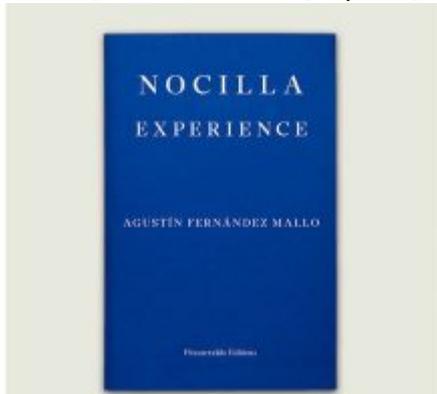


A text after Agustín Fernández Mallo's Nocilla Experience

written by John Trefry | May 9, 2017



Nocilla Experience by Agustín Fernández Mallo
Translated by Thomas Bunstead
Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016
200 pages – [Fitzcarraldo](#) / [Amazon](#)

1

SEAN CARROLL: When you actually do fall through the event horizon, you might not even notice. There is no barrier there, no sheet of energy that you pass through to indicate that you've entered a black hole. There is simply a diminution of your possible future life choices; the option of "returning to the outside universe" is no longer available, and "crashing into the singularity" is your only remaining prospect... You might try to delay this nasty fate, for example, by firing rockets to keep yourself away from the singularity, but it would only be counterproductive. By struggling, you only hasten your doom.

2

JOHN MILIUS: Saigon... shit; I'm still only in Saigon... Every time I think I'm gonna wake up back in the jungle. When I was home after my first tour, it was worse. [Grabs at flying insect.] I'd wake up and there'd be nothing. I hardly said a word to my wife, until I said 'yes' to a divorce. When I was here, I wanted to be there; when I was there, all I could think of was getting back into the jungle. I'm here a week now. Waiting for a mission. Getting softer.

3

Nocilla Experience is a text of collected interstices—the ballistic wreckage of contemporary thought and experience fallen from the sky—played as it lays, and itself, as a book project, lies at the threshold of many types of writing. In the sight of contemporary particle physics, cosmology, sociology, geography, political science, or nearly any stratum of critical inquiry, there is nothing that cannot be considered lying on the borderland of multiple territories, factions, or phases. In the way that all of these are able to distill, that all things are of a similar basic materiality whose only appearance of difference is in the way they affect one another, or are characterized by the way they are detected or perceived, the *Nocilla* books are of a raw material that has not or cannot be distinguished as a form, or as having specificity, unlike the way that *The Hunt for Red October* is apparent as a novel, or *City of Quartz* is apparent as a history, the *Nocilla* books are simply words lying adjacent to each other, in a pattern that makes a book, adjacent to other books, against which, or with whose influence, they are able to be distinguished as something—but only something other than those other books.

4

GILLES CLEMENT: If we ceased looking at land as purely something to be exploited, we would suddenly be confronted with a large number of undefined spaces, not serving any particular function, difficult to name with any accuracy. Together they belong to neither shadow nor light. They exist at the margins of things: at the forest edge, along main roads and next to rivers, in the most forgotten corners of culture and in places where machines cannot go. They sometimes cover modest areas and may be scattered as wide as the remote corners of a field [ditches].

5

AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ MALLO: In Madrid, an enormous Olympic flame appeared when a skyscraper called the Windsor Tower went up in smoke at 11.30 one night, the fire fighters powerless, the column of smoke visible from the adjacent cities, and the fire blazing away until midday the next day, a sunny February morning, and thousands of people, going out for bread and the morning papers, stopping to watch the inferno, the spectacular way it writhed and twisted. It was the day of the contemporary art fair, ARCO... So what did people like more? I'll tell you what they liked more, they liked watching the burning tower, the real work of art.

6

Earth is not a sphere. It is described as an oblate spheroid. The dimension from pole to pole is twenty-seven miles smaller than that of the diameter at the equator. Additionally, the surface of the earth, although its surface

deviations are minor in proportion to the size of the globe—the Mariana Trench is the most significant, a .17% deviation—they are nonetheless present. A sphere is ruthless. Earth is not a sphere.

