



The Cuban factors of humanity: Reproductive biology, historical ontology and the metapragmatics of race

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Abstract

Ostensibly a book written with a view towards publicly promulgating an anti-racist agenda by synthesizing a vast body of mid-20th-century biological and genetic science, Fernando Ortiz's *El engaño de las razas* (1946) remains one his least commented-upon works. Eclipsed in its scholarly reception (both nationally and internationally) by its immediate predecessor, *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) and its English translation (1946), *El engaño de las razas* also appears to have been shadowed by (or simply assimilated into) the spate of post-Second World War anthropological anti-racist pronouncements culminating in the 1951 UNESCO Declaration Against Racism. However, paying close attention to Ortiz's analytical and rhetorical strategies reveals that *El engaño* is by no means a mere anti-racist tract in the guise of a (characteristically learned and vociferously poetic) Latin American *ensayo*. As I will argue, the text merits our attention today not only because it refracted and subjected a larger, international anthropological agenda of the time to a local perspective, but also because its analytical tropology – arguably – only entered anthropological theorizing about human biology, heredity, and sociality under the sign of relationality from the 1990s onward. I suggest that in outlining a metapragmatic ethics and politics of metaphor Ortiz also anticipated a de-stabilization of representationalist accounts of 'race' that goes well beyond social constructionism.

Keywords

Cuba, genetics, human biology, metapragmatics, race

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In this brief contribution, I would like to try to shed some new light on one of the great Cuban savant Fernando Ortiz's (1881–1969) perhaps least known works, his 1946 book-length essay *El engaño de las razas* (The Deception of Races). What I will argue is that this book, so far, has largely been read as a seemingly straightforward exemplar of mid-20th-century anthropological anti-racist interventions. As a result, its relevance as a contribution to science studies *avant la lettre*, and a sophisticated precursor to what we nowadays might call 'theory from the South' (though not necessarily in Comaroff and Comaroff's (2012) sense), has gone unappreciated. I am deliberately employing anachronism here to highlight the relevance of Ortiz's contribution for theoretical pursuits – such as a turn towards questions of ontological relationality – that have only recently become an articulated focus of concern in our discipline. And I do so in order to highlight a moment that Ortiz himself consistently foregrounded in his own work, viz. the inescapable historicity not only of human life worlds but our knowledge thereof, including our knowledge of the biology of such worlds. More specifically, my argument is that what Ortiz sought to develop in his fight against a metapragmatics of essentialist racial taxonomizing was an ethic of metaphoric predication: one that might not only reveal the linguistically mediated nature of 'human nature', but would afford us a glimpse of the densely woven fabric of heterogeneous multiplicities from which humanly meaningful (and socially consequential!) singularities – 'races', individuals, even microbiotic entities – are cut.

Based on a course that Ortiz taught at the University of Habana in 1944 (but anticipated in earlier publications, see below), *El engaño de las razas* followed on the heels of some of Ortiz's most extensively referenced mid-career publications: *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Cuban Counterpoint of Tobacco and Sugar) (1940), and the essays 'Los factores humanos de la cubanidad' (The Human Factors of Cubaness) (1940) and 'Por la integración cubana de blancos y negros' (For the Cuban Integration of Blacks and Whites) (1943). The book's declared purpose was humble enough. Writes don Fernando:

This book only aims to contribute to a clarification of the ideas and forms of consciousness pertaining to the races by expounding the conclusions of contemporary science pertaining to them... We have written this book principally for our compatriots, among whom races and racism are also topics of debate.

He continues with characteristic understatement

The enlightened reader will encounter in the following pages few items of novel information, references or arguments that he does not already know, and so [this book] may seem superfluous. Nonetheless we ask forgiveness for the fact that this book is primarily informative in nature, that it only seeks to divulge antiracist convictions in our (Latin American) countries where treating racial issues openly still remains suspect and where there exists today a great urgency to strengthen and put into practice a set of ideas in defense against the social and imperialist commotions

that, in their tides and undertow, once more wash to the shore the horrors of racisms. (Ortiz, 1975: 32–3)

The book's 12 chapters would seem to do just that: present, and synthesize in a language accessible to Hispanophone lay audiences the findings of mid-20th-century biological scholarship concerning the non-existence of human races. Ortiz does so in a manner ostensibly reminiscent of, for example, Huxley and Haddon's *We Europeans* (1936), Barzun's *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition* (1937), Benedict's *Race: Science and Politics* (1940), or, perhaps most famous of all, Montague's *Man's Most Dangerous Myth* (1942). Ortiz's coverage of mid-20th-century genetics is fully up-to-date – as evident in his discussion of Lysenko's then still ongoing Stalinist crusade against 'bourgeois Mendelians' (1975: 177–83).¹ Still, as an anti-racist manifesto, *El engaño* is a latecomer, preceding by only a few years the 1950 and 1951 UNESCO (1969) statements on the matter that seemed to close the book on post-Second World War antiracist declarations. As such, it may have seemed like an afterthought, or a belated Hispanophone addition, to a debate of some standing.

