

FANTA-REALITY ON THE ROAD.**CARS AND SUSPENSION OF TIME IN THE SHORT STORIES *LA AUTOPISTA DEL SUR* BY JULIO CORTAZAR AND *AUTOSOLE* BY CARLO LUCARELLI****Silvia Zangrandi**

Università IULM – Milano

silvia.zangrandi@iulm.it

ABSTRACT: Cars have imposed themselves peremptorily on our society, they have changed the life of human beings and life among human beings. This presence has been skilfully intercepted by many authors who have written fantastic stories about cars, such as Julio Cortázar and his *La autopista del sur* and Carlo Lucarelli and his *Autosole*. The stories share several elements: a) the narration unwinds along two similar motorways, though in two countries quite distant from each other, b) the characters represent the double of their cars, so much so that they identify themselves in the name of the car brand owned; c) the biological and the mechanical are fused: the car becomes the “carapace” of the human being (Mc Luhan) and men and cars form a single entity; d) there are two traffic jams where the time – space coordinates are loosened (the roads are no longer a place of transit but of life; time goes crazy and its flow is suspended). Starting from some anthropological reflections, this essay aims to show, using the two stories, how Cortázar and Lucarelli’s fantasies have in fact anticipated reality: on 14th August 2010, a huge traffic jam in China trapped thousands of drivers for over a month on National Expressway 110, which connects Beijing to Tibet...

KEYWORDS: motorways; traffic jam; immobility; double; anticipation of reality

RESUMEN: Los coches se han impuesto con fuerza en nuestra sociedad, han cambiado la vida de los seres humanos y la vida entre los seres humanos. Dicha presencia ha sido hábilmente captada por varios autores que han escrito historias fantásticas sobre los automóviles, como por ejemplo Julio Cortázar, en su cuento *La autopista del sur*, y Carlo Lucarelli, en su novela *Autosole*. Ambos autores comparten distintos elementos pertenecientes a la literatura neofantástica: a) la narración se desarrolla a lo largo de dos autopistas similares, aunque en dos países muy distantes entre sí; b) los personajes pueden ser considerados el doble de sus coches, tanto es así que los protagonistas se identifican con sus marcas; c) lo animado y lo inanimado se funden entre sí; el coche se convierte en el “caparazón” del ser humano (Mc Luhan) y los hombres y los coches forman una sola entidad; d) en los respectivos cuentos, estamos ante dos embotellamientos situados fuera de las coordenadas tiempo – espacio. Estas se desvanecen en ambas obras: las carreteras no son ya un lugar de tránsito, sino de vida, el tiempo enloquece y su flujo queda suspendido. A partir de algunas reflexiones antropológicas, este trabajo tiene como objetivo demostrar, utilizando las dos historias antes señaladas, cómo la genialidad fantástica de Cortázar y Lucarelli haya anticipado la realidad: el 14 de agosto de 2010 un enorme atasco en China atrapa a miles de conductores, durante más de un mes, en la Autopista Nacional 110, la que conecta Beijing con el Tíbet...

PALABRAS CLAVE: autopista; embotellamientos; inmovilidad; doble; anticipación de la realidad

Eccomi dunque su questa autostrada che
ho percorso centinaia di volte [...] mi
sembra d'aver perduto il senso dello
spazio e quello del tempo
(Italo Calvino 118)

Background

Cars have imposed themselves peremptorily on our society, they have changed the life of human beings and life among human beings, they are the means that make it possible to move, to live, to experience newness itself. Their speed seduces and fascinates, it gives us the possibility to go everywhere, to change space and time. Even, for Barthes, it has become a “magic object”: “je crois que l’automobile est aujourd’hui l’équivalent assez exact des grandes cathédrales gothiques: je veux dire une grande création d’époque [...] consommée dans son image [...] par un peuple entier qui s’approprie en elle un objet parfaitement magique” (Barthes 50). By speaking about a new model of Citroën, Barthes claims that the car “est le meilleur messenger de la surnature: il y a facilement dans l’objet une perfection et [...] un silence qui appartient à l’ordre du merveilleux” (Barthes 150). The association between cars and magical aspects has been intercepted by many narrators who have written fantastic stories about cars. By starting from purely real data, which everyone has experienced at least once in their life, they have created stories which lead to the Fantastic.