7

It seems that great filmmakers, when they try their hand at genre films, create works that stand alone as both significant to the genre and embodying more complexity because of their friction with or baggage inherited from all the genre other films that orbit them. Stanley Kubrick made three significant genre contributions: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Shining*, and *Full Metal Jacket*. Although his more conventionally dramatic or comedic films, like *Dr. Strangelove* or *Eyes Wide Shut*, are complex and well-shot, the scrutiny demanded by them is not as robust. In that their reference plane is too broad, it is difficult to assert when and why they are taking the liberties that they do, and if they are liberties. Consider other examples: *Apocalypse Now*, *Solaris*, *Metropolis*, *Alien* and *Bladerunner*. The genre film—horror, science fiction, war (specific enough and not necessarily describing a tone (comedy does not seem like a genre in this sense, but a blanket ethos))—is constrained in such a way, providing a shape or envelope, or providing an armature, so that part of the treatment of the film is how it exploits that armature. These deviations, the inscription of the form within this sheath of space, make visible or exacerbate thematic aspects of a film that might not be especially apparent or poignant were it not for their inclusion in a milieu where they don't jibe. *The Exorcist*, a film by William Friedkin, known previously for *The French Connection*, is one of the most renowned horror films, a gruesome, tormented tale of a young girl's possession by a demon. It is also an incredibly tender and understated exploration of a parent's anguish of a sick child and of a priest's loss of faith. These two subjects are easily dealt with in a dramatic context. But in the context of levitation, back-masking, and buckets of other horror tropes, these delicate subjects are striking, and potentially more naturalistic in that they must be discovered by the viewer as though digging through the noise of life to access a loved-one's feelings, rather than the placed conspicuously in a frame the way a conventional drama, something like *Lorenzo's Oil*, might. It is not the first thing one notices when watching the film. But like many other bodies existing at the threshold between two terrains, it requires standing on one side first to see the other.

8

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT: Novels: Corrupt the masses. Are less immoral in serial than in volume form. Only historical novels are tolerable, because they teach history. Some novels are written with the point of a scalpel. Others rest on the point of a needle.

French entertainer Michel Lotito, or Monsieur Mangetout, or Mr. Eat-All, was featured in the Guinness Book of World's Records' "Feats of Eating" section for his consumption of a bicycle (including tires). The record was immediately asterisked to note that although it was still a record, the feat would be withdrawn from competition due to the obvious dangers associated with consuming metal, plastic, and rubber. This did not stop Mangetout from later eating an airplane—a Cessna 150—over the course of two years. Thirty years later, in 2011, a Serbian man named Branko Crnogorac was admitted to the hospital after friends bet him he could not eat a bicycle in three days. Crnogorac had previously consumed 25,000 lightbulbs, 2,600 dinner plates, and thousands of phonographic records. Two kilograms of metal were found in his stomach, including two gold rings. It is not known how long these objects had remained within him, part of his body passing through time and space. This disorder is called pica.

Even with the heavy lifting of this type of work was done in the nineteenth century, the so-called genreless work, as a genre, lies at the fringe of literary typologies. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and J.K. Huysmans' *The Cathedral* sometimes called "encyclopedic novels", were, even in the oeuvre of their authors, rather atypical works. Each was originally either a critical failure or a curiosity, only eliciting esteem well into the twentieth century and modernism. Of Huysmans at the time, for whom, out of these three, *The Cathedral* was the least significant departure from his rather plotless explorations of Decadence and Satanism (*A Rebours* and *La Bas* respectively), it was said, "This man is to Chateaubriand what a toad is to a nightingale." For Flaubert, it is likely the obsession with writing *Bouvard and Pécuchet* that precipitated his death. Published shortly thereafter, it was seen as formless and ponderous (and what picaresque isn't, only this was a picaresque exploring knowledge rather than a landscape). What unites these books is not the ambivalence surrounding their reception, but the texture of their content. In each, a preponderance of conscripted non-fiction writing bears heavily. It proportionally usurps the place typically reserved for in-situ exposition. Although sometimes presented as the thoughts or commentary of a character—in *The Cathedral* for instance, the research and conversation of Durtal and the abbe of Chartres about the history of the building—its uninterrupted roving after the initial attribution leaves little doubt rhetorically about who is uttering these morsels: the material world itself. Melville takes the game the furthest perhaps, dedicating entire chapters to cetology or the history of the biblical Jonah, without ever mentioning a character from the narrative. But perhaps the most hereditary aspect in the conversation about the *Nocilla* books is Melville's preface, called "Extracts," in which he presents a ten-page compendium of whale-related quotes, facts, and anecdotes about whales, and specifically sperm whales, without editorial, without narrative, without

any contextual embedment whatsoever.

