Visión de Anáhuac [1519] as Virtual Image: Alfonso Reyes's Bergsonian Aesthetic of Creative Evolution

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Abstract
This essay offers a new reading of Alfonso Reyes's canonical imagining of Mexican national identity, published in 1917 during the Mexican Revolution. Reyes and his contemporaries of the Ateneo de la Juventud were self-proclaimed "vitalists" inspired by James, Boutroux and Bergson. Despite this, there has been minimal examination of the impact of this philosophy on Reyes's writings. Robert Conn's recent monograph on Reyes denies genuine engagement with vitalism on the part of the Ateneo and he, alongside Ignacio Sánchez Prado, draws on Hegel for an interpretation of the text. Beginning with a close examination of this last essay, I argue that, despite the historical frame of Part I, Reyes's essay does not set out to provide a historical idealist depiction of Mexico. Instead, working closely with three of Bergson's major texts, I argue that Reyes's "vision" can be understood as an aesthetic of metamorphosis echoing the philosophy of creative evolution. Deriving his thesis on Mexican identity from a textually visual aesthetic, I conclude that the essay equates to a Bergsonian, virtual image of nation, evoking a communal, ahistorical consciousness. In this way, my reading shows that, although *Visión de Anáhuac* connects to Romantic ideas of perception and subjectivity, Bergson's influence separates the essay from mainstream 19th century currents.

Keywords: Alfonso Reyes**,** Mexican Literature**,** The Ateneo de la Juventud**,** Henri Bergson**,** Creative Evolution, Philosophy, Aesthetics, Romanticism.

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Introduction

In the series *Historia documental de mis libros*, Alfonso Reyes recalls a letter written to Antonio Mediz-Bolio in 1922 in which he set out the ambitions of *Visión de Anáhuac*. Although never realized as such, the poetic essay was to be the "first chapter" of a series of works under the title *En busca del alma nacional* that would try to make sense of Mexico's "terrible fábula histórica" and "pedir a la brutalidad de los hechos un sentido espíritual" (Reyes 1990, 185).[1] This schema is prefaced with a more personal reflection on the context of 1915 in which the author had recently relocated to Madrid after the violent death of his father. Here, he tells us that the essay was a response to "el recuerdo de las cosas lejanas, el sentirme olvidado por mi país y la nostalgia de mi alta meseta" (Reyes 1990, 178). Combining registers and modes, in *Visión de Anáhuac* Reyes produces a hybrid text that is part thesis on cultural identity and part sensual reflection on personal loss.

Thanks to that enigmatic hybridity, the essay has continued to provoke debate concerning exactly what Reyes is saying about Mexico as Nation and, in turn, what this says about him and his generation of thinkers. By way of a contribution to this dialogue, my reading will begin as a response to a recent article by Ignacio Sánchez Prado, who sees Reyes's vision of the past, present and future times of Mexico as fundamentally Hegelian. For reasons that will be explored in depth, I want to argue that, whilst there may be echoes of Hegel in *Visión de Anáhuac*, Reyes's essay is not historically idealist at heart. When Reyes talks of a "sentido espiritual", he is first extrapolating a personal, aesthetic vision from the wreckage of Mexican history rather than a strictly historical idealist telos. As I discuss below, to see the image of Mexico in *Visión de Anáhuac* as a Hegelian model of dialectical process makes sense only up to a point. It may apply to the historical scene setting of the essay but seems inadequate as a way of approaching the descriptive, poetic sections. These parts of the essay that reveal the minutiae of the event – a thoroughly non-historical scenario – are those in which Reyes most clearly deploys his aesthetic. As such, these sections are the focal point of my argument because they allow us to understand that Reyes's approach to Mexican history hinges on an aesthetic or creative philosophy rather than a historical one.

Reyes and his contemporaries identified themselves with a philosophical vitalism, a term used to bracket together the ideas of a series of thinkers that they saw as directly oppositional to Mexico's history of Positivism. Significant philosophical differences amongst their sources were elided by their blanket use of this term but opinion has often been quick to dismiss the depth of engagement with the "vitalist" ideas. In this regard, Robert Conn (2002, 54) states that "the Ateneo, in appropriating the paradigms of the figures making up this movement, divested them of their philosophical content". My aim is to demonstrate the exaggeration of this dismissal by drawing attention to the presence of Bergson's philosophy in Reyes's most celebrated work.

Whilst it remains important to acknowledge that *Visión de Anáhuac* cannot be reduced to the statement of one philosophical system, an understanding of the influence of Bergson's ideas relating to time, perception and creativity reveal unexplored aspects of Reyes's text. A reinterpretation of the essay along Bergsonian lines affords a new perspective on Reyes's use of history and cultural identity with respect to the central

motif of the essay, namely the visualisation of an ideal image of Mexico. My contention is that a Bergsonian reading of *Visión de Anáhuac* allows for a new way of seeing Reyes's "vision".

The "sentido espiritual" that Reyes derives from his rearticulation of the clash of cultures results from a three-stage process of perception, reinvention and communal identification. Although such a model owes much to the influence of the dialectic, as I will argue, Reyes's base material is nature rather than history. In this, despite his generation's stated intentions to reject the episteme of the Nineteenth Century, Reyes has a strong affinity with Romanticism. As Conn (2002, 116-8) has argued, Reyes frames both the 1915 essay and the earlier "El paisaje en la poesía mexicana del siglo diecineuve" (1955, 193-245) drawing closely on Alexander von Humboldt's commentaries in the *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811). John A. Ochoa discusses Humboldt's indebtedness to figures of German *Naturphilosophie* such as Fichte, Schelling, Herder and Goethe. Following their example, he argues, Humboldt steers his scientific observations of both the natural world and the human in their environment toward a deeper reflection on the nature of perception and what this reveals about the human subject (Ochoa 2004, 81-109).

Ochoa heads his chapter on Humbolt with an epigraph from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and another from *Visión de Anáhuac* thereby suggesting (without further elaboration) the affinity between Reyes's essay and the Romantic vision. Extending the connection made by Ochoa, a case could be made for a neo-Romantic Reyes defining his own brand of late *Naturphilosophie* for the cultural identity of Mexico. In this he would be a successor to Bolívar who was inspired by Humboldt's "scientific mission […] to provide a voice for that landscape" (Ochoa 2004, 82). There is undoubtedly a line to be drawn from Humboldt to Reyes but the temptation to define *Visión de Anáhuac* as a purely Romantic elegy to cultural failure and personal loss ought to be avoided. Such a reading would be coloured more by the common image of Reyes's conservatism than by a balanced overview of the text.

Ochoa (2004, 83) sums up Humboldt's legacy as "the guiding spirit of a Latin American version of Romantic *Sensucht*, the longing for the distant morning when time was new and humanity and nature were still one". In the analysis that follows, I aim to show that, although Reyes's image of Mexico has a clear affinity with the Romantic view of nature, his aim is a spatio-temporal image differs from the idea of a Golden Age idyll. Such a vision would be a counterpart, albeit the reverse, of the Hegelian telos of historical idealism: two times of perfection at either end of a process of change. Historical idealism and Romanticism are pillars of the enlightenment that feed into Reyes's ideas but his particular image of change that is an amalgam of nature and artifice, I will argue, is better understood with reference to Bergson's "vitalism". Reyes's Anháuac, rather than an ideal image of either a static past or concrete future, is represented as flux or spatio-temporal identity in the making. This, as I shall demonstrate, is a manifestation of creative evolution, a combination of the material and the virtual rather than an ideality.

