Au Naturel

Au Naturel:
(Re)Reading Hispanic Naturalism

Edited by

J. P. Spicer-Escalante and Lara Anderson

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J.P.S.E.
L.A.

Melbourne, Australia
February 25, 2010

PART ONE:

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

AU NATUREL: (RE)READING HISPANIC NATURALISM

J.P. SPICER-ESCALANTE AND LARA ANDERSON

The role of a society's cultural production in the process of social change has shown, over time, that Art–broadly defined as the sum of the myriad aesthetic forms that implicitly or explicitly manifest discourses beyond the merely aesthetic—is never truly innocent. From an ideological standpoint, Art has always had, and will continue to have, a panoply of "readings," from the apparently innocuous to the overtly political. As Benjamin Barber and Michael McGrath point out in *The Artist and Political Vision*, Art:

> [C]hallenges or complements political vision, reinforces or spurns mores, enjoins social integration or promotes social alienation. [It] celebrates or defies, rejoices or despairs. It is neither detached, nor impartial, nor isolated, nor pure. (1982, x)

Thus seen, Art has the potential to manifest itself as a subversive form of human communication. "Read" in this way, aesthetic texts have the ability to convey discourses of rebellion and insubordination, dissidence and revolution. As such, they are also frequently objectionable to those with materialistic values or conventional attitudes, traditional aesthetic tastes or preconceived artistic notions. Since the rise of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, Art has often functioned to "épater le bourgeois"—shock bourgeois sensibilities, and implicitly, to expose this class's underbelly. That is, as Mateo Calinescu, has proposed, Art has functioned in a manner so as to destroy the "traditional aesthetic authority" (1987, 4) that has existed, historically, in juxtaposition to the artist's vision. This view of Art is even more central to the post-modern world, as can be seen in Frederic Jameson's belief in the "modes of expression" that characterize the role of the artist in the period of late capitalism (1991); it also simultaneously poses new challenges to cultural criticism in the era of globalization in which the presence of social texts is ever more rampant,

their messages potentially more viral, and their distribution "virtually" immediate.

In spite of these characteristics–or perhaps thanks to them—Art, not unlike politics, has often played a key historical role as an interrogatory component, and often as a constructive instrument in relation to the processes of social change. Thus, we are once again reminded to, in fact, "historicize" (Jameson 1981), especially in relation to the cultural critic's role in interpreting not only literary texts, but the concomitant social texts that embody critical discourses.

The present focus on the ideological nature of Art therefore promotes the notion that the practitioners of social change, both artists and politicians, have an intertwined role in social evolution:

> [W]hether they treat one another as comrades or adversaries, it seems apparent that the artist and the statesman, the poet and the legislator, occupy some of the same ground and pursue many of the same objectives: a clear view of human reality in its private and public dimensions; a vision of alternate human futures; and a full picture of complex human reality. (Barber and McGrath 1982, ix)

Therefore, neither Art nor artists have a passive role in their position as purveyors of societal foresight. As these aforementioned critics note:

> Whether art 'stands above reality to gaze on the current situation from the heights'…, or engages actively in shaping that reality, it is concerned with vision. (1982, ix)

This frank and unapologetic "reading" of the ideological role of both Art and the artist is quite apparent in the socio-critical discourses inherent to Art, both in terms of the observation and mimetic characterization of "reality" or the creation of other potential "realities" that make up a particular imaginary. Within the context of the impact of Art on society and social progress, particularly in the face of rapid economic change, the artist has a significant impact on the fabric of society. Either as lucid visionary or false prophet, the artist is a constant voice from beyond the banal monotony of quotidian bourgeois life that seeks change, transformation and, in certain cases, out-right revolution. This understanding of the role of the artist is particularly relevant in societies conceived, composed, and constantly re-written *in medias res*, as is the case in general of the post-modern, globalized world, as well as the particular case of the Hispanic world–understood specifically as Spain and its former colonies in the Americas.

Art and ideology have permeated the aesthetic and social texts of the Hispanic world for centuries. Cultural production in the Hispanic context, therefore, must be seen from the vantage point of the socio-economic realities that have shaped and continue to shape cultural production from the colonial period throughout the present day. The pace of the ideological imprint of Art on Hispanic society became more apparent, however, as both Spain and Hispanic America—in the aftermath of the collapse of the Spanish colonies—made their abrupt and spasmodic entrance into the age of modernity in the nineteenth century, a modernity that has both bourgeois and aesthetic characteristics (Calinescu 1987, 41-45). In fact, it can be argued, without a doubt, that Art within the Hispanic context has had the greatest social impact on/in Spain and Hispanic America from the nineteenth century to the present day. This claim is particularly relevant given the evolving notion of what constitutes a cultural artifact, and how such a work of art is produced, distributed and consumed in a post-modern, globalized age.