Introduction to the two stories

In 1966 Julio Cortázar publishes the short story *La autopista del Sur* regarding a hyperbolic and improbable motorway traffic jam.¹ In 1998 Carlo Lucarelli, very famous in Italy for his spy stories, publishes a book entitled *Autosole*² whose outcome is halfway between a novel (in fact, there is a common story which links the narration) and a collection of short stories. The two stories share several elements: a) the narration unwinds along two similar motorways, though in two countries quite distant as far apart, b) there are two traffic jams where the coordinates of space and time are loosened (the roads are no longer a place of transit but of life; time goes crazy and its flow is suspended); c) the characters represent the double of their cars, so much so that they identify themselves in the name of the car brand owned; d) the biological and the mechanical are fused: the car becomes the “carapace” of the human being, as McLuhan said, and human being and cars form a single entity.

Cortázar and Lucarelli deal with daily problems of traffic and translate them into narrative occasions. Using a term dear to Marc Augé, for both writers, the motorway is a “non lieu de la surmodernité” which swallows time, space and identity. Before the reader’s eyes characters, whose existence is anonymous and who live in a present without time and out of the History, parade. Their characters have only one reality linked to movement or to its negation, and to the attainment of the destination. The plots of both stories are spare and used as a pretext. For the two writers the motorway represents the ideal background for the staging of a story of sociological kind where representing the relationship among the characters entrapped on the motorway. As Bakhtin claims,

¹ It is not the first time since Cortázar has set his narrations on a motorway; in fact, in 1983 he publishes *Los autonautas de la cosmopista*, a trip without time from Paris to Marseille.

² To be precise, in August 1997 Lucarelli was asked to write a story every day for a month for the daily newspaper l’«Unità». These articles were in part collected in a book whose title is *Autosole*.

the road is the meetings place par excellence. On the road the travelling in the time and in the space of the most different people is intertwined with other people in a certain point in the time and in the space (Bachtin 93). In the story by Cortázar, the drivers organize themselves to be able to face several problems, as the supply of food and water, assisting people who feel bad and even the management of the dead. As Cortázar said in an interview, he wishes to illustrate “el signo mas negativo de nuestra triste sociedad en la que vivimos, una especie de contradicción con la vida humana, decir una especie de búsqueda de la desgracia, de la infelicidad, de la exasperación a través de la gran maravilla tecnológica que es la automovil que debería darnos la libertad” (www.youtube.com - Entrevista a Cortázar). On the contrary, Lucarelli’s drivers seem not to have problems of surviving in the jam (they don’t look for food or water) but, similarly to Cortázar’s story, we are given an accurate representation from a sociological point of view: we meet rich businessmen, abandoned fiancées, families with children, disabled people, thieves who are escaping, penniless boys who would like to reach their resorts... Everyone must try to solve a problem, which is always a relational sentimental type, the jam is further complicating. In both we assist in the passive acceptance of the event, as if it were normal in some periods of the year (in fact, we are in August). What astonishes us is the fact that Cortázar and Lucarelli’s fantasies have in fact anticipated reality: on 14th August 2010, a huge traffic jam in China trapped thousands of drivers for over a month on National Expressway 110, which connects Beijing to Tibet... As in Cortázar’s story, the Chinese drivers had to organize themselves in order to survive, they created a sales network of basic products, they formed a sort of society similar to the one they came from. The same happens in Cortázar’s story, whose evident metaphorical and allegorical function is to show how the society created by the drivers reflects the conditions which generated it. However, it is useful to remark that, when this motionless society gets back into gear, as mysteriously as it stopped, the ethical value of the old sense of solidarity, friendship and love dissolves as at the end of a pretence which has precise norms we can not contravene. As in Lucarelli’s story, the motorway of the Chinese reality becomes the emblem of our daily life: speed, risk, sudden blocks which put a strain on us.

