



ON TROPICAL GROUNDS

AVANT-GARDE AND SURREALISM
IN THE INSULAR ATLANTIC

Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián

On Tropical Grounds

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Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián

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Para Antonia y Francisco
en el mismo mar

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Foreword

Richard Rosa

The name “avant-garde” that came to define a series of iconoclastic and radical artistic movements in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century entails many tensions and even contradictions that could be traced to the meaning of the word itself. The word, which has a spatial dimension, referring to being ahead as part of an advancing military force, simultaneously becomes a temporal one, as in being ahead in time. And yet, being ahead here also implies transcending a condition of temporality, advancing beyond its constraints and conditions; but the word also reasserts that condition. Further, the avant-garde emerges as a movement that is essentially European, but at the same time one that reappears, replicates, and is reproduced elsewhere, everywhere. It reveals the idiosyncratic nature of its origin, but also its cosmopolitan signature; the different movements are rooted in “national” venues, while at the same time claiming a universal, cosmopolitan status. This is why the avant-garde has been an important point of reference for recent trends focused on “world literatures”: the “avant-garde” has even become a measure for determining how close to recognition by literary institutions a particular (national) tradition is. The “avant-garde” can be described as a radical rupture and a burst of disenchantment, but can also be constructed as a consecrating, mystifying gesture, both a destabilizing and a policing force. Hence, it reveals the paradoxical environment in which it emerged. The active, messianic gesture that is emblemized in the typical “manifesto” is countered by the

erasure of the line separating art from everyday life, its dissolution into the biological and even the physical.

To study the *avant-garde* (as a literary, artistic, and cultural movement) is to navigate through those many contradictions and perhaps risking deactivating the political potential behind them. This is particularly true with regards to what has been called “peripheral” or “global” *avant-garde* movements, happening in sites where the “denial of coevalness” was such a fundamental colonial strategy. And of course, it is particularly challenging when we are confronted with the Atlantic insular space that is the object of this book by Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián.

As in other parts of what is now called the Global South, literary and art histories, associated with the managerial nation-state and its narrative of modernity and modernization, attempt to administrate and accommodate cultural production in the Caribbean to a predetermined script. Many of these narratives restricted their scope to the relationship between the European producers, their products, and their after-effects in the region, or they focused primarily on adjusting local aesthetic innovations to a World or Global paradigm, where they could circulate and be consumed as stable representatives of their respective polis or ethnos. Less attention was granted to the multiple political and economic connections between the islands themselves or the complex cultural articulation between islands and metropolis. The Atlantic insular spaces link Europe with Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and were historically determined by experiments with global, mercantile capitalism, slave trade, land grabbing, the plantation system, extractive economies, and then more recently by the extractive tourist industry that capitalizes on the biopolitical view imposed by colonizers. During the timespan of the historical *avant-garde*, the region became a site of experimentation with a new kind of governing debt intersected by racial capitalism that would then be extrapolated to the rest of the world. An area marked by historical upheavals, yet resistant to unitary narratives that suppress its diversity, and resistant as well to the temporal policing implied in every literary and art history. Periodization, we could say, comes to die on the shores of these islands in the Atlantic.

Hernández Adrián’s approach to a diverse and fascinating corpus of Caribbean and Atlantic *avant-garde* texts is far from conventional. It certainly fits within the critical tradition established by an impressive group of authors who in recent years have recast the way in which Caribbean and Atlantic literature has been

read. Spearheaded by Édouard Glissant's concepts of relation, errancy, and the archipelagic, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's reworking of the archive, and Sylvia Wynter's rearticulation of the flesh/spirit dichotomy, authors such as David Scott, Paul Gilroy, and Gary Wilder, among others, have moved beyond the physical and political constraints imposed by the imperial nation-state by asserting the important insular nature of these societies. *On Tropical Grounds: Avant-Garde and Surrealism in the Insular Atlantic* builds upon these conceptual innovations in order to read and interpret literary works and images that communicate their insular nature. In each chapter, the author puts together a group of texts that engage or miss each other, that try to reach to other islands and then form archipelagos and gravitate towards new forms of complicity and empathy.

