that this image was not the image of representation, a visual one (*eikon*), but one that demanded an 'unfavourable point of view' (*phantasma*), an image that had to sacrifice the fluidity of signification in order to show its voracity, its 'infinite resemblance to an essential Form', that Form of the Other that Plato had introduced in his *Sophist*. Lezama Lima also knew that this image depended on fragmentation, on the progressive work of metaphor, that this image gathered together the traces left by a vanishing event, the event of poetry, and even more, he knew that all this process relied on a contradiction, on making the impossible, possible:

This contradiction constitutes a thesis: No attested trace of an event amounts to proof of its having taken place. The event is subtracted from proof, otherwise, it would lose its dimension of undecidable vanishing. Yet it is not ruled out that there is a trace or a sign, even if, since it is not an element of proof, this sign does not constrain its own interpretation. An event can very well leave traces, but these traces never have a univocal value in themselves. In fact, it is impossible to interrogate the traces of an event except under the hypothesis of an act of naming. Traces can signify an event only if this event has been decided. (Badiou 2005: 130)

The traces left by an event have no other referent than a decision, a truth that relies on the intervention of a faithful subject, which is why, from the viewpoint of a given situation, these traces appear senseless, alien and fragmented. In José Lezama Lima's poetic system, it is the image that gathers the metaphoric fragments together, which offers a referent to those elements that have been forced into the situation, but in order to do so, the image also needs the intervention of a faithful subject who would assume the 'unfavourable point of view' of a

decision, and not the favourable perspective of proof, evidence and veracity. From his very first poem, 'Muerte de Narciso' (1937), to his very last text, José Lezama Lima assumed the 'unfavourable point of view' of the *phantasma*, and not the adequate position of the *eikon*. His poetic system is a testimony of his faithfulness to a truth, the truth of the image as *phantasma*.

## Conclusion

In an interview (Álvarez Bravo 1968: 31), José Lezama Lima recalls how after finding in a text the word *potens*, which, according to Plutarco, represented the ‘if it is possible’, the *infinite possibility*, he came to the conclusion that his notion of image should ‘incarnate’ that *potens*. He also concluded that the idea of resurrection, which represents the greatest ‘infinite possibility’, should become the ultimate *potens* of the image: poetry is, for Lezama Lima, ‘la imagen alcanzada por el hombre de la resurrección’ (1968: 32). Further on in the same interview, he also refers to his own poetic system, saying that his main objective with it was to ‘destroy the Aristotelian causality’ trying to find at the same time what he calls the ‘incondicionado poético’, the poetic unconditioned. ‘Pero lo maravilloso’, continues Lezama Lima, (...) ‘es que ese *incondicionado* poético tiene una ponderosa gravitación, referenciales diamantinos y apoyaturas’ (1968: 34). In other words, the ‘incondicionado poético’, although being in itself ‘unconditioned’ and therefore, also inaccessible, has a manifestation in the ‘conditioned’, it gravitates in a world and it has a visible appearance and a material support. These two references, one related to the notion of image and the other one to José Lezama Lima’s poetic system, summarise the questions that prompted this research: firstly, what type of image is the image that appears in José Lezama Lima’s poetic system? Is it possible to circumscribe the notion of ‘image’ as it is conceived and described by José Lezama Lima in his essays on poetry? And secondly, how does his poetic system operate? How could the relationship between metaphor and image, as it is described by Lezama Lima in his essays, be understood? What role do every of the main components of that poetic system (poet, poem, image, and metaphor) play within the system itself?

In order to answer these questions, the first chapter of this research focused on describing and exploring a philosophical framework which was built upon two key concepts, that of the *phantasma*, introduced by Plato in one of his later dialogues, the *Sophist* (1921) and that of a

*truth procedure*, an idea that belongs to the French philosopher Alain Badiou and which can mainly be found in his book *Being and Event* (2006), although there are references to this concept in many of his other works. The former helped to circumscribe the notion of image that appears throughout all of José Lezama Lima's work, a notion that is a fundamental part of his poetic system. The latter helped to understand the process that underlies such poetic system and the role that the aforementioned notion of image plays within it, together with other concepts like those of metaphor, poet and poem. The second chapter explored a corpus of texts from José Lezama Lima where he not only delineates his own poetic system, but where he also reflects on the main components of that system, namely, poetry, poem, poet, image and metaphor. This second chapter concluded with a recapitulation of the statements and ideas presented by Lezama Lima in the texts discussed and it summarised his whole poetic system in one single statement: 'Lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud'. The objective of the third and final chapter was to tie together that single statement, and José Lezama Lima's poetic system, with the philosophical framework discussed in the first chapter, especially with Plato's notion of *phantasma* and Badiou's idea of a *truth procedure*.