In tune with the Romantic legacy, Reyes's essay is preoccupied with the theme of perception from which can be extrapolated a more general theory of subjectivity. The nature of Romantic subjectivity, according to *Naturphilosophie*, is dictated by environment, and Ochoa (2004, 84) explains how Humboldt "intimates that citizens build their national character through sensibility to their specific natural surroundings, within a certain time and place". On the one hand, *Visión de Anáhuac* echoes this sentiment in the oft-quoted coda that sees Reyes invoking the "alma común" of those who encounter "el mismo objeto natural" (Reyes 1956a, 34). On the other, a subtle but

clear difference should be noted between the Romantic science of the "certain time and place" and Reyes's formulation that proposes a transhistorical community. Imagined by Reyes, I would argue, is not a monolithic community of Mexican subjects but an idea of a shared, evolutionary subjectivity that supersedes a specific spatio-temporal context. I shall go on to show that this can be demonstrated with reference to the tenets of Bergson's philosophy. Reyes may share a Romantic spirit, as does Bergson in his indebtedness to Kant, but if the genuine contribution of the latter's "vitalism" is missed, so too is the essay's departure from the ideas of the early 19th Century.

The Historical Idealist Interpretation of *Visión de Anáhuac*

As underlined by the author's reflection in *Historia documental de mis libros*, *Visión de Anáhuac* has a very clear historical dimension. Written in 1915 at the time when revolution was sliding into civil war, the text reimagines the perspective of the European colonial encounter with the Valley of Mexico, initiating a dialogue between two moments of crisis and impending change. As a leading member of Mexico's cultural elite dating back to the Ateneo de la Juventud of 1909, in *Visión de Anáhuac*, Reyes is clearly making a statement of how the nation should progress beyond that crisis.

In Part I, Reyes (1956a, 14-5) prefigures the lyrical body of the essay with a discursive reference to "casi tres civilizaciones" or "tres regímenes monárquicos, divididos por paréntesis de anarquía". These regimes – the indigenous, the colonial and the modern – are both builders and destroyers of civilisation, with the latter act symbolized by the draining of the waters of Anáhuac. Significantly, with reference to post-colonial rule, Reyes (1956a, 14) draws attention to the *Porfiriato* or, "la prodigiosa ficción política que nos dio treinta años de paz augusta". Apparent from this shorthand summary of the history of the region is the cyclical process of organisation and chaos and the implied conclusion that the two are historically interdependent. Despite this inference, deliberately drawing attention to the contexts of 1519 and 1915, Reyes (1956a, 15) lends rhetorical weight to chaos in perhaps the most frequently quoted sentence of the essay: "Cuando los creadores del desierto acaban su obra, irrumpe el espanto social".

Ignacio Sánchez Prado has argued for a Hegelian interpretation of the text based primarily on this section. Taking a lead from Evodio Escalante's analysis of Reyes's essay "La sonrisa" also published in 1917, Sánchez Prado, identifies the anarchy of the "espanto social" as the catalyst for the birth of historical self-consciousness initiating a new dialectical movement of historical progress (Sánchez Prado 2007, 116). Sánchez Prado contests Robert Conn's thesis that Reyes, as part of the vanguard of Mexican intellectuals, cultivated himself as an originator of a new Mexican State along classically "Pedagogic" or "Aesthetic" models (Conn 2002, 45-80). Where Conn (2002, 126) – also along Hegelian lines – reads *Visión de Anáhuac* as Reyes's "final appropriation of *Indianismo*" designed to instate indigenous mythology as the "'obra menor' of the Spanish literary tradition", Sánchez Prado (2007, 117) sees it as a "proyecto emancipatorio". Both Conn and Sánchez Prado discern a Hegelian dialectic in the text but treat it in opposing ways. Conn, reading Reyes against the grain, wants to unveil the author's hidden, totalising purpose that would see his ideals take centre stage in a post-Porfirian Mexico. Sánchez Prado (2007, 116), on the other hand, sees in the essay an "imperativo ético" or a utopian expression of the potential of America's coming into consciousness. Albeit to very different ends and with divergent

interpretations of the dialectical idealist view of history, both readings focus closely on the opening part of *Visión de Anáhuac* and assume Hegel's centrality.

Hegel's ideas were not without influence for the Ateneo but those who shaped the group's philosophical outlook, such as Antonio Caso, emphasized that they had been replaced by a more intuitive view of the individual with respect to history (Krauze de Kolteniuk 1985, 49). Published in 1914, Caso's "La filosofía de la intuición" was a marker for his generation's support of the so-called vitalism of James, Boutroux and, most importantly Bergson. In the article "Bergson al servicio de Francia" in *La Nación* in 1947, discussing the philosopher's diplomatic visits to the U.S. before that country entered the Great War, Reyes (1958, 129) recollects the importance of the essay in which Caso states:

> Los intelectualistas ofrecen, al término de sus ejercicios sistemáticos y dialécticos, un conjunto de proposiciones informadas en datos reales, pero incapaces de engendrar, por su síntesis, la realidad misma. Es el mundo de Spinoza: la negación del mundo; el mundo de Hegel: la apoteósis [*sic*] del devenir, la negación del ser (Caso 1914, 551).[2]

Years later, in *homage* to Bergson, José Vasconcelos would echo Caso condemning the notion of Hegelian historical self-consciousness:

> El concepto hegeliano de la autocontemplación del yo; el yo que se piensa a sí mismo y se objetiva, no pasa de ser una pedantería ociosa. Nos da una imagen que elimina del yo toda su infinito de virtualidades, para dejarnos un ente de cátedra, objetivado, idealizado (Vasconcelos 1941, 142).

The overt message of the Ateneo regarding Hegel was that his philosophy belonged to a previous generation. The group's objection is centred on the endpoint of historical idealism where individual and national consciousnesses are deemed to be indistinguishable. For the ideology of the Ateneo, the systematisation associated with Hegel's philosophy of history, reflected too strongly the 19th century, nation-building project of Positivism.

The group's vocal rejection of Hegel's teleological form of "becoming" ("la apoteósis [*sic*] del devenir") in favour of the Bergsonian "infinito de virtualidades" brings into question Sánchez Prado's view that Reyes's essay is an explicitly Hegelian, historical interpretation of Mexican identity. As Caso and Vasconcelos attest, the Ateneo espoused a view of identity grounded in concrete experience that eluded the grasp of deterministic rationalism. Whilst it must be acknowledged that the group's reading of Hegel rarely stands up to rigorous philosophical scrutiny, their rejection is nevertheless clear. If Reyes aims to deploying a Hegelian theory of history in his essay, it must be concluded that he does so unwittingly or even covertly. Despite the residual presence of Hegel in *Visión de Anáhuac*, the popular intellectual currents do not point to historical idealism as an explanation for the "sentido espiritual" sought by Reyes in the essay. The text contains a historical perspective but it is not a properly historical treatise. Such a reading places too much emphasis on the introduction at the expense of the poetic description of the majority of the essay and suggests a concretisation of the historical subject not evidenced in the text.

Reyes offers clues to the ambiguous purpose of the essay in the final section of the late synthesis of his ideas "El hombre y los hombres" published in *Andrenio:*

Perfiles del hombre (Reyes 1979, 467-80). Here, he presents a synopsis of Western conceptions of historical progress, identifying two distinct positions, one being "properly historical" and the other "mystical" (Reyes 1979, 474).[3] The "properly historical" is a science based upon empirical reality and the mystical upon a redemptive messianism. However, for Reyes, these two principles connect in that the mystical never ignores terrestrial realities and the historical is always inspired by an idea of progress betraying a teleology. At no point does Reyes argue in favour of any one philosophy of history and, of Hegel, he states: "Muchos, influenicados por él, cayeron en un optimiso pueril" (Reyes 1979, 472).

