Rachel Price

Planet/Cuba: Art, Culture, and the Future of the Island. London: Verso, 2015. i + 256 pp. (Paper US\$ 29.95)

For more than half a century, the Cuban imaginary has suffered from a metonymic succession that, in contrast to the ephemerality of its elements, promises to be inexhaustible: “from Davidic protector of Latin America ... to satellite of Cold War powers and site of futuristic fantasies ... to a post-Soviet Planet Cuba of commodified experiences ... to an archipelago on a shrinking planet” (p. 10). In *Planet/Cuba*, Rachel Price draws on this sequence of images as a theoretical point of departure to rearticulate the newest link of the chain, converging the local and the planetary in an effort to decentralize all paradigmatic conceptions of the island while symbolically annihilating the myth of “transition” in which they operate. But how does this collection of essays break away from a process of historicization rooted in the constant transmutation of such an imagery?

Delineating a cognitive map of contemporary Cuba, Price’s introduction highlights the *idée fixe* of “transition” that has haunted the hermeneutical panorama of the island for approximately half a millennium—if by “transition,” we imply an obsession with transformation, with the accumulation of the rhetorical signifier “post,” and with the superposition of political realities onto the nation’s ideological palimpsest. This opening chapter encompasses an era of “post-Sovietism” and “post-Special Period,” “post-socialism” and “post-communism,” “post-Fidelismo” and “post-revolution,” that in an extrapolation of a chaotic present contemplates the emergence of subjective, aesthetic, and ethical paradigms hybridized within the category of aberration. Such an archeology of the present not only reveals the existing parasitic symbiosis between a politics of memory and a politics of progress in today’s Cuba, but also lays the groundwork for a close examination of the ongoing changes in the island’s actuality, including the construction of special economic zones, the advancement of digitalization, the lifting of migratory restraints, and the (small) degree of ideological de-sovietization.

Inexorably allowing for the catalysis of a reaction in which shifts occur between insularity and globalization, between the micro and the macro, *Planet/Cuba* can be tersely explained as an exploration of literary and artistic landscapes primarily focused on postmodern discourses of environmental and sociocultural crises. For example, Chapters 1 and 2 (“We Are Tired of Rhizomes” and “*Marabusales*”) meditate on issues concerned with agricultural impasse and a history that pits forestry against sugar production, zooming in on a horizontally-oriented bush whose symbol represents stagnation and desperation, but also development and expansion. Likewise, Chapters 3 and 4 (“Havana

Under Water” and “Post-Panamax Energies”) delve into cultural productions that deal predominantly with natural resources such as water and oil, emphasizing, in a *sui generis* style, these oeuvres’ preoccupations with ecological apocalypse and environmental degradation. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 (“Free Time” and “Detail in the Era of Camouflage”) similarly reflect on ecumenical matters that interrogate this Caribbean nation in an era of accelerated capitalism, this time via notions of labor and technology. The first four chapters—revolving around the imagination of a dystopian society either submerged under rhizomes or water, or established along circumstances of extractivism and postcarbon times—intertwine biopolitics, ecocriticism, and a philosophy of finitude in an attempt to redefine the identitary margins of Cuba on two of its fundamental levels: geographic and symbolic. However, the last two chapters, in a reorientation of their analytical lens toward the importance of surveillance and *el juego/el ocio*, implicitly extrapolate the concept of the “post” by calling into question such topics as gambling, censorship, underemployment, and the paranoia of vigilance, without setting aside intrinsic ones such as slavery and the military.

Undeniably, this exemplary book reformulates the notion of *cubanía* theoretically and empirically, as it tires out its old connotation(s) through an indepth dissection of many cultural experiments whose *raison d’être* gravitate toward a Lyotard-based postmodernism of alterity, resistance, and transgression. Not only does *Planet/Cuba* hypothesize the contingency of a novel aesthetic era in the largest island of the Caribbean; but it also proposes, perspicuously, an exhaustion with both the ghost of “transition” and a reality “where the specter of observing momentary historical change titillates more than any less spectacular investment in realizing genuine social justice” (p. 14). Hence, by examining a (more globalized and less exceptional) deviant array of art and literature, Rachel Price joins the cultural subjects of her book in stressing the importance of redirecting the Cuban eye from obsolete preoccupations with political exorcism toward a more quotidian reality in which the threats of planetary capitalism compete with those of climate change.

Andy Alfonso

Department of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures,
Princeton University
andya@princeton.edu