The detailed discussion, made in the first chapter, of the history and etymology of the terms *phantasma* and *phantasia*, both in Plato and in Aristotle, as well as the discussion about the common aspects and differences between those two concepts, was essential for the subsequent analysis in the third chapter of José Lezama Lima's notion of the *image*. Without this discussion about the pair *phantasma/phantasia*, and the contrast, also made in the first chapter, between the concept of *phantasma* and that of the *eikon*, it would not have been possible to separate Lezama Lima's image from the other image that is commonly associated with visual or mental representations of concepts and ideas, an image that, unlike the one

suggested by the Cuban author, functions as a guarantee of meaning and clarification. The connection between José Lezama Lima's image and Plato's notion of *phantasma*, touched upon in the first and second chapters but discussed in more detail in the third chapter, is one of the most important contributions of this research. It is a connection that explains the obliquity and hermeticism in the poetry of Lezama Lima, as well as the evasiveness and lack of evidentiality of his notion of image in his poems. The Lezamian image is an image-*phantasma*, not an image-*eikon*, it questions the comfort that meaning and referentiality bring into language without breaking the whole process of signification. The unexpected connections that the progression of metaphor causes in the poem are gathered together neither by the emergence of a sense (*sentido*) or by the lack of it (*sinsentido*), but by the appearance of a *contrasentido*, the regression of the image as *phantasma*. The image of José Lezama Lima's poetic system is a 'testimony of an infinite resemblance to an essential Form', and this infinity comes from the fact that its point of reference is not a fixed model or paradigm, but always an-other referent, infinite resemblance to the Other, one that can inevitably only appear as *an-other*. It is also from this fact that the image receives the 'voracity' of a Form, the *potens* that makes of the image-*phantasma* an Idea, a paradigm of itself, and not just a copy or a referent of an object.

The other important contribution that this research makes has to do with the relationship between the poetic system proposed by José Lezama Lima and the notion of *truth procedure* developed by Alain Badiou. After having explored and discussed, in the second chapter, those texts where José Lezama Lima makes reference to his own poetic system or to those elements that, according to him, are part of it (poem, poet, image, metaphor and of course, poetry itself), the third chapter demonstrates that what such poetic system intends to describe, to make evident, is nothing else than the implementation of a truth procedure, the forcing into



a situation of a metaphoric language whose referential point, the image, lies in an indiscernible and infinite place. The difficulty of José Lezama Lima's poetry is not a particularity of his style or the result of a neo-baroque language whose code, after a hard work of interpretation, can always be found. As Fina García Marruz affirms:

Hay en Lezama lo que llamaríamos la imagen que no regresa. Porque el "cuadrado pino" de Góngora vuelve siempre a su sentido inicial de "mesa". Las metáforas pueden ser más audaces, elevarse a la segunda o la tercera potencia, pero al cabo "los raudos torbellinos de Noruega" nos vuelven bastante dócilmente a la mano como halcones. En Lezama hay un momento en que el nexo lógico, la referencia inicial, se nos pierde, pero en que presentimos que no nos está proponiendo un desfile onírico, como en la aventura surrealista (...). La imagen en Lezama no sólo no regresa a su sentido inicial, sino que prolifera y se aleja cada vez más de ella, busca, como él dice, "un hechizamiento", un faraónico "dilatarse hasta la línea del horizonte". (Vizcaíno 1984a: 152-153)