Chapter 1 is, perhaps, a radical example. In it, Hernández Adrián combines different media and materials that range from the 1937 German film *La Habanera*, written by Gerhard Menzel (a famous Nazi screenwriter) and directed by Douglas Sirk (who fled Nazi Germany after this film), which is staged on the island of Puerto Rico but filmed in Tenerife, Canary Islands, during the Spanish Civil War; a critical essay by canonical poet and essayist Pedro Salinas; the poetry of two writers from the Canary Islands (Josefina de la Torre, Domingo López Torres) and one of the most important representatives of pure poetry in Cuba (Mariano Brull), as well as the ideas of jurist and political philosopher Carl Schmitt, whose important works spanned the period of the avant-garde. All these references converge on the idea of the island, and the condition of tropical insularity, articulated in diverging and even opposite directions. In hindsight, we can say that these materials all point toward a polarization that was present at the origin of the historical avant-garde but also notable at the political and cultural development of the insular Atlantic. On the one hand the articulation of a regulative order, a mechanistic self-referentiality, and then, on the other, the decisionism, the assertive modality that has a certain messianism behind it. This first chapter of the book focuses in part on how the three insular writers, de la Torre, López Torres, and Brull, fit or do not fit into a "Republic of letters" as understood in the avant-garde, but also how this ideal is conditioned by colonial conceptions of space, the tropics, and capitalist investments. The works of these three writers, in different ways, short-circuit the disciplining gaze or voice coming either from the images of the German film or from Pedro Salinas's critical essay, and they do so in different ways. In

the case of de la Torre, her early book of poetry defied stereotypes of the tropics found not only in the Nazi film, but also in the introductory essay by Salinas, who invokes traditional colonial notions of the island which he tries to impose upon her work. In contrast, Domingo López Torres builds his littoral poetics around images of precariousness and dispossession grounded on his insular condition. López Torres develops what Hernández Adrián calls a *littoral sensorium* that is based on an insular immediacy and a “solar perspective.” In contrast, in the poetry of Mariano Brull, the utmost representative of elite, lettered culture in Cuba, who navigated between Afro-Cubanism and “pure poetry,” the island is viewed as a vanishing point, a dislocation, a space of pure potentiality, where the image of a child appears as a locus of enunciation. In Brull’s poetry, landscapes become vehicles of transcendence, but they also refuse a specific historic or ethnic content. In all these works, and despite their differences, we see a movement where the drive to turn the island into a target and object of artistic or aesthetic experimentation, economic exploitation, exoticizing gaze, political discipline, or biopolitical regulation, is intersected, appropriated, and countered by a voice, a material, a nature that suspend or bracket its effectiveness. In that sense the avant-garde is not exempt from the same colonial aspirations present in other epistemological, political, or economic projects coming from Europe, but at the same time, it provides some of the strategies that will be useful to undermine its most overwhelming effects. Two distinctive sets of memories associated to conquest and plundering or to work and resistance are deployed against each other in continuous friction. At the end, the insular avant-gardists present their search for a generative locus of political affirmation and creative agency against the stereotypical representation of insularity seen in the film by Sirk.

Hernández Adrián connects Mariano Brull’s Eurocentric universalism/cosmopolitanism, particularly the fantasies of maritime expansion present in his poems, to Hispanism as a civilizational ideology that had become hegemonic in the region by the 1920s and 1930s. Hernández Adrián highlights the role that Hispanism had as a specific imperial, colonial, and postcolonial project and how it intersects and collides with other colonialities enabling or hindering some emancipatory projects in the Atlantic. This in part is made clearer by his inclusion of the Canary Islands as a central site necessary to understand the Atlantic avant-garde movements. The Canary Islands became a point of articulation between continents: geographically located in Africa, it is yet an integral component

from which the Iberian empires were built, and where slavery and the plantation complex assumed its actual form while connecting to Orientalist geographical fantasies.