The Revolutionary Cuban government, too, does not seem to have made all that much of *El engaño*. While it republished the book along with the better part of Ortiz's oeuvre in 1975, the preface by Mariano Rodríguez Solvera included the following damning praise:

With his characteristic method, the Cuban polygraph accumulated an enormous amount of informational material, classified it, compared it, analyzed it in its internal relations and with his great talent obtained conclusions of the most valid sort. Yet how far would don Fernando's work have reached in its strictly scientific dimension had he been in possession of dialectical and historical materialism as his philosophy and method? Without this limitation, his capacities to interpret the enormous mass of facts and ideas he handled would have increased a hundred-fold, and, particularly as a sociologist, he would have reached the exactitude, profundity, and coherence which only Marxist-Leninism offers. (Rodríguez Solvera in Ortiz, 1975: 25)

With friends like that, who needs enemies, we might say! Of course, all this came a decade before the Cuban state officially conceded that remnants of racism existed in a society that simply had not yet fully superseded its capitalist past, and still remained on its way to a socialism where racism would finally wither away along with other remnants of class society.

In short, it is safe to say that, different from Ortiz's other writings, *El engaño* was not much heralded either at home or abroad.² By 1975 it seemed to have turned into a period piece worth republication more as an indigenously Cuban antiracist document than for its intellectual merits. A footnote, perhaps, to *El Apostol*, José Martí's copious antiracist writings, and proof that don Fernando had his heart on the right – that is, left – side.

Nor has *El engaño* engendered much of a secondary literature. In fact, the only essay-length publication devoted to *El engaño* that various online searches generated for me is a very perceptive 2008 article by the intellectual historian Gilles Lastra de Matías.³ In what follows, I have taken to heart Lastra's suggestion to read *El engaño* against *Contrapunteo* and 'Los factores humanos'. For the better part of this essay, however, I will steer my argument in a direction that I have tried to adumbrate in my book *The Cooking of History* (Palmié, 2013), that is, less towards the history of the formation of don Fernando's thought and more towards its implications for contemporary social theory.

To begin to clarify my position, let me briefly explain the decidedly frivolous and illegitimate title of this essay. Frivolous and illegitimate because I stole it from one of my former students, João Felipe Gonçalves, who, together with Duff Morton, has produced the first English translation of Ortiz's signature essay, 'Los factores humanos de la cubanidad' (Ortiz, 2014). At one point, João phoned me to see if I could help clarify something in the text and he misspoke, calling it: 'Los factores cubanos de la humanidad'. We both had a hearty laugh. But then it struck me: 'Los factores' certainly represents a brilliant characterization of 'la condición cubana' based on a refutation of determinist metaphors that yoke 19th-century European linguistic and ethno-racist ideologies and their 20th-century North American permutations to the evaluation of New World national being and becoming.⁴ But might not *El engaño*, perhaps, be read in an analogous fashion as – we might say with Latour (1993) or David Bloor (1991), if you prefer – a final symmetrical subsumption of the original argument in 'Los factores humanos' (Palmié, 2013: 78–112; Gonçalves, 2014)?

In other words, Cuba and other Latin American nation states' alleged heterogeneity and hybrid nature is *not* an anomaly that needs to be defended against racist detractors; rather, this very state of apparent anomaly is the product of what, with Latour, we might call a peculiarly modernist project of purification. If so, might not the entire ideological edifice of ethnolinguistic homogeneity supporting the mirage of asymmetric national formation (rendering Europe and the segregationist United States the norm and the rest of the Americas a problematic deviation) stand and fall on the basis of an examination of the biologicistic theories that seemed to naturalize it? If biology, as Marx had already recognized, developed in correspondence with bourgeois notions of human sociality (cf. Rose et al., 1984), then might it not be worth our while, or so Ortiz argues, to examine 'nature' – and so: human nature – as a sociogenic phenomenon?

Certain elements of Ortiz's argumentation in *El engaño* made their first appearance in a collection of polemical essays that he published under the title *La reconquista de América: Reflexiones sobre el pan-hispanismo* (The Reconquest of America: Reflections on Panhispanism) in 1911.⁵ Ortiz's main target, then, were attempts on the part of Spanish intellectuals to ideologically recuperate a lost empire by expressing historically contingent linguistic and cultural relations between Spain and its lost colonies in an essentializing idiom of Panhispanic 'racial affinity'. In attacking the romantic idealist foundations⁶ of such post-imperial translation of an imagined

supranational linguistic community into an ethnic or even crypto-biotic one, Ortiz found some unlikely allies. These included sociologists such as Ludwig Gumplowicz (1892) or Iakov Alexandr Novikov (1910),⁷ whose theories of 'racial strife' went beyond the simplistic confluences of the social and biological that were the order of the day at the turn of the 20th century (Rojas, 2008). As don Fernando put it then:

Thus Gumplowicz can define race by saying that it is a product of the historical process, the result of multiple and varied causes, . . . which is characterized by the existence of 'principally intellectual' factors and by a 'sentiment' of unity and solidarity among the individuals and groups that constitute it, in such a way that, in the course of time, the 'illusion' of an anthropological [i.e. biological] unity [and so of] common origins is produced. One sees how Gumplowicz, despite his racist theories, reduces the concept of anthropological race to a pure illusion. (Ortiz, 1911: 18)

Here we arrive at the core of what Ortiz would come to argue more than four decades later:

The idea of race, like that of species and genus does not exceed being a simple criterion of scientific division and grouping of animals within the entire zoological spectrum, instead of [being] an 'entity', as the metaphysicians would say, of proper and substantive existence, like the individual. Nature does not create races, [just] as it doesn't create species and genera; humanity invents them for its goals, be they scientific, social, political, religious, etc. (Ortiz 1911: 12)

Yet while parts of the agenda of *El engaño* can be seen as prefigured in Ortiz's early polemic against a fudging of philology and biology in the service of a Spanish neo-imperial project, there is a crucial switch in analytical orientation: what don Fernando is after in *El engaño* is not to denounce attempts to disguise what Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007) calls the lasting effects of the 'coloniality of power' as the result of spiritual as well as racial affinity. Nor does he explicitly target the kind of Panamerican modernity propagated by the new North American hegemon.⁸ Instead, what comes into focus in *El engaño* is not biology as a mere discursive prop for political interests; it is biology and biological knowledge as sociogenic and therefore ontologically *historical* phenomena (cf. Hacking, 2002).

