

IMAGING LITERATURE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM
IN SALVADOR ELIZONDO AND ROBERTO BOLAÑO

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Rafael Orozco Ramírez

January 2014

© 2014 Rafael Orozco Ramírez

IMAGING LITERATURE: PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM
IN SALVADOR ELIZONDO AND ROBERTO BOLAÑO

Rafael Orozco Ramírez, PhD.

Cornell University 2014

Imaging Literature studies the depiction of the human form and its fragmentation in visual images analogous to the fragmentation of the literary discourse. An analysis of the novels, short stories, and essays written by Roberto Bolaño and Salvador Elizondo pays particular attention to the way in which new means of mechanical and technological reproduction continue to enrich a representational paradigm within the arts. *Imaging Literature* is a study that, perhaps found closer to an essayistic exploration than to a theoretical analysis, tries to understand how literary works achieve the effects they do, how they relate to other literary texts, and how they affirm or contest literary conventions regarding structure and meaning. Attending not only to content and form but also to the thematic convergence of the texts explored in each chapter, this study is arranged into four chapters: a poetics of the superficial, a poetics of light, a poetics of the body, and finally, a poetics of pornography. The artistic possibilities writers of literature first saw in a medium such as photography may be read as the anxieties generated by literary innovation projected onto the visual medium, ultimately reflecting back onto the literary endeavor itself and shedding light on the limits of literary representation. The fragmentation of narrative, found with greater clarity in Salvador Elizondo's *Farabeuf* (1965) and Roberto Bolaño's *Antwerp* (2002), has a dual purpose. First, the fragmentation of the literary discourse becomes analogous to the fragmentation of the human body in its visual representations and,

second, it articulates the pervasiveness, and perhaps the impossibility, of escaping representational conventions dating back to Aristotle's postulates in his *Poetics*.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rafael Orozco Ramírez was born in Puruándiro Michoacán, México on March 20th, 1981. He completed his B.A. in Spanish Literature the University of California, San Diego in 2004 and M.A. in Spanish at San Diego State University in 2008. For the academic year of 2002-2003 he studied at the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain. Rafael Orozco Ramírez came to Cornell University in the summer of 2007 for his doctoral work in contemporary Latin American literature.

A mi familia, que me ha apoyado en cada uno de los pasos de esta larga carrera.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Edmundo Paz-Soldán for his advice and encouragement during the writing of this dissertation and throughout my graduate studies at Cornell. I also want to thank my special committee members, Dr. Debra Castillo and Dr. Patricia Keller, who have provided me all along the completion of this dissertation with their insight, their invaluable comments and feedback.

I would like to thank as well my colleagues and friends at the Department of Romance Studies with whom I shared numerous readings and endless conversations about literature, work, and life. I am grateful for all the support received from the administrative staff in the Department of Romance Studies, particularly from Rebecca Davidson and Callean Hile. I want to Tomás Beviá and Jeannie Routier-Pucci, my language course coordinators, from sharing with me their passion for language instruction.

Finally, I want to thank Rodrigo Fuentes, Camila Silva Flor, Emily Eaton, and Melissa Figueroa, for making Ithaca feel a little more like home, time and time again.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	
IMAGING LITERATURE.....	1
CHAPTER 1	
A POETICS OF THE SUPERFICIAL.....	15
CHAPTER 2	
A POETICS OF LIGHT.....	60
CHAPTER 3	
A POETICS OF THE BODY.....	97
CHAPTER 4	
A POETICS OF PORNOGRAPHY.....	132
CONCLUSION	175
REFERENCES.....	180

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Roberto Bolaño “Sión”

Figure 2 José Juan Tablada “Impresión de La Habana” and “Madrigales ideográficos”

Figure 3 Guillaume Apollinaire “Lettre-Océan” (1914)

Figure 4 José Juan Tablada. *Li Po y otros poemas* (1920)

Figure 5 Marius de Zayas, “Elle” (1915)

Figure 6 Francis Picabia “*Voilà elle*” (1915)

Figure 7 Marius de Zayas, “Alfred Stieglitz” (1914)

Figure 8 Marius de Zayas. “José Juan Tablada Psicografía” (1920)

Figure 9 José Juan Tablada “Madrigales”

Figure 10 Roberto Bolaño “Mexicans seen from above”

Figure 11 José Guadalupe Posada “Oratoria y Música” (1911)

Figure 12 Abel Quezada “El Charro Matías”

Figure 13 Abel Quezada “One-dimensional peasant”

Figure 14 Roberto Bolaño, “Ventanas”

Figure 15 Velázquez, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y. “Francisco Lezcano, ‘el Niño de Vallecas’. (1636-1638)”

Figure 16 Gironella, Alberto. “Fco. Lezcano en su taller (1965-1966)”

Figure 17 Leng Tch'é. Photograph

INTRODUCTION.

IMAGING LITERATURE

As Ezra Pound read Ernest Fenollosa's manuscript for *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, a study he would ultimately translate into English and which would animate his own *Ars Poetica*, Pound wrote on the margins of the manuscript "Compare Aristotle's *Poetics*: 'Swift perception of relations, hall-mark of genius'" (Fenollosa, 54). In Fenollosa's articulation of the ideogram, Pound read a reconfiguration of the *metaphor* as a process where the use of material images suggests immaterial relations, conceptually adding a visual element to the writing of literature in the West at the beginning of the 20th century. The advent of photography and film as new media for artistic representation and mass reproduction coincides in this study with Pound's reconfiguration of the metaphor, providing a point of departure for creative experimentation in the endless quest for artistic relevance sought by no small number of authors and artist studied here. *Imaging Literature* is anchored on the literary production of Salvador Elizondo and Roberto Bolaño as it explores the relationship between the photographic/cinematic visual image and the creation of a literary text. The visual representation of the human body emerges as central concern in the work of Elizondo and Bolaño, and although this concern is explored differently, I argue that in both cases the fragmentation of narrative, found with greater clarity in *Farabeuf* (1965) and *Antwerp* (2002) respectively, has a dual purpose. First, the fragmentation of the literary discourse becomes analogous to the fragmentation of the human body in its visual representations and, second, it articulates the pervasiveness, and perhaps the impossibility, of escaping representational conventions dating back to Aristotle's postulates in his *Poetics*.

The Chinese Written Character was not the first of Fenollosa's manuscripts Pound would translate into English: most notably, in 1915, Pound published *Cathay: For the Most Part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the Notes of the Late Ernest Fenollosa, and the Decipherings of the Professors Mori and Ariga*. Competing with T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Wallace Stevens' *Harmonium* (1923) "for the title of the most influential English-language poetic collection of the century"¹, *Cathay* bears in its English-translation title Pound's explicit will to acknowledge and trace back the path followed by this collection of Chinese poetry before reaching his hands, for

Though he knew the name of Li Po he let the Japanese form 'Rihaku' stand when the little book went to press, content to leave it on record that the Chinese had come to him by way of Japan, as 'Jupiter' comes from 'Zeus' by way of Rome. That Li Po should reach Kensington by way of Tokyo, through the intercession of a Harvard-educated enthusiast of Spanish descent, was but a global recapitulation of the steps by which the Arabs transmitted Aristotle to 12th century Paris. (Kenner, 222)

When Fenollosa wrote that "The chief work of literary men in dealing with language, and of poets especially, lies in feeling back along the ancient lines of advance", Pound added: "The poet, in dealing with his own time, must also see to it that language does not petrify on his hands. He must prepare for new advances along the lines of true metaphor, that is interpretative metaphor, or image, as diametrically opposed to untrue, or ornamental, metaphor" (Fenollosa, 54). The journey a poet embarks on, dealing with language before the emergence of visual media, aware of his own time, looking back yet moving forward—this remains a constant concern of the texts explored in *Imaging Literature*. The numerous exponents and works studied here also add to the global recapitulation observed by Pound and inscribed in *Cathay*'s title,

¹ Saussy, Haun. "Fenollosa compounded". Introduction to Fenollosa, Ernest, Ezra Pound, Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (eds). *The Chinese Written Character As a Medium for Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 3.

including, among others, French visual poetry from Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire; the work of Mexican cartoonists of political satire, ranging from celebrity portraiture to abstract caricature; visual representations regarding national identity stemming from the Mexican Revolution or Nazi Germany; and the intellectual exchange between the Parisian and New York *avant garde* movements just before The Great War, to name a few.

The methodological challenge presented by the number and variety of exponents and works analyzed in this study prompted me to structure the chapters in this study under the notion of poetics. I've sought to conduct a study that, perhaps found closer to an essayistic exploration than to a theoretical analysis, tries to understand how literary works achieve the effects they do, how they relate to other literary texts, and how they affirm or contest literary conventions regarding structure and meaning. Attending not only to content and form but also to the thematic convergence of the texts explored in each chapter, I have arranged my study into four chapters: a poetics of the superficial, a poetics of light, a poetics of the body, and finally, a poetics of pornography. The texts analyzed throughout this dissertation range from visual poetry to literary essays, from autobiographic narratives to cartoons of political satire and to photography; they also span from the middle of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twenty-first, published in Europe and the Americas but alluding, if tangentially, to Chinese and Japanese literary traditions. I will argue that the artistic possibilities writers of literature first saw in a medium such as photography may be read as the anxieties generated by literary innovation projected onto the visual medium, ultimately reflecting back onto the literary endeavor itself and shedding light on the limits of literary representation.

The ideogram, a conceptual node that exemplifies a metaphorically visual form of writing, takes us back to *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*.² Written by Ernest Fenollosa, we find in Haun Saussy's "Fenollosa compounded" that this text was part "of a bundle of manuscripts on Chinese and Japanese language, literature, art, and thought that the author's widow, Mary McNeil Fenollosa, bestowed on a young American poet living in London, Ezra Pound" (2). Pound, in his efforts to publish the text (unsuccessfully until 1936) presented Fenollosa's study as an *Ars Poetica* for the Imagist movement. Advocating for something that would eventually trickle down to and become a maxim of most literary workshops ("show, don't tell"), Pound developed the concept of ideogrammatic thinking or method based on the Chinese written character: if these characters "still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or the be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing...The Chinese 'word' or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS..."³ for the ideogram of 'red', Pound claims, is but a synecdoche, the abbreviated pictures of ROSE, CHERRY, IRON-RUST, and FLAMINGO. In order to contrast the ideogram of 'red' to a definition of the word 'red' in Western poetics and languages, Pound notes that a definition of the word in the latter stance inevitably leads to abstraction: red → color → vibrations or a refraction of light → mode of energy → modality of being, or not being, etc. Saussy's critical edition highlights the concrete problems that arise from the translation of a text and the more general issues at stake in the cultural exchange not only of art but of language as well.

² Fenollosa, Ernest, Ezra Pound, Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein. *The Chinese Written Character As a Medium for Poetry*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

³ Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading* (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1951), 21-22.

Of the many misinterpretations of Fenollosa's text (first and foremost by Ezra Pound), Saussy notes that for many scholars whose field of study is China and Japan, the ideogrammatic method is "just a fantasy, harmless if irritatingly persistent" (1). Such conclusion is arrived to when these scholars not only underline the absence of sound in the articulation of the ideogram (which the critical edition of *The Chinese Written...* addresses as a product of Pound's fierce editing and deletion) but also to a misunderstanding of Fenollosa's philosophical ventures into Buddhism, which unveil part of the logic behind the ideogrammatic method and has been left out of previous analyses. Saussy, commenting on the reception of Fenollosa's text by Charles Olson and Jacques Derrida, underscores how

Olson's insistence on breath and speech specifies and narrows Fenollosa's designedly inclusive term 'energy', preparing a traditional polemic against writing and mediation that readers of Derrida can by now recognize in their sleep; likewise, Derrida, in order to consecrate the 'rupture' of Fenollosa's graphic poetics, must ignore Fenollosa's praise of the verb and his denigration of the dead externality of alphabetic writing. (38)

The 'energy' that Fenollosa speaks of, which he finds in Buddhist schools of thought and which Olson interprets as the utterance of the ideograms in 1951, is absent from Pound's edited version of the text. On the other hand, Derrida sees how

the meaning of the work of Fenollosa whose influence upon Ezra Pound and his poetics is well-known: this irreducibly graphic poetics was, along with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound's writing may thus be given all its historical significance. (92)

The fascination with the Chinese ideogram found in Pound is originally present in Fenollosa, who states that the "Chinese notation is something much more than arbitrary symbols. It is based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of

nature... the Chinese method follows a natural suggestion” (6). The fascination of both Pound and Fenollosa is carried over to Elizondo and, to a lesser degree, Bolaño.

Salvador Elizondo translated Pound’s edited version of *The Chinese Written...* into Spanish and published it with an introduction of his own. The ideogram, one of the cornerstones in the confection of *Farabeuf*, is derived precisely from Pound’s interpretation of Fenollosa’s text. In his essay ‘De los *Cantares*’, a brief text on Pound’s *Cantos* included in *Teoría del infierno y otros ensayos*, Elizondo tells of his study of the poet’s work, focusing on ‘poundian sinology’ and ‘silence as a medium for poetry’, and recalls how

The common catalyst was the reading of a literary essay closely linked to Pound, who had “discovered” and published it: *The Chinese Written Ideogram [sic] as a Medium for Poetry* by Ernest Fenollosa. The ‘cup of tea’ Chinese that both his enemies and academic sinologists had criticized, was revealed to me as yet another skill of Pound, if not as a contribution to the technical yearbooks of Oriental Studies. Indeed, the nature of Chinese writing is such that there are in it already formed (as characters) or may be formed (as compounds) *visual* signs of writing that are or may correspond to what in the West and in terms of poetry is called “the image”. The image is obtained through the use of *figures* (we say that the language of poetry is figurative language in the same way that we say that Chinese writing is made of “figures”).⁴

Although Elizondo chooses here to view Pound’s “cup-of-tea Chinese” as a skill rather than a fault, linguistic precision is at the core of his diatribe against another of Pound’s translators, José Vázquez Amaral. The publication of *Cantares Completos (I-*

⁴ My translation. The original reads: “El catalizador común fue la lectura de un ensayo literario íntimamente vinculado a la carrera de Pound, quien lo había “descubierto” y editado: *The Chinese Written Ideogram [sic] as a Medium for Poetry* de Ernest Fenollosa. El chino ‘de taza de té’ que tanto le habían criticado sus enemigos los sinólogos académicos, se me reveló como una habilidad más de Pound, si no como un aporte a los anuarios técnicos de estudios orientales. En efecto, la naturaleza de la escritura china es tal que existen en ella ya formados (como caracteres) o pueden formarse (como compuestos) signos *visuales* de escritura que corresponden o pueden corresponder a lo que en Occidente y en términos de poesía se llama “la imagen”. La imagen se obtiene mediante el empleo de *figuras* (decimos que el lenguaje de la poesía es un lenguaje figurado de la misma manera que decimos que la escritura china está hecha de “figuras”).” Elizondo, Salvador *Teoría Del Infierno* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 175-176.

CXX) (Joaquín Mortíz, 1975), a Spanish translation of *The Cantos*⁵ by José Vázquez Amaral becomes an event that resonates quite differently to Elizondo and Bolaño. While I discuss in greater detail Elizondo's linguistic diatribe in chapter two, I would like to note here Roberto Bolaño's treatment of Pound's translator. Bolaño takes the figure of Vázquez Amaral and, effectively, turns him into one of the many narrators who, in the middle part of *The Savage Detectives*, give a first person account of his encounter with the visceral realists. The fragment in question, titled "Joaquín Vázquez Amaral, walking on a university campus in the American Midwest, February 1977" is a fictional(ized) account of Vázquez Amaral's visit to Mexico "in 1975 for the launch, if you can call it that, of my translation of Pound's *Cantos*, a book that in any European country would have attracted much more attention (it was published in a handsome edition, by the way, by Joaquín Mortíz)" (209). After 'the launch' Vázquez Amaral and the young group of visceral realist go out for drinks and talk "About the maestro, of course, and his time at Saint Elizabeth's, about that strange man Fenollosa," about a number of Chinese dynasties and poets, including "Li Po (701–762)," or, "in other words, about Pound things that none of us knew anything about, not even the maestro, really, because the literature he knew best was European literature, but what a show of strength, what magnificent curiosity Pound had, to root around in that enigmatic language, am I right? What faith in humanity, wouldn't you say?" (209-210). The fragment ends with the group dispersing through the night; the tone of Vázquez Amaral is at once nostalgic and eerie, recalling "those kids, those

⁵ Regarded by Manuel Brito as "Possibly Pound's best book in Spanish", the *Cantares Completos* succeeds in following "Pound's advice to Vázquez Amaral to take the translation as a sort of vision," avoiding a translation that operates "too literally on the basis of the English referent." Vázquez Amaral would also write "briefly about his personal relationship with Pound to explain Old Ez's special desire that the Spanish translation of *The Cantos* should be 'Cantares,' as in the chansons de geste or 'Cantar del Mío Cid,' because they also deal with the tale of the human tribe." Tryphonopoulos, Demetres P, and Stephen Adams. *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2005), 276.

eager, idealistic kids,” who at first remind him (or wishes they would) of his students, but ultimately concludes: “no, they would never be my students. I don't know why I thought it when really, they'd been so polite, so nice, but I thought it”, even though the character begins his account by stating: “No, no, no, of course not. That boy Belano was an extremely nice person, very polite, not hostile at all” (209, 210). This fragment from *The Savage Detectives* provides an insight into Bolaño's perception of Pound—an insight, in any case, more easily attributed to Bolaño than to the fictional(ized) version of Vázquez Amaral. Ezra Pound's presence in the novel would appear to be anecdotal, tangential at best: Pound way of the academic establishment he often abhorred⁶ and a group of young students who seem to know as much or as little as Vázquez Amaral knows of the many “Pound things.” And yet, as the group disperses through the night, “possibly in the deepest silence, a Poundian silence, although the maestro is the furthest thing from silent, isn't he? His words are the words of a tribe that never stops delving into things, investigating, telling every story. And yet they're words circumscribed by silence, eroded minute by minute by silence, aren't they?” (211)

The misunderstanding of the ideogram, dating back to Fenollosa himself, may be reconfigured when considering Jacques Rancière's postulates of the *ethical*, *representative*, and *aesthetic* regimes of art in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000). In the *ethical regime of images* “‘art’ is not identified as such but is subsumed under the question of images. As a specific type of entity, images are the object of a twofold

⁶ In *ABC of Reading*, a piece of writing “impersonal enough to serve as a text-book” (11), Pound asserts, as part of the ‘warning’ that precedes the text, that “The harsh treatment here accorded a number of meritorious writers is not aimless, but proceeds from a firm conviction that the only way to keep the best writing in circulation, or to ‘make the best poetry popular’, is by drastic separation of the best from a great mass of writing that has long been considered of value, that has overweighed all curricula.” (13) Also, Pound rants about how “the general nullity and incompetence of organized intellectual life in America, England, their universities in general, and their learned publications at large, could be indicated by a narrative of the difficulties I encountered in getting Fenollosa's essay printed at all.” (18)

question: the question of their origin (and their consequently truth content) and the question of their end or purpose, the uses they are put to and the effects they result in” (20). Since this regime is primarily concerned with the *telos* of imagery in relation to the community, ‘art’ is prevented from individualizing itself as such (21). The *representative regime* of the arts breaks away from the previous regime in that it frees the arts (ways of doing and making) from any ethical purpose and establishes “the notion of representation or *mimēsis* that organizes these ways of doing, making, seeing, and judging... It is first of all a fold in the distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in social occupations, a fold that renders the arts visible” (22). This Aristotelian system of representation (primacy of plot, hierarchical organization of genres, etc.) is ultimately replaced by the *aesthetic regime*, which “asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself” (23). According to Rancière

The leap outside of *mimēsis* is by no means the refusal of figurative representation... novelistic realism is first of all the reversal of the hierarchies of representation (the primacy of the narrative over the descriptive or the hierarchy of subject matter) and the adoption of a fragmented or proximate mode of focalization, which imposes raw presence to the detriment of the rational sequences of the story. (24)

The *avant garde*, understood in light of the aesthetic regime of arts, can “only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parceling out of the visible and the invisible” (19). In *The Future of the Image* (2003) Rancière articulates the notion of the *image* as an operation between the *sayable* and the *visible*, the first as the *representative* (belonging to the representative regime of the arts) and the later as the *present*, as

mere presence. Images, he goes on to argue, can be visual or verbal articulations; the *sayable* produces continuity in narrative terms, while the appearance of the *visible* fragments, disrupts, invades discourse and paralyzes action by its mere presence. The visual image ultimately becomes an ontological question: as Pound complained, “red” becomes a modality of being or not being. The appealing notion of the ideogram, of its image, eclipses its misunderstanding: to the writers in the West the ideogram synthesizes the *sayable* and the *visible*, even if it may be read as one of the *japonerías* or, as Borges would say, *japonecedades* of 19th century French poetry and Latin American *modernismo*.

In chapter one I articulate a *poetics of the superficial* as a poetics that accounts for the conventions, interpretations, and effects produced by and involved in the production of a literary text, aligned with a notion of the superficial encompassing the optical impact of a visual text, the surface where it occurs (the page and the screen) and the “vain” artistic and literary gestures at once marginal, ephemeral, and humorous, found in a number of vanguardist texts. I argue that satire, visual poetry, and political caricature as a combination of the two, provide a key to interpret the “literary corpus” left by the visceral realist in *The Savage Detectives*. Roberto Bolaño’s novel offers a revision of the Mexican cultural and literary establishment of the 1920s and 1970s from the late 1990s, drawing the tensions that arise between visual and verbal representations; between artistic innovation and institutionalized government patronage; between a commerce of ideas and the anxiety that new means of reproduction, particularly photography, bring to the literary enterprise. In my analysis I claim that José Juan Tablada plays a central and referential role in the novel’s revision of the Mexican *avant garde*. Along with an exploration of Tablada’s ideographic poetry I study the work of Marius de Zayas, a Mexican cartoonist of political satire that played a central role in the cultural exchange between the New

York and Paris *avant garde* movements prior to the Great War. The visual poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire provide a compass for the artistic and literary experimentation sought by both Tablada and De Zayas. Finally, the chapter also discusses the pervasion of a national visual iconography and explores the pursuit of artistic innovation and literary relevance as a tension that arises between the towering figure of the poet and the multitude of modernity.

For chapter two I pursue a *poetics of light* in relation to the figure and work of Salvador Elizondo. The bulk of Elizondo's literary production takes place in a span of roughly fifteen years, beginning with the publication of *Poemas* in 1960. Turning to fiction and essay writing, Elizondo's oeuvre takes on a number of vanguardist motifs of first explored by Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Georges Bataille, among others, effectively situating Elizondo and his literary production in a diametrically opposed path from the magical realism that began to take hold of the era in Latin American literature. The cosmopolitan, literary and linguistic experimentation of Elizondo's body of work elaborates on the notion of the poet/writer-critic as a mythical literary figure in his autobiography (written at the age of thirty-three) and his essays on Ezra Pound and José Juan Tablada. What begins as a meditation on writing becomes an exploration on the verbalized, painted, and photographed visual image. The human body emerges as the bridge through which the poet negotiates his interiority with the external world. Taking after Da Vinci and Wittgenstein, Elizondo's "Tractatus rhetorico-pictoricus" is presented as a treaty on the craft and discipline of painting, as a method, but is ultimately concerned with the nature of writing and representation. As one of the first axioms indicates, "§ The Tractatus consists of three correlated parts involved in the pictorial operation: the first is devoted to the eye, the second to the hand and the third to light. One deals with the genius, the other with skill or technique.

The third, dealing with poetics, is the impossible treaty.”⁷ The construction of that impossible treaty, a poetics of light, becomes an exploration on the nature of visual and verbal representations in the articulation of the poet/writer-critic as a mythical literary figure.

In the third chapter I analyze the visual representations of the human body in Elizondo’s essay “El putridero óptico”, the novel *Farabeuf*, the short story “Narda o el verano”. “El putridero óptico” begins as a reflection on Alberto Gironella’s *Fco. Lezcano en su taller (1965-1966)*. Gironella’s painting takes the character of *Francisco Lezcano, "el Niño de Vallecas". (1636-1638)* by Diego Velázquez, and places him as Velázquez himself in a warped interpretation of *Las meninas*. Elizondo argues that reality becomes mutable through art, through representation, and delirium (as Elizondo characterizes Gironella’s painting) is but an unstable reality, manifested as impersonation in *Fco. Lezcano*. For Elizondo, the notion of *person* (mask, dramatic character, lies, and arcane disguise) originates from the proclivity of our mental nature to be ourselves the face, the mirror, and the reflection. Pondering whether the confusion of intelligence with the senses is not, in a way, Baroque’s ideal, Elizondo asks “Pascal and Berkeley. Why talk of solipsism and terror at the same time? These are apparently mutually exclusive ideas. If we do not exist just as the image reflected in the mirror, the dissolution of the flesh—horror’s end—is alien to us.”⁸ Torn between the two maxims, *cogito ergo sum* and *esse est percipi*, Elizondo finds an unsettling dialectic in *Fco. Lezcano*. Ultimately, Elizondo claims the dissolution of the

⁷ “§ El Tractatus consta de las tres partes correlativas que intervienen en la operación pictórica: la primera está dedicada al ojo; la segunda a la mano y la tercera a la luz. Una se ocupa del genio, la otra de la destreza o la técnica. La tercera, que trata la parte poética, es el tratado imposible.” Elizondo, Salvador. *El grafógrafo* (México: J. Mortiz, 1972), 56.

⁸ “Pascal y Berkeley. ¿Por qué hablar de solipsismo y de terror a la vez? Éstas son ideas que se excluyen aparentemente. Si no existimos más que como la imagen reflejada en el espejo, la disolución de la carne—extremo del espanto—nos es ajena.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 76.

flesh to be the image of who we truly are. *Farabeuf* gravitates around the photograph of the Leng Tch'é, a photograph that captures a tortured and dismembered man at the moment of death. Reproduced in the novel, the photograph is presented as a “singular image, unique in the history of sado-erotic iconography” (42). Based on the French surgeon Louis Hubert Farabeuf (1841 – 1910), the character of Dr. Farabeuf attempts to recreate the Leng Tch'é on his nurse in a sacrificial ritual of erotic mysticism. The instant notoriety and literary acclaim *Farabeuf* brought Elizondo propelled a greater linguistic complexity in subsequent texts (particularly in *El hipogeo secreto* (1968) and *El grafógrafo* (1972)), leaving Elizondo to ponder whether his literary production reached a solipsistic, creative dead end. I argue that reading “Narda o el verano” as a counterpoint to *Farabeuf* reconfigures Elizondo's oeuvre and questions his apparently barren literary legacy. *Narda* may be read as a satirical short story, filled with visual and literary clichés, but in the end, it is through *Narda* that Elizondo's oeuvre finds an escape valve, and a way forward in literature.

In the final chapter I analyze the narrative instances in Bolaño's literary production regarding the representation of the human body within the realm of pornography. The pornographic visual image found in Bolaño's work range from the description of audiovisual pornographic texts to the stories of characters who form part of the pornographic realm, be it as photographers, actors, film creators and, of course, consumers of pornographic material. While the description of some audiovisual pornographic texts may be characterized as an ekphrastic exercise (writing commenting upon another art form) and the inclusion of characters involved in the pornographic realm as commentary on the production and reception of pornography as artistic and cultural production, by the end of the chapter I argue that a *poetics of pornography* is at work in the creation of *Antwerp*. The fragmentation of the cinematic narrative in pornography shares with the textual fragmentation of *Antwerp* a tripartite

concern: the editing of images/texts that leads to fragmentation, the abjection behind a fragmented body/text, and violent plateau where fragmentation is put on display. A *poetics of pornography* has a dual component in Bolaño's literature: thematically, it ranges from the amateur production of pornographic texts to the exhibition of *gore* photography while, formally, the fragmentation of visual images of the body in *Antwerp* parallels the fragmentation of the text.

Finally, I will argue that in *Farabeuf* and *Antwerp* both Elizondo and Bolaño reached the limits of literary representation, disregarding generic conventions and literary tropes and, in an attempt to incorporate a logic of the visual image to the writing of a literary text, the representation of the human body emerges as central concern, in both cases leading to the fragmentation of narrative. The fragmentation of the literary discourse becomes analogous to the fragmentation of the human body in its visual representations.

CHAPTER 1

A POETICS OF THE SUPERFICIAL

Hormigas sobre un
grillo, inerte. Recuerdo
de Gulliver en Lilliput...

José Juan Tablada

In Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* a group of young, self-proclaimed poets wander the streets of Mexico City during the mid-1970s. As they attend a number of readings and literary workshops (if only to wreak havoc) these poets, the visceral realists, don't appear to write a single poem throughout the novel. The only literary production, so to speak, left by the visceral realists consists of a visual poem, a set of caricatures, and the sketching of three "window frames". These visual texts are regarded by the characters that come across them as doodles, riddles and, ultimately, jokes covering up something more serious. Satire, I argue, becomes instrumental in the analytical operation seeking to uncover that "something more serious" at the root of the visceral realist corpus. A coming of age story, *The Savage Detectives* offers a revision of the Mexican cultural and literary establishment of the 1920s and 1970s from the late 1990s—the visual texts in question crystalize such revision drawing the tensions that arise between visual and verbal representations; between artistic innovation and institutionalized government patronage; between a commerce of ideas and the anxiety that new means of reproduction, mainly film and photography, bring to the literary enterprise. Locating the visceral realist production in the tradition of visual poetry allows, first, for a comparative analysis to the ideographic poetry of José Juan Tablada and Guillaume Apollinaire's *calligrammes*, and later, to the work of

Mexican cartoonists of political satire, including that of Marius de Zayas, José Guadalupe Posada, and Abel Quezada. The poems and caricatures analyzed here revolve around satire and what I argue constitutes a poetics of the superficial: a poetics that accounts for the conventions, interpretations, and effects produced by and involved in the production of a literary text, aligned with a notion of the superficial here encompassing the sensory (optical) impact of a visual text, the surface where it occurs (the page and the screen) and the “vain” artistic and literary gestures at once marginal, ephemeral, and humorous, found in a number of vanguardist texts.

Bolaño’s visual texts in *The Savage Detectives* may be divided into three sets: “Sión”, the visual poem accredited to Cesárea Tinajero, the set of caricatures dubbed “Mexicans seen from above”, and the three “window frames” with which the novel ends. In fact, “Sión” is the only poem that also appears on another text, *Antwerp*, which Bolaño claims to have written before 1981 but does not publish until 2002. In the introductory note to the text, titled “Total Anarchy: Twenty-two Years Later”, Bolaño writes: “The scorn I felt for so-called official literature was great, though only a little greater than my scorn for marginal literature. But I believed in literature: or rather, I didn’t believe in arrivisme or opportunism or the whispering of sycophants. I did believe in vain gestures, I did believe in fate” (x). Vain gestures and sycophants posed as antithetical poles of the literary endeavor, and the oscillation between the two, may also be read as a central theme developed in *The Savage Detectives*. In *Antwerp* the poem is not treated as such, but rather as a dream the narrative voice has (a straight line that undulates near the middle part of the segment and jags by the end) and verbally interprets: “‘The straight line is the sea when it’s clam, the wavy line is the sea with waves, and the jagged line is a storm’ ... ‘I guess there isn’t much aesthetics left in me’ ... ‘nnnnnnn’ ... ‘A little boat’ ... ‘nnnnnnn’ ... ‘nnnnnnn’ ...” (30). The dream, though geometrically, visually represented in the text, lacks any writing

whatsoever—that is, any writing in its representation that is not before an interpretation of the dream. In the following fragment of *Antwerp* the text separates the three segments of the line into individual frames, and then, in a larger frame next to it, the line is once again connected and a “ship”, a square and triangle united by small line, navigates the original line dreamt. Again, the narrative voice claims: “The straight line made me feel calm. The wavy line made me uneasy, I sensed danger but I liked the smoothness: up and down. The last line was agitation. My penis hurt, my belly hurt, etc.” (31). *Antwerp* does not inquire further the graphic poem, but the text reappears in *The Savage Detectives* as “Sión”.

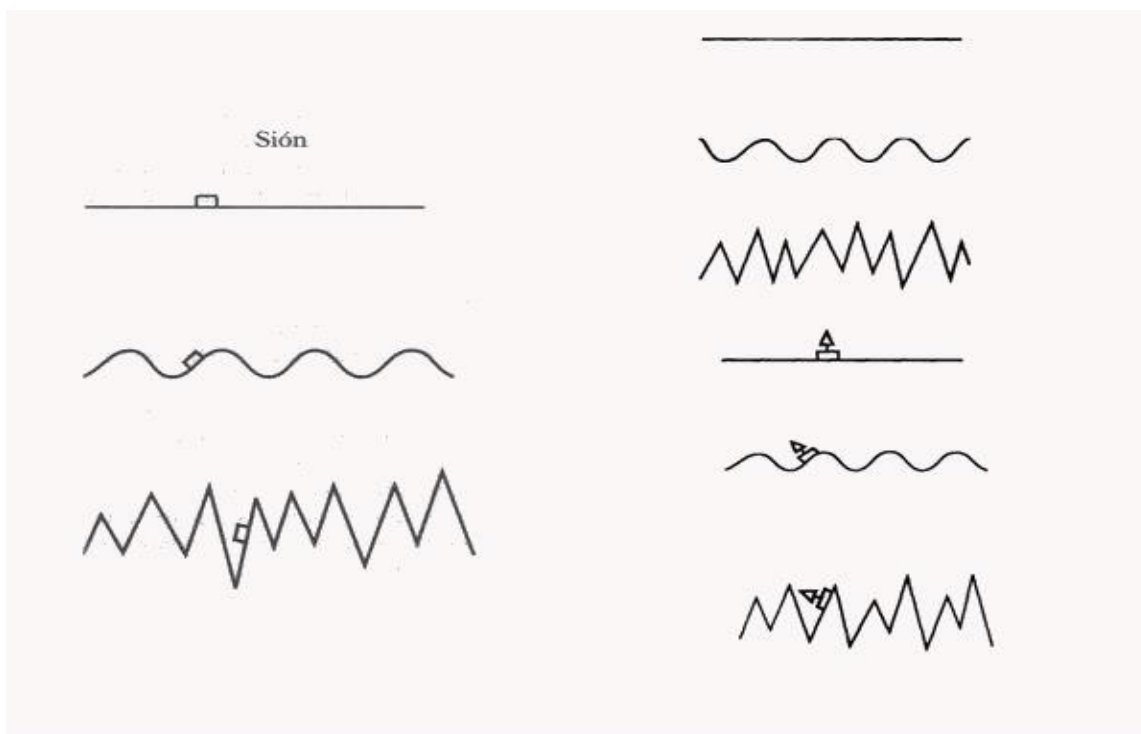


Figure 1 "Sión"

“Sión” is the only poem published by Cesárea Tinajero. Tinajero, we read, was a poet contemporary of the *estridentistas* in the 1920s. The visceral realists adopt her

as the forerunner of their literary movement and, near the end of the novel, take the road in order to find her. Ulises Lima and Roberto Belano, leaders of the visceral realists, agree that hidden behind the title “Sión” was the word “Navegación”, or “navigation”, and that the poem is a graphic representation of it. Oddly enough, there are no references to Zion, except the name itself, and the fact the “c” ión” is replaced by an “s”. The poem is again divided into the three segments of the line, appearing vertically one after the other; on top of each line sits a small rectangle. Amadeo Salvatierra recalls: “And I asked the boys, I said, boys, what do you make of this poem? I said, boys, I’ve been looking at it for more than forty years and I’ve never understood a goddamn thing. Really. I might as well tell you the truth. And they said: it’s a joke, Amadeo, the poem is a joke covering up something more serious” (398). Later in the novel one of the young poets confesses he had seen the poem in a dream when he was a boy (one is to assume the poet is Belano, alter ego and narrator of many of Bolaño’s texts, including *Antwerp*), and then the characters indulge in an interpretative jest, both young poets leading Amadeo,

What do you mean there's no mystery to it? I said. There's no mystery to it, Amadeo, they said. And then they asked: what does the poem mean to you? Nothing, I said, it doesn't mean a thing. So why do you say it's a poem? Well, because Cesárea said so, I remembered. That's the only reason why, because I had Cesárea's word for it. If that woman had told me that a piece of her shit wrapped in a shopping bag was a poem I would have believed it, I said. How modern, said the Chilean. (421)

It is, of course, not without a sense of irony that what identifies the visual text as a poem is Cesárea’s *word*, nor is the loaded image with which the Chilean equates with modernity. After establishing that “hidden behind the title, Sión, we have the word navigation”, and that the poem is a graphic representation of it, they end up with a number of other interpretations,

the predictable ones, I suppose: Quetzalcoatl's ship, the nighttime fever of some boy or girl, Captain Ahab's encephalogram or the whale's, the surface of the sea that for sharks is the enormous mouth of hell, the ship without a sail that might also be a coffin, the paradox of the rectangle, the rectangle of consciousness, Einstein's impossible rectangle (in a universe where rectangles are unthinkable), a page by Alfonso Reyes, the desolation of poetry. (424)

“Sión” may be read, or viewed, as a visual representation of the journey the visceral realists take. Within the novel, the poem remains a text of the fictional Cesárea Tinajero. Analyzing “Sión” in relation to the visual poetry of José Juan Tablada opens up the poem to a larger examination of the literary and cultural revision Bolaño undertakes in the novel.

To call Amadeo and the young poets’ reading of “Sión” as an interpretative jest can only be done so in light of the other instances where Bolaño playfully engages on a personal canon formation throughout his literary production. In *Woes of the true policeman* (2011) a character dreams of directing a film and assigns the roles of the main characters to a number of different writers and poets. Near the middle of the text there is a fragment entitled “Notes from a Class in Contemporary Literature: The Role of the Poet” (89-91) that consists of a question, “Why would you want Amado Nervo as a houseguest?” a short reading list including some poems written by Nervo, a book by Lawrence Stern and another one by Matsuo Basho, and a classification of poets following a criteria akin to a pop magazine: the happiest (Lorca), the most tormented (Celan, Trakl), the fattest (Neruda and Lezama Lima), best movie companion (Elizabeth Bishop, Berrigan, Ted Hughes, José Emilio Pacheco), most desirable as a literature professor, though only in short bursts (Ezra Pound), the best and worst drinking buddy (Vitier, Prévét / Maiakovski, Orlando Guillén), best gangster in Hollywood (Artaud), New York (Patchen), Medellín (Mutis), Hong-Kong (Lowell, Gimferrer), Miami (Huidobro), Mexico City (Leduc), etc., etc. From the list José Juan Tablada is awarded the title of “most elegant”. In fact, *Woes of the true policeman*, a

manuscript published posthumously comprised of numerous fragments found in Bolaño's archive, begins with a list, perhaps an earlier draft, of one that appears on *The Savage Detectives*, where the character of Ernesto San Epifanio begins by classifying literature "as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Novels, in general, were heterosexual, whereas poetry was completely homosexual; I guess short stories were bisexual, although he didn't say so" (80). The list in *The Savage Detectives* engages in the debate of virile and effeminate literature that spurred in the Mexican literary scene after Julio Jiménez Rueda's 1924 article "El afeminamiento de la literatura mexicana". Robert Irwin has noted in *Mexican Masculinities* that the notion of a virile literature can be traced back to Seneca, Erasmus, Ben Johnson, Montaigne and Andrés Bello (118) to name a few, but that in the context of postrevolutionary Mexico, such a debate occurred around both the novel of the Mexican revolution and a more avant garde trend, favoring a consciously universal and apparently more aesthetic intent as opposed to a more national, social in nature literary project (185). While the novel of the revolution at first and "in terms of representation, is a vindication of turn-of-the century notion of barbarous lower-class masculinity", Irwin argues, in the more avant garde trend "The macho *vanguardismo* of the *estridentistas* died out quickly while the effete poetry of the Contemporáneos gradually emerged, despite homophobic assaults of their rivals, as a major force in postrevolutionary Mexican literary history" (185). Where does Tablada fall on this debate?

Xavier Villaurrutia, also in 1924, considered Ramón López Velarde and José Juan Tablada the Adam and Eve of the young Mexican poets.⁹ Tablada, an "Eve of one-hundred forbidden apples", receives slightly more than a flattering note in this particular text. San Epifanio's classification, on the other hand, satirizes the debate

9 "La poesía de los jóvenes de México" (1924) reprinted in Villaurrutia, Xavier, Alí Chumacero, Miguel Capistrán, and Luis M. Schneider. *Obras: Poesía, Teatro, Prosas Varias, Crítica* (. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 819-835.

around virile literature and comments on Tablada public image and literary prowess. San Epifanio goes on to add, “Within the vast ocean of poetry he identified various currents: faggots, queers, sissies, freaks, butches, fairies, nymphs, and philenes. But the two major currents were faggots and queers.” (80) Ethics and aesthetics are to be found at either end of the poetic spectrum, with faggots and queers representing each end respectively. For San Epifanio, “As a general rule, poets like Carlos Pellicer were butches, while poets like Tablada, Novo, and Renato Leduc were sissies.” (81) Furthermore, “Sissies, according to San Epifanio, were faggot poets by birth, who out of weakness or for comfort's sake lived within and accepted—most of the time—the aesthetic and personal parameters of the queers” noting that “the poetry scene was essentially an (underground) battle, the result of the struggle between faggot poets and queer poets to seize control of the *word*.” (81) It is worth noting the contrast between the struggle to seize control of the *word* by these poets and Amadeo Salvatierra, to whom Tinajero had given her *word* that “Sión” was in fact a poem. From these two lists one is able to see Tablada, aesthetically speaking, held in high esteem, even if on an ethical plane the poet falters. “In the work of some early modernists or vanguardists,” Bolaño writes, “one can find instances of genuine humor. They’re scarce but they’re real. I’m thinking about Tablada”.¹⁰ Bolaño’s canon formation, regarding these lists, may be understood gesture of vanguardist humor. Elsewhere in *Between Parenthesis* Bolaño says in an interview that, in regards to Mexican poetry, he rereads Tablada and López Velarde (359), and recalls Tablada among the number of poets whose books he stole as a young man living in Mexico City. The references to Tablada and his work in *The Savage Detectives*, however, shed light on the visual texts of the novel.

10 “Humor in the wings”, in Bolaño, Roberto, Ignacio Echevarría, and Natasha Wimmer. *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles, and Speeches, 1998-2003* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 214.

In *The Savage Detectives* the figure of Tablada comes afloat repeatedly. Tablada, Marius de Zayas, and Guillaume Apollinaire, appear all as signatories in the vertiginous list that comprises the Directory of the Avant Garde (225), read by Amadeo from Maples Arce's *Actual No. 1*. Amadeo recalls a night when among friends he "set off along the streets of the city center, reciting the verse of the reactionary Tablada", (285) and then, in another fragment, recalls the figure of Diego Carvajal, boss and eventual lover of Cesárea Tinajero¹¹, "reading a little book by Tablada, maybe the one where Don José Juan says: 'Under fearful skies / keening for the only star / the song of the nightingale.' Which is as if to say, boys, I said, that I saw our struggles and dreams all tangled up in the same failure and that failure was called joy." (379) If according to Amadeo Diego Carvajal was "a general who had befriended the stridentists, although he didn't know a goddamn thing about literature, that's the truth," then one must infer Tinajero's hand in the general's reading of Tablada's *Un día...Poemas sintéticos*. Finally, there is Juan García Madero, the last member to join the visceral realists and the only one who, in the course of the novel, actually produces a sort of literary text—the set of "Mexicans seen from above" and the "windows" with which the novel ends. García Madero's diary bookends the bulk of the novel: 96 first-person narrative fragments from 53 different characters. García Madero, writes about his readings, among others, of Tablada. First, he recalls the time that, "Since I didn't have the money to go to a coffee shop, I stayed in the plaza, sitting on a bench, writing in my diary and reading a book of Tablada's poems that Pancho had loaned me. When two hours exactly had passed, I got up and set out for Calle

¹¹ In "Un epitafio en el desierto. Poesía y revolución en Los detectives Salvajes", Andrea Cobas Carral and Verónica Garibotto see that "la presencia del general Diego Carvajal —con algunos rasgos de la figura de Heriberto Jara, mecenas de los estridentistas— marca ese compromiso entre vanguardia literaria y política." For more see Paz, Soldán E, and Patriau G. Faverón. *Bolaño Salvaje*. (Canet de Mar (Barcelona): Editorial Candaya, 2008), 163-189.