Agustín Espinosa, one of the main representatives of the Canary Islands' avant-garde, is an important author not only because of his two great works studied here, *Lancelot 28°-7°* [*Guía integral de una Isla Atlántica*] (1929) and *Crimen* (1934), but also because of his personal and professional bonds to peninsular writers who were themselves exploring Spain's Oriental past as well as the fantasies of Orientalism related to Spanish imperial projects. Espinosa's seminal book, *Lancelot 28°-7°* displays the connections between those different layers of colonial and imperialist fantasies that are constructed around the small island of Lanzarote, showing how the intervention of a certain kind of Hispanism in relation to other imperialisms led the author to invoke and to summon, but at the same time to exclude, the historical population of the island. This population, like that of other Caribbean islands, had been part of a biopolitical project that started with colonization, the introduction of slavery, the plantation system, etc.

Espinosa's focus on biology and geography, the physical space and the life that thrives on it, and the name, the symbols that seem to be needed to submit them under a particular history, will resonate with other authors discussed in the book. Lanzarote is in a state of infancy until an epic, European mark is imposed upon it. The site, as well as its inhabitants, gravitate around that possibility, while they are pulled as well into the Orient, into Africa. In the context of European thought, "life" had become a debated issue in the schools of philosophical phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics. Life, finite life, was to be elevated through the spirit or culture, or economy (rationalization) in order to be meaningful, becoming part of a civilization inextricably linked to a place. In *La Habanera*, the character of Don Pedro de Avila, in contrast to the Swedish (Germanic) characters, seems to incarnate the civilizational decadence of *Hispanidad*, as it devolves into a tyrannical regime in the tropics while manipulated by the capitalists in the United States. For Puerto Rican Antonio S. Pedreira, in contrast, the island is figured as a small child traumatized and docile, for whom regression into a Hispanic "stage" became a way of partial or minor salvation from its almost pathological condition of "insularismo."

If a forward movement, progression, and advancement, was a signature of the avant-garde, Hernández Adrián identifies these authors (Pedreira) with a regression, and that regression with their

male identity and their “Hispanism.” Regression appears as not only a refusal of the future, a negation of the present, and even a refutation of time itself, but it also points to the topic of primitivism that was so present in debates regarding social sciences, particularly anthropology and the arts. Regression in Freudian psychoanalytic language is an unconscious defense mechanism against the effects of a traumatic event. Among writers like Pedreira or even the young Carpentier, regression could be a response to the effects of new forms of commodification and imperialism, which are seen by mainstream economics (and statistics) as a certain change of direction in economic growth. Since 1898, as a new US plantation complex with its white burden and its white supremacism emerged triumphant from its defeat at the American Civil War, reference to a Hispanic race resisting their depredations became a signature of cultural resistance. It is at this moment that the geopolitical and the biopolitical become points of contention through the distinct configuration of the island and the tropics, and where the prevailing discourse of civilization goes adrift into less stable coordinates. The confrontation between “northern” and “southern” races took place in the scenery of the insular and tropical spaces, themselves marked by disease, natural disasters, overabundance and sometimes (imaginary) overpopulation. These unstable sceneries, representing a plasticity at times unmanageable to the foreign metropolises, were inhabited by dark and darkening bodies and by the web of materials and discourses they had built around them, including avant-garde artistic works that were missed or misunderstood by their European counterparts. It is in that zone of partial blindness and misunderstandings that Hernández Adrián finds the specific core of insular Atlantic avant-gardism. European sites here are not places of origins or sources, but rather, as he phrased it, “a dynamic of insular and cosmopolitan interconnectedness where modes of non-European relation resonate across the archipelagic and littoral spaces of the modern Atlantic.”