In *El engaño*, Ortiz thus no longer recurs to the chauvinistic imagery of transhistorical affinities among the speakers of Cervantes's language that he had attacked in 1911. Nor does he revisit the ideological presuppositions of a *yanqui*-style melting pot that he had debunked in 'Los factores humanos'. His aim has become more radical. As he points out in 'Los factores humanos', there are no crucibles in Cuba, only domestic cook pots in which homey stews (*ajiacos*) bubble away on the hearth of history, absorbing new elements all the while older ones sink and dissolve in a 'rich and succulent sauce'. Being boiled down in such a fashion makes them no longer perceivable in their 'rawness' by any observer's – necessarily historically

situated – palate and conceptual apparatus of discrimination. Yet new ingredients always are thrown into the evolving *ajiacó*, thus driving a process that unceasingly proliferates difference. Emergence, not origins, is the basis of the language game the image of the *ajiacó* aims to convey. But the crucial move that Ortiz performed in ‘Los factores humanos’ was to argue that the observer’s discriminatory apparatus itself is subject to the moment he classified as *cocedura* (the process of cooking). There is no way to perceive a (national or other) ‘synthesis’ except from a vantage point that, in itself, must always already be indefinitely preliminary, always on its way to a novel predication potentially productive of novel perspectives.

History, as I have tried to point out (Palmié, 2013), thus cooks us all – subjects and objects of observation and whatever opportunities of ‘tasting’ and evaluating our own or others’ lifeworlds it may afford us. What is more, it does so dialectically: in don Fernando’s vision subjects and objects of observation dance around each other across time in a spiraling progression, only ever assuming momentary states of mutually constitutive recognition, before phasing on into new states of being and becoming that demand novel forms of identification – and analysis. Every classificatory act, in that sense, is a move in an endless game whose rules get rewritten by the – seemingly aleatory – cumulation of such moves. There is no teleology in history. Only the incessant bubbling away of the stews in which we happen to find – or choose to situate – ourselves.⁹

If these are conclusions one might legitimately draw from the earlier essay, then how much more fitting that Ortiz now delves all the way down into what, after Gregor Mendel’s peas and Thomas Hunt Morgan’s fruit flies, ought to have been biological common sense in 1946: the facts of sexual reproduction.¹⁰ Using the language of ‘Los factores humanos’, we might say that what comes first is the sauce, not the ingredients. Heterozygosity being the name of the game, every human being is, as he puts it (almost half a century before Marilyn Strathern (1992), and with no knowledge of genomics), a ‘mestizo’. It is the belated labor of social sorting and taxonomizing that creates collective ‘identities’ where there – biologically speaking – are nothing but contextual relationalities between individuals of indefinitely varying constitution. In good Darwinian terms, the basis of evolution consists in individual singularities – biotic events – rather than predictable sequences. The latter might be inferred post-hoc, but never projected into a thoroughly open future. All we can know, at any one point, is how such individualities cohere relationally: just like ‘langue’ is empirically inaccessible to us in the absence of ‘parole’, so (at least before the advent of genomics) ‘phenotype’ logically had to constitute the empirical basis for inferring – hypothesizing, really – the relationalities expressed in the construct of ‘genotype’.

To be sure, among a reflexively (rather than merely reproductively) self-defining and self-delimiting species as *homo sapiens* such fundamental relationalities can become obscured by their taxonomic fracture. Given unlimited human interfertility, perhaps such relationalities must be broken up, even if only to become operationalizable in the form of ideologies of kinship and descent.¹¹ But the divisions resulting from such conceptual separations (such as between kin and non-kin) are

the functional fictions of historical sociological orders, and if they can have biological consequences in producing 'phenotypical semblances' in reproductively isolated populations – which Melville Herskovits and Eugen Fischer had shown – then these are not the products of Darwinian evolution but the artifices of the politics of human autodomestication. Since neither the 'Rehobother Bastards' (Fischer, 1913) nor the 'American Negro' (Herskovits, 1928) were biologically distinct let alone stable units, but instead the product of legal systems restricting mating patterns and policing social boundaries, 'race' – for Ortiz – is all *hechura* (i.e. artifice) and no *natura* at all.¹² The artifice of race is just that: an artefact. Made, rather than extant, and it is discovered by means of – socially imagined, and politically implemented – invidious distinctions, rather than found out there in the world.¹³

It is the work of the term 'race' – an ill-begotten word that leads an evil life, as don Fernando says many times – that washes to some shores an evil and fundamentally inessential foam generated by larger undercurrents of hostility and anxiety, perhaps especially when kinship is thought to be reckoned bilaterally. But this is so for historically, not biologically, explicable reasons. Such 'foam', if I may say so, is of a fundamentally linguistic nature. Don Fernando thinks so, too, and he spends the first chapter of *El engaño* going after etymological issues. But for both of us the ultimate etymological roots of 'raza', whether in the Latin *radix* or the Arabic *ra's*, are less important than the discriminatory work such words-turned-concepts do in cutting what Strathern (1996), in her important critique of Actor Network Theory, calls 'the network' of potentially endlessly ramifying relationalities.