The philosophy of history, as discussed in *Andrenio* is apparent throughout *Visión* and, albeit from a fictional rather than academic perspective, I would argue that Reyes is equally circumspect in his support of any particular theory. From the opening lines where Reyes introduces the Valley of Mexico via Ramusio's *Delle Navigationi et Viaggi*, history has the status of palimpsest rather than polemic (Reyes 1956a, 13). We first encounter Anáhuac via a Renaissance utopianism and the essay experiments with the notion of America as ideal image but at no point does Reyes depict an ideal, alternative reality or uchronia. Subsequently, the essay in several places alludes to a cyclical conception of historical progress, from the repeated three-stages of development and exhaustion of Part I, to the metaphorical use of the wheel in Part II where the conquistador is overcome by the sensory information of the Aztec marketplace. In *Andrenio*, Reyes includes an account of Vico's cyclical or, as often interpreted, spiral view of socio-historical change, which certainly seems to be echoed in the elements of cyclicality in *Visión de Anáhuac* (Reyes 1979, 475-7). Curiously, Sánchez Prado notes that these images do not fit with his linear reading of Hegelian progress but in this he appears to ignore Hegel's spiral conception of *aufhebung* (Sánchez Prado 2007, 109).[4] Whether, Hegelian or Vician (and a case could be made for either), in my view, these models of historical change are best understood themselves as historical phenomena within the frame of an essay in which they are aestheticized rather than employed as primary tools of analysis.

The opening words of the coda reveal Reyes's interest in locating a natural source, anterior to the idea of historical consciousness:

> Cualquiera que sea la doctrina histórica que se profese, […] nos une con la raza de ayer, sin hablar de sangres, la comunidad del esfuerzo por domeñar nuestra naturaleza brava y fragosa; esfuerzo que es la base bruta de la historia (Reyes 1956a, 34).

Implying that he is not a follower of any one theory of history, Reyes betrays the influence of Romanticism referred to in my introduction. After the initial naming of the regimes of power in the first part, he effectively levels these by placing emphasis on the natural world, an object portrayed as the base material common to all epochs. However, nature is not the trigger for a Romantic *Sensucht* in this passage, rather it is a common ground operated on by the human action required to produce history.

In the conclusion of *Andrenio* Reyes suggests an understanding of history that helps us to understand his purpose in the 1917 essay in the light of the vitalist philosophical context discussed above. After his summation of both the "mystical" and "properly historical", he states:

> Muy posible es que, de todos los puntos de vista hasta aquí expuestos, surja mañana otra doctrina, la cual, corrigiendo suficientemente la

> noción simplista de progreso, acerque un poco más la realidad y el ideal (Reyes 1979, 480).

From this standpoint, *Visión de Anáhuac* can be viewed neither as an "old" or "new" historical doctrine but as a way of seeing Mexico's history differently, with the explicit intention of addressing the divide between "la realidad y el ideal". My contention is that, in the hybrid format of *Visión de Anáhuac*, Reyes looks at the human in time to expose the Other of history or a "sentido espiritual" that connects to a primal sense of creativity or invention rather than an ideal historical consciousness. In this, I want to argue that Reyes aims to explore a meaning of identity founded on the virtuality referred to by Vasconcelos rather than a solidification of historical consciousness.

Although Bergson is not mentioned explicitly in this final passage of *Andrenio*, the drawing together of reality and the ideal is identical to the aims expressed in the introduction to the philosopher's *Matter and Memory* (Bergson [1896] 1991, 9-16). In that work, Bergson presents a reconciliation between material reality and a metaphysical idea of memory hinging upon his concept of *durée*, or a non-chronographic, non-historical time of pure flux or becoming. In the later *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson connects *durée* to an *a priori* principle of life to argue for a non-deterministic concept of evolution. Bergson, who enjoyed immense international fame at the turn of the century, was a touchstone for the Ateneo de la Juventud. In 1917, when the philosopher travelled to Madrid to deliver a series of lectures, Reyes wrote to him explaining the importance of his ideas to his group and subsequently met him in person (Reyes 1990, 255-6).[5] Elsewhere, in "El vago imperio del yo" in *Andrenio*, Reyes concludes his account of the limits of the self, asking whether Bergson's thesis of "[d]el acto creador del yo" is not "–siquiera relativamente– una ventana a la libertad?" (Reyes 1979, 439). At a glance, *Visión de Anáhuac*, may appear to present the landscape of a nation as historical construct but beneath that surface a substratum of Bergsonian ideas dictates a more fundamental message.

Reyes's affirmation of the liberating character of Bergsonian subjectivity helps to understand the author's use of perception in *Visión de Anáhuac,* allowing us to differentiate the essay's approach from the classically Romantic position outlined in my introduction. Ochoa's discussion of Humboldt holds that the Romantic idea of subjectivity is derived from the experiential relationship between individuals and their natural environment. Whilst this Romantic subjectivity does not preclude the idea of spiritual transformation within the individual, the primary importance of the natural environment as source material tends to subordinate that subjectivity to the role of a vocalizer of an ideal space-time. A result of this is the longing to reunite the individual with a kind of mythical source environment. In these terms, perception and its concomitant subjectivity, notwithstanding the awareness of human agency, tend toward the static (and longed-for, ecstatic) unification of sense and place. Aspects of Reyes's essay are reminiscent of this Romantic sensibility. Indeed, as has been mentioned elsewhere, the very framing of the text, as an anthropological overview attempting to synthesize an aesthetic idea of a Nation, closely resembles Humboldt's accounts. However, the "acto creador" of Bergsonian subjectivity so highly praised by Reyes, lends a different agency to perception in *Visión de Anáhuac*.

By recognising the Bergsonian dimensions of perception and subjectivity in the essay, Reyes's image of Mexico can be interpreted in a way that does not assume an affirmation of an ideal or teleological sense of Nation. For Bergson, creativity in the individual and as it pertains to the human, hinges upon his re-appraisal of Kant's discussion of the intellectual organisation of the material world. Kant, according to

Bergson ([1907] 1998, 358), took for granted the subordination of "extra-intellectual matter" believing it to be "co-extensive with" or "less extensive than intellect". For Bergson, this organisation is always two-fold, meaning that the human subject evolves both intellectually and intuitively. No intellectual solidification of the material universe – the production of reality – takes place without a parallel intuitive sense of the mind's undifferentiated relationship with the Whole. The aim of *Creative Evolution* is to open the reader's eyes to this and to encourage a training of the non-intellectual faculty of sense perception. Bergson argues that intuition of the vital becoming of the Whole – the *élan vital* – is the core activity of the artist, who, rather than representing the world as a manifestation of a singular, intellectual ideality, is able to reveal its true image as a virtual snapshot of its transformation.

Élan Vital and Reyes's Bergsonian Aesthetic of Metamorphosis

It is within that context that I aim to address the overtly historical interpretation of *Visión de Anáhuac* and, at the same time, disambiguate Reyes's approach to the natural world from his Romantic predecessors. In a way that troubles the historical, Hegelian interpretation of the essay, Reyes is at pains to underline the commonality of all peoples deriving from the transformation of nature. But rather than solely look back to the 18th and 19th centuries, I want to argue that Reyes's perspective of nature draws as much on the vitalism of Bergson's creative evolution as it does on the scientific Romanticism of Humboldt. Bergson's inversion of Darwinian principles replaces determinism with an innovative principle of life and a conviction that creativity is able to go beyond nature in a synthetic process revealing the evolution of infinite, virtual forms.