In the poetry of Luis Palés Matos, and even more so in that of Nicolás Guillén, Africa and Africanness become sites of memory and struggle that now oppose an imperial or post-imperial Europe or America. They both construct bridges and passages between the Islands, and between these islands and Africa. Most prominently, there has been a fundamental critical approach centered on the unifying thread represented by “negrista,” “negritude” or “Afro-Caribbean” poetry that assumed different forms from the early experiments by Palés Matos and Guillén, pointing to the

groundbreaking projects pioneered by Aimé Césaire and Suzanne Césaire, which constituted in itself a fundamental opening establishing connections between African-American, Caribbean, and African poetics prefiguring the future Black Atlantic and Global South configurations. In the case of poets Guillén and Palés Matos, male regression is associated with the construction of a threatening/liberating African or Afro-Caribbean woman upon which a nationalist, anticolonial project is half-built. “Hispanism” consolidates and then retreats from its own approaches to Africa, from the recognition of the “pueblo negro” that constitute its “self.”

In contrast, we are also shown how contacts between Afro-Caribbeans, Andalusians, and African Americans are taking place simultaneously, and how, in the case of Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos, according to Hernández Adrián, “race does not flee to a utopia of cosmic integration of races and cultures.” Rather, he argues, “it reaches the water and suggests a fluid Caribbeanness that transcends insularity without effacing the impact that traces of slavery and racism have on island lives.” Julia de Burgos is able to assert an anticolonial stance that at the same time eludes any kind of potential ethnocentrism. The creature that in Pedreira was a traumatized child haunted by visions of natural and political disasters, racial mixings, and geographic limitations, longing for a paternal savior, becomes in Burgos’s poetry a voice that fuses with the material and spiritual dimensions of the island, and, instead of longing for a father, it (the voice) extends its fluvial currents to the land and the spaces that contain the memories of a past marked by racism and colonialism. This reading of Burgos, in which life and symbol become inextricably entangled, is connected to another famous Caribbean writer and anthropologist Lydia Cabrera, from Cuba, who facilitated connections between Afro-Caribbean, Mediterranean, Martinican, and US anticolonial poetry. In her life and in her poetry, Burgos emblemizes a fluidity and a plasticity that allow her to project a Caribbean persona that extends to nature and matter, and which contrast with the photographs and narratives of carceral subjects and male anxiety in the chapter that follows.

Through the photography of Walker Evans, the novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* by Alejo Carpentier, and *Hombres sin mujer* by Carlos Montenegro, we contemplate a carceral space within the context of Cuba’s Gerardo Machado’s dictatorship and US sugar imperialism, in which Black Cubans’ labor and sexuality are coerced and contained in a sort of island within the island. The lives (of Black bodies) contained in these photographs and narratives

reflect a suspended time that is in tension with either the gaze or the corporal movements of the subjects in the photographs and the novels, while they also constitute the matter upon which the promise of a future “emancipated” republic can be constructed. The birth of the “new” Menegildo Cué at the end of Carpentier’s novel returns to us this creature that seems to announce a new beginning, and new connections throughout the Caribbean, particularly to the neighboring Haiti, which will be made more explicit in the last chapter of the book, where growing and intensifying political upheavals move writers from one place to the other, translating them in both senses of the word. Inspired by Surrealism, Martinican Aimé Césaire writes his famous *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* in the Mediterranean, and through it facilitates all kinds of connections between insular spaces. Surrealism was the most long-lived of the movements of the avant-garde, and the one that was most radical in its criticism of Western rationality, and its bureaucratic, administrative impositions and routinization. At the center of Surrealism’s claims lay the idea of freedom and the important role of the imagination as two conditions that could liberate human beings from the constraints that kept them (mostly “him”) tied to a conventional universe. The sites of the tropics and the islands became spaces identified with that mission, although it required a redeployment of many traditional Western colonization and masculinist tropes. This ambivalence was picked up by the insular representatives of the avant-garde who contested it promptly.