But if language is the root of all evil as an instrument capable of simultaneously producing both knowledge and ignorance, why then should language not also be the solution? Legally trained polymath that he was, Ortiz never bothered to spell out a coherent theory of language use.¹⁴ Yet if the social taxonomies of dead generations rest like a nightmare on the brains of the living, then might not a new set of semantic transfers from unexpected domains arouse us from our slumber? Don Fernando certainly thought so, and Lastra de Matías (2008: 261) is right when he posits that for Ortiz the poetics and ethics of metaphor were one and the same thing. To be sure, Ortiz was not the only one who thought so at the time. But he was different from other mid-20th-century anti-racists in his unique insistence on the politics of language. Take his response to a rare gem of Anglophone culinary metaphors, Ashley Montague's (1942: 31ff.) characterization of the results of statistical extrapolation from individual phenotypical measurements to 'racial types' as a 'race omelette' [sic]. Here we have an intriguing – if perhaps Eurocentric – parallel to the epistemologically much more challenging metaphoric vehicle of don Fernando's '*ajiaco*'. Nothing like an omelette is found in nature, says Montague (1942: 31–2):

The process of averaging the characteristic of a given group, of knocking the individuals together, giving them a good stirring, and then serving the resulting omelette as a 'race' is essentially the anthropological process of race-making. It may be good cooking, but it is not science, since it serves to confuse rather than to clarify. When an omelette is done,

it has a fairly uniform character, though the ingredients which have entered into its making have been varied. So it is with the anthropological conception of 'race'... The omelette called 'race' has no existence outside the frying pan in which it has been reduced by the heat of the anthropological imagination.

Ortiz agrees with the biological untenability of the statistical gerrymandering that Montague denounces. However, a '*revoltillo*' (i.e. omelet) is something rather different from an '*ajiacó*' (stew), and not just because it falls squarely towards the mechanical rather than stochastic end of models. For one thing, the proteins in an omelet congeal at a precise point, which renders Montague's metaphoric vessel ahistorical in that it can neither tolerate further processuality nor accommodate ingredients added at too late a stage. Temporality does matter. Both genetically and phenotypically, human populations, says Ortiz (1975: 171), are 'instable equilibria'. In fact they are processes, and to mistake a momentary state for a stable biological form is akin to mistaking 'a single and irrepeatable photographic still capriciously cut from an infinite cinematographic film' (1975: 171) for a stable reality. Montague's omelette constitutes, I would think, a metaphor that don Fernando might have seen as characteristic of the ethnonationalism that gripped Europe in the 19th century, and was passed on, in normativized form, to its American postcolonies.¹⁵

But the difference is best illustrated by a turn to don Fernando's genetics – a science, one should add, that had barely existed in its post Mendelian-Morganite state for more than a generation by the time that he wrote *El engaño*. I have already mentioned that Ortiz's understanding of heterozygosis in sexual reproduction led him – and could only lead – to the conclusion that every human being was *par force* a 'mestizo', a novel hybrid individuality, in both the biological and historical sense. But how to conceive of the fusion of heterogeneous gametes in necessarily binary, relatively speaking aleatory, and therefore, Ortiz says, 'dilemmatic' processes of procreation? Homey culinary imagery once more is not hard to come by, though it presents its own problems. A *café con leche* (coffee and milk) metaphoric is thus quickly discarded – and simply because the biochemical forces at work in the fusion of gametes are neither based on a quantitative logic nor result in the homogenization of previously disparate individual genetic configurations. Forget the strained calculi of admixture by which colonial Latin American *casta* systems tried to police degrees of deviation from a norm of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood). Forget also the blood quanta institutionalized in North American systems of hypodescent. But what about *arroz con frijoles* (rice and beans)?

It has been thought that a good metaphor might be that of black beans and white rice stirred together in a serving dish, for in this case the color that prevails on the surface will make the [dish] appear externally mixed, more white or black depending on the chance distribution of the grains... Nevertheless, though better than previous ones, this metaphor is also imperfect. In the dish of beans and rice, the grains, even though irregularly mixed and of diverse appearance, present the sight of a discontinuous

coloration, except at a distance when the images of the colors superimpose themselves upon each other and appear fused. One could extend the metaphor supposing that the rice and beans are cooked together (*congrí*), and so, once the pigments blend into each other, give the dish a mulato-like coloration. But even this metaphor becomes invalid once one considers that, once prepared, the rice and beans can no longer recombine themselves in a new process of cooking. (Ortiz, 1975: 157)

Culinary metaphors no longer seem to serve here to convey the essential contingency and temporal open-endedness of the recombinant process Ortiz has in mind. And so he abruptly switches to other vehicles to effect what Black (1962) might call metaphoric interactivity so as to select, emphasize, suppress, and organize features of the semantic field he has in mind (or, as Fernandez (1974) would have it, to bring about a movement of the 'inchoate' object of human heredity in semantic quality space). Perhaps not surprisingly, Ortiz settles on music. This was a metaphoric register that he had already explored in *Contrapunteo cubano*, and that Claude Lévi-Strauss would deploy again, if in a very different fashion, in *Mythologiques* (1969–90): Just like the amino acids that we today know as adenine, thiamine, cytosine, and guanine retain their chemical identity in the infinitesimal possible outcomes of the meiotic and zygotic processes involved in procreation, so can unthinkable numbers of distinct musical works – symphonies, Ortiz says (1975: 158) – be conjured up from the same black and white piano keys. The piano doesn't change its shape. The music does. Much like the interplay of tobacco and sugar in Cuban history – and contrary to the mathematical combinatory logic of 'mythologemes' as posited by Lévi-Strauss – human heredity constitutes an open-ended contrapuntal dynamic.¹⁶