Colima.” (73) Later, in another diary entry, he remembers “leafing through old books” and directly mentions “*Li-Po y otros poemas* by Tablada” among them. (117)

José Juan Tablada enjoyed various political appointments and endured economic hardships during his periods of exile. Only days before Tablada left his diplomatic post in Venezuela and sailed back to Mexico on January 19, 1920, Imprenta Bolívar published *Li-Po y otros poemas* in Caracas. “Impresión de la Habana”, published a year earlier in Cuban and Mexican periodicals, is included in this book. Ramón López Velarde, in a letter dated June 18, 1919, informs Tablada of his appreciation on the latter’s ideographic poems:

My attitude, in short, is one of restraint. Until now, the ideographic interests me because you work on it rather than by itself. Since I learned about Apollinaire’s work I had the impression of something conventional, and that impression persisted after your poems from Havana were later reproduced here... Today, I seriously doubt that ideographic poetry carries the serious condition of fundamental art. I’ve seen it as a joke, able, of course, to yield excellent results if a man of your aesthetic hierarchy works on it.¹²

Tablada’s response, found in a letter addressed to López Velarde—published in *El Universal Ilustrado* (13 de noviembre de 1919)—stresses that his “Madrigales Ideográficos” and “Impresión de La Habana” are but “avant coureurs” of his work to come, first in *Los ojos de la máscara* (a book that never materialized) and ultimately in *Li-Po*. Furthermore, Tablada provides a number of sources to which his poems are indebted:

¹² Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the Spanish are my own. “Mi actitud, en suma, es de espera. Hasta hoy, lo ideográfico me interesa, más que por sí mismo, por usted que lo cultiva. Desde que conocí lo de Apollinaire, se me quedó la impresión de algo convencional, y esa impresión persistió después de reproducirse aquí los poemas de usted en La Habana...Hoy por hoy, dudo con duda grave de que la poesía ideográfica se halle investida de las condiciones serias del arte fundamental. La he visto como una humorada, capaz, es claro, de rendir excelentes frutos si la ejercita un hombre de la jerarquía estética de usted.” From Ramón López Velarde, *Obras*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1971), 769-770.

Many years ago I read in Panude's Greek Anthology that a Hellenistic poet had written a poem in the shape of a 'wing' and another in the form of an 'altar'. I learned from my Chinese studies that at the Confucian temple a certain hymn is sung whose characters are written with the movement of choreographers' dance, on the pavement. I finally saw those of Jules Renard: Les Formis, elles sont: 3333333333: ... so admirably suggesting the restless line of ants ... I made the Madrigal ideographs in New York five years ago. Then I saw similar attempts by Cubist painters and a modernist poet.¹³ But they were no more than a stammer.¹⁴

Later on Tablada claims that his ideographic poetry "though similar in principle to Apollinaire's, is today completely different; the ideographic nature of my work is circumstantial, the general aspects of it are really a suggestive synthesis of pure and discontinuous lyrical themes, as well as an energetic relationship between the action and reaction between the poet and the causes of emotion."¹⁵ For Tablada "The ideograph has, in my view, an expressive force that is 'simultaneously graphic and lyrical' ... Furthermore, the graphic aspect advantageously substitutes the discursive or explicative aspect of old poetry, rendering the literary themes as 'pure poetry', just like Mallarmé wanted it."¹⁶

¹³ According to Bohn, the "pintores cubistas y algún poeta modernista" suggest a reference to Marius de Zayas, Francis Picabia, and Vicente Huidobro. Bohn, *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 270-271.

¹⁴ My translation. The original reads: "Hace muchos años leí en la Antología griega, de Panude, que un poeta heleno había escrito un poema en forma de 'ala' y otro en forma de 'altar'. Supe por mis estudios chinos que en el templo de Confucio se canta cierto himno cuyos caracteres escriben el movimiento de su danza, los coreógrafos, sobre el pavimento. Por fin vi aquellos de Jules Renard: Les formis, elles sont: 3333333333:... con lo que sugiere tan admirablemente la inquieta fila de hormigas... En New York hace cinco años hice los Madrigales ideográficos. Luego vi algunos intentos semejantes de pintores cubistas y algún poeta modernista . Pero no eran más que un balbutir." Reproduced in José Juan Tablada, *Obras V. Crítica literaria* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Literarios, 1971), 341-343.

¹⁵ "aunque semejante en su principio a la de Apollinaire, es hoy totalmente distinta; en mi obra el carácter ideográfico es circunstancial, los caracteres generales son más bien la síntesis sugestiva de los temas líricos puros y discontinuos, y una relación más enérgica de acciones y reacciones entre el poeta y las causas de emoción". *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "La ideografía tiene, a mi modo de ver, la fuerza de una expresión 'simultáneamente lírica y gráfica,' a reserva de conservar el secular carácter ideofónico. Además, la parte gráfica sustituye ventajosamente la discursiva o explicativa de la antigua poesía, dejando los temas literarios en calidad de 'poesía pura,' como lo quería Mallarmé." *Ibid.*



Figure 2 "Impresión de La Habana" and "Madrigales ideográficos"

For Tablada, in his ideographic poetry “everything is synthetic, discontinuous, and therefore dynamic; the explicative and rhetorical are forever eliminated; it is a succession of substantive states; I believe it is pure poetry”¹⁷, which leads him to

¹⁷ “todo es sintético, discontinuo y por tanto dinámico; lo explicativo y lo retórico están eliminados para siempre; es una sucesión de estados sustantivos; creo que es poesía pura”.
Ibid

claim: “My current poems are a frank language; some are not only ideographic but architectonic: ‘La calle en que vivo’ is a street with houses, churches, crimes and wailing souls. As for ‘Impresión de La Habana’, it is an entire landscape.”¹⁸

In an effort to avoid being deemed an imitator of Apollinaire, Tablada gave a number of confusing (if not false) dates for the composition of his *Madrigales*: in the letter to López Velarde he claims to have written his first two ideographic poems in 1914; in an interview published for the Venezuelan magazine *Actualidades* on July 20, 1919, Tablada admits that his friend, de Zayas, showed him Apollinaire’s “Lettre-Océan” in 1915, though he claims that at the time he had already written his *Madrigales*. (Bohn 1997, 269-270) Rodolfo Mata, however, found in Tablada’s archive the newspaper clipping of a photograph of Old Bartholomew’s Church, with a caption written in pencil reading: “E 43rd St. I lived here with Palomar in 1916, the perfume lab; the only garlic soup, in the luxurious apartment. Mural kalogramas, the check for grilled chicken, first ideographic verses El puñal, Talon rouge and [illegible]”¹⁹. Tablada’s knowledge of Japanese culture, his approach to Chinese poetry via French and English translations²⁰, the tradition of *technopaegnia*, the play between text and image in the *Histories Naturelles* de Jules Renard, and the *kalogramas* of Torres Palomar—along with the *calligrammes*, these are all sources of

¹⁸ “Mis poemas actuales son un franco lenguaje; algunos no son simplemente gráficos sino arquitectónicos: ‘La calle en que vivo’ es una calle con casas, iglesias, crímenes y almas en pena. Como la ‘Impresión de la Habana’, es ya todo un paisaje.” *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “E 43rd st. Aquí viví con Palomar en 1916, el laboratorio de perfumes; la única sopa de ajo, en el lujoso apartamento. Kalogramas murales, el cheque por el pollo asado, primeros versos ideográficos. El puñal, Talon rouge e [ilegible]”. Tablada, José J, Rodolfo Mata, Diego Bonilla, and Guzmán C. López. *José Juan Tablada: Letra E Imagen : Poesía, Prosa, Obra Gráfica Y Varia Documental*.

²⁰ For Saborit, “las fuentes de Tablada salieron del francés (Judith Gautier) y más que nada del inglés (James Whitall), como primero lo sugirió Adriana García de Aldrige y más adelante lo confirmó Esther Hernández Palacios al trabajar con los libros de temas orientales en la biblioteca personal de Tablada.” Tablada, José J, and Antonio Saborit. *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*. (México, D. F: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2008), 63-64.

inspiration without which *Madrigales* could not have been possible. As Bohn states, “Although Tablada consistently denied his debt to the French poet, for fear of being branded an imitator rather than an innovator, his concern turns out to have been groundless. By 1919, he had developed his own unique style and was composing poetry that was surprisingly original.” (207) With “Impresión de La Habana” the Tablada left a poetic imprint of his own. Guillaume Apollinaire saw his own *calligrammes* as “an idealization of free-verse poetry and typographic precision at a time when typography’s brilliant career ended in the dawn of new modes of reproduction such as film and the phonograph.”²¹ The *calligrammes*, an actualization of the traditional poetic form of *technopaegnia*²² in the face of new modes of reproduction (mainly film, photography, and the phonogram), may be categorized as a *conversation-poem*, a *simultaneous-poem*, and a *lyrical-ideogram*. Some of the *calligrammes*, particularly “Ocean-Letter” (1914), exemplify the combination of these three poetic forms.

S. I. Lockerbie’s introduction to *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)* finds that the techniques of fragmentation and recombination employed in the conversation poems “stems from the conviction that the simultaneous nature of consciousness can be even more powerfully rendered by abandoning not only discursive expression but also the traditional linear layout of the poem as well.” (10) While typographic play and the presence of blank spaces contesting the primacy of language may be traced back to Mallarmé’s poetic experiments, in Apollinaire’s “Lettre-Océan” the visual representation on the page far exceeds its verbal

²¹ My translation. The original quote reads “Quant aux Calligrammes, ils sont une idéalisation de la poésie verslibriste et une précision typographique à l’époque où la typographie termine brillamment sa carrière à l’aurore des moyens nouveaux de reproduction qui sont le cinéma et le phonograph.” Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Roger Shattuck. *Selected Writings*. (New York: New Directions, 1950), 21.

²² A term first proposed by Ausonius (ca. 310.) A poem imprinted or shaped after its subject matter, for example a vase or an egg.

counterpart: Roger Shattuck renders the lines of the poem unreadable and goes on to argue that text is, in fact, not a poem (19-20), while Lockerbie and Hyde Greet agree that “Lettre-Océan” is “undoubtedly the most radical experiment in ‘typographical simultaneity’, involving a greater subordination of the text to graphic from than in other calligrams” (380).

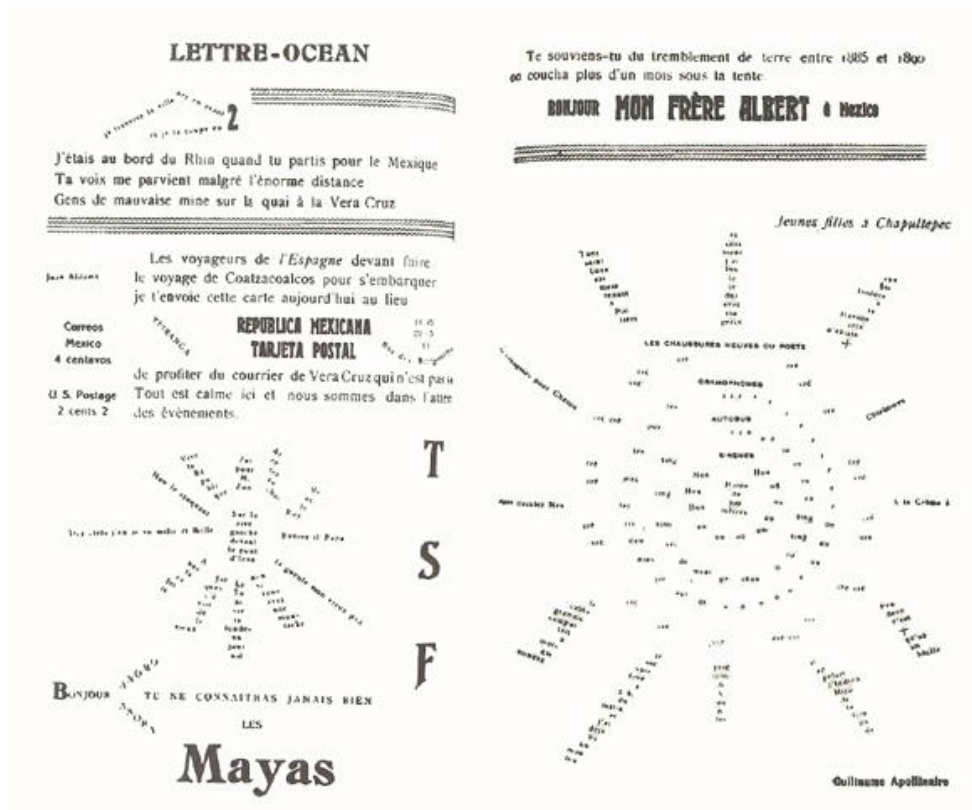


Figure 3 Guillaume Apollinaire "Lettre-Océan" (1914)

Subordinate as it was, the language in “Lettre-Océan” plays a double role: while words give shape, literally and visually illustrating radio waves emitted from towers as well as “a Gramophone record, which was for Apollinaire an equally vital twentieth-century mode of expression destined to replace the written word” (381), the words also correspond to the emissions generated by either a sound recording or its transmission over the radio waves. As an idealization of free-verse poetry, “Lettre-

Océan” heightens its form graphically as well as thematically. The legible speech fragments in the poem form a sort of lyrical mash-up than includes, among others, political slogans, (*Vive la République; Vive le Roy; A bas la calotte*); slang expressions and sexual innuendos (*et comment j’ai brûlé le dur avec ma gerce; non si vous avez une moustache*); stereotyped utterances of policemen (*allons circuler*), railway guards (*[en voi]ture les voyageurs*), and bus conductors (*changement de section*); set phrases from restaurant menus (*À la Crème*) and newspaper advertisements (*[pro]priétaire de 5 ou 6 im[meubles]*). (381-382) The random snippets of verbal communication and sounds, though expressed in a disjointed and apparently chaotic manner, transmit at once the life of the city (the first phrase of the poem is “*Je traverse la ville*”) and the wonders of worldwide communication. The literary imprint better outlined by Apollinaire’s *calligrammes*, particularly visible in a text such as “Letter-Océan”, revolves around the notion of simultaneism—a notion that originated as the first attempt to reinvigorate literature facing the advance of new technological means of artistic reproduction.

When analyzing “Impresión de La Habana” and “Ocean-Letter” next to each other (both stem from, or may be characterized as artistic interpretations or variations on the notion of the postcard), Tablada’s poem has, at first glance, strikingly more visually recognizable features than Apollinaire’s text. While the graphic elements on “Ocean-Letter” serve to illustrate ocean waves or telegraph cords and radio waves or gramophones, in “Impresión de La Habana” the words are arranged in such fashion as to illustrate (at times tautologically) the themes and subjects verbally represented—sea gulls, palm trees, and cliffs, among others. While in Apollinaire’s poem the notion of the postcard serves to illustrate and celebrate tourism (“*Les voyageurs de l’Espagne devant faire le voyage de Coatzacoalcos pour s’embarquer je t’envoie cette carte aujourd’hui au lieu*” and “*Tu ne connaîtras jamais bien les Mayas*”) and long distance

communications (“Ta voix me parvient malgré l’énorme distance”) as palpable signs of modernity, in Tablada’s text the postcard functions as a canvas that, even in the word play of its title (impresión—print, imprint, impression) foretells the multiple levels of signification visually and verbally illustrated by the poem. While Apollinaire’s text simultaneously incorporates speech and sound fragments to illustrate the radio waves that are at once a sign of modernity and the means through which he communicates with his brother in Mexico, in Tablada’s text its simultaneous aspect seeks to incorporate the entire history of the island; not only are flora and fauna depicted but also, verbally evoking Columbus’s voyage the lighthouse, a “standing conqueror’s cadaver” is erected on a cliff incrustated with the bones of the Spanish that the sea brings ashore endlessly. “Sión”, unlike “Impresión de la Habana” and “Ocean-Letter”, omits written language or conversations and simultaneity altogether but, more than sharing with the latter two poems the notion of the voyage (an allegory for the coming of age story presented in the novel) it attempts to produce a visually essential, geometrical representation of it.

Reading Magritte’s *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* as a *calligramme*, Foucault notes that “the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetic civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read.” (21) An analysis of such abolition is by no means an easy task; it is an arduous theoretical feat, the excavation of a terrain mined with numerous complications, not least of which is that such an analysis usually (if not exclusively) takes place in the site language. Much like Foucault’s claim that “In its millennial tradition, the calligram has a triple role: to augment the alphabet, to repeat something without the aid of rhetoric, to trap things in a double cipher” (20), analyses of visual poetry tend to gravitate towards a tripartite concern: a philosophy of language, the materiality of the experimental typography used in the confection of

visual poetry in the avant-garde and, finally, a discussion on the limits of art—its mode of production and the boundaries between one form and the other, as well as from life. A more suitable approach to the visual texts studied here may benefit from considering the notion of space, but more specifically, of surface, as central to these texts, at once delimiting its field of representation and avoiding the pitfall of a dichotomy between visual, non-linguistic representation and its verbal, written counterpart. Writing on Tablada²³, Salvador Elizondo recalls Victor Hugo's appreciation of modern poetry's *frisson nouveau* as the moment when the poetic endeavor becomes tightly bound to sensorial perception, when the poetic image replaces the poetic idea. A poetic image, of course, is not necessarily a visual image, but a vanguardist pull towards synthesis (say imagism or visual poetry) coupled with new means of mechanical reproduction—film and photography—turns sensorial stimuli into a matter of consideration for artistic and literary production. The superficial here refers not only to the apparently immediate perception, particularly through sight, of a visual text; the superficial also encompasses the vain gestures Bolaño saw literature as capable of producing. Finally, the superficial here delineates the surface where a text or a visual image occurs, whether on a page or a screen.

After suggesting Tablada as an Eve of a one-hundred forbidden apples, Villaurrutia wrote that only a “tone deafness and a lack of probity” would account for ignoring *estridentismo*, for it “managed to ruffle the surface of our slow poetic processes.”²⁴ Tablada often refers to Stéphane Mallarmé when articulating his ideographic poetry. In the preface to “Un coup de dés...” for the May 1897 edition of

²³ “José Juan Tablada”. Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 81.

²⁴ “Sería falta de oído y de probidad no dedicar un pequeño juicio al estridentismo que, de cualquier modo, consiguió rizar la superficie adormecida de nuestros lentos procesos poéticos.” Villaurrutia, Xavier, Alí Chumacero, Miguel Capistrán, and Luis M. Schneider. *Obras: Poesía, Teatro, Prosas Varias, Crítica* (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 827.

the international journal *Cosmopolis* (the poem would not be published on its own until 1914, the same year Apollinaire publishes “Ocean-Letter”) Mallarmé writes: “I don’t transgress against this order of things, I merely disperse its elements.” The order of things in poetry, until “Un coup de dés...” never had the blank page any significance in the construction or finishing of the text. “The paper” Mallarmé goes on to add, “intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others,” ultimately acknowledging the “Page... as the basic unit, in the way that elsewhere the Verse or the perfect line. The fiction rises to the surface and quickly dissipates, following the variable motion of writing”.²⁵ Thinking of the Page as the surface on which a poem appears and disappears facilitates a reading where visual images may follow the poem in like manner. Borges himself, in his introduction to *A Universal History of Infamy*, writes how “The book is no more than appearance, than a surface of images; for that very reason it may prove enjoyable.” (12) Also, and perhaps of greater relevance, the Page as a surface contained by the materiality of the paper easily morphs into a screen, crucial as one begins to think of film and photography. It comes to no surprise then Apollinaire’s claim, in his 1917 lecture “The New Spirit and the Poets”, that

It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art *par excellence*, the cinema, is a book of pictures, the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of films. These last will become more perceptive, and one can predict the day when, the photograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown.²⁶

²⁵ Reprinted in Mallarmé, Stéphane, and Henry Weinfield. *Collected Poems*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 121-122.

²⁶ Cook, Jon. *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology, 1900-2000*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 76.

Unlike Apollinaire, Tablada does not seem too concerned with such new media²⁷; rather, Tablada finds in his ideographic poetry a fertile ground to explore elemental notions on writing and the visual image as well as a contrast between eastern and western methods of representation. The epigraph anticipating the collection of poems in *Li-Po* serves as a point of departure for the poetic venture Tablada embarks on. Six lines from Mallarmé's "Weary of bitter sleep" (1864/1866), the epigraph reads:

To follow what the Chinese of fine, transparent soul
 For whom the purest ecstasy is painting on a bowl
 Fashioned out of snowflakes stolen from the moon
 The end of some exotic flower that sheds its scent upon
 His lucent life, the flower he sensed in infancy
 Grafting itself upon the spirit's blue-tinged filigree²⁸

Already in Mallarmé's poem this fragment functions as a silver lining in the midst of decadence found from the very first couple of lines of the poem "Las de l'amer repos où ma paresse offense / Une gloire pour qui jadis j'ai fui l'enfance" / "Weary of bitter sleep in which my indolence / Offends a glory for which I once fled childhood's innocence." Following Mallarmé's advice Tablada—a decadent²⁹ and *modernista* in

²⁷ After publishing the novel *La resurrección de los ídolos*, Tablada wrote a letter to Genaro Estrada where he enthusiastically shares with him the possibility that the novel will be undergo a film adaptation. "¡Mi novela, Gordo! ¡Mi novela! ¡Ayer domingo la concluí...! ¡Dicen que es lo mejor que he escrito! [...] Creo que hará bien y su alcance ético me preocupa más que el artístico. Tengo ya proposiciones para el cinematógrafo. ¡Si prende allí... me salvé!" Tablada, José J, Serge I. Zaitzeff, and Genaro Estrada. *Cartas a Genaro Estrada, 1921-1931*. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001), 254.

²⁸ The epigraph is in its original French version: "Imiter le Chinois au coeur limpide et fin / De qui l'extase pure est de peindre la fin / Sur les tasses de neige à la lune ravie / D'une bizarre fleur qui parfume sa vie / Transparente, la fleur qu'il a sentie, enfant, / Au filigrane bleu de l'âme se greffant." Mallarmé, Stéphane, and Henry Weinfield. *Collected Poems*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 16.

²⁹ Rodolfo Mata, in his prologue to the 2005 edition of *Li-Po*, highlights among the many drawings Tablada made throughout his life those of "varios enfermos del Hospital de San Hipólito, institución de salud mental en la que probablemente fue internado, a causa de una intoxicación por drogas, en 1895." The fascination with Li Po, not exclusive to Tablada, also lies on the Chinese poet's life-long love of wine and his ability to create and sing his poetry under its influence. In an open letter published on January 15, 1893, Tablada pledges "apoyar en México la escuela del Decadentismo, la única en que hoy puede obrar libremente el artista

the early stages of his literary production—and under the premise of synthesis (one must recall that Tablada did not call his short poems of *Un día...* haikus but “poemas sintéticos”) Li Po’s life is represented as “the anecdote of a life, calligraphically and typographically fragmented, over the course of eight pages with twenty-five vignettes more essentialist than the poems of *Un día...*”³⁰ Aspiring to pure ecstasy in the (vain?) gesture of painting on a bowl fashioned out of snowflakes, Tablada’s ideographic poetry, not unlike *estridentismo*, ruffled the surface of Latin America’s poetic processes.

Li Bai (701-762), also known as Li Po (after the Wade-Giles romanization) and Rihaku (its Japanese variation) was one of the most renowned Chinese poets of the Tang dynasty and had a considerable presence on the Western imaginary at the turn of the twentieth century. In “Las fuentes chinas de José Juan Tablada” Adriana García de Aldrige points to Judith Gautier’s *Le livre de jade* (1867; revised and augmented edition 1902), its translation into English as *Chinese Lyrics from the Book of Jade* (1918) by James Whitall, and a 1901 Herbert Giles translation of Li Po’s “Drinking alone in the moonlight” / “Three with the moon and his shadow”, as exerting direct influence on Tablada’s composition of *Li-Po*. García de Aldrige goes on to argue that “Junto al río”, “Embriaguez de amor”, and “La flor prohibida”, which Héctor Valdéz wrongfully attributes to Tablada in the introductory study to the poet’s *Obras I. Poesía* (1971), are in fact translations of Li Po’s poems after Whitall’s versions. While agreeing that some of Tablada’s poems are a translation twice

que haya recibido el más ligero hálito de la educación moderna”. (Tablada, “Cuestión literaria: Decadentismo”, *El País*, January 15, 1893, México.) For examples of Tablada’s poetry during this period see “Ónix” and “Misa negra”, both published in 1893 on periodicals and later in the collection *El florilegio* (1904).

³⁰ “la anécdota de una vida fragmentada caligráfica y tipográficamente a lo largo de ocho páginas por medio de veinticinco viñetas más esencialistas que los poemas de *Un día...*” Tablada, José J, and Antonio Saborit. *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*. (México, D. F: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2008), 63.

removed from Li Po's original texts, the ideographic nature of Tablada's poems sets them apart from Gautier's, Whitall's, and Gile's.

In the first half of the book, the poem "Li Po", the ideographic representation of what is referred to with words remains constant: throughout the book there are poems and vignettes that verbally and graphically depict the moon and its various stages (or its reflection on a body of water), birds and bird tracks, toads, cups, flowers and grass, etc. Much like Pound's "L'uomo nel Ideogramma"³¹, *Li Po* begins by noting the contents of the first men's world, earth, plants, moon, and, finally, the human form. One of the vignettes from "Li Po" on the first half of the collection, reads: "Hasta que el poeta cae / como pesado tabor / y el viento / le deshoja el pensamiento / como una flor", (Until the poet falls / like a heavy urn / and the wind / defoliates thought / like a flower). In the ideographic representation of these verses all three images are visible at once: the poet, the urn, and the flower. In the second half of the collection one finds the poem "Huella" written within the outline of a footprint. The poem, which breaks down in syllables the first verse ("Pie de la bailarina") and assigns the first five to a corresponding toe, echoes the hymn sung and danced/written at the Confucian temple of which Tablada informs López-Velarde in his defense of ideographic poetry, but also, in relation to Mallarmé's text. In Mallarmé's "Ballets" the fascination that originates with the dancer and her choreography rapidly turns into one where "writing with her body, she *suggests* things which the written work could *express* only in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose. Her poem is written without the writer's tools."³²

³¹ According to Kenner, "L'uomo nel Ideogramma" is Ezra Pound's "unpublished ms. on what seems to be wartime paper, at Brunnenburg, 1969." Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 104, 569.

³² Reprinted in Copeland, Roger, and Marshall Cohen. *What Is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*. (Oxford, Oxfordshire: Oxford University Press, 1983), 112.

Tablada’s “Huella” appears to acknowledge that the blank page can only aspire to record marks or traces of the dance—Mallarmé’s poetry of movement and suggestion. In the footprint of “Huella” resonates “Oiseau” / “Bird”, another poem of *Li-Po*, which reads: “Voici ses petites pattes / le chant s’est [sic] envolé...” (“Here are its little feet / singing its flight...”) Along with these two lines that comprise the entire

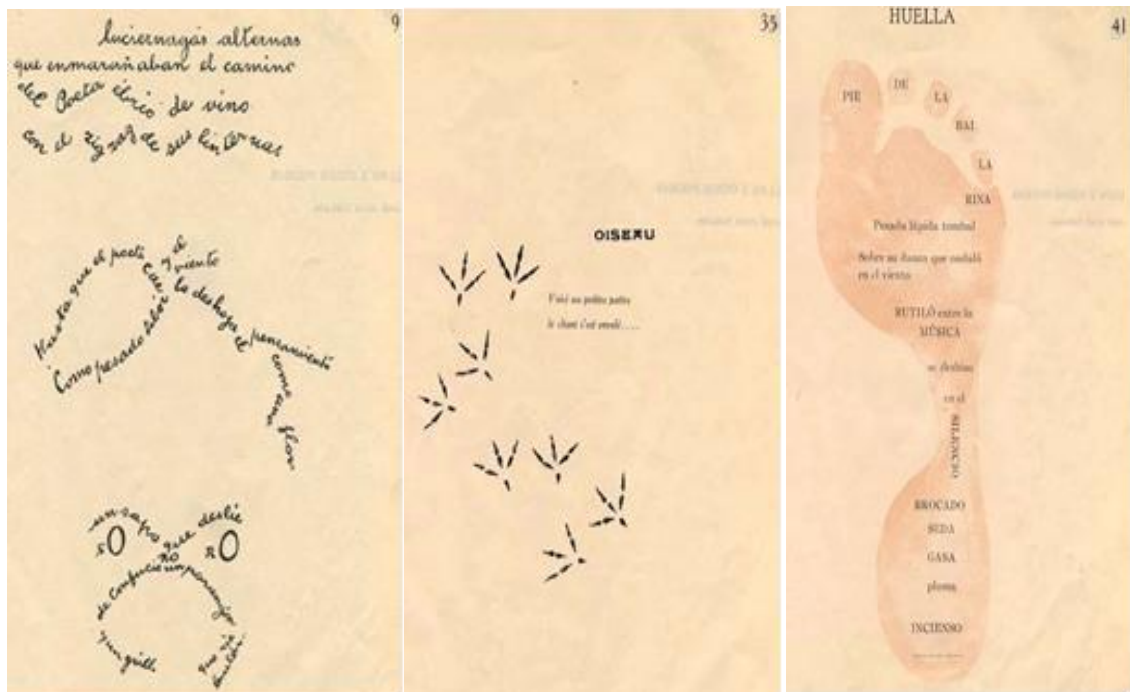


Figure 4 José Juan Tablada. *Li Po y otros poemas* (1920)

poem one finds eight bird tracks and, with them, a clear reference to the “bird tracks” story from the *Book of Changes* or *I Ching* (after the Wade-Giles romanization) that links the tracks left by the claws of birds and animals found by the Yellow Emperor’s scribe, Cang Jie, to the beginnings of language.³³ If a bird track would ultimately yield the written character, what is one to make of a ballerina’s footprint?

³³ For more on this story see Saussy, Haun. *The Prestige of Writing: Wen², Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: Dept. of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1997.

Before returning to the remaining visual texts found in *The Savage Detectives* it will be of great help to consider the work of Marius de Zayas's work and his influence on the visual poetry of José Juan Tablada. Tablada met the de Zayas family in during one of his periods of exile in New York³⁴. De Zayas introduced Tablada to the city's literary and artistic circles and must have shared with Tablada the details of his trip to Paris in May in 1914 (the extent of those, unfortunately, remain unknown) where he met and collaborated with Apollinaire. The turbulent relationships of the de Zayas family with many Mexican political figures at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the various political appointments and the economic hardships they endured during the periods of exile of the de Zayas family, culminating in their residence in San Francisco and ultimately, New York, serve as a point of entry for discussing the artist's elusive cosmopolitan life and artistic production. The trade of Marius de Zayas as a graphic journalist (way of his caricatures) and art dealer³⁵ always prompted him to search for artistic innovation. De Zayas as editor of the artistic journal *291* (where Apollinaire's work would eventually be published) collaborated with the French poet and critic in Paris during his visit in 1914. In a letter de Zayas wrote to Alfred Stieglitz dated on July 1st 1914, de Zayas informs his colleague: "The last word in art in Paris is the "Simultanism" in literature. Apollinaire

³⁴ Tablada, much like the de Zayas family, enjoyed various political appointments and endured economic hardships during his periods of exile. Antonio Saborit, in his introductory study to *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*, writes how Tablada, during his exile in New York the poet worked on "su rehabilitación política al final de la segunda década del siglo xx, la cautela a la que lo obliga su pasado inmediato como adversario y satirista de la persona pública de Francisco I. Madero y también como simpatizante y colaborador en el gobierno de Victoriano Huerta." (76) In Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* Amadeo Salvatierra, who he frequented the *estridentista* group, aids Lima and Belano in their search for Cesárea Tinajero, and recalls a night when he "set off along the streets of the city center, reciting the verse of the reactionary Tablada." (285)

³⁵ As Bohn noted, one of the results of the de Zayas trip to Europe was that "In October 1915, he opened the Modern Gallery, a venture clearly patterned on French galleries such as Paul Guillaume's and Kahnweiler's and which unlike the "291" enterprise was frankly commercial." (Bohn 1976, 42)

is the father of it. I recommend you to read in the last number of the *Soirées* his “Carte-Océan” [“Lettre-Océan”]. It is really very amusing. This Apollinaire is really the deepest observer of superficiality. We have become good friends” (De Zayas 1996, 181). On a second letter dated July 9th, the day after Apollinaire “devoted his entire art column in *Paris-Journal* to an enthusiastic review of de Zayas’ caricatures”, de Zayas wrote Stieglitz:

I am working hard in making these people understand the convenience of a commerce of ideas with America. And I want to absorb the spirit of what they are doing to bring it to “291.” We need a closer contact with Paris, there is no question about it. The *Soirées de Paris* is going to publish four of my caricatures in the next number: Vollards’s, Apollinaire’s, Picabia’s, and yours. They asked for them and I thought it would be good for all of us to really get in with this crowd.” (De Zayas 1996, 184)

On the same letter de Zayas notifies Stieglitz: “I also have gotten from him some of the originals of his new poems which are creating among the crowd of modernists a real sensation. He is doing in poetry what Picasso is doing in painting. He uses actual forms made up with letters. All these show a tendency towards a fusion of the so-called arts” (De Zayas 1996, 184). Generally speaking, Willard Bohn notes, “de Zayas adopted as his guidelines such Apollinairian aesthetic principles as modernism, spontaneity, and surprise—principles which played an important role in what Apollinaire was later to name ‘surréalisme.’ Language, form, and content in *291* all

reflect these preoccupations and reveal a determined effort to apply them as principles” (Bohn 1976, 43).

Marius de Zayas’s contribution to the corpus of visual poetry during the avant-garde extending beyond the divulgence (and active promotion) of Apollinaire’s theories and work in America may be traced back to “Elle”, the third of the visual poems to appear in *291* and the only one accredited solely to de Zayas. “Elle” is perhaps the visual poem where the simultaneous presence and absence of the human body is thoroughly significant. The poem lacks the abstract figures and drawings de Zayas included in previous collaborations, but the arrangement of phrases on the page and the use of multiple typographic fonts render it closer to an Apollinairian *calligramme*. There is no visible human form in the poem (severing the text from the tradition of *technopaegnia*) in spite of the initial tease of the text: “FEMME! TU VOUDRAIS BIEN TE LIRE DANS CE PORTRAIT” (*Woman! You’d like to read yourself in this portrait*). In “The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas” Bohn notes that the poem “Elle” was published side by side with Francis Picabia’s mechanomorphic drawing *Voilà elle* (451). Although both artists at one point claimed that “these works were portraits of the same woman made at different times and in different places ‘without collusion’”, Bohn finds this hard to believe, since “Situated at the intersection of caricature and machinism, both works portray the same woman in an identical manner” (451). Not only are both titles virtually the same, but they are both placed in roughly the same place on the text and the chosen language is French. According to Bohn, “Compositionally, both works feature a single vertical upright surmounted by a larger mass; both have a marked diagonal component extending from the lower left to the upper right corner; and both use a curved element (at the left) to connect the

vertical with the diagonal.” (451) William A. Camfield’s interpretation of Picabia’s drawing³⁶, concludes that “We are dealing with sexual symbols here, and the portrait

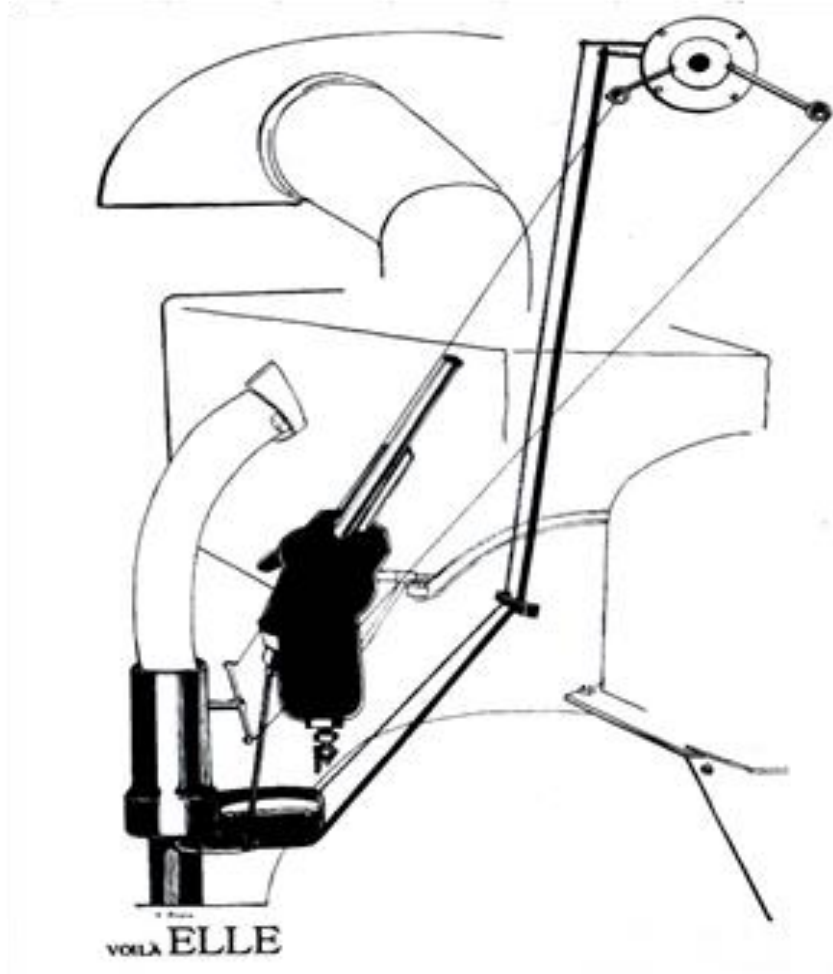


Figure 6 Francis Picabia “*Voilà elle*” (1915)

depicts a woman with nymphomaniacal tendencies...De Zayas’s poem is an equally scathing denunciation of the unknown woman, who is wholly devoted to carnal gratification and suffering from ‘cerebral atrophy’.” (qtd. in Bohn 451) A number of other phrases scattered throughout “Elle” confirm this reading: “pas de forme”, “hurluberlu” (*scatterbrained*), “atrophie cérébrale causée par matérialité” (*brain*

³⁶ For a full reading of Camfield’s interpretation see Camfield, William A. *Francis Picabia His Art, Life, and Times*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979), 53, 81-85.

atrophy caused by materialism), “pas d'intellectuasim”, and “elle n'a pas fait son école d'amour dans la littérature” (*she did not love her school in literature*). The leitmotiv of the *femme fatale* is, of course, not exclusive to the avant-garde; “Elle”, a visual poem—a portrait—of a woman, constructed entirely of loose phrases, discloses the *femme fatale* as a discursive construct. The pairing of de Zayas’s poem and Picabia’s drawing on opposite pages, besides having a thematic subject in common, clearly reaffirmed the experimental portraiture explored by Stieglitz circle in the late teens and 1920s.³⁷

In “Una visita a Picasso o La influencia del ambiente. Ocho dibujos de Marius de Zayas.” one is able to see the progression of the more traditional, realistic and representational de Zayas caricature into what will be, by the eighth drawing, an abstract caricature—abstract yet still heavily influenced by cubism. The series of eight drawings, reproduced by Saborit in *Una visita* (45-46) starts off the first sketch with a realistic, representational drawing of F. Haviland (the *Parc du Champs de Mars* and a piece of the *Tour Eiffel* in the background) with the caption that tells how F. Haviland, accompanied by ‘the great’ Mr. Steichen, pick de Zayas up before they go visit Picasso at his studio. Already by the second cartoon the caption reads: “At the gate I thought Rapp Mr. Haviland had a strange look, one might say 'angular'.”³⁸ In this second cartoon some of the traces outlining the drawing of F. Haviland become sharper; by the fourth cartoon the background has been replaced by a few squares and triangles and Mr. Haviland “was not only angular but had acquired a few triangles and a square.” In the sixth drawing, when entering Picasso’s studio, “Mr. Haviland had all

³⁷ Greenough, Sarah. *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*. (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 145.

³⁸ De Zayas originally wrote the captions for every sketch in French. Antonio Saborit offers a translation of them into Spanish for *Una visita a Marius de Zayas*. Since I found de Zayas handwriting is practically illegible from the sketches reproduced in Saborit’s text, I will rely on his translation for my own of the captions into English.

sorts of geometric figures, but was incomprehensible.” The seventh drawing of the series depicts a more realistic and representational cartoon of Picasso, and de Zayas writes “I contemplate the maestro around whom I was able to admire the most beautiful conception of black art, as though they were among the legs of the blue bird.” The last drawing of the series returns to Haviland, only now transformed into a complete polyhedron; the square, straight line and triangle into which his face and hat had mutated by the sixth drawing have been fully incorporated—and arguably lost—into the polyhedral mass. The last caption reads: “After leaving the [study] of the maestro, through the power of his art, I saw Mr. Haviland in all his geometric value. And here he is...” While the indebtedness to cubism in the caricatures of de Zayas is put on display in this series of sketches, de Zayas would go on even further in the abstraction of his portraits, eventually developing a series of *psicografías*, leaving thus a permanent mark in the avant-garde movement and building a bridge not only between European artistic trends and those flourishing in New York, but also in Latin American literature, playing a crucial role in the incorporation of the visual image into a literary text via Tablada and, ultimately, Bolaño.

Willard Bohn, in “The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas” (1980), provides a very detailed and critical, as the title of his article suggests, approach to the artistic legacy of de Zayas, culminating with the *psicografías*. According to Bohn, “In Mexico and during his early years in New York, de Zayas had worked in a realistic, representational style. However much he might distort an individual’s features, the final portrait had to be recognizable to be effective” (434). In *Puck*, a humorous magazine of political satire (1871-1918), Marius de Zayas published two cartoons where a character’s features become distorted—in accordance to the titles of the sequences and, of course, the punch line they intent to represent. The first sequence, entitled, “She worked him for a car”, shows a young woman seducing an older,

affluent man, effectively turning his face (as the frames advance) into the resemblance of the front of an automobile. The second sequence, entitled “The trail of the serpent”, depicts a young couple dancing in the first frame, the woman gradually turning into a serpent that ultimately strangles the male dancer by the last frame.³⁹

Recalling his first abstract caricature of Stieglitz, “Alfred Stieglitz”, *Camera Work*, XLIV, 1914 in *How, When and Why Modern Art Came to New York*, de Zayas remembers

In 1914, studying the ethnographical collection at the British Museum, I was impressed by an object invented by an artist from Pukapuka or Danger Island in the Pacific. It consisted of a wooden stick to which a few circles made of some vegetal material were fixed by pairs right and left of the stick. It impressed me particularly because it reminded me of the physical appearance of Stieglitz. I say ‘physical’ because the resemblance was also spiritual. The object, said the catalogue, was built as a trap for catching souls. The portrait was complete, and it caught my soul, because from it I derived a theory of abstract caricature... (80)

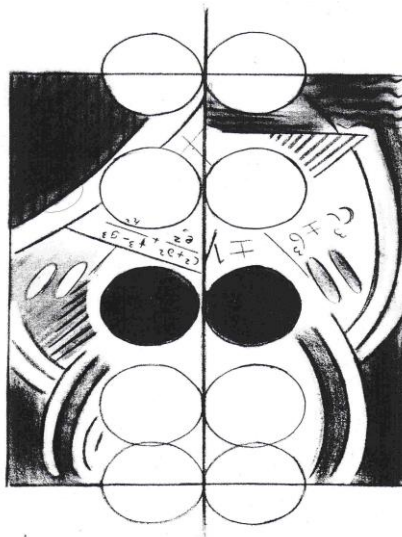


Figure 7 Marius de Zayas, "Alfred Stieglitz" (1914)

³⁹ Both graphic sequences are reproduced in Saborit, Antonio, Marius de Zayas, David Maawad, and Ahumada A. Tovalín. *Una Visita a Marius De Zayas*. (Xalapa, Ver., México: Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura, 2009), 116-117.