Agustín Espinosa revisits the image of the Island in his novel *Crimen* (1934), although this time he subverts the conventional views related to traditional Western exoticism, while surrealist painter Óscar Domínguez will use surrealist techniques to excavate the Canary Islands’ past, invoking its ancient inhabitants. The image of Africa (or the Orient) contained in and constrained by the representations of Europeans will now reappear in the reassertion of a politically charged racial identity within a transnational and multilinguistic framework developed in different ways across the Atlantic. This framework took place within networks of exchange that went beyond or against the colonial structures imposed on the islands: these encounters, framed by fringe situations such as wars, exile, and migration, enabled the emergence of conversations and works of art that were not subdued to the colonial imperative, although closely related to it. The diverse encounters with André Breton and Surrealism had an important role within this development, but it was in the process of appropriation, contestation,

and translation that it became a notable literary and artistic practice that challenged the traditional or conventional approach to World or Global literature. The unveiling of Wifredo Lam's *The Jungle* after an itinerary through the Caribbean that ended up in Port-au-Prince closes the book with an interrogation about the intersection between Surrealism and the Atlantic, and particularly the new role that Haiti will have in the articulation of a new geography of the south that Alejo Carpentier and Maya Daren will develop further in the 1940s.

On Tropical Grounds challenges us to move beyond *terra firma* into a more unstable and liquid view of things. Insular avant-garde poetry is a response to that challenge. Hernández Adrián finds various and divergent strategies for asserting an insular material and spiritual presence, incarnate and sensuous, that yet refuses colonial ethnographic appropriations. Instead of reading these works in order to build or construct a tradition that would compete with other traditions, he expands upon the concept of constellation originating from Walter Benjamin's early work on the *Trauerspiel*. Instead of being drawn or driven to a specific location or particular reading, the works discussed here gravitate around each other and around other manifestations of the avant-garde, reinscribing the meaning of their colonial forerunners: constellational and archipelagic, but also intimate and precarious, they contest the ethnographic colonial grasp that is extended over them and they interrupt the flow of pleasure yearned at by the colonial capitalist and extractive gaze attempting to appropriate and commodify the islands' tangible and/or intangible goods.

Introduction: On Tropical Grounds

Articulating Islands

What are the grounds for speaking of an insular avant-garde? Most definitions of the avant-garde emphasize a desire for transformation and a drive to destroy “the Powers of old Europe,” as Marx and Engels declare in the Manifesto of 1848.¹ Writing about a textual genealogy that claims the 1848 Manifesto as precursor, Martin Puchner argues that “the transportation, transmission, and adaptation of avant-garde manifestos indicate how these texts formed an international avant-garde, an avant-garde at large.”² This book approaches the archipelagos of the Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean and the Canary Islands as the scenarios of important discussions whose attentiveness to local histories of the present are worth understanding and relating in today’s changing perceptions of the global Atlantic.³ Contrasting ideological and aesthetic displacements within local avant-garde movements, I propose to look at the modernist Atlantic from an insular viewpoint. I contend that insularity can act as the geopolitical location of postcolonial island societies whose cultural production offers a unique critical viewpoint on the modern Atlantic, while posing a critical challenge to Eurocentric approaches to the insular avant-garde.⁴

After the era of colonial expansion, dominion, and exploitation that we know as Atlantic modernity, the long-term consequences of the old European powers are felt persistently in the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet the Atlantic “space” remains

inadequately modern in this period, the colonial imagination representing a negative foundation among insular avant-gardists who often draw on modern forms of universalism to provisionally or tactically adopt, if not “unite” with, an expansive metropolitan avant-gardism. For these avant-gardists, an underlying reality has to be excavated out of thick layers of *nesophilia* (a love of islands), romantic exoticism, and a novel touristic fascination with islandscapes. In the Caribbean and Atlantic spaces this book discusses, metropolitan and continental attitudes are the objects of conflict, negotiation, and compromise. The attraction forces of the distant or bordering continent translate as predatory, universalist, cosmopolitan, or internationalist emancipatory projects. But while the islands remain dependent and in some cases expendable on the level of metropolitan imaginary and political projections, they are rarely passive recipients of these projects.