Art's intrinsic role in the development of Hispanic society over the last two hundred years is based firstly on the presence of the philosophical discourse of liberalism, and the corresponding ideological "Pandora's box" of individual freedoms that appear as a result of the rationalist model of thinking that ensued in the wake of the Enlightenment. This discourse later nurtured the already incipient discourse of science as an overarching epistemological narrative of understanding. Recognition of the relevance of this progressively more intimate, intertwined set of discourses is paramount to our understanding of both the nineteenth-century and post-nineteenth-century Hispanic cultural contexts. Both liberal and scientific discourses are present in Hispanic cultural production from the end of the colonial period through to the nascent twenty-first century in which we now live. These discourses have also, with their sublime and simultaneously rebellious nature, helped shape the content and the form of the multi-stranded text of Hispanic Culture in myriad ways over the centuries. This is particularly evident in the ways in which Art has provided a non-hegemonic counter-discourse that responds to dominant discourses, which are based on traditional modes of authority, beginning with the Spanish Crown and, more recently, with democratically-elected leaders.

From a historiographic standpoint, Art as counter-discourse has played an important historical role in the Hispanic world. The centuries-long colonial hegemony of Spain in Spanish America and the Spanish American colonial subjects' contestatory "push back" in a variety of aesthetic fashions provide ample evidence of the contentious intersection

between Art and State policy within the highly charged colonial context where it must also be recognized, in passing, that Spanish writers also responded to Crown authority, not only the colonial subjects of the colonies. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the Spanish court's forced exile to Cadiz—where the Spaniards, who met in secret may be said to have provided the first expression of a particular form of modern, liberal nationalism—as well as the Wars of Independence in formerly Spanish–now politically but not culturally independent—Hispanic America, the nineteenth-century Hispanic world suddenly found itself facing an abrupt transition from a previously shared, but not always prized, colonial relationship, to a new, post-colonial state of affairs. This novel reality provided ample intellectual fodder for both ideologues and artists –or, more specifically *ideologue-artists*— to reflect upon the state of identity politics and envision future public policy initiatives in their newly created homelands.

Not content with mere mimetic representation of "reality," they also took it upon themselves to envision new national landscapes to confront the post-colonial void as well as the increasing loss of empire that they inevitably faced. As Benedict Anderson's work has shown, the written word was paramount in the process of creating new national imaginaries (1991). Writer-ideologues on both sides of the Atlantic found creative ideological space within the bounds of literature, in particular. The Western world's perceived need at this time to confront the core principle of what it meant to be economically and/or culturally "modern"—in an increasingly secular, scientifically-inspired universe—meant that many writers inscribed patently ideological perspectives related to economic modernization and cultural modernity on their homelands in their writings. These concepts, addressed by Hispanic intellectuals in a plethora of literary genres, were generally at the core of virtually all political and cultural policy-making in the incipient nation-states of the Pan-Hispanic world given the prevailing climate of ideas that followed the end of colonial hegemony. Due to these circumstances, literary texts promptly became social texts of great ideological consequence in the necessary process of envisioning new national topographies–political, social, economic, and, perhaps more importantly, cultural—in the period that historian John Chasteen has defined as one that is characterized by a sense of "post-colonial blues" (2006, 11-143) in nations whose notion of identity was still very much in flux. Such a cultural ebb and flow includes Spain, of course. Given the detrimental impact of the Wars of Independence on the Spanish economy, and the hindrance posed to cultural and economic modernization during the "década ominosa" (1823-1833), Spain,

"displaced to the periphery of the modern" became the "first posthegemonic European Nation-state" (Iarocci 2006, xi).

Given this particular state of post-colonial affairs, the nineteenth century in the Hispanic world thus offers, perhaps the clearest examples of cultural production's ideological currency in terms of determining and shaping transitory societies with innovative ideological discourses. Ideologically charged literature in particular, in both Spain and Hispanic America, was the norm, not the exception. Propped up initially in the print media age of the mid-nineteenth century by the presence of liberal discourse in the aftermath of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain and the resulting Wars of Independence in Hispanic America, the literary word served as alternately an important tool and a potent weapon in the creation of public policy. As such, it was utilized to aid in the formation of modern nation-states/societies in countries that were–and continue to be, in a globalized context—quite *in transitio*. While Neo-Classicism still had a certain sway in several cases early on–prime examples are the transitional writers, Mexican José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardí (*Periquillo sarniento* [1816, 1830-31]), and Venezuelan Andrés Bello (*Silvas Americanas* [1826-27])—within traditional Hispanic studies, the Romantic generation in both Spain and Hispanic America is generally recognized for its ground-breaking role in envisioning their transitional societies' latent promise and potentialities. Authors such as Mariano José de Larra and José de Espronceda (Spain), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Jorge Isaacs (Colombia), Ignacio Manuel Altamirano (Mexico), as well as Cuban-born Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, to name only a few, provided not only a keen social critique of their transitional societies but also suggested potential political roadmaps to lead their nations towards "modern" redemption through their principal nativist-*costumbrista* social texts. While in Homi Bhabha's words, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1993, 1), these authors—and a plethora of others—played a "critical" role in not only envisaging economic growth but also cultural progress in their (re)nascent nationscapes.