The very first abstract caricature of Alfred Stieglitz shows what amounts to a metaphoric portrait/caricature—the ‘soul-catcher’—bearing an objective title: the name of *Alfred Stieglitz*. “In transferring his symbolism from the verbal to the visual plane,” de Zayas “gave it a central position in his aesthetic...Not only does the soul-catcher symbolize Stieglitz’s role as chief proselytizer for modernism in America, it also symbolizes his efforts as a photographer, whose task is to capture human images on film” (444). The multiple sets of eyeglasses (corresponding to the circles of vegetable material attached to the wooden stick of the original soul-catcher) may even be read, as Craig R. Bailey is credited by Bohn in doing so, as infinity signs—making this an insuperable tribute to the leader of the 291 circle (444). In the preface to the exhibition of his abstract caricatures in 1913 (later published in “Caricature: Absolute and Relative” *Camera Work*, XLVI, April 1914, 20), de Zayas stresses how his “new procedure in caricature is inspired by the psychological reason of the existence of the art of the primitive races, which tried to represent what they thought to be supernatural elements, existing outside of the individual, elements however which science has proved to be natural and which exist within the individual.” As Bohn notes, the concept of what de Zayas calls “the psychology of form” functions as “the translation of intellectual and emotional responses into formal patterns on the canvas” (437). If, as Bohn argues, instead of the physical manifestation of an object or scene Picasso sought its psychic manifestation in order to represent its essence, then “the concept of essence versus appearance underlines the invention of abstract caricature”, or as de Zayas stated in the preface to his 1913 exhibition, abstract caricature may be defined as ‘the representation of feelings and ideas through material equivalents’ (437). Art, then, “is no longer to be rendered as extrinsic impression but as ‘intrinsic expression’” (439). A realistic representation depicting the physical appearance of an individual can

never get beyond the point of a superficial impression—de Zayas’s goal is to provide an analysis of such individual via the creation of an abstract caricature.

In January of 1913 de Zayas asserts, “Picasso is perhaps the only artist who in our time works in search of a new form. But Picasso is only an analyst; up to the present his productions reveal solely the plastic analysis of artistic forms without arriving at a definite synthesis.”⁴⁰ Though most of de Zayas’s abstract drawings defy interpretation, Bohn sees how

According to the method revealed to him at the British Museum, each of his subjects undergoes a process of *double abstraction*. In practice this involves two steps: objectification and simplification. Once an object is chosen to represent a given person, its basic form is abstracted to produce a portrait twice removed from reality. In addition, the choice of the object depends on a double correspondence between subject and object. The resemblance must be physical as well as ‘spiritual’ (symbolic). (443)

The three maxims in the creation of an abstract caricature, as de Zayas’s points out in the preface to his exhibition, are thus outlined by Bohn: first, “the *spirit* of the individual is to be represented by algebraic formulas,” second, “his *material self* by ‘geometrical equivalents,’” and finally, “his *initial force* by ‘trajectories within the rectangle that encloses the plastic expression and represents life” (440). Furthermore, “The compositions are often arranged symmetrically around a vertical axis, and several include prominent diagonals” (441). However, the lack of any explanation on the part of de Zayas in regards to, for example, some of the values assigned to the algebraic variables used in the abstract caricatures, not only turn the caricatures “personal and hermetic” but, as Bohn notes, also explain why “The absence of algebraic devices in three of the later drawings seems to indicate that the system was

⁴⁰ Marius de Zayas, “Photography”, *Camera Work*, no.41. Reprinted in Petruck, Peninah R. (Ed). *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 54-57.

eventually discontinued” (441). In “Photography and Artistic Photography”⁴¹ de Zayas argues that the difference between the two lies in that “The first is a process of indigitation, the second a means of expression. In the first man tries to represent something that is outside of himself; in the second he tries to represent something that is in himself. The first is a free and impersonal research; the second is a systematic and personal representation.” The work of Marius de Zayas can ultimately be described as a systematic and personal representation—an acute focalization (de Zayas would undoubtedly render it subjective and synthetic)—of the human form in its visual and verbal representation.

Tablada wrote a number of chronicles about the New York and its cultural scene. In “Tres artistas mexicanos en Nueva York: Marius de Zayas, Pal-Omar, Juan Olaguíbel” originally published in *El Universal Ilustrado* in November 1918 de Zayas is the first of the artists reviewed in the article. Tablada notes how Marius “De Zayas developed an intense and long work as a caricaturist of the mundane and theatrical, twisting with his expressive and synthetic pencil the physiognomies of plutocracy’s heroes, of Mrs. Astor’s 400, and the masks of Broadway’s actors.”⁴² According to Tablada, de Zayas redeemed the newspaper caricature from its “crass vulgarity” to the point where his synthetic and vital style has acquired a number of unworthy imitators. Tablada also highlights that his caricatures, possessing the subjective virtue of modern art, have been published in *Les Soirées de Paris*, *Camera Work*, and *291*. The brief note on de Zayas ends, following his ‘artistic evolution’, with the creation of his

⁴¹ Marius de Zayas, “Photography and Artistic Photography”, *Camera Work*, no.41. Reprinted in Petruck, Peninah R. (Ed). *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 58-60.

⁴² The original reads: “De Zayas desarrolló un intenso y largo trabajo como caricaturista mundano y teatral, deformando con su lápiz expresivo y sintético las fisonomías de los próceres de la plutocracia, de los 400 de Mrs. Astor y las máscaras de los histriones de Broadway.” *El Universal Ilustrado* in November 1918. Reprinted in Tablada, José J, and Antonio Saborit. *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*. (México, D. F: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2008), 315.

psicografías, the abstract caricatures or portraits which, according to Tablada, render “the image of a person, neither photographic nor objective, that filtered through the artist’s subjectivity is broken down like a prism turns the sunray into a spectrum.”⁴³ De Zayas created a number of such *psicografías*, including those of Stieglitz, Apollinaire, Picabia, Theodore Roosevelt and, of course, Tablada.

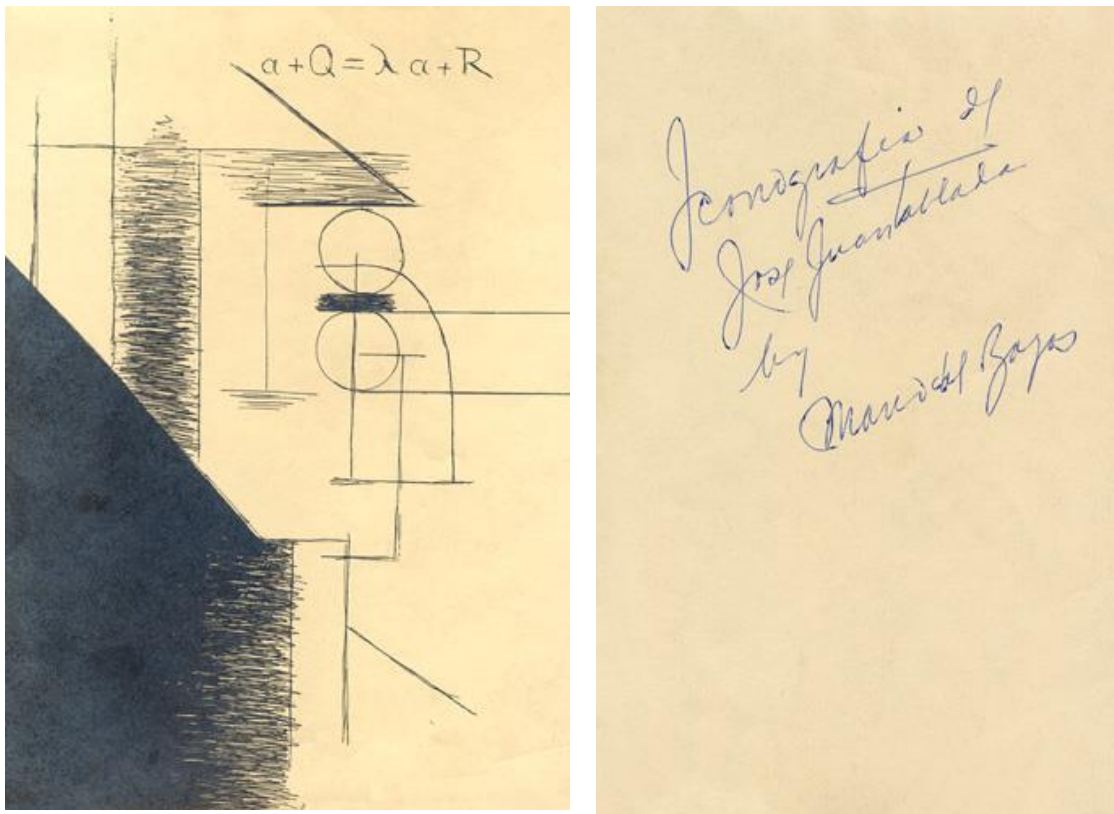


Figure 8 Marius de Zayas. "José Juan Tablada Psicografía" (1920)

In the last paragraph of the chronicle/note on the three Mexican artists, Tablada writes that if he'd ever try to come up with a *psicografía* of de Zayas, he “would have to represent, in an abstract manner, the lenticular line of his great, camber forehead

⁴³ “la imagen de una persona, no fotográfica u objetiva, sino filtrada a través de la subjetividad del artista que la descompone como un prisma el rayo solar tornándolo en espectro.” *Ibid*, 316.

radiating from the skyscrapers where he resides, as from a lighthouse over the Great Sea, in this Babylonian city, a projector beaming bright lights and large bundles of evidence on the sub-humanity and the old plastic consciousness, shocked and mortally wounded ...”⁴⁴ The *psicografía* that Marius de Zayas made of Tablada would ultimately end up in the cover of the first edition of *Li-Po y otros poemas*. In the late 1920s Tablada sought to incorporate the motifs found in the work of the Mexican muralists into his work, most notably with the publication of *La Feria*. Miguel Covarrubias collaborated some illustrations for the book. Tablada’s break from his ideographic poetry and subsequent exploration of the cultural nationalism of the era sets the stage for an analysis of the abstract caricatures in the set of “Mexicans seen from above”.

Ricardo Martínez has suggested reading the visual texts in *The Savage Detectives* from the field of cognitive poetics. Such a reading involves a metaphoric process of visual cognition wherein the reader/viewer must “complete” the visual text following George Lakoff’s *Idealized Cognitive Models* (ICM).⁴⁵ The inventive critical approach argued by Martínez, however, drains the texts of their historical context and literary tradition. Following Lakoff’s ICMs inevitably dismisses the many layers of signification one can find on a drawing of a “Mexican seen from above”: establishing a point of perception (the altitude from where the Mexicans are seen) and an “idealized” cognitive model relying what is already considered to be Mexican—the task of the reader is whittled down to “completing”, or incorporating into the ICM, the variants of the drawing—a bike, a pipe, etc. To establishing the “Mexicans seen from

⁴⁴ “habría de representar en abstracto la línea lenticular de su gran frente comba irradiando desde el rascacielos donde mora, como desde un faro, sobre el Mare Magnum, de esta urbe babilónica, irradiando como un proyector luminoso, grandes haces de luces y evidencias sobre la subhumanidad y la vieja conciencia plástica atónita y ya herida de muerte...” *Ibid*, 317.

⁴⁵ Martínez, Ricardo “Más allá de la última ventana: Los «marcos» de Los detectives salvajes desde la poética cognitiva.” Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De Roberto Bolaño*. Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003.

above” sketches as ideographic poems or abstract caricatures one must identify the two concentric circles as a “traditional” Mexican hat “seen from above”; the hat a synthesis of a “Mexican”, a cubist still life not unlike Tablada’s “Madrigales ideográficos.”⁴⁶



Figure 9 José Juan Tablada "Madrigales"

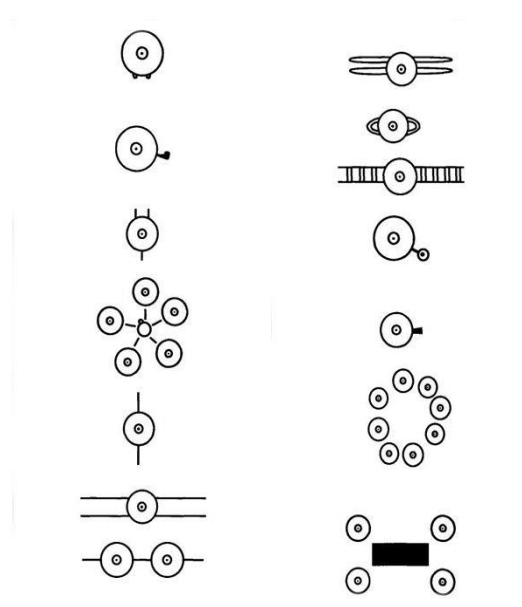


Figure 10 Roberto Bolaño "Mexicans seen from above"

⁴⁶ Before publishing them with “Impresión de La Habana”, and even after when included in *Li-Po*, “Talon Rouge” and “El puñal” were coupled together under the title “Madrigales Ideográficos.” A *madrigal*, being an brief amorous poem combining seven and eleven syllable lines, does not seem to adequately classify the poems that, notwithstanding their visual form, they don’t “seem to be a madrigal so much as a *piropo*, that is, a flirtatious compliment addressed to an attractive woman passing by. Tablada has simply taken the verbal metaphor (or simile), which has a lengthy history in western literature, and raised it to the visual level.” (Bohn 2001, 192) Bohn goes on to add: “The French title probably indicates that the footwear has been imported from France and refers indirectly to Apollinaire’s calligrams... With a little imagination the total composition can be seen to depict a *femme fatale*. Juxtaposed with the wicked stiletto representing her piercing gaze, the high-heeled shoe betrays her determination to grind Tablada under her heel.” (Bohn 2001, 194)

Although quite tempting, it would be useless to take the “Mexicans seen from above” at face value (as the characters in the scene do) or to analyze the sketches as a sort of *psicografía* of the Mexican, venturing hypotheses that inquire on the Mexican identity as illustrated by the two closed circles or pondering the significance of the distance required to render them visible (these Mexicans are, after all, seen from above) as well as to ask who is it that observes these figures. A different and more productive approach would be to establish the sketches within a graphic tradition and the manner in which the “Mexican hat” was transformed first, into an icon of the Mexican revolution and, later, into one of Mexican identity—the works of José Guadalupe Posada, the Mexican muralists and Abel Quezada shed light on the edification and eventual dissolution of this construct.

In *Posada: Mito y mitote* (2009) Rafael Barajas writes how Posada, a cartoonist who chronicled Mexican political life from around 1871 until his death in virtual anonymity on 1913, acquires a newfound recognition in the mid 1920’s when postrevolutionary intellectuals Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and Dr. Atl, among others, reassess his work and situate Posada as one of the precursors of the Mexican revolution (19-20). The notion of Posada as precursor to the Mexican revolution extended to a point where Juan José Arreola claimed that Posada “shot the first bullets of the [Mexican] revolution” (my translation, 29); Diego Rivera’s *Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda park* (1947) shows, near the center of the mural, a sort of “family portrait” where Rivera, a child in the representation, appears next to Posada and his most famous creation, *la Catrina*, both figures enacting the role of the muralist’s parents, rendering Rivera a legitimate heir to Posada’s artistic legacy⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ José Clemente Orozco, in his autobiography, claims to have seen Posada at work when he was young, an event he accounts for “el primer estímulo que despertó mi imaginación y me impulsó a emborronar papel con los primeros muñecos, la primera revelación del arte de la pintura.” Orozco, José C. *José Clemente Orozco - Autobiografía*. (México: Cultura SEP [u.a.] 1971), 11.

ORATORIA Y MUSICA



Figure 11 José Guadalupe Posada "Oratoria y Música" (1911)

Even André Breton, in the introduction to his *Anthology of Black Humor*, wrote

It would seem that, in visual art, we must consider the triumph of humor in its pure and manifest state a much more recent phenomenon, and recognize as its first practitioner of genius the Mexican artist José Guadalupe Posada. In his admirable 'popular' woodcuts, Posada brought to life all the upheavals of the 1910 revolution. (xvii)

Rafael Baraja's study, however, goes on to illustrate that Posada's entire body of work was never ideologically stable insofar as many of his cartoons are, usually depending on the magazine they were published, against or in accord with Porfirio Díaz, Francisco I. Madero, and the revolution itself. Eduardo del Río (*Rius*) in *Los moneros de México* (2005) recalls: "Leopoldo Méndez confessed to me having found some posadista 'sins' that, in the monumental book he wrote about [Posada] had to omit so as not to hurt his image of an artist committed to the people" (my translation, 36). The

figure of Posada, his *Catrina*, and the caricatures of revolutionary Mexicans, whose hats were often inscribed with the word “PUEBLO”, gradually became part of the national imaginary—it would take the work of another political cartoonist, Abel Quezada, for the demystification of such figures to take place.

On route to find Cesárea Tinajero, driving through the desert in Sonora, García Madero writes on his diary: “To make the trip go faster, I started to draw pictures, puzzles that I was taught in school a long time ago. Although there are no cowboys⁴⁸ here. No one wears a cowboy hat here. Here there's only desert, and towns like mirages, and bare hills” (609). By the time the road trip takes place, on the first days of 1976, Quezada had already been publishing his cartoons for about twenty years. In the prologue to Quezada’s *El mexicano y otros problemas* (1976)⁴⁹, Carlos Monsiváis writes how “Quezada constructed a parallel Mexico, using invented characters which society began to plagiarize, employing publicity campaigns as to the style and manner of Mexicans, and ironic demolitions of the political system and its way of governing.” The satirical cartoons published by Quezada found a way to democratize the official politics of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that governed Mexico for the better part of the century by developing a social criticism via the *crónica costumbrista*, “He soon unveiled a catalogue of defects assumed as virtues, and of virtues that shouldn’t be; instead of eradicating these dispensable ‘essences of what is truly Mexican,’ Abel lances parodic broadsides. The moralist in Quezada is exasperated by the triumphalist mythology which hardly hides its profuse inefficiency.” The humor in Quezada’s work, “a humor which allowed no room for catharsis; a humor that subliminally persuades and returns like an induced observation”, found “the

⁴⁸ In the original text the term is actually “charros”.

⁴⁹ Reprinted and translated into English by Roberto Tejada on Tejada, Roberto, Carole Castelli, Fox L. Scott, Salvador Lutteroth, and Uribe J. Sánchez. *Abel Quezada*. (México: Artes de México y del Mundo, 1996), 88-89.

transformation of national characteristics into the evils of mannerism (and vice versa)". An array of characters that after Quezada populated the national imaginary included "the taco vendor with his basket-of-perfect-crimes, the one-dimensional peasant held up by sticks", "the national (preferably hydraulic) planner", and "machos whose sombreros bear inscriptions (like the one worn by Charro Matías *and those who don't like it, they can just go to...*)".



Figure 12 Abel Quezada "El Charro Matías"

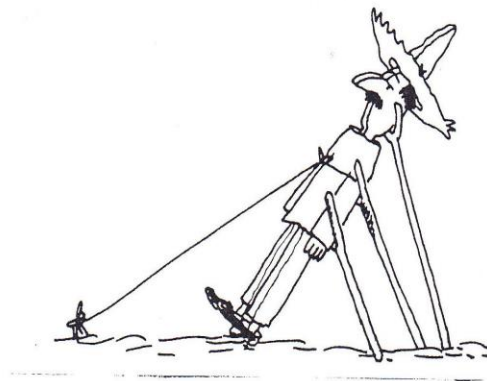


Figure 13 Abel Quezada "One-dimensional peasant"

Quezada, "the first to realize that God made Mexico exuberant and later inflicted it with the sexennial presidential term, a scheme of power that follows the rules of fashion" was able to "translate Mexican politics into the language of pop-art" carrying on "a satiric program over to politics with the simplicity of the drawing tool to disguise the conclusiveness of words, and where the verbal effectiveness half hides the lethal character of the drawing." A similar operation to Quezada's is at work with the "Mexicans seen from above"; satire becomes, in the context of the Mexican literary

establishment for which Bolaño seeks to revise, a viable route for a critique of governmental patronage and literary vanguardism.

A “Mexican seen from above” may be read as a visual poem, an icon, a *psicografía*, and even as a parodic ideogram of “man”, of a Mexican that beyond the hat is virtually devoid of historical significance. Ultimately, in a novel that directly looks into the avant-garde (in fact seeking to revive Tinajero’s visceralist movement fifty years later) the “Mexicans seen from above”, learnt by García Madero in school as a joke/puzzle, at once notices a trait of the official national discourse on Mexican identity and quickly satirizes it, turning the revolutionary icon of yore into, shall we venture, what Jacques Rancière sees in *The Politics of Aesthetics* as a sign of the avant-garde’s “two different ideas of political subjectivity: the archi-political idea of a party, that is to say the idea of a form of political intelligence that sums up the essential conditions for change, and the meta-political idea of global political subjectivity, the idea of the potentiality inherent in the innovative sensible modes of experience that anticipate a community to come” (30). The two concentric circles, which can never meet, one encapsulating the other without definite distinction, portray with a dollop of humor the crossroads of literary vanguardism and the political apparatus where it’s found: the “Mexicans seen from above” may be read as a visual representation of such crossroads or compromise, personified in the figure and work of Tablada and located in a Mexico ruled over by a political party that effectively names and insists on seeing itself as one of institutional revolution.

Marius de Zayas, in “Photography” (1913), wrote: “Art has abandoned its original purpose, the substantiation of religious conception, to devote itself to a representation of Form. It may be said that the soul of Art has disappeared, the body only remaining with us, and that therefore the unifying idea of Art does not exist. That body is disintegrating, and everything that disintegrates tends to disappear” (53-54).

The search for Cesárea Tinajero, which leads to her death when found by the young poets, leaves the real visceralists with “Sión” and the visual poems or sketches drawn up by García Madero, totaling the literary production conjured up by this particular avant-garde movement. After García Madero draws the first two concentric circles Ulises Lima asks whether they are an elegiac verse (610), but when they reach the last drawing, that of four “Mexicans seen from above” (one at each corner of a solid black rectangle), Belano does not hesitate in answering that they’re “Four Mexicans keeping vigil over a dead body” (613). The last sketch anticipates Tinajero’s death and recalls the fact that the novel begins on a November 2nd (Mexican day of the dead) diary entry.

The novel ends with García Madero drawing three window frames, along with the question “What’s behind the window?” A star, for the first frame; a bed sheet for the second. The last remains unanswered and the novel ends. When asked about the meaning of the “windows” at the end of *The Savage Detectives* Bolaño answered: “Of course there is an answer and it’s not easy or simple, but isn’t either, as the rabbit told Alice, difficult or complicated. Of course, I cannot tell you the answer.”⁵⁰



Figure 14 Roberto Bolaño, “Ventanas”

⁵⁰ “Por supuesto que existe una respuesta y no es fácil ni sencilla, pero tampoco como le dijo el conejo a Alicia, es difícil o complicada. Por supuesto, también que yo no puedo decírtela.” Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De Roberto Bolaño*. (Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003), 200.

One can almost hear Alice ponder: “and what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?” (*Alice in Wonderland*, 1) *The Savage Detectives* draws a parallel between poetry as a thematic center for the text and the novelistic genre as its form, and it is rather significant that García Madero, at the beginning of the text asks what a *rispetto* is (4) and, before he starts drawing the “Mexicans seen from above” as well as the “windows”, asks his road trip companions “some tricky questions, questions that were problems too, and enigmas (especially in the Mexican literary world of today), even riddles”, such as what free verse, a tetrastich, a syncope, a sestina, a glyconic, or a hemiepes was (591-592)—the subject matter of the questions, by the end of the diary entry, turns from a taxonomy of poetry to one of street slang. The novel seems to play with the notion of a novelistic structure as that of a building, so much so that a reading of the “windows” as such (even if or especially because García Madero identifies them in that way) is as plausible as reading the final three squares not as windows but rather as projection screens. The final “window”, for which the characters in the scene make no interpretation, appears to fragment, just a moment before it is shattered—but may also suggest the light emanating from a projection screen, the technological unsatedness of avant-gardist visual poetry in direct allusion.

In the summer of 1927 Tablada publishes in *El Universal* part of his memoirs, most notably editing a number of his diary entries from February of 1913 dealing with the *coup d'état* that brought about the assassination of Francisco I. Madero and José María Pino Suárez. Such editing is to be understood as part of an effort to continue the rehabilitation of his public image: Tablada had, in 1910, published under a pseudonym *Madero-Chantecler* (a “zoological-political tragicomedy” that satirized Madero as the “apostle of democracy”) and later, in September of 1913, the laudatory text *La defensa social*, praising the military feats of Victoriano Huerta. Huerta seized the presidency

after Madero's death and, in fact, Tablada's exile was prompted by his fall in 1914⁵¹. As Tablada begins to recall "*la decena trágica*" (the duration of the *coup*) fourteen years later, he describes a relatively placid existence afforded by the hard work and economic stability that guarantees the artist time for both work and repose: the artist's study, his beloved books and the pieces of art patiently collected, the Japanese garden where stray birds find refuge. Such quotidian sight Tablada characterizes as symbolic. The poet then turns his head in the opposite direction, only to perceive the Zapatista bonfires lighting up on the Ajusco slope. "I saw myself in the rubble of a material and moral collapse and then in exile, in utter helplessness, having to start over, in the most adverse conditions, the struggle for life or rather, for mere subsistence."⁵² Mallarmé may have written about shipwrecks and the depths of the abyss but Tablada, exiled in New York, has to give French and swimming lessons in order to make a living.⁵³ The pitfalls of governmental patronage, particularly in the political instability brought about by a revolution, are perhaps as dire as those posed by engaging in a "commerce of ideas". Marius de Zayas, after collaborating with Stieglitz in the "291" gallery formed his own, the Modern Gallery, more directly pursuing a commercial enterprise. Later, de Zayas associated with Walter Conrad Arensberg and opened the De Zayas Gallery. Both galleries had a brief existence and, as Saborti argues in *Una visita...*, a financial dispute between de Zayas, Arensberg and Charles Vignier (their French associate) revolving around two paintings by Cézanne meant the end of the De Zayas gallery and the beginning of de Zayas's silence and

⁵¹ Tablada, José J, Herrera R. Lozano, Andrés Calderón, and Genevieve Galán. *La Defensa Social: Historia De La Campaña De La División Del Norte (1913)*. (xix)

⁵² "Me vi a mí mismo entre los escombros de un derrumbamiento material y moral y luego en el exilio, en absoluto desamparo, teniendo que volver a comenzar, en las condiciones más adversas, la lucha por la vida o por la simple subsistencia, mejor dicho." Tablada, José J. *La Ciudadela De Fuego: A Ochenta Años De La Decena Trágica*. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993. (15)

⁵³ Tablada, José J, and Antonio Saborit. *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*. (59)

disappearance from public life. (72-79) Like Tablada, de Zayas begins writing his memoirs, finishing the manuscript for *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York* in 1954—fragments of it would first appear in the April 1980 edition of *Arts Magazine* (edited by Francis M. Naumann) and later, in its entirety and book form, in 1996. When collaborating with *Camera Work* de Zayas once argued⁵⁴ that the difference between photography and artistic photography lied in that “The first is a process of indigitation, the second a means of expression. In the first man tries to represent something that is outside of himself; in the second he tries to represent something that is in himself. The first is a free and impersonal research; the second is a systematic and personal representation.” The towering figure of the artist, of the poet, it would seem, may be articulated around the systematic and personal representation of his/her production. However, how can a systematic and personal representation be aligned with, or incorporated into a project of communal identity? Is the rehabilitation of a public image after questionable political alliance or failed commercial enterprise not as relevant as the reception or rejection received by the national or artistic community for which it is intended? Octavio Paz, paying tribute to Tablada, sums up his fate: “Ideograma de tu suerte: / *Hormigas sobre un grillo inerte.*”⁵⁵ Tablada’s haiku “En Liliput” draws a parallel between Gulliver, Swift, the poet, and an ant-covered cricket. May one speak not of fate, but of a poet constrained by modernity, Liliputians replaced by Zapatistas—by Mexicans seen from above.

⁵⁴ Marius de Zayas, “Photography and Artistic Photography”, *Camera Work*, no.41. Reprinted in *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979. (58-60)

⁵⁵ “José Juan Tablada (1871-1945)” Reprinted in Paz, Octavio, and Luis M. Schneider. *Generaciones Y Semblanzas: Escritores Y Letras De México*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987. (633)

CHAPTER 2

A POETICS OF LIGHT

Pound once drafted an essay, “L’uomo nel Ideogramma,” which began by noting the contents of the first men’s world, earth, plants, sun, sky, moon, and went on to note the dominance of the human body in radical after radical.
--Hugh Keener, *The Pound Era*⁵⁶

El tiempo llegará sin duda en que abandone este lirismo en aras del supremo menester, o mester poético, pero es que estoy comprometido, más comprometido, con la mirada que me mira en el espejo que con el esplendor del cielo.
--Salvador Elizondo, *Autobiografía Precoz*

“I think this country is so truly destitute spiritually, that many times I have started to think about the lack, for example, of traitors. Treason in Mexico never occurs, and there’s a simple reason for it: because there is nothing to betray.” So declares Salvador Elizondo in an interview with Elena Poniatowska.⁵⁷ Claiming his predilection for aristocracy, lamenting the fall of Maximilian I as the emperor of Mexico, and siding with Porfirio Díaz—if only for introducing proper table manners

56 According to Kenner, “L’uomo nel Ideogramma” is Ezra Pound’s “unpublished ms. on what seems to be wartime paper, at Brunnenburg, 1969.” Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 104, 569.

57 Most texts analyzed in this chapter have not been translated into English; unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. “Creo que este país es tan verdaderamente indigente espiritualmente, que muchas veces me he puesto a pensar en la carencia, por ejemplo, de traidores. En México el delito de traición no ocurre jamás, y eso, por una sencilla razón: porque no hay nada que traicionar.” Originally published in the August 18th 1966 edition of *Novedades*. The interview was reprinted in *La Jornada*. Mexico, D.F: DEMOS. April 7th, 2006.

to Mexican families—it is fairly obvious that Elizondo’s aim in this interview is fashion himself a provocateur. When Poniatowska presses him on the idea of treason, and the need for traitors, Elizondo simply states his admiration for treason as an act of absolute individualism. In this chapter I explore the manner in which Elizondo constructs a notion of the *poet/writer-critic* developed in his autobiography and his essays (including those on Ezra Pound and José Juan Tablada) in relation to a “poetics of light”. Articulating the figure of the *poet/writer-critic* as a mythical literary figure involves a meditation on the nature of writing that, found under a poetics of light, turns into a meditation of the visual image—verbalized, painted, and photographed. Making images visible brings the human body into this meditation for doing so not only demands sight and gazes, but the human body is negotiated as the bridge connecting an artist’s interiority with the external world. Such a negotiation, central to creative act in Elizondo’s writing, fuels the pursuit of a method, a method I will explore in the following pages.

In “El signo y el garabato” (1968)⁵⁸ Octavio Paz claims that Elizondo’s “criticism of reality and language does not stem from reason or justice but from an immediate, direct and aggressive evidence: pleasure.”⁵⁹ Pleasure, Paz notes, has a threefold implication: “the imaginary satisfaction of an animal instinct and a physical response to a psychological need, the brutal irruption of the body and its humors in the philosophical fellowship, and the gradual fading of the phallus and croup in the libertine’s boudoir.”⁶⁰ Above all, pleasure is an instantaneous choice—an affirmation

⁵⁸ Originally published in a collection of essays bearing the same of title of his text on Elizondo, I will be referring here to its reprinting in Paz, Octavio, and Luis M. Schneider. *Generaciones Y Semblanzas: Escritores Y Letras De México*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987).

⁵⁹ “Su crítica de la realidad y del lenguaje no parte de la razón o de la justicia sino de una evidencia inmediata, directa y agresiva: el placer.” *Ibid* (610)

⁶⁰ “es la satisfacción imaginaria del instinto animal y la respuesta física a una necesidad psíquica, la irrupción brutal del cuerpo y sus humores en el convivio filosófico y el paulatino desvanecimiento del falo y la grupa en el lecho del libertino.” *Ibid*, 611.

(613). Such a claim does not fall far from Elizondo's notion of treason as an act of absolute individualism; that "affirmation" as an act of individualism that does not need to be verbalized. But Elizondo, of course, chooses to do so. Elizondo begins his essay "La autocrítica literaria"⁶¹ deeming the task a clumsy art *par excellence* for it demands a degree of bias on the part of the writer while running the risk (and necessity) of writing about him or herself in the third person, thus creating a rhetorical figure—the writer, generally speaking and in abstract terms. A literary self-critique can easily become, according to Elizondo, an "autobiographical critique", where "judgments about the qualities of the work are mixed with anecdotes and where the writer's own critique gives birth to the character or the ghost of who one was, who we wanted to be or maybe will be, but never who we really are, here, now: as if the critique was influenced more by desire than analysis."⁶² For Elizondo, although the writer is the *a priori* of the text (199), once literary self-critique begins the writer becomes part of the text, for "writer and man; both are equally blurry images, especially if they are looked at through a critical lens. They share, too, having been reduced by virtue of writing to the condition of concrete things, communicable, real and literary."⁶³ In broad strokes, the critique of one's own writing amounts to the formulation of the subject as a factor in the literary creation (195) allowing the writer-critic to bridge the divide between an interior and exterior reality—even if at the expense of the former (198-199). The literary text becomes an array of

⁶¹ Included in Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 193-203.

⁶² "los juicios acerca de las cualidades de la obra se confunden con las anécdotas y donde la crítica de sí mismo hace nacer al personaje o al fantasma del que fuimos, del que hubiéramos querido ser o del que tal vez seremos, pero nunca del que somos realmente, aquí, ahora: como si la crítica estuviera más condicionada por el deseo que por el análisis." *Ibid*, 193.

⁶³ "el escritor y el hombre; ambas imágenes son igualmente borrosas, sobre todo si se las mira a través de algún lente crítico. Tienen en común, también, el haber sido reducidas por virtud de la escritura a la condición de cosas concretas, transmisibles, reales y literarias." *Ibid* 195.

ambiguous or discrete sets of relationships between signs enacting the drama of a masked character that applies the mechanics of writing to the analysis and interpretation of reality, whether that reality is behind or beyond the eyelids or whether such a reality would actually be writing itself, as if it were no longer a thing that the spirit, the will and technique combined to produce something else or an effect, but a thing that is the result of itself.⁶⁴

It is worth noting the role that the eyelids play as the gates, as the divide between an internal and external reality. A writer's critique of his own work is dressed up with a sort of empiricism that attempts to "collect and define what is called literary experience, aiming to systematize its history, formulating a tractatus or establishing an Academy, in order to unravel or perfect, way of experience, the mysterious methods governing writing."⁶⁵ Whether in fiction or essayistic work—often the generic line blurs when classifying Elizondo's texts—the quest to unravel the "mysterious methods governing writing" involves the presence of the writer-critic. More succinctly, "literary drama is expressed in the fact that the goal the writer aims for is unknowable, unless that goal is formulated as the literary work is being written, so the closer the critical endeavor is to writing, the more effective both become, and in that sense the optimal conditions for writing are those that allow an effectively critical writing."⁶⁶ It is under this premise that I will explore how Elizondo articulates the method followed

⁶⁴ "...conjuntos discretos o ambiguos de relaciones entre signos por los que se representa el drama de un personaje enmascarado que aplica la mecánica de la escritura al análisis e interpretación de la realidad, independientemente de que esa realidad esté más acá o más allá de los párpados o de que esa realidad sea la escritura; como si se tratara no ya de una cosa en la que el espíritu, la voluntad y la técnica se conjugan para producir algo, otra cosa o un efecto, sino de una cosa que es el resultado de sí misma." *Ibid* 203.

⁶⁵ "recoger y definir lo que se llama la experiencia literaria, con el fin de sistematizar su historia, para formular un Tratado o instaurar una Academia, para desentrañar o perfeccionar por la experiencia los misteriosos métodos que rigen la escritura." *Ibid* 199-200.

⁶⁶ "El drama literario se expresa en el hecho de que el objetivo que el escritor pretende alcanzar es incognoscible, a no ser que ese objetivo se vaya formulando a medida que la obra literaria se va haciendo, por lo que mientras más cercana está la crítica a la escritura, más efectiva es una y otra, y en ese sentido las condiciones óptimas de una escritura serían las que permitieran realizar una escritura efectivamente crítica." *Ibid* 202.

in his writing, focusing on the appearance of the human form and the manner in which the visual image transverses from the written text to photography and vice versa.

Salvador Elizondo reluctantly agreed to reissue his autobiography thirty-four years after its original publication. The new edition of *Salvador Elizondo* (1966) forgoes the introductory text of the first edition written by Emmanuel Carballo, bears a different title—*Autobiografía Precoz*—and includes foreword by Elizondo, profile photographs of the author that bookend the autobiography, a short poem, and a final section labeled “Cartapacio”. The final section is composed of a number of sketches and drawings, most untitled and all dating from 1992 to 1998, drawn and painted by the author in pencil and watercolor. There is a drawing pertinent to this study: a set of twelve frames or episodes, each containing a pair of figures in different hues of green, yellow and orange, fluidly depicting, first, two human silhouettes coming into contact or a struggle, fusing with one another to varying degrees in the successive frames until the last couple of figures resemble Chinese written characters. The text “La grafostática u oda a Eiffel” follows the author’s foreword. Although published elsewhere along with six sketches depicting the Eiffel tower⁶⁷, in *Autobiografía Precoz* only the text is printed, allowing for a sharper focus on its verbal content: three stanzas where one or many forces act on a body, suggesting in each instance a way to neutralize, react to or deflect the forces exerted on the body with the final purpose of holding one’s (the body’s) balance or equilibrium. The enigmatic poem is followed by the first of the two photographs of Elizondo—the autobiographic text in effect symbolizing the more than three decades separating the pictures of a young and old Elizondo.

⁶⁷ Elizondo, Salvador. “La grafostática”. *Revista de la Universidad de México*. Nueva época. Febrero 2008, No. 48

<<http://www.revistadelauniversidad.unam.mx/48/elizondo/48elizondo.html>>

In this reissue, the foreword and the inclusion of both photographs highlight the passage of time. Elizondo acknowledges the text as a “presumptuous” book; an irresponsible act of vanity fitting a thirty-three year old and his autobiography. The epigraph remains the same: “We have our erasers in order...”⁶⁸, and though the autobiographical text does not change, Elizondo makes a couple of corrections in the foreword. The presence of others, particularly his parents and a grandmother, is mentioned in the foreword for they are not found elsewhere in the narrative. The passage of time, Elizondo argues, “has changed my disposition towards life, seeing things differently, though it is also true that there are immutable aspects of my personality that, over time, have been refined or blurred, but always remain.”⁶⁹ The text ought to be read, Elizondo claims, not in absolute terms but as an attempt to define life at a given moment. A life, perhaps, but also a literary project. In any case, Elizondo concludes, what’s done is done—“a lo hecho pecho” (11). My analysis of Elizondo’s autobiography here seeks to delineate the manner in which Elizondo articulates the role of writing, and of himself as a writer, in relation to the visual image in photography and the human body.

Elizondo’s madeleine, so to speak, is the first line of Enrique González Martínez’s “Los días inútiles”⁷⁰ (“Sobre el dormido lago está el sauz que llora”/ “Over the sleeping lake the willow weeps”) conjuring up the dreamlike image of the “infinitely naked, infinitely white body” of *schwester* Anne Marie, his German nurse

⁶⁸ A verse from *Elegies* by Propertius “Exactus tenui pumice versus eat...”, Elizondo prefers Pound’s modern interpretation of it, and uses it to exemplify Pound’s translation method in “Pound en español” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000). 186-187

⁶⁹ “ha cambiado mi disposición hacia la vida y ahora veo las cosas de manera diferente, pero también es cierto que hay puntos inmutable de mi personalidad que con el tiempo se afinan o se desdibujan, pero siempre permanecen.” 9-10.

⁷⁰ Published in *La muerte del cisne* (1915), reprinted in González Martínez, Enrique. *Señas a La Distancia: Ciento Treinta Poemas 1903-1952*.

(14).⁷¹ González Martínez was a member of the Ateneo de la Juventud group and Elizondo's great-uncle on his mother's side. Kinship may account for Elizondo's familiarity with the line—presented as an early childhood memory—even if the last stanza of the poem is left unsaid, a significant omission when writing an autobiography: “And while I reconstruct all the past, and I think /of the frivolous moments in my digression, / an immense desire awakens in me / to sob alone and ask for forgiveness”.⁷² The line triggers the visual memory of Anne Marie's body and a “distant echo” of Nazi Germany where Elizondo lived part of his childhood⁷³: “the beating of drums, the rhythmic beat of the goose step on the cobblestones, the whistling exasperation of the fifes and very slow flutter of long red banners hanging from the windows, hitting the façades of the dingy and shivering houses on our street.”⁷⁴ The nationalism presented here as a distant echo and mere display of imagery, is quickly embodied by Anne Marie. In *Gender & Nation* (1997) Nira Yuval-Davis has studied the central role women have played in imagining nation and nationalism. Anne Marie may be read, in effect, as embodying in broad strokes the findings of Yuval-Davis: Elizondo's nurse is presented not just as a maternal figure or agent of biological reproduction, but also a symbol of Nazi ideology, transmitting the

⁷¹ My analysis of the autobiography follows the pagination of the first edition, *Salvador Elizondo*. México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966.

⁷² “Y mientras reconstruyo todo el pasado, y pienso / En los instantes frívolos de mi divagación, / Se me va despertando como un afán inmenso / De sollozar a solas y de pedir perdón.” González, Martínez E, Luis V. Aguinaga, and Angel Ortuño. *Señas a La Distancia: Ciento Treinta Poemas 1903-1952*. (Guadalajara, Jalisco, México : Secretaría de Cultura, Gobierno de Jalisco, 201), 57.

⁷³ Elizondo's father held a diplomatic post in Berlin from 1936 to 1938. For more see Elizondo, Salvador *El Mar De Iguanas*. (Girona: Atalanta, 2010), 15-16.

⁷⁴ “el batir de los tambores, el golpe acompasado del paso de ganso sobre los adoquines, la exasperación sibilante de los pífanos y el aleteo lentísimo de los largos banderines rojos, que colgaban de las ventanas golpeando las fachadas lúgubres y ateridas de las casas de nuestra calle.” *Salvador Elizondo*. (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966), 14.

national culture and delineating ethnic and national boundaries to the child on her care, and finally, as a dramatic participant in the national struggle.

Elizondo thought of his time in Germany as one of the most pleasant instances in his life, for “Everything was regulated: the seasons, domestic discipline, nutrition, effective life, things which directed my German sitter. She was like a Valkyrie, she undressed in front of me in the locker room of the Olympic pool and showed me her body...I remember Germany as a wonderful gym where everything is dedicated to the body. Not the spirit, the body.”⁷⁵ In his autobiography Elizondo recalls Anne Marie egging him on to yell “¡Schweine Juden! ¡Schweine Juden!” at “Jewish children, shivering and emaciated, wandering down our street a few moments, when it was deserted, for the sun to, if nothing else, feed their rachitic little bodies.”⁷⁶ Anne Marie would take Elizondo to the sunflower fields on the outskirts of the city, and would continue to speak, “with no less conviction for having to translate into baby talk, of the greatness of the Führer, of the sublime destiny of the German people.”⁷⁷ Once in the field, hidden from the sight of others, they would undress and while Anne Marie “kept talking about the same things [Elizondo] looked at her body, carefully analyzing that perfect whiteness, the harmonious lengths of that flesh slowly rhyming its movements to the rhythmic swing of huge blossoms in the breeze.”⁷⁸ As a child unable to grasp

⁷⁵ “Todo estaba regulado: las estaciones del año, la disciplina doméstica, la alimentación, la vida efectiva, cosas de la que se encargaba mi nana alemana. Ella era como una valquiria, se desnudaba delante de mí en los vestidores de la alberca olímpica y me mostraba su cuerpo...Recuerdo Alemania como un maravilloso gimnasio donde todo está dedicado al cuerpo. No al espíritu, al cuerpo.” Pagés Rebolgar, Beatriz. “Salvador Elizondo disfrutó su niñez en el gimnasio de Berlín” en *El Sol de México en la Cultura* 436. *El Sol de México*, February 13, 1983.