Space

La autopista del sur described by Cortázar is the motorway which leads to Paris passing through Fontainebleau and on Sundays in August is often blocked by traffic; the motorway where Lucarelli’s story takes place is called A1 Milano-Napoli, also known as Autosole,³ and in August (period when most Italian people leave for their holidays) is often congested by traffic. Differently from the road, the motorway has always been considered not a place of meeting but an infrastructure for the fast shipping, alien to its surrounding, to the landscape (which is often marred by its presence) and to the people who travel: it is without identity. In Adorno’s opinion, the motorway has no expression, it ignores the shadows of steps and wheels (51). On the contrary, in Cortázar and Lucarelli’s stories the motorway loses its anonymity: for some characters it becomes a place for meetings, life, love; for others it is the symbol of solitude without isolation; for everyone it is no more the place of movement but the place of the forced immobility. In a paradoxical, hyperbolic and, as in Lucarelli’s, in a certain sense amusing situation the two stories take place. They start from a real event, precisely the traffic jam, but soon the time-space coordinates skip and the motorway becomes a place where neither circulation nor communication exist. Lucarelli anthropomorphises the motorway: “L’autostrada diventa un serpente dalle scaglie fitte, che

³ See Menduni, Enrico. *L’Autostrada del Sole*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999 to master the story of the Autostrada del Sole, whose construction, started in 1956, marked the “Italian economic miracle” and changed the perception of the Italian geography.

lentamente si allunga, si stende, abbagliante di riflessi” (7. My translation: “the motorway becomes a snake with thick scales, which slowly stretches, with dazzling reflections”). The metaphor referring to the cars in the queue, similar to a snake, is used several times: “un serpente dalle scaglie fitte, che attende immobile sotto al sole rovente, respirando piano” (9. My translation: “a snake with thick scales which waits, still, under the hot sun, breathing slowly”); “il serpente di metallo [...] riprende lentamente a muoversi” (19. My translation: “the metal snake [...] starts again to move slowly”). Lucarelli trespasses in the field of visual images. In the words of Sklovski, with his images he means to transfer the object from its usual perception into the sphere of a new perception, as to say an original sematic variation (Sklovski 5). Let’s read this very visual description: “vista dall’alto, l’autostrada sembra un fiume nero attraversato da un branco di pesciolini di tutte le forme. Il sole si riflette sulla lamiera delle capotte come sulle squame dei pesci e brilla, blu oltremare, nero nacré, verde marino, rosso ferrari, bianco metallizzato. Un arlecchino di lamiera rovente” (104. My translation: “seen from above, the motorway looks like a black river crossed by a shoal of small fish of all forms. The sun reflects on the sheet hoods like on the scale of fish and shines, blue ultramarine, black nacre, sea green, red Ferrari, white metal. A harlequin of hot sheet metal”). In order to increase the visibility, Lucarelli uses chormatisms, similes and metaphors. Thanks to similes, the sense skips towards the surreal and the grotesque: la “coda pazzesca [...] sta strangolando l’autostrada” (37. My translation: the “crazy queue [...] is strangling the motorway”); “the motorway is obstructed worse than the arteries of an octogenarian” (my translation: “l’autostrada intasata peggio delle arterie di un ottantenne”, 41); “la coda [...] li fa arrancare a singhiozzo sull’autostrada” (49. My translation: “the cars queuing on the motorway are struggling uphill on a stop-and-start”); “l’autostrada [...] si muove [...] al ritmo lento di un respiro” (65. My translation: “the motorway [...] moves to the slow rhythm of a breath”).

Since for ever fiction has had the task to reproduce into itself the relationship with the world, to represent it, to suggest the object to present through a linguistic devise and to draw it. According to Wunenburger, the image is the concrete representation of a material or conceptual object which is present or absent from a perceptive point of view and which entertains a relationship with its referent so to be able to represent and to recognize and identify by the mind (Wunenburger 5). The practical translation of this statement is in the images of the jam given by Cortázar: “todo era olor a gasolina [...] brillo del sol rebotando en los cristales y en los bordes cromados, y para colmo la sensación contradictoria del encierro en plena selva de máquinas pensadas para correr” (506) and the queue is associated to a “caravana de camellos” (506). Lucarelli associates the motorway to a snake, Cortázar to a river: “la cinta blanca del macadam con su río inmóvil de vehículos” (510).