Traditional literary history within the Hispanic context often makes, at this juncture, a chronological leap forward to the *fin-se-siècle* period, however, where the focus becomes the truly noteworthy contribution to Hispanic letters—and Hispanic culture—of the *modernistas* in Hispanic America and on the *noventayochistas* in Spain. The critical eye has traditionally gazed upon those writers whose works reflect a belief in the spirit of renewal of the Hispanic world through Art, especially when faced with the increasingly bourgeois environment that lacked an essential,

spiritual and cultural component which had been displaced by an overarching belief in material accumulation and Positivist politics. Hispanic American *modernistas* and the Generation of 1898 in Spain—writers such as José Martí and Julián del Casal (Cuba), Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (Mexico), José Asunción Silva (Colombia) and Rubén Darío (Nicaragua), as well as Miguel de Unamuno, José Martínez Ruiz ("Azorín"), Antonio Machado and José Ortega y Gasset from Spain, to mention only a few—are clear examples of the intertwined relationship between aesthetic schemes and political agendas.

However, the brusque social criticism that the realist mode offered was generally not part of their repertoire. In reality, the realist mode of expression, with its heightened focus on objectivity, had been a transitory component of Hispanic letters from the colonial period on. Its roots can be traced from the Early Modern and Colonial periods—both Fernando de Rojas' *La celestina* (1499) and Juan Rodríguez Freyle's *El carnero* (1638) come to mind, in fact. Its presence changes, nonetheless, as the discourse of science appears in the cultural production of the Hispanic world in the mid-nineteenth century, initially influenced, but not enslaved, by the tenets of the French naturalism, led by Emile Zola. The objective-realist mode of expression evolves and the *roman à thèse*—with realist tendencies but with a clearly subjective discourse—appears as a potent vehicle of ideological commentary and, frequently, of social, political, cultural, and economic change. Naturalism as a critical counter-discourse was, thus, born, and its presence—we argue—continues to be displayed in the Hispanic cultural production of the present day.

The spirit of *Au Naturel: (Re)Reading Hispanic Naturalism* is, thus, to focus on the countless ways in which Hispanic naturalist texts–literary and filmic, in particular—have contributed to the critical social discourse focused on the evolving Hispanic world, from naturalism's turbulent days in the *fin-de-siècle* period of the nineteenth century through the present day. The volume's contents, from different generations of scholars with different readings of naturalism in mind, are a testament to both the subversive and constructive nature of Hispanic cultural production, especially within the bounds of literary and cinematic expression. Within this vein, *Au Naturel* proposes a major revisionist contribution to the study of the canonical *naturalista* writers–if such an entity exists in a world where they are considered marginal, fringe players—as well as the *secuela* of literary and filmic artists who have followed in their footsteps in the ensuing period since the *fin de siglo* era. It is also conceived as an invitation to critics, scholars and students of Hispanic letters to unlock the naturalist tendencies, inclinations, and trajectories of other writers whose

works display a penchant for the counter-discourse that naturalism continues to provide as we venture forth into the twenty-first century. The essays in this volume bear moving, expressive, and articulate witness to the broad chronological reach of traditional literary naturalism in the Hispanic world, displaying not only a traditional understanding, but also new approaches to naturalism, as well as its obvious extension through intermediate aesthetic movements, as well as what can be called "naturalist cinema" in the Hispanic world. The essays demonstrate the intimate relationship between the aesthetic vision of particular artists and the sociopolitical impact of naturalism and naturalist counter-discourse, and their chronologically diverse but socio-aesthetically analogous prodigy in the Hispanic world from the nineteenth century through the current day. Thus, *Au Naturel* should be conceived as an open invitation to the scholarly community whose focus is on Hispanic cultural production, understood in its broadest sense, to critically engage with the works of naturalist writers and cinematographers from other national backgrounds and time periods. It is a summons to take part in and flesh out the ongoing contribution of the socio-critical discourse of naturalism in the Hispanic context where the careful observation of and reflection upon social issues that continue to plague Hispanic society can and should be noted; in sum, it is a way to recognize the truths that are part of a social problematics that impedes true social, political, economic and cultural progress from taking place and to propose alternate futures for Hispanic society. With this in mind, we anticipate that *Au Naturel: (Re)Reading Hispanic Naturalism* will not only provide sufficient intellectual support for the relevance of constant critical analysis of naturalism in the Hispanic world. We also believe that it will show the ongoing importance of the socio-aesthetic criticism present in Hispanic cultural production from the nineteenth century onward.