⁷⁶ “niños judíos que, ateridos y escuálidos, vagaban unos instantes por nuestra calle, cuando ésta estaba desierta, para que el sol, ya que no otra cosa, alimentara sus pequeños cuerpos raquíuticos.” *Salvador Elizondo*. (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966), 14.

⁷⁷ “no con menos convicción por tener que traducir ésta a un lenguaje infantil, de la grandeza del Führer, del destino excelso del pueblo alemán.” *Ibid*, 15.

⁷⁸ “ella continuaba hablando de las mismas cosas yo miraba su cuerpo, analizando detenidamente esa blancura perfecta, las longitudes armoniosas de esa carne que se estremecía

the gravity of his surroundings, Elizondo imagined belonging to both sides of the conflict constantly discussed by the adults around him. A recurring thought, however, brings the memory of his childhood in Germany to a halt: the body of Anne Marie, “the image of that beautiful body lying in the sun among huge sunflower-stems, and in a bitter and sinister flash, the flesh that [Elizondo] loved without understanding, was mangled, gushing blood, the body torn to shreds that the wind lashed against the side of the bombed road.”⁷⁹ Such a gruesome image haunts the young Elizondo and causes him to withdraw from those around him, afflicted with melancholia and “the feeling of knowing reality, but not its meaning.”⁸⁰ Elizondo constructs a notion of interiority resulting from this withdrawal, an interiority that is also the source from where his writing emanates.

Elizondo equates his melancholia, an inexplicable and deaf sadness, to a feeling much like love, both capable of making worlds turn. After a briefly claiming that both Jack the Ripper and Jesus Christ “shared that mood found in the dimmest light of the soul, within which it is possible to explain the world without having such an explanation entail any meaning”⁸¹, Elizondo goes on to add that melancholia is not an annihilating feeling, for it often moves men towards action and violence, towards creation and poetry (18). In his account, the reality found in the external world is gradually eclipsed by the reality of another world, by an interiority inordinately limited but far more apprehensible, asserting that

rimando lentamente sus movimientos con el vaivén acompasado de las enormes corolas movidas por la brisa.” *Ibid*, 15.

79 “imagen de aquel cuerpo hermosísimo tendido al sol entre los enormes tallos de los girasoles y como un chispazo siniestro y amargo esa carne que yo amaba sin comprenderla se desgarraba chorreando sangre y ese cuerpo se rompía en girones que el viento azotaba contra el reborde de la carretera bombardeada.” *Ibid*, 17.

80 “la sensación de conocer la realidad, pero no su significado.” *Ibid*, 18.

81 “compartían ese estado de ánimo que transcurre en la luz más mortecina del alma y dentro del que es posible explicarse el mundo sin que por ello esa explicación tenga un significado” *Ibid*, 18.

In the end, as a writer, I've become a photographer; I press on certain [photographic] plates the look of that interiority and distribute them among anonymous fans. Perhaps my search aims for an extremely faithful impression of a site that, on principle, is forbidden to us all. I think that, after all, insincerity—the emulsion on which those images are perpetuated—when conscious, is the greatest proximity that we can have to truth.⁸²

The parallel drawn between writing and taking a photograph is reinforced when Elizondo later asserts that the substance of poetry are not the mere words that make up the poem, but the vital force that inspires it (21). The rhetorical effect of such a parallel stems from a notion that, when a visual image is not conjured up by words but rather captured in photography, the claim of its veracity is founded on the indexical aspect of the medium. Insincerity here may be understood as the fictional, literary expression found in language. For Elizondo the poet “is either a man who faces eternity momentarily, in which case he lives or concretes, through language, images or sensations,” or is one “who perpetuates the instant living the images or feelings in language, a language that being the very act of creation is itself the creation of his personality and the fulfillment of an aspiration to maximum universality.”⁸³ On either instance, however, Elizondo refers to a “conscious” insincerity—its consciousness or even its conscious use by the poet, calls for a method. “Tractatus rhetorico-pictoricus” offers an approximation.

“Tractatus rhetorico-pictoricus” is divided into three sections: the first is a compilation of axioms or precepts; the second and third are somewhat longer

⁸² “Al final de cuentas, como escritor, me he convertido en fotógrafo; impresiono ciertas placas con el aspecto de esa interioridad y las distribuyo entre los aficionados anónimos. Mi búsqueda se encamina, tal vez a conseguir una impresión extremadamente fiel de ese recinto que a todos, por principio, está vedado. Creo que, después de todo, la insinceridad, que es la emulsión sobre la que esas imágenes se eternizan, cuando es consciente, es la máxima cercanía que podemos tener de la verdad.” *Ibid*, 20.

⁸³ “El poeta, o es un hombre que se enfrenta a la eternidad momentáneamente, en cuyo caso vive o concreta, mediante el lenguaje, imágenes o sensaciones, o bien eterniza el instante viviendo las imágenes o las sensaciones en el lenguaje, un lenguaje que por ser el hecho mismo de la creación y la creación misma de su personalidad es el cumplimiento de una aspiración de máxima universalidad.” *Ibid*, 24-25.

meditations “on secret painting(s)” and “how to paint the *kaki*” respectively. The text explores the writing of a treaty, or tractatus, on painting. The compilation of axioms follow no particular order—precepts are not necessarily derived from or logically developed from other precepts, each marked only by the section sign instead of following a numerical listing. “Tractatus rhetorico-pictoricus” in fact displays the fissures and sutures a tractatus either ignores or hides: “§ Any attempt to write a treaty, though doomed—given the impossible nature of language—is the impossible attempt to establish an order, the attempt to formulate demonstratively the canon of a classic fact.”⁸⁴ In other words, all attempts at writing are attempts at ordering and articulating experience –failed attempts insofar as writing itself is in this text presented as a tractatus on language. Because every tractatus is a critique of treaties that precede it (59), “§ The treaty can only be tentative. Writing of a treaty is impossible in so far as the writing, but not the notion of "treaty" is impossible.”⁸⁵ Much like an essay, a tractatus becomes a display failed attempts, revealing how “§ Every treaty is systematic exposure, on a prescript basis, a critique of the Trattato or methodical discourse that explains the failure of an attempt that, were it to succeed, would have portentous consequences.”⁸⁶ The writing of a tractatus must be written under the premise of its success, for even in failing to achieve its initial goal, it nonetheless provides a glimpse of the author’s unknowable intent in the creation of a literary text.

Presented as a treaty on painting as a craft and discipline—as a method—the text has as a driving force the nature of writing and representation. The choice of

⁸⁴ “§ Toda tentativa de escritura de un tratado, aunque está condenada al fracaso—por el carácter imposible del lenguaje—es el intento de instaurar un orden, el intento de formular demostrativamente el canon de un hecho clásico.” Salvador Elizondo, *El grafógrafo* (México: J. Mortiz, 1972), 57.

⁸⁵ “§ El tratado sólo puede ser una tentativa. La escritura de un tratado es imposible en la medida en que la escritura, pero no la noción de “tratado”, es imposible.” *Ibid*, 64.

⁸⁶ “§ Todo tratado es la exposición sistemática, en forma preceptiva, una crítica del Trattato o discurso metódico que explica cómo se fracasa en una tentativa que, si triunfara, tendría consecuencias portentosas.” *Ibid*, 59-60.

painting instead of photography as a subject for the tractatus offers a better focused analogy to writing, mostly by not engaging with the mechanical aspect of photographic reproduction. Although Elizondo draws brief parallels between photography and painting later in the tractatus (“Just as light is to photography (and to everything), so is water to painting. It directs, leads, dissolves, fixes, overlaps, scares, perpetuates small soot particles so as to satisfy a spiritual requirement”⁸⁷) painting, as a craft and discipline, is read as a producer of visual illustrations (images) the way writing produces their verbal counterpart. As the first two axioms claim, the tractatus is the book that the painter writes while painting and contains what the painter would write about his experience. The third axiom states the beginning of a method: “§ The Tractatus consists of three correlated parts involved in the pictorial operation: the first is devoted to the eye, the second to the hand and the third to light. One deals with the genius, the other with skill or technique. The third, dealing with poetics, is the impossible treaty.”⁸⁸ This is one of the first instances where Elizondo suggests a “poetics of light”, an underlying current found across a number of his texts regarding the visual image. “§...To whoever writes it, the precepts equal axioms or unprovable propositions governing, not the operation of painting, but the exhibition or description of the act of painting in order to reduce the components of this act to synthetic terms, to principles consistent with the precept stated as an axiom.”⁸⁹ While writing a tractatus on painting, a number of notions remain at the margin: taste, the history of

⁸⁷ “Lo mismo que la luz es a la fotografía (y a todo), así es el agua a la pintura. Ella ordena, conduce, disuelve, fija, sobrepone, ahuyenta, perpetúa las pequeñas partículas de hollín de tal manera que satisfagan un requisito espiritual.” *Ibid*, 68.

⁸⁸ “§ El Tractatus consta de las tres partes correlativas que intervienen en la operación pictórica: la primera está dedicada al ojo; la segunda a la mano y la tercera a la luz. Una se ocupa del genio, la otra de la destreza o la técnica. La tercera, que trata la parte poética, es el tratado imposible.” *Ibid*, 56.

⁸⁹ “§...Para quien lo escribe, los preceptos equivalen a axiomas o proposiciones indemostrables que rigen, no la operación de pintar, sino la exposición o descripción del acto de pintar y que sirven para reducir los componentes de este acto a términos sintéticos, a principios que concuerden con el precepto enunciado como axioma.” *Ibid*, 58.

art, personality, and sensibility (57). Underlying every structure of a tractatus is a strictly geometric form of thought that seeks to define art in terms of the relations found among the elements that constitute a given text (58); for Elizondo the artist's commitment to his work occurs with the adoption of a method. The method a painter chooses is the result of "...strictly manual experiences or experiences optical in nature. Or deeper experiences which combine both conditions. Or experiences dealing with pure luminosity that fall outside the realm of language and thus constitute the substance with which the painting is done: a magical substance."⁹⁰ In this formulation language, and writing in particular, illustrates the structures behind that magical substance: it takes a young man murdering an elderly pawn-broker with an ax for one to know what a writer is asking and what his "literary-other" responds ("La autocrítica literaria", 159). Among the axioms only one offers a definition of a precept: "§ *Precept.* - There is only one real, concrete form of thought: writing. Writing is the only proof I have that I think, ergo, that I am. Were it not for writing I would think that the very thought that conceives the reality of the world as an illusion and a lie is itself an illusion, a lie."⁹¹ For Elizondo there are two essential forms of representation: writing as the exposition of an idea in time, and painting as the disposition of an idea in space (62). In the tractatus the notion of space is formulated as a more stable visual perception, a more concrete form of thought, by virtue of the writing that suggests it—*time* is not explored in the same manner space is in the tractatus. However, in response to the question of "what is painting" another axiom brings the visual perception of

90 "...experiencias estrictamente manuales o experiencias de índole óptica. O experiencias más profundas en las cuales se conjugan ambas condiciones. O bien se trata de experiencias de la luminosidad pura que caen fuera del dominio del lenguaje y que por ello constituyen la substancia de la que el pintar está hecho: una substancia mágica." *Ibid*, 59.

91 "§ Precepto.— Sólo existe una forma real, concreta, del pensamiento: la escritura. La escritura es la única prueba que tengo de que pienso, ergo, de que soy. Si no fuera por la escritura yo podría pensar que el pensamiento mismo que concibe la realidad del mundo como una ilusión y como una mentira es, él mismo, una ilusión, una mentira." *Ibid*, 60-61.

space back to writing in its discursive form: "...Painting is, among other things, a meditation on the phenomenal nature of light. A painting is a discourse on a topic. Only to the extent that this axiom is valid, it is possible to speak of abstract painting."⁹² In order to elaborate on painting as a meditation on the nature of light, the focal point of the tractatus turns to the reception and interpretation of painting as a discourse in order to claim that "§ Paintings have no public [audience], they have gazes. It has eyes in the same way that the drama has spectators. A painting is a representation of the drama of light."⁹³ Throughout these axioms painting upstages writing precisely because of its formal and spatial approximation to light; the last two sections of the tractatus serve to illustrate and articulate writing as painting.

In the second part of the "Tractatus", a longer axiom "on secret painting(s)", the text turns into a brief meditation on the *gaze*. For Elizondo, "The gaze is cursed because the nature of the eye is the nature of what transposes the threshold between the self and the outside. The revelation of a secret is the end of science, and the heroism of art is an indiscretion, every act of contemplation is a scandal and every realization a crime."⁹⁴ Between the mirror and the gaze, Elizondo affirms, lies a secret world, equally secret to our interior world, filled with "...images that were not intended to reach any retina and to never be reflected on the surface of any mirror. Invisible images."⁹⁵ Revealing those invisible images remains the task of art, for "Mystery is the golden rule of creation, the work itself, the realization of a secret act.

92 "...La pintura es, entre otras cosas, una meditación acerca de la naturaleza fenomenal de la luz. Un cuadro es un discurso acerca de un tema. Sólo en la medida en que este axioma es válido, es posible hablar de pintura abstracta." *Ibid*, 62.

93 "§ La pintura no tiene público; tiene miradas. Tiene ojos de la misma manera que el drama tiene espectadores. Una pintura es la representación del drama de la luz." *Ibid*, 64-65.

94 "La mirada es maldita porque la naturaleza del ojo es la de lo que transpone el umbral entre el Yo y lo de afuera. La revelación de un secreto es el fin de la ciencia y el heroísmo del arte es una indiscreción, toda contemplación un acto de escándalo y toda realización un crimen." *Ibid*, 65.

95 "...imágenes que no estaban destinadas a tocar ninguna retina y a no ser reflejadas jamás en la superficie de ningún espejo. Imágenes invisibles." *Ibid*, 66.

To subtract form from the world only to uncover it, to deliver it naked, wrapped only with the beauty of the nefarious, to the gaze this is perhaps the most joyful and infamous of unpardonable sins: to create.”⁹⁶ Creating is, in fact, the subject of the last part of the tractatus, putting on display instructions on how to paint a “kaki”. The text does not specify what a “kaki” is, for such a question becomes irrelevant: to paint a kaki is to think a kaki and to think a kaki is to know a kaki, and to know a kaki is to be a kaki. The painting of a kaki extends beyond the its definition; explaining how to paint a kaki without defining it steers the tractatus towards calligraphy and in particular the technique involved in the creation of a Chinese written character and its “Use of synthesizing instruments; the writing is the result of the combined action of gravity and muscular pressure between the surface of the paper and the tip of the brush. This technique responds to the application of an economy in which the invention and attribution of a method is a game of the spirit”.⁹⁷ Thus, the method turns into a convention that allows for the description of a procedure that exists almost as a parenthetical annotation, beyond its original intent and final outcome. Delineating this parenthesis, Elizondo offers the following image:

The degree of ink absorption, the time of gradual impregnation and the radius of centrifugal penetration of the ink from the point on which the brush touches the paper, as the volume of water with which the ink has been mixed, the ability of the brush and the pressure applied to the brushstroke, all of them require the perfect planning and programming of the various operations, and the timing of a greater operation covering all the proceeding stages.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ “El misterio es la regla de oro de la creación, la obra en sí, la realización de un acto secreto. Sustraer a la forma del mundo para descubrirla, para entregarla luego desnuda, envuelta sólo con la belleza de lo nefando, a la mirada es, quizás, el más jubiloso e infame de los pecados imperdonables: el de crear.” *Ibid*, 67.

⁹⁷ “utilización de instrumentos sintetizantes; la escritura es producto de la acción conjunta de la gravedad y de la presión muscular entre la superficie del papel y la punta del pincel. Esta técnica responde a la aplicación de una economía en la que la invención y atribución de métodos es un juego del espíritu”. *Ibid*, 70.

⁹⁸ “El grado de absorción de tinta, el tiempo de impregnación gradual y el radio de penetración centrífuga de la tinta desde el punto en que el pincel toca la superficie del papel, según sea el volumen de agua con el que la tinta ha sido mezclada, la capacidad del pincel y la presión con

The painting of a *kaki* is no longer the concern of the procedure; by putting on display the material, physical operation of painting, the tractatus returns to writing and contributes to a subject explored time and again in Elizondo's *oeuvre*: calligraphy and the Chinese written character. In his autobiography, Elizondo saw calligraphy "as a sensible expression of an *instantaneous* pictoric or poetic mood" that afforded him the possibility of projecting works where, through the learning of the Chinese written characters, would allow him to achieve, in a more congruent manner, that *freezing* of images he'd already attempted with the use of language (47). *Farabeuf*, the novel that materialized such a possibility, had already been published and awarded the prestigious Xavier Villaurrutia prize in 1965 by the time Elizondo published his autobiography. I will analyze the novel, among other texts, in the following chapter; here I would like to turn to Ezra Pound, a towering figure in Elizondo's literary canon, for it is around Pound and his work that Elizondo continues to mythify the notion of the *poet* as a figure that not only transcends language, written and visual media, but also as a figure capable of operating with light. Using Pound to illustrate this, Elizondo claims that "When the poet makes visible the poetic 'image', he realizes an operation with light. So-called 'pure' poetry is, therefore, a poetry about light—generally about the *amount* of light. Light can only be measured in these terms...or space or time."⁹⁹

Ezra Pound's presence in the writings of Salvador Elizondo is documented by Elizondo himself as translator, editor, and author who, in a number of critical essays

que la pincelada ha sido aplicada, todo ello exige la perfecta planeación de una programación de las diversas operaciones, los tiempos de esa operación mayor que abarca todas las etapas del procedimiento inicial." *Ibid*, 71-72.

⁹⁹ "Cuando el poeta hace visible la 'imagen' poética, realiza una operación con la luz. La poesía llamada 'pura' es, por eso, una poesía acerca de la luz—generalmente acerca de la cantidad de luz. Sólo en esos términos puede medirse la luz...o el espacio o el tiempo." Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría del infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 179.

and interviews, never fails to highlight his interest in Pound's work. In 1962 Emilio García Riera, Juan García Ponce and Salvador Elizondo founded the magazine *S.NOB*, which ran from June to October of that year and totaled a number of seven issues. Elizondo, the publication's director, declared in a 2004 interview: "We wanted to make a literary magazine, but not strictly literary, because our generation really liked *el relajó*...we wanted to be anarchist snobs. We wanted to talk about everything, about Pound, sex, drugs..."¹⁰⁰ *S.NOB* magazine had, among its recurrent collaborators, Jorge Ibargüengoitia, Tomás Segovia, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and Leonora Carrington, and included an array of articles (written and photographic) that, not unlike other publications and artistic production of the time, reprised and revised certain avant-garde procedures in content as in form. Elizondo's article for the last issue of *S.NOB* "Morfeo o la decadencia del sueño" includes a couple of Chinese ideograms and the photograph around which the text of *Farabeuf* would eventually be constructed. In the second issue of the magazine Luis Guillermo Piazza writes the article "El libro secreto de Pound", which announces that in 1950 Pound, at St. Elizabeth's, "gave us, slyly wrapped in old newspapers, his book THE CHINESE WRITTEN CHARACTER AS A MEDIUM FOR POETRY, with the apparent name of another author: *Ernest Fenollosa*."¹⁰¹ The brief article ends claiming "'Everything Flows' and the plan intricate, Pound said when presenting his work, which had to appear and circulate in slyness. SNOB will transcribe in coming issues the major theses and lesser-known

¹⁰⁰ "Queríamos hacer una revista literaria, pero no estrictamente literaria, porque en aquella generación nos gustaba mucho el relajó...queríamos ser anarquistas snobs. Queríamos hablar de todas las cosas, de Pound, de sexo, de drogas..." Héctor de Mauleón interviewed Elizondo for *Confabulario*, the literary supplement for the newspaper *El Universal*.

¹⁰¹ "nos entregó disimulado en periódicos viejos su libro THE CHINESE WRITTEN CHARACTER AS A MEDIUM FOR POETRY, con el aparente nombre de otro autor: Ernest Fenollosa." *Revista S.nob*. (México: Editorial Aldus, 2004), 34.

concepts of this work.”¹⁰² There is no follow up to this article in subsequent issues of the magazine—the article’s playful tone and obviously inaccurate bibliographical data on *The Chinese Written Character*...suggest a text whose primary objective is that of edifying the figure of Pound at St. Elizabeth’s as the archetype of a damned poet whose production is surrounded by an aura of secrecy and rebelliousness. Elizondo would, however, translate into Spanish Pound’s edition of Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* twelve years after this article for *Plural* magazine, in May of 1974.

Salvador Elizondo, a translator in his own right, wrote briefly on occasion of Vázquez Amaral’s translation of the *Cantos*. “Pound en español” and “De los *Cantares*” are two texts that deal directly with Pound and belong to *Teoría del infierno* (1992), a collection of essays written by Elizondo between 1959 and 1972. “Pound en español” is a thinly veiled criticism of Vázquez Amaral’s translation of the *Cantos*. Although Elizondo concludes that “The publication of this book is not the end but the beginning of Ezra Pound in Spanish. I’m sure that this translation of the *Cantos* will not take long in favorably influencing the development of poetry in our language”¹⁰³, the bulk of the essay focuses on the difficulty of translating texts as literary and linguistically dense as the *Cantos*—or so it wants to portend. As the essay begins Elizondo acknowledges the difficult art of translating poetry and claims that, to stop and compare Vázquez Amaral’s translations to the original text would, inevitably, lead to a “discussion not unlike one regarding to the borders of Hungary, as it pertains to the limits between the subtle categories of version, translation, paraphrases,

¹⁰² “‘Todo fluye’ y el plan es intrincado, dice Pound para presentar su obra que tuvo que aparecer y circular disimulada. De ella SNOB irá transcribiendo en números próximos las principales tesis y los conceptos más desconocidos.” *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “La publicación de este libro no es el fin de Ezra Pound en español sino el principio. Estoy seguro de que esta traducción de los *Cantares* no tardará en influir saludablemente en el desarrollo de la poesía en nuestra lengua.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 192.

transformation, and transfiguration”.¹⁰⁴ Half way through the essay Elizondo makes a point of noting that Vázquez Amaral’s version is one “attended by a very special circumstance”—Pound’s direct input, if not involvement (as with the suggestion to give the title of *Cantares* to the translation, in direct reference, among others, to the *El cantar de Mío Cid*) with the final text presented by Vázquez Amaral. Elizondo also notes that, before Vázquez Amaral, he only had knowledge of and up to the Canto CIX, and that the rest he now knows only in Spanish due to Vázquez Amaral’s version. Elizondo concludes: “I have reached Paradise through the lacuna. If on previous occasions I had severely judged Vázquez Amaral’s translations, especially in light of my own, I cannot help but recognize that the full version has shown me what I now consider the maximum virtues of this great work of poetry of our century.”¹⁰⁵ Elizondo will still claim that his translation of Canto XLV is better than Vázquez Amaral’s, even if he reluctantly admits that “Vázquez Amaral’s complete translation is one of the truly important events of our literary moment because it reveals to us not only the *totality* of this poem but also its intrinsic *unity*.”¹⁰⁶

“De los *Cantares*” begins as it attempts to answer the question of what poetry is and how to go about analyzing it. For Elizondo there are, generally speaking, two procedures in order to engage such a dilemma: “The first consists of *analyzing* poetry

¹⁰⁴ “Tratándose del difícil arte de la traducción de la poesía...no creo que sea el caso de detenerse a hacer el cotejo sumario de las versiones de Vázquez Amaral con los originales, ya que ello nos llevaría a una discusión similar a la de las fronteras de Hungría por lo que respecta a los límites entre las sutiles categorías de versión, traducción, paráfrasis, transformación y transfiguración que a estas alturas ya figuran en ella.” *Ibid*, 185.

¹⁰⁵ “He llegado al Paraíso a través de la laguna. Si en algunas ocasiones anteriores había yo juzgado con cierta dureza las traducciones de Vázquez Amaral, especialmente en función de las que yo mismo había intentado, no puedo menos que reconocer que su versión completa me ha revelado las que ahora considero máximas virtudes de esta gran obra de la poesía de nuestro siglo.” *Ibid*, 188.

¹⁰⁶ “Si bien sigo creyendo que mi traducción del Canto XLV es mejor, estoy convencido de que la traducción completa de Vázquez Amaral es uno de los hecho verdaderamente importantes de nuestro momento literario, porque nos revela no solamente la totalidad de este poema sino también su unidad intrínseca.” *Ibid*, 188.

linguistically, the result of which is philology. The second, less successful but more profound, consists in *interpreting* poetry in terms, almost always parallel, to a *mythical* figure.¹⁰⁷ The second procedure, he goes on to explain, may be characterized by highlighting intertextual relationships between different literary texts and figures, such as finding Odysseus in Joyce's *Ulysses*, or Orpheus in *The Divine Comedy*. Given the density of the *Cantos* opting for one procedure over the other would inevitably result in an incomplete analysis; this is reason enough for Elizondo to conclude that, for the critical task at hand, "Perhaps it is necessary to approach it in a more sentimental and immediate manner, applying either method at the critic's discretion, but never forgetting that many times, as Valéry said, understanding a poem, capturing its meaning, precisely nullifies the substance that allows the poem *be*."¹⁰⁸ As part of the more sentimental and immediate interpretation that Elizondo makes of Pound's work, he speaks about the up-and-downs of his spiritual disposition towards the poet and his work, eventually leading him to "judge Pound as a *poet-critic*, which is to say, that his poetry is about the making of poetry."¹⁰⁹ There are two instances where Elizondo's perception of Pound and his work take on a new significance: Richard Avedon's photographic portrait of Pound¹¹⁰ as he is released from St. Elizabeth's, and an audio recording of Pound himself reading poetry. Pound's written work, as it were, is not only complemented but, in a sense, liberated when taking into account Avedon's portrait of Pound and the poet's audio recording. Elizondo claims that understanding

¹⁰⁷ "El primero consiste en analizar la poesía en función lingüística; de ello es fruto la filología. El segundo, menos fructífero pero más profundo, es el que consiste en interpretar la poesía en términos—casi siempre paralelos—de una figura mítica." *Ibid*, 168.

¹⁰⁸ "Tal vez es preciso por ello atacarla de una manera más sentimentalista e inmediata, aplicando uno u otro a discreción, pero sin olvidar que muchas veces, como dice Valéry, la comprensión de un poema, la captación de su significado, nulifica justamente esa sustancia por la que el poema es." *Ibid*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ "juzgar a Pound un poeta crítico; es decir: que su poesía trata del hacer poesía." *Ibid*, 170.

¹¹⁰ A reproduction of this portrait is included in Luis Guillermo Piazza's text on Pound. (S.NOB No. 2)

Avedon's portrait in light of Pound's voice recording will ultimately reveal the logical development of not just a vocation, but of a way of enunciating the poetic (174). In other words, Elizondo claims, "What was heard on that recording corresponded on a very high degree with what was seen on the photograph" insofar as "what the poem *truly* was, was obtained through a mysterious synthesis involving various sensorial operations invoking at all times the manifestation of an essence that is able to convert the things of the most blunt reality into perfect forms, communicating a poetic structure essentially sonorous."¹¹¹ The incorporation of different media in the (sentimental and immediate) analysis that Elizondo proposes for Pound and his work will have a significant repercussion in Elizondo's own literary production.

Elizondo highlights, in this particular essay, that his analysis of Pound's work (as well as that of Joyce's) was founded on the notion of *montage* as conceptualized by Eisenstein. The logic governing Eisenstein's *montage*, stemming from the Chinese written character, enabled Elizondo to see Pound's *Cantos* "as a great construction much like a montage, but a montage of *what...?*"¹¹² The montage in the Pound's work, Elizondo argues, was one of figures related to History: "It was, then, a grand allegory by which the poet designated, in the order of verbal images, a certain set or a specific entity that fell outside of language's designating power and which could be alluded to through that sign constructed from the elements of poetry's language."¹¹³ Put in a

¹¹¹ "Lo escuchado en ese disco correspondía en tan alto grado a lo visto en la fotografía, que lo que el poema era verdaderamente, se obtenía por una síntesis misteriosa de varias operaciones de los sentidos que invocaba en todo momento la aparición de una esencia que alcanza a convertir las cosas de la realidad más grosera en formas perfectas, comunicantes de una estructura poética esencialmente sonora" Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 183.

¹¹² "Veía yo entonces en esa magna construcción como un montaje ¿pero un montaje de qué...?" *Ibid*, 175.

¹¹³ "Se trataba, entonces, como de una magna alegoría mediante la que el poeta designaba, en el orden de las imágenes verbales, a un determinado conjunto o a una entidad específica que estaba fuera del poder designatorio del lenguaje y a los que se podía aludir mediante ese signo construido de los elementos del lenguaje de la poesía." *Ibid*, 175.

different, perhaps more succinct way, Elizondo interprets the use of different languages throughout the *Cantos* (including the Chinese written character) as an attempt by Pound to “illustrate the volition in the poet’s soul”¹¹⁴ when giving life to the multiple characters or figures, related to History, that inhabit the work: the poem, as it were, accumulates languages in order to transcend them, rendering the poet once again with the sole power to designate. Following Elizondo’s argument the poetic image, or rather, the verbal image may be obtained “through the use of *figures* (we say that the language of poetry is a figurative language in the same way we say that Chinese writing is made up of ‘figures’). These figures may be of two kinds: sonorous, conceptual, and successive in the West as they are silent, visual, and instantaneous in China.”¹¹⁵ Elizondo does not stray far away (if at all) from Pound’s postulates on Fenollosa’s *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. In fact, when Elizondo translates Pound’s version of the Fenollosa manuscript, it is only in the introductory notes to the text that Elizondo highlights, in 1974 (date of its publication), “the area of this essay that has suffered most damage over time is that of the general notions on which it’s based, particularly the notion of ‘nature’ that today carries a host of very different meanings from the ones it held for Fenollosa in 1908.”¹¹⁶ Striving to avoid a more detailed clarification—one that would ultimately end up derailing the text into a philosophical argument dealing with transcendentalism or Emersonian organicism (Kenner, 230)—Elizondo suggests his readers to “mentally replace the

¹¹⁴ “ilustrar una volición en el alma del poeta” *Ibid*, 175.

¹¹⁵ “mediante el empleo de figuras (decimos que el lenguaje de la poesía es un lenguaje figurado de la misma manera que decimos que la escritura china está hecha de ‘figuras’). Esas figuras pueden ser de dos clases: sonoras, conceptuales y sucesivas como en Occidente, y silenciosas, visuales e instantáneas como en China.” *Ibid*, 176.

¹¹⁶ “que la zona de este ensayo que mayores estragos ha sufrido con el paso del tiempo es la de las nociones generales en que se funda y muy particularmente en la de ‘naturaleza’ que ya hoy comporta un cúmulo de significados muy diversos del que todavía tenía para Fenollosa en 1908.” Fenollosa, Ernest F, Ezra L. Pound, and Salvador Elizondo. *Los Caracteres De La Escritura China Como Medio Poético*. (México: UAM, 2007), 8-9.

Fenollosian notion [of nature] for others, such as ‘knowledge’, ‘experience’, ‘reality’, etcetera, since doing so will not demerit the original idea about the composition of poetry in its most general sense.”¹¹⁷ In any case, the more instantaneous (non-linear, or non-sequential), visual (concrete), and silent (without a phonetic component¹¹⁸) figures produced by the Chinese ideogram are more attuned with Elizondo’s own work at the time, as he notes how during the 60s his research on Pound’s work focused on both a Poundian sinology and, on a more general level, silence as a medium for poetry (175).

In Elizondo’s work silence, after all, does not only refer back to Pound, but to Mallarmé as well (who would dare deny silence the condition of a poetic element, if such is not the fate of the blank spaces and indentation play at work in Mallarmé’s poetry (177)) who back in 1897 had already tried, according to Elizondo, to create “a poetic ideogram using the visual properties of typography and their disposition on the page with *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* and I’m not sure if the calligrammes and its successors up to concrete poetry, visual poetry, etcetera, are not the same attempt, or a result of it.”¹¹⁹ The formulation of silence, in poetry or via the

¹¹⁷ “sustituir mentalmente la noción fenollosiana por otras, tales como ‘conocimiento’, ‘experiencia’, ‘realidad’, etcétera, sin que desmerezca por ello la idea original acerca de la composición poética en su sentido más general.” *Ibid*, 9.

¹¹⁸ According to Haun Saussy’s “Fenollosa Compounded: A Discrimination”, Bernhard Karlgren had shown in his *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (1923) and *Grammata Serica Recensa* (1940) that “the overwhelming majority of Chinese characters, even many that had long been taken to be compound pictograms, were formed from a semantic clue added to a phonetic clue, and that the phonetic clues taken together gave a clear if not always definite map of the pronunciation of archaic Chinese.” Pound attempted to rebut Karlgren’s “reconstruction of phonetic word-families in ancient Chinese” in an unpublished essay written in Italian, tentatively titled “Ideogrammario”, undated but probably from the early 1940s. However, Pound ultimately asserts: “It seems to me that only with the greatest reserve and after precise consideration should one have recourse to a phonetic explanation.” Fenollosa, Ernest, Ezra Pound, Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 8, 180.

¹¹⁹ “un ideograma poético valiéndose de las propiedades visuales de la tipografía y de su disposición en la página con su poema *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* y no estoy

Chinese ideogram, serves as a passageway to the consolidation of a visual aesthetic, getting us closer to the study of visual poetry and the artistic production that uses photography and film as a medium. It is as though, in reference to “Tractatus rhetoric-pictoricus”, Elizondo refuses to pass over in silence that we cannot speak about.

If Pound is not the Great Poet of the History of the 20th century, Elizondo argues, then he undoubtedly deserves such a title for at least the first half of the century (182). He goes on to add, “Not in vain had I invoked, at a moment of my contact with Pound’s work, an aesthetic that being strictly *calligraphic*, I had assumed to be *cinematographic* as well.”¹²⁰ Elizondo even ventures a hypothesis where tracing back the origin of Pound’s poetic writings to the Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin* is as valid an argument as one that finds the governing principles of the Chinese ideogram in the very same scene (182). The *cinematographic* aesthetic that Elizondo encounters in Pound “would naturally be linked to a form that pretended to express the true meaning of an epoch such as ours.”¹²¹ For Elizondo, it is Pound the one who clamored for a *prose kinema* (182) in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”: “The ‘age demanded’ chiefly a mould in plaster, / Made with no loss of time, / A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster / Or the ‘sculpture’ of rhyme.”¹²² Neither Pound nor Elizondo, in “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” or “De los Cantares”, elaborate much more on the concepts of “prose kinema” or “cinematographic aesthetics” respectively, but the presence of film as a medium that the ‘age demanded’ has been readily

muy seguro si los caligramas y sucedáneos hasta la poesía concreta, poemas visuales, etcétera, no son la misma tentativa o un resultado de ella.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 176.

¹²⁰ “No en vano había yo invocado, en un momento de mi contacto con la obra de Pound, una estética que siendo estrictamente *caligráfica*, yo había supuesto también ser *cinematográfica*.” *Ibid*, 182.

¹²¹ “naturalmente estaría ligado a una forma que pretendía expresar el verdadero significado de una época como la nuestra.” *Ibid*, 182.

¹²² Reprinted in Pound, Ezra, Lea Baechler, and A W. Litz. *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. (New York: New Directions Pub, 1990), 186.

established; the quest to incorporate such an aesthetic into the very writing of literary texts has yet to go through the production of visual poetry during the avant-garde movements of the second decade of the twentieth century.

As mentioned here earlier, Elizondo's *Teoría del infierno* (though published in 1992) is a collection of essays originally written between 1959 and 1972. In the introductory note entitled "Prólogo a posteriori" Elizondo writes: "Readings and the experience of the last twenty years seem to highlight [the essays] mistakes and point out their deficiencies, but they also note some intuitions that the criticism that followed has confirmed."¹²³ Elizondo finds himself compelled to publish his collection of essays to the readers acknowledging that those who may have read, "for example, *The Pound Era* by Hugh Kenner, published in 1973 and read by me in 1985, cannot help but consider my opinions on Joyce and Pound too naïve or too hasty, as they were pedantic and snobbish when they were published at the time in literary and cultural supplements twenty or more years ago."¹²⁴ Unwilling to fully accept any critical stumble he may have taken, Elizondo makes sure to emphasize that "in general terms the public welcomes, even today, that norm apparently invariable of literary taste, which has no choice but to qualify as pedantic that which does not understand and snobbish what is still unknown."¹²⁵ In any case, Elizondo clarifies, "Hugh Kenner

¹²³ "La lectura y la experiencia de los últimos veinte años parecen subrayar sus errores y señalar sus deficiencias, pero también marcar algunas intuiciones que la autoridad o la crítica ulterior han confirmado." Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 9.

¹²⁴ "por ejemplo *The Pound Era* de Hugh Kenner, publicado en 1973 y leído por mí en 1985, no podrá menos que considerar mis juicios sobre Joyce y Pound o demasiado candorosos o demasiado apresurados, como lo fueron de pedantes y esnobs cuando en su momento se publicaron en revistas literarias y suplementos culturales hace veinte años o más." *Ibid*, 9.

¹²⁵ "en términos generales el público se acoge, hoy también, a esa norma al parecer invariable del gusto literario, que no tiene más remedio que calificar de pedante lo que no entiende y de esnob lo que todavía ignora." *Ibid*, 9.

says a lot better than I do the things I said and about which I wrote thirty years ago.”¹²⁶

Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era* is a monumental achievement in its own right and a fitting contribution to Poundian studies; there are a few instances in the text that will help further this analysis—instances regarding, primarily, “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”, Pound’s notion of the image, and Fenollosa’s study of the Chinese ideographs.

In *The Pound Era* Kenner notes how Ezra Pound once wrote in a letter that “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” was his “attempt to condense the James novel.” (16, 564) It is also in regards to this poem that Kenner declares: “Pound’s concern ran, if it is our vocation to write, and seize moments in our writing, [to] seize glimpses, there to seize, real”. (71) The real appears to be seized, if at all, momentarily, in glimpses, through the creation of images. For Kenner “Pound was most deeply entangled in the aesthetic of glimpses in the *Lustra-Mauberley* period, the years when the elements of his mature method were being worked out. It is a period of looking back wistfully, a period of laments for departed experience, the period inaugurated by *Cathay*” (71). When Wyndham Lewis associates Pound with time, Kenner points out, such an appreciation “was not radically wrong... for the drive toward fragmentation of what had been temporal narrative was undertaken because narrative itself had disclosed its tendency toward static constructs. The fragments, the moments, shattering that block, recover time: through each of them rushes process” (32). When Pound, in the summer of 1916, reduces “the whole of art” to “a) concision, or style, or saying what you mean in the fewest and clearest words. b) the actual necessity for creating or constructing something; of presenting an image, or enough images of concrete things arranged to stir the reader” (61), Kenner highlights that “We need not wonder that he ultimately made it a moral criterion, nor that his poiesis welcomes ideograms, voiced as

¹²⁶ “Hugh Kenner dice mucho mejor que yo las cosas que dije y sobre las que escribí hace treinta años” *Ibid*, 11.

monosyllables and affirming semantic boundaries by their integrity of design on the page” (91-92). According to Kenner, “By 1920 the fifth canto was in print, and the aesthetic of Paterian elegy which its first page recalls, the aesthetic he had exorcised in *Mauberley*, was replaced by the studied aesthetic of ‘hard squares’ worked out under the sign of Fenollosa” (71). The sign of Fenollosa: the Chinese ideogram, its conceptualization and the role it would play in the blurring of the boundaries separating the written word and the visual image would, for Pound, crystallize the presentation of an image in the concision of a sign.

Kenner writes how Pound, “When he found in Morrison’s Chinese Dictionary that sign of the sun above the horizon 旦 dawn (a Chinese says *tan*) he wrote beside it, ‘Magnificent ideogram—phanopoeia’: his word for the casting of images on the visual imagination, and here a visual image of a thing visible” (103). The ideogram thus enabled the poet, for Pound, to exert ‘the whole of art’ in a single character—a concise presentation of an image in the fewest and clearest words. Fenollosa was not, however, the first to become enthralled by the Chinese written character. The Chinese ideogram caught Francis Bacon’s attention before 1605, when he stated the not well known proposition of “the use in China, and the kingdoms of the High Levant, to write in characters real, which express neither letters nor words in gross, but things or notions; insomuch as countries and provinces, which understand not one another’s language, can nevertheless read one another’s writings” (*Advancement of Learning* 166). For Kenner, Bacon’s notes on the Chinese character clearly showed how “from Jesuit intelligence even then filtering back to Europe, that the characters registered things, not the mere sounds men emit in things’ presence” (223). In *ABC of Reading* Pound, though he never mentions Bacon’s encounter with the Chinese character, does not fail to claim that “...all your teachers will tell you that science developed more rapidly after Bacon had suggested the direct examination of phenomena, and after

Galileo and others had stopped discussing things so much, and had begun really to look at them, and to invent means (like the telescope) of seeing them better” (20). Kenner notes, however, that in spite of Bacon’s observations on the Chinese character, “ideograms during their first Western incursion presided over what was to become an anti-poetic” (224). Furthermore, “The Descartes who (Boileau complained) had ‘cut the throat’ of poetry, and the Locke who made poetry a diversion of relaxed or enfeebled minds, lived among learned men who the rumors of Chinese analogy had encouraged to think of words naming things, and words as many as there were things, and language a taxonomy of static things, with many an ‘is’ but ideally no verb” (224-225). Fenollosa, who had mistakenly taken these notions as ‘medieval’, set out to refute them “on behalf of ‘the language of science which is the language of poetry’” (225) for he saw that the ideogram, rather than naming *things* presented *actions*—the verb took precedent over the noun. In any case, Kenner argues, “In the field specified by a cluster of ideograms, the mind of a western reader supplies whatever syntax he assumes responsibility for, and small errors impose strange deflections” (215), Fenollosa included. However, such strange deflections are, for Kenner, “undertaken with open eyes. There is no question of seduction by half-understood ideograms; no ideograms are in evidence on these pages of Fenollosa’s. There is no question of misunderstanding; the notes are unambiguous. It is a question, purely and simply, of taking all necessary measures to protect the course of a poem” (213). Protecting the course of the poem and attempting to synthesize two continental civilizations, for Fenollosa, who “was at the center of the Meiji period’s experimenting with the ideas and technologies of the West, the most up-to-date versions whereof were always preferred” (Saussy 11). When Fenollosa returned to America in 1890 to take up the curatorship of Asian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, he wrote on a personal note a detailed sense of mission: “First, I must remember that, however much I may

sympathize with the past civilizations of the East, I am in this incarnation a man of Western race, and bound to do my part toward the development of Western civilization” (Saussy 11). Fenollosa’s conceptualization of the ideogram became intertwined with the most up-to-date ideas and technologies of the West that, within the realm of the arts, now pointed in the direction of mass media, film, and photography.