Here, then, is yet another historicizing factor: genotypes as well as the phenotypes they come to express are subject to variation over time, but at *rates* of variability that cannot easily be calibrated, let alone predicted.¹⁷ Nor is the process necessarily continuous. 'Sometimes', writes Ortiz (1975: 174), 'there is a certain dissoluteness in the life of genes, certain embarrassing moments in their coupling'. Such 'ultramicroscopic love affairs' that disrupt orderly descent with variation, result in 'militant genes' that experienced change 'during their confinement in genital barracks so that when they rush out to the battle field of reproduction, they will no longer be what they were' and 'if they succeed in imposing themselves in the creation of another human individuality, a new type will manifest in it' (1975: 174). 'One might say', Ortiz (1975: 176) argues, 'that mutation introduces freedom into genetics; a freedom which is not a metaphysical concept, but the perennial possibility of genuine individuation'. Such potentiality – freedom as radically historical contingency – relates, as Ortiz already had underlined in his earlier essays, to the ongoing 'colloquy' between what he now calls 'don Ambiente' (Sir Environment) and 'doña Natura' (Lady Nature) (Ortiz, 1975: 296):

Already in genetic phenomena, the specific function [*acción*] of each gene is influenced by the proximity of its companions in the same chromosomic formation. Each gene

experiences the environmental functions of the other genes of the same chromosome, just as each chromosome experiences those of the others comprised in the same nucleus. (1975: 299)

As a biological event, every individual life form is simultaneously part of a larger process, and its inherent characteristics (*inherencia*) are at one and the same time heredity (*herencia*) and what Ortiz calls relational 'adherence' (*adherencia*) to an environment that informs its development, and is impacted, in turn, by its existence. As on the cellular level, so on the level of the organism. 'Just like a circle is measured from its inside as well as its outside by its circumference, so is the existence of every being an equation of exogenous and endogenous, extrinsic and intrinsic factors' (1975: 292). Individual being and environment – the self and the non-self – form an indissoluble unity. The same holds for the special case of human individuation: 'Human personality cannot be conceived as an organic entity capable of manifesting itself outside' (1975: 301) an environment that, in the case of humanity, is not just a biotic but a fundamentally social one. Durkheim, dead by then for a generation, could not have but agreed. But so, for that matter, might have Deleuze (1994), if in a very different philosophical register: singularities – individuals – are unthinkable on any other grounds than the heterogeneous multiplicities that are the condition of their becoming.

Much as Marx and Engels had realized, the very concept of nature, as it arose in bourgeois societies in the 19th century, fundamentally referenced something other than an ultimate bedrock of biotic being. What it spoke to was a self-conscious recension thereof, based in what they aptly called humanity's self-produced and self-limiting 'second nature'. Humanity's second nature thus pertains to a state of becoming no longer tied to the rigors of a blind biotic process of physiological descent with modification. Instead, it comprises forms of fundamentally artificial selection based on conscious social action and reflection (and their biotic consequences, whether intended or not).¹⁸ To this picture, Ortiz wants to add at least a *third nature*: society and language – the necessarily historical outcome as well as necessary determinant of yet another dimension of humanity's being and becoming.

It is this postulate of a third nature that necessarily raises the question of Ortiz's (however implicit) metalinguistic – or better: metapragmatic – positionality vis-a-vis language and representation. For how attractive is the possibility of assimilating such a third nature to Peirce's concept of 'Thirdness' as the moment connecting language to thought and reality!¹⁹ To be sure, there is not a shred of evidence that Ortiz ever read Peirce. But is not the better part of *El engaño* dedicated to exposing the pernicious semiotic (not just semantic) intertraffic between zoological and anthropological fields of significance? Is not the very term 'race', as it has come down to us across centuries of iniquitous usage, an invitation to engineer invidious slippages between indexical and iconic registers?²⁰

No need here to go into Ortiz's lengthy explorations of 'scientific' or other attempts to construe longstanding icons of social 'otherness' into indexes of 'animality'. Take instead, as a final case in point, don Fernando's remarks on the pseudo-totemic logic of 'racial difference' as it took shape among Nazi scientists only a few years before his writing. He calls it a 'curious example':

The Bakongo blacks divide humans into four groups which we could now call *races*: the whites, the Portuguese, the *bangundu*, i.e. the crocodiles, and themselves, that is, the blacks. The whites are the Europeans without authority with whom the Bakongo have social relations; the Portuguese are those Europeans who dominate them; the crocodiles are those human beings who by virtue of special magical abilities, in their view, transform themselves into such beasts, and the blacks are they, themselves, that is, the classifiers. (1975: 36, emphasis in the original)

'It is easy to smile at such expressions of petulant superiority', Ortiz continues:

But such classifications of races which do not distinguish between the human species and animal species are not exclusive to savages [*hombres de la selva*]. One can also encounter them in the recent bibliography of so-called Nazi science. At least in the work of Professor Herman Gauch who literally says: 'We can, then, establish the following principle: there do not exist characteristics, whether physical or psychological, which justify the distinction between the "human" and "animal kingdom"'. The only differences that exist are between the Nordic humans on the one hand, and the animals on the other, including among the latter those non-Nordic humans, that is to say, subhumans, which are a species in transition. (Ortiz, 1975: 36–7)

Ortiz (1975: 37) finds this classificatory move 'even more surprising than that of the Bakongo', and who could possibly disagree with this? Nothing to smile at here. And yet: given that Professor Gauch's move is not (or not expressly) based in a totemic ideology that might support the idea of 'invisible', supra-empirical essences,²¹ the ontology traced out by such Nazi scholars on the basis of the semiotic ideology of a science 'in the service of criminal politics' (1975: 37) ought to give pause to those of us who see anthropology's new mission in a non-reductive, anti-relativistic, and post-representational exploration of 'radical alterity'.