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THE "LONG TAIL" HYPOTHESIS: THE DIACHRONIC COUNTER-METANARRATIVE OF HISPANIC NATURALISM

J.P. SPICER-ESCALANTE

A María Luisa y Daniel Alberto

> …hay un cine cuyo objetivo es el entretenimiento […]. Otro tipo de cine cuyo mayor objetivo es contar una historia, […]. Y hay otra gente, donde estoy yo, que lo que quiere es compartir una percepción del mundo, una serie de emociones e ideas sobre las que uno tiene nada demasiado contundente que decir. Es el cine que hago.
> —Lucrecia Martel (2008)

Certain moments in human history are destined to serve as inflection points from which to ponder the direction of human evolution, and *fin-de-siècle* periods have traditionally been particularly ripe occasions to pause and reflect upon the status of human civilization. This is particularly relevant in the realm of the Aesthetic, and recent history also bears witness to the validity of this assertion in the Pan-Hispanic cultural context. The gut-wrenching, tortuous—and still dubious—entry into cultural modernity that began with the nineteenth century wars of independence in Hispanic America was widely commented upon on both sides of the Atlantic well into the twentieth century. Only with the Hispanic American coming of age that was the "Boom" generation's works as well as the appearance of post-Franco cultural production do these concerns appear to have somewhat abated and does the discussion of an Hispanic (post)modernity become more feasible.[1]

Although the latest *fin de siglo* period lacked much of the immediate drama that the post-colonial rupture offered both Spanish and Hispanic American writers on the dawn of *el 900*, the arrival of Hispanic society upon the doorstep of the third millennium was truly was no different in principle. Given the emergent nature of the globalized world, the juncture of the millennia was a true watershed in terms of an appraisal of the evolution of Hispanic culture and its cultural production. Mired in the

abyss of prophesy—much like its predecessor, whose baggage was lighter, however, due to the absence of grander millennial preoccupations—the year 2000 provided ample opportunity for critical reflection on the status of *la hispanidad* and its aesthetic contribution, cultural production. However, while cultural criticism occupied itself with fatalistic hand-wringing over the state of affairs of Hispanic civilization at the dawn of the third millennium—Néstor García Canclini went so far as to apocalyptically question whether there would be a "Latin American Cinema in the Year 2000," fearing that Hispanic identity was in a unrecoverable tail-spin due to globalization (1997, 246)—the fact of the matter is that the cultural oracles, once again, appeared to have deceived us. The death knell of Hispanic culture proclaimed at both *fin de siglo* periods, was evidently premature. Hispanic cinema, in particular, was quite truly experiencing vertiginous and triumphant days in a nascent global context.

While the much merited acknowledgment of the world-wide reading public of the cultural production originating in the Hispanic world in the contemporary era was quite apparent in the three Nobel Prizes for literature granted to Hispanic authors between 1982 and 1990,[2] the veritable darling in terms of Hispanic cultural production over the last several decades is no longer the novel, the essay or poetry (although they continue to be widely read, both in Spanish and in translation). The "bestseller" in terms of the numerous cultural texts emanating from Spain and Hispanic America in the global era has both decidedly, and progressively, been the "seventh art": cinema. Taking advantage of the greater access to broader channels of distribution that the globalized world now offers, as well as the deep pockets of its foreign investors, cinema has become the standard bearer for Hispanic cultural production in the global cultural marketplace. Hispanic cinematic *auteurs* have garnered a quiver full of prestigious nominations and awards from the world's best and most competitive international film competitions in recent years including the Cannes, Berlin, Venice and Sundance festivals, as well as the Oscar and Golden Globe awards. Recent cooperation between El Deseo, S.A., Pedro and Austín Almodóvar's production company, and Argentine directors Lucrecia Martel (*La niña santa*, 2004, and *La mujer sin cabeza*, 2008) and Julia Solomonoff (*El último verano de la Boyita*, 2009) augurs a new stage of development for Hispanic cinema: it gives hope that Hispanic producers and directors will now be more conscious about the need to provide production support from within the bounds of *la hispanidad*, not just from clearly more commercial external sources of funding. This transnationalization of resources, while still guaranteeing the local character of cinema, can be

credited, in fact, with the survival of not only Spanish cinema (Triana-Toribio 2007, 151), but most likely the ongoing success of Hispanic cinema in general. Given its rising status globally, stating that Spanish and Hispanic American cinema has, indeed, become a *qualified success story* (Shaw 2007, 1-10), is thus, to assert the obvious.[3]