Near the end of *The Chinese Written Character...* Fenollosa, addressing the reader, writes: “You will ask, how could the Chinese have built up a great intellectual fabric from mere picture writing? To the ordinary western mind, which believes that thought is concerned with logical categories and which rather condemns the faculty of direct imagination, this feat seems quite impossible” (53). The answer Fenollosa encounters is that the Chinese “language with its peculiar materials has passed over from the seen to the unseen by exactly the same process which all ancient races employed. This process is metaphor, the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations” (54). Pound would annotate, next to Fenollosa’s answer in the original manuscript, “Compare Aristotle’s *Poetics*: ‘Swift perception of relations, hall-mark of genius’” (54). According to Haun Saussy, “For Pound the identity of interests between himself and Fenollosa was total”, the point of convergence being the Image: “The accumulation of energy, or meaning, of luminosity in a single figure describes equally the Image (Pound, 1913)¹²⁷ and the Chinese character (Fenollosa, 1903/1919).” (9) Kenner, drawing from Pound’s *Literary Essays* and *Gaudier-Brzeska: a Memoire*, briefly sketches the poet’s notion of the image: “‘An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’: that is the elusive Doctrine of the Image. And, just 20 months later, ‘The image...is a radiant node or cluster; it is

¹²⁷ “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” Pound, Ezra. *Literary Essays*. (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1954).

what I can, and must perforce, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing.’ And: ‘An *image*...is real because we know it directly.’” (185) As for Fenollosa, he would go on to claim that a true noun, by itself, does not exist in nature, but rather “Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one, things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them” (*Chinese* 46). Kenner, on Fenollosa, highlights that “‘The forces which produce the branch-angles of an oak lay potent in the acorn,’ wrote Fenollosa; and again, ‘The development of the normal transitive sentence rests upon the fact that one action in nature promotes another; thus the agent and object are secretly verbs.’ And what does the Chinese writer set on his page? Why, a picture of an active thing” (159). The visual nature of the Chinese character (relegating its phonetic component to a lower plane) is better conveyed with the simile of a photograph. As Kenner notes, the “Natural sciences formed on minute attention produced in the 19th century a new order of descriptive exactness, obligated by the fact that there was no accurate way to reproduce a picture” (168), but with the rise of photography in the late 19th and early 20th century, it is not surprising to find out that for *The Chinese Written Character*...“There were several drafts, none final. Fenollosa had meant it, quite in Emerson’s way, for a public lecture, and four pages of a 1901 notebook list lantern slides he intended to have made: ‘Photograph of a man doing something, as ‘Man leads horse’” (158). The ideogram, for Fenollosa, “sketches a process, seizes some continuous happening...and fixes it...with three or four minimal vigorous spatial gestures” and the word, “freed from evanescent sound, transcends the moment of utterance and re-utters itself in a vibrating field of force” (160). The ideograph, which supposed to correspond with things, after Fenollosa, corresponded with actions, since

“His great, his unassailable originality stemmed from his conviction that the unit of thought was less like a noun than like a verb, and that Chinese signs therefore denoted processes (‘the ideograph meaning ‘to speak’ is a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it’)” (225). As Pound noted, “The Egyptians finally used abbreviated pictures to represent sounds, but the Chinese still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things” (*ABC of Reading* 21). Fenollosa “was teaching Emerson to his best Japanese students at the time he began looking closely into ideograms, there to find confirmation of Emerson’s etymologist who ‘finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture’”, an inspection that “enabled Fenollosa for the first time in centuries to restore metaphor, ‘the swift perception of relations’ (Aristotle’s ‘hallmark of genius’), to the heart of a poetic process not peripheral to but concentric with the most intent working of the focused mind” (230). As the confection of metaphors are prioritized in the poetic endeavor and the creation of an image becomes imperative in such a task (“in the fewest and clearest words”, thus rendering it closer to visual rather than verbal expression), the ideogram becomes the conceptual catalyst for a visual poetry that, after Mallarmé’s experimentation, further asserts its presence as a recurring motif for the avant-garde.

Salvador Elizondo, in an essay titled “José Juan Tablada” (*Teoría del infierno*, 1992) sets out to explore the phase in Tablada’s literary production dealing primarily with visual poetry. For Elizondo “Tablada could be an archetype of the relationship between poet and poetry, and even his theosophical distractions are an accurate index of his valiant eagerness to achieve, through language, a sensible synthesis of whole

verbal complex.”¹²⁸ Tablada’s work, which until his ideographic work remains faithful to the postulates of *modernismo*, indulges in a certain degree of literary exoticism—allowing Elizondo to highlight that “if that exotism turned East it would find the barrier of a general principle of vision (and therefore writing), that is to say, of thought, radically different from the one at work in traditional poetry, to say nothing of poetry in Castilian, in the West.”¹²⁹ Elizondo finds in the first line of the poem “Exégesis” (1918) a spiritual adscription to Orient (“Es de México y Asia mi alma un jeroglífico”) while at the same time an articulation of the literary challenge Tablada is about to face. Tablada’s “*Lawn-tennis*”, also written in 1918, allows Elizondo to characterize Tablada as one of the most fervent postulants of the avant-garde, and declares,

I realize for the first time, because I see it and hear it, the purpose that the poet will pursue from there on. Tablada was well aware that Castilian was the language where it was possible to transcribe poetically the resonant clatter of the tennis racket combined with the brief bounce of the ball, which would not matter were it not to combine, with the onomatopoeic element of language, another purely visual element that would figure prominently in subsequent attempts: the visually strophic element.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ “Tablada podría ser un arquetipo de esta relación entre el poeta y la poesía e inclusive sus distracciones teosóficas son un índice certero de su denodado afán de conseguir, mediante el lenguaje, una síntesis sensible de todo un complejo verbal.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 81.

¹²⁹ “si ese exotismo se volvía hacia Oriente encontraría la barrera de un principio general de la visión (y por lo tanto de la escritura), es decir del pensamiento, radicalmente diferente del que habría operado en la poesía tradicional, no se diga de la poesía en castellano, en Occidente.” *Ibid*, 78.

¹³⁰ “por primera vez me percató, porque la veo y la oigo, de la finalidad que el poeta habrá de perseguir a partir de allí. Tablada se dio perfectamente cuenta de que era el castellano la lengua a la que era posible transcribir poéticamente el traqueteo vibrátil de las raquetas combinado con el escueto rebote de la pelota, lo que no tendría mayor importancia si no fuera porque en ello se combina con el elemento onomatopéyico del lenguaje otro elemento de carácter estrictamente visual que habría de figurar prominentemente en las posteriores tentativas: el elemento visual estrófico.” *Ibid*, 83.

The visual structure for “*Lawn-Tennis*” is such that the odd numbered stanzas (three out of the total six; every stanza composed of four pentasyllabic lines) begin at the left side of the page while, the even numbered stanzas, begin after an indentation roughly the length of the previous stanza, to the right. Such a structure, then, suggests the back and forth of a tennis ball and, added to the onomatopoeic ‘bouncing of the ball’ found in the pentasyllabic lines, takes the poem beyond the words imprinted on the page. The creation of a poetic image, which would eventually find a form in some visual poems, appeared to reach the senses sooner than any sort of onomatopoeic effect. Elizondo goes as far as taking the liberty of restructuring the last stanza of Tablada’s “Noche del trópico” (1937), which reads “¡es igual / a una cruz / de cristal!...” in the form of a cross, the first and last lines of the stanza written vertically, having the middle line function as the crossbar, thus ending Tablada’s original poem in what would have been an ‘ideal form’ (85). Elizondo argues that the history of poetry appears to be but the review of the methods employed by other poets (79), and sees the poetic image replacing the poetic idea in new poetry (81). As the realm of science requires an ever-urgent expansion of its lexicon, Elizondo argues, the arts move in the opposite direction, tending towards a more instantaneous, methodic realization—

“Synthesis and analysis are the two poles of expression.”¹³¹ At the former pole of expression is, of course, where Elizondo places Tablada, praising him for creating an equivalent of the haiku not only for poetry written in Spanish but for the West at large, and stresses Tablada’s “eagerness for extreme verbal synthesis would only highlight the inability to go further without subverting not only the essentially syntactic nature of language, but its traditional apprehensible form as well.”¹³² Elizondo concludes his

¹³¹ “Síntesis y análisis son los dos polos de la expresión.” *Ibid*, 79.

¹³² “su afán de extrema síntesis verbal no haría sino poner en evidencia la imposibilidad de ir más allá sin subvertir no sólo la naturaleza sintáctica esencial de la lengua, sino también su forma aprehensible tradicional.” *Ibid*, 86.

essay commenting on Tablada's late literary production, one where the poet sought to introduce into his poetry a number of elements relating to popular Mexican culture. The attempt to incorporate into poetry the motifs found in the work of the Mexican muralists led Tablada, Elizondo claims, to a rather absurd and delirious nationalist populism (88) with the publication of *La Feria*.

The essay ends without Elizondo writing any more on Tablada's attempt to contribute to the nationalist cultural agenda. Elizondo does not comment on Tablada's tarnished public image after supporting Victoriano Huerta (arguably the nation's modern figure of the traitor) nor does he write about the poet's exile and return to Mexico. Elizondo does, however, swiftly notes Pound's fate and acknowledges the "insults from those who saw in him the politician rather than the poet who, since the publication of its first book, in 1908, had incorporated into the universal poetic canon a new way of handling poetic values and formulas."¹³³ Furthermore, Elizondo highlights, "Those who seek to draw civics lessons from poetry, particularly his countrymen, have accused him of not setting a good example when his country needed him most. This disapproval is ethical, not aesthetic. After all, the personal biases of a poet matter very little."¹³⁴ Elizondo notes that Pound, after all, edited *The Waste Land* and secured the funds for the publication of *Ulysses*. Pound continues to be, according to Elizondo, an "Undisturbed inhabitant of the world of poetry; his ivory tower, however, was located at the center of world history, and from his vantage point the poet remained a witness, if not a kind of actor, in the drama of an age that has seen the

¹³³ "el denuesto de aquellos que veían en él más al político que al poeta que desde la publicación de su primer libro, en 1908, había incorporado al acervo poético universal una nueva modalidad de manipulación de los valores y la fórmulas poéticas." *Ibid*, 151.

¹³⁴ "Aquellos que pretenden extraer de la poesía lecciones de civismo, sus compatriotas particularmente, lo han inculpado de no haber dado un bueno ejemplo cuando su país más lo necesitaba. Esta reprobación es de orden ético y no estético. Después de todo, las inclinaciones personales de un poeta importan bastante poco." *Ibid*, 166.

dislocation, increasingly violent, of a continuity proposed by liberalism."¹³⁵ Elizondo's dismissal of Tablada after the publication of *La Feria*, and the notion of Pound as an actor in the drama of History, are quite telling regarding the concept of nation—and treason—in his *oeuvre*: they can't capture his interest the same way his own fixed gaze on the mirror does. As I will explore in the following chapter, national cultural imagery is either dismissed, in the case of *Farabeuf*, or unveiled as a façade, as a stage prop, as articulated in "Narda o el verano." What remains a concern, however, is the human body.

There is a short, untitled text, a fragment not even a page long, found in Elizondo's *Cuaderno de escritura* that begins by raising the question "In which part of the body lies that proclivity towards the impure?"¹³⁶ When a universal condition leading us towards degradation manifests in ourselves, the text argues, we adjust our aspirations to the always pressing determination of ambiguity: "We are then like a mistake from the gods, like a typo in a banal book. Image ... moment ... How strange is the order of these dimensions!"¹³⁷ Under such a premise, the writer declares, he would set out to write "a novel that did not have a single order of reality involved in the very substance of the text. If I could to write it, it would mean that the very substance of the world are words ... and in a way, that I am God."¹³⁸ Because an aspiration to godliness

¹³⁵ "Habitante imperturbado del mundo de la poesía, su torre de marfil, sin embargo, estuvo situada en el centro del mundo de la historia, y desde su mirador inasequible el poeta no dejó de ser el testigo presencial, cuando no una especie de actor, del drama de una época que ha visto la dislocación, cada vez más violenta, de la continuidad que proponía el liberalismo." *Ibid*, 151.

¹³⁶ "¿En qué parte del cuerpo reside esa proclividad a lo inmundo?" Elizondo, Salvador. *Cuaderno De Escritura*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 139.

¹³⁷ "Somos entonces como un error del dios; como una errata en un libro banal. Imagen...instante... ¡Qué extraño es el orden de esas dimensiones!" *Ibid*, 139.

¹³⁸ "una novela en la que no hubiera un solo orden de la realidad que no estuviera involucrado como substancia misma de ese texto. Si yo consiguiera escribirla, eso querría decir que la substancia misma del mundo son las palabras... y, en cierto modo, que yo soy el dios." *Ibid*, 139.

is of the highest order, the gods are all that which is not reality (139). But the reality of the body is unescapable even when, as illustrated at the end of the “Tractatus...”, writing and painting requires pressing of a brush or a pen against a canvas or a sheet of paper. Or the pressing of a camera shutter for the writer to take snapshots of his interiority in order to distribute them among anonymous fans. Writing on Bataille’s *Somme Athéologique* Elizondo found an attempt to “build a systematic philosophy that synthesized inner experience with reality. When [Bataille] sensed that the procedure to achieve such purpose was closely linked to the erotic experience, he signaled, certainly, to an important truth in our time, in our society, only now becoming apparent.”¹³⁹ In similar fashion, writing on de Sade, Elizondo claims: “I am infinitely more interested in the ‘mechanics’ he had devised for creating collective intercourse or the recipes for making aphrodisiac chocolates rather than his pedestrian *Weltanschauung* which certain myopic critics, perhaps suffering from acute presbyopia, strive to attribute to attribute to him...”¹⁴⁰ Again, aesthetics rather than ethics, and the pursuit of a method, as the driving force behind Elizondo’s writing. In “Tractatus rhetorico-pictoricus” there is an axiom that brings back the human body to the center of the Sadean mechanics and of Bataille’s systematic philosophy synthesizing inner experience with reality:

§ *On the presence and manipulation of women in the workshop.* –In the artist's workshop women inevitably conjures up the anatomical notion we have of

¹³⁹ “construir una filosofía sistemática que sintetizara la experiencia interior con la realidad. Cuando intuyó que el procedimiento para lograrlo se encontraba estrechamente ligado a la experiencia erótica, señaló, seguramente, la importancia de una verdad que en nuestra época, en nuestra sociedad, sólo comienza a ser evidente.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Teoría Del Infierno*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 77.

¹⁴⁰ “Me interesaban infinitamente más las ‘mecánicas’ que él había ideado para realizar coitos colectivos o las recetas para confeccionar bombones afrodisiacos que esa *Weltanschauung* pedestre que ciertos críticos miopes, o quizá exageradamente présbitas, se esfuerzan en atribuirle...” Elizondo, Salvador. *Salvador Elizondo*. (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966), 38.

nature in general and our bodies in particular. Its eminently plastic matter is used to change, albeit virtually, common notions about the virtues of human flesh, so full of defects in and of itself. Every woman holds a secret, this is why it's unadvisable for them to be in the proximity of toxic substances such as lead oxide and etching and in areas where it is most archetypes are handled.¹⁴¹

The axiom, which may be read hint of irony, reveals (or reinforces) the notion of the female body closely linked, on one hand, to “nature”, and on the other, to the defective notions regarding the “virtues” of the human flesh. The malleability and plastic matter of the body, the axiom states, enables the artist to “handle” it as an archetype, challenging and even destroying common notions attributed to the form. The body, now gendered and responding to the erotic, sexual experience that echoes not only Georges Bataille and Marquis de Sade, but also *schwester* Anne Marie, is further complicated when photography becomes central to the creation of a literary text.

¹⁴¹ “§ *De la presencia y manipulación de mujeres en el taller*. —La mujer en el taller del pintor convoca ineluctablemente la noción anatómica que tenemos de la naturaleza en general y de nuestro cuerpo en particular. Su materia eminentemente plástica sirve para modificar, aunque sea virtualmente, las nociones comunes acerca de las virtudes de la carne humana, tan llena de defectos de por sí. Toda mujer encierra un secreto, esto es lo que las hace desaconsejables en la proximidad de substancias tóxicas como el óxido de plomo y el aguafuerte y en ámbitos donde lo que más se maneja son los arquetipos.” Elizondo, Salvador. *El Grafógrafo*. (México: J. Mortiz, 1972), 60.

CHAPTER 3
A POETICS OF THE BODY

*quel corpo luminoso parrà più splendido,
il quale da più oscure tenebre circondato sia...*

*and a luminous body will show itself greater
when it is set against a darker background.
--Leonardo da Vinci, Light and shade¹⁴²*

Ramón López Velarde's "The last odalisque" (*Zozobra*, 1919) prompted José Juan Tablada to comment "What a poet, what astonishing simultaneity of brain and heart, how did he manage to make past and future converge in his heartbeat! That was an archangel, one of God's seraphim, who fell for an instant on the ground and bounced off our mud with such impetus that he left us behind."¹⁴³ Erotic mysticism, the perception of time and the constant attempts at capturing it in an instant and, above all, the body—all these notions abound in Elizondo's oeuvre, most noticeably in *Farabeuf* (1965). The novel received the Xavier Villaurrutia Award, became a central text in Elizondo's literary production, and brought about not only immediate literary acclaim, but the perception of being a notoriously difficult text. An expected wave that

¹⁴² Leonardo, and H. A. Suh. *Leonardo's Notebooks*. (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2005), 86.

¹⁴³ Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Spanish are my own. The original reads: "¡Qué poeta, qué pasmosa simultaneidad de cerebro y corazón, cómo supo hacer que convergieran el pasado y el futuro en los latidos de su corazón! Ése fue un arcángel, un serafín de Dios, que cayó un instante en la tierra y rebotó sobre nuestro barro con ímpetu tal que se nos fue." Letter sent to Rafael López from New York on September 10th, 1922. Included in Cabrera, de T. N. *José Juan Tablada En La Intimidad: (con Cartas Y Poemas Inéditos)*. (México: Impr. Universitaria, 1954), 181.

ebbed rather quickly, the novel's critical reception established the parameters for a reading that, parting from a Saussurean analysis *de rigueur*, affirmed the novel's sacral aspirations. In "Yin / Yang"¹⁴⁴ Severo Sarduy argues that Elizondo wants "to prove the presence of the signified, prove that every signifier is no more than a rhetorical figure, theater, the writing of an *idea*, in other words, an *ideo-gram*... The issue here is one of metaphoric philology. What gave rise to graphy, of what reality is every letter a hieroglyphic, what does each sign hide and displace? : those are the questions raised by *Farabeuf*" (21-22). In "El signo y el garabato"¹⁴⁵ Octavio Paz ventures an answer and suggests a reading of *Farabeuf* that stems from "The last odalisque", particularly the lines that read: "Voluptuous melancholy: the charms / of Pleasure's calligraphy / twine about the soft body on / which Death inscribes its scrawl" (López Velarde, 65). According to Paz, *Farabeuf* is a work built around parallel series of signs that reflect each other, and whose combinations produce images and situations that are similar and yet slightly different from one another (614). The agglomeration of signs, Paz argues—one referring to the next and back on itself—transforms the signs into a scrawl, and the scrawl, as in López Velarde's poem, becomes the unintelligible signifier of death: "That is the original reality, the source and end of all metaphors. And that reality is undecipherable."¹⁴⁶ And so, in a span of no more than three years after the publication of *Farabeuf*, Sarduy's reading appears

¹⁴⁴ Sarduy's brief essay on Elizondo's *Farabeuf* first appeared in the magazine *Mundo Nuevo* No. 13, July 1967. It would later be included in *Escrito sobre un cuerpo* (1968). I refer here to the English translation. Sarduy, Severo, and Carol Maier. *Written on a Body*. (New York, NY: Lumen Books, 1989).

¹⁴⁵ Originally published in a collection of essays bearing the same of title of his text on Elizondo, I will be referring here to its reprinting in Paz, Octavio, and Luis M. Schneider. *Generaciones Y Semblanzas: Escritores Y Letras De México*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987).

¹⁴⁶ "Esa es la realidad original, la fuente y el fin de todas las metáforas. Y esa realidad es indescifrable." Paz, Octavio, and Luis M. Schneider. *Generaciones Y Semblanzas: Escritores Y Letras De México*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987), 616.

to open up the novel to critical interpretation while Paz manages to shut the novel off to radically new readings.

Some twenty years later Dermot F. Curley's *En la isla desierta* appeared as the first book-length scholarly work fully devoted to Elizondo's oeuvre. Given that novels such as *Farabeuf* and *El hipogeo secreto* (1968) break away from traditional narrative categories and conventions, Curley argues, "some critics have made a Herculean effort to construct a plot; others have identified central issues, while still others have resorted to obvious—and not so obvious—influences in order to find a logical and coherent explanation for the existence of a fictitious, strange and unique world."¹⁴⁷ A hermetic oeuvre such as Elizondo has often yielded an equally hermetic scholarly production to reflect it. A Herculean effort may be one much like Juan Carlos Ubilluz's *Sacred Eroticism: Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski in the Latin American Erotic Novel*. In the chapter dedicated to *Farabeuf* Ubilluz takes as a point of departure the novel's lack of plot, scene and characters in order to align it with the *nouveau roman*. While Elizondo repeatedly denied Alain Robbe-Grillet's postulates for the *nouveau roman* as a point of reference for his novel, Ubilluz seems to ignore the author. There is another instance in the chapter when, citing an interview where Elizondo claims the novel is "The chronicle of an instant" (*Farabeuf*'s original subtitle), Ubilluz clearly states "In spite of Elizondo's agreement with Curley, *Farabeuf*, in my view, is not the chronicle of one but two different instants" (144). Ubilluz sees the novel as "the ambivalent conception of eroticism as a ritualistic torture (the Leng Tch'ê) in which the victimizer/man identifies with the victim/woman so as to experience the loss of

¹⁴⁷ "algunos críticos han realizado un esfuerzo hercúleo para construir una trama, otros han logrado identificar temas protagónicos, mientras que todavía otros han recurrido a influencias obvias—o no tan obvias—con el fin de encontrar una explicación lógica y coherente de la existencia de un mundo ficticio extraño y singular." Curley, Dermot F. *En La Isla Desierta: Una Lectura De La Obra De Salvador Elizondo*. (México: UAM, Unidad Cuajimalpa, 2008), 85.

individuality in the sacred, and as an act of modern surgery in which an active man/libertine/surgeon remains in a position of mastery as a passive woman/victim/patient pays alone the price of transgression” (13-14). Ubilluz argues for the use of *hypercharacters* (143), a term of his own coining, to analyze *Farabeuf*. Much like one character refers to the next, parallel signs that reflect one another, Ubilluz argues that the novel consists of six *tableaus*: sequences or scenes that take place in an apartment in Paris, a public square in Beijing, Dr. Farabeuf’s amphitheater and, in a sense, on the surfaces of a mirror, a painting (Titian’s *Sacred and profane love*) and the photograph of the Leng Tch’é. Elaborating on the notion of *tableau vivants* (‘living pictures’, a 19th century parlour-game in which living people adopt the postures of characters in a famous painting) Ubilluz articulates the concept of *tableau mutants* (141). In the end, Ubilluz’s inventive critical approach does little to break the novel’s hermetic seal by adding yet another layer of signification in his interpretation.

A number of doctoral dissertations, scholarly books and articles have been devoted to study Elizondo’s work in general and *Farabeuf* in particular. There are those who, following Curley’s assertion, have identified recurring themes and central issues, such as Adriana de Teresa’s *Farabeuf: Escritura E Imagen* (1996) and Elba Sánchez Rolón’s *La Escritura En El Espejo: Farabeuf de Salvador Elizondo* (2008). There are also those whose primary objective is to retrace some of the historical and textual references found in the novel, such as Rolando J. Romero’s “Ficción E Historia En Farabeuf” (1990) and Tae J. K. Kwon’s *La Presencia Del I Ching En La Obra De Octavio Paz, Salvador Elizondo Y José Agustín* (1998). Yet the hermetic seal surrounding the novel persists; a seal that has kept the novel (and the scholarly work surrounding it) from establishing a literary path forward, from finding or generating a noticeable influence in other literary texts following its publication. The barren legacy of Elizondo’s oeuvre was of great concern for the author himself who, ten years after

the first printing of *Farabeuf*, made it abundantly clear in an interview with Jorge Ruffinelli. Elizondo acknowledges that his novel opened up a “strange” perspective in Mexican literature, a perspective that “almost nobody followed. [The novel] was commented on, very much so, but I believe that any attempts that take as a point of departure a writing of this nature, have not been very effective, especially in the context of a Mexican literature that pursues paths completely different to those I set out to find with the writing of *Farabeuf*.”¹⁴⁸ Elizondo goes as far as admitting that *El hipogeo secreto*, a continuation of the literary project that began with *Farabeuf*, is a novel where the writing becomes completely “autistic” (34). “After *Farabeuf*” Elizondo claims, “not even sensible experience has any place in my work. Almost everything becomes mental.”¹⁴⁹ In a frank and desperate gesture, Elizondo confesses: “While I could do mental puns or wordplay, everything was fine, but now I have reached the end point of the puns and I’m desperate because I do not know what I’ll do... I’ve arrived, after ten years, at a point where I have to find another way out that is not through one of those mental puns or whatever you call them.”¹⁵⁰ Standing at such a dead end prompts Elizondo to ponder on the literary fate and legacy of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett as possible exits to his conundrum, only to find *Finnegans Wake*’s critique of language far more appealing than Beckett’s return to theatre—if

¹⁴⁸ “una perspectiva que casi nadie siguió. Se comentó, se ha comentado mucho, pero creo que los intentos hechos a partir de una escritura de esa naturaleza, no son muy efectivos, sobre todo en el contexto de la literatura mexicana, que busca otros caminos completamente diferentes a los que yo pretendía encontrar en la escritura en *Farabeuf*.” Ruffinelli, Jorge, and Salvador Elizondo. “Salvador Elizondo.” *Hispanamérica*. 6.16 (1977): 33-47.

¹⁴⁹ “Después de *Farabeuf* ya ni siquiera la experiencia sensible tiene ningún lugar en mi obra. Casi todo se vuelve mental.” *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁵⁰ “Mientras podía yo hacer los retruécanos mentales, todo estaba muy bien; nada más que ahora he llegado al punto final de los retruécanos y estoy desesperado porque no sé qué es lo que voy a hacer... ya llegué, después de diez años, a un punto en que tengo que buscar otra salida que no sea mediante uno de esos retruécanos mentales o como les quieras llamar.” *Ibid*, 40.

only because one of Elizondo's main concerns, in fact a fundamental concern, is to break with the generic conventions of literature (41).

How does one find a way out of a text devoid of generic conventions, out of the labyrinthine realm presented by *Farabeuf*? Ruffinelli suggests a point of convergence between *Farabeuf* and "Narda o el verano", published a year after the novel in a collection of short stories bearing the same title. *Narda* tells the story of a summer when two young men, the narrator and his friend Max, decide to vacation on a small beach town off the coast of Italy, sharing equally living expenses and the personal affections of Narda. As the story progresses Tchomba, Narda's procurer, asks the narrator to take a photograph of Narda in the nude. Responding to a fit of jealousy brewing over the time Narda spends with Max, the narrator carries out Tchomba's request. After the unexpected snapshot takes place, a disconcerted Narda escapes the young men's small villa. The story ends as they realize that Tchomba has been imprisoned for murdering Narda in a sacrificial ritual. Both *Farabeuf* and *Narda* have a similar climatic sequence: the sacrificial murder of a female character—the nurse/victim/patient in the novel and Narda, the leading character of the short story. Neither death is explicitly narrated: in the novel the narration of the Chinese boxer's dismemberment may be read analogous to or as anticipating the torture of the nurse/victim, while Narda's murder is only alluded to in the criminal investigation that follows it. Elizondo, hesitant at first, notes that "Everything that is happening in *Farabeuf*, especially in the last chapter, is a sort of dramatic representation, totally artificial."¹⁵¹ He goes on to add

Perhaps I did the same thing in *Farabeuf* and in "Narda o el verano", but without any limitations. I actually wrote "Narda o el verano" as a scheme to turn it into a film, which it later was, but unfortunately it was a very bad film,

¹⁵¹ "Todo lo que está pasando en *Farabeuf*, sobre todo en el último capítulo, que es como una representación dramática, es totalmente artificial." *Ibid*, 39.

the way all movies made in Mexico are. So in that sense, in the sense of "Narda", I kept it very close to a specific reality, for it to be photographed and narrated, which was naturally detrimental to the artificiality or that vacuous writing that essentially interests me. Notice the "instant theater" of Dr. Farabeuf, which hosts certain representations: they are representations which cannot take place—are they not?—it is impossible to represent Farabeuf's mental drama, as opposed to "Narda o el verano", which is drama that can be represented. Which is why I consider it less pure: it suffers from the possibility of being represented.¹⁵²

That which makes *Narda* less pure, the possibility of being represented, offers a way out Elizondo's work. The verbal and visual representations of the human form, with a particular emphasis on the photographic image, become Ariadne's thread to the linguistic labyrinth erected in *Farabeuf*. Elizondo concedes that "... parting from photographic notions of writing, or rather on notions derived from photography, may facilitate a reading [of *Farabeuf*]." ¹⁵³ Analyzing *Narda* as a more conventional counterpart to *Farabeuf* reconfigures Elizondo's oeuvre and questions its barren legacy. As the first stanza of "The last odalisque" reads: "Awed, my flesh weighs on me, / its extraordinary weight / is part of the quivering chain / of universal beings who / with my life form one totality" (López Velarde, 65), the chain that quivers as compassionate Catholicism in López Velarde responds to an impassionate individualism in Elizondo's work. The concern remains, however, with the extraordinary weight of the flesh. A poetics of the body, as articulated here, focuses on

¹⁵² "En Farabeuf yo tal vez hice lo mismo que en 'Narda o el verano' pero sin ninguna limitación. 'Narda o el verano' la escribí en realidad como un esquema para hacer una película, que después desgraciadamente se hizo muy mal, como se hacen todas las películas en México. Así que en ese sentido, en el sentido de 'Narda', sí estaba yo atendido a una realidad específica, fotografiable y narrable, que naturalmente iba en detrimento de esa artificialidad o de esa escritura in vacuo que es la que me interesa esencialmente. Fíjate en el 'teatro instantáneo' del doctor Farabeuf, donde tienen lugar ciertas representaciones: son representaciones que no pueden tener lugar, ¿no?, es imposible representar el drama mental de Farabeuf, y en cambio 'Narda o el verano' sí, es un drama representable. Por lo cual yo lo considero menos puro: adolece de la posibilidad de ser representado." *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁵³ "...partiendo de nociones fotográficas en la escritura, o mejor dicho nociones derivadas de la fotografía, creo que se puede facilitar un poco la lectura [de *Farabeuf*]." *Ibid*, 35.

the spectacle rendered by visual representations of the body in Elizondo's work. The spectacle, whether written, painted, or photographed, suggests the (de)formation of an identity found(ed) on visual imagery of the human form, an imagery that in photography is inherently theatrical. By reading *Narda* as a counterpoint to *Farabeuf I* will argue that, while the novel aspires to represent an erotic mysticism that questions the subject's identity through its annihilation, in *Narda* the visual imagery regarding the body, an accumulation of seemingly quotidian visual representations, manages to question the formation of an identity in the archetypal models often at work in popular literature.

The "notions derived from photography" that Elizondo argues facilitates a reading of *Farabeuf* are helpful as well in formulating *Narda* as a counterpoint to the novel. Such notions are explored by Elizondo in his essay titled "El putridero óptico", included in *Cuaderno de escritura* (1969). Elizondo sees the concepts of *instant* and *eternity* not only as the very substance fueling the ideographic writing sought by the West, but fundamental to a "history of perception" regarding visual images (77). The search for an ideographic writing continued, Elizondo argues, with Niepce, Daguerre, and Fox Talbot, whose development of photography managed to capture and eternalize an instant from reality itself (78), adding to the history of "photo-grapheia" the question concerning components (theatrical and otherwise) pertaining visual representation, particularly the indexical aspect attributed to photography. In other words, Elizondo claims: "The presence of photography—*instant* and *reality*—appears to undo the two coordinates where pictorial vision essentially lies: *eternity* and *poetry*. But the goal of this method is precisely the discovery an interior identity that exists...between *eternity* and the *instant*, between *reality* and *poetry*."¹⁵⁴ One must

¹⁵⁴ "La presencia de la fotografía—*instante* y *realidad*—parece desdecir de las dos coordenadas en cuyo modo, esencialmente, está situada la visión pictórica: *eternidad* y *poseía*. Pero el fin de este método es justamente el descubrimiento de la identidad interior que existe, como se

note here that “poetry” in Elizondo encapsulates artistic representations beyond the literary, for “Who doubts that *Las Meninas* is 87216 square centimeters of an instant, but who can doubt, as well, that these 87216 square centimeters of an instant are all mysterious. Criticism is the acceptance of the challenge raised by that mystery. And it is certainly not a deciphering, but the analysis of a poem.”¹⁵⁵ The essay “El putridero óptico” includes a quote from one of Leonardo da Vinci’s manuscripts—part anatomical study, part exploration on the bright and dark interplay at work in the drawing and painting the human form—that Elizondo interprets freely and figuratively (“and a luminous body will show itself greater when it is set against a darker background”) in order to create the darkest background possible. For Elizondo “The world is about settle in its very essence: the shadows. Fade-in, Fade out. Only the greatest lucidity is able to understand the ultimate meaning of the darkness.”¹⁵⁶ The darkest background is taken metaphorically to depict the grotesque, graphic representation of violence exerted on the human body. Elizondo’s pursuit to capture the luminosity of a body so blinding that it obliterates its surroundings is constructed on the *theatrical representation* of visual imagery regarding the human form, a dramatic effect that on photography and painting emerges in the verbal in the interpretation of the image while, in a literary text, is carefully inscribed in the narrative.

“El putridero óptico” begins as a reflection on Alberto Gironella’s *Fco.*

Lezcano en su taller. Visiting Gironella’s workshop, Elizondo recalls his first viewing

demuestra, entre eternidad e instante, entre realidad y poesía.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Cuaderno De Escritura*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 79.

¹⁵⁵ “Quién duda que *Las meninas* es 87216 centímetros cuadrados de instante, pero quién duda, también, que esos 87216 centímetros cuadrados de instante son todos misteriosos. La crítica es la aceptación del reto que nos propone ese misterio. Y no se trata, ciertamente, de un desciframiento, sino del análisis de un poema...” *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁵⁶ “El mundo está a punto de resolverse en su propia esencia: la sombra. Fade—in, Fade out. Sólo la más grande lucidez es capaz de comprender el significado último de la oscuridad.” *Ibid*, 76.

of the painting as a fleeting, inconsequential act (72) that nonetheless haunted him for days to follow. The painting “Just completed, the canvas still resting on the easel, presented the entrance to a Spanish hell of an individualistic recalcitrance all while Catholic, displaying its metamorphic mystery as a corpse shows the visceral plethora of its interiority, at the center of the amphitheater, fidgeting with and exacerbating all things that we use to build our imperturbable vigil.”¹⁵⁷ Gironella’s painting, Elizondo argues, “Invokes the tortuous acuties of *concectisti*; invokes, way of Velázquez and the *tenebristas* after Caravaggio, that other blinding clarity: that of Góngora, made only of light; that of San Juan de la Cruz, made all of clarity.”¹⁵⁸ Casting a *chiaroscuro* over the biting satire, concision and wit found in *conceptismo*, the text echoes, in its rhetorical operation at work, Baltasar Gracián’s notion of the Concept¹⁵⁹ as the correlation expressed by the intellect between two or more objects. Elizondo argues that “The history of art is the only one without evolution. It can be said that time passes through art, but not that art reaches new goals over time.”¹⁶⁰ The tension between an instant and eternity—time passing through art and the instant of creation/perception—becomes a point of departure from where to “follow the evolution of a painting based on their attempts and hesitations... In this sense we can say that an expressive trend found here blends with a Mannerist tendency—or rather,

¹⁵⁷ “Apenas concluida, la tela reposaba todavía sobre el caballete figurando la entrada a un infierno español recalcitrantemente individualista y a la vez católico, desplegando su misterio metamórfico como muestra el cadáver la interioridad de la plétora visceral sobre la plancha de anfiteatro, inquietando y exacerbando todas las cosas que nos sirven para construir nuestra vigilia imperturbable.” *Ibid*, 72.

¹⁵⁸ “Invoca las tortuosas agudezas de los *concectisti*; invoca, por medio de Velázquez y los pintores tenebristas posteriores a Caravaggio, esa otra claridad cegadora: la de Góngora, hecho sólo de luz; la de San Juan de la Cruz, hecha toda de toda claridad.” *Ibid*, 65.

¹⁵⁹ “Es un acto del entendimiento que exprime la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos.” Gracián, y M. B, and Calderón E. Correa. *Agudeza Y Arte De Ingenio*. (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1969), 55.

¹⁶⁰ “La historia del arte es la única sin evolución. Puede decirse que el tiempo pasa a través del arte, pero no que el arte alcanza nuevas metas a través del tiempo.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Cuaderno De Escritura*. (México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), 72.

aspiration—that feeds from, and pretends to keep flowing, the pictorial traditions.”¹⁶¹
 The artificiality and preciousness that constitutes Mannerism prompts Elizondo to claim:
 “I cannot define 'Mannerism' but as an endeavor that brings forms to their ultimate its
 consequences.”¹⁶²



Figure 15 Velázquez, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y. *Francisco Lezcano, "el Niño de Vallecas"*. (1636-1638)



Figure 16 Gironella, Alberto. *Fco. Lezcano en su taller* (1965-1966)

Elizondo sees both in *Las meninas* and in *Fco. Lezcano* “a memorious world where the forms proposed only remind us of other forms we may have already known. The pictorial work functions in this manner; sometimes it seems that the essence of these forms is memory, the memory of an image already dreamt.”¹⁶³ For Elizondo *Fco. Lezcano* shows the vermin of the Palace stealing their masters’ clothes in order to

¹⁶¹ “seguir la evolución de una pintura en función de sus tentativas y de sus vacilaciones... En este sentido puede decirse que discurre aquí una corriente expresiva que se funde con esa otra corriente—o más bien aspiración—manierista que se nutre en, y pretende mantener fluidas, las tradiciones pictóricas.” *Ibid*, 73-74.

¹⁶² “No puedo definir el ‘manierismo’ sino como el empeño de llevar las formas a sus últimas conclusiones.” *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁶³ “un mundo memorioso en el que las formas propuestas sólo recuerdan otras formas que tal vez ya hemos conocido. El hecho pictórico funciona así; a veces parece que la esencia de esas formas es el recuerdo; el recuerdo de una imagen ya soñada.” *Ibid*, 66.

impersonate them, to be them in another plane of reality (65). Francisco Lezcano, in Gironella's painting, impersonates Velázquez, thus turning the imagery of *Las meninas* into a grotesque nightmare. According to Elizondo, Gironella is retracing the path Velázquez has already completed (73), creating "a painting of ideas, from a painting of ideas about painting ideas".¹⁶⁴ The painting of ideas, in Elizondo's analysis, is a painting concerned primarily with the play on perception orchestrated by Velázquez in *Las meninas*. The painting of ideas becomes a game of mirrors as Elizondo argues that, retracing the "inner life" of *Las Meninas*, Gironella creates a "work of art that does not evolve but degenerates into hallucination. The reality is immutable only as such. As perceived fact it absorbs slowly, over the centuries, our own dissolution. We're joined on the journey toward that kind of clarity made of incomprehensible data. Every work of art is the origin of a delirium. If not, has failed."¹⁶⁵ Reality becomes mutable through art, through representation; delirium—an unstable reality—is manifested as impersonation in *Fco. Lezcano*.

The vermin of the Palace steal their master's clothes in order to impersonate them, in front of a mirror and for their own amusement. Elizondo sees identity theft in this impersonation. Elizondo affirms "The words Rey and Reality were both calved by the primeval mother herself: Re (the maiden-goddess Rhea, mother of Castor and Pollux?) It is the original thing, the thing as such, that thing used to denote the pure, essential reality of that which is".¹⁶⁶ Kings, Elizondo goes on to add, exist on a superior strata of being: only they produce awe, implicitly carrying with them the idea

¹⁶⁴ "una pintura de ideas; de una pintura de ideas acerca de las ideas de la pintura" *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁶⁵ "obra de arte que no evoluciona sino que degenera hacia la alucinación. La realidad es inmutable sólo como tal. Como hecho percibido va absorbiendo lentamente, a lo largo de los siglos, nuestra propia disolución. Nos acompaña en el viaje de la especie hacia esa lucidez hecha de datos incomprensibles. Toda obra de arte es el origen de un delirio. Si no lo es, ha fracasado." *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁶⁶ "La palabra Rey y la palabra realidad fueron paridas por una misma madre primigenia: Re (¿la doncella—diosa Rea, madre de Cástor y Pólux?); se trata de la cosa original, la Gran Cosa, esa Cosa que sirve para denotar la realidad esencial pura de lo que es". *Ibid*, 70.

of imperium, of the power to command (66); lacking a precise identity—no one knows their name for certain—when they themselves speak their names, all that suffices is the utterance: Yo El Rey. (69) When Velázquez cunningly manages to shift the perspectives on *Las meninas*, Elizondo argues:

Before this painting we will all be Felipe IV in a background of luminous haze, contemplating a becoming of lucidity, a lucidity that only serves to give us the key to our decomposition, to the irredeemable dissolution of our flesh, gently taking us to the decaying chamber, where passion becomes a very slow dream about mirrors, hair, pale faces, and numbers, before being eaten by the nasty and tenacious slugs from the laws of Nature. I stand before the mirror, aware of my own dissolution... Clearly this is a world in which the mirror is the highest attribute of vision. This is a world in which the self is a fictional (or false) instance of not - being.¹⁶⁷

Elizondo suggests the painter as the photographer of dreams, and art as the realm where dreams manifest themselves sensibly (65). Whoever observes Velázquez's painting is granted both the visual manifestation of a dream and a momentary stature akin to that of the King. For Elizondo "We are, after all, unable to represent our passions through abstract images. Our mind suffers from a persistent, anthropomorphic *eidesis*. The concept of person (mask, dramatic character, lies, and arcane disguise) originates from the proclivity of our mental nature to be ourselves the mirror, the face and the reflection."¹⁶⁸ Elba Sánchez Rolón argues that the mirror

¹⁶⁷ "Ante este cuadro todos seremos Felipe IV en un trasfondo de bruma luminosa, contemplando un devenir hecho de lucidez, de esa lucidez que sólo sirve para darnos la clave de nuestra descomposición, de la disolución de nuestra carne irredimible, para llevarnos suavemente al pudridero en el que la pasión se convierte en un sueño lentísimo acerca de espejos, de cabelleras, de rostros pálidos, de números, antes de ser devorado por las babosas tenaces y repugnantes de las leyes de la Naturaleza. Me planto ante este espejo, consciente de mi disolución... Se trata, claramente, de un mundo en el que el espejo es el más alto atributo de la visión. Ése es un mundo en el que el ser es una forma ficticia (o falaz) del no - ser." *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁶⁸ "Somos, después de todo, incapaces de representarnos nuestra pasiones mediante imágenes abstractas. Nuestra mente adolece de una pertinaz eidesis antropomórfica. El concepto de persona (máscara, personaje dramático, mentira, disfraz arcano) se origina en esa proclividad de nuestra naturaleza mental a ser nosotros mismos el espejo, el rostro y el reflejo." *Ibid*, 70.

symbolizes a number of obsessions found in Elizondo's work, including "a doorway to the fantastic, to the violence of identity and *meta-fiction*; the duplication and fragmentation of space, identities, and writing; the mirror as a *self-reflexive* prostheses where subjects and writing look at themselves and at what is usually out of view."¹⁶⁹ Elizondo asserts that man's only invention is the mirror: that "First and foremost there is the mirror. The mirror is before all. Before all is the mirror. The great metaphor of Platonism brought to a Baroque exacerbation. Insane figuration of reality's abhorrent lucidity, that of the good Bishop Berkeley, which is resolved in a Kafkaesque horror before the inability to define ourselves as reality or as solipsism."¹⁷⁰ Raising a "Disturbing proposition: intelligence is the organ that measures the terror"¹⁷¹, Elizondo ponders whether the confusion of intelligence with the senses is not, in a way, Baroque's ideal: "Pascal and Berkeley. Why talk of solipsism and terror at the same time? These are apparently mutually exclusive ideas. If we do not exist just as the image reflected in the mirror, the dissolution of the flesh—horror's end—is alien to us."¹⁷² Torn between the two maxims, *cogito ergo sum* and *esse est percipi*, Elizondo finds an unsettling dialectic in *Fco. Lezcano*: "Gironella has painted a mirror that devours us and makes us live within it. That mirror is a reality that turns us into

¹⁶⁹ "el umbral al espacio de lo fantástico, a la violencia de la identidad y a la *metaficción*; la duplicación y la fragmentación de espacio, identidades y escritura; y el espejo como prótesis *autoreflexiva* donde los sujetos y la escritura se miran a sí mismos y lo que normalmente está fuera de campo de visión." *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ "Ante todo, está el espejo. El espejo está ante todo. Ante todo está el espejo. La gran metáfora del platonismo llevada a su exacerbación barroca. Figuración demente de la lucidez aborrecedora de la realidad del buen obispo Berkeley que se resuelve en un horror kafkiano ante la imposibilidad de poder definirnos como realidad o como solipsismo." *Ibid*, 74.

