

THE ADVENTURES OF LUCKY PIERRE: THE RHIZOMATIC VOYAGE OF A POSTHUMAN HERO

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In the context of postmodern narrative theories the advent of electronic hyperfiction was greeted with excitement among both authors and critics. Electronic texts consist in a more interactive medium than print texts allowing for the infusion of more interaction and reader-centeredness in the experience of narrative fiction.

One of the central features of Coover's fiction lays on the poetic in-scription of the impact of twenty-first century technology – digital, cybernetic and biomedical – on what it means to be human, on the ideological and mythical dimensions of our representations of being human. Coover's works are just as revealing of the ethical and political dimensions of the current age as are the material artifacts of humanity's technological endeavors. This can be evidenced in his myth making potential, linguistic craftsmanship, and verbal virtuose - all encoded within his avowed realistic aesthetic project

The attribution of tyranny as an ontological asset of the line by Coover(1992) helps explain why and how one may approach *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre*. The novel, which shares the typical features of many of Coover's works that have already been deemed as proto-hypertexts, relies more on the notion of planes than on the notion of the line as constitutive of story.

This deployment of planes of consistency rather than of lines alone characterizes Coover's strategy to fight "the tyranny of the line" without, however, doing away with it altogether. The lines that are drawn within the reading process of a novel like *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* constitute lines of flight on the plane of consistency, demonstrating the potentiality to experience the body without organs at play.

As a geometrical category, differently from the line, the plane stands as the element that provides the reader with the chance to inhabit alternative spaces that restrain the unfolding of time, relying more on rhythm than on evolving speed. This kind of reading is described as topographical, as evading the notion of finality in-scribed by the line. Typical of hypertextual writings, this reading operates on a series of beginnings, of successive re-readings, of repetitions, of revisiting of spaces wherein the present is the dimension of time at play - reversibility being a constant.

As *Lucky Pierre* inhabits different scripts and footages, film genres and strips, he misses continuity. His basic experience is that of discontinuities, until he is faced with the final discontinuity - his. *Lucky Pierre*, though a posthuman hero, and maybe precisely because of that, must find an end to his voyage.

A book awaited for 30 years, *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* has raised a mystique of its own, as Brian Evenson(2003) remarked. In an interview to Matilde Sánchez, Coover explains that the novel started in the late 1960s, with a story whose title was "*A Man who walked in winter*". To write the story, Coover imagined the man opening his fly, without knowing what this action could trigger.

The novel eventually turned out as a sequence of nine reels - the equivalent of a section or long chapter. Interestingly, a nine-reeler is the longest a finally edited film – in the pre-digitalized movie era – would get. The first reel was finished in 1970, the second

and most of the third in 1971. Since that time portions of this novel have been published in literary journals and glossy magazines ranging from *Post Modern Culture* to *Playboy*.

Each of the nine reels is a different film directed by a different woman, a woman who serves as Lucky Pierre's sexual partner on and off screen as well as his muse – as nine were the Greek muses presiding over the arts. Each reel is an occasion for Lucky Pierre to perform, each is a different genre of film, and Coover artfully brings to the fore the distinctive traits of each art being focused – or presided over - by each one of the Muses. Despite the fact that this formal arrangement parodies the epic poem procedure and formal convention of summoning one Muse, they do not correspond only or exactly to the nine Greek Muses.

Coover makes his own catalog alternating a Christian saint, blessed or martyr and occasionally a character in American pop culture with a Greek muse, or mythic character or archetype, just to invert and subvert the conventions shaped by these ideological sets in our reading habits connected with our notion of genre and, in this way, he produces radically innovative fiction.

He does that to achieve an aesthetic resolution that allows him to displace the idealized purity associated to these icons exposing them as fictions or fictionalities taken for real. All the director share the initial C.

Order is granted linearly according to musical notation. C is also the letter that corresponds to the first note in the octave in music notation, as follows, C(do) D(re) E(mi) F(fa) G(sol) A(la) B(si) C(do). From the start, Coover sows the seeds of the association between cinema and music.

Furthermore, the first word in the first reel is *Cantus*, the first word in the second reel is Documentary, Exit in the third, Focus in the fourth, Green fields in the fifth, Adventures in the sixth, Bum in the seventh. The putative sequence of these reels as they are structured in the novel is mimetic in relation to the scale.

As for the last two reels Coover presents the ordinary stretch of human voice, that is, C to C in the eighth reel, and the virtuoso of the human voice, F to F in the ninth. In this way, Coover manages to tie the extension of the novel and the limit of the number of reels to the bodily limits the human voice bears to produce music. The human – not technologically enhanced - body is the limit.