11

LEE SMOLIN: Particles... move by jumping from node to node, along the edges, just as in the lattice model. If you look from far enough away, you don't see nodes or graphs, you just see the smooth geometry of everything they approximate. The particle then looks as if it is traveling through space. So perhaps when we throw a ball, what's really happening is that the atoms in the ball are hopping from atom of space to atom of space to atom of space.

12

HERMAN MELVILLE: It is some systematized exhibition of the whale in his broad genera, that I would now fain put before you. Yet it is no easy task. The classification of the constituents of a chaos, nothing less is here essayed. Listen to what the best and latest authorities have laid down.

13

The sphere is a seemingly innocuous, pristine three-dimensional solid. A sphere is ruthless. Consider the cone for instance. Its contributing factors are linear and circular. One must determine the angle that its shell drafts away from its apex. And although cut by a plane any distance away from its apex, but perpendicular to its axis, it is selfsame, the determination must be made about that dimension in addition to the draft angle. Additionally, although it is arguable, the cone also includes a number of variations. Some allow that any polygon at all extruded to a point, like a pyramid, must be considered a cone, or, that oblique cones, in which the extrusion occurs on an axis that is not normal to the base, is also a type of cone. Then there is the whole matter of the frustum. How absurdly complicated. Reconsider the sphere. It is defined by a single value: the equidistance of all points on its surface away from a center. The cube, which is similarly described by the single value of the length of its sides, has the added complexity of, although being symmetrical in many directions, requiring a definition of its orientation. It acquires difference and distinction by rotation in all axes. The sphere, once defined, can be translated and rotated infinitely and its defining geometric characteristics do not change.

14

PAUL METCALF: A better temper than prevailed in the Melville household, where Herman would harangue his wife and two daughters (this was after the sons were gone) on matters that had no interest for them, and they would roll their eyes, and sigh, and wait, or there would be outbursts of temper,

sarcasm...

15

The contemporary contribution of *Nocilla Experience* to the tradition of genreless or encyclopedic novels lies not in its narrative bankruptcy, or even in the concreteness of its nonfiction and journalistic content, but in its unfettered heterogeneity. Perhaps it is the ultimate zenith in human intelligence to be able to synthesize a being, an outlook, from the explosive surplus of accessible voices and sources, as hesitant and fragmented as they are resolute, where the being of an individual, their consciousness, lies not in the particular content, but in the sensibility that defines their interconnection.

16

AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ MALLO: He had vivid memories of the case, and confirmed that a number of inexplicable things had taken place during the ritual, that the boy had reacted very badly to the holy water, to communion and whenever he heard the names Jesus, God or the Virgin Mary. The exorcism of Robbie Brady had strengthened his faith, he said. He said that he and Father Bowdern had gone to see the film together, but that they had not liked it. It struck them as the usual Hollywood fare, he said, a horror movie intended to make people scream, nothing more.

17

J.K. HUYSMANS: Well, it would be better to accept the real walls of a church, making use of the structure, and limiting ourselves to completing the idea by details borrowed from the symbolism of flowers.

18

Around lunchtime in January 2001 a fire broke out in the upper floors of the 27-story Los Angeles transit headquarters building. Visible in panorama from around the city, it was watched by a young man on a sidewalk in a desolated industrial area just east of little Tokyo. Smoke billowed though no fire was visible. To his surprise, another man stopped to watch, not maintaining a distance commensurate with the desolation, but standing immediately adjacent, and asked what was going on. "The building is on fire. I think it is the MTA building." He responded, "I'm fascinated by fires." His father, an architect, had died by fire after falling asleep with a cigarette. As the fire department quickly suppressed the blaze, both men departed.

AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ MALLO: *The Cooking With Your Car Compendium*, as suggested by the title, was described as a series of recipes to cook on a car engine, useful if at the end of a car journey someone wants a decent, hot meal, but doesn't want to go in search of fast food restaurants. Cooking times were calculated according to the distances driven, and there are as many as 53 recipes for basic, easy-to-use ingredients like potatoes, carrots, chicken, beef, eggs [don't crack them], various fish such as tuna and swordfish, and all with the added bonus that oil is never needed.