Both Cortázar and Lucarelli dedicate several moments to the description of the cars queuing: el “horizonte de techos de automóviles” (Cortázar 508) is described by Cortázar in this way: “el 404 del ingeniero ocupaba el segundo lugar de la pista de la derecha contando desde la franja divisoria de las dos pistas, con lo cual tenía otros cuatro autos a su derecha y siete a su izquierda, aunque de hecho sólo pudiera ver distintamente los ocho coches que lo rodeaban” (506); “las doce filas se movían prácticamente en bloque, como si un gendarme invisible en el fondo de la autopista ordenara el avance simultáneo sin que nadie pudiese obtener ventajas” (508). The cars queuing described by Lucarelli produce the dreamlike vision of a mechanical landscape: “luci rosse e gialle che frenano, rallentano e piano piano si fermano [...] le auto sfilano lungo i finestrini, sembrano tornare indietro e poi ripassano avanti, lentissime. [...] le luci gialle e rosse riprendono a lampeggiare e lentamente, senza speranza, il movimento si blocca” (9, 11. My translation: “red and yellow lights brake, slow down and little by little stop [...] the cars parading along the windows, seem to come back and then to pass again very slowly [...] the red and yellow lights start again to flash and slowly, hopeless, the movement stops”); the cars move “a passo d’uomo, disposti su tre corsie diverse come carte mescolate a caso da uno che non sa giocare» (101. My translation: “at a

walking pace, on three different queues, similar to cards random mixed by a person who can't play").

Time

The revolutionary concept of "entropy change" shown by the physician Rudolf Clausius who, in 1865, spoke about the increase or decrease of the degree of disorder in a complex system, can help us to understand what is happening to the characters of the two stories: according to Clausius, every transformation of a system leads to an increase of entropy (as to say, of disorder) of the same system. We could say that the universe is made in such a way that each system evolves inexorably from ordered states to more and more disordered states. In fact, in the two stories the writers present a situation which passes from an ordered state (regular flux of traffic) to a disordered one (jam and block of movement).⁴ Cortázar and Lucarelli offer the perception of a time "other", rescued from human conventions. The two stories open in *medias res*: the two motorways are plunged into cars, the characters are already queuing. We know exactly how long the jam told by Lucarelli lasts (it is indicated from the title of the first and of the last chapter: "Autosole, 1st August", "Autosole, 31st August"), while in Cortázar's story the time length of the jam is not precise ("no atardecía nunca, la vibración del sol sobre la pista [...] dilataba el vértigo", 506) and the climatic changes indicate the flow of time (we pass from the summer heat of a Sunday afternoon, to the winter with snow and ice, to the spring). In this period passengers and their cars organize themselves to find food and water, to assist people who feel bad and even to manage the dead.

Our world, our life can not even be conceived apart from the concept of time as a sequence of events which can not be reproduced. Time is with space the essential component of every human representation: we can not know any objects without relating them to space and time. According to Aristotle, time exists only as a factor inherent to movement, as "*passio motus*, in a similar relationship with matter (movement) and accident (time)". On the base of this meaning of the time as *passio motus*, which appears in a fragment of the *Physics* by Aristotle, from a metaphysical point of view, time has not an independent existence but must necessarily inhere to *motus* in order to exist (Ghisalberti 72).

