Nobody There: Acousmatics and An Alternative Economy of Meaning in Latin American Poetry of the 1970s

Mónica de la Torre

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on the works of three authors whose first poetry books appeared in the 1970s, in the context of the dictatorial and authoritarian regimes that began seizing power in Latin America in the 1960s and '70s. At a juncture in which both traditional leftist discourse and the programs of earlier avant-gardes had begun to seem inadequate, younger poets sought to articulate, in the realm of the symbolic, coherent responses to increasingly oppressive and polarized political environments. The works in question are the following: Brazilian Waly Salomão’s *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972); Juan Luis Martínez’s *La nueva novela* (Santiago, Chile, 1977); and, by Mexican conceptual artist Ulises Carrión, the unpublished *Poesías*, from 1973, as well as a selection of his poetry-based artists books. These are hyper-referential, process-oriented, polyphonic works. They are not only politically motivated, but, given their understanding of the entwinement of politics and genre, are also decidedly against the ideology bolstering the lettered tradition, lyrical poetry, and self-expressive tendencies.
At the core of their critique is a rejection of an economy of meaning in which the author’s function, as Foucault puts it, equals “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.” First and foremost, in their goal to burst open the meaning-making process, Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión disembark the utterance and question notions of literary value that set apart literary language from common speech. Relying heavily on appropriation and framing devices, they each posit an alternate model of authorship in which writing and reading are inextricable and, consequently, the work is co-created by the reader.

Key among their strategies is that of acousmatics—here understood as the concealment of the source of the utterances in the text—in order to, primarily, create conditions of reception in which the reader can interact with the material on the page directly, without its being mediated by the poem’s subject. Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión each achieve the uttering subject’s removal from the text through different procedures that are contrasted in the dissertation. Emulating the cacophony of popular culture, Salomão performatively adopts multiple subjectivities in his works, saturating them to the point that no unitary subject can be said to be manifest in them. Martínez, on the other hand, mirrors the cacophony of
printed matter. Besides failing to attribute the copious materials he samples in the wide-ranging word/image works comprising *La nueva novela*, in presenting them he adopts the depersonalized institutional tone of textbooks, photographic captions, and paratextual materials such as footnotes, editor’s notes, and bibliographical annotations. In Carrión’s works the subject seems to have vacated the poem entirely, as author function is reduced to misreading canonical materials and performing interventions and erasures on them. Resulting from Carrión’s operations are open structures that serve as models for post-literary ways to engage with texts.

The way these authors assembled and put their books in circulation is also examined, since *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*, *La nueva novela*, and Carrión’s artist books are the result of a thorough rethinking of the politics of the book, the lettered tradition’s keystone institution.
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Introduction

From the 1960s to the early 1980s Latin America underwent generalized sociopolitical turbulence. Not only was the Cold War playing itself out upon different Latin American stages; locally, traditional elites and new power groups had engaged in a struggle for hegemony that culminated either in the consolidation of authoritarian regimes or the military dictatorships that prevailed during those decades. Writers, in the words of Jean Franco in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City* (2002), were witnessing “the collapse of belief in utopia and in literature with a capital ‘L’” (275), and those purporting themselves to be heirs to earlier 20th-century avant-gardes were prompted to at least bestow consideration on the nexus between politics and artistic practice and question whether past models for their articulation were still viable.

If most of the protagonists of earlier Latin American vanguard movements had manifested a commitment both to aesthetic innovation and to political causes, by the 1970s those who were still alive had become canonical—their engagement in politics had become complicated and, some claimed, even compromised. It seems symbolically charged that Pablo Neruda received the news of Pinochet’s coup on his deathbed. Borges had ceased to write about politics
after an a brief period of avant-garde poetic experimentation as a member of the Ultraísta group in the 1920s, and, despite his problematic relationship with the Chilean and Argentine military during the dictatorships in both countries, overall had not spared the political realm of his distinctive skeptical outlook. Even younger figures such as Octavio Paz, who at the beginning of his career and roughly up until the period following the Spanish Civil War had written his share of political poetry, held political views that, by then, had become controversial. In 1968 he resigned from his post at the Mexican Embassy in India in protest of the military repression with which the student revolt had been met. In 1971 he returned to Mexico City and founded the magazine *Plural*, which would advocate a liberal position as critical of the governing party’s authoritarianism as of the left for its turning a blind eye on the human rights violations being committed in the name of social equality in the Soviet Union and Cuba. For certain left-leaning intellectuals, Paz’s liberalism was not enough, and equated complicity with the official regime.