¹⁷¹ "Proposición inquietante: la inteligencia es el órgano que mide el terror" *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁷² "Pascal y Berkeley. ¿Por qué hablar de solipsismo y de terror a la vez? Éstas son ideas que se excluyen aparentemente. Si no existimos más que como la imagen reflejada en el espejo, la disolución de la carne—extremo del espanto—nos es ajena." *Ibid*, 76.

nothing or into the image of who we truly are.”¹⁷³ The vermin’s impersonation of their masters, an amusement stemming from identity theft, uncovers the individualistic recalcitrance before an absent identity. The dissolution of the flesh is the image of who we truly are.

“El putridero óptico”, a decaying chamber of visual imagery depicting the human form, is based on Elizondo’s idea of Mannerism (bringing forms to their ultimate consequences) that relies on the representation of violence, since “violence has no measure; the extreme where man is diluted in his own effort to dissolve or assault is fundamentally extreme because that is where all measure disappears. It would be necessary to analyze the work of art that—inscribed within the limits of judgment—awaits for the approval or disapproval of the senses, depending on nothing more than our sensations.”¹⁷⁴ The violence exerted on the human body leaves such an indelible impression that, for Elizondo “There are visions—why not call them visions?—able to subvert and invert any worldview.”¹⁷⁵ Regarding the 20th century, Elizondo argues, the visions have left him with such an impression are three: the Chinese torture photograph reproduced by Georges Bataille in *Les larmes d'Eros*, the scene of the eye in the preface of *Un Chien Andalou*, and the scene of Nadia’s murder in *Rocco ei Suoi Frattelli* (72). One must note that the violence exerted on these bodies, particularly on the photograph of the Leng Tch’é, is carried out by others. The photograph of the Chinese torture that drives the narrative of *Farabeuf* is a public

¹⁷³ “Gironella ha pintado un espejo que nos devora y nos hace vivir dentro de él. Ese espejo es una realidad que nos convierte en nada o en la imagen de lo que verdaderamente somos.” *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ “la violencia no tiene medida; el extremo en el que el hombre se diluye en su propio afán de disolución o de ultraje es extremo fundamentalmente porque es allí donde toda medida desaparece. Haría falta analizar la obra de arte que—inscrita en el límite del juicio—espera la reprobación o aprobación de los sentidos, en función no más de nuestras sensaciones.” *Ibid*, 71.

¹⁷⁵ “Hay visiones- ¿por qué no llamarlas así?-capaces de subvertir y trastocar cualquier concepción del mundo.” *Ibid*, 72.

spectacle of torture. As Elizondo claims that “Torture is the phenomenal transmission of a passion”¹⁷⁶ the figure of the surgeon/torturer emerges in his work. Elizondo notes that “The essential condition of torture is its antithesis: the sacrifice of who suffers it. Only the relationship between lovers is as close and supportive as the one that exists between executioner and victim. The executioner represents the disturbing end of the engagement. The artist bears witness to that pole of expression ... and to the other pole as well.”¹⁷⁷ The voice of the victim, however, never appears at the moment of torture. Inscribed in an erotic mysticism that culminates in death, Elizondo proposes the notion of surgery/torture as dramatic representation, for

Torture, just like being, has an essentially dramatic characteristic. Any kind of surgery clearly aims—in the same way that sexual intercourse secretly does—to the condition of drama; that is to say: to re-actualize imagined experience. The couple always refers to the abysmal origins of the species. Intercourse, like surgical craftsmanship, relieves the ardor beasts, appeases the executioner and gratifies common man.¹⁷⁸

It is worth noting here that the object of Elizondo’s work is torture as a dramatic representation, not the verbalization of pain. As Elaine Scarry has argued in *The Body in Pain* (1985), “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language”, and “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes

¹⁷⁶ “La tortura es la transmisión fenomenal de una pasión.” *Ibid*, 69.

¹⁷⁷ “La condición esencial de la tortura es su antítesis: el sacrificio de quien la sufre. Sólo la relación que existe entre los amantes es tan estrecha y solidaria como la que existe entre el suplicador y el suplicado. El verdugo representa el extremo inquietante del compromiso. El artista da testimonio de ese polo... y del otro también.” *Ibid*, 67-68.

¹⁷⁸ “La tortura, como el ser, tiene un carácter esencialmente espectacular. Toda intervención quirúrgica aspira manifiestamente—de la misma manera que el coito lo hace en secreto—a la condición del drama; es decir: a ser la reactualización de una experiencia imaginada. La pareja siempre alude a los orígenes abismales de la especie. El coito, como a artesanía quirúrgica, alivia el ardor de las bestias, aplaca al verdugo y gratifica al hombre común.” *Ibid*, 68.

before language is learned” (4). While Elizondo is interested in the representation of torture as an “imagined experience” that, once represented leads to a sacral realization of an erotic experience, Scarry is concerned with the actual political implications of torture, for

torture is a process which not only converts but announces the conversion of every conceivable aspect of the event and the environment into an agent of pain. It is not accidental that in the torturers’ idiom the room in which the brutality occurs was called the ‘production room’ in the Philippines, the ‘cinema room’ in South Vietnam, and the ‘blue lit stage’ in Chile: built on these repeated acts of display and having as its purpose the production of a fantastic illusion of power, torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama. (27-28)

A grotesque piece of compensatory drama that sustains a fantastic illusion of power, applied to Elizondo’s work analyzed here, may be traced back to the “power to command” of a King lacking a precise identity. It may also stand as a rather succinct analysis of *Farabeuf*. In any case, Elizondo is perfectly aware, and eager to show, the linguistic artificiality on which his novel, and literature for that matter, is founded. The narrative voice of *Farabeuf*, which at times addresses the characters of the novel (particularly Dr. Farabeuf and the nurse/victim), constantly addresses the reader of the text as well. Early on in the novel the narrative voice clearly states:

Your real identity is no longer important: perhaps you are old Farabeuf who arrives at the house after having snapped two or three arms and legs in the enormous amphitheater at the École de Médecine or perhaps you are a meaningless being, someone conjured up who exists only in the mind of someone else whom we don’t know, the reflection of a face in the mirror, a reflection that in the mirror must meet another face. That is all. (5)

The characters of the novel (Dr. Farabeuf/man/torturer and the nurse/woman/victim) and the setting (Paris, Beijing, a coastal shore) are permanently changing; in fact, they are often categorized as reflections on a mirror. The historical and political implications (the woman may be interpreted as symbolic of China’s political stance

before a Western invasion, the tortured Chinese boxer as an inverse iconography of Christ, etc.) serve as a background to the many analogies formulated in the novel: man/woman, torturer/tortured, east/west, ying/yang, etc., etc. Only one constant remains throughout the novel: the sacrificial torture of a body and the spectacle it renders.

Rather than trace the esoteric references in *Farabeuf*, which among others include direct references to the hexagrams of the I Ching (or Book of Change) and its Western analogous Ouija; or attempt to articulate a coherent sequence of events and formulate precise character identifications throughout the text, I will analyze the instances in the novel where the body and its visual representation operate as the site for the (de)formation of a subject's identity. By focusing my analysis on these instances I intend to create a conceptual framework from which to read the short story of "Narda o el verano", a more conventional counterpoint to the narrative offered by *Farabeuf*. The concept of the mirror in the novel, as Plato's cave at its most Baroque but also as photography, becomes instrumental to the making and unmaking of a subject's identity. In an interview with Margo Glantz¹⁷⁹ Elizondo says that in *Farabeuf* the notion of the mirror symbolizes an axis around which the parallel series of signs revolve; conceptually speaking, the mirror functions as the doorway for the crossing of these signs, and what matters is not the mirror itself but the specular notion that supports the structure of the novel (32-33). As Sánchez Rolón has noted, "The mirror opens up the possibility of the unreal, introduces the characters to an iconic-symbolic universe that operates through the universalization of the specular image; a

¹⁷⁹"Entrevista con Salvador Elizondo y Edgar Allan Poe" first appeared in the cultural supplement of *Siempre!*, "La Cultura en México" on October 30, 1968. I refer here to its reprinting in Glantz, Margo. *Repeticiones: Ensayos Sobre Literatura Mexicana* Xalapa: Centro de Investigaciones Lingüístico-Literarias, Instituto de Investigaciones Humanísticas, Universidad Veracruzana, 1979.

procedure more common to photography and painting than to the mirror.”¹⁸⁰ A loss of identity begins as the characters of the novel pass through the specular doorway, seeing their reflections on a mirror or observing the photograph of the Leng Tch’é. Early on in the novel, when Dr. Farabeuf sees a mirror hanging in the room where his procedure is set to take place, we read that “It was then that a sense of his true identity was lost to him. He thought of himself as nothing more than an image reflected in the mirror, and he lowered his eyes trying to forget everything” (7). But of course, Dr. Farabeuf does not forget. *Farabeuf* begins and ends its circular narrative asking the question “Do you remember...?” It is never clear who is asking the question and who is being asked, but the question confirms the novel goal of capturing a moment, of recreating experience. Photography plays an essential role in the process of achieving such a goal. Claiming that “Certain looks weigh upon the conscience. It is curious to feel the weight a particular look can have”, the narrative voice ponders how “It is interesting to see how the dire need to retain a memory is more potent and more sentient than silver nitrate carefully spread on a glass plate and exposed for a fraction of a second to light penetrating a more or less complicated combination of prisms. That light, like the light of memory, is materialized forever in a moment’s image” (11-12). Referring to the Leng Tch’é, the narrative voice claims: “Memory could not have contained that moment. Memory stopped at the point of torture... They had photographed him from all angles. ‘One must supplement memory,’ he said, ‘...photography is a great invention’” (28). The reproduction of the photograph in novel highlights how the visual image plays an integral role in the novel’s attempt to recreate the moment of death, a moment for which memory does not suffice. In order

¹⁸⁰ “El espejo abre la posibilidad de lo irreal, introduce a los personajes en un universo icónico-simbólico que funcionará por medio de universalizaciones de la imagen especular; un procedimiento más común a la fotografía y a la pintura que al espejo.” Sánchez, Rolón E. *La Escritura En El Espejo: Farabeuf De Salvador Elizondo*. (Valenciana, Gto., México: Universidad de Guanajuato, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2008), 24.

to articulate a narrative that matches the multiple layers of signification of the photograph, the novel relies upon the dramatic representation of Dr. Farabeuf's surgical procedure. Described as "a man who loves his occupation for its own sake", the novel notes of Dr. Farabeuf how, "Every time he introduces an improvement in the procedure, he likes to draw the audience's attention to it by means of spectacular turn of events, by means of a phrase that seems to have a hidden meaning. This satisfies the magician's vanity in him, but in the end everything that happens during his operations is extremely simple" (117). There are a number of other instances where the novel indicating the theatricality of Dr. Farabeuf's is on display, such as "The lights went on. The man directed himself to the audience, saying humbly: 'Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We do our best to please,' and the spectators applauded" (83), and "With the lights on, the stage is left more or less in shadow, as required by the show I wish to offer you today. At the same time, the image of the room is multiplied to infinity on the surface of the mirror" (113). There is even a provocation: "Perhaps you will find the key to the mystery in the play of lights of the Instantaneous Theater of Master Farabeuf" (103). With the added element of dramatic representation, the "specular notion that supports the structure of the novel" is concerned primarily with the spectacle rendered by the visual representations of the human body.

In the novel Dr. Farabeuf ponders "Are we nothing more than the image in a photograph that someone took in the rain at that small plaza? Are we perhaps nothing more than a blurred image on a piece of glass, the body that was loved infinitely by someone who retains us in his memory despite our will to be forgotten?" (53). When it appears that Dr. Farabeuf is able to grasp his fictional condition: "I refer to the possible, though unfortunately improbable, fact that we are not ourselves, that we are some other type of configuration or solipsism—how is one to phrase these conjectures on the nature of our being?—such as, for example, the possibility that we are the

image in a mirror, or the characters in a novel or story, or—why not?—that we are dead” (38), Dr. Farabeuf’s search for answers ultimately leads him to formulate even more questions: “1) If we are merely an image in a mirror, what is the exact nature of the beings we reflect? 2) If we are merely an image in a mirror, can we attain life by killing ourselves? 3) If we are merely an image in a mirror, is it possible for us to create, by means of the surgical operations known as the carnal act or coitus, new and autonomous beings, independent of the one we reflect?” (58).



Figure 17 Leng Tch'é. Reproduced in *Farabeuf* (1992)

The oscillation between the resistance to being “merely an image on the mirror” and the desire to identify with exactly those images is materializes with the photograph of the tortured Chinese boxer. Upon viewing the photograph of the Leng Tch'é (“the symbol of an exquisite profanation” (70), a “singular image, unique in the history of sado-erotic iconography” (42)) the narrative voice appears to belong, if only momentarily, to Dr. Farabeuf’s thoughts, asking: “Whose body is it? It is vital to

remember here and now: the identity of that mutilated body that suddenly appeared before our eyes and which we would like to have seized in a useless embrace of fleshless stumps, unable to grasp other whole bodies, but desirous of being lost in that slow, hypnotic agony, motionless and erect” (32). In response to the suggestion, articulated on the text, that the image of the Lent Tch’*é* symbolizes “a Chinese Christ, a blurred Messiah—in short, a murderer photographed at the moment of his execution, at the moment of his death” (108-109), Dr. Farabeuf addresses the nurse/victim’s apparent concern regarding the sacrificial surgery after a viewing of the photograph, telling her:

Bah! Your body is more than just that. It is the extension of the world as seen from a supreme height. No one escapes your flight which immobilizes everything, making it unforgettable. Your flesh, as I caress it, welcomes the cruelty of oblivion. That is why I do not know the nude man’s name, the man tied to a stake who subjects himself to a life everlasting. Can’t you see that in his expression? What difference does his name make when, even if were blind, I would be able to recognize his flesh all my life, recognize his body which is yours? (109)

The nurse/victim, although “she would like to have forgotten that moment because it was filled with the terrible presence of a torture victim streaked with thick furrows of blood, tied to a stake before his executioners, filled with the terrible presence of the indifferent spectators who tried to retain the essence of that terrible but sensuous image, an image evoked at the moment of orgasm...” (68), in the end the nurse/victim accepts the possibility that she is in fact the dying man depicted in the horrific photograph, claiming “That face is mine. We are radically mistaken, Master. Our senses deceive us. We are the victims of a fiendish misunderstanding which transcends the limits of our knowledge. We have confused a postcard with a mirror. It is crucial that we know who took that photograph” (98). Though the nurse/victim does not know, in the novel the fictionalized Dr. Farabeuf is unveiled as the photographer in

Beijing. Dr. Farabeuf recalls that at the time of the photograph, he was “interested in only two things: battle surgery and instantaneous photography” (46). Considering photography as “a static form of immortality” (12), Dr. Farabeuf also claims that “One of the fundamental principles of surgery—as of photography—is sharpness” (47). “Photograph a dying man,” Dr. Farabeuf taunts, “and see what happens. But remember, a dying man is a man in the act of dying, and the act of dying is an act which lasts but an instant. . . .to photograph a dying man, the shutter of the photographic apparatus must open precisely at the only instant when the man is dying, that is to say, at the exact instant the man dies” (12). In *Farabeuf* photography is not the only method of eternalizing an instant: an operation involving writing and dramatic representation emerges as a verbal alternative to the photographic image.

As Dr. Farabeuf enters the room where the sacrifice of the nurse/victim is to take place, there is a “Chinese ideogram, a character that someone has drawn on the moisture of a windowpane” (100). The ideogram, 六, “is the number six and is pronounced *liú*. The arrangement of the strokes which comprise it is reminiscent of the position of the torture victim as well as the shape of a starfish, am I not right?” (100). The number six, an allusion to the hexagrams found in the I Ching, also suggests that “the arrangement of the executioners is that of a hexagon centered around an axis, the torture victim” (100). The visual analogy of the Chinese ideogram to the photograph of the Leng Tch’*é* prompts the following exchange between Dr. Farabeuf and the nurse/victim: “Do you feel faint? ‘No, torture is a form of writing.’ You are witnessing the performance of an ideogram. A sign is represented here and death is but a set of lines you drew obliviously on a moist windowpane. I know you would like to have deciphered it” (87). “In other words,” Severo Sarduy clarifies in his essay on *Farabeuf*, “the entire experience may have been merely the dramatization of an ideogram, perhaps something similar to the splitting of the metaphor represented by all

signs, a discovery of the real base hidden behind all signs, a discovery of the real base hidden behind all signals, of the original reality of ideogrammatic language” (Sarduy, 20). The revelation, for it is treated as such in the novel, is that writing becomes the dramatization of experience: torture is a form of writing; the Leng Tch’è is but the performance of an ideogram. A first reading suggests that changing the order of the factors, to have writing precede experience, does alter the end result; only in this fashion can the novel be, as Sarduy proposed, an exercise in metaphoric philology. The writing that precedes the experience, in the case of *Farabeuf*, is an ideogrammatic writing, so that the dramatization of an ideogram discovers “the real base hidden behind all signs.” However, I argue that the rhetorical operation at work here is not a change in the sequence of the factors (writing preceding experience) but in fact a displacement of the theatrical from photography to writing. The tension that arises between photography and writing in both *Farabeuf* and *Narda* is crystalized in the notion of theatricality and can be best articulated by drawing on the notions of *studium* and *punctum* first proposed by Roland Barthes. As Geoffrey Barchen writes in his introduction to *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (2009) “Terms established by Barthes, such as *studium* and *punctum*, have become part of the standard lexicon of photographic debate, along with a particular understanding of photographic time and of photography’s relationship to death and a certain narcissistic way of speaking” (3). Although *Camera Lucida* (1980) is published some fifteen years after *Farabeuf*, it is not difficult to find certain affinities between the works of Elizondo and Barthes in relation to the photographic image beyond that particular understanding of photography alluded to by Barchen, most notably a concern with language that continues to mull over Saussure’s postulates on the sign.

Barthes sees two elements in photography: *studium* and *punctum*. The first, “is an extent, it has the extension of a field, which I perceive quite familiarly as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture; this field can be more or less stylized, more or less successful, depending on the photographer’s skill or luck, but it always refers to a classical body of information” (24-25). For Barthes, “The *studium* is the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes ones finds ‘all right’” (27). One infers in Barthes’ delineation of the concept that most photographs are, in effect, all *studium*: the photographer’s myths (read intentionality) in photographs “aim at reconciling the Photograph with society...by endowing it with *functions*” (28). The notion of *punctum*, on the other hand, has been greatly debated, whether in its first conception as a detail that “punctures” the *studium* and “pricks” the viewer, or as developed later: “I now know that there exists another *punctum* (another ‘stigmatum’) than the ‘detail.’ This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (‘that-has-been’), its pure representation” (96). Michael Fried’s “Barthes’s Punctum”¹⁸¹ argues that antitheatricity and the fundamental distinction between *seeing* and *being shown* are found at the core of the notion of *punctum*. According to Fried, “The *punctum*, we might say, is *seen* by Barthes but not because it has been *shown* to him by the photographer, for whom it does not exist...it is an artifact of the encounter between the product of that event and one particular spectator or beholder, in the present case, Roland Barthes” (546). Furthermore, “for a photograph to be truly antitheatrical for Barthes it must somehow carry within it a kind of ontological guarantee that it was not intended to be so *by the*

¹⁸¹ Although Fried’s essay is included in *Photography Degree Zero* I will be referring to the text as published in *Critical Inquiry*. 31.3 (2005): 539-574.

photographer...The *punctum*, I am suggesting, functions as that guarantee” (553). Fried claims that for a photograph to inflict the hurt, prick, or wound on a viewer, time becomes a guarantor of antitheatricality that comes to a photograph, for “Time, in Barthes’s sense of the term, functions as a *punctum* for him precisely because the sense of something being past, being historical, cannot be perceived by the photographer or indeed by anyone else *in the present*” (560). Locating the antitheatrical in photography turns, in one hand, into a process of evading, eliding or just getting around the photographer’s intentionality, and on the other hand, into a permanent awareness of Time in the image captured by photography. Fried sees *Camera Lucida* as “a swan song for an artifact on the brink of fundamental change” (563) not just in the advent of digitalization, but also because Barthes “comes to understand himself as commenting on an image-making or perhaps more accurately an image-consuming regime that is all but defunct, not because of any material alteration in the photographic artifact but because of what he takes to be a profound transformation of society—the world—at large” (562). There are two aspects to the categorization of the image-consuming regime as defunct (not operating, no longer in effect or use—at least for Barthes): Time functioning as the *punctum* of photography (every photograph as that ‘that-has-been’) and the *pose* as a fundamental aspect of photography, denying the ever sought antitheatricality of the medium.

For Barthes, “what found the nature of Photography is the pose. The physical duration of this pose is of little consequence...I project the present photograph’s immobility upon the past shot, and it is this arrest which constitutes the pose” (78). Furthermore, Barthes argues that the Photograph’s *noeme* deteriorates when the Photograph is animated and becomes cinema because “in the Photograph, something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling); but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of the same tiny hole: the pose is swept

away and denied by the continuous series of images: it is a different phenomenology, and therefore a different art which begins here, though derived from the first one” (78). According to Fried, “The question, of course, is how, within the logic of the arguments we have been tracking, photographs based on the frontal pose, and thereby foregrounding the subject’s awareness of the fact of being photographed, can succeed in defeating theatricality in the case of subjects who are not...humanly exceptional” (571). Again, searching for the antitheatrical, Barthes imagines that the essential gesture of the photographer, to surprise something or someone, is perfected “when it is performed unbeknownst to the subject being photographed. From this gesture derive all photographs whose principle (or better, whose alibi) is ‘shock’; for the photographic ‘shock’ (quite different from the *punctum*) consists less in traumatizing than in revealing what was so well hidden that the actor himself was unaware or unconscious of it” (32). The fascination with the photograph of the Leng Tch’*é* that *Farabeuf* reproduces, literary and as literary discourse, lies on the capturing of the ecstatic moment of death experienced by the tortured Chinese boxer. The revelatory aspect of the Leng Tch’*é* for Dr. Farabeuf is no more than “the photograph of a man at the moment of death or orgasm, was engraved on your retina, which was alive with the color of blood” (69). The torture may have been set up as a public spectacle, but the moment of death captured on the image escapes representation, it is the *punctum* of the photograph, it undoes the theatricality of the public spectacle. “The meaning of the image”, Dr. Farabeuf asserts, is “the truth of that instant: *The crying stops, death arrives*” (33). In its attempt to recreate the experience, that moment of antitheatricality, the novel takes over the dramatic aspects of the photograph and inscribes them in the writing of the text itself; the reproduction of the photograph in *Farabeuf* is liberated from its theatrical constraints.

Fried sees Barthes's predilection for photographs of the frontal type "precisely because of the difficulties they would seem inevitably to present for an antitheatrical esthetic, [which] further suggests that for him overcoming, not avoiding, theatricality is what has to be accomplished and perhaps also that success in that endeavor can be imagined to take place only against the grain of the photographer's intentions" (571). *Farabeuf* would appear to overcome, or at least attempt to overcome, the theatricality of the Leng Tch'é (thus capturing, if only for a moment, the real, that which can't be represented) by displacing the theatrical nature of the photograph onto the written text. It becomes almost a severe demand of photography as a medium to capture reality beyond representation, beyond theatricality. One must not forget, however, that in the novel *Dr. Farabeuf* is the photographer of the Leng Tch'é, an aspect that in fact both undercuts and may explain the novel's attempt to displace the theatricality of the photographic image onto the writing of a literary text. In his interview with Ruffinelli, Elizondo notes that "There is an aspect that is usually overlooked regarding instantaneity, and is an essential issue for me not only in *Farabeuf* but in almost all my books, short stories and other things I've written; that is, rather than the order of instantaneity, the order of fixity, characterized tangibly in the narrative by the inevitable appearance of the notion of photography."¹⁸² Elizondo is not only interested in fixity but in its order, in the structure of fixity; in other words, fixity as lack of action and, perhaps, representation. A similar operation is at work in *Narda*, where the narrator is a photographer that embeds his narrative with brief, technical cinematographic descriptions and, in a climatic sequences, takes a photograph of

¹⁸² "Hay un aspecto que casi siempre se ha pasado por alto respecto a esta cosa de la instantaneidad, y es un aspecto que para mí resulta fundamental no sólo en *Farabeuf* sino en casi todos mis libros, relatos y otras cosas que he escrito: eso es, más que el orden de la instantaneidad, el orden de la fijeza, que se caracteriza tangiblemente en la narración por la aparición inevitable de la noción de fotografía" Ruffinelli, Jorge, and Salvador Elizondo. "Salvador Elizondo." (*Hispanamérica*. 6.16 (1977)), 34.

Narda both in a fit of jealousy and in exchange for an unedited poem written by Ezra Pound that, not surprisingly, turns out to be a fake. Both *Farabeuf* and *Narda* are highly codified texts, but while the codification of the novel relies heavily on the esoteric aspect of the code (the I Ching, the Ouija, erotic mysticism) in *Narda* the multiple referential layers are ultimately concerned with a cultural commodification and image-consumption regime so transient and quotidian that it hides in plain sight. The photograph of Narda, presented in the text as a mystery, may be read as Elizondo's attempt not at avoiding the theatricality of a photograph but as a tentative to overcome such theatricality.

"Narda o el verano" tells the story of a summer spent by the narrator and his friend Max in a villa on an Italian coastal town. Before the summer they had agreed to share living expenses equality, including the personal affections of a single woman. The story is narrated at the end of the summer as the narrator remembers and reconstructs the events. As Elizondo told Ruffinelli, when he began writing *Narda* he had in mind turning the story into a film, which it was, but not to Elizondo's liking. Elizondo's intention may be read in the narrator's description of the settings in the story in a more "cinematic", rather than literary, sense. The village, according to the narrator, "A few years ago had been a fishing village, dirty and smelly, but with a beautiful bay. Now it was a 'fishing village', hygienic, dilapidated to the extent that ruins are necessary for tourism. Each house painted pink, old ocher, blue, yellow, functions as a *boîte*, a snack bar, a terrace with an orchestra, a cave with jazz."¹⁸³ The village is filled with former fishermen now working as bellhops and waiters for exclusive hotels and with tourists either sunbathing or dancing to the tune of cha-cha-

¹⁸³ "Hacía algunos años había sido un pueblo de Pescadores sucio y maloliente, pero con una bonita bahía. Ahora es un 'pueblo de pescadores', higiénico, destartalado en la medida que la ruina es necesaria al turismo. En cada casa pintada de rosa, de ocre viejo, de azul, de amarillo, funciona una *boîte*, un *snack-bar*, una terraza con orquesta, una *cave* con *jazz*." Elizondo, Salvador. *Narda o el verano*. (México: Era, 1966), 44.

cha and “*Nel blu dipinto di blu*” (44). In the village there is a *boîte* that is decorated as a jacal, a Mexican hut, with a reproduction of Diego Rivera’s *Danza de la Tierra* hanging on the door to the women’s bathroom and a photograph of Emiliano Zapata holding his rifle on the door of the men’s bathroom (53). The description of the settings puts on display a lighthearted humor in the narrative of the story that could not be more distant from the torturous narrative at work in *Farabeuf*. Added to the lighthearted tone of the story, the description of the characters encountered by the young men, particularly Narda and her procurer, Tchomba, are pulled straight out of pulp fiction. As the two young men go in search of a woman to share for the summer, they end up in a restaurant run by black Africans called *Baobab*, a name that the narrator recalls from *Le Petit Prince* (45). It is at the *Baobab* where the young men find Narda and his procurer, Tchomba. The narrator first describes Tchomba, owner of the *Baobab*, as “a black giant, naked to the waist, beating rhythmically a few pieces of wood producing what, with a great breadth of aesthetic criteria, would qualify percussion music.”¹⁸⁴ The two friends joke about Tchomba being a cannibal, an elephantine *mâitre d’hotel* whose sharp teeth resemble shark jaws. These descriptions anticipate in a very obvious manner the fantastic ending of the story, the sacrificial death of Narda at the hands of Tchomba. When the narrator and Max first meet the woman Tchomba has procured for them at the *Baobab*, she tells them that although her name is Elise, for that summer she wanted to call herself Narda, like the girlfriend of Mandrake the Magician (48). The initial unease the narrator feels regarding Narda (“Women who change their names according to the seasons are beings that fancy themselves refined, slaves to banality who have read Mme. Sagan and nothing more, but the pseudonym was not bad. I liked it, it was a diaphanous and firm name at the

¹⁸⁴ “un negro gigantesco, desnudo hasta la cintura, golpeaba rítmicamente unos trozos de madera produciendo lo que con una gran amplitud de criterio estético pudiera calificarse de música de percusión.” *Ibid*, 47.

same time”¹⁸⁵) quickly dissipates as when she refers to Tchomba as her “Tiger from Kilimanjaro”. In addition to being a reader of Hemingway, Narda tells the young men that she comes from a wealthy Swiss family and that she is a philology student at the Zürich Polytechnic. It would appear that whatever anxieties take over the narrator, they are generated by the perception of a lack of sophistication due to Narda’s references to popular literature and culture. Known as Mme. Sagan, Françoise Sagan (1935-2004) was a playwright and novelist; the publication of her first novel “Bonjour, Tristesse” (1954) turned her into a bestseller author at the age of 19. The narrator’s disdain for her readership covers up the other reference to popular culture, precisely that of Mandrake the Magician. Created by Lee Falk in 1924, Mandrake the Magician was the central character of a syndicated newspaper comic strip from the mid 1930’s. The character of Tchomba, which at one point the narrator addresses a Lotario, undoubtedly refers to Lothar, an African prince that acted as bodyguard and sidekick to Mandrake. There is no character in *Narda* analogous to Mandrake, except perhaps the narrator himself, not just by creating an illusion through storytelling, but also as the photographer of Narda.

After they have dinner at the *Baobab*, Narda agrees to be spend the summer with both young men, and so they decide to celebrate by going out to dance. Throughout the short story there are many instances where the narrator is constantly seeking to incorporate references to photography and, more specifically, cinematography. The most glaring example comes up when, dancing with Narda, the narrator remembers how Max’s “gray eyes followed us with a *close-up* in which only Narda's face was in focus and I was just a blur in the middle of an intimate mist. But I

¹⁸⁵ “Las mujeres que cambian de nombre según las estaciones son seres que se creen refinados, esclavos de la banalidad que han leído a Mme. Sagan y nada más, pero el pseudónimo no estaba mal. Me gustaba; era un nombre diáfano y firme a la vez.” *Ibid*, 48.

saw her in a more violent *close-up*, I could have counted her skin cells”.¹⁸⁶ When it is Max’s turn to dance with Narda, the narrator follows them not in a *close-up*, but in a “*plan americain* [sic] aimed at their waists.”¹⁸⁷ There are a number of other instances where the narrator speaks “in cinematic terms” where the main objective is not only to highlight the artificial nature of the story, but also to illustrate the snobbery of the narrator, a character flaw crucial to the plot twist of the story.

The narrator does not reveal his name in the story, but we read that Tchomba addresses him as Toubab, a Central and West African derogatory name that refers to a wealthy tourist, usually of European descent, that can be easily defrauded or cheated. When Tchomba asks the narrator to take a photograph of Narda in the nude, he offers in exchange, among other things, souvenirs from Auschwitz, authentic photographs of Marilyn Monroe taken in Mexico City, a secret edition Mao Tse Tung’s erotic poetry, a manuscript autographed by Ezra Pound, etc., etc. To the narrator “It looked like he was reciting one of those strange hypnotic incantations heard in the Tarzan films (the Weismuller series). Everything about him reminded me of *Trader Horn*.”¹⁸⁸ In the end the narrator agrees to Tchomba’s request in exchange for the Pound manuscript. At night in the villa, while Narda performs a playful erotic dance for the two young men with the lights out, the narrator manages to take the unexpected snapshot of Narda naked. As the narrator recalls: “I was actually perplexed because the gleam of the *flash* had but an incomprehensible result. Life had been frozen in that photograph taken with all the aggravations. Narda remained so still before that violent orgasm of

¹⁸⁶ “sus ojos grises nos seguían en un *close-up* en el que sólo el rostro de Narda estaba en foco y yo no era más que un borrón en medio de la bruma íntima. Pero yo la veía en un *close-up* más violento, hubiera podido contar las células de su piel.” *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁸⁷ “*plan americain* [sic] enfocado a la altura de sus cinturas.” *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁸⁸ “Parecía que estaba recitando uno de esos extraños encantamientos hipnóticos que se escuchan en las películas de Tarzán (serie Weismüller). Todo en él recordaba *Trader Horn*.” *Ibid*, 61.

light I had produced that it was as if she had died in that position.”¹⁸⁹ Disconcerted, Narda leaves the villa and when the young men go look for her at the *Baobab*, they find her in the company of another man. She ignores them and that is the last time they see her. On the following day the narrator exchanges the photographic film for the Pound manuscript that turns out to be a fake. Later the young men learn that someone has been incarcerated for murdering Narda in a sacrificial ritual; when they leave the police station they hear someone rhythmically knocking on the bars of a jail cell. The night before, when the narrator confronted Tchomba about the fake manuscript, Tchomba handed him over an envelope with the film and photographs taken of Narda. As they leave Tchomba plays a “syncopated, savage variations on *Für Elise*” (78). Days later, when the narrator looks at the film and photographs of Narda, he sees the photographs he took of her and Max, and the photograph requested by Tchomba, but Narda is not in them. The story never resolves the mystery of Narda’s absence in the photographs.

Why doesn’t Narda appear on the photographs taken of her? The story mentions a sacrificial ritual but never shows it. The reference to Mandrake may account for a sort of magical disappearance of Narda. The story’s lighthearted tone and mystery, particularly when compared to those found in *Farabeuf*, may be read as a tribute to pulp fiction and cinema. Originally intended to be turned into a movie, the story is filled with visual and literary clichés. I argued earlier on this chapter that to place *Narda* as a counterpoint to *Farabeuf* reconfigures Elizondo’s oeuvre and questions its barren literary legacy. Both texts share a concern for the representation of the human body in photography and have, at their core, similar climactic sequences

¹⁸⁹ “En realidad estaba perplejo pues el fotonazo del *flash* no había tenido sino un resultado incomprensible. La vida se había quedado congelada en aquella fotografía tomada con todas las agravantes. Narda se había quedado tan quieta ante ese violento orgasmo de luz que yo había producido que era como si se hubiera muerto en esa actitud.” *Ibid*, 71.

involving a sacrificial death of a woman. When Elizondo told Ruffinelli that he preferred *Farabeuf* over *Narda* because the later could be more easily represented, I argue that the antitheatrical demands of photography are at the center of such preference. Elizondo also mentioned to Ruffinelli that one of his fundamental concerns was to break with the generic conventions of literature, which may account for the fragmentary narrative found in the novel. In *Farabeuf* the fragmentation of narrative is analogous to the fragmented, torn up bodies of the Leng Tch'é and of the nurse/victim, but I would suggest that the fragmentation of the narrative may account as well for the desire of the antitheatrical, for that which can't be represented. The opening lines of *Narda* read: "It has been a terrible day. 23 scenes and all in sequence."¹⁹⁰ When the narrator begins to tell the story the summer has ended, and he is working in a film production at the Italian town. I would argue that in *Narda* there is not an avoidance but an overcoming of the theatrical aspect of photography in particular and visual images of the human body in general (Diego Rivera's painting and the photograph of Zapata as gender indicators to the lavatories at the club decorated as a Mexican hut) and that, the absence of *Narda*'s body in the photographs, the fantasy of *Narda* (a character pulled straight out of pulp fiction) does not belong in a photograph for which there was no pose. It is as if the fantasy of *Narda*, an archetypal character in popular culture (Mandrake's girlfriend) is all representation. The flash produced by the snapshot, "a violent orgasm of light", hints at a particular kind of photography and film: pornography. The sacral aura of photography elaborated on *Farabeuf* dissipates before the mundane. The reflection on the mirror, a literary trope that haunts Elizondo throughout his oeuvre, is one to be revisited when considering his literary work, the mirror now as self-portraits, as a subset of photographic inquiry. As *Farabeuf* concludes, the narrative voice asks: "Do you think

¹⁹⁰ "Ha sido un día terrible. 23 escenas y todas en secuencia." *Ibid*, 41.

your death would seem more your own if, as you were dying, you could see yourself reflected in a mirror?" (108). The question remains unanswered as the novel casts an apparent curse at its readers:

Farabeuf will fill your mind with the memory of the thing you have glimpsed only in your dreams and that you have forgotten or think you have forgotten. The image that delights and terrifies. Then, a brief interlude. Lights. The Nurse perhaps will sing an obscene and festive song, and you will know then that you have lost control of your body. Nude, you will find yourself imprisoned among the steel instruments. With a gesture of his gloved hand, Farabeuf will make the darkness return. The performance will continue. Now *you* will be the spectacle. (119)

CHAPTER 4

A POETICS OF PORNOGRAPHY

In this chapter I will analyze the narrative instances within the literary body of work written by Roberto Bolaño where pornography is addressed in a direct manner. As Ian F. Moulton has noted in *Before Pornography* (2000) “the fundamental problem with definitions of pornography is that the term is applied simultaneously to the content of a given product, the manner in which that content is represented, and to the attitude of the observer toward the product” (3-4). My analysis will not explore texts or scenes that may be considered erotic or pornographic writing, but rather it will focus on those instances in the literature of Bolaño dealing directly with the realm of pornography, which include narrative descriptions of audiovisual materials pornographic in nature, along with the stories of characters who form part of this pornographic realm, be it as photographers, actors, film creators and, of course, consumers of pornographic material. This study will not explore arguments in favor or against pornography¹⁹¹, since doing so would inevitably lead, among other things, to an endless debate of eroticism versus pornography. The study presented here begins with the premise that, given the abundant existence of pornographic material in Western society (as great as it is impossible to properly quantify), pornography has become a cultural factor that can no longer be ignored.

The first section of this chapter will explore the constant allusion to audiovisual pornographic texts in the narrative of Roberto Bolaño and the effect that an image-consuming regime has on the individual, which ranges from the photographs

¹⁹¹ For further reference on the debate between anti-pornography and anti-censorship camps, consult the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (anti-pornography) and Camille Paglia, Alisson Assiter, and Avedon Carol (anti-censorship).

some teenagers take of one of their sexual encounters in *The Savage Detectives* to the protagonist of *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce*, a man who can only imagine his girlfriend in the leading role of a pornographic film in order to reaffirm his desire for her. Photographic records and cinematic sequences are sought after in an attempt at capturing an elusive experience, mainly though not exclusively the sexual act, but in failing to achieve this, the records end up replacing the experience itself. The second section of this chapter will focus on the short stories “Prefiguration of Lalo Cura” and “Joanna Silvestri.” Both of these short stories explore the pornographic industry from the perspective of two of its survivors: Lalo Cura is an assassin and the son of a pornographic actress while Joanna Silvestri is an ex-pornographic actress herself. With both of these characters one is able to glimpse, after their dehumanization, the utilitarian function of the subject in relation to the pornographic realm. Then, this chapter will explore the relationship between pornography, violence, and death in a Latin American context when analyzing two narrative fragments from *2666* and *Distant Star*; the first dealing with the story behind the origin of *snuff* films, while the second revolves around the description of a *gore* photographic exhibition. Finally, this chapter will analyze *Antwerp* (a novel composed of fifty-one fragments and a prologue) where pornography ceases to be a thematic point of reference and is incorporated, through an aesthetic of fragmentation, formally into the literature of Roberto Bolaño.

Pornographic representations have always existed as marginal discourses in Western culture, although the contemporary notion of pornography dates back no further than the French Revolution¹⁹². In *Pornografía: sexo mediatizado y pánico moral* Naief Yehya claims that during the mid-nineteenth century pornographic

¹⁹² For more see Hunt, Lynn Avery. (Ed). *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*. New York: Zone Books, 1993.

photographs begin to be reproduced in post cards, some of which also contained obscene and misogynous jokes that echoed the satirical caricatures attacking both the Church and the affluent during the French Revolution (68). With the mass reproduction of these cards pornography turns from a subversive social resource into a product for consumption. Modern pornography gradually begins to differentiate itself from other sexual representations in that it became readily available given its presentation in formats that could be acquired and used in privacy as opposed to the paintings and sculptures found in the public arena (44). From photography to film, and over the course of the late twentieth century, the pornographic industry in the United States alone is thought to have annual revenues in the billions of dollars. The revenue accounts for the professional production and commercialization of pornography in the United States, and does not take into account the pornography produced for internet consumption, nor the new *mecas* of the industry such as Moscow or Budapest, to name a couple. If one were to add to the number of pornographic material just mentioned the production *amateur* pornographic content, the cultural magnitude of that pornography holds in contemporary society can only be hinted at with a production literally becomes endless.

In 2002 Roberto Bolaño publishes *Una novelita lumpen*, a novel that tells the story of a teenage brother and sister whose parents die in an automobile accident. The story takes place in Rome, capital city to a country where the image-consumption regime is exemplified, if anecdotically, by the political might of media mogul Silvio Berlusconi. In the novel, when the brother and sister become orphans, they find that their father's pension is not enough to support them and they both abandon school in order to get a job. Gradually they both take on the daily routine of watching trash-television programming and video rentals. The second chapter of the novel begins as follows: "A Little later my brother rented a pornographic movie and we watched it

together. It was horrible and I told him so. He agreed. We watched it until the end and then we watched tv, first an American program and then a game show.”¹⁹³ Later Bianca, the narrator of the story, tells how the next day her brother returned the pornographic video and rented another one. When she asks him why he had rented another pornographic video, he answers that he rented it to learn how to make love, Bianca replies that nothing can be learned by watching filthy movies but her brother advises her not to be so sure about it “with a hoarse voice which until then she had never heard.”¹⁹⁴ After watching the new video her brother’s “Eyes were bright. Then he began to exercise on the floor, crunches and stuff like that, and for a second I thought he was going crazy.”¹⁹⁵ His obsession with bodybuilding, which is established in the previous chapter when he confesses his dream of becoming *Mister Roma*, and then *Mister Italia* or *Lord of the Universe* (17), is complemented with his liking, if not addiction, to pornographic materials where graphic sexual representations are founded on an endless and repetitive exhibition of corporeal iconography. Bianca’s taste for cinema is also established in the second chapter, where she declares herself “omnivorous” because of her liking of romantic comedies, classic horror movies, gore cinema, psychological thrillers, and detective and war movies (24). On her way home, after renting some videos, Bianca tells how she would examine the covers on the tapes as if they were books (24). The brother and sister in the novel are forced, given their precarious economic situation and the lack of social services, to abandon their

¹⁹³ *Una novelita lumpen* has not yet been translated into English, therefore the translation for this text is my own. The original reads: “Poco después mi hermano alquiló una película pornográfica y la vimos juntos. Era horrible y se lo dije. Él estuvo de acuerdo. La vimos hasta el final y luego nos pusimos a ver la tele, primero una serie americana y después un concurso.” Bolaño, Roberto. *Una Novelita Lumpen*. (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2002), 21.

¹⁹⁴ “con una voz enronquecida que hasta ese momento nunca le había escuchado.” *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁹⁵ “Tenía los ojos brillantes. Luego se puso a hacer ejercicio en el suelo, abdominales y cosas por el estilo, y por un segundo pareció que se estaba volviendo loco.” *Ibid*, 21.

education and enter the labor force in order to survive, and the television programs and videos they watch become a critical part of their upbringing.¹⁹⁶

Teenage sexual curiosity leads another set of characters, now from *The Savage Detectives*, into the realm of pornography. The novel is divided in three sections, the first and last written in the form of a diary by Juan García Madero, one of the leading characters of the story. The text to be analyzed next can be found in the first section of the novel as part of the diary entry for “November 18.” In this entry the narrator and writer of the diary, García Madero, recalls going to meet some of his friends at their house. Once he arrives he finds them looking at a set of “fifty or sixty photos” (52) that one of them has taken of his sexual encounter with a brother and sister. Of the description that García Madero makes of the pictures, it is worth exploring a couple of his observations. One of the descriptions of a photo states: “The face of the boy being fucked was twisted in a grimace that I assumed was an expression of mingled pain and pleasure. (Or fake emotion, but that only occurred to me later.)” (53). Where Natasha Wimmer translated as “fake emotion,” in the original text we have the expression described as “de teatro.” García Madero goes on to add that: “The last pictures showed the three of them in bed, in different poses, pretending to sleep or smiling at the photographer” (53). It’s important to note from these observations not only the inclusion/intrusion of the photographic camera (tool for the reproduction of images) in the sexual experience but also the way it changes the act into a theatrical performance. The theatre (or fake emotion), the smile directed at the photographer, and the posing that the characters take—they all contribute to drain the sexual experience of all reality in favor of a handful of pornographic images.