We should keep in mind that the first movies were silent, and only later they were projected together with the performance of musicians to add to its expressive dimension. Coover manages to provoke a commentary on the historical process of movie-making and projection by opening each reel with a word starting with letters that, when read sequentially, correspond to the arrangement of the musical scale: *Cantus*, *Documentary*, *Exit*, *Focus*, *Green fields*, *Adventure*, *Bum* – the seven musical notes, the first seven reels - followed by C to C, *Cold Cocked* (do to do) and F to F, *Film Festival* (fa to fa)

Besides, language embodies the aesthetic dimension of each art being presided over by the muse at play, as well as it corresponds to, fits, or matches the film genre in which Lucky Pierre stars, as I wish to demonstrate. Language is stretched, imploded, invested with several dimensions and perspectives as any other raw material in the hands of a visual artist. Coover's linguistic and artistic craftsmanship is nowhere else more evident than in this novel.

Another line of flight from the hierarchical arborescent model inscribed by the coding of music notation lies on the connection of the opening word – which starts with the letter corresponding to the note in the series - with the genre of film that the director muse makes and the manipulation of language to fit the respective art. This endows the narrative with several levels of complexity.

The first reel, a silent classic, is directed by Cissy, alias Euterpe, the muse presiding over Music. Interestingly, Cissy is short for Cecilia, the Christian Patron Saint of Music. There is also a concern with ordering in Coover's choice of the first reel as a silent movie, a kind of tactics acknowledging the historicity and historiography of the medium.

There is still the intricacy of the plastic use of language to convey its musical dimension at various levels. To fabricate the atmosphere of winter, of the wind – air in movement – Coover contrives a consistent alliteration of plosives and fricatives, that is, you have to make wind and listen to it as you read the lines, you have to engage your full body in the process of reading. In addition, the alliterations thus produced are put to the service not only of the perceptive apparatus of the materiality of language as sound – to force the reader to experience wind - but also to draw the reader's attention to this contraption – as a postmodern writer is keen at – by explicitly elaborating on these sonorous qualities as they are performed in lexical items pertaining to music jargon.

Lucky Pierre's journey is presented in rhizomatic fashion, that is, each piece of footage can and does lead to further bifurcations, endlessly, repeating the move and re-instating it. In so being, at various instances Lucky Pierre wonders how he ended up in a certain situation of place of film and is incapable of retracing his journey, of recollecting the process that led him to that point – obviously a trick of the muses. He is continually coming – in both senses – in the scripted scenes, and when he is not, that is, the episodes in which he is *going* somewhere, he cannot get there. He is caught up in one of the muses' scripts. Only to be made to come again.

Humanity as a whole, as race, has contrived the means to its perpetuation, and our narratives stand as one among them. The issue to be raised here is whether humanity will be able to become one with the map it draws with the world it inhabits or it will choose to submit to an always pre-described territory in which to be fitted. Like Lucky Pierre, who among us will long to have a life outside the frames? Who will not shiver at the possibility of falling onto the black leader¹?

Keeping in mind that each reel in the novel is structured as a distinctive plane of consistency, given the working Coover performs in shaping its elements according to the art/film genre being presided over by the muse/director, I will analyze three of the nine reels: Reel 1, Reel 7, and Reel 9. The first and last reels correspond to the opening and closing of the novel, and the linearity is affirmed to ensure that the piece falls into the categorical labeling of a novel, which describes the voyage of a hero, his aging or maturing, and eventual "discontinuance". The choice of Reel 7 is because its director is Cora - the powerful mayor of Cinecity, or Terpsichore - the muse of dance, the art that most outstandingly relies on the body - itself a teaser to bring together the notions of the posthuman body and of the Body without Organs.

Cecilia: summoning the muse

Opening his novel with a parenthetical in-scription of the classic entreaty to the muse is one of Coover's contrivances to frame story within a parodical mood on different levels. This works as a reference to the initial section of the classic epic poem - to which we have learned to attribute the generic origin of the novel - and as an allusion to the conventional in-scription of stage directions in drama.

The former connotation is as much a traditional formal feature that accounts for the sober content of the writing to follow, a recognition of the poet's necessary plea to the divine order to get started, as an interpellation of the reader to comply with the conventions of this genre. However, the writing that follows is a postmodern novel and the appeal is clearly to the reader-in-the-world to help the writer set the story on. The graphic parentheses marks work as a tag of the author (function) and provide directions on how to read his piece, a novel instead of a play. In other words, reading is about to be staged, and the reader is definitely one of the players. This is in accord with the notion of corporeal reading that Coover's novels at the same time trigger and rely on.