Also for Tommaso d'Aquino time has its base in movement, as to say in the first and then of the motion itself.⁵ In the Commentary to the Book IV of his *Fisica*, Tommaso highlights the more characteristic structural datum of temporality, as to say the direction man attributes to time, by interpreting it according to the categories oriented from the past to the future, from birth to death (Ghisalberti 73). Therefore, human beings recognize themselves as subject to time. Everyone lives

⁴ In these last years studies from a physical point of view about the creation of jams have been made. In the n° 10 of the «New Journal of Physics» (march 2008) a team of Japanese scholars presented a research project entitled *Traffic jams without bottlenecks – experimental evidence for the physical mechanism of the formation of a jam*. I quote from the abstract: "A traffic jam on a highway is a very familiar phenomenon. From the physical viewpoint, the system of vehicular flow is a non-equilibrium system of interacting particles (vehicles). The collective effect of the many-particle system induces the instability of a free flow state caused by the enhancement of fluctuations, and the transition to a jamming state occurs spontaneously if the average vehicle density exceeds a certain critical value. Thus, a bottleneck is only a trigger and not the essential origin of a traffic jam. In this paper, we present the first experimental evidence that the emergence of a traffic jam is a collective phenomenon like 'dynamical' phase transitions and pattern formation in a non-equilibrium system. We have performed an experiment on a circuit to show the emergence of a jam with no bottleneck. In the initial condition, all the vehicles are moving, homogeneously distributed on the circular road, with the same velocity. The average density of the vehicles is prepared for the onset of the instability. Even a tiny fluctuation grows larger and then the homogeneous movement cannot be maintained. Finally, a jam cluster appears and propagates backward like a solitary wave with the same speed as that of a jam cluster on a highway" (<http://iopscience.iop.org/1367-2630/10/3/033001/fulltext>, 11 July 2011).

⁵ See Tommaso d'Aquino, in *I Sent*, 19, 5, 1.

and perceives the flow of time; this perception is helped by elementary phenomena such as the succession of days and seasons, the awareness of our own aging when we look in the mirror... Nevertheless, when we have to define what time is, words fail. Sant'Agostino in *Le confessioni* wondered: "what's time? Who could explain it in a plain and short form? if nobody questions me, I know; if I liked to explain it to whom is questioning me, I don't know". The question of temporality summons who formulates it, his habits of thought, his language, the same organization of the world and his different philosophies of Time which have alternated. In the opinion of the Italian physician Giuseppe Longo, the fracture between perception and rational description of time is a relatively recent phenomenon. He claims that temporality is confined to mere illusion where there's neither space for man nor for his apparent freedom of thought and action. The man, unpredictable and subject to the mutability of fate, becomes a deformed and alien creature to the predictable Universe where he lives (<http://people.na.infn.it/~longo/>). The assertions here quoted reflect in the two stories: the *passio motus* is at the base of the flowing of the days on the motorway; the days and the events told are oriented, as Tommaso d'Aquino suggests, from the past to the future, from birth to death. Anyway, in the two stories the temporality is confined to mere illusion: it seems impossible to Lucarelli's drivers that a month has passed, as on the contrary the conventional instruments as the calendar clock and the motorway toll ticket state; Cortázar's characters insist in vain to measure the time or they don't care for it, becoming in this way deformed and alien creatures. Cortázar speaks about time several times, starting from the very beginning: "Al principio la muchacha del Dauphine había insistido en llevar la cuenta del tiempo, aunque al ingeniero del Peugeot 404 le daba ya lo mismo. Cualquiera podía mirar su reloj pero era como si ese tiempo atado a la muñeca derecha o el bip bip de la radio midieran otra cosa, fuera el tiempo de los que no han hecho la estupidez de querer regresar a París por la autopista del sur un domingo de tarde" (505); "ya ni valía la pena mirar el reloj pulsera para perderse en cálculos inútiles" (506); "las horas acababan por superponerse, por ser siempre la misma en el recuerdo" (509). At first, the jam is lived as an offense to one's own pride, in fact for someone "el embotellamiento era una afrenta exclusivamente personal" (510), someone complains "porque le parecía un atropello someter a millares de personas a un regime de caravana de camellos" (506); then, little by little, the drivers submit to the situation and organize themselves to front the adversities which will appear during their forced stop. Once the jam vanishes as mysteriously as it was created, the running of the cars starts again and the story ends in the speed. The drivers don't know the reason of the hurry: "no se podía hacer otra cosa que abandonarse a la marcha, adaptarse mecánicamente a la velocidad de los autos que lo rodeaban, no pensar [...] sin que ya se supiera fin por qué tanto apuro, por qué esa carrera en la noche entre autos desconocidos donde nadie sabía nada de los otros, donde todo el mundo miraba fijamente hacia adelante, exclusivamente hacia adelante" (522-523). This statement shows the behaviour of the modern-direct human being who simply fits mechanically and abstractly into what surrounds him, looking fixedly forward in a solipsism which precludes the relationship with the others. In Lucarelli's story we have the impression that since the beginning the drivers are already prepared to face the queue. In fact, apart from the man on board the blue Bravo, who looks at his watch insistently because he has two meetings (one being a hot date), and the man who has just done a robbery and wishes to arrive soon because he has been wounded by a security guard, all the other characters accept the queue, demonstrating that in August it is normal to have it as a travel companion and the narration forgets to inform about the flux of time and devotes itself to the examination of the characters and their private life. The motorway, or better, as Lucarelli's describes it, "un serpente dalle scaglie fitte, che [...] attende, immobile sotto il sole, respirando piano" (7. My translation: "a snake with thick scales which [...] waits under the hot sun breathing slowly") is the metaphor of the universe where different personalities cohabit, with their wishes, their contradictions, the problems that life poses every day. Only in the two final chapters Lucarelli