Furthermore, the once radical work of those considered the “founders of Latin American poetry”—in the full, proprietary sense of the term by Saúl Yurkievich and
others—had become, to a degree, institutionalized, in the sense that it was the paradigm against which later emerging poetry movements were measured. Yurkievich limited himself to studying Spanish-language poets, but Brazil manifested a similar pattern as well. In the 1920s Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade spearheaded *Modernismo* and the poetry of the two subsequent vanguard movements—second-generation modernism and Concrete poetry—was, at least in part, a revision of the previously set standards. If the *Modernistas’* main propositions involved defining authentic Brazilian culture and prescribing the strategies it should develop in order to better position itself against the prevailing European cultural models, by the late 1960s the main problem being debated in Brazil was not how its culture fared vis-à-vis Europe—the United States posed a larger threat—but how to balance the forces from the left and right of the political spectrum that were struggling to come up with a feasible plan for the cultural, political, and economic development of the nation.

The outcome of these various struggles is known. Skepticism and frustration by the left’s failure to prevent the CIA-backed military from crushing incipient Latin American democracies was widespread. In this climate, poets examined their role as cultural producers and decided
whether or not to engage in the debates taking place in the public sphere regardless of the restrictions that their corresponding governments might have imposed on this practice. If protest poetry was prevalent in the 1960s and '70s, in Central America especially, some poets resisted political poetry’s overtness and instead remained firmly within the realm of the lyric, albeit complicating its terms, such as its subject matter and its approach to language, as well as its relationship to history and philosophy. Such is William Rowe’s thesis in Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and the Inner Life (2000) which is devoted to the works, among others, of Chileans Nicanor Parra and Gonzalo Rojas; Jorge Eduardo Eielson and Carmen Ollé, from Peru; and Juan L. Ortiz, from Argentina. Yet another group of poets, whose work this dissertation examines, chose to deal with politics by contesting the ideological apparatus supporting the very genre of poetry: its conditions of possibility up until then, the locus of enunciation of its speakers, its production, symbolic exchanges, and circulation.

In the 1987 essay “The Politics of, the Politics in,” cited in Craig Dworkin’s Reading the Illegible (2003), poet and critic Jed Rasula puts forth a helpful taxonomy distinguishing the politics through the poem from the
politics in the poem and the politics of the poem. If the first two categories refer to politics in a narrow sense, as it might appear in a conventional protest poem or song, the politics of the poem points to “what is signified by [the poem’s] form, enacted by its structures, implicit in its philosophy of language, how it positions its reader, and a range of questions relating to the poem as a material object—how it was produced, distributed, exchanged” (5). This study focuses precisely on a late avant-garde poetry that, having surfaced in different contexts in response to this critical moment in the history of Latin America, is self-aware and critical of the politics of the poem and perhaps for that very reason eschews announcing itself as political. What is more, it avoids dealing with politics topically, not primarily due to censorship, as one might all too easily be tempted to think, but out of the crucial realization that the politics in, through, and of the poem might, and almost inevitably do, work at cross-purposes. That is, regardless of the vehemence and degree of legitimate outrage articulated in a protest poem by, say, Pablo Neruda or Ernesto Cardenal, the very premise of the text rests on the author’s sense of duty to voice the concerns of a collectivity and hence engage in the complicated act of speaking for others, an act whose most
immediate consequence is that it concentrates cultural capital on the figure of the author, instantly setting it apart from the group. Much has been written about the politics of representation, and this is not the place to go over prior formulations on the issue. What matters here is that the paradoxes of this dynamic, which puts the socially conscious utterance in somewhat of a predicament, were not lost on those late avant-garde poets who began writing in the 1970s. Their burgeoning poetics was equally distrustful of the rhetoric of the left—which had proved itself to be exclusionary on a number of counts (of women and gays, among others), overly dogmatic, and futile in its aims—as well as of lyric practices that in their effort not to compromise the poem’s alleged universality, preferred not to address the conditions of the specific historical moment and therefore posed no symbolic obstacle to the preservation of the status quo.

Consequently, for those participating in these emergent vanguard poetry groups, poetry was a de-skilled activity less concerned with the writing of poetry than with making a statement and implementing a different type of relationship with the reader: it implied bypassing institutions and engaging in micro-level, self-managed actions and performances, as well as small-scale self-
publishing initiatives, which became the predominant mode of dissemination of the work. Although the groups had varying agendas, and some even questioned the teleology implicit in the idea of the avant-garde, one of their shared aims was to unsettle a decaying lettered tradition that, to them, had ossified art and, more important, mirrored and perpetuated social hierarchical orderings.