¹⁹⁶ Camille Paglia claims that “There is neither decline nor disaster in the triumph of mass media, only a shift from word to image—in other words, a return to western culture’s pre-Gutenberg, pre-Protestant pagan pictorialism” Paglia, Camillie. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 34.

To speak of an image-consumption regime and its impact on individuals one must go further than the mere contact or consumption he or she may have with media objects such as photographs or films. Another side to the regime emerges when these individuals begin to produce, on their own, mediatic texts in the form of audiovisual recordings. Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*, claims that

Photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information. Photography has become the quintessential art of affluent, wasteful, restless societies—an indispensable tool of the new mass culture that took shape here after the Civil War, and conquered Europe only after World War II, although its values had gained a foothold among the well-off as early as the 1850s when, according to the splenetic description of Baudelaire, ‘our squalid society’ became narcissistically entranced by Daguerre’s ‘cheap method of disseminating a loathing for history. (69)

Keeping in mind that this young group of characters identify themselves as participants of a poetic movement (in spite the fact that none of them is ever writing or publishing a text), it comes as no surprise then that any one of them would take photographs of a sexual encounter, seeking to capture those “unpremeditated slices of the world” in the “found objects” that are those photographs. However, the theatricality of the encounter and its reproduction in images end up neutralizing whatever sexual experience they may have had, in the sense that pornography, as Jean Baudrillard has claimed *On Seduction*, “...does not play with violent sex, sex with real stakes, but with sex neutralized by tolerance. Sex here is outrageously ‘rendered,’ but it is the rendering of something that has been removed. Pornography is its artificial synthesis, its ceremony but not its celebration” (29). It is as if the representation of the sexual experience ends up replacing actual act, or rather, its representation replaces the

celebration of the ceremony—one must wonder whether Baudrillard notes here a secularization, so to speak, by its representation on the public arena.

In *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce*, novel co-written by Roberto Bolaño and Andoni García-Porta, the extent of an image-consumption regime and the effect it exerts on the individual becomes characterized on the figure of Ángel. The novel tells the story of Ángel and Ana, a young couple that engage on petty criminal activities until, of course, they participate in burglaries and murders. At one point in the story the police, chasing after them, forces them to flee in separate directions. During this separation, where the lead characters have no contact with one another whatsoever, Ángel fantasizes about Ana imagining her in the leading role of a pornographic film; only in this way is he able to masturbate (105). Ángel describes three scenes of those mini productions. On the first scene, Ana “was lost in a bizarre Barcelona, wandering among sleeping men and bulging crotches.”¹⁹⁷ On the second scene Ana “Appeared in gloomy underground hovels where she was raped by cops dressed in old-fashioned uniforms...silhouettes of cops that walled her like dancers from Merce Cunningham’s ballet and screaming.”¹⁹⁸ Finally, on the last scene, Ángel imagines that Ana “arrived with loaded bags of food to a South-American apartment; he would see her sort cans in a cupboard while a guy waited for her in the bedroom, lying on the bed, with the curtains closed, smoking”¹⁹⁹ until Ana “undressed, sitting at the foot of the bed, speaking as if he was her partner ... then he

¹⁹⁷ “la veía perdida en una Barcelona extrañísima, vestida con pantalones de cuero, deambulando entre hombres dormidos y con las braguetas abultadas.” Bolaño, Roberto and Antoni García Porta. *Consejos de un Discípulo de Morrison a un Fanático de Joyce*. (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1984), 105.

¹⁹⁸ “aparecía en lóbregos cuartuchos subterráneos donde la violaban polis vestidos a la antigua usanza...las siluetas de los polis que la emparedaban como si fueran bailarines del ballet de Merce Cunningham.” *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁹⁹ “llegaba cargada con bolsas de comida a un departamento de sudamericanos; la veía ordenar latas de conserva en una alacena mientras un tipo la esperaba en el dormitorio, acostado, con las cortinas cerradas, fumando.” *Ibid*, 105.

would pull her hair and told her that he loved her.”²⁰⁰ There is no indication, Ángel never tells, of whether these scenes follow any sort of logic, or whether they would come from different mini productions. Of the first scene what remains is the pornographic iconography of the leather jeans and bulges in men’s pants. From the second scene comes the description that most closely resembles a sexual act, when the cops “wall” Ana in, but even this description quickly vanishes behind the silhouettes out of Cunningham’s ballet. In the last scene the atmosphere of suspense previously created is displaced by one that is definitely more quotidian, a scene that escapes commonly used pornographic scenarios.

In Ángel’s sexual fantasies his interaction and even dependence on pornographic images is clearly present—in order for him to literally be able to picture Ana he must do so within the pornographic scenarios he creates. In other words, in his fantasies pornography becomes the bridge that connects him to Ana. However, the pornographic scenarios imagined by Ángel are never fully realized when the narrative is kept from the sexual act. In the first scene the sexual encounter between Ana and the men is implied but never realized since they’re all asleep. In the second scene Cunningham’s figure, an icon of modern dance whose abstract choreographies have often been associated with Dadaist, surrealist and existentialist movements²⁰¹, practically steals the scene, putting forward the theatricality of the sexual encounter in Ángel’s mini production. Finally, in the last scene, the quotidian air of domesticity takes over his pornographic fantasy—the confusion of the individual in an image-consuming regime ends up betraying it when the longing Ángel may feel for Ana has to pass through, almost mechanically, a pornographic canvas.

²⁰⁰ “se desnudaba sentada a los pies de la cama, hablándole como si fuera su compañero...entonces el la cogía del pelo y le decía que la quería.” *Ibid*, 105-106.

²⁰¹ “Merce Cunningham.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2010. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 15 Jan. 2010 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/146610/Merce-Cunningham>>.

Frances Ferguson in *Pornography, the Theory* (2004) explores the utilitarian function of the individuals that make up the pornographic realm. According to Ferguson, “pornography is one among an array of practices that developed with modern utilitarianism, which has accustomed us to evaluate actions in a relative way and to see them as the output of a system rather than that of individual intention or agent” (1). Elaborating on Bentham’s panoptic structures, Ferguson claims that utilitarianism is “significant for introducing an account of objectification and perceptibility that tries to capture the notion of use” (1). Furthermore, Ferguson adds, “Utilitarianism prepared the way for pornography not merely by saying that it was less concerned with what things were than with what they used for,” and that “the remarkable aspect of these social structures was that their functioning was indifferent to the memories, anticipations, and beliefs that persons frequently define themselves by” (3). Michela Marzano, in *La pornografía o el agotamiento del deseo* (2006) follows on this analytical line of thought when she claims that “pornography systematizes the general principle of utility according to which each individual represents a role and function; like totalitarianism, pornography establishes a rule under which the individual is no more than a body/flesh to be controlled”²⁰² For Marzano pornography is a “discourse where a display of sex replaces the subjective difference and where the economy of desire is reduced to instinctual functioning of the organs. What matters is not the individual in their specificity and uniqueness but its reduction to a set of genitals and erogenous zones.”²⁰³ Such a

²⁰² “la pornografía sistematiza el principio general de la utilidad según la cual todo individuo representa su papel y su función; como el totalitarismo, la pornografía instituye una dominación en virtud de la cual el individuo no es más que un cuerpo-carne que se debe controlar.” Marzano, Michela. *La Pornografía o el Agotamiento del Deseo*. trans. Víctor Goldstein. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, 2006), 47.

²⁰³ “discurso donde la exhibición de los sexos sustituye la diferencia subjetiva y donde la economía del deseo es reducida al funcionamiento pulsional de los órganos. Lo que cuenta no es el individuo en su especificidad y su unicidad sino su reducción a un conjunto de órganos genitales y zonas erógenas.” *Ibid*, 43.

functional pulse is put on display in a segment of *2666* where, in the description of a pornographic video of an actress penetrated simultaneously by three other actors, the narrator notes that in the scene depicting this act “The effect was of a perpetual-motion machine. The spectator could see that the machine was going to explode at some point, but it was impossible to say what the explosion would be like and when it would happen” (321). The participants of this film are able to, given the performance they enact, be compared to a functional machine where the continuous movements they engage on overshadow their individual identity. The explosion of the machine, that is to say, the moment when the performers become useless to the pornographic realm, can be observed in the short stories “Joanna Silvestri” and “Prefiguration of Lalo Cura.”

The story of “Joanna Silvestri” is a first person account of an Italian ex-pornographic actress agonizing in anonymity at a French hospital. The character of Joanna appears first (though briefly) in *Distant Star*, published a year before *Llamadas Telefónicas*, the short story collection where her story is told in more detail. Its translation into English, along with the one for “Prefiguration of Lalo Cura”, was published in the summer of 2010 by New Directions in the short story collection titled *The Return*. In the novel Joanna receives the visit of a private detective chasing after Carlos Wieder. The detective, following a lead that supposes Wieder a cameraman in the European pornographic industry, visits Joanna to find out if she had met Wieder at some point in her career. In the short story Joanna barely mentions Wieder since the story she is about to tell revolves around her last visit to Jack Holmes²⁰⁴, a

²⁰⁴ It is inevitable not to see behind the character of Jack Holmes the figure of the famous pornographic actor John Holmes, an actor whose film trajectory reached its peak during the decades of the 1970s and 1980. The myth engulfing the figure of Holmes is grounded not only on the highly publicized length of his sexual organ but also on the fact that he was one of the very first pornographic entertainers who contracted and died of AIDS. Behind the character of Joanna Silvestri one may glimpse that of Moana Pozzi, and Italian pornographic actress who, in 1992, co-founded with Cicciolina (another pornographic actress of Hungarian descent) the

pornographic actor living in Los Angeles. Given that Joanna's trip to Los Angeles was originally work-related, the story has a few scenes dealing directly with the shooting of a film and, of course, throughout the story there is a constant allusion to the pornographic industry in southern California. However, the abandonment and disease of Jack Holmes eclipse the glamour and professionalism with which Joanna carries out her job, unveiling at the same time the utilitarian function of an industry that discards its members the minute they're no longer useful or usable.

The story begins with the narrator stating "Here I am, Joanna Silvestri, thirty-seven years of age, profession: porn star, on my back in the Clinique Les Trapèzes in Nîmes, watching the afternoons go by, listening to the stories of a Chilean detective" (81). The presentation of the protagonist carried the weight of a self-affirmation from an individual who, in her deathbed, recalls her professional career and the personal relationship to Holmes that came out of it. She briefly mentions the Chilean detective (the scene from *Distant Star*) but immediately turns to her memory of Holmes and her trip to Los Angeles in 1990, the last time she saw him alive. From her arrival to California Joanna recalls a noticeable improvement from the working conditions she had back in Italy (shooting four movies in two weeks) but she also remembers a talk with the film producers about the changes the industry was undergoing, especially the financial aspect of it, with the "combination of apparently unrelated factors: money, new players coming in from other sectors, the disease, the demand for a product that would be different but not too different" (84). With the mention of the "disease", and although it is never specified as AIDS, the character of Jack Holmes enters the story. Throughout the story Jack Holmes, who no longer works in the industry, is described as a man who gradually gets thinner and weaker as a result of his illness. Joanna

Party of Love in Italy. Moana Pozzi, much like Joanna Silvestri, died in a hospital in Lyon, France, in the summer of 1994 after suffering from liver cancer.

remembers how “his legs were much thinner than I had remembered, and his chest seemed to have sunken in, only his cock was the same, and his eyes too, but no, the only thing that hadn’t changed was the great jackhammer, as the ads for his movies used to say” (90). In noting that Holmes’ penis remains the same suggests the desire, not just from Joanna, to rescue Holmes from abandonment and disease, remembering him at his best sexual expression, which is to say, at his best functional expression.

In the story there is a scene that shows the importance that Holmes held for the industry and at the same time builds on the myth surrounding him. Throughout the story Joanna visits Holmes at his bungalow in Monrovia on repeated occasions. Holmes lives in isolation and only once he shows up at one of Joanna’s shoots. Joanna, in the middle of a performance, is the last one to realize Holmes’ presence on the set, although she quickly notices “the silhouettes surrounding us in the shadows, all still, all turned to stone” (93). No one dares utter a word in the presence of Holmes, and Joanna remembers that he “seemed to be sanctifying our movie and our work and our lives” (95). The use of the verb ‘to sanctify’ suggests a number of interpretations. On one hand, this sanctification may be read as a sign of the recognition and fame Holmes held in the industry. On the other hand, it’s also possible to read this sanctification as a sign of relief since Holmes, an AIDS carrier, has been practically banned from the production of pornographic films. Ultimately, a third reading appears to suggest a sort of messianic aura on the part of Holmes in the sense that, in spite having been sacrificed and discarded by the industry, his fame has given him back a sense of individuality—he now stands apart, literally outside of the industry, and although suffering from a terminal condition, Holmes is no longer a body that must be controlled.

The short story “Prefiguration of Lalo Cura” was originally published in 2001 as part of a collection of short stories under the title *Putas Asesinas*; its translation, as

mentioned earlier, appeared in the collection *The Return*. In this story we are presented with yet another side of the pornographic industry, one carried out in Latin America. The story is told by Olegario Cura²⁰⁵, the son of a Colombian pornographic actress and a priest or minister, the protagonist himself is never quite certain of this. Lalo Cura grows up to become an assassin and goes in search of the characters that worked alongside his mother, Connie. The story ends with an encounter between Lalo Cura and Pajarito Gómez, a former pornographic actor. The narrative of the story, in which Lalo Cura remembers some of the films that his mother participated in, deals with some of the ideas previously explored in this chapter, an image-consumption regime and the utilitarianism of the pornographic industry, but adds two more recurring themes in Bolaño's literary production, those of violence and the Latin American context.

Lalo Cura, as stated earlier, is the son of pornographic actress who participated in the production of some films while she was pregnant with Lalo. One of the most revealing passages of the story is found when Lalo remembers the house where these films were shot. Lalo remembers: "Once I went into the kitchen, to help, and when I opened the cupboards all I found were enema tubes, hundreds of enema tubes lined up as if for a military parade. Everything in the kitchen was fake...Everything in the house was fake" (101). The house belonged to Helmutt Bittrich, the creator of the pornographic films, and it served as his only shooting location for the movies. The fake house that Lalo encounters parallels the theatricality of the pornographic industry in particular and the performances at large. In fact, later in the story Lalo sees pornography as "the dealing that imitates life" (103). The disenchantment that befalls Lalo with the industry under which he grew up on, which begins with the discovery of

²⁰⁵ There is another character in the literature of Bolaño with the same name, Olegario Cura o Lalo Cura. The character of the short story is different from the one that shows up in *2666*.

the fake house, reaches its maximum point when he sees one of his mother's performances on video. Upon viewing the first film Lalo remembers telling himself: "The Force is with me, I thought, the first time I saw that movie, at the age of nineteen, crying my eyes out, grinding my teeth, pinching the side of my head, the Force is with me" (102). In spite of Lalo's upbringing and his acceptance of the 'fake' aspect of the productions and set, Lalo can't seem to escape the reach of popular culture, making a reference not only to *Star Wars* but also, as he encounters Pajarito Gómez, talking about Mexican actor Ignacio López Tarso. Of Pajarito Gómez, leading a economically precarious life, Lalo sees that his routine was summed up when "He went from home to work and back again, with a brief stop each day at a video store, where he'd usually rent a couple of movies...He never brought food back, only movies" (113). Pajarito Gómez, much like the brother and sister of *Una novelita lumpen*, rents videos every day and spends most of the time watching them.

The characters of Lalo Cura and Pajarito Gómez exemplify the impact that the pornographic industry has on the people who participate of it by systematizing a general utilitarian principle where every individual represents a function that ends up defining their character. Of Pajarito Gómez we learn throughout the story that he would always 'vibrate,' no matter what film or room he entered. When Lalo finally finds him, he notices that not only does he appear to be at least ten years older than he probably was, but also that "His days of vibrating were over" (114). Pajarito's vibration, of course, recalls his function as a pornographic actor, and from this interpretation one doesn't have to make too big a leap to identify this character with a vibrator, an erotic toy/machine that has lost its function the moment he no longer takes part of the pornographic industry. Of the character of Lalo Cura one must recall the way he presents himself in the story: "That's what it all comes down to. Getting closer to hell or further away. Me, for example, I've had people killed. I've given the best

birthday presents. I've backed projects of epic proportions. I've opened my eyes in the dark" (99). His presentation serves the exact opposite function than that of Joanna Silvestri. While in Joanna's presentation a sort of individual reaffirmation prevails, in Lalo's own presentation he would rather let his actions and deeds speak for him. In the story we are told that twelve of former pornographic actors (his mother's peers) have been murdered. Lalo does not confess to the murders in spite the fact that he is portrayed as an assassin. When Pajarito Gómez asks him if he is going to kill him, Lalo says: "I haven't come to rub you out, I said to him in the end. Back then, when I was young, I had trouble using the word *kill*. I never killed: I took people out, blew them away, put them to sleep, I topped, stiffed or wasted them, sent them to meet their maker, made them bite the dust, I iced them, snuffed them, did them in. I smoked people" (115). If Lalo defines himself through the acts he performs, then, it comes as no surprise to understand him as a product of the utilitarian, pornographic realm.

The title of the short story, "Prefiguration of Lalo Cura," lends itself to a couple of possible interpretations. The first, and most obvious, would be that it describes the plot of the story; the second is hinted at when Lalo mentions some of the dreams (or nightmares) and visions he has of Latin America. In the final shot of one of the movies described by Lalo one of the actors is "naked from the waist down, his penis hangs flaccid and dripping. It's dark and wrinkled and the drops have a milky sheen. Behind the actor a landscape unfolds: mountains, ravines, rivers, forests, ranges, towering clouds, a city perhaps, a volcano, a desert...That's all" (110). The shot, which Lalo compares to a poem by Tablada, is almost immediately labeled as "Impossible geography, impossible anatomy" (110). Lalo wonders whether Bittrich with this scene wanted to "give an impression of useless grandeur: handsome young men without shame, marked out for sacrifice, fated to disappear in the immensity of chaos" (110) where money is "a point of reference in the midst of chaos" (111).

Continuing the reading of the title, and the name of the character itself, Lalo Cura, suggests the play on words that make reference to “La locura”, or madness. Lalo’s prefiguration finds a plateau, the continent at large, where some of the themes regarding the pornographic realm (image-consumption, utilitarianism and dehumanization) are put on display. Pornography and violence, in a Latin American context, announce Lalo’s view of the continent, none other than “The cottage of movies. The house of solitude, which was later to become the house of crime, out there on its own, among clumps of trees and blackberry bushes” (101). The vastness of the continent and its chaotic nature, a thematic staple of many Latin American literary texts, is now observed in “Prefiguration of Lalo Cura” under a pornographic lens.

Two forms or subgenres of pornography that make an appearance in Bolaño’s literature are *snuff* films and *gore* photography. This particular kind of pornography, as found in Bolaño’s texts, is presented in such a manner that the violence and death they depict become intertwined with recent episodes of Latin American history. According to Patricia Espinosa, Bolaño’s writing is an expression that “oscillates between desire and its referent and where the historical-political context is at the service the writing itself.”²⁰⁶ Desire confused, one might interpret, with an obsessive consumption, while the referent has already been lost behind an endless reproduction of audiovisual iconography. *Snuff* films and *gore* photography unveil a Latin American context of cheap production, mass consumption and readily discarded human beings. The socio-historical and political background of the texts to be analyzed here (dictatorships and social turmoil in the southern hemisphere or a city on the U.S.-Mexico border in the late twentieth century) becomes central stage to the pornographic scene explored in *2666* and *Distant Star*. This double representation is

²⁰⁶ “oscila entre el deseo y el referente y donde lo histórico-político está al servicio de la escritura misma.” Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De Roberto Bolaño*. (Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003), 20.

ultimately presented at the service of writing itself and the obstacles and issues that emerge around the task of literary creation. What is the relationship between violence and artistic creation and representation in the literature of Roberto Bolaño? In the texts analyzed in this segment the narration of violent audiovisual texts leads to a fragmentary narrative without clear referents, composed of pastiches where violence and art in Latin America may be found precisely through a pornographic representation.

Two narrative fragments in Bolaño's work are analyzed in order to explore, on one hand, a retelling of the myth behind *snuff* films under a fictitious lens, while on the other, an exhibition of gore photography by a Chilean aviator under the Pinochet dictatorship. In the fourth of the five novels that make up *2666* one finds a retelling of the myth created around the origin of *snuff* films. The story told in the novel appears in the context of a border town where myth and consumption seem intertwined. Also, the Latin American context (Argentina) is presented as a crucial trait in the forming of such myth. Along these lines one may sketch out a trajectory where, taking mythology as a starting point for mass consumption, ends with an attempt to represent the atrocities afore mentioned. Although the photo exhibit to be analyzed in this chapter appears twice in the Bolaño's literary production, I will be referring to the one presented on chapter six in *Distant Star*.²⁰⁷ In this narrative segment a description of the photographic exhibition is told, the images consisting mostly of the agonizing,

²⁰⁷ The story of the Chilean aviator and his photographic exhibition appears first in *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (1996). This text, a collection of vignettes of fictional writers, includes a glossary, a bibliographical index and even a list of publishing houses and magazines (all of them fictional) where these writers publish their work. The links between these writers, aside from their shared geographic/continental locale, is their marginality as well as their fascist and ultraconservative tendencies. The last of the vignettes included in this text revolves around the figure of Alberto Ruiz-Tagle. Two years after the publication of *Nazi literature in the Americas* Bolaño publishes in Anagrama *Distant Star*, a novel that expands the vignette of the aviator. Although some of the names of the characters change (the aviator is no longer Alberto Ruiz-Tagle but Carlos Wieder) the story remains the same, and the segment narrating the photographic exhibition in both books is not altered noticeably.

dismembered, and ultimately lifeless bodies of disappeared women during the dictatorship. The analysis of these two fragments forwards two lines of inquiry, one thematic and the other structural, in the works of Bolaño: the link between violence, a popular culture of mass consumption and narrative fragmentation.

Sexual representations and discussions, particularly those pertaining to pornography, have been and remain considered obscene by society at large. However, in her introduction to *Porn Studies*, Linda Williams suggests that these representations are not only on scene, but they actually constitute one of the main spectacles of contemporary culture. Williams, speaking on obscenity, which literally means “off-scene”, postulates the term *on/scenity*, defining it as “the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene” (3). Although Williams speaks in an American sociocultural context, one may argue that her views on the cultural role of pornography extend to the larger context of western culture. Pornography, in such a media driven society, has been gradually acquiring a status of leading performance act, being adopted by and considered to be mainstream. However, according to Naief Yehya, speaking of mainstream pornography, common sense would indicate that one speaks of the representation of the sexual acts between a man and woman in a variety of positions and settings, although once the sexual act becomes represented the breath of sexual “transgressions” grows dramatically (197). Within the vast catalogue of pornographic genres²⁰⁸ *snuff* films and pedophilia emerge

²⁰⁸ Naief Yehya suggests a cataloguing of the pornography under the following criteria: a) sexual acts, b) kinds of relationships (gay, straight, transsexual, etc.), c) particular physical characteristics or traits of the performers, d) fetishes, e) “freaks” (natural phenomena and/or prosthetic genitalia), and f) “others” (animation, gonzo, sexual education, parodies, etc.) Furthermore, Yehya notes a subgenre of pornography, “problemáticos tanto en términos estéticos como éticos y morales” that include amateur pornography, sadomasochism, *snuff* films and pedophilia. Yehya, Naief. *Pornografía: Sexo Mediatizado y Pánico Moral*. (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2004), 199-201.

as a kind of subgenre that do not have direct links to the legitimate pornographic industry and, as Yehya notes, not only may they be considered a sort of pornography *of* pornography, but in fact to produce, purchase, obtain and watch them constitutes a crime (201).

The term *snuff* begins to be used during the 1970's to denote pornographic material that captures on film the violent murder of a person. According to Román Gubern in *La imagen pornográfica y otras perversiones ópticas* the attraction to the *snuff* genre is precisely the depiction of extreme situations. Gubern goes on to add that *snuff* is a postmodern return to the old rituals of the Roman Coliseum, where the voyeur satiates his/her desire to contemplate how a body, at the hands of the executioner, manifests its humanity just before losing it, first as a desperate plea and finally through death (345). This human manifestation unveils perhaps the greatest problem faced by pornography, which is to seek out, capture and reproduce a more realistic mimetic representation. While in mainstream pornography the quest for reality plays out on a hyperrealist plane with moaning, close-ups of genitalia and ejaculations, in *snuff* films such quest reaches its limits with the death of one of their participants. The postmodern aspect of these sexual representations, then, derives from the massive and hyperrealist reproduction of iconographies through film and photography, which grants contemporary pornography a new sociocultural status different from the one it used to hold in Greco-roman paganism(9).

At first glance the link between *snuff* films and *gore* photography lies in its violent thematic content. One may, however, venture a technical association between both forms of reproduction and representation. For Gubern the transition from life to death is analogous to the transition from the moving image to the photographic still; the camera stops reproducing life in order to capture death (325). *Gore* photography illustrates the ending of a *snuff* film: after the fleeting moment of death, what remains

is the fixed body/object of the deceased. It's rather pertinent to note here the epigraph with which Bolaño begins *Antwerp*'s first fragment, titled "1. Facade." Quoting David O. Selznick, film producer of such films as *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *Rebecca* (1940), the epigraph reads: "Once photographed, life here is ended. It is almost symbolic of Hollywood. Tara has no rooms inside. It was just a facade" (3). This epigraph not only suggests the link between death and photography, but also comments on the spectacle of violence, the connection between mass consumption and artistic creation and, ultimately, the inevitably failed representation of reality. In *Distant Star* the *gore* photography exhibit organized by Carlos Weider is staged as an outlet where his artistic creations are exposed to the public. Susan Sontag, in her analysis of Diane Arbus's photographic work in *On Photography*, notes that,

Much of modern art is devoted to lowering the threshold of what is terrible. By getting us used to what, formerly, we could not bear to see or hear, because it was too shocking, painful, or embarrassing, art changes morals—that body of psychic custom and public sanctions that draws a vague boundary between what is emotionally and spontaneously intolerable and what is not. The gradual suppression of queasiness does bring us closer to a rather formal truth—that of the arbitrariness of the taboos constructed by art and morals. (40-41)

The fragment in *Distant Star* pertaining to the *gore* photo exhibit and, particularly the narrative description of the scene, allows in its analysis for an interpretation where that arbitrariness is exposed not only on the written text but also on the artistic object as such.

While the existence of a *snuff* film industry has never been officially confirmed, the possibility that material of this sort has been produced is not far-fetched. A minor character in *2666*, a Mexican General, when asked whether a wave of murders committed against women in the border town of Santa Teresa was in any way linked to a *snuff* film industry, claims that "All you need to make a snuff film...was money, and there was money before the drug lords made their fortunes, and

also a pornography industry” (537). The story of this pornographic subgenre is, from the very beginning, linked to consumption—and not entirely of the life of the victim. In linking myth and consumption, Jean Baudrillard argues in *Consumer Society* that

the whole discourse on consumption, whether learned or lay, is articulated on the mythological sequence of the fable: a man, “endowed” with needs which “direct” him towards objects that “give” him satisfaction. Since man is really never satisfied (for which, by the way, he is reproached), the same history is repeated indefinitely, since the time of the ancient fables. (39)

Following this “sequence of the fable” the pornographic text/object will never be able to give the satisfaction of a sexual encounter since they are only representation; the story is repeated indefinitely to an incomplete satisfaction (even for the voyeur) in an effort to seek a “truer” representation of reality. As Baudrillard notes, now in *Seduction*, “the only phantasy in pornography, if there is one, is a not thus a phantasy sex, but of the real, and its absorption into something other than the real, the hyperreal” (29). According to Naief Yehya, the story of the origin of *snuff* as a pornographic subgenre begins with a trip that Michael and Roberta Findlay make to Argentina in 1971 and, while vacationing, decide to “make a movie on a shoestring budget (giving that life was cheap South America).”²⁰⁹ Yehya adds that for the duration of a month and with a budget of thirty thousand dollars the Findlays shot a film with no sound, given that the actors didn’t speak English, inspired on the murder of Sharon Tate, who while pregnant, was murdered on August 9th, 1969 by members of the Manson sect (222). The film is released under the title *The Slaughter*²¹⁰ in 1971 to no major box office success. Allan Shackelton, head of the Monarch Realising

²⁰⁹ “de paso hacer una película con un presupuesto reducido (aprovechando que en Sudamérica la vida era barata).” Yehya, Naief. *Pornografía: Sexo Mediatizado y Pánico Moral*. (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2004), 222.

²¹⁰ *The Slaughter*. 1971. Written and directed by Michael Findlay.
<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0991282/>>

Corporation, opted to redistribute the film 1976, now under the title *Snuff*²¹¹ and adding a five minute long sequence at the end of the film staging the murder of an actress by actor in the role of the director of the film. At the end of the scene the actor playing the director of the movie “cuts open the belly [of the actress] rips the still beating heart and something that looks like an intestine. The director, who is wearing a shirt that says <Vida is life> (in Spanish), shouts triumphantly raising her guts.”²¹² The film earned \$66,000 on its opening weekend and lead the box office charts from three weeks in spite strong protests carried out in front of cinemas and the fact that Shackelton was forced to prove that the crime shown on the screen was not real, and that the actress was alive and well (223).

The story of the origin of *snuff*, as recreated by Roberto Bolaño, doesn't stray too far away from Yehya's account but definitely sets out to underscore the Latin American element of its confection. There are minor alterations to the story, particularly the names of the creators of the film, who under the fictional account presented in *2666* become Mike and Clarissa Epstein. Bolaño's account recreates the month long production of the film and there is no character identifiable with Shackelton. Of course, there is no mention at all of the added footage and redistribution of the film, and the actress whose death is staged flees from production to Europe with an Italian revolutionary. Bolaño's variations of the story establish a frame where the political and pornographic realms merge in a representation that lack clear referents. In *2666* the story of the myth behind *snuff* films is told in the context of Santa Teresa, a town on the border between Mexico and U.S.A. The narrator of the

²¹¹ *Snuff*. 1976. Written and directed by Michael Findlay.
<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072184/>>

²¹² “tras abrirle el vientre [a la actriz] le arranca el corazón aún palpitante y algo que parece un intestino. El realizador, que lleva una camiseta que dice <Vida es muerte> (en español), grita triunfalmente alzando las entrañas.” Yehya, Naief. *Pornografía: Sexo Mediatizado y Pánico Moral*. (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2004), 223.

story is a character that only shows up once in the novel and whose only purpose is to tell the story behind the myth of *snuff*. The character is an Argentine journalist who goes to Santa Teresa in order to write an article about the alarming number of women murdered around town, which constitutes the fourth section of *2666*, “The Part about the Crimes.” This character shows up for roughly five pages of the novel and this segment deals with his arrival to Santa Teresa and his telling of the story about the pornographic subgenre.

The journalist’s stay in Santa Teresa establishes the context of a town where one of the lines of investigation behind the murders of women in the area seem to point towards the possible existence of an active *snuff* film industry. Bolaño situates the character in no more than three lines: “He went to a bullfight. He was at a brothel, Internal Affairs, and he slept with a whore called Rosana. He visited Domino’s, the club, and Serafino’s, the bar” (540). Within these three sentences not only is the journalist located in Santa Teresa, but the tone of the segment is also foretold. With the bullfight, of course, it may be argued that more than a violent spectacle there is also a close reference to one of the definitions of *gore*, which is to “to pierce with or as if with a horn or tusk.”²¹³ The name of the brothel mentioned, under a humorously macabre reading, also anticipates the concept of sexual encounters and representation as a form of entertainment and consumption. Finally, lingering on this close reading for just a few more lines, the names of “Domino’s” and “Serafino’s”, in a Mexican border town, underline not only the social context of a town revolving around the service industry, but also, seeking the etymology of both names, one may see how telling they are in helping set the mood of the segment, echoing not only fiery angels and hooded cloaks, but ultimately domination and mastery.

²¹³ "gore." *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 26 Feb. 2010. <[Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gore](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gore)>.

The Argentinean journalist, now in Santa Teresa, manages to meet a friend of a colleague who claims to own a *snuff* film. Immediately after meeting they both go to the new acquaintance's home and view the video without commenting it, after which they go have a few beers at a place called "El Rey del Taco." The description of this restaurant is brief, but can be read alongside the Barthesian definition of myth, a "second-order semiological system" (*Mythologies* 114) at the service, in this case, of consumption:

That night they went to a place called El Rey del Taco for beers. As they were drinking, the Argentinean thought for a moment that all the waiters were zombies. It didn't surprise him. The place was huge, full of murals and paintings depicting the childhood of El Rey del Taco, and the heaviness of a petrified nightmare over the tables. (541)

El Rey del Taco as a mythological character is yet another remainder of the humor that inhabits Bolaño's literary work, but at the same time veils the unmasking of contemporary mythologies, always failed if not at increasing consumption in a commoditized society. The Barthesian notion of myth ought to be kept in mind when in this narrative segment what occurs next is the telling of the myth behind the origin of *snuff* films.

After dining at the restaurant, the journalist flies to Los Angeles, where he spends "his nights writing a long article about the killings of women in Santa Teresa. The article centered on the porn film industry and the underground sub industry of snuff films" (541). At this point in the segment the character of the journalist performs the second and last purpose in the novel, to tell the story behind the origin *snuff*, after which the journalist quietly exits the narrative of the novel. The text imagines and recreates the month long production of the first *snuff* film (or rather the myth behind it) by noting that "The term *snuff film*, according to the Argentinean, had been invented in Argentina, although not by an Argentinean but by an American couple

who had come there to make a movie” (541). In the journalist’s account there is no description of any particular scene in the movie; in fact, after the failed exhibition of the film in New York, the segment ends with the death of the film creator: “Epstein was killed when he fell down an elevator shaft. After a fall of fourteen flights, the state of the body, according to witnesses, was indescribable” (545). It’s quite telling that, in a story about the origin of *snuff*, there isn’t a single description of a grotesque or intensely violent scene, and not only that, but even Epstein’s death becomes indescribable. By not presenting a description of this nature for the duration of the segment, the novel maintains its focus directly on the victims of the killings of Santa Teresa and indirectly on those of recent Latin American history.

Throughout *2666* there is a significant number of violent scenes alongside meticulous descriptions of the found bodies of murdered women in Santa Teresa. The fact that there isn’t a scene or description of this nature in the segment about the first *snuff* film suggests a number of interpretations. First, as state above, the segment establishes a social and cultural context where sex, violence, and consumption are intertwined. However, there is also a strong connection sought to be established with a larger area in Latin America, particularly with Argentina and Chile. The climate of social instability and oppression is alluded to in the recreation of the Epstein’s film production, which happens “in 1972, when there was still talk in Argentina about revolution, about Peronist revolution, about Socialist revolution and even mystical revolution” (541). After arriving to the Argentinean pampa, Epstein sees it as “better than the American West, because in the West, when you thought about it, all the cowboys did was herd cattle, and here, on the pampa, as he had come to see more and more clearly, the cowboys were zombie hunters” (541-542). A night when the film crew had a party “There was talk about politics, the need for agricultural reform landowners, the future of Latin America, and the Epsteins and JT were quiet, partly

because they weren't interested and partly because they had more important things to think about" (542-543). Of the character JT, the cinematographer for the film, one learns that shooting sex scenes "was what JT was best at, since he was an expert in indirect lighting, in the art of hints and suggestion" (543). Near the end of the segment, when Epstein returns to New York, "Clarissa, his wife, stayed in Buenos Aires, where she moved in with an Argentinean movie producer. Her new companion, a Peronist, later became an active member of a death squad that began by killing Trotskyites and guerrillas and ended up orchestrating the disappearance of children and housewives" (545). Bolaño constantly alludes to the sociopolitical background in Argentina during the 1970s, which by the end of the story behind the filming of what would eventually be *Snuff* gains relevance in the creation of its myth.

If in the segment pertaining to the myth of *snuff* there isn't a description of Epstein's body it is because the description of the found bodies of murdered women in Santa Teresa maintains primacy during the novel. Most of these women, whose identities are often unknown because of their social marginality and/or the incompetence and corruption of the local authorities, regain certain particularities through the description of their corpses. It is worth noting here that some of the bodies of these victims are found in dumps around the city, one of which is referred to in a number of instances throughout the novel: "The dump didn't have a formal name, because it wasn't supposed to be there, but it had an informal name: it was called El Chile" (372). Of the people who hover the dump we learn that "There weren't many of them. They spoke a slang that was hard to understand. ...Their life expectancy was short. They died after seven months, at most, of picking their way through the dump" (372). Later in the story, when the local authorities decide to eliminate the dump (they couldn't officially close it down because of its clandestine nature), "A reporter for *La Tribuna de Santa Teresa* who was covering the relocation or demolition of the dump

said he'd never seen so much chaos in his life. Asked whether the chaos was caused by the city workers involved in the futile effort, he answered that it wasn't, it came from the inertia of the festering place itself" (473). The link between the dump and Chile, where Bolaño was born, of course, goes beyond both sharing the same name. While El Chile, the dump in Santa Teresa, becomes a site product of consumption and waste where some of the bodies of the murdered women are found, the country of Chile is where *Distant Star* takes place (or at least begins) and where the bodies of murdered women appear in Wieder's *gore* photo exhibit, directly linking their deaths to the *coup d'état* of 1973.

Of the posthumously published collection of essays, articles and speeches written by Bolaño and gathered in *Between Parentheses*, two texts stand apart giving a glimpse into Bolaño's stance in regards to the Chilean *coup d'état* of 1973. In "A Modest Proposal" Bolaño asks "What would have happened if September 11 had never existed? ...I think everything would be the same, in Chile and Latin America. It can be argued: there would be no disappeared. True. And there would be no caravan of death" (88) Nonetheless, later in his essay, when pondering a scenario where an ideologically opposed camp had taken the place of those behind the *coup d'état*, Bolaño comes to the conclusion that he would have probably been taken to a concentration camp in the south of Chile, he adds ironically, "for being a writer with no class or consciousness or sense of history" (88). In the end, however, Bolaño decides that "Such a bath of horror, you might say, would be less sticky than the real historic bath of horror into which we were plunged" (88). A brief instance of this historical horror can be found in "Words from Outer Space", another text from the compilation that makes reference to *Secret Interference*, a recording where the voices heard transmit orders during that September 11, 1973. According to Bolaño, such voices are "Voices we've vaguely heard at some point in our lives, but to which we

aren't able to attach a body, as if they issued from forms without substance" (79). The voices heard in the recording speak of killing in the act, bombing and other actions, but, what draws Bolaño's attention is "A humor that one recognizes and would rather not recognize" (84). Bolaño realizes that "The voices are performing for us, as if in a radio serial, but mostly they're performing for themselves. Pornography, snuff movies. At last they've found the roles of their lives. Finally, the soldiers have their war, their great war: before them we stand, unarmed but watching and listening" (86) The social and historical Chilean context after the *coup d'état* is a constant point of reference in Bolaño's literary body of work. In this brief approach it is possible to establish a connection between the military overthrow of the government and the audiovisual pornographic texts inhabited by readily discarded human beings whose last record is not enough to rescue them from anonymity—the void of the image engulfs whatever history they had before.

Roberto Bolaño publishes *Distant Star* in 1996, roughly six years after the transition to democracy is completed. The novel is a detective thriller that revolves around the figure of Carlos Wieder, a member of the Chilean air force whose artistic production begins with the writing of sentences on the sky and ends with the *gore* photographic exhibition whose subjects are the dismembered bodies of disappeared women. The narrative description of the photographs is brief, but puts in place a lens under which a literary aesthetic may begin to be articulated around the more fragmentary lapses of Bolaño's literature. Before the military coup, the novel tells, Carlos Wieder frequented some literary workshops under the name of Alberto Ruiz-Tagle. The many names of the character, alongside the lack of personal references, forward the plot of the novel, where a detective sets out to find Wieder in order to kill him. The lines, the phrases that Wieder understands as brief poems, resonate with the slogan on the shirt of the "creator" of *Snuff*, which read "Vida es muerte." (Yehya

223) Among the lines written on the sky by Wieder the following are found: “Pupils of fire” (33), “Death is friendship,” “Death is Chile,” and “Death is responsibility.” (80) These last lines anticipate the *gore* photo exhibit not only thematically, but formally too if only in their fleeting nature. The lines written on the sky, which last but a few moments, resonate with the photographs that capture an instant.

The narration of the *gore* photo exhibit is part of the novel but only as the transcription of another fictional text, one written by Muñoz Cano, one of the characters who attend the exhibit. Much like the ever-elusive personal information about Wieder, the account of the exhibit “trickles down” to *Distant Star* after a number of other fictional texts and characters. The exhibit takes place in the bedroom of a house where only a few comrades from the military and some old friends of Wieder attend. The fragment dealing with the description of the exhibit and photographs reads as follows,

The surrealist reporters looked disapproving but maintained their composure. Muñoz Cano claims to have recognized the Garmendia sisters and other missing persons in some of the photos. Most of them were women. The background hardly varied from one photo to another, so it seemed they had been taken in the same place. The women looked like mannequins, broken, dismembered mannequins in some pictures, although Muñoz Cano could not rule out the possibility that up to thirty per cent of the subjects had been alive when the snapshots were taken. In general (according to Muñoz Cano) the photos were of poor quality, although they made an extremely vivid impression on all who saw them. The order in which they were exhibited was not haphazard: there was a progression, an argument, a story (literal and allegorical), a plan. The images stuck to the ceiling (says Muñoz Cano) depicted a kind of hell, but empty. Those pinned up in the four corners seemed to be an epiphany. An epiphany of madness. In other groups of photos the dominant mood was elegiac (but how, asks Muñoz Cano, could there be anything “nostalgic” or “melancholy” about them?) The symbols were few but telling. A photo showing the cover of a book by Joseph de Maistre: *St. Petersburg Dialogues*. A photo of a young blonde woman who seemed to be dissolving into the air. A photo of a severed finger, thrown onto a floor of porous, grey cement. (88-89)

The void of the image, when its subject is composed of graphically violent, dismembered bodies, becomes a sort of empty hell. The Bataille experience of transgression, the epiphany of madness, the macabre plan orchestrated by Wieder quickly dilutes into silence and ends with the military police taking Wieder into custody and confiscating the photographs. However, Wieder manages to escape and is not found until the end of the novel.

The photographic description of the exhibit suggests a number of interpretations. Although Wieder does not look to profit from the photographs, the content of his images situates them closely to a project much like that of *snuff* films. Gubern claims that in *snuff* films “there is no complicity or pleasurable submission between two free subjects, but a submission imposed by the master against the victims’ will, who live the remainder of their lives before the camera. That is to say, there’s sadism on the part of the executioner but not masochism on the part of the victim.”²¹⁴ The record of that moment before death during a *snuff* recording seems to be captured in the photographs, since according to Muñoz Cano’s account, some of the “subjects had been alive when the snapshots were taken.” The relationship between Wieder and the pornographic industry is built later on in the novel when, after fleeing the authorities, the detective chasing after him follows a lead that takes him to meet Joanna Silvestri (the pornographic actress whose short story is included in *Llamadas Telefónicas*) since Wieder is thought to have worked as a camera man in the shooting of various pornographic material in Europe. The inclusion of the afore mentioned photographs, given their fictional nature, can never be set on the same plane of reality, and the extent of their representation serve only to articulate a crime, not the

²¹⁴ “no existe complicidad ni sumisión placentera acordada entre dos sujetos libres, sino sumisión impuesta por el amo contra la voluntad de la víctima, que recorre ante la cámara su última tramo vital. Es decir, hay sadismo del ejecutor pero no masoquismo de su víctima.” Gubern, Román. *La Imagen Pornográfica y Otras Perversiones Ópticas*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005), 341.

identities of the victims. The link between Wieder's photo exhibit and other real life audiovisual records, graphic and violent in nature, left after the *coup d'état* and dictatorship²¹⁵ is displaced by the always present question in Bolaño's literature about artistic creation and the sociocultural and historical context under which they are produced.