This is, of course, no mean feat, as commercial interests often supersede aesthetic impulses in cultural production. In a cinematic context, Hollywood's commercial allure, in particular, is quite potent, and has attracted directors to venture over to the "dark side" on more than one occasion.[4] Yet, Hispanic cinema has survived and thrived internationally in spite of a difficult internal state of affairs that often both creates unexpected hurdles to cinematic production and potentially compromises cinematic values. The crisis in Spanish cinema appears in the wake of the virtual death/dearth of state funding for cinema in Spain after the fall of Felipe González's government in 1996, and the subsequent *ocaso* of the Miró legislation that encouraged Spanish cinematic production through public sector support for cinema in Spain from 1983 to 1996 (García et al 2003; Jordan et al 1998). The case of Hispanic American cinema is virtually no different (Elena et al 2006, 7-8). The one-two punch of traditionally limited funding for state-supported cultural programs—for example, the bankruptcy of the distributor Películas Nacionales in 1991 and the demise of the theater corporation "Compañía Operadora de Teatros, S.A." in 1993 in Mexico (Vargas 2003)—and the preponderance of late twentieth century neo-liberal economic policies aimed at reducing the size of the state have impacted the potential for public backing of national cinemas and forced coalitions of investors to cohabit a common space of filmic production.[5] The economic and political fall-out that was brought on by both the local millennial economic crisis—and a more general, long-term economic malaise—also factors in heavily against successfully producing films in Hispanic America. However, the show has successfully gone on in both Spain and Hispanic America very much in spite of the odds, in fact. As José García Espinoza has stated, "la industria del entretenimiento es la única que, en tiempos de crisis, no está en crisis" (2003). At the beginning of the third millennium, Hispanic cinema's time has clearly come.

While contemporary Hispanic cinema has flourished in this climate of crisis and uncertainty, its recent success is potentially most relevant because the "story" that it tells is of the more lurid side of human existence in the Hispanic world, not the one on display in tidy, made-to-order, *comedias* that have traditionally appealed to the cinematic escapism of the masses in moments of crisis. The sort of internationally successful more

"recent" Hispanic cinema—along the lines of "radical" cinematic *auteurs* from the *Movida* generation in Spain (Jordan et al 1998, 114) and the tail-end of the *Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano* movement,[6] as well as what I prefer to call the "Millennial Generation" in Hispanic America[7]—has frequently confronted audiences with filmic tales of the sordid nature of humanity in a contemporary, Pan-Hispanic context from outside the standard Hollywoodesque, commercial mode of production.[8] Representative examples can be seen in Pedro Almodóvar's telling of the ongoing tale of life in Post-Franco/(Post)*Movida* Spain, Alejandro González Iñárritu's relating of human survival in (post?)Modern/Post-*Crisis del Tequila* Mexico, as well as Lucrecia Martel's narrating of the perils of life in (post?)Neo-liberal Argentina.[9] Although the socio-critical slant in contemporary Hispanic cinema extends beyond these directors' dim, critical take on life in the current Hispanic *fin-de-siècle* period, their cinema, in particular, frankly exposes and consistently deconstructs—through the graphic depiction of the abundant underbelly of the complex, difficult, and sordid realities that exist in their specific locales—the teeming pathologies of contemporary Hispanic society.[10] This Pan-Hispanic cinematic *lugar común* identifies the works of all three of these directors with the precepts of a more remote literary phenomenon: Hispanic naturalism. Of course, the mere mention of an aesthetic/thematic link between an apparently nineteenth-century literary phenomenon and a twenty-first century cinematic reality is cause for contemplation and discussion.[11] Nonetheless, the predominant objective of this essay is not to assert that Almodóvar, González Iñárritu, and Martel have produced something along the lines of "naturalist cinema," although a link between these directors' cinema and naturalism clearly exists and this point will be developed here. Discussing current Hispanic cinema—and Lucrecia Martel, in particular—simply serves as a convenient trope for a more fundamental discussion and much-needed theorization of Hispanic naturalism.

In this essay I would like to interpellate the traditional notions related to Hispanic naturalism by delving into its genealogy and teasing out the critical trajectory of its representative works and authors, from the nineteenth century *through* to the present, in both literature and cinema. I hypothesize that a plethora of works from the heyday of Hispanic naturalism in the late 1800s onward point to the existence of a "long tail" with regards to *naturalismo*, and I suggest that Hispanic naturalism be read as a diachronic, (post)modern, socio-critical aesthetic phenomenon. Given the conflictive construction of Hispanic society in the (post)modern, globalized era, I would also like to look at how this particular vision of

Hispanic naturalism should be read as a counter-metanarrative vis-à-vis the prevailing discourses present in the Hispanic world since its entry into modernity, in spite of Jean-François Lyotard's concern over the discredited reputation of master narratives in the postmodern context and their dissipation into *petits recits* (1979, 37-8; 60).[12] These intentionally provocative proposals are intended to re-semanticize Hispanic naturalism, traditionally the *bête noire* of Hispanic cultural production, and invite current criticism to (re)read Hispanic naturalism in a broader, more inclusive, and more constructive fashion.