However, it should be said that not all of the groups being formed then manifested a cohesive, carefully considered poetics. Even if most of them penned wholehearted manifestos announcing the dawn of a new era in poetry, few were the poets whose interventions went beyond rhetoric. The subset that concerns this study is one which not only sought to dismantle the conventions and tropes of lyric poetry once and for all, but also, aware of the politics of the poem, took apart the genre’s formal and ideological supports—the lyric “I,” for one—and, as mentioned earlier, put forth alternative exchange and authorship models. Placing emphasis not on craft or the expressive skills displayed in the poem as a finished product, but instead on the symbolic exchanges enacted by the text, in this new model poets are reticent to pronounce themselves, to put forth utterances reflective of their own individuality. Instead, they experiment with polyphony and
orality, they manage and manipulate appropriated utterances, and investigate process and open, dialogical structures, thereby undermining the notion of poems as expressionist vehicles for a unitary self. Given the exhaustion of both the lyric and the social protest modes predicated on the integrity and moral righteousness of the poetic subject, subjectivity becomes these poets’ first target. Taking full advantage of the disembodiment of the utterance allowed for by print media, these late avant-garde poets consequently complicate, de-naturalize, and explode identity. The poem is not a window into the poet’s interiority but a mosaic of voices in dialogue, each vying for attention, often clashing with each other and attempting to cancel each other’s utterances out. That is, the poem contains a plurality of voices, and no voice in the poem has the final say. The hallmark of these poets’ production, then, becomes the framing of the utterance as problem. Who the speaker is matters little, in the spirit of Beckett’s “What does it matter who is speaking...” cited in Foucault’s seminal 1969 essay “What Is an Author?” What is more: in the poem we can no longer assume that the author is the subject producing the utterance. The author might simply be channeling utterances emitted by others, ventriloquizing them, mimicking them, or appropriating
them—all in all, displacing them and thereby framing them in the poem.

To clarify, I will use the phrase “poetic utterance” as a way to convey an understanding of language as being “verbal interaction,” “a verbal performance in print” (22), as poet/critic Ron Silliman puts it in the essay “The Political Economy of Print,” citing Valentin Voloshinov. Not only is my notion of utterance in keeping with Silliman and Voloshinov’s—as the latter writes, “Any utterance... is only a moment in the continuous process of communication” (22)—it is also consistent with the performative views of language shared by the poets whose works I will examine.

Yet key to the procedures that such poets favored, and which will be discussed in further detail later, is that they are made possible by the displacement of the utterance to print media, a process that, given the homogenizing effect of type, inevitably allows for the obscuring or covering up of the utterance’s source. In other words, the medium of print, in its homogeneity, makes it possible to equalize a variety of utterances originally emitted by different sources, to erase any visible signs of difference among them, often to unsettling effect. I will refer to this phenomenon by the term “acousmatic,” which indicates

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the concealment of the source of the utterance in order to destabilize the conditions of its reception. Mladen Dolar in *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) writes: "the acousmatic voice is simply a voice whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place" (60). Pythagoras was the first to apply this term to his pupils; his pedagogical method consisted of lecturing his students behind a veil since: "The body distracts the spirit, it is a cumbersome impediment, so it has to be reduced to the spectrality of mere voice, and entrusted to its disembodied body" (Dolar, 62). In the mid-1950s Pierre Schaeffer, founder of musique concrète, designated the perception of mediated sounds whose causes we cannot discern—sounds that in the advent of new media have become, so to speak, universal—as acousmatic listening. Such listening takes in sonorous objects that, having been extricated from the instrument that produced them, open up new possibilities for the listener who no longer is conditioned to consider them in conjunction with their source. Schaeffer writes: "The tape recorder has the virtue of Pythagoras’ curtain: if it creates new phenomena to observe, it creates above all new conditions of observation..." (Cox and Warner, 81). Lastly, the term has also been applied to film, indicating those non-diegetic
sounds that have no correlatives in the image or the story unfolding onscreen.

The poets whose works this dissertation focuses on manifest an awareness of print media’s intrinsic detaching of utterances from their sources. If in the lyric tradition only through literary artifice the bond between the utterance and the emitting subject is restored—the subject or persona inevitably being a construct of the text—as we shall see, the poets under consideration here seem to recognize that acousmatics is a condition of print, and fully exploit its potential by complicating the source of speech in the poem. The ways in which they carry this out will be addressed later on. Suffice it to say for now that as a result of their operations, the individuated poetic subject—the hypersensitive protagonist of the lyric poem, that is—is silenced and undermined in expressly antipoetic or hybrid works in defiance of generic conventions.