According to Punday, narrative in a post-deconstructive context can be defined as,

that form of discourse that both claims the authority to describe an object or event and yet also makes clear that it *is* the product of a certain person speaking or writing. [...] [N]arration, by implication, is that mode of discourse where the ordering of the text is represented within the text, where the text folds back and represents its own exterior (the act of constructing the text) within itself [...] par excellence(PUNDAY, 2003, p.43).

The textual space that Coover lays out at the beginning of his novel entertains the discursive element providing an entrance to corporeal reading. Next to the parenthetical in-scription, which asserts the physicality of the act of writing, we are presented with the affirmation of the absence of light and a tactile appeal, "[i]n the darkness, softly"(COOVER, 2002, p.1). This forestalls the sense of sight and furthers that of touch; a summoning of the senses. The ensuing sentence starts a sequence of alliterations of voiceless and labialized phonemes in rhythmic pattern and in repetition of words that impress hearing forcefully and gradually encompasses the other senses.

A whisper becoming a tone, the echo of a tone. Doleful, a soft incipient lament flowing in the night like a wind, like the echo of a wind, a plainsong wafting distantly through the windy chambers of the night, wafting unisonously through the spaced chambers of the bitter night, alas, the solitary city, she that was full of people, thus a distant and hollow epiodion laced with sibilants bewailing the solitary city(idem).

Besides, the tone is of mourning, solitude and desolation, of wasteland, in poetic diction. To say the least, a weird beginning to a novel whose title announces "adventures". As this reel is directed by Cecilia, a juxtaposition of Saint Cecily, the Catholic patron saint of music, to the Greek muse that presides over music and lyric poetry, of joy and pleasure and of flute playing, the musical quality of language is brought to the fore and expanded to

encompass manifold associations. The tone, as we have noticed, is not at all of joy. Bearing in mind the fact that the films are all porn, flute-playing in the porn jargon is suggestive of one kind of action to take place and be performed.

The landscape that is described in the sequence is of barren hills which little by little define into a woman's naked body, and the snow falling in the city is frozen milk from her heavy breasts that sway in the wind "blown out of the anus and the vaginal canal"(p.2-3). It is in this setting that Lucky Pierre walks, the tyranny of the line implied here:

the shadow of a solitary man, like the figure in pedestrian-crossing signs, a photograph of a waling man, [...] walking alone in a lifelike parable of empty triads, between a pair of dotted lines, defined as it were by his own purpose: to forever walk between these lines(COOVER, 2002, p.3).

He walks with an erection, and loathes, "my god, it is cold, what the fuck am I doing out here?"(idem). Longing to be somewhere else, while waiting for the light to change from red to green at a curb, he conjures up a different setting,

No. Stop thinking about it. Change locations. Think warm, think green. [...] [T]hink nymphet. That's better. [...]. Through the wild flowers, into the sun-dappled forest - she takes off, her bright tail flashing like a doe's scut, what a sight! [...]. Some kind of music...[...]. [S]treet sounds diminishing to nothing more than a playful whisper in the fading forest - [...] distantly the returning sound of muted trumpets(COOVER, 2002, p.5-6).

This setting is alternated with the scene of the freezing city, until the light changes:

BlaaaAAAAAATT! He jumps back to the curb, but too late, a bus bearing down on him - *THWOCK!* - Whacks his boner as it goes roaring by [...].

He sits on the curb, snuffling, huddled miserably over his battered rod, wrapped now in crumpled newsprint, trying to coax green dreams out of his iced-up lobes [...]. Something seems to leave him, some spring released, a slipping away...(COOVER, 2002, p.6-7).

His attempt at retrieving some memory of "all the pleasant things he had from days of old"(p.6) is not without success. Overtaken by sudden panic, he cries and runs, "goal in view, central heating, hot tub, all that"(p.7), to his office. There he is greeted by his personal assistant, Cissy. At the same time that her greeting is sent forth, issued as a scream "at a high soprano squeal but suddenly plummet[ing] to a grinding basso profundo"(COOVER, 2002, p.12), a series of actions are presented in the form of a list describing the moves slowly performed by several different elements, as in a script.

Among these elements, there is the man's right knee, his calf muscle, his left toe, the silk tie, the fingers on his right hand, the jacket sleeve, the cufflink, the fileclerk, the operator, the receptionist's thighs, the man's rosy erection, and the elevator doors. To each of these and other elements a movement is assigned to be performed, as if each were an actor in the scene, which, all in all, is composed of Lucky Pierre's staged act, performing sex. Slow. Motion.