Indeed, the veritable explosion of graphic, socio-critical, Hispanic cinema that has graced the world's movie houses and video clubs over the last several decades–building upon a strong tradition of cinematic glory that dates back to the *cine nacional* of the golden age of Hispanic film where Madrid, Mexico City and Buenos Aires were all Hollywood-style national cinematic Meccas of sorts—has quite deep roots. It is appropriate that Hispanic cinema engage with and problematize cultural crisis, however, as it is fulfilling a role often played traditionally by cultural production in the Hispanic world in general, and a significant sector of Hispanic cinema, in particular. In fact, a proper discussion of the lineage of contemporary Hispanic cinema points to the fact that its contemporary directors' critical cinematic engagement with the panoply of ills that plague Hispanic society is not an isolated phenomenon: Hispanic cinema has not been alone in the telling of the particularly unpleasant story of the state of the Hispanic world either now, in the globalized era, nor previously. The "pre-texts" of the current boom of films from Hispanic American and Spain can be remotely, but effectively, located in the fairly recent genealogy of the Hispanic literary tradition: the Hispanic naturalist novel whose origins are linked, but not restricted, to the nineteenth century *fin de siglo* period.

Chronologically, cultural production in the Hispanic world has had quite a "long tail" in its critical engagement with Hispanic society. Its pedigree dates back to the conflictive nineteenth century and to the first authors and thinkers to critically engage Hispanic society with a double-pronged approach that merged rationalist inklings with the truths of scientific experimentation. Carrying this out within the confines of the literary work, they created a new epistemology to explain the socio-cultural phenomena of the day. The romantic literature of the post-colonial period tended towards the creation of "foundational fictions" (Sommer 1992) that sought to solidify the political objective of developing progressive nation-state models amidst the muddled and chaotic realities of the immediate post-independence period through literary expression.

Within the bounds of the early/mid nineteenth century Hispanic socio-cultural context, it was the perfect aesthetic locus for the beginning of the expression of the metanarrative of liberal/bourgeois/positivist progress—the "story in the story" of nation-building that has had a dominant and ongoing impact upon Hispanic society, even in the contemporary postmodern/neo-liberal period.[13] The Hispanic naturalist literature that appeared later in the nineteenth century was disinclined, however, to follow the romantics' subjective sentimentality and unsubstantiated claims to prophetic vision, preferring to tell the "other" story of the illusive *ciudad letrada* that both the Illustration and romantic writers had cultivated.

At this juncture, however, the genealogy I propose requires a statement of what I understand as *naturalismo*. Traditional criticism has tended to define Hispanic naturalism, in positivist fashion, as a chronologically-limited, synchronic construct often focused on a particular national manifestation or specific author's *opus* (Ara 1965, Baquero Goyanes 1986, Blasi 1962, Castro 1993, Cymerman 2007, Fernández 1995, Frugoni de Fritzsche 1966, Gálvez 1990, García Barragán 1979, Gnutzmann 1998, Goic 1972, Gural-Migdal et al 2006, Guzmán 1972, Lissorgues 1988, Miller 1993, Molina 2001, Morales 1997, Nouzeilles 2000, Prendes 2003, Schlickers 2003, Sotelo Vázquez 2002, Urbistondo 1960).[14] While a variety of theoretical approaches have been successfully used to describe *naturalismo* in the aforementioned studies, their view of Hispanic naturalism perceives it as a predominantly "static construct" limited to specific nations' authors, and fairly specific chronological boundaries. The latter issue is of greatest concern, however, as the transnationality of Hispanic naturalism is not really in dispute: it's broad manifestation across a vast array of Hispanic nations makes this point self-evident. The *transtemporality* of Hispanic naturalism is the question at hand. Except for Manuel Prendes's brief incursion into the "pervivencia" of *naturalismo* (2003, 317-39), for the vast majority of the aforementioned critics naturalism is, in general, a predominantly late nineteenth century school/movement whose critical currency was regretfully spent by the time in which the Hispanic world transitioned towards the first centenary/WWI and the Avant-garde period. While I have noted the "long tail" of Hispanic naturalism in my own incursions into this area of study (Spicer-Escalante 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006), proper self-reflection tells me that I, too, have been timid in my affirmations as to the "after life" of what could be called traditional naturalism, read above as a *fin-de-siècle* nineteenth/early twentieth century phenomenon.[15] A broader reading of Hispanic naturalism fleshes out its protean heterodoxy. Another "reading"

of Hispanic naturalism is clearly long over due, and an overarching theory of naturalist cultural production in the Hispanic context is needed.