Above all else, and in a way that echoes Bergson's faith in the aesthetic spirit, *Visión de Anáhuac* elevates the roles of human creativity and artifice with the aspiration that they might overcome or at least fracture the science of history. Discussing Reyes's citation of the colonial accounts of indigenous imitations of nature, Margot Glantz has argued that the essay, itself a deliberate act of recitation, is an attempt to understand national identity via self-reflexive, artistic artifice (Glantz 1981, 371). Building on Glantz's observations in the light of Bergsonian creative evolution, the aims of the essay can be elucidated further. On one level, Reyes's focus on citation, intertextuality and mimicry in the essay, points to a proto-postmodern critique of originality. *Visión de Anáhuac*, telling a story already told, appears to emphasize the impossibility of returning to an untainted impression of the Valley of Mexico. The essay does contain this dimension and Reyes uses it to suggest that there can be no unmediated, or in other words, authentic national, historical consciousness. He also employs this idea to ironize the nostalgic dimension of the essay cited in my introduction. However, in Bergsonian terms, these repetitions can be seen as only the formal manifestation of the material. Communal and individual identity seen only as solidifications of consciousness, are equivalent to what Reyes terms in *Andrenio* as "la noción simplista de progreso" (Reyes 1979, 480). Bergson adds the ideal principle of life – or *élan vital* – to this concrete reality and it is these two in conjunction that form creative evolution.

Explaining the relationship between material reality and fluid creativity Bergson ([1907] 1998, 239) writes:

> For we seize from within, we live at every instant, a creation of form, and it is just in those cases in which form is pure, and in which the

> creative current is momentarily interrupted, that there is a creation of matter.

The philosopher's contention is that rational consciousness perceives only form and, in that perception, is blind to the "creative current". Only intuition, the realm of sense perception, can grasp "the creative current" associated with *durée*. The dialectic, he argues, although a necessary science, proves the insights of intuition but is never adequate to the truth of "the creative current" (Bergson [1907] 1998, 238). For Bergson, the artist, unlike the philosopher or the scientist, produces meaning by trying to reduce the distance between rational thought and its object (Bergson [1907] 1998, 177). This drawing together of the artist and the subject differs oppositionally from the Hegelian self-consciousness or the "autocontemplación del yo" as condemned by Vasconcelos. What Bergson proposes as the "uninterrupted" core of creative evolution is not the materialisation of consciousness but the revelation of its immaterial – one might say spiritual – being as governed by *durée*. This is the category of creativity that, for Bergson, separates human evolution from that of all other life forms:

> In the course of evolution, while some beings have fallen more and more asleep, others have more and more completely awakened, and the torpor of some has served the activity of others. But the waking could be effected in two different ways. *Life, that is to say consciousness launched into matter*, fixed its attention either on its own movement or on the matter it was passing through; and it has thus been turned either in the direction of intuition or in that of intellect (Bergson [1907] 1998, 181-2).[6]

Sánchez Prado gains evidence for his Hegelian reading of *Visión de Anáhuac* from Reyes's essay "La sonrisa" published in *El suicida* also in 1917, where Reyes reads the smile as an initiation of consciousness:

> La sonrisa es la primera opinión del espírutu sobre la materia. Cuando el niño comienza a despertar del sueño de su animalidad, sorda y laboriosa, sonríe: es porque le ha nacido el dios (Reyes 1956b, 237-8).

He then transposes this birthing of the human onto the negation that is the historical vacuum of the "espanto social" of *Visión de Anáhuac*: revolution equals revelation and the promise of future renewal. There is, without doubt, a Hegelian influence in "La sonrisa" but to use it to interpret *Visión de Anáhuac* as thoroughly Hegelian, Sánchez Prado must turn a blind eye to that essay's reference to "la 'evolución creadora'" (Reyes 1956b, 240). He must also be unreceptive to the Bergsonian implications of "la primera opinión del espíritu sobre la materia" that are patent in the above extract. "Consciousness launched into matter" and focused on the material world is closer to Hegelian historical consciousness, whereas consciousness turned in on its own movement is the intuitive perception of the vital principle that precedes material form and guarantees creative evolution. Returning to the essay "La sonrisa", it is clear that emancipatory consciousness for Reyes resides not in its materialisation but in its cleaving to an originary, vital principle:

> Toda actividad libre, toda nueva aportación a la vida, tiende a incorporarse, a sujetarse en las escalvitudes de la naturaleza. […] Lo

> libre sólo lo es en su origen, en su semilla, en su inspiración (Reyes 1956b, 238).

Reyes's words echo Bergson's affirmation that an intuitive consciousness of the vital principle precipitates the "creative current". It is this attitude, I would argue, that dominates in *Visión de Anáhuac* rather than that of the Hegelian dialectic.

In two senses there is much overlap between my reading of *Visión de Anáhuac* and that of Sánchez Prado. Both see what might be termed a philosophy of becoming in the text and both argue that Reyes is concerned with an ethics of a future, open Mexican identity. However, when viewed in relation to the rest of the text, the historical dialectic with which Part I sets the scene in *Visión de Anáhuac* begins to resemble not so much a guiding principle of the essay as a straw man that Reyes will destabilize in Parts II and III.

The "sentido espiritual" of *Visión de Anáhuac* is the author's attempt to capture the life of "the creative current" from the empirical reality or the "brutalidad de los hechos" of Mexican history, but Bergsonian, rather than Hegelian, the spirit pursued by Reyes is not to be found in the developmental trajectory of history. The historiographical tone of Part I that suggests a synthetic account of Mexico past and present is replaced by a personal, almost anthropological, approach in Parts II and III. Of equal significance to this shift in focus is the fact that the move away from historiographical metanarrative is conveyed via the recitation of real conquest historiographies. Rather than dialectical, the process that Reyes highlights, particularly in Part II, is one of repetition and difference that incorporates the categories of the natural and the artificial.

Glantz's discussion of mimicry and artifice introduced above gives a perceptive account of Reyes's view of identity and is worth considering in detail. In Part II, Reyes cites Bernal Díaz – citing Gómara – in a lengthy description of the elaborate indigenous fabrication of nature. Glantz argues that the image of indigenous artifice is a seed from which springs a series of recreations culminating in Reyes's essay itself. Underlining the "contradictory meanings" of the verb *contrahacer*, Glantz (1981, 371) writes:

> contrahacer es repetir, mediante lo artificial, lo que ha hecho la naturaleza y, por ello mismo, lo contrahecho es lo deforme: recrear es deformar. *Visión de Anáhuac* resume mediante enumeraciones poéticas, epígrafes y síntesis históricas una conciencia de lo nacional o mejor el inento de definir cuál sería esa conciencia, y en el intento, que presupone la escritura, se entrevé un artificio, un deseo de contrahacer lo natural pues la identidad pasa ante todo por la naturaleza: "cualquiera que sea la doctrina histórica que se profece [sic], … nos une con la raza de ayer, sin hablar de sangres, la comunidad de esfuerzo por domeñar nuestra naturaleza brava y fragosa; esfuerzo que es la base bruta de la historia".

Glantz's conclusions regarding the "conciencia de lo nacional" are ambivalent and run to an abrupt close. Echoing Part I, she states that the remodelling of the base, natural materials can end in either cultural grandeur and refinement or chaos and exhaustion. We are left to glean that Reyes, with "una rica interpretación de nuestra realidad que más que lógica y cerebral es puramente poética" (Glantz 1981, 374), offers up both potential outcomes for Mexico almost ambivalently.

The poetics of recreation in *Visión de Anáhuac*, I would argue, belie greater ambition. Although the term "lo deforme" might, in certain contexts, be understood neutrally, Glantz (1981, 371) provides context prior to the above citation that point to the pejorative sense of the word: "La acción de contrahacer que describen los cronistas se vuelve prodigiosa y lastimera". Understood in this way, as fecund but damaging, the process of creative copying neatly fits with the cycle of civilisation and decay introduced by Reyes in Part I. The difficulty with this analysis is that the pejorative sense of deformation that Glantz connects to "lo contrahecho" in *Visión de Anáhuac* is not supported by evidence from the text. Such a reading relies on the unambiguous purity of nature as source and an uncompromised mistrust of human artifice, neither of which make any sense viewed against the poetic optimism of the coda. Moreover, Glantz's conclusions endanger the relationship she draws between the indigenous feats of recreation and Reyes's own intertextual confection. "Lo contrahecho", be it a butterfly made of feathers and gold (Reyes 1956a, 23) or *Visión de Anáhuac* itself, is intended by Reyes to be a ritual enunciation of evolution rather than a pale simulacrum of nature.