Metaphor is a threshold. All language is metaphor. But more specifically, any text that is not explicitly analogical must be read as a metaphor. It is a magic transubstantiation. The hermeticism of personal reading, which takes place in the mind, is the more significant tissue between words than grammar, which is alien.

Ryugyong Hotel, nicknamed the "Hotel of Doom," or the "Phantom Hotel", a 105-story pyramid-shaped skyscraper in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea, sits empty. Ostensibly completed in 2009, after beginning construction in 1987 and faltering multiple times, the project cost a reported \$750 million. The only sanctioned tour of the massif's interior in 2012 revealed vacant concrete viscera still cluttered with temporary construction railings and outriggers for falling-object protective netting. Estimates in South Korean media have estimated completion of the hotel interior at an additional \$2 billion. Perhaps having learned a lesson, in 2016, developers of a 70-story apartment tower in Pyongyang reportedly provided methamphetamines to workers to speed their efforts. The pyramid has no significant symbolism in Korean culture. It is, however, structurally, the easiest way to build something tall.



22

AGUSTÍN FERNÁNDEZ MALLÓ: This very building, for example, is prefabricated, a helicopter comes and sets it up just as you see it; it's a 5-minute job, you put it down anywhere you like... There are people who become lost in places no one cares about.

23

The Dymaxion Map—developed by Buckminster Fuller—is a projection of Earth onto an icosahedron and then unfurled—as a developed surface—in any manner of contiguous equilateral triangles. The most famous of these arrangements, strikingly different than most typical equatorcentric projects, aligns all of the landmasses in a nearly contiguous sequence from the south pole and Antarctica, across the Mar de Hoces to South America, up along Central America to the North American landmass, across the Bering Strait to Asia, where it splits, one leg traveling through Europe and down across the Arabian and Iberian Peninsulas to Africa, the other running down through China and Indonesia, from New Guinea across the Torres Strait to Australia, and across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. Apart from small islands strewn about, the last interruption is the most significant, over 1,000 miles. Ever the pragmatic optimist, Fuller argued that the projection, lacking a directional bias, was more in keeping with our place in the universe and eliminated cultural biases. The edge of each triangle matches the arc of a great circle

on the globe.

24

DANIEL MARTIN (AKA DIABOLUS): Simply stated, I have absolutely no interest in politics or society. My physical existence is spent preparing for my astral existence (through the gathering of knowledge and experience), with everything else being rather trivial and more or less a way for me to pass time.

25

SEAN CARROLL: In contrast, consider the two-dimensional surface of a sphere. First we have to generalize the notion of a "straight line," which on a sphere isn't an obvious concept. In Euclidean geometry, as we were taught in high school, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. So let's declare an analogous definition: A "straight line" on a curved geometry is the shortest curve connecting two points, which on a sphere would be a portion of a great circle. If we take two paths on a sphere that are initially parallel, and extend them along great circles, they will eventually intersect. That proves that the principles of Euclidean geometry are no longer at work, which is one way of seeing that the geometry of a sphere is curved.

26

It is arguable where the body ends. Even more esoteric or liberated theologies, like Buddhism, believe that the body, as a manifestation of the individual, is somehow contingent on four other aggregates that constitute physical existence: sensations, perceptions, mental activity, and consciousness. However, the most cursory flipping through the stations on what was once known as television will reveal that human DNA is left copiously all over crime-scenes—unless you are clever, or bald. Even if you have not committed a crime, which is really the only time anyone would care, you have inevitably thrown away a bloody bandage, lost a tooth, shut your hair in the car door, or shat in the ocean. The contents of these leavings are only your body. It could not every be mistaken for anything but a part of your body. It has been surmised that the approximate half-life of DNA is 521 years, meaning that without preservation it would only become unrecognizable after one million years.

27

MARTIN HOGUE: Best known for his spatially dynamic extractions of large sections of walls and floors from abandoned buildings, Gordon Matta-Clark

(1943-1978) purchased thirteen parcels of residual land, deemed 'gutter space' or 'curb property,' in Queens that had been put on sale for \$25 each: a 2.33' x 355' long strip of land, a 1.83' x 1.11' lot, among others, with the goal of highlighting neglected architectural environments that make up the urban and suburban fabric. The artist created an exhibit of his newly acquired 'properties' by assembling for each, and with deadpan accuracy, a photographic inventory of the site, its exact dimensions and location, as well as the deed to the property. *Or, on the genreless text.*