Hispanic naturalism has had a particularly noteworthy impact in/on the Hispanic world over the past two centuries of vertiginous and conflictive change. Its narratives—both novelistic and filmic—share a common thread of social criticism that makes possible the rendering of a more palpable image of the dysfunctionality that has plagued Hispanic society since the demise of the colonial world, the irruption of liberal/positivist modernization, the prevailing bourgeois notions of modernity in the late nineteenth century Hispanic world, and the (post)modern realities of life in the neo-liberal/globalized era. Often perceived as insubordinate and defiant due to its penchant for shocking bourgeois society's traditional precepts related to the notion of *el buen gusto* and exposing its proclivity towards material excess in notably graphic fashion, Hispanic naturalism provides countless examples of how Art and the artist challenge preconceived notions of social, economic, and cultural progress in the Hispanic world. The same can be said of Hispanic naturalist authors and cinematographers who share a common interest, overtly or not, in State and public policy, Church affairs, gender issues, economic modernization and its correlative, cultural modernity, (post)modernity, democracy, progress, freedom (both collective and personal), freedom of expression, censorship, amongst a multitude of other concerns. They are guided by the firm belief that through their Art—their ideologically-charged aesthetic vision—they will achieve social change by divulging what they deem as historical truths linked to their societies' needs for change through their frank engagement with their respective locales' socio-economic, political and cultural realities. As such, they take their share of the mantle of secular priesthood, as ideological elites—whether they write from the "right," the "left," or anywhere in between—and accept their duty as "purveyors of truth," as Emile Zola perceived the naturalist calling. In fact, under close scrutiny, it is quite apparent that Hispanic naturalist writers–and more recently filmic *auteurs*—have not only displayed a social commitment that is on par with the romantic generations, the *modernistas* and *noventayochistas*, but one that given the "long tail" of naturalist discourse, has actively outlived the aforementioned movements by more than a century.

Founded on the principle of the need for a profound critical observation of Hispanic society in the wake of the irruption of modernity in the Hispanic world that began with the end of the colonial period, Hispanic naturalism sought to apply an approach to the analysis of society and culture that—devoid of the aforementioned visionary concerns that

captivated the attention of the romantics, in particular—was ostensibly a more objective and methodological stratagem for carrying out socio-cultural analysis. Epistemologically, the tendency present in works such as Prosper Lucas’s *Traité philosophique et physiologique de l'hérédité naturelle* (1847/1850), Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Hippolyte Taine’s *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise* (1863), Claude Bernard’s *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), and Charles Letourneau’s *Physiologie des Passions* (1868), heavily impacted nineteenth century Hispanic naturalist writers who sought to create a new literary discourse through their literary, but also fundamentally social-scientific, texts. The impact of authors like Lucas, Darwin, Taine, Bernard, and Letourneau is particular relevant in relation to the understanding that Hispanic naturalist writers had in terms of the intertwined nature of determinism, heredity and instinct in society, elements that conspired against the idealized nature of the world that the romantic generation had espoused. Taine’s principles of race, milieu, moment were particularly relevant components of their nascent counter-discourse, especially when understood as nation, setting and a particular time in the life of a specific culture. Inspired by the example of the experimental novel as espoused by the founder of French naturalism, Emile Zola—in spirit, but not always in practice, as literary phenomena have traditionally been syncretic in the Hispanic world and absolute mimesis was never a reality—literary naturalism in Spain and Hispanic America proceeded to critically dissect Hispanic society with a *lujo de detalles* in terms of graphic representation of existent social realities, that up to that point in time, was virtually unseen.[16] The echoes of their work can still be plainly heard in the contemporary age (Spicer-Escalante 2005, viii-ix), both within—and from beyond—the Hispanic world, especially as this work reaches an increasingly global audience through cinema.

While Hispanic naturalism attempted to objectively point out both the strengths and deficiencies of the (re)nascent Hispanic world, it is easily arguable that its graphic and sometimes pedantic treatment of the base state of affairs in the Hispanic world in the *fin de siglo* favored the former over the latter due to its revisionist zeal and its interest in shocking what they considered the source of much of the societal dysfunctionality—the bourgeois codes of social conduct—into submission. On both sides of the Hispanic Atlantic, writer-ideologues peered into the mid-nineteenth century void in search of an ideological pathway out of the post-colonial quagmire, using the written word to propose and problematize the possible routes to engage with both faces/phases of modernization and modernity: both economic progress and cultural evolution. The *naturalistas*, however,

had the advantage of seeing, *ex post facto*, that the ideal nation-states proposed in earlier romantic works only ever really materialized in the eyes of the so-called prophets, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out (1993, 1), often just remaining as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991). In fact, their critical view of the plethora of social problems brought on by the *aburguesamiento* of Hispanic society pointed out that progress was not necessarily the panacea it was hoped or expected to be. It expressed a counter-discourse (Spicer-Escalante 2006) that, reading Hispanic naturalism as an over-arching construct, interrogated and demystified the prevailing metanarrative of modern/bourgeois/positivist progress.