But Lucky Pierre's memory of a time when things were different assaults him once more,

[d]ays were all of a piece in that time, and there were fantastic adventures in every direction. Then suddenly it was over, everything started closing in, running down, freezing up. Cleo. Yes, she spoiled it(COOVER, 2002, p.15).

The reference made to Cleo, the director of the next reel, Reel 2, is a variation of Clio, the muse of History. To add a further association and reversal of the myth within the novel, it is worth bringing to mind that the muse Clio fell in love with Pierius¹.

The city, thus, can be seen as mourning this long lost temporality and its entering into chronological time - the city is in perpetual winter and night, darkness being the absence of light (enlightenment/History). This is already a hint that Lucky Pierre's adventures will encompass resisting to Cleo's direction.

In so doing, he will draw lines of flight and become a body without organs. His experience of a different temporality, one closer to spatiality, to abolition of determinative causations, is akin to the experience of subjectivity in technologically enhanced societies that modulate perception, for one, as fluidity in space.

While being assisted in his warm bath by Cissy and her team, the news report is on one of the television screens. The mayor of Cinecity, Cora, is being interviewed by Cleo, the reporter, about the crisis in the city,

a *thawnow* computer virus unleashed by anarchist hackers that is causing a citywide meltdown on the circuit [...] and about the use of old film archives to ease the fuel shortage [...] -City hall is indeed in the grip of a new fundamentalism, as some have argued?(COOVER, 2002, p.17-18).

Still while in his bath, Lucky Pierre confesses to Cissy how afraid he feels of going out into the frozen city again. To soothe his qualms, she soaps his back, and as an avatar of the muse of music,

Cissy runs nimble arpeggios up and down his spine, presses tonics, inversions, and augmented sevenths out of his tensed muscles. Carezzando, martellato, amorevole. She squeezes out the ice crystals, thumps away the bad news, strokes the discords down the drain with the ever-changing bathwater(COOVER, 2002, p.20-21).

The scene, which is being taped by Cissy, evolves into sexual intercourse underwater, in which, as he comes, he finds himself fighting to get to the surface, being beaten down by storm waves, swallowing seawater and "suddenly, unexpectedly it's all over"(COOVER, 2002, p.22). Trying to make sense of what went wrong, wondering about the stuntman, who should have been there instead, "[h]e waits foundering inside the raging sea for his whole life to flash before his eyes, thinking: I might at least know at last, if too late, who I am!"(p.23).

In the passage mentioned above, Lucky Pierre is transported from one shooting location to another, without any cut from one scene to the other. Though there is

discontinuity in the story being shot, there is continuity in the "medium" he is surrounded by. Though apparently fantastic, this transportation is not unfeasible, given the present state of the art of softwares and tools of image digitalization and manipulation. After all, it is a fact to be kept in mind that the hero is a film character whose existence is framed within filmstrips.

Lucky Pierre stands as an instance of a posthuman subject inasmuch as it is rather pattern and randomness what characterizes his existence than presence, or the illusion of presence. There is pattern - associated to rhythm in the musical model that underlies the novel as a whole - in his behavior and performance, which, on their turn, occur randomly - what prevents the anticipation of further developments based on identified causes.

The itinerary Lucky Pierre follows is associated with rhizome because it attends more closely to a series of randomic beginnings at any point in his trajectory, placing him always in the middle, not clearly or necessarily coming or going, always in flux. The fact that Lucky Pierre's memory constantly and increasingly fails him throughout the story is an index of the lines of flight to be drawn in his becoming a body without organs.

Hard Cora: ruling the body

The seventh reel is directed by Cora, Cinecity's Mayor. The issue of power, germane to the nature of her position as film director, is enhanced here once she takes on the role of the ruler of the city too.

Keeping in mind Cora makes adventure porn films, s/m¹ easily springs to consideration and triggers a series of associations with our worldly experience of institutional power and the shape it bears when invested by the state. On bringing together this, Coover instantiates a very provocative *liaison* between power and pleasure and the notions of the play of myth in our making sense of everyday life, which we too often fail to examine or acknowledge.

The name Cora, besides echoing the ending of the name of the muse of dance, Terpsichore, hints at Koré. In *Timeus* Plato refers to Koré as the space in between, as the space for the emergence of a third form of political organization. In Greek mythology Koré is also associated to the myth of the beginning of winter, which is attributed to the young Persephone.

Thus Cora is at the same time director, mayor, dominatrix and "queen of the underworld", where the unconscious rules. In all these instances, Lucky Pierre is always submitted to coming. The choice of the title for this subsection associates the category of hardcore pornography - extremely explicit pornography, to bear on the overall tone of the reel directed by (hard) Cora.