With the *gore* photo exhibit in *Distant Star* surfaces a possible aesthetic of narrative fragmentation that one may argue is on full display in the confection of *Antwerp*. Bolaño, who recognizes himself as a writer with social and historical conscience, produces a literary body of work where the Chilean *coup d'état* and subsequent dictatorship serve as a point of entry to the larger discussion of violence and media and Latin America. Literature, however, recognizes itself as an artistic representation delimited by a larger and far more complex socio-historical reality. In the sentences written on the sky as much as on the bedroom walls covered with *gore* photographs, Wieder attempts to make of the world and its reality an extension of his artistic creation. It all fails, the sentences fleeting in a moment and the bedroom of the photo exhibit remains a private chamber, dismantled in its isolation from society. Literature, perhaps, much like Baudrillard's definition of pornography, counts among its phantasies that of reality.

In spite of writing *Antwerp* around 1979, Bolaño does not publish his novel until 2001. Rodrigo Fresán, in a review of the novel for the newspaper *Página 12*, sees the text as "a sort of flashback to that Big Bang of a personal style that has been mutating into more complex and ambitious forms, but that along the way has never

²¹⁵ In her book Calveiro notes the proliferation in the media (after the transition to democracy in Argentina) of images and records from the concentration camps and the effect they produced by saturating the public opinion, showing how "el impacto de las imágenes brutales se amortiguaba y se pervertía exhibiéndolas a vuelta de página de las modelos más cotizadas del año." Calveiro, Pilar. *Poder y Desaparición: Los Campos de Concentración en Argentina*. (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004), 162.

sacrificed any of the intensity behind the original explosion.”²¹⁶ Following the study of the inclusion of audiovisual pornographic material as it appears throughout Bolaño’s literary body of work, in *Antwerp* one is able to glimpse at the aesthetic of the pornographic montage in the writing of this fractured and fragmented novel. The fragmentation of the cinematic narrative in pornography shares with the textual fragmentation of *Antwerp* a tripartite concern: the editing of images/texts leading to fragmentation, the abjection behind a fragmented body/text, and violent plateau where fragmentation is put on display.

Lind Williams, in *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, traces the evolution of pornography as a cinematic genre from its beginning in the early twentieth century until the end of the 1980s. Between contemporary pornographic films and those produced at the dawn of the century, also known as *stag films*, the production of these audiovisual texts has gone through a number of significant changes, not only thematically but formally as well. Aside from the shifting target audience, or rather, the manner in which pornographic material is consumed, the most significant change has taken place in the editing room. From the very early *stag films* until a significant number of the pornographic material produced today, the narrative arguments of these texts have taken a back step in relation to the very close, almost clinical, depiction of the female body, putting on graphic display the sexual differences between male and female performers. Editing, of course, remains crucial to such depictions. While in the *stag films* one is able to observe the insertion of close-up of the performer’s genitals (also known in the industry as *meat shots*) into the scenic space or *master shot* in order to show the veracity of the sexual encounter, the

²¹⁶ “una suerte de flashback a ese Big Bang de un estilo personal que ha ido mutando a formas más complejas y ambiciosas, pero que por el camino no ha sacrificado nada de la intensidad del estallido original.” Fresán, Rodrigo. “Pequeño Big Bang”. *Página 12*, 27 de Julio, 2003. 23 April, 2010. <http://www.letras.s5.com/bolano280803.html>.

technology employed in such productions constrained the filmmaker's capacity to put on display not just a penetration but ultimately any sort of satisfaction on the part of the performers in order to verify, again, the sexual encounter. The incorporation of sound into the cinematic reel sought to fill the representational gap that the pornographic production has always faced; moaning, groaning, sighing or any sort of verbal articulation added to the pornographic representation on film but in the end, these elements do not suffice in conveying the veracity of the sexual encounter.

According to Linda Williams, the transition from the *stag film* into contemporary pornographic films occurred with the "insert of an insert", that is to say, with the *money shots* or *cum shots*. In other words, the insertion of a *money shot* to the close-up of the performer's genitals, which by its own right is an insertion into the *master shot*, is one of the fundamental aspect of the pornographic montage (74-75). The veracity of the sexual encounter appears to be proven, with the *money shot*, at least on the side of the male performers. The successive insertion of 'inserts' in the pornographic film has as its most urgent task representing the veracity of the sexual encounter—the task becomes none other than a quest for reality through representation. As Baudrillard notes *On Seduction*,

Consequent to the anatomical zoom, the dimension of the real is abolished, the distance implied by the gaze give way to an instantaneous, exacerbated representation that of sex in its pure state, stripped not just of all seduction, but of its image's very potentiality. Sex so close that it merges with its own representation: the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy—end of scene, end of an illusion. (29)

In *La imagen pornográfica...* Roman Gubern also claims that "The abstraction inherent to the genre fits oddly with the hyperrealism of the acts shown. Let us say that, as the famous dichotomy between the showing and telling, hardcore pornography

seeks to show rather than tell.”²¹⁷ Through its emphasis on showing hard-core pornographic films seek to escape the hyperreality of film. However, in doing so, Linda Williams sees that “Classical narrative cinema has abandoned this theatrical conception of scenic space, articulating its seamless illusion of a space-time-continuum instead by ‘weaving narrative’ out of a multitude of spatial and temporal fragments” (72). Both the multitude of spatial and temporal fragments in the pornographic montage and the textual fragments in *Antwerp* have in common an unsuccessful pursuit of reality through the cinematic and literary representation.

Patricia Espinosa argues that “*Antwerp* confronts us with the presence of that body worn out, tired, to whom the words of others are unintelligible and only the adoption of pornography succeeds in making reality more” since “pornography appears in this volume as the desire for a reality in excess, or for a hyperreality always graspable but in pieces.”²¹⁸ In the last of *Antwerp*’s narrative fragments, titled “56. Postscript”, the narrator claims: “Of what is lost, irretrievably lost, all I wish to recover is the daily availability of my writing, lines capable of grasping me by the hair and lifting me up when I’m at the end of my strength” (78). The lifeline of the whole text is established in this fragment, and it is none other than writing at the service of showing rather than narrating. Espinosa concludes of *Antwerp* that “Without

²¹⁷ “La abstracción consustancial al género se acopla curiosamente con el hiperrealismo de los actos mostrados. Digamos ya que de la famosa dicotomía entre el *mostrar* y el *narrar*, el cine porno duro busca el *mostrar* sobre el *narrar*.” Gubern, Román. *La Imagen Pornográfica y Otras Perversiones Ópticas*. (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005), 26.

²¹⁸ “*Amberes* nos enfrenta a la presencia de ese cuerpo gastado, cansado, al cual las palabras de los otros resultan ininteligibles y que solo la adopción del porno logra hacer más real lo real” since “la pornografía aparece en este volumen como el deseo por el exceso de realida, o por una hiperrealidad siempre asumible a pedazos.” Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De Roberto Bolaño*. (Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003), 24.

beginning or end, lacking anecdote, without a trigger event, without a guilty character or a protagonist: we only have the way of narrating.”²¹⁹

The descriptions in *Antwerp* effortlessly take place in dreams, memories and cinema. It becomes an impossible task to clearly situate any of the descriptions in the novel within the cinematic realm, in spite of fragments such as the one titled “20. Synopsis. The Wind.” The text announces itself precisely as the synopsis of a film, perhaps one screened in the woods where, as the back cover of the novel (originally published in Spanish by Anagrama) suggests, lies the key to understanding the story presented. In this text there is a summary of various scenes that show up throughout the novel, a sentence per scene, rendering this section a fragment made up of other fragments. Reading “20. Synopsis. The Wind” in this fashion allows for any of the other chapters in the novel to be read as scenes or cinematic sequences. Furthermore, throughout the novel, scattered on a number of different fragments or sections, there are recurring words and phrases (always in between parentheses) which may be interpreted as the reactions of an audience that, more than reading the novel, appear to be entertained by the staging of a theatrical piece or, ultimately, the screening of a film. Some of those reactions include “(Applause)...(Applause and laughter)” (12), “(Someone applauds. The hallway is full of people who open their mouths without a sound.)” (50), “(Coughs)” (37), “(Miles from here people are applauding, and that’s why I feel such despair.)” (51), “(A stifled attempt at applause.)” (55), “(Applause)” (66), “(The one person who applauded closes his eyes now. In his mind something takes shape, something that might be a hospital if the meaning of life were different. In one of the rooms the girl is in bed. The curtains are open and light spills into the room.)” (50). These reactions may be read as, first, an allusion to the groups of men

²¹⁹ “sin principio ni finalidad, sin anécdota, sin un hecho detonante, sin un culpable ni un protagonista: solamente contamos con el trayecto de narrar.” *Ibid*, 23.

who would get together in the early twentieth century to screen stag films; second, the reactions are in tune with the logic of the fragmentation that the novel follows, encouraging a sense of estrangement, preventing any sort of potential catharsis found in traditional narratives and, finally, a third reading of such reactions suggest a sort of self-awareness of the text, underlining a theatrical aspect of literature in general and specifically on display in *Antwerp*.

Continuing with the premise that many of the fragments that make up *Antwerp* may be read as a shot or scene from a film (in fragment 42 one reads “(In this scene the author appears with his hands on his hips watching something off-screen)” (60), the fragment entitled “27. Occasionally it Shook” (37-38) presents a sequence from a hard-core pornographic film where the endless quest for reality within the pornographic realm is clearly portrayed. The text, which begins with the sentence “The nameless girl spread her legs under the sheets”, quickly states the very descriptive narration of the scene, where a girl and a cop are about to engage in a sexual act, and but on the fourth sentence reads “So the cop turned out the light and unzipped his fly. The girl closed her eyes when he turned her face down. She felt his pants against her buttocks and the metallic cold of the belt buckle.” The description of the sex scene continues almost immediately when “His fingers burrowed between her cheeks and she didn’t say a thing, didn’t even sigh. He was on his side, but she still had her head buried in the sheets. His index and middle finger probed her ass, massaged her sphincter, and she opened her mouth without a sound.” While the scene grows in intensity there is an attempt at including a metaphor in the description of the sexual encounter when one reads how “He pushed his fingers all the way in, the girl moaned and raised her haunches, he felt the tips of his fingers brush something to

which he instantly gave the name stalagmite.” The image of stalagmite²²⁰ is sought in order to better transmit the intensity of the sexual act between the characters (at least on the part of the cop who conjures up the word) but it is ultimately revealed as a failed attempt when the description continues noting how “He worked his fingers in and out. As he squeezed the girl’s temples, he thought that the fingers went in and out with no adornment, no literary rhetoric to give them any other sense than a couple of thick fingers buried in the ass of a nameless girl.” The literary rhetoric is abandoned in the sequence when it becomes quite clear that the representation of a sexual act, whether in film or in a text, can’t escape the limits of its representation and the novel, much like a pornographic audiovisual text, fails at successfully recreating and transmitting the reality it endlessly seeks.

The title of the novel, *Antwerp*, is taken from the 49th fragment of the text, a fragment that tells the story of how “In Antwerp a man was killed when his car was run over by a truck full of pigs” (68). The news of the accident and death of an unnamed man, never again or before alluded to in the novel, serves an anecdote and perhaps an excuse for a telephone call, remembered and narrated in the first person, of which only loose phrases and sentences remain and make up the rest of the fragment. At the end one reads “... ‘Every word is useless, every sentence, every phone conversation’... ‘She said she wanted to be alone’...I wanted to be alone too. In Antwerp or Barcelona. The moon. Animals fleeing. Highway accident. Fear.” (68) Espinosa, in her analysis of *Antwerp*, notes how in Bolaño’s novel “We are before footprints, discursive fragments that cannot build but only haunt presence, to touch upon it so that, in the same act, it can deviate from its mirror, preventing reproduction

²²⁰ A stalagmite is “a deposit, usually of calcium carbonate, more or less resembling an inverted stalactite, formed on the floor of a cave or the like by the dripping of percolating calcareous water.” “Stalagmite.” Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 09 May. 2010. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/stalagmite>>.

and mimetic pacts with the reader.”²²¹ The fact that the novel takes its title from this fragment not only makes it, to a certain extent, representative of all the other fragments, but also, in a novel where the spatial and temporal coordinates are never static, the mention of a particular city, Antwerp (where none of the action of the text place aside from the anecdote aforementioned) suggests a reading of the novel that attempts to situate it within the larger tradition of literature written in Spanish while also commenting on the logic of the fragment under which the novel comes together. It’s rather pertinent for this reading to keep in mind the history of Antwerp, a city that under Spanish rule was one of the two (the other being Alcalá de Henares) where *Lazarillo de Tormes* was originally published. A number of editions of *Don Quixote* can also be traced back to Antwerp. Both of these texts are generally considered to be among the first examples of the modern novel, among the precursors of the genre. Looking at the etymology for the name of the city, the more “picturesque” account revolves around

the story of the evil giant Druon Antigoon, who severed the hands of the river’s boatmen when they refused to pay his exorbitant tolls. The Roman soldier Silvius Brabo challenged him to a fight, cut off one of his hands, and flung it into the river, not far from the site of the present Steen, thus putting an end to the giant’s extortion and giving the city its name: literally, “to throw a hand.” Antwerp’s coat of arms consists of a fortified castle with a hand on each side; and in the Great Market, in front of the 16th-century Town Hall, the Brabo Fountain (1887) depicts the legendary event.²²²

For an analysis of the novel that takes into account both the etymology for the name of the city and the fragmentary nature of the text, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection

²²¹ “nos enfrentamos así, a huellas, fragmentos discursivos que no pueden construir la presencia sino solo rondarla, rozarla para, en el mismo acto, desviarse de su espejo, impidiendo la reproducción y los pactos de mimesis con el lector.” Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De Roberto Bolaño*. (Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003), 20.

²²² “Antwerp.” Encyclopædia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 17 May. 2010 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/28938/Antwerp>>

quickly comes to mind. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva formulates "The abject has only one quality of the object and that is being opposed to I" (1). Furthermore, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (15). Bolaño, as if anticipating a reading of Antwerp under the sign of abjections, writes in "A Modest Proposal" that "Everything would suggest that we're entering the new millennium under the glowering word *abject*, which comes from the Latin *abjectus*, which means lowly or humble, according to Joan Corominas, the sage who spent his last years on the Mediterranean coast, in a town just a few miles from mine" (87). Back in *Antwerp*, segment 47 is titled "There are no rules" and half way into the fragment one can read "There are no rules. ('Tell that stupid Arnold Bennet (*sic*) that all his rules about plot only apply to novels that are copies of other novels')" (66). The rules that the novel attempts to break, it would appear, only begin with those followed by traditional narratives. Bennett, a British novelist at the turn of the twentieth century who made no effort to hide his preference for popular (even if formulaic) literature, along with the reference to both *El Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Don Quixote* via the city of Antwerp, help articulate the drive behind a text like *Antwerp*, a novel that more than just being original refuses to be the copy of another novel. The fragmentation of the text stands as the only option when distancing itself from traditional narratives, but the fragment, along with a notion of the abject, find in *Antwerp* an meeting place where a pornographic poetics is fully explored both thematically and formally.

According to Michela Marzano, pornography is the spectacle of abjection since "the fragmentation of the body proposed by pornography is not only the breakdown of a unified image but above all a 'breakdown' of the subject into matter without form.

Losing the unity of the body leads to angst.”²²³ The fragmentation of the images of the body, in *Antwerp*, parallels the fragmentation of the text. Furthermore, the fragments that comprise the novel become fragmented themselves; the chapters into paragraphs, the sentences into phrases, the words into letters, and everything, ultimately, into an ellipsis. In fragment 36, titled “People walking away”, the anguish of the narrative voice is established at the beginning of the text, which claims how “Nothing lasts, the purely loving gesture of children tumble into the void. I wrote: ‘a group of waiters returning to work’ and ‘windswept sand’ and ‘the dirty windowpanes of September’... I stopped at the fucking ‘lonely words.’ Undisciplined writing” (51). Fragment number 30, “The medic”, ends with the following statement “All I can come up with are stray sentences, he said, maybe because reality seems to me like a swarm of stray sentences. Desolation must be something like that, said the hunchback” (42). Anguish and desolation, the very fabric of *Antwerp*, accelerate the fragmentation of the narrative, making the space inhabited by the text one lacking referential coordinates, the only possible no-place ripe for fragmentation.

In Roberto Bolaño’s literary body of work, particularly that pertaining to his fiction, only *Monsieur Pain* and *Antwerp* contain a prologue written by the author. In *Antwerp*’s prologue, titled “Total Anarchy: Twenty-Two Years Later” (ix-xi) Bolaño recalls the time when he claims to have written the novel, around 1980, and in a confessional tone, asserts: “I wrote this book for myself, and even that I can’t be sure of...In those days, if my memory serves, I lived exposed to the elements, without papers, the way other people lived in castles...My sickness, back then, was pride, rage and violence...I spent my days uselessly tired. I worked at night. During the day I

²²³ “la fragmentación del cuerpo propuesta por la pornografía no es solamente la ruptura de una imagen unificada sino sobre todo de una ‘degradación’ del sujeto al estado de materia informe. Perder la unidad del cuerpo conduce a la angustia.” Marzano, Michela. *La Pornografía o el Agotamiento del Deseo*. trans. Víctor Goldstein. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, 2006), 94.

wrote.” Later on he mentions how “In those years (or months), I was drawn to certain science fiction writers and certain pornographers, sometimes antithetical authors, as if the cave and the electric light were mutually exclusive” and, speaking of the manuscript for *Antwerp*, he recalls how he “never brought this novel to any publishing house, of course. They would’ve slammed the door in my face and I’d have lost the copy...the original manuscript has more pages: the text tended to multiply itself, spreading like a sickness...The scorn I felt for so-called official literature was great, though only a little greater than my scorn for marginal literature.” Finally, near the end, Bolaño confesses to have felt, at the time, “equally distant from all the countries in the world.” For a novel that makes every effort to erase the coordinates of time and space where it exists, the only constant throughout the novel ends up being the author and his alter egos.

Roberto Bolaño, in an interview with Daniel Swinburn, addresses the question of the level or degree of autobiographical information found throughout his literary production (including *Antwerp*) when he claims

In any case I prefer literature, in a manner of speaking, with a slight autobiographical tinge, which is the literature of the individual, that which distinguishes one individual from another, than the literature of us, the one that appropriates with impunity the “you and I”, which appropriates your story, and tends to merge with the masses, which is the pasture of unanimity, the place where all the faces are confused.²²⁴

Bolaño’s answer, along with the fragmentary structure of *Antwerp*, inevitably bring to mind Fredric Jameson who ponders, in ‘Postmodernism and consumer society’, whether “perhaps the immense fragmentation and privatization of modern literature—

²²⁴“En cualquier caso yo prefiero la literatura, por llamarle de algún modo, teñida ligeramente de autobiografía, que es la literatura del individuo, la que distingue a un individuo de otro, que la literatura del nosotros, aquella que se apropia impunemente de tu yo, de tu historia, y que tiende a fundirse con la masa, que es el potrero de la unanimidad, el sitio donde todos los rostros se confunden.” Fresán, Rodrigo. “Pequeño Big Bang.” Página 12, 27 de Julio, 2003. 23 April, 2010 <<http://www.letras.s5.com/bolano280803.htm>>

its explosion into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms—foreshadows deeper and more general tendencies in social life as a whole” (5). One must keep in mind that in *Antwerp* there is a character named Roberto Bolaño, an alter ego that in many of the author’s other works of fiction mutates into Arturo Belano, Belano, Arturo B., and even just B. The attempt to blur the dividing line between fact and fiction remains constant with the many alter egos created by Bolaño. Throughout his literary body of work the erosion of the alter ego has much in common with *Antwerp*, a novel that appears to be constantly eroding into fragments, many of which never cease to crumble down, turning paragraphs into sentences or phrases and, ultimately, loose words.

Maurice Blanchot, in *The Writing of Disaster*, contends that, “When all is said, what remains to be said is the disaster. Ruin of words, demise writing, and faintness faintly murmuring: what remains without remains (the fragmentary)” (33). Blanchot’s text, originally published in 1980 (around the same time when Bolaño claims to have written his novel) shares with *Antwerp* many traits, not least of them a fragmentary structure. For Blanchot “the fragmentary promises not instability (the opposite of fixity) so much as disarray, confusion” (7). Disorder and confusion, though not yet a promise of the fragmentary, appear on full force in the epigraph for the novel where, taken from Pascal’s writing, one reads

When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after—*memoria hospitis unius diei praetereuntis*—the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright and am amazed to see myself here rather than there: there is no reason for me to be here rather than there, now rather than then. Who put me here? By whose command and act were this place and time allotted to me?

The questioning of the space and time inhabited, perfectly articulated by Pascal, serves as a premise for *Antwerp*, even if in the end it yields no more answers than the

fragmentary. Drawing a parallel between the fragmentary narrative of *Antwerp* and the pornographic montage elevates pornography, a recurring theme in Bolaño's literary production, to a formal level in the creation of a literary text.

CONCLUSION

After the publication of *Farabeuf*, between 1965 and 1975, Elizondo publishes two collections of short story collections *Narda o el verano* (1966) and *El retrato de Zoe* (1969), his autobiography *Salvador Elizondo* (1966), and a couple of collections of essays that have previously appeared on magazines and newspapers. He also publishes a few oddities: the “autistic” *El hipogeo secreto* (1968), *Cuaderno de escritura* (1969) and *El grafógrafo* (1972). These last two entries somewhat difficult to classify: they are formed by short narratives, personal reflections, and essays. After such a prolific decade, Elizondo found himself at a creative dead-end. Elizondo’s narrative experimentation following *Farabeuf* are best exemplified by the “autistic” *El hipogeo secreto* and the short text “El grafógrafo”, which I dare not translate and reads:

Escribo. Escribo que escribo. Mentalmente me veo escribir que escribo y también puedo verme ver que escribo. Me recuerdo escribiendo ya y también viéndome que escribía. Y me veo recordando que me veo escribir y me recuerdo viéndome recordar que escribía y escribo viéndome escribir que recuerdo haberme visto escribir que me veía escribir que recordaba haberme visto escribir que escribía y que escribía que escribo que escribía. También puedo imaginarme escribiendo que ya había escrito que me imaginaría escribiendo que había escrito que me imaginaba escribiendo que me veo escribir que escribo.

In his 1975 interview with Jorge Ruffinelli, when Elizondo is asked what does he see coming out of “El Grafógrafo”, what can be derived from it, he candidly answers: “Unfortunately I don’t see anything deriving from it...I’m against a wall. The derivation would possibly be a non-writing, a state prior to the writing, the blank page, the starting point or a possible starting point.”²²⁵ Ruffinelli then asks how his state

²²⁵“Lo malo es que desgraciadamente no veo derivaciones...Estoy ante una pared. La derivación, posiblemente, sería la no-escritura, el estado anterior a la escritura, la página en

may be reverted through literature, to which Elizondo answers: “I do not know. That's the problem. Possibly, extrapolating a form of writing that does not comply with any of the traditional precepts of literary writing. And for that writing to not be psychic or automatic writing either, or that sort of thing.”²²⁶ In the end, Elizondo sees that “There would still be other outlets: possibly concrete poetry, the visual text, but those seem to me, I don't know, much easier than finding an outlet through writing. And I want to find it there. I can begin to write in Chinese, why not? Or write based on the disposition of verbal images on a blank page. But all that has already been done.”²²⁷

Elizondo would write another novel, or rather, a semi-autobiographical novella *Elsinore: un cuaderno* (1988). Although the novella is an exemplar of the genre, Elizondo refused to categorize it as such and would only refer to the text as a story, never a novella. After *Elsinore* Elizondo no longer wrote fiction.

There is only one direct reference to Elizondo in Bolaño's literature. Elizondo never wrote or commented on Bolaño. In “Dentist”, a short story written by Bolaño originally published in *Putas asesinas*, a character recalls a friend of his youth:

That night I discovered that he shared my admiration for Elizondo, and during the second summer of our friendship, we attempted to emulate the characters in *Narda or Summer* by renting a shack by the sea in Mazatlán, not exactly the Italian coast, but, with a little imagination and good will, close enough. Then we grew up and, looking back, our youthful adventures seemed rather contemptible. Young middle-class Mexicans are condemned to imitate Salvador Elizondo, who in turn imitated the inimitable Klossowski, or fatten

blanco, el punto de partida o un posible punto de partida.” Ruffinelli, Jorge, and Salvador Elizondo. “Salvador Elizondo.” *Hispanamérica*. 6.16 (1977), 34.

²²⁶ “No sé. Ese es el problema. Posiblemente, extrapolando una forma de escritura que no atiende a ninguno de los preceptos tradicionales de la escritura literaria. Y que no fuera tampoco automática o escritura síquica, o ese tipo de cosas.” *Ibid*, 32.

²²⁷ “Habría aún otras salidas: posiblemente la poesía concreta, el texto visual, pero me parecen, no sé, mucho más fáciles que encontrar una salida mediante la escritura. Y yo quiero encontrarla allí. Puedo derivar a escribir en chino, ¿por qué no? O escribir con base en la disposición de imágenes verbales sobre la página en blanco. Pero todo eso ya está hecho.” *Ibid*, 34.

slowly in business or bureaucratic suits, or flail around ineffectually in vaguely leftist, vaguely charitable organizations (199-200).

It would be an overreach to suggest Bolaño as a literary heir to Elizondo based on this passage alone, but I would argue that the satire at work in “Narda o el verano” has often been overlooked; Bolaño’s reference to *Narda* and Elizondo may be read as a fitting satirical homage to both the writer and his short story. The satire at work in *Narda* frees Elizondo, if only for the duration of the story, from a very romantic, solipsistic, and even narcissist *écriture*. Emmanuel Carballo, in his introduction to the first edition of Elizondo’s autobiography, noted of *Narda* how “Sex, or rather eroticism, in alliance with perversion, crime and fatigued customs, structure a story in which an innocent and unattractive love triangle is complicated and leads to promiscuity, filth and death. Excels in this work a sense of humor, frivolity and light tone.”²²⁸ A short-story filled with visual and literary clichés and characters pulled straight out of pulp fiction, “Narda o el verano” becomes an oddity in Elizondo’s oeuvre.

Before the limits of literary representation, narrative fragmentation appears in both Elizondo and Bolaño. But while Elizondo ponders about his literary legacy, finding himself at a creative dead-end, in Bolaño pornography, formally and thematically, establishes a pathway out of the impossibility of escaping traditional representational paradigms. Taking after Michael Fried’s “Barthes’s Punctum”²²⁹ I would like to venture that the ontological question posed by the photographic image in both Elizondo and Bolaño is formulated as a concern regarding the theatricality inherent to photography. By theatricality, Fried argues, one is to understand that which

²²⁸ “‘Narda o el verano’ es una típica obra de Elizondo. El sexo, más bien el erotismo, aliado a las perversiones, al crimen y a las costumbres fatigadas, estructuran un cuento en el que un triángulo amoroso inocente y poco atractivo se complica y desemboca en promiscuidad, suciedad y muerte. Sobresale en esta obra el sentido del humor, la frivolidad y el tono ligero.” Elizondo, Salvador. *Narda o el verano*. (México: Era, 1966), 10.

²²⁹ *Critical Inquiry*. 31.3 (2005): 539-574.

is a representation or a production. In Elizondo a search for the antitheatrical, for a reality that can't be represented, leads him to a literary dead-end. Such is the desire for the antitheatrical that in *Farabeuf* that the theatricality found in the image of the Leng Tch'é is displaced onto the narrative of the novel. Bolaño, taking into account his claim to have written *Antwerp* in 1980 (at the very beginning of his literary production, even though the novel would not be published until 2002), the fragmentary narrative of the novel is faced, not unlike Elizondo, with the impossibility of the antitheatrical in the literary discourse. In contrast, I would argue that with the writing of and about the realm of pornography Bolaño does not seek to avoid the theatrical in the visual image but rather overcomes it with a poetics of pornography. Taking the maxim of "showing, not telling" to its ultimate consequences, pornography underscores the utilitarian function of narrative convention and undercuts the Aristotelian system of representation while commenting, often in a satirical light, on an image-consumption regime.

Yet by the end of this study, roughly ten years after the publication of *Antwerp*, the vertiginous speed with which devices for mechanical audiovisual reproduction have become widely available to the masses, has rendered the notion of a *poetics of pornography* a radically different endeavor than what was understood by Bolaño. In an almost prophetic voice, the narrator of *Farabeuf* declares: "The performance will continue. Now *you* will be the spectacle" (119). Falling outside the confines of the discipline, the articulation of a poetics in an effort to approach to a literary text is must articulate as well the social conditions of production for any literary and artistic text; the task becomes an argument for its inclusion or exclusion of a given discipline. As this dissertation set out to explore a number of poetics—of the superficial, of light, of the body, and ultimately of pornography—the notion of the *image* became an operation between the *sayable* and the *visible*, the first as representation while the later

as mere presence. While the *sayable* produces continuity in narrative terms, the appearance of the *visible* fragments, disrupts, invades discourse and paralyzes action by its mere presence.

REFERENCES

- Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Anne H. Greet. *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. Print.
- Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Roger Shattuck. *Selected Writings*. New York: New Directions, 1950. Print.
- Bacon, Francis, and William A. Wright. *The Advancement of Learning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873. Print.
- Barajas, Rafael. *Posada: Mito Y Mitote : La Caricatura Política De José Guadalupe Posada Y Manuel Alfonso Manila*. México, D. F: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2009. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.
- Batchen, Geoffrey. *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "Consumer Society". *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Mark Poster, ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. Print.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*. trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. Print.
- Bohn, Willard. "Guillaume Apollinaire and the New York Avant-Garde." *Comparative Literary Studies*. Penn State University Press. 13.1 (1976): 40-51. Print.

- . "The Abstract Vision of Marius De Zayas." *Art Bulletin*. 62.3 (1980): 434-452. Print.
- . *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print.
- *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde*. SUNY series: The margins of literature. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997. Print.
- "The Visual Trajectory of José Juan Tablada." *Hispanic Review*. 69.2 (2001): 191-208. Print.
- Bolaño, Roberto. 2666. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2004. Print.
- Amberes*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002. Print.
- Amuleto*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999. Print.
- Entre Paréntesis*. 1a. ed. Compactos (2004; Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005). Print.
- Estrella Distante*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 1996. Print.
- La Literatura Nazi en América*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1996. Print.
- Llamadas Telefónicas*. 1a. ed. Compactos (1997, Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002).
Print.
- Los Detectives Salvajes*. 4a. ed Compactos (1998, Barcelona: Anagrama, 2003).
Print.
- Putas Asesinas*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001. Print.
- Una Novelita Lumpen*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2002. Print.
- Bolaño, Roberto and Antoni García Porta. *Consejos de un Discípulo de Morrison a un Fanático de Joyce*. Barcelona: Anthropos, 1984. Print.
- Bolaño, Roberto, Chris Andrews (trans.) *Distant Star*. New York: New Directions

- Pub, 2004. Print.
- Nazi Literature in the Americas*. New York: New Directions Pub, 2008. Print.
- *The Return*. New York: New Directions Pub, 2010. Print.
- Bolaño, Roberto, and Natasha Wimmer (trans) *Antwerp*. New York: New Directions Pub, 2010. Print.
- 2666. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. Print.
- The Savage Detectives*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Print.
- *Woes of the True Policeman*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. Print.
- Bolaño, Roberto, Ignacio Echevarría, and Natasha Wimmer. *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles, and Speeches, 1998-2003*. New York: New Directions, 2011. Print.
- Borges, Jorge L. *A Universal History of Infamy*. New York: Dutton, 1972. Print.
- Breton, André, and Mark Polizzotti. *Anthology of Black Humor*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997. Print.
- Calveiro, Pilar. *Poder y Desaparición: Los Campos de Concentración en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Colihue, 2004. Print.
- Camfield, William A. *Francis Picabia His Art, Life, and Times*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1979. Print.
- Carroll, Lewis, and Donald J. Gray. *Alice in Wonderland*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971. Print.
- Seduction*. trans. Brian Singer. New York: New World Perspectives, 1990. Print.
- Cabrera, de T. N. *José Juan Tablada En La Intimidad: (con Cartas Y Poemas Inéditos)*. México: Impr. Universitaria, 1954. Print.

- Copeland, Roger, and Marshall Cohen. *What Is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism*. Oxford, Oxfordshire: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.
- Cook, Jon. *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology, 1900-2000*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004. Print.
- Curley, Dermot F. *En La Isla Desierta: Una Lectura De La Obra De Salvador Elizondo*. México: UAM, Unidad Cuajimalpa, 2008. Print.
- Elizondo, Salvador. *Farabeuf; o, La crónica de un instante; novela*. México: J. Mortiz, 1965. Print.
- *Narda o el verano*. México: Era, 1966. Print.
- . *Salvador Elizondo*. México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966. Print.
- . *El Grafógrafo*. México: J. Mortiz, 1972. Print.
- . *Autobiografía Precoz*. México: Editorial Aldus, 2000. Print.
- . *Cuaderno De Escritura*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000. Print.
- *Narda O El Verano*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000. Print.
- . *Teoría Del Infierno*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000. Print.
- . *Camera Lucida*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001. Print.
- . *Revista S.nob*. México: Editorial Aldus, 2004. Print.
- . “La grafostática”. *Revista de la Universidad de México*. Nueva época. Febrero 2008, No. 48. Web. 24 Nov. 2012.
- <<http://www.revistadelauniversidad.unam.mx/48/elizondo/48elizondo.html>>
- . *El Mar De Iguanas*. Girona: Atalanta, 2010. Print.
- Elizondo, Salvador, and John Incledon. *Farabeuf*. New York: Garland, 1992. Print.
- Espinosa, Hernández P. *Territorios En Fuga: Estudios Críticos Sobre La Obra De*

- Roberto Bolaño. Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003. Print.
- Fenollosa, Ernest, Ezra Pound. Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein. (eds.) *The Chinese Written Character As a Medium for Poetry*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. Print.
- Fenollosa, Ernest F, Ezra L. Pound, and Salvador Elizondo. *Los Caracteres De La Escritura China Como Medio Poético*. México: UAM, 2007. Print.
- Ferguson, Frances. *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *This Is Not a Pipe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Print.
- Fresán, Rodrigo. "Pequeño Big Bang". Página 12, 27 de Julio, 2003. <<http://www.letras.s5.com/bolano280803.htm>>
- Fried, Michael. "Barthes's Punctum." *Critical Inquiry*. 31.3 (2005): 539-574. Print.
- García de Aldrige, Adriana. "Las fuentes chinas de José Juan Tablada." *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*. Liverpool: Institute of Hispanic Studies. 60 (1983): pp. 109-119. Print.
- Glantz, Margo. *Repeticiones: Ensayos Sobre Literatura Mexicana*. Xalapa: Centro de Investigaciones Lingüístico-Literarias, Instituto de Investigaciones Humanísticas, Universidad Veracruzana, 1979. Print.
- González, Martínez E, Luis V. Aguinaga, and Angel Ortuño. *Señas a La Distancia: Ciento Treinta Poemas 1903-1952*. Guadalajara, Jalisco, México: Secretaría de Cultura, Gobierno de Jalisco, 2011. Print.
- Gracián, y M. B, and Calderón E. Correa. *Agudeza Y Arte De Ingenio*. Madrid:

- Editorial Castalia, 1969. Print.
- Greenough, Sarah. *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*. Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000. Print.
- Gubern, Román. *La Imagen Pornográfica y Otras Perversiones Ópticas*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005. Print.
- Hernández Palacios, Esther. “José Juan Tablada en la Babilonia de hierro.” *De Coyoacán a La Quinta Avenida: Una Antología General*. Tablada, José J, and Rodolfo Mata. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007: 457-481. Print.
- Hunt, Lynn Avery. (Ed). *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*. New York: Zone Books, 1993. Print.
- Irwin, Robert M. K. *Mexican Masculinities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Print.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. New York: Verso, 1998. Print.
- Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. European perspectives. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Print.
- Kwon, Tae J. K. *La Presencia Del I Ching En La Obra De Octavio Paz, Salvador Elizondo Y José Agustín*. Guadalajara, Jalisco, México: Universidad de Guadalajara, Coordinación Editorial, 1998. Print.
- Leonardo, and H. A. Suh. *Leonardo's Notebooks*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2005. Print.

- López, Velarde Ramón. *Obras*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1971. Print.
- López, Velarde R, Margaret S. Peden, and Juan Soriano. *Song of the Heart: Selected Poems*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1984. Print.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, and Henry Weinfield. *Collected Poems*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. Print.
- Mata, Rodolfo. “De Coyoacán a la Quinta Avenida.” *De Coyoacán a La Quinta Avenida: Una Antología General*. Tablada, José J, and Rodolfo Mata. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007: 15-34. Print.
- Marzano, Michela. *La Pornografía o el Agotamiento del Deseo*. trans. Víctor Goldstein. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial, 2006. Print.
- Mauleón, Héctor de. “Interview with Salvador Elizondo”. *Confabulario* No. 21, September 11, 2004. Print.
- Moulton, Ian F. *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*. Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 2000. Internet resource.
- Norman, Dorothy. “Marius de Zayas y 291.” *Vuelta*. Mexico. 81.7 (1983): 41-44. Print.
- Orozco, José C. *José Clemente Orozco - Autobiografía*. México: Cultura SEP [u.a.] 1971. Print.
- Ortega, y G. J. *The Dehumanization of Art: And Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1968. Print.
- Pagés Rebollar, Beatriz. “Salvador Elizondo disfrutó su niñez en el gimnasio

- de Berlín.” *El Sol de México en la Cultura* No.436. *El Sol de México*, February 13th 1983. Print.
- Paglia, Camillie. *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Print.
- Paz, Octavio, and Luis M. Schneider. *Generaciones Y Semblanzas: Escritores Y Letras De México*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987. Print.
- Paz, Soldán E, and Patriau G. Faverón. *Bolaño Salvaje*. Canet de Mar (Barcelona): Editorial Candaya, 2008. Print.
- Petruck, Peninah R. (Ed). *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth-Century Photography*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979. Print.
- Poniatowska, Elena. “Salvador Elizondo”. *La Jornada*. Mexico, D.F:DEMOS. April 7 2006.<<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/04/07/index.php?section=cultura&article=a06a1cu>> November 5th, 2012.
- Pound, Ezra. *Abc of Reading*. New York: New Directions, 2006. Print.
- Gaudier-brzeska: A Memoir*. Hesse, England: Marvell Press, 1960. Print.
- Literary Essays*. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1954. Print.
- Pound, Ezra, Lea Baechler, and A W. Litz. *Personae: The Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions Pub, 1990. Print.
- Pound, Ezra, and Amaral J. Vázquez. *Cantares Completos, I-CXX*. Mexico City: J. Mortiz, 1975. Print.
- Rancière, Jacques, Slavoj Žižek, and Gabriel Rockhill. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Continuum, 2007. Print.
- *Destin Des Images. English; The Future of the Image*. English ed. London; New

- York: Verso, 2007. Print.
- Río, Eduardo del (Rius). *Los moneros de México*. México: Grijalbo, 2005. Print.
- Romero, Rolando J. "Ficción E Historia En Farabeuf." *Revista Iberoamericana*. 56.151 (1990): 403-418. Print.
- Roberto Bolaño: Una Mirada Crítica*. Princeton, N.J: Films for Humanites & Sciences, 2004. Film.
- Ruffinelli, Jorge, and Salvador Elizondo. "Salvador Elizondo." *Hispanamérica*. 6.16 (1977): 33-47. Print.
- Saborit, Antonio, Marius de Zayas, David Maawad, and Ahumada A. Tovalín. *Una Visita a Marius De Zayas*. Xalapa, Ver., México: Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura, 2009. Print.
- Sánchez, Rolón E. *La Escritura En El Espejo: Farabeuf De Salvador Elizondo*. Valenciana, Gto., México: Universidad de Guanajuato, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2008. Print.
- Sarduy, Severo, and Carol Maier. *Written on a Body*. New York, NY: Lumen Books, 1989. Print.
- Saussy, Haun. *The Prestige of Writing: Wen², Letter, Picture, Image, Ideography*. Philadelphia, PA, USA: Dept. of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 1997. Print.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Print.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. 1st Picador USA ed. New York: Picador USA; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001, c1977. Print.

- Stieglitz, Alfred, and Dorothy Norman. *291*. New York: Arno Press, 1915. Print.
- Tablada, José J. *La Ciudadela De Fuego: A Ochenta Años De La Decena Trágica*. Mexico: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1993. Print.
- Tablada, José J, Herrera R. Lozano, Andrés Calderón, and Genevieve Galán. *La Defensa Social: Historia De La Campaña De La División Del Norte (1913)*. México, D.F: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2010. Print.
- Tablada, José J, and Andrea Martínez. *Hongos Mexicanos Comestibles: Micología Económica*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983. Print.
- Tablada, José J, and Rodolfo Mata. *De Coyoacán a La Quinta Avenida: Una Antología General*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007. Print.
- Tablada, José J, Rodolfo Mata, Diego Bonilla, and Guzmán C. López. *José Juan Tablada: Letra E Imagen: Poesía, Prosa, Obra Gráfica Y Varia Documental*. México, D.F: UNAM, DGSCA, Coordinación de Publicaciones Digitales, 2003. CD.
- Tablada, José J, and Rodolfo Mata. *Li-po Y Otros Poemas*. Círculo de arte. México, D.F: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, CONACULTA, 2005. Print.
- Tablada, José J, and Antonio Saborit. *José Juan Tablada. Los imprescindibles*. México, D. F: Ediciones Cal y Arena, 2008. Print.
- Tablada, José J, Valdés H. Valdés, de S. J. A. Ruedas, and Velázquez E. Lara. *Obras*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de Estudios Literarios, 1971. Vol. 1-9. Print.
- Tablada, José J, Serge I. Zaitzeff, and Genaro Estrada. *Cartas a Genaro Estrada, 1921-1931*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001. Print.

- Tejada, Roberto, Carole Castelli, Fox L. Scott, Salvador Lutteroth, and Uribe J. Sánchez. *Abel Quezada*. México: Artes de México y del Mundo, 1996. Print.
- Teresa, Adriana de. *Farabeuf: Escritura E Imagen*. México, D.F: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Coordinación de Humanidades, Dirección General de Publicaciones, 1996. Print.
- Tryphonopoulos, Demetres P, and Stephen Adams. *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2005. Print.
- Ubilluz, Juan C. *Sacred Eroticism: Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski in the Latin American Erotic Novel*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2006. Print.
- Villaurrutia, Xavier, Alí Chumacero, Miguel Capistrán, and Luis M. Schneider. *Obras: Poesía, Teatro, Prosas Varias, Crítica*. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006. Print.
- Williams, Linda. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Print.
- Yehya, Naief. *Pornografía: Sexo Mediatizado y Pánico Moral*. Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2004. Print.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender & Nation*. London: Sage publ, 1997. Print.
- Zaïtzeff, Serge I. "José Juan Tabalada en Sudamérica." *De Coyoacán a La Quinta Avenida: Una Antología General*. Tablada, José J, and Rodolfo Mata. México, D.F: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007: 483-500. Print.
- Zayas, Marius de, and Francis M. Naumann. *How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996. Print.

Zayas, Marius de, and Antonio Saborit. *Crónicas Y Ensayos: Nueva York Y París (1909-1911)*. México: DGE Ediciones, 2008. Print.

Zayas, Marius de. "Caricature: Absolute and Relative" *Camera Work*, XLVI, April 1914, 20. Print.