Glantz is right to call Reyes's essay more poetic than logical but underpinning his poetics is a broadly Bergsonian "vitalism" that counteracts the logic of the dialectic. If history would seem to be locked into an exchange of civilisation and exhaustion, a poetics of creative evolution offers an alternative perspective. Reyes's approach to going beyond Mexico's historical impasse as set out in Part I, is to refocus away from a panoramic, epochal landscape towards the emotional detail of individual experience; a readjustment that, in Bergsonian terms, equates to a primary focus on the sensory rather than cognitive reasoning.

In Part II, Reyes takes the contemporary historiography of the conquest and, as Glantz has suggested, emphasizes the way in which the gaze of the colonist catalogues, organizes and incorporates the brute matter encountered (Glantz 1981, 371).[7] Familiar as many readers will be with the language of colonial accounts, the descriptions reproduce visual forms that are firmly etched in a collective consciousness. As an enumeration of factual experience, such accounts make experience formally material, producing a record upon which can be grounded intellectual mastery and political control. Reyes's reciting and restaging of these accounts, however, overtly brings the process into question. In a way that clearly introduces the theme of "lo contrahecho" that follows on subsequent pages, Reyes encourages the reader to engage with metamorphosis as process.

The clearest example of this is the conquistador's description of the marketplace. What begins as a cataloguing of innumerable wares, quickly transforms into an impressionistic account of sensory overload:

> En pintoresco atolondramiento, el conquistador va y viene por las calles de la feria, y conserva de sus recuerdos la emoción de un raro palpitante caos: las formas se funden entre sí; estallan en cohete los colores; el apetito despierta al olor picante de las yerbas y las especias. Rueda, se desborda de azafate todo el paraíso de la fruta: globos de color, ampollas transparentes, racimos de lanzas, piñas escamosas y cogollos de hojas. En las bateas redondas de sardinas, giran los reflejos de plata y de azafrán, las orlas de aletas y colas en pincel; de una cuba sale la bestial cabeza del pescado, bigotudo y atónito (Reyes 1956a, 22).

Reyes overtly interrupts the numeration of detail, with a poetic impression of metamorphic objects. Rather than materialized in concrete forms, the consciousness of the conquistador struggles to "freeze" time and space to form clearly delineated matter. Immediately recollecting Bergson's differentiation between intellectual and sensory perception, this passage replaces the cognitive, quantification of data with an intuitive, sense perception of a process of becoming.

Contrasting with the more sober, historical panorama of Part I, the account of the conquistador's experience of the market place is poetic and ludic. The description diverges significantly from the discussion of a structural decadence of national identity, highlighting instead, the fragmentation and recombination of impressionistic forms. Although the passage refers to the memory of the conquistador's bewilderment and loss of cognitive mastery, the "palpitante caos" is presented with exuberance by Reyes. The crisis of the spectator, no longer able to order the data of his consciousness, is transformed into what Bergson ([1907] 1998, 239) terms "the creative current". The disorientation of the experience echoes but twists the previous image of chaos supplied by Reyes in his reference to the "espanto social". Here, rather than exhaustion, chaos comes to signify a flux of metamorphic creativity that explicitly undermines the colonial process of scopic mastery.

In this passage that precedes the discussion of "lo contrahecho", Reyes explicitly emphasizes the combination of the natural and the manufactured as "las formas se funden entre sí". The account of the spontaneous melding of the organic and the artificial lends a meaning to the account of the indigenous arts of mimicry that is not picked up on by Glantz. As outlined above, there is a sense in which Glantz sees a linear, developmental connection between natural source and artificial copy. However, preceded by this passage in which the two are conjoined in an indefinite hierarchy ("racimos de lanzas"; "orlas de aletas"), the reader is encouraged to ponder an evolution open to *durée*, or non-linear time where the familiar logic of the copy is destabilized.

In Bergsonian terms, evolution as creative rather than deterministic is propelled by *élan vital*, that which overcomes the bounds of biological imperative from within. It is manifested in life forms but these do not represent its condition:

> There is no doubt that life as a whole is an evolution, that is, an unceasing transformation. But life can progress only by means of the living, which are its depositaries. Innumerable living beings, almost alike, have to repeat each other in space and time for the novelty they are working out to grow and mature (Bergson [1907] 1998, 230-1).

The iterations of beings and forms are to be understood less as results of evolution than as snapshots of its movement. Such snapshots have a serial rather than linear relationship, underpinned, as they are, by the "unceasing transformation" of *durée*. Reyes's fascination with "lo contrahecho" in *Visión de Anáhuac*, it seems to me, centres not on the process of historical "boom and bust" but in trying to glimpse the Bergsonian evolution that, paradoxically, inhabits the serial, repeated cultural forms of the essay. His poetic recreation of colonial accounts reproduces a series of repeated forms that are familiar to us but, at the same time, make manifest the immediacy of their becoming.

For Bergson, it is the artist rather than the logician that is best attuned to capture, via intuition, the movement of evolution. As if in recognition of this and undermining the colonial practice of visual consumption, the final line of the above passage reverses the direction of "lo contrahecho" and has the moustachioed conquistador transformed into a devilish fish. Reminiscent of the decorative work of folk Catholicism – an art

that consistently blends the natural with Christian iconography and the human with the animal – the control of the European is mediated as its image is mutated to retell the story of the conquest from a less univocal perspective. The conquistador, in the very act of visual documentation, cedes to the affect of sensory impression and, in the process, is rendered metamorphic, part man part animal. As an attempt to convey the movement of creative evolution, the images of fusion between the artificial or the fabricated and nature, demonstrate the process of exchange between these elements rather than a linear movement away from an organic source.

Seen in this way, the discussion of "lo contrahecho" can be read in conjunction with the neo-baroque sensibility of Reyes's poetics in this passage. As one layer of a *mise en abîme*, the indigenous "citations" of nature are repeated in the conquistador's record of Anáhuac and yet again in Reyes's "vision". In line with the Ateneo's "vitalist" approach, Reyes is careful to emphasize the self-conscious fabrication, not as a damaging deformation but as a process of appropriation and distortion intended to reflect upon a culture in the making. As Patrick Romanell (1952, 72) points out, the Ateneo's vitalism directly appealed to "the Bergsonian-Jamesian *homo faber*, not the Spinozistic *homo cogitans*". The artistry of the indigenous craftsmen and the prose poetry of *Visión de Anáhuac* are, I would argue, linked by Reyes via the implicit connection to these anti-intellectualist influences. The conquistador, the would-be "*homo cogitans*", is disturbed in the act of giving account because his cognitive powers are destabilized by the overwhelming sensory information.

Counteracting the historical and dialectical dimensions of the introduction with a Bergsonian aesthetic, Reyes expresses the Ateneo's vitalist conception of the subject and - to cite Vasconcelos - its "infinito de virtualidades". The perception of the conquistador and, in an implied mirroring, the contemporary eye that perceives this vision centuries later, does not capture a concrete image of Mexico, or even a series of points on a historical line as suggested in Part I. Instead, in "lo contrahecho", *Visión* presents a window on the Bergsonian vital, evolutionary process in which physical, motor action and the immaterial combine in a sedimentation of reality. Perception in these terms attends to a subjectivity quite different, on the one hand, from a historical materialisation of consciousness and, on the other, distinct in degree from the Romantic theory discussed above. This intuitive perception of the dance between the real and the virtual (matter and spirit) helps us to understand *Visión de Anáhuac* as Reyes's experiment with the Bergsonian "acto creador del yo". As I continue to explore below, the influence of Bergsonian subjectivity lays behind Reyes's conviction in an inter-subjective idea of invention.