The opening paragraph of the seventh reel still preserves the sonorous summoning of the first reel, though language is handled so as to project the image of submission from the start. A series of participle adjectives suggest the operation of passive voice, of the subject as the sufferer and bearer of actions being performed onto and against him by another.

¹ s/m: sadomasochism

The expectation of pain and pleasure on the part of the deviant subject, the paradox defining the play of power in sado-masochistic doings, sets the tone of the reel at the outset and leaves no doubt about the explicitness with which the theme will be developed:

Bum bared and on high, horsed over the foam-rubber seat of a camera boom, wrists cuffed to his ankles, the former revolutionary hero, unmasked and stripped now of all but his fiberglass codpiece, understands that he is about to explore his tolerance for pain and the pleasures, if any, to be found in it(COOVER, 2002, p.270).

Later on a commentary on Lucky Pierre's physical, emotional and psychological condition after the ritual is made by the narrator, who manages to translate and share the character's misery, for he uses exclamation mark and italics to convey emphasis and feelings of outrage and indignation. The use of interjections helps disclose the feelings of pain while blurring the enunciative level of the text. At the same time, narrator, reader and character's dimensions are leveled, as Coover ends the paragraph with a witty remark on the one-sidedness of the "dialogue". The lengthy quotation that follows is meant to illustrate my reading:

He has never felt so utterly forsaken. [...] [T]hough even now, blinded, shackled, tortured, humiliated, his brain ass-gripped, he feels an unrepentant longing for cool Lottie and her friends. *His* friends! How good it was! [...]. The orgasms! Indeed, he aches for all the women he has ever known [...]. [...]. All of them. Sequentially or all at once. Ow! Oh! And now so alone! He, once the idol of the masses, has been reduced to an audience of one, and that one has abandoned him, [...] his loneliness so extreme he almost wishes the ruthless tyrant were back lashing him with tongue and whip again, harrowingly onesided though such dialogue is.

But wait. He is not alone. Someone is spraying ointment on his wounds(COOVER, 2002, p.274-275).

The interpellation "But wait" situates the reader at a very complex positioning. At first, the reader was following the rendering of the character's situation being mediated by the narrator's perspective as a witness of the character's ordeal, implying a specific chronology. This chronology establishes firstly the event and secondly its "representation", or in-scription, in discourse by an observer. Third, the handing down of the "story" by the observer to still another observer, the reader. When the reader is faced with the warning on the part of the narrator to hold the flow, to "wait", he is forced to leap from the level of receiver of second-hand information to that of first-hand witness, side by side with the narrator. Besides, from a receiver of information always already pre-verbalized in textual form, the reader is prompted to join the narrator's first "reading" of the event as a spectator, once he contrives his narration as if in real-time.

In this way, Coover arranges the narrative conventions and the narratological elements of point of view, focalization, and narrative mode to emulate a real-time experience that induces a displacement of the provisionally stabilized functioning of the reader within the structure of the text. As Katherine Hayles puts it, "when narrative

functionalities change, a new kind of reader is produced by the text"(HAYLES, 1999, p.48).

Though I agree with her proposition, which forces us to entertain the dynamic play of narrative, I would like to argue that this emergent reader-spectator is not only produced by the text but also one of the circumstances that bring such texts into being, along with many others. The category of a reader-spectator corresponds, to a certain extent, to a whole new condition of cultural consumers of texts on their multimedia electronically supported technologies.

This is only one of the several instances in the novel in which the continuum between man and its artifacts is explored. In her answer to Cissy's protestations, Cora justifies the harshness of her thrashing of Lucky Pierre's buttocks like this:

- If I didn't (hit him so hard), my child, I would be restraining the whip from performing its natural and necessary function. I am not cruel or merciless. I am the mere servant of the whip, not its master. The wielder has no more will than has her tool; she simply releases it to do what it must, to be what it is. I like to think of the whip as, in effect, the ablative absolute of the backside. [...]. Surface is only surface and infinitely restorable(COOVER, 2002, p.274).

Ritual and myth provide, thus, the context for an inextricable association of the material and immaterial dimensions of human experience. Cissy, Lucky Pierre's personal assistant, but also Cora's production assistant and cameraperson, comes to his help with an apparently lenitive potion. However, instead of soothing his pain and healing his body, Cissy is in fact just preparing the screen - his buttocks skin, really - "coating it with a reflective surface" on which Cora will shoot her "grand epic [...] an X-pic, more like"(COOVER, 2002, p.276).