reminds us that the characters who tell the stories are trapped in a jam. In fact, the last but one chapter ends in this way: “improvvisamente, la fila si muove [...] l’autostrada sembra un serpente dalle scaglie luminose, senza testa e senza coda, che si stira e si allunga, come se si fosse svegliato in quel momento. Talmente compatto che non lascia neppure intravedere la trama nera dell’asfalto sotto le squame colorate (103. My translation: “suddenly the queue moves [...] the motorway seems a snake with bright scales, without head or tail, which stretches as if it has awoken in that moment. So compact that it doesn’t even allow to glimpse the black texture of the asphalt under its coloured scales”). The metaphor motorway-universe appears in all its evidence in the last passage. Here all the cars with their human cargo are presented at the starting parade. It seems that the queue has stopped and everyone asks: “what is happening?”. Almost awakening from a long sleep, the drivers lean out of the windows trying to see what has caused the jam. Someone tries to give an answer: maybe an accident, maybe the road works, but the more real answer is the colloquial “Boh” (108. My translation: “no idea”). Here the question of everyone regarding the future and the unknown is subtended. “El Diablo riesce a vedere solo fino alla prima curva, dove c’è Rambo che vede solo fino alla galleria” (108. My translation: “El Diablo can see only up to the first curve where Rambo is, who can see only up to the tunnel”). The perception of the passing of the time has fallen into confusion: when the man in the Mercedes, who “gli sembra di essere fermo in coda da una vita” (109. My translation: “thinks he has been stopping all his life”) looks at the calendar clock on his Rolex, which indicates 31st August, and compares it to the motorway toll ticket, which indicates 1st August, the panic explodes. To his “it’s not possible” echoes the “it’s not possible” of the boy in the Panda. But what is really puzzling are the last words of the story which kick off any possible conclusion: “Cosa succede quando finiamo la benzina? [...] e che succede se non la finiamo mai più?” (109. My translation: “What will it happen when we run out of petrol? [...] and what will it happen if it never runs out?”).

The conclusion of both stories is emblematic. Lucarelli’s drivers can’t see where the queue finishes. It is so long that it mixes up with the horizon. Therefore, the central question about the human existence was born: what happens later?. Similarly Cortázar’s drivers ask the reasons for their continuous motion and they can’t find the answer in the other drivers because they are in turn closed in their own lives and look fixedly forward, without thinking, suffering the motion.