While Hispanic naturalist writers sought to literarily scrutinize their individual societies, putting them to the test of rational scientific scrutiny and fleshing out in their cultural production the trials and tribulations of those societies as they sorted out their transition through modernity and post-coloniality, their rationalist/scientific authority was also established: their task was to objectively observe their contemporary societies and judge their modern accomplishments. This authority is anchored in direct experience as seen in Zola's *Le roman experimental* (1880) where he clearly states that naturalist novelists are the "examining magistrate of men and their passions" (10), the "analyzers of man in his individual and social relations" (17), whose moral obligation it is to study "the effect of society on the individual and the individual on society" (20) as "experimental moralists" (25). Zola clearly calls upon naturalist authors—following Taine's call for understanding the complexity of the Race/Milieu/Moment continuum—to begin, however, with their personal experience as a stepping stone for predictive vision:

> In our scientific age, it is a very delicate thing to be a prophet, as we no longer believe in truths of revelation, and in order to be able to foresee the unknown, we must begin with the known. (1880, 53)

The spirit of Zola's dictum is present in Argentine author, Eugenio Cambaceres's, own definition of *naturalismo*, as described to Miguel Cané in 1883. In a letter to Cané, Cambaceres expresses a common vision of *naturalismo*, which presupposes a break from romantic literary precepts and a new truth-based approach to socio-critical enquiry:

> Entiendo por naturalismo, estudio de la naturaleza humana, observación hasta los tuétanos. Agarrar un carácter, un alma, registrarla hasta los últimos repliegues, meterle el calador, sacarle todo, lo bueno como lo malo, lo puro, si es que se encuentra, y la podredumbre que encierra, haciéndola mover en el medio donde se agita, […], sustituir a la fantasía

> del poeta o a la habilidad del faiseur, la ciencia del observador, hacer en una palabra verdad, verdad hasta la cuja...(1883)

The emphasis on providing a true, accurate perception of the social reality of the day is also noteworthy in his suggestions to his compatriot regarding the literary aesthetics of naturalism:

> Si las crudezas le repugnan, suprímalas. Ni Stendhal, ni Flaubert, ni Daudet, tres maîtres del género, las gastan.
> Si el calador le da asco, no se lo acerque a las narices; limítese a hacerlo circular por el auditorio, con el gesto fruncido y el brazo tieso.
> Si el *argot* no es lengua de su paladar, no hable *argot* francés ni *argot* criollo, ni nada.
> Pero eso sí, insisto en una cosa y es esta: no ponga almíbar en la boca de un changador, ni le haga decir mierda a una institutriz inglesa; respete a la verdad. (1883)

These words—followed by his later declaration to Argentine author Martín García Merou praising the importance of being a “crítico sagaz y penetrante” (Cambaceres 1885) in terms of literary artistry—clearly affirm the manner in which Cambaceres and many other nineteenth century naturalist writers, including Spanish naturalist author Emilia Pardo Bazán—who addressed it in her “Prefacio a *Un viaje de novios*” in 1881—embraced the notion that the novelist has an important social role as truth-teller and critic, conferred with the task of correcting a malignant society. While Cambaceres’s critics accused him to no end for his literary style and themes (Spicer-Escalante 2005, xvi-xix)—also the fate of many other naturalist authors in the Hispanic world—he freely admitted his preference for harsh and abrasive realities: “En cuanto a mí, Ud. sabe que tengo un flaco por mostrar las cosas en pelota y por hurgar lo que hiede; cuestión de gustos” (Cambaceres 1883). His definition of naturalism is, nonetheless, a poignant indicator of what he and a multitude of other *naturalistas* deemed as the predominant role of the naturalist writer: to wield the potent counter-discourse of naturalism to function as a literary social scientist, producing an aesthetic-scientific product: the *estudio social* that was to become the modern novel. This is quite evident, moreover, in the fact that that particular moniker frequently appeared as a subtitle in many novelistic titles in the *fin de siglo* period. The spirit of Cambaceres’s observation lives on to the present day in a plethora of Hispanic works.

In fact, Cambaceres’s reflection on the role of the naturalist writer also displays an important quality that cannot be overlooked: they do not reference a particular moment in time—as a synchronic understanding of naturalism would propose—but a general statement on the role of the artist