The eventual accomplishment of Badboy's quest in the epic takes place in an arena downtown Cinacity, where he arrives in Clara's ambulance and is met by figures representing art and history - "as they rattle into the clearing of the arena, the film gives way to live action"(COOVER, 2002, p.308). Conforming to the narrative conventions of an epic,

Clara delivers the exordium, reporting on the tortuous journeys they have just made through the perilous fringes to reach this place, which, though flat as a board, she calls the summit and nadir or the mythological round(COOVER, 2002, p.309).

The virgin in the castle he is about to rescue in the epic is not flesh and bones, but an electronic contraption,

The robotic apparatus [...] has been programmed with all known epic plots, as well as elements from romance and other genres. One moves through this vast database by making choices, the results of which will be visible to everyone up on the video wall. They are not rational choices but purely gestual; one moves

or is moved and the story changes. Or, in this case, two move, and multiple instantaneous choices are made, which more often than not conflict with each other(COOVER, 2002, p.310).

Coover's parody of the reader's quest for the ultimate meaning of a text in this passage sheds light on the complexity with which even the most rudimentary experiments with hypertext can yield. Their impact on literary theory and their breaking with conventional linearity in narrative texts encompass a rearrangement of the field. Likewise, following this elaboration, when, in Cora's footage of her epic the hero convinces himself of his noble destiny, Coover provides another parodic in-scription of the text as that artifact awaiting to be rescued by the reader so that it can yield its hidden, ciphered meaning, "[h]e is he who will fuck, in effect, the city itself and thus the world and, so doing, will save it from itself"(COOVER, 2002, p.315).

However, given the new capabilities provided to him precisely because he is attached to the plot bot, he is not powerless, "[h]e could change the rules, disrupt the continuity, introduce a few avatars of his own"(COOVER, 2002, p.316). These are some of the functional commands available to a MUD user/scriber. Still, he is just an actor, not the director, just a character, not the writer, despite the additional apparently freeing resources he has incorporated - an index of his posthumanness.

This can be read as Coover's acknowledgement of the criticism to the technophile celebratory and even romantic claim that hypertexts free the reader from authorial control. As part of Coover's comment about the argument of hypertext's empowering features. Lucky Pierre understands that, "his hopes for success are greater if he stays within her [Cora's] dreamworld, riding his dick steadfastly to the end of her story. For it's his story too" (idem).

Here we can say that Lucky Pierre eventually becomes what he is. He performs the role of Cinecity's liberator not as a result of his surrender to Cora's power. Instead, he performs precisely according to Baudrillard's suggestion that the subject becomes a parody of what the media presents as his "captured", represented self. On doing this Lucky Pierre composes his Body without Organs, for he understands that his story (history?) and the end of her story are not necessarily the same story.

Badboy the All conquering's feat is staged as part of the plot of a knight's siege to a castle, "a familiar castle theme". A theme that, despite the familiarity it purports, plants some doubts in him, for, "[w]hen the gods' ends have been accomplished, the epics end, sometimes with the triumphant return of the hero, but often as not with his demise"(COOVER, 2002, p.318).

Notwithstanding, despite his acknowledgement of the possibility of his relative agency, he understands that "even if death awaits him, [...] turning back would be death of another kind"(idem). That is, if death is his destiny as scripted to be performed by the epic hero he plays, choosing not to bring the castle walls down, choosing not to "breach the unbreachable"(id. ibidem), would correspond to being discontinued as Cora's partner. The binary choice is an illusion. One way or another, he cannot escape story.

Calliope: discontinuing the hero

The story that Lucky Pierre cannot escape is reenacted in Calliope's reel. Unlike Reels 1 and 7, Reel 9 is opened with the phrase Film Festival centered on the page, in all caps bold font, likening a title. Like in the other reel, however, the musical quality of language is granted. And again Coover chooses to summon the reader's attention by foregrounding the visual component of the words on the page.

FILM FESTIVAL

announces the huge sign over the arched entrance to the midway, through which he is being led by Cally(COOVER, 2002, p.363).

Notice how Coover sets the subject of the sentence apart from the verb and complement by changing lines, using different font formats, and ignoring conventional indentation. In so doing, he makes a mimetic in-scription of the formal aspect of the experience of being caught by the visual appeal of a verbally structured street sign.

The procedure is repeated twice more, building in continuity and discontinuity:

A LUCKY PIERRE REVIVAL!

the sign overhead goes on to say...

THE CINEMATIC EVENT OF THE CENTURY!

Well, revival, yes; he could use a little of that(COOVER, 2002, p.363).

The revival announced overhead and welcomed by Lucky Pierre establishes continuity in the sense that in the previous reels he has been physically abused to the point of, for example, "consummation" in Reel 7 and "dismantling" in Reel 8. Notice that Reel 8 is directed by Catherine, a.k.a. Thalia, the muse of Comedy, who makes cartoons, animations. Cartoons typically approach themes from a funny perspective, aiming to produce laughter, which has a powerful subversive and de-structuring effect.