A partial overview of different movements that emerged in the 1970s in Latin America will follow in order to illustrate the different contexts from which a model for acousmatic poetry was generated. As we will see, though most of the movements of the time—poesia marginal in Brazil, avant-garde poetry in Chile and Argentina, Infrarrealismo in Mexico, Hora Zero in Peru—claimed to be
countercultural and anti-lettered, some failed to get to the core of what made conventional poems possible in the first place, and consequently will not be studied here.

In Brazil, for instance, following the eruption of the *Tropicalista* movement, there was a surge in countercultural poetry in part prompted by the publication in 1972 of *Messegura qu’eu vou dar um troço* by Waly Salomão, a poet and lyricist closely associated with the Tropicália musicians Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa, Os Mutantes, and the visual artist Hélio Oiticica. *Poesia marginal*, as it was labeled, was a phenomenon that did not go unnoticed by journalists or scholars. The accessibility of mimeograph and offset printing technologies led to a proliferation of self-published books that were sold by the poets themselves at bars, theaters, and book launches. Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda remarks in the introduction to her anthology *26 Poetas Hoje* (1976) that this direct relationship between poetry’s sellers and buyers implied “the recovery, for literature, of the sense of a human relationship,” a sense that, formally, was enhanced by “the presence in the poems of an informal language, at first glance easy, light, and funny, speaking of lived experience” (8). In the critic’s words, marginal poetry “rejected both classicizing literature and the current experimental avant-garde which
had imposed itself on [Brazil’s] literary landscape as an orthodoxy in a controlling and repressive way” (8). It differentiated itself from political poetry of a “missionary and schematic type” since politics were understood as a “factor of interference and limitation of daily experiences” (9). Not all poesia marginal stemmed from or manifested the same degree of critical analysis, and it is perhaps unfortunate that it all became lumped under the same rubric. The otherwise vaguely defined movement included poets who were suspicious of intellectual discourse, given its institutional ties to the academy, as well as highly analytical figures such as Ana Cristina César and Francisco Alvim, whose poetry, only deceptively colloquial, incorporated and framed conversational language, occluded the author figure, and located itself at the complex intersection of public discourse and subjectivity.

Alvim is somewhat of a ventriloquist—his poems subtly present the reader with pithy utterances attributable to someone other than the poet himself, with made-up utterances that appear as if they had been overheard and then transcribed. A look at “Lembra?” (“Remember?”)—from the book Elefante (2000)—is revealing of the author’s distinctive methodology when it comes to the utterance: “O
sujeito que foi torturado e que não escondia/ O que não foi e dizia que tinha sido/ O que tinha sido e que negava/ O que foi e que escondia” (“The subject who was tortured and did not hide it/ Who was not but said to have been/ Who had been but denied it/ Who was but hid it”\(^2\) (123). Alvim has spoken of his interest in Pound and Eliot’s collage-like use of voice and polyphony in terms of their coming from a “crushed subjectivity” whose fragments are refracted by the “shrapnel of voice.”\(^3\) In its tightly controlled economy, this poem performs a similarly sophisticated operation. Uttered in the voice of a subject recalling the paranoiac environment that the dictatorship imposed, it replicates the instability of oral accounts and instantly implicates the reader in the questioning of the truthfulness of a subject’s claim to have been tortured (or not), a muddled claim mirroring the silencing and obfuscation favored by the military regime and the shifty workings of personal and official memory. As we shall see in the second chapter, which will be devoted to Waly Salomão’s *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*, Salomão also complicates the use of voice and

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\(^2\)Unless otherwise noted, I have undertaken all the translations in this study. For the sake of concision, when citing poetry I will provide both the original and its translation, and when citing prose I will simply provide the English versions.

\(^3\)From an interview conducted by Sergio Bessa for *BOMB Magazine*, issue 102, winter 2008.
polyphony but to a higher degree: *Me segura* presents readers with the aggressively cacophonous soundscape of Rio de Janeiro, one in which print and mass media, the counterculture, and official discourse were all competing for air space so as to shape people’s sensibility. If Alvim’s approach to poetry ultimately bears a personal stamp, Salomão’s is so inclusive of multiple subjectivities that it is nearly impossible to single his out.