Identification car-human being

In the two stories here examined the characters are identified with the name of the car brand they are driving: in *La autopista del sur* the characters are recognized as Peugeot 404, BMW, Dauphine, 2CV, “Floride, como se divertían en llamarlo los chicos del Simca” (Cortázar 516) and so on. The animate mixes with the inanimate, human being and car become one; let’s read this fragment: “Taunus les ordenó a gritos que volvieran a sus coches [...] Estirando el brazo izquierdo el 404 buscó la mano de Dauphine [...] 404 miró enternecido y deslumbrado a su izquierda buscando los ojos de Dauphine” (Cortázar 520-521). In *Autosole* people are associated to the car they drive, in fact we don’t know their true names but we call them by the name of the car brand: blue Bravo, blue 2CV, red Fiesta, silver Ka, white Tipo, white Scania, Mercedes 5000. The cars do not limit themselves to lend their name to the owners, but they transform themselves in a lively mechanism, in vibrant and attractive bodies. As McLuhan claims, once men were terrorized by animals and for this reason they entered ritually and psychologically in the skins of the animals they had captured; now men behave in the same way in respect of cars which scare and dominate them (McLuhan 76). The car is built around the human beings who drive it, it wraps them up and it completes their body, precisely it identifies with them. In the case of Peugeot 404 by Cortázar and Mercedes 5000 by Lucarelli, the car becomes the symbol of social promotion: Cortázar’s engineer, proudly conscious

of the charm of his car given by its dimensions, “ofreció su coche, que llamaba burlonamente el wagon-lit, a quienes lo necesitaran” (513); the man in the Mercedes described by Lucarelli “ha la faccia di un uomo talmente fortunato che non ha bisogno di sognare [...] *la Mercedes fa capire che sono un uomo molto ricco, lo ammetto*” (33-34. My translation: the man “has the face of such a lucky man who doesn’t need to dream [...] *my Mercedes makes it clear I am a very rich man, I admit*”). In fact, even a small mean of transport gives the concrete sensation of the individual ownership, of something which is ours, which obeys to our orders: it helps our desire for omnipotence (Andreoni 69).

The car is considered a sort of decentralization of the house: to create intimacy, the engineer’s car has «las ventanillas tapadas por las lonas de la tienda» (Cortázar 518); the seat covers of the white Scania are “coprisedili come il perlinato di una pizzeria” (Lucarelli 29. My translation: “similar to the wooden upholstery of a pizzeria”). The items on the car as well witness the wish to reproduce the homeliness and some tinsels resist: talismans, secular and religious images, teddy bears... Let’s read this passage by Lucarelli:

“sul portellone posteriore del TIR, la decalcomania del tipo che mostra il medio e dice *tiè, sono italiano!* E più sotto la scritta a lettere mezze scollate del nome in codice per la radio cb: MACHO. Sui finestrini laterali della cabina i poster di Moana Pozzi e Selen a grandezza naturale. Sul cruscotto, dietro una cornice di luci bianche, rosse e verdi [...] una statua bianca e illuminata della Madonna col cuore trafitto” (29).

(My translation: “on the tailgate of the truck, a decal showing the middle finger and the writing “I’m Italian!”. Below, the driver’s name MACHO. On the side windows some life-size posters of the two pornostars Selen and Moana Pozzi. On the dashboard, behind a frame of white, red and green lights [...] a white statue of Our Lady and a heart pierced”).

The engineer’s discouragement in understanding that, with the end of the jam, he has lost his new friends irremediably, is masterfully presented by Cortázar in the list of the objects that the owners have forgotten in different car-houses: “en el Volkswagen del soldado debía estar su chaqueta de cuero. Taunus tenía la novela que él había leído en los primeros días. Un frasco de lavanda casi vacío en el 2HP de las monjas. Y él tenía ahí [...] el osito de felpa que Dauphine le había regalado como mascota” (522).

At the end of the analysis of these two stories it is clear how the forced paralysis induces the characters to reconsider their own relationship with the others, with the space which surrounds them and with the time which marks their existence. In conclusion, the huge hyperbole that characterizes the jam becomes the metaphor of the technological society where we live (Brilli 125).

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Universidad Eötvös Loránd, Departamento de Español, 1088 Budapest, Múzeum krt. 4/C