How unsurprising, then, that – as it turns out – Ortiz's 'humble proposal' of a 'mere' compilation, in accessible language, of contemporary scientific knowledge concerning 'race' is undercut by a fight against language itself. It is about demolishing the metapragmatics that gave race – an 'ill-begotten word with an evil history' – its lease on life in the first place. As is typical of Ortiz, his attention is focused not just on the zoological realm that gave rise to the luxuriously animalistic lexicon of Latin American 'mestizaje' (cf. Stephens, 1999); what concerns him is the question of what, in a world that was soon to learn about the extent and logic of the Nazi holocaust, the Enlightenment project might possibly look like from an eccentric – Cuban, Latin American – point of view.

How can we – ought we – speak of difference? What languages might we use? What metaphors do we have at our disposal that can help us to think of a world that might, analytically, be cut up at joints we have barely begun to imagine – or, alternatively, a metaphors that could afford a principled refusal to even contemplate doing so? Might there be a metapragmatics that will not implicate us in the genocidal logics of Euro-American modernity that inevitably shaped the conditions of possibility of peripheral nationhood, without falling into the trap of a merely oppositional discourse prescriptive of creolism or *mestizaje*? Given that the coloniality of power reproduces itself in the classifying work of language, might not the key to interrupting its operation lie in the linguistic realm as well?

It is in this dimension that we need to locate Ortiz's vision of the 'specter of race'. It is a specter 'agitated by the conjurations of the living': the language that perpetuates the 'ill-begotten and evil life' of the very word 'race'. Such language casts its spell upon our minds like 'a terrible idol that drinks human blood and demands holocausts, that enslaves persons and peoples, blinds their conscience and poisons their lives'. In sum, since the ontology of 'race' is social and linguistic, 'Human society which created the races will have to suppress them' (Ortiz, 1975: 402). If so, then from what better vantage point to begin the work of exorcizing the phantasm of race than from an American one? 'All of America is an immense seething and boiling of races. Neither has this ebullience ended, nor will it cease soon' (1975: 31). This is so because:

America, all of America is *mestizo*. 'It is impossible to ascertain to which human family we belong' said Bolívar in his famous address at Angostura in 1829 [sic]; and one could understand that expression as much in South America as in Central and North America, and on the continent as well as on the islands... It is impossible to study whatever aspect of the American peoples without immediately becoming aware of their profound *mestizaje*, and in some of them, specifically of their *mulatez*.²² (1975: 31–2)

But what could this possibly mean? As Ortiz (1975: 32) writes in the prologue to *El engaño*:

Given that *mestizaje* is a mixture of races, i.e. a concept derived and composed of two others – the concept of this race and of that other race – any understanding presupposes already having a good idea of what both races are, or better said, of what race is as a substantive and generic term, and what, in this regard, the special adjectival predications of the distinct races represent, and finally, what the process of mixture which is synthetically defined as *mestizaje* means.

The problem, as it turns out, is the product of a vicious circle. No races, no *mestizaje*. Or by the same token, *mestizaje* as the inescapable condition, even precondition, of sexually reproducing organic life, obscured in its inevitability by the artifices of a classifying social animal that has come to express its historical

interests and enmities in a language of essential, rather than incidental, natural rather than historical, forms of 'identity' and 'otherness'. Of course:

One cannot understand the history of the Americas without knowing all the ethnic essences which have blended on this continent, and without appreciating what has been the true result of their reciprocal transculturation. We say reciprocal because there are efforts underway to make believe that there is no such reciprocity, and we say true because much of what is thought of as congenital and racially typical merely implies or is an effect of social reverberations. (1975: 32)

As Ortiz had argued in 'Los factores humanos', it is this moment of constant transformation in the 'human factors of cubanidad' that makes for the possibility of distinguishing the fact of Cubanness ('cubanidad') from a state of consciousness he, with a critical nod to Unamuno, called 'cubanía': an act of willed identification that transcends the mere accidents of origin and location, and so creates a – however transitory – historical reality of its own. This is a distinctly human achievement: a form of 'doing' (Mol, 2002) rather than 'being', a singularity rather than an essence. Cuba's astonishingly extensive variety of native bat species certainly may be said to exemplify a sense of 'cubanidad'. They are the products of local micorevolutionary differentiations that occurred well before the onset of the so-called Anthropocene, in its colonial, capitalist, or 'late' socialist instantiations. As such, however, the biotic fact of these airborne mammals' Cuban indigeneity is as historically irrelevant as the fact that the thousands of islands composing the Cuban archipelago are, geologically speaking, a part of the Yucatan peninsula.

But Cuba's entirely invasive and historically complexly constituted human population does not admit such a definition of unproblematic nativeness. Its Cubanness, if I may now be allowed to blur Ortiz's important distinction in the service of Anglophony, represents a conscious, self-reflexive, and so ultimately social, achievement that has nothing whatsoever to do with the facts of its – as the current genomic euphemism goes – biogeographical ancestry or present habitat. The very notions of 'mestizaje' and 'mixtión' are nothing but a 'mixtificación'! Understanding 'las Américas' and their supposedly 'racial' history is, for don Fernando – and for me, too – to understand the fundamentals of the human condition.

Ortiz chose not to elaborate on the issue of what we might call 'heteronormative' standards of national viability, avoiding the polemical barbs he directed at 'El Norte' (i.e. the USA) in the earlier essay, or later publications (Ortiz, 1998). But I think it is sufficiently clear that 'los factores humanos de la cubanidad' and 'los factores cubanos de la humanidad' are, ultimately, cut from the same cloth. How else, then, can we interpret his call for the exorcism of the phantasm of 'race'? To say 'We have never been racial' would be trivial. But we might do well to think with don Fernando in considering whether our sense of 'humanidad' as a species (in all its heterogeneity) ought not be complemented by efforts to achieve a common 'humanía': unmarked and unquestionable as both an ethical disposition

towards the other, and as an analytic that places contingency and emergence at the core of our being and becoming human. This is a page that we, as anthropologists, can – and ought to – take from his book, however belatedly. And we should do so with the retrospective insight into the history that has cooked our common interest in the ‘human condition’ to the point in time at which I end this essay.

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Notes

1. Which (unbeknownst to Ortiz) had already resulted in the death of the eminent Russian plant geneticist Nicolai Vavilow in a Gulag, and would cripple Soviet agriculture in the decade to come.
2. Araceli García Carranza's (1970) excellent *Bio-bibliografía* only lists two reviews in Mexican newspapers, and one by a foreigner, John T. Reid, then a staff member of the American Embassy in Habana. The *Miscellanea II* (InterAmericas 1998), which covers the secondary literature to 1996, adds an anonymous review in the journal *Úlra*, a review in the Cuban daily *El Mundo*, and a note concerning an homage to the book published in the same newspaper in 1947.
3. Several of the contributors to Font and Quiroz (2005) mention the book in the context of discussing Ortiz's antiracism, and Rojas (2008) provides useful perspectives on the intellectual context of its origins, but likewise refrains from directly addressing it in any detail.
4. Like other Latin American public intellectuals at the time Ortiz aimed to counter European and North American ideologies that predicated nationhood on ethnoracial purity and linguistic homogeneity, and so questioned the viability of racially and culturally heterogeneous and hybridized Latin American nation-states (cf. Helg, 1990; Skidmore, 1990; Knight, 1990).
5. A good number of these were originally written for the Cuban daily *El Tiempo* in response to the Spanish Historian Rafael Altamira y Crevea's 1910 lecture tour of several of Spain's former American colonies (including recently independent Cuba). Cf. Vázquez Villanueva (2008) for an analysis of the debate between Ortiz and Altamira. Spanish intellectuals were, of course, not the only ones to tour the post-1898 Americas: As Ortiz was well aware, US academic emissaries were similarly wooing Latin American elites at the time.

6. Not incidentally, Altamira was the translator into Spanish of Johann Gottlob Fichte's 1808 *Reden an die deutsche Nation*.
7. Ortiz gives no bibliographic references, but the publication dates pertain to the Spanish translations that he likely had read.
8. As he recounted in 1948 (Ortiz, 1998: 193–4): 'As a very perceptive Costarican diplomat accredited in Washington told us some 15 years ago, "the trouble with Panamericanism is that, for the Hispanophone Americas, *pan* means something very different than for the Anglophone ones. For [the former] *pan*, in Castillian, is our daily bread, while for the [latter] it is the [frying] pan".'
9. Transcending the chess-analogy, so beloved to analytical philosophers, the *ajicao* metaphor not only points towards history as a 'self-writing game' (Gellner, 1973) but to its interpretation as what Black called a form of 'EpiChess'. In such a game, 'a player would have the right to move any piece as if it were another of equivalent or inferior value (a bishop moving for once as a knight, say, or pawn) *provided the opponent accepted such a move*' (Black, 1993: 23, emphasis in the original). Of course, what would be crucial to this is an understanding of iterativity based on a semiotic ideology (Keane, 2003) that allows for the recognition of the continuity of one and the same game (rather than one game being replaced by another without notice). This is a critical point: ever since the establishment of the topos of 'history' as a collective singular (Koselleck 1985) the question of whether human fate is ruled by chance or necessity has been an agonizing one.
10. Already in *Contrapunteo cubano* he had analogized the social moment of 'transculturación' with the biological one of sexual reproduction (Ortiz, 1995: 103). Now he turns the tables and looks at heredity from a 'transcultural' point of view.
11. 'Interracial' fertility had always been the Achilles heel of pseudo-scientific attempts to analogize the (biologically eminently productive) social facts of 'miscegenation' to those of trans-specific mating.
12. Ortiz was likely not aware of Max Weber's (1978: 385–98) insights into the historic, sociogenic nature of the processes by which 'communities of fate' that were submitted to political restrictions on exogamy transformed into 'communities of intent', thus acquiring, in due course, not just their own reasons for 'consciousness of kind' but potentially also the phenotypical commonalities due to artificial, rather than natural, selection. Perhaps ironically, while Weber had most certainly not read the results of Fischer's (1913) – unquestionably racist – experimental defense of Mendelian human genetics, the two ultimately came to the same conclusions about the historical plasticity of phenotypes in human populations.
13. Ortiz (1975: 295) thus quotes with approval Ashley Montague's (1942: 161) scathing critique of invocations of 'nature' to 'explain' racial prejudice: 'In fact, Nature is the name we give to the projection of the totality of our ignorance concerning the forces which are conceived to be involved in or responsible for the generation of life and its maintenance. Nature is not a "thing-in-itself" which operates upon other things; the term denotes rather, if it denotes anything at all, an artificial construct whose purpose is to serve as a general stereotype for our ignorance, in addition to serving as a *deus ex machina* to which, in a quandary, we may appeal in order to be comfortably relieved of our perplexities. For most people to say that a thing is "natural" explains it. But does it? What do we mean by "natural"?''
14. In fact, his two explicitly linguistically oriented publications (Ortiz, 1924, 1974) lack any preface or introduction, and give no indications that they are informed by any other