This proliferation and deviation from an 'initial referent' can be better explained if the poetic system delineated by José Lezama Lima is understood under Badiou's idea of a *truth procedure*. Here the Lezamian interdependency and interaction between metaphor and image become the interdependency and interaction between a forced language in a situation and its gathering together by a truth that is in itself indiscernible and infinite, a 'lost initial referent', in García Marruz's words. The poem is the site where such truth procedure takes place, an extension where Lezama Lima's metaphor represents the forcing of a language non-veridical and alien to the situation, to the efficacy of daily communication. A truth, the referential point of this metaphoric language, is, as has been mentioned before, indiscernible and infinite, which is why Lezama Lima talks about the *contrasentido* of the image, a point of

signification that is always in the future anterior, always in the threshold, and whose tangibility and veracity depend on the faithful intervention of a subject, the poet. Metaphor represents the more visible and identifiable part of a truth procedure, the recognition of a generic language that has been forced into the situation, alien elements whose hermeticism and obliquity can either be discarded or, as a faithful subject does, incorporated into the *potens* of the image as truth. The image in Lezama Lima lacks manifestation and evidentiality precisely because it cannot be covered by the language of the situation. It is not a consequence of imagination or a mental representation that appears magically at the end of the reading of a poem (hence the importance of the contrast of the pair *phantasma/phantasia* made in the first chapter). The appearance of the image as *phantasma*, the Lezamian image, depends on the intervention of a faithful subject, on an 'unfavourable point of view', or, according to Lezama Lima's poetic system, on the poet, 'el guardián de la semilla'. The final part of chapter three is dedicated to making this whole procedure more visible, more veridical, through the analysis of one of José Lezama Lima's most representative poems, 'Recuerdo de lo semejante'. This poem gives veracity to Lezama Lima's statement, 'lo imposible, al actuar sobre lo posible, engendra un posible actuando en la infinitud', and with it to his whole poetic system, showing that at the centre of the question about the image, there lies also the question about resemblance.

The image as *phantasma* and a poetic system as a truth procedure, two statements that condense the conclusions drawn by this research and which respond to the questions that were raised at the beginning of this same research. They offer a new insight not only into the work of one of the greatest Latin American poets, but also to the nature of poetry itself because, as José Lezama Lima acknowledged, his own poetic system departs from the same elements that belong to poetry, namely, poet, poem, metaphor and image. If the reader of

José Lezama Lima's work accepts that -as this research concludes- the notion of image that Lezama Lima proposes is an image-*phantasma*, an image that relies on infinite resemblance and which can only appear through the intervention of a subject, then the whole problem of referentiality, hermeticism and interpretation of José Lezama Lima's poetry disappears. This research has approached José Lezama Lima's poetic system not as a mere combination of elements or terms but as an operation, a mechanism that is aimed at making manifest what is, by its very nature, indiscernible, and to recognise that such manifestation depends on the ethical intervention of a subject and not on other external factors. A cultural, historical, hermeneutical, or biographical approach to Lezama Lima's work would be 'unethical' only from the point of view of the event, because they would represent an attempt to 'understand' his work, to 'archive' it, to make it veridical and include it into the encyclopaedia of the situation. A subject who encounters José Lezama Lima's work is confronted with three alternatives: firstly, to reject it as non-sense, as difficult, hermetic or enigmatic. Secondly, to invest it with some veracity, to incorporate it into the situation by giving it some sense, by interpreting the text from one of many points of view (historical, cultural, political, semantic, etc., the list is long because the *eikon*, the veridical image, can be seen from any perspective). because a truth is infinite and absolute, and so is the image. However, there is a last and third option, the unfavourable point of view of the *phantasma*, the faithful intervention of a subject who sees in Lezama Lima the gesture of an event, the calling of a truth.

When in 1948, Willard V. Quine examined The *Sophist's* riddle of the being of non-being, the appearance of the *phantasma*, he thought that the problem was that things were made to be more complicated than they actually were:

Non-being must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not? This tangled doctrine might be nicknamed *Plato's beard*; historically it has proved tough, frequently dulling the edge of Occam's razor' (Quine 1948: 21).

José Lezama Lima's beard, the non-being of the image, although 'historically it has proved tough', like in Plato, it has also dulled 'the edge of Occam's razor'. Lezama Lima's riddle about poetry, his poetic system, can be easily solved with the *potens* of a decision.

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