Native American World Soul and Bergsonian Subjectivity: A Virtual Rather than Ideal Image

Where Part II introduces this metamorphic representation of identity through the prism of European colonial accounts, in Part III Reyes extends his ideas within the context of indigenous poetry. Reinforcing the link between cultural identity and nature, Reyes focuses on the potency of floral imagery in the Aztec consciousness. If, as my argument has outlined, Part II moves away from the apparently objective, historical perspective of the introduction to highlight the sensual experience of individual metamorphosis, Part III is concerned with establishing the relationship between individual and collective consciousness. It is here and in the concluding coda that Reyes attempts a

synthesis of the one and the many and of the personal and the social alluded to in my introduction.

Sensual rather than cognitive experience remains at the heart of Reyes's contemplation of a collective identity, which he explores via the citation of the poem *Ninoyolnonotza*. Reyes notes that Brinton, the translator who published it as one of a series of Nahua ballads in English in 1887, saw in these an allegorical dimension reminiscent of the Romantics, adding that, for the poetic voice of *Ninoyolnonotza*, "El mundo mismo le aprece como un sensitivo jardín" (Reyes 1956a, 30-1).

Whilst Reyes also doubtless saw a connection to the Romantic tradition embodied in the lonely figure of the poet in a natural landscape, within the context of the aims of the essay as a whole, his engagement with the poem can be understood not as a contemplation of the primacy of nature but rather as an examination of the transformative relationship between the natural and the supernatural or the material and the spiritual. Although Reyes (1956a, 29) is at pains to note the reality of "la pérdida de la poesía indígena como fenómeno general y social", he asserts that it remains possible to detect a Native American sensibility that survives European interference and, in doing so, he implicitly distances himself from Brinton's Romantic colouring of the ballads: "En los viejos cantares náhoas, las metáforas conservan cierta audacia, cierta aparente incongruencia; acusan una ideación no europea" (Reyes 1956a, 30).

Ninoyolnonotza sees the poet wandering through a valley in search of flowers that he might collect for his people to raise their spirits but by the implication of his cries – "¡Si algunos de nuestro pueblo entrasen aquí! ¡Si muchos de los nuestros estuviesen aquí!" – he would appear to be a sole survivor (Reyes 1956a, 31-2). Reyes points out the ubiquity of floral imagery in Aztec culture, noting the coincidence of the arrival of the conquistadors with the predicted rain of flowers that would accompany the final phase of the cosmological period of the fourth sun. He continues with reference to the Vatican Codex, in which "la diosa de los amores lícitos, colgada de un festón vegetal, baja hacia la tierra, mientras las semillas revienten en lo alto, dejando caer hojas y flores" (Reyes 1956a, 28). In this image and in *Ninoyolnonotza* the flower encapsulates the fecund pleasure of life as well as the potential of rebirth and, despite the ultimate pessimism of the poem ("…El dolor llena mi alma a recordar en dónde yo, el cantor, vi el sitio florido…" [Reyes 1956a, 32]), it is the motif of rebirth or redemption that Reyes takes forward into his conclusions.

Although Reyes alerts the reader to the danger of historically inaccurate interpretations of Nahua texts, he does not prevent himself from identifying in them the presence of a universal myth as evidenced in his comparison of *Ninoyolnonotza* with the *Song of Songs* and of the legend of Quetzalcóatl with Persephone, Adonis and Tammuz (Reyes 1956a, 32-3). In a sense, Reyes is as guilty of re-writing Nahua culture as the author he humorously condemns for claiming the influence of Horace in Netzahualcóyatl (Reyes 1956a, 30). His implicit defence is that he is doing so openly by declaring the claim to a shared cultural heritage embodied in the aesthetic icons of the nation's past. Critics such as Conn have considered this a strategy of appropriation but this opinion risks underestimating the extent to which Reyes engages with that problem.

In his adoption of Nahua myth as a motif of redemption, Reyes is open about the mutation it undergoes in his own essay. Unlike the Mediterranean myths of the returning hero, he argues, in Mexico "el héroe tarda en resucitar, tal vez nunca resucitará" (Reyes 1956a, 33). His affirmation that "La peregrinación del poeta en busca de flores, y aquél interrogar al pájaro y a la mariposa, evocan en el lector la figura de Sulamita en pos del amado" (Reyes 1956a, 32) must, by implication, acknowledge

that the redemption between a people and their God interpreted in the union of the lovers in the *Song of Songs* is absent in the unfulfilled longing of *Ninoyolnonotza's* poet to be united with his kin. Reyes's aim is problematic to those who are troubled by his de-historicisation of the Nahua cultural forms but it amounts to a proposal that redemption persists as a seed in the aesthetic images of a historically decimated culture and that their continued reworking may cause that seed to sprout.

This ambition is clear enough in the coda where Reyes (1956a, 34) affirms: "Si esa tradición nos fuera ajena, está como quiera en nuestras manos, y sólo nosotros disponemos de ella". Less immediately obvious is the weight of the vitalist or Bergsonian influence that adjusts what at first might appear to be an unambiguously Romantic sentiment. If, as I would contend, *Visión de Anáhuac* is not simply a nostalgic recuperation of the past, it is important to connect Reyes's reading of the role of the Nahua aesthetic object back to the tenets of Bergsonian creative evolution and intuitive sense perception. Linking back to the metamorphic images of Part II, it is possible to see how Reyes proposes an evolving relationship between matter and spirit. Part III develops this relationship by extending the episode of the conquistador's individual transformation into a reflection on a collective and national perspective.

Referring to a separate ballad in comparison with *Ninoyolnonotza*, Reyes cites the poet's desire to envelop his soul in flowers and to become intoxicated in anticipation of exile (Reyes 1956a, 32-3). "La flor", he argues, "aparece al poeta como representación de los bienes terrestres" (Reyes 1956a, 33). The flower, in this way, is a Nahua image of material rootedness but its representation in the ballads is complex, indicating more than a purely organic dimension understood in opposition to the categories of the artificial or the metaphysical. As a figure for the joy of belonging, the flower picks up on two central themes of *Visión de Anáhuac*: the inter-penetration of the organic and the inorganic as developed in the metamorphosis of Part II and the aspiration of a collective identity towards which the essay as a whole is oriented.

Referring back to Reyes's observation that the Nahua poetic metaphors "acusan una ideación no europea" (Reyes 1956a, 30), this is indicated most strikingly by the powerful animism of *Ninoyolnonotza*. The poet is the sole human presence in the text but rather than interior reflection, we are presented with a dialogue not only between the poet and the animals encountered but between elements of the natural world of differing degrees of sentience: "—Al pasear, oigo como si verdaderamente las rocas respondieran a los dulces cantos de las flores; responden las aguas lucientes y murmuradoras; la fuente azulada canta, se estrella, y vuelve a cantar" (Reyes 1956a, 33). Understood within the animistic roots of Mesoamerican cosmology, it would be wrong to interpret these lines as a purely Romantic, psychological personification of the natural. Instead, the poem presents each element as a material substance imbued with a world spirit. Whilst it might be going too far to completely align Reyes's point of view with the poem's indigenous animist roots, there is nevertheless a potent cross-fertilisation between that "ideación no europea" and the Bergsonian challenge to the Western binary of idealism and realism.