On Tropical Grounds does not offer a seamless panoramic view of the avant-garde–Surrealism continuum in the Hispanic and Francophone Atlantic. I propose instead a local-bound and historically situated investigation into the Atlantic experience in dialogue with what Édouard Glissant calls “a field of islands.” This book embraces the idea of a plurality of islands that extends like a field across connecting seas, in a construction that maintains a fundamental tension between the apparently irreconcilable extremes of extension and instability, on the one hand, and fragmented diversity, on the other. In Michael Dash’s appreciation, the poems in Glissant’s *Un Champ d’îles* (*A Field of Islands*) (1953) constitute “evocations (*traversées*) in which a central and obsessive drama is enacted between the dreamer, the sea and the shore.”⁵ The following chapters show that an analogous dramatic instability of island spaces represents fertile grounds for the modern emergence of national, regional, and insular aesthetico-political demands. As we shall see, critical constructions of place and political change are periodically rearticulated in the decades of avant-garde effervescence that the book considers. What role, then, do these islands play in avant-garde figurations of soil, field, and future-bound spaces? Conversely, what role does the avant-garde perform in the formation of new modes of insularity?

Throughout this book, I employ the expression *avant-garde* instead of its inexact equivalent *modernism*, more common in English-language contexts. I am concerned with the Hispanic and Francophone islands of the Atlantic, hence my choice of *avant-garde*, a term with spatial connotations that Spanish and other

European languages adapted from the French *avant-garde*. While *vanguardia*, *arte nuevo*, and *ismos* are widely used in the Spanish-speaking world during the first half of the twentieth century, *modernismo* remains the name of an international symbolist style associated with José Martí, Rubén Darío, Julián del Casal, Tomás Morales, Alfonsina Storni, Gabriela Mistral, Miguel de Unamuno, and the young Juan Ramón Jiménez, among others. At stake in the insular avant-garde are the rhetoric and experience of location and, concurrently, the arbitrariness of colonial articulations of malleable “space.” The insular avant-garde groups I discuss participate in international avant-gardism while engaging in critical efforts to transform the colonial experience of location. In her groundbreaking study of the Latin American avant-garde, Vicky Unruh characterizes the early decades of the century as

an epoch of contentious encounters manifesting the challenging alliances that accompany shifting economic, social, and political conditions. Latin American nations experienced the impact of World War I era economic changes, of political hopes generated by the Russian revolution and international workers’ movements, and of the pervasive postwar disillusionment with European culture epitomized in Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918–22).⁶

In the 1920s, insular journals, manifestos, and aesthetico-political commitments demonstrate an awareness of the impact of Cubism, Italian Futurism, Dada, northern European Expressionism, Soviet avant-gardism, and the Black internationalism spreading from New York’s Harlem and Paris. Yet in what precise sense might we consider Unruh’s principle of the avant-garde as “an epoch of contentious encounters” across the Hispanic and Francophone islands? There are those in the various groups who mimic international trends in derivative manifestos and other ephemera, for the most part short-lived calls for rebellion and transformation in island societies that survive in the grips of well-established oligarchies and systemic neocolonial exploitation. But the most daring form activist communities, produce bodies of poetic, essayistic, and artistic works, and publish manifestos and journals that define them as avant-garde formations with local, national, and international profiles. At the heart of their activities lies a preoccupation with social change, a deep commitment to the transnational call to liberate “the wretched of the earth,” and an unprecedented desire to assert a communal awareness of their geopolitical location.⁷ Expanding Unruh’s Latin Americanist perspective, this book questions one-way

and nation-to-nation expressions of the insular Atlantic as a cartographic and iconic geography located southwest of the European subcontinent, and south and southeast of the United States. My aim is to delineate how insular avant-garde practices contest colonial cooptation through strategies of individual and communal introspection, reorientation, and dislocation. I do this by situating my arguments in the context of multiple avant-garde critiques of colonizing modernization.