In addition to this, continuity is also established vertically, to shape constitutive elements of story as patterns instead of progression only - characteristic of striated space. This is, however, smooth space.

Every reel opens with the suggestion of music and some ground on which Lucky Pierre walks (Reel 1, 2, 6, and 9), strides (Reel 3), falls (Reel 4), steps out (Reel 5), mounts (Reel 7), and is reanimated (Reel 8). In Reel 9 there is the description of a fair-like ground where the festival takes place, with the music of "[a] calliope [...] playing somewhere" (COOVER, 2002, p.363).

Interestingly, the calliope, an American invention, is an instrument played from a keyboard that forces steam through a set of whistle pipes. Here we have two of the elements that compose the smooth space: the wind (steam) that blows relentlessly in Cinecity and the keyboard, which is an emblem of the current technology of writing, to say the least.

Thus, after suffering consummation and dismantling, Lucky Pierre, who in Cally's films goes by the name of Willie, greets the anticipation of a "revival" led by Calliope.

In Reel 7, Lucky Pierre/Badboy has already been "assailed by doubt"(COOVER, 2002, p.318), wavering between performing his part to the end as an epic hero, and facing the possibility of death in the reel performance, and giving up the part - surrendering, then, to Cora in real life. "It's do or die. Or both"(idem), a different kind of finality.

In Reel 9 Lucky Pierre/Willie is again harried by the notion of finality. This time, interestingly, it is not his knowledge of the genre of the script that hovers over him with the possibility of death. Here it is the word finality,

[t]hat word, as if recently read or heard, has been nagging at him actually since they began this stroll: *finality*. Or *final*. Final something, he doesn't know what. Maybe he saw it on that sign over the entry arch. A final festival"(COOVER, 2002, p.366).

As Willie and Cally are about to enter the Picturedrome, he is already aware of the dimension to which their stroll - an index of *agnorisis* on the way:

- Cally, he asks, looking around, where are the cameras?
- Cameras? Whatever are you *talking* about? Look! There's the Picturedrome!
- You're not fooling me, Cally. We're in another film. What's going on?(COOVER, 2002, p.367).

Cally eventually relinquishes and gives in her act. She explains,

- Oh, Willie, if you must know, Cleo's doing a documentary about the making of our next film, that's all and this walk is part of it. I just didn't want you to be too self-conscious(idem).

However, Willie knows better at this point of his trajectory. Cleo makes documentaries, and like "[r]etrospectives, memorials, relics"(COOVER, 2002, p.367), they convey the sense of an ending, of things of the past. He says, "A historical itinerary is history. [...]. Those fans were probably hired extras. This documentary's my last film"(COOVER, 2002, p.368).

In the studio at the back of the Picturedrome the directors/partners/muses are convened. The section that presents the action inside the studio, from the time they are expecting Lucky Pierre's arrival to the point when they find out he has managed to run away, is the first one in the book in which the directors address one another by their mythic names.

While Lucky Pierre is being prepared, he leaves through a ring binder he finds in the director's chair, and understands it must be the script. Surprised at what he reads, he confronts Cissy and asks for some explanation. The dialogue that follows is a remarkable play of successive associations and negotiations of meaning in which Cissy and L P engage, each trying to prove his own point. For Lucky Pierre, it is the confirmation of his anticipation of death; for Cissy, it is the challenge to keep him framed, "fresh and spontaneous"(COOVER, 2002, p.371) to play his part:

- I thought it was to be called *Leaving the Island*, he says. But here on the title page there's only a big double-F. What does it stand for?
- Ah... let's see, that can't be the title, she says, taking the script away from him. I think that's just the camera instruction for the first scene. Full frontal, probably. Yes, I'm sure -
- The script says you're opening with an overview of the island. How can that be full frontal?(COOVER, 2002, p.371)

He manages to scape wrapped in the studio tapestry, aware of his extreme visibility and misery, Lucky Pierre deploys precisely the strategy Baudrillard (1995) suggests as the one possibility to resist the power of media: to give back the captured image that the medium has produced of the subject. Thus, he sees that the only way to escape from being spotted by the directors is to disguise himself as an image of himself, to go unperceived among the fans that dress up in his earlier heroic guise as a star. This can be described as Lucky Pierre's drawing a line of flight that allows him to become the body without organs.

He has of course, gone unrecognized by the tourists. Wouldn't recognize himself. They look more like him than he does with their false mustaches and foam-rubber dongs. Maybe that would be the way to disguise himself: as himself. Lose himself among his epigones(COOVER, 2002, p.374).

We watch the posthuman character, Lucky Pierre, becoming one with the map, inhabiting smooth space. Faced with the increasingly physical and sensuous interpellation of the scene he is watching, he eventually understands what is going on:

He has the pattern. Soft fleshy adagios interrupted by heart-stopping percussive bursts if he slips into a haze for a moment. A film that talks back. That won't tolerate inattention(COOVER, 2002, p.393).

At this point Lucky Pierre effectively apprehends and accepts the idea of his inevitable finality, as he watches his whole life passing before his eyes, "[t]he one he has fled. Ending it not to end it"(COOVER, 2002, p.394). He deliberately heads back to the studio where the directors welcome him and prepare him for the shooting.

At this juncture, he cannot as easily make the transition from the studio into the world of the film. He has the clear notion of the dissociation between the island in the film(s) and the island of the studio. The feeling that prevails is the latter, "no reel is infinite, and he feels no rancor, for he has lived the heroic life of the great artist, while enjoying sensual delight"(COOVER, 2002, p.401).

However, the film is definitely changing, as all the nine nymphs/costars/film crew watch The Great Woowallah/Lucky Pierre/film star stand up off the altar and head to the director's office to discuss an idea he has just had for the finale. He goes into Calliope's office - Calliope, the chief Muse, being the director of Reel 9 and of the double-F title, tells her he loves her, and engages in intercourse that eventually leads to the premature conclusion they have been warned to avoid.

For Lucky Pierre this seemed to have been the way to escape from having his double-F performance registered on tape, his idea for an alternative finale - his drawing a line of flight. However, "in the grip [...] of that explosive violence by which being became, he has a strong sensation of the presence of others gathering around though he can't see them"(COOVER, 2002, p.405).

The sentence with which Coover ends his novel suggests that the double-F script was led to a conclusion, if not as previously scripted - in the adytum setting, at least as expected - with Lucky Pierre performing it with Calliope in real time, keeping up with the tight timing. The reader is here reminded that the story must come to a conclusion, as "the book" (the novel, and the artifact) is about the end - another bright in-scription of Coover's sharp remark about "the end of books".

Narrative today can be equated to a literary regime better than to a literary genre, drawing on the concept of regime in contemporary studies of technological change in the field of social sciences as encompassing all the rules operating in and derived from the complex of knowledges, practices, procedures, institutions and infrastructures that make up a specific technology. According to *The Social Science Glossary*(2001) a regime guides technological development and its embedding in society, adjusting actions and perceptions. These are aspects of institutions that pattern innovation and adoption.

In a time when the whole civilization of the book - its main repository - is seen by some as threatened with discrediting, one may wonder whether narrative will, like Cleopatra, keep "marble stand" or be discontinued and eventually replaced by another form of writing/reading. If for Baudrillard, we are already moving into writing post-narratives inasmuch as historical time has been emptied of its function at the present condition enjoyed by capitalist societies, for Punday it is precisely narrative that endures and articulates the possibility of critical stances within social practices mediated by language.

As I see it, a narrative is always an unfettering regime, a regime that pushes one to break bondages that prevent one from establishing bondage at one's own will. Though not totally anarchic, it bears anarchy as a condition for its own existence. In this way, Coover's narratives are indeed fostering alternative plateaus on which actions and perceptions alike can be adopted and hopefully determine adjustments into other regimes in different spheres of human activity.

In *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre*, which I deem as his *pièce de resistance* within the novel form and genre, Coover even in-scribes the implications of the Marxist concept of class as shaping the changes in form to be assimilated first as innovation and eventually as the form of choice - the characterization of regime applying to his narrative distinctiveness. Coover manages to turn the novel into less a repository continent of the expressive form of the intellectual and artistical curiosity of a class to be consumed than into a spatial field of practice for a class deemed by Fleischman, among others, The New Class. This New Class is characterized as,

educated and educating people [...] not totally weaned from the low or middling culture of their classes of origin, they hold up their mongrel taste as the model of cultural value generally: we like everything from Monteverdi to U2 and beyond, and see no reason to give any of it up (FLEISCHMAN, 2002, p.24).

Thus, the fact that Coover is considered a writer that writes for the academic circle can be interpreted as an affirmation of an emergent class of reader, with different perceptual framings and sensibilities. A class emerging in these digitalized and disembodied practices that, nevertheless, cannot do without the body.

NOTAS:

ⁱ The black leader is the opaque portion of the film roll that lets no light through and therefore is not sensitive to image recording.

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