In this light, Reyes's connection of the flower to the "bienes terrestres" has implications beyond the nostalgic, Romantic appropriation of nature. In the very elevation of nature, Romanticism asserts the centrality of the individual psyche as controlling force (even if the objective certainty of that control may be brought into question). The residues of the far less personal, indigenous mind in *Ninoyolnonotza* that would have had a greater affinity with the interconnection of matter and spirit connect to Bergsonian subjectivity as a reconciliation of idealism and materialism. Reyes's tone in *Visión de Anáhuac* is certainly not divorced from Romanticism. His notes of longing

and loss in *Historia documental de mis libros* add context to such an interpretation but the link to Bergson reveals a more radical purpose to the use of the indigenous literature than the author has been credited for. The "non-European" use of the natural in this poetry differs from pathetic fallacy and Reyes does not simply deploy it as such. Rather it carries weight in its own material function and in the extent to which it evolves in combination with the ideal or the immaterial spirit.

Bergson's philosophy is not strictly animist but the idea of *durée*, through which spirit and matter coincide in innovation, posits a supra-intelligence of universal movement that contains individual consciousness. The intuition of such a perspective would glimpse an exchange of forms in perpetual motion between the organic and the inorganic. This is not identical to the idea of the *Anima Mundi* but it should be remembered that Plotinus is a significant influence on Bergson.[8] The Native American poetry recalls the idea of a world soul that has strong parallels with the Bergsonian dispersal of a human-centred subjectivity.

There is a direct correlation between *Ninoyolnonotza's* meditation on exile and the poet's place in the world and the metamorphic process of "lo contrahecho" as witnessed from the focalising perspective of the conquistador in Part II. Both the animistic representation of the world in *Ninoyolnonotza* and the metamorphic exchange in the marketplace section are suggestive of a mixing of the organic and inorganic that refutes an oppositional relationship between the material and the ideal. Rather than a Romantic idealisation of a material past, the "vision" sketches new forms in the making springing from within the component parts of a culture. What Reyes sees in the Nahua poetry, I would argue, is a template for the unification of matter and spirit that Bergson approaches in *Creative Evolution*, in which the *élan vital* not only shapes the manifestation of material reality but, in its alignment with *durée*, exceeds the laws of the physical universe. Like the flow of creative evolution, it can be witnessed via sensual, intuitive perception:

> Llámase el cantar *Ninoyolnonotza*: meditación concentrada, melancólica delectación, fantaseo largo y voluptuoso, donde los sabores del sentido se van trasmutando en aspiración ideal (Reyes 1956a, 31).

On one hand, these lines might be read as the confirmation of Romantic idealisation; on the other, seen from a vitalist standpoint, they encapsulate the on-going ("se van trasmutando"), intuitive fusion of the material and the ideal.

In the discussion of the Nahua poetic image and in the concluding words of the coda, Reyes leaves the reader with the most urgent message of the essay, namely that the energy of the aesthetic image continues to evolve by dint of its collective significance. This appeal to the unifying power of a universal myth is evident in his comparison to the *Song of Songs* and to the Mediterranean myths of rebirth. The particular focus on the animism of indigenous culture and the linking of this to contemporary Bergsonian currents allows him to develop that idea in ways hitherto unacknowledged.

The indigenous animism of Nahua verse presents being as a concatenation of the organic and the inorganic and as an experience that seemingly can only be enjoyed collectively: "'Yo soy miserable, miserable como la última flor'" (Reyes 1956a, 33). An animistic world-view posits existence as fundamentally inter-relational: the one in the many and the many in the one. Although the Nahua poem presents a first person perspective it accentuates that voice as part of a world consciousness that exceeds

individual psychology. This aspect of *Ninoyolnonotza* is used by Reyes as an analogy for his own image, thereby functioning as a visual, dramatic scenario lodged within the essay.

If we venture a Bergsonian model of consciousness for Reyes's essay, his "vision" lies alongside that of the Nahua poem, not as its historical inheritor – he explicitly denies the historical continuity of shared tradition – but as a parallel, virtual manifestation of a spatio-temporal landscape briefly isolated from the Whole. Virtuality, as developed by Bergson in *Matter and Memory* is a quality that pertains to all images to a greater or lesser extent depending on the degree of their remove from concrete, physical experience[9]. Bergsonian virtual images, contrary to commonplace conception, rather than simulacra, are the fabric of a reality, which is the distillation of intelligible images from the amorphous Whole. It ceaselessly forms and reforms as a relational process between real, brute experience and virtual, pure image. At one end, motor experience is unreflected habit, and, at the other, the bodiless pictures of pure memory are equivalent to spirit.[10]

In Bergson's model, intellectual perception (as opposed to pure, sense perception) takes place virtually because its inception is a *de facto* break from the real. This break immediately plunges the amorphous self into the realm of subjectivity and subjective consciousness is, at heart, impersonal because it draws on images from memory, the realm of spirit that exists externally and inorganically. By extension of this, the perceiving subject itself must also be understood as an image and one that pertains to virtuality in the same way that all that extends outside of it. A fundamental principle of Bergson's model of perceived images is that the brain resides in them rather than vice versa. Each virtual image that connects us to memory, in this way, is not a restaging of the past exclusively within the mind but is a resurgent plane of consciousness intruding upon the present that relinks matter and spirit.

It may be an exaggeration to define *Visión de Anáhuac* as a thoroughgoing literary execution of the thesis of *Matter and Memory* but it is not difficult to see Reyes's essay as an aesthetic experiment in the virtuality of the "living" image in Bergsonian terms. If we dare to see *Visión de Anáhuac* in this way, Reyes's composite and refracted picture of the Valley of Mexico becomes a virtual image connecting the individual subjectivity of the artist to the manifold subjectivities of a community. In this way, it would reveal, to re-cite Vasconcelos and Reyes, the "infinito de virtualidades" within the "acto creador del yo", and allow us to see in the author's personal account of loss an innovative thesis on collective identity. Bergsonian virtuality permits Reyes to propose and, as an artist, to participate in a radical agency of the past that is quite different to a notion of historical continuity. In the virtual image, the present and the past are connected even if loss is never recuperated via a process of retrospective historical understanding. The virtual image, running contrary to historical understanding, is a collective being *with* the past that re-establishes the circulatory relationship with the non-chronological time of *durée*.

Where Part II of *Visión de Anáhuac* saw Reyes overtly experimenting with his own metamorphic poetics, Part III forms a more distanced reflection of that process, drawing on the Native American examples. The focus still rests firmly on an idea at the heart of *Creative Evolution*, that the creative impulse can reactivate the planes of consciousness that organize matter. Reyes may not refer overtly to creative evolution in this text but his appeal to active memory repeats Bergson's affirmation ([1907] 1998, 180) that "Man […] is not limited to *playing* his past life again; he *represents* and *dreams* it."[11]

Anáhuac, as represented by Reyes via the palimpsestic sources employed, becomes a stage set and a metaphor for the mobile image in which a communal, cultural identity may be forged through the linking of the material past to a sensual present:

> cuando no se aceptara lo uno ni lo otro —ni la obra de la acción común, ni la obra de la contemplación común— la emoción histórica es parte de la vida actual, y, sin su fulgor, nuestras valles y nuestras montañas serían como un teatro sin luz (Reyes 1956a, 34).

The term "emoción histórica" does not carry philosophical precision but when set against the categories of communal action and contemplation that Reyes discounts, it points to a union of immediate sense perception and the past that returns us to the Bergsonian real and virtual.

Building on Part II, Reyes continues to connect the process of renewal to artifice in a way that again recalls the neo-baroque with more than a hint of renaissance, divine dramaturgy. As he goes on to explain, evidently drawing a parallel between his examples and *Visión de Anáhuac* itself, the link between the past and the present can be found in the aesthetic image: "El poeta ve, al reverberar de la luna en la nieve de los volcanes, recortarse sobre el cielo el espectro de Doña Marina, acosada por la sombre del Flechador de Estrellas" (Reyes 1956a, 34). The role of the poet or, as Bergson would have it, the artist in general, is to realize the purpose of organic forms; a purpose to fulfil the trajectory of the *élan vital*:

> Our eye perceives the features of the living being, merely as assembled, not as mutually organized. The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model (Bergson [1907] 1998, 177).