Concurrently, in Santiago, Chile, a group of visual artists and writers including novelist Diamela Eltit and poet Raúl Zurita founded the Colectivo Acciones de Arte (CADA) in 1979. That same year Zurita’s groundbreaking book *Purgatorio* was published to instant critical success: in it the author cross-dresses; incorporates an assortment of materials (including clinical assessments of his mental health), which alternately de-authorizes the text and validates his account of madness; and presents readers with dialogical sections directly implicating them in the symbolic operations in which the book summons them to participate in, such as deciphering the nonsensical syllogisms in the poems, and in doing so, enacting an intermittent dynamic toward and away from logocentrism.⁴

⁴Raúl Zurita’s poetry, as tantamount as it has become with production resulting directly from the Chilean dictatorship, will not be examined here given that this study focuses on anti-genre practices at whose foundation lies a dismissal of the value system regulating what falls
CADA’s aim was to mobilize artists to respond to the military coup in ways that lessened the distance between cultural producers and their audiences, by either opening up cultural institutions or doing without them altogether, and by radically contesting conventional notions of authorship. The collective’s actions often involved symbolically charged yet simple gestures reaching disenfranchised groups through spectacular means that managed to avoid censorship due to their perceived inoffensiveness and the density of their theoretical underpinnings. They distributed milk in the action Para no morir de hambre en el arte (1979), for example, and used a giant blank canvas to block access to Santiago’s Museo de Bellas Artes and parked milk delivery trucks in front of its entrance in Inversión de Escena (1979). For ¡Ay Sudamérica! (1981), they hired six airplanes to fly in military formation over a remote municipality of Santiago and drop 400,000 flyers whose message to the people—delivered by a voice as acousmatic as it could possibly be—was that the only valid art was that whose effect was to heighten the individual’s experience of life: “Any man who works to expand his daily spaces, even mentally, is an

into a genre’s domain. Zurita’s book projects from Purgatorio on have attempted to reclaim the lyric tradition, if poignantly and critically so, and therefore fall outside the purview of this dissertation.
Consequently we argue that the work toward the amplification of the habitual levels of life is the only display of art that is valid/the only exhibition/the only living art work..." (CADA DIA, 150).

The poetry of Chilean Juan Luis Martínez, a contemporary of the members of CADA, partook of similar concerns and effected a considerable paradigm shift cancelling the author/reader dichotomy. The third chapter of this study is dedicated to the idiosyncratic self-published and self-distributed book objects that he assembled, in part, with appropriated texts and images, and mainly to La nueva novela (1977). Martínez’s use of borrowed material is so pervasive throughout his published writing, that in it reading and writing are made radically equivalent, both for him as the author, who appears to read and plunder more than come up with his own utterances, and for the reader, who is summoned to co-create his deliberately unfinished books upon reading them. That a large portion of the materials appropriated in La nueva novela were translated from the French but were incorporated into the writing without clear attribution has postcolonial implications which will be discussed further in the chapter on Martínez. This textual operation certainly put both Chilean consumers of culture, who in the
book are made producers, on equal footing with European cultural producers.

In Argentina poets responded, too, to the critical political juncture of those years. In Buenos Aires the poetry journal XUL was launched in 1980 as “a resistance to the censorship of millions and the extermination of thousands of people by the military government as well as a questioning of the shortcomings of other sectors of the community as a whole,” according to Ernesto Livón-Grosman, editor of The XUL Reader (ix). If the journal’s spirit was everything but tame conformism, it was able to dodge censorship precisely because it was devoted to the publishing of poetry exclusively; specifically, anti-absorptive, difficult texts radically different from those being written, say, by the marginal poets in Brazil. Poet/publisher Douglas Messerli pertinently compares the poetry published in XUL with Language Poetry, its simultaneous American counterpart in the United States, for it “sought in the purposeful complexity and density of words a way to resist the failed language of seemingly ‘transparent’ statements of both sides, of both the victims and the victimizers.” Yet it was not only poetry’s inaccessible diction which favored the magazine’s

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5 Published in Douglas Messerli’s page on the Electronic Poetry Center archive: http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/authors, and reprinted from Mr. Knife, Miss Fork, number 1 (1998), 178-179.
uncensored circulation, Livón-Grosman argues, it was also the genre’s marginal status: “Poetry constituted a practice which—because of its independence with respect to commercial publishing houses and because of its more limited circulation in comparison with the novel and essay—received less attention from censors and permitted a revision of the criteria around which the community was organized” (ix). The statement resonates in that it posits marginality as a safeguard, and also reveals a shift in the conception of poetry, since it is described as a practice that serves the additional purpose of generating and articulating a community more engaged in critical dialogue than in pushing an independent formal or aesthetic agenda.