than – by then – rather dated versions of 19th-century philology. It should be noted, though, that just such philology – e.g. in the form of Bopp and Schleicher's 'Stammbaumlehre' – exerted considerable influence on Darwin's thought (Alter, 1999). A tropological and narratological examination of Ortiz's language akin to Beer's (1985) analysis of Darwin's writings or White's (1978) metahistorical exegesis of 19th-century historiography remains to be undertaken.

15. Yet even there few, excepting Hispanophone and Hispanophile elites, had come to develop a suitably stable, self-reflexive sense of 'doneness' – or could afford the luxury of entertaining such a self-image (Klor de Alva, 1995; Quijano, 2000, 2007; Rojas, 2008). Nor is the persistence of the 'coloniality of power' in the (Latin American) periphery a mere anomaly. What Eric Wolf (1981) once called the 'mills of inequality' have not ground to a halt in the core, either. As we now know (*pace* Fukuyama), 1989 was decidedly not the 'end of history'. Mixing metaphors, we might say that this seeming end to a short 20th century (1918–1989) merely marked a phasal shift in the 'cooking' that was mistaken for a dish ready to be served.
16. We are back, as it were, to Black's game of 'EpiChess', now configured as a musical ensemble (see note 9) improvising, perhaps, on a given score. Speaking of the – then still hotly debated – issue of mutagenesis as a determinant of rates of genetic change, Ortiz (1975: 178) marvels at the possibility of toxicologically or radiationally induced 'diploidy' in tobacco and sugar cane, and so at the potential mutability of what he had taken as an invariable biotic determinant of Cuban history when writing *Contrapunteo cubano*.
17. We can only speculate what Ortiz might have thought about genetically engineered life-forms conscripted into mercenary commercial usages through recombinant DNA technology and the legal protocols covering their reproduction!
18. It is thus not towards the *Origin of Species* but the *Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* that we should look here. In fact, Ortiz comes closer to Lukács than to Marx and Engels: 'whatever is held to be natural at any given state of social development, however this nature is related to man and whatever form his involvement with it takes, i.e. nature's form, its content, its range and objectivity are all socially conditioned' (Lukács, 1971: 234). The only – but crucial – difference is that Ortiz is talking about human nature!
19. Ortiz thus appears to anticipate a view of life as a vast semiotic process that ranges from the molecular semiosis involved in RNA-DNA transcription through macrobiological interactivity between organism and environment over (evolutionary) time, and all the way up to the realm of the linguistic and historical. It is unlikely that Ortiz was aware of the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll's near-contemporary attempts to develop an explicitly biosemiotic perspective in *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen* (1934) and *Bedeutungslehre* (1940), but von Uexküll's penchant for contrapuntal metaphors makes for fascinating comparisons (see von Uexküll, 2010, for English translations of both works).
20. That is, the transformation of a sign taken to have an intrinsic connection to what it signifies ('where there's smoke there's fire') into one that evokes a relationship of semantically broader semblance or likeness (e.g. 'the smokescreen of ideology' or 'the fires of damnation') in such a way that the semiotic value of the index gets subsumed and naturalized under a (referentially more capacious) iconic sign. As Ortiz points out again and again, racist language thrives on such transformations of indexical attributes into icons of 'essence', such as when the phenotypical features of a person are read into

- registers of essential 'otherness'. For a brief introduction to Charles Sanders Peirce's distinction between indexes, icons and symbols, and the uptake of Peircian philosophy in anthropology, see Mertz (2007). See also Keane (2003) on processes of naturalization.
21. Durkheim's (1995: 134) quotation of Spencer and Gillen's anecdote comes to mind, about an aboriginal Australian man recognizing his own 'kangaroeness' in a photograph shown to him. Yet if Spencer and Gillen's informant managed to 'indexicalize' the strange 'icon' he was shown – did he even understand the 'connection'? – then it would have been on the basis of a meta-semiotic theory he formed on the spot. Why, in other words, would someone who had never seen a 'photographic likeness' be persuaded that the image beheld was an index of his or her 'being', let alone 'individuality'? Why, then, should we be surprised that what Spencer and Gillen's informant recognized in it was a form of 'kangaroeness'? Cf. Karen Field's (2013: 31) analysis of this episode.
 22. The latter is a term of don Fernando's coinage designed to create for Cuba (where Native American populations were more or less defined out of existence by the early 19th century) a 'counterpoint' to mainland Latin American notions of 'mestizaje'. The general point, of course, was that – different from Old World social formations for which ideologies of homogeneous origins could be projected back into the mists of time – New World societies (including the remnants of their indigenous populations) were the inescapably heterogeneous products of turbulent post-Columbian histories.

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