Far removed from a properly historical method, Reyes's essay can be read as a personal realisation of this Bergsonian formulation of creativity, where Anáhuac is the model within which the artist searches for the transformational potential of *durée*.

It might be argued that Reyes's approach to Mexico's past and present is idealistic and elitist in its attachment to the power of the aesthetic. *Visión de Anáhuac* offers a rarefied thesis that, for many, will never address adequately socio-historical reality. Yet an understanding of the contexts, including the history of Positivism, against which Reyes and the Ateneo positioned themselves, and the philosophical sources on which they drew, enables a recognition of the "vitalist" dimensions of the essay. In *Visión de Anáhuac*, Reyes counters the shortcomings of the dialectic and attempts to recover that which is lost to history but salvageable from a different temporal perspective. Moreover, for a commentator whose writing is, for some, identified with an outmoded neo-Classicist elite, Reyes makes a concerted effort to think through the meaning of the relationship between the individual and the collective in Mexico. The sense of an identity to which he aspires is explored in the metamorphoses of Part II and the inter-subjectivity of the indigenous ballads of Part III. Essentially Bergsonian rather than dialectical, Reyes's position places equal emphasis on the individual and the collective in preference to a historically derived social superstructure.

One line of the coda best sums up these attitudes: "El choque de la sensibilidad con el mismo mundo labra, engendra un alma común" (Reyes 1956a, 34). In Bergsonian terms, this appeal can be read as a reconciliation of the reality of material circumstances with an ideal, metaphysical purpose. Reyes's statement makes it clear that his ultimate vision is spiritual but the revelation sought can only be found within a material universe acting as a collective touchstone of inspiration. Quite different from the interpretation of the text that views the historical vacuum as a catalyst for change, this model requires an epiphany in the form of an instant of aesthetic clarity. In this way, consciousness is not defined as an ideal collectivity springing forth from chaos. Rather than an end point, understood within the context of Bergson's *durée*, consciousness is the metamorphic form taken by evolution.

The "alma común", I would argue, is not, for Reyes, the union of consciousness and the material world, but the intuitive, sensual experience of the material as a virtual manifestation that links past, present and future consciousness non-chronologically. *Visión de Anáhuac*, on one hand, establishes nature rather than history as "la base bruta" but, in its fascination with the physical jolt of the supernatural – the metamorphic, the animistic and "lo contrahecho" –, on the other, it pursues the transformative facility of the aesthetic to defy natural laws. The "alma común" is not the proscribed result of historical change but a way of describing a non-deterministic relationship between the individual and the communal, whereby individual acts of creativity are precipitated by a shared principle of evolution.

Because Bergson centres perception in an intuitive self, the model also enables Reyes to bring together the socio-historical with the personal in a way that would be impossible within historical idealism. This intention is made clear by the way in which Reyes mirrors himself in the author of the Nahua poem transcribed in Part III. The *Mexica* poet, on the one hand, finds a metaphor for the loss of a people in the simple image of "la última flor" and Reyes, on the other, reflects his exile and the loss of his father in the grand backdrop of Anáhuac. The success of *Visión de Anáhuac* is that neither of these images comes to dominate the other. Instead, through the author's implicit engagement with Bergsonian ideas, the personal and the communal, the individual and the social are reflected and redeveloped in one another throughout the essay.

Visión de Anáhuac predates Bergson's final book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* but Reyes's attempt to sketch the idea of a national identity within the framework of creative evolution seems to anticipate that work's call for an "open society". His belief in the crystallisation of "la emoción histórica" in the aesthetic image finds an echo in Bergson's discussion of society as driven by a twofold moral impulse. On the one hand, the norms of social organisation, which are learned through the intellectual response to the demands of nature, bind us as coherent but exclusionary units. This "closed society", impelled by "pressure" attains great material products but, for Bergson, is essentially inward looking and circular in its nature (Bergson [1932] 1977, 51). Primary morality, connected closely to the principle of life as devised in *Creative Evolution*, speaks not for society but for "humanity" and is derived not from cognition but from the "supra-intellectual" (Bergson [1932] 1977, 44). This latter morality, at the vanguard of the "open society" is fostered via "aspiration" rather than "pressure" (Bergson [1932] 1977, 50-1). Where the morality of the "closed society" is static that of the "open society" ensures forward momentum (Bergson [1932] 1977, 51).

Following the model of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson draws on artistic metaphors to demonstrate his supra-intellectual morality and the difference in kind between the emotion that generates it and the "commonplace" emotion of simple affect:

> To sum up, alongside of the emotion which is a result of the representation and which is added to it, there is the emotion which precedes the image, which virtually contains it, and is to a certain extent its cause. A play may be scarcely a work of literature and yet it may wrack our nerves and cause an emotion of the first kind, intense, no doubt, but commonplace, culled from those we experience in the course of daily life, and in any case devoid of mental content. But the emotion excited within us by a great dramatic work is of a quite distinct character. Unique of its kind, it has sprung up in the soul of the poet and there alone, before stirring our own (Bergson [1932] 1977, 47).

Although not those of a single, individual author, Reyes posits the iconic Nahua images as a channelling of an "emoción histórica" that is capable of forging a unity akin to Bergson's "open society". Different to emotion as nostalgic empathy or the catalyst of ideation, in the absence of substantive social structures on which to base a new idea of nation, Reyes advocates a prior, creative emotion as an alternative to the oppositional and destructive realities of contemporary Mexico. As Reyes's own contribution to the aesthetic imagining of Mexico, the essay, as "acto creador del yo" can be seen as an aspiration to energize a spiritual community. In this, he consciously joins the author of *Ninoyolnonotza* as the creator of an image that brings the individual into an evolving relationship with the communal.

As I have argued above, by recognising the influence of Bergson, there is a case to see the image of Mexico in *Visión de Anáhuac* as virtual rather than ideal. Reyes's accentuation of the making of image in the text, from the examples of Renaissance travel literature in Part I, through to the Nahua mimicry of nature and the "teatro sin luz" of Parts II and III, underlines that his vision is one among many and provisional. If all images are evolving and fleeting they are also, in Bergsonian terms, glimpses of a universal consciousness. Virtuality is both fragile and latent with invention, linking the individual to the many and the past to the present. *Visión de Anáhuac* provides evidence that there is substance to Reyes's "vitalism". As such, its virtual image of Mexico provides an alternative to Romantic and Hegelian readings of the essay.

Notes

[1] The translations are my own.
[2] As Robert Conn (2002, 55) notes, Reyes would immediately endorse Caso's championing of anti-intellectualism in the following volume of *Nosotros*.
[3] The translations are my own.
[4] For a discussion of the figure of the spiral in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Bates (2004, 143-5).
[5] Bergson's visit to Madrid was prefaced by a series of lectures by Manuel García Morente whose *La filosofía de Henri Bergson* (1917) was to become the primary critical source for generations of Spanish readers. Morente's readings of Bergson place a strong emphasis on *Creative Evolution* and it is perhaps not coincidental that the Ateneo's use of Bergson's ideas shares this tendency.
[6] My emphasis.
[7] Glantz extends her analysis to make a comparison between the colonists' accounts of the Valley of Mexico and Reyes's own impressions of Spanish foodstuffs in Madrid,

arguing that he executes the same process of incorporation. Whilst this may be the case, Reyes's portrayal of the colonial accounts is, I would suggest, more nuanced than Glantz's comparative analysis would permit.

[8] For a discussion of this see Hancock (2001, 139-62

[9] For a revealing analysis of the meaning of Bergson's virtual image see Ansell-Pearson (2002, 143-8).

[10] For an unambiguous affirmation of the latter, see Bergson ([1896] 1991, 240).

[11] The emphases are in the original.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by a period of study leave provided by the University of Leicester.

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