While universalist discourses of the Atlantic reinscribe the cultural superiority of the West, the archipelagic Atlantic that emerges in this book questions the very idea of “old Europe” and its colonial extensions as an exclusive domain of modernizing and modernist practices.⁸ On the contrary, the critical spaces of avant-garde insularity grow out of a consciousness of political and cultural asymmetries between situated experiences of modernization and culturally embedded discourses of Eurocentric supremacy. For this reason, I find that Chantal Mouffe’s distinction between antagonism and agonism apply to the Atlantic locations of insular avant-gardism. Mouffe defines antagonism as “a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground,” and agonism as “a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are ‘adversaries’ not enemies.”⁹ While Mouffe’s conceptual analysis responds critically to Carl Schmitt’s friend/enemy opposition, she underlines the boundaries between conflict and relation and maintains that in agonism, “while in conflict, [the conflicting parties] see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place.”¹⁰ I see agonism not antagonism as the preferred space where avant-garde experiences develop and flourish, even as the historical period is fragmented by multiple crises.

The texts and contexts I discuss in this book merit a nuanced and expanded analysis of the notion of agonism. If agonism, relation, and contentious cosmopolitanism can describe aesthetic optimism and political ambition among insular avant-garde groups, there is also an undeniable dimension of adversarial attitudes that are bound by colonial, postcolonial, and decolonial efforts. These attitudes would be best described as antagonistic, oscillating from the early 1920s to the late 1930s between conservative, antidemocratic, authoritarian, and fascist extremes. In Mouffe’s analysis, “political association” and “common symbolic space” are panoramic abstractions that

will arguably come undone under the perspectival acuity of archipelagic thinking, and be tested in multiple expressions of Glissant's "field of islands." Yet, it remains important to ask how Mouffe's "common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place" would translate into the three decades of Atlantic avant-gardism. I argue that such a symbolic space unfolds in multiple inscriptions and rearticulations of longstanding antagonisms between nation and colony, region and archipelago, and island and cultural location. Furthermore, which kinds of antagonistic and agonistic relations can we discern among insular avant-gardists? We certainly see them moving beyond superficial appropriations of the vocabularies of their European counterparts and adapting grammars of aesthetico-political disruption. But do these attitudes amount to evidence that, as Mouffe states, "they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space"? This book investigates the conditions of antagonism and agonism that shaped the varieties of insular avant-gardism as these authors strive to make cultural difference and geographic distance intelligible to themselves and others through formal experiments and political demands.

In *On Tropical Grounds*, I contend that the Canary Islands are a central enclave in an Atlantic politics of location that distinguishes between national literary and cultural histories on one hand, and hemispheric and trans-Atlantic relations on the other. If the Canaries are exceptional for their peripheral location within Atlantic national mappings post the "disaster" of 1898, they are no less dependent in a broad colonial sense.¹¹ Therefore, my contention seeks to neither force an Americanist reading of the Canaries nor obfuscate the evidence of political and cultural formations that constitute them as Spanish. Nor do I posit an Atlantic comparativism of creole and colonial cultural forms. Instead, I read the Canaries as an exterior frontier of Caribbean culture, and as a revealing mirror and margin of Hispanism's Atlantic meta-archipelagos.

This book explores textual, visual, and conceptual *constellations* that, while speaking to local and national avant-garde canons, seek to articulate the specific textures of a displaced international avant-gardism. In Walter Benjamin, as Fredric Jameson observes, "the word 'constellation' is a destructive weapon, an instrument to be wielded against system and above all against systematic philosophy: it is meant to break up the homogeneity of philosophical language (and thereby to undermine the very order it seems itself to promote among the stars)." Jameson proceeds to comment on "the historical situation" during Benjamin's formative years "as the moment of