As we have seen, this was also the case in Brazil and Chile. Although Jorge Santiago Perednik, editor of XUL, claimed that the journal did not represent any particular school of writing, its regular contributors often were politically active in non-traditional ways, such as Néstor Perlongher, who was a member of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual (Gay Liberation Front) in the late ‘70s.

XUL acknowledged Osvaldo Lamborghini as one of its forebears and the works that I will examine share with his poetry a fractured, polyphonic, bodily-marked, and provisional quality. César Aira, in the introduction to the
volume of Lamborghini’s collected poems from 1969-1985 that he edited, describes the poems as “having an air of ‘definitive drafts.’” Apropos of this, consider the advice Lamborghini dispenses at the provocative end of an abject poem from 1974 “Los Tadeys” (not to be confused with his eponymous story) dealing, often in code, with treason, mutilation, obscure rituals, and politics (parts of the poems are allegedly notes by a miserable deputy): “Mi consejo a la joven industria es: inviertan poco, traten de ahorrarse la estúpida comprobación de que todo (lo que se dice: todo) está invertido ya. Fabriquen alguna cosita a medias, flotadora, virtual” (“My advice to the young industry is: invest little, try to spare yourselves of the stupid proof that everything (literally: everything) has been invested. Make something halfway, a little, virtual thing that can float”) (67).

Critic Ezequiel Alemian, in an article in the Uruguayan magazine *Bitácora*, describes some of the characteristic traits in Lamborghini’s poetry—an over-saturation of references and a non-normative use of typography and punctuation signs, for example—as breaking the “surface of the poem into different planes that unfold simultaneously” as if “instead of there being a single poetic voice, there were one per plane, and Lamborghini’s
poetry were constituted by the briefest moments in which those voices dialogue among themselves." An awareness of parallax permeates his poems, as another excerpt from “Los Tadeys” indicates: “Cada uno habla desde su lugar/ invirtiendo el lugar” (“Everyone speaks from their place/ inverting the place”) (49). Paired with an exploration of the inherent performative potential of utterance-based poetry, manifest, for instance, in the two lines “Entonces telón./ Veintisiete letras” (“And then a curtain./ Twenty-seven letters”) (49), there is no room for sincerity in Lamborghini’s poetry. It is writing as artifice and disembodied voice, precisely, as utterance, and consequently as a frozen moment in an ongoing verbal performance that allows for the multiplicity of poetic utterances to unfold.

In comparison with the poetic models discussed above, then, the 1970 manifesto “Palabras Urgentes” (“Urgent Words”) whereby Peruvian poets Jorge Pimentel and Juan

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6 Alemian explains too that only four poems by Lamborghini were published during his lifetime: two of them appeared in the key critical magazine Literal (1973-1977), which was at the intersection of literature, politics, and psychoanalysis. [http://www.bitacora.com.uy/noticia_4531_1.html](http://www.bitacora.com.uy/noticia_4531_1.html). Given that Lamborghini’s writing consisted primarily of fiction, it will not be studied here either.

7 Note how in this quote Lamborghini uses the verb “invertir,” which in English can mean both “invest” and “invert.” He used the same verb in the quote cited previously, advising “the young industry” to “invest little.” He almost posits that to state—to prove or pronounce—equals an investment that goes hand-in-hand with ideological inversions. The less said, or invested, the less one is prone to invert.
Ramírez Jiménez founded the Hora Zero movement in an effort to go against all established rules—because “anything established is corrupt”—might come off as naïve and sanctimonious. If they deem “stupid” the position of those “hiding behind the tag of lyric and ineffable poets” and also argue that “social poetry” was practiced to the point of exhaustion by a group of “insubstantial hysterics, lost in inconsequent screams” and “completely negated by their lifestyles,” the Hora Zero poets advocate a “living poetry,” capturing everything that “palpitates and moves”: “Our solid response to the omissions and the farce is to sustain that literature, and poetry in particular, consolidates the possibility of communication between men and, fundamentally in these times, its most honest and responsible role is to propose, clarify, and ‘Propagate strength and happiness’” (9-13). That is, they believe in poetry as an expressive vehicle for the so-called true self, one whose ability to effect change depends on sincerity, whose condition of possibility is language’s transparency—a circular argument which fortunately did not translate into facile poetry, but which fails to engage a critical examination of language or a rethinking of the politics and economics of the poem.

\[\text{8} \text{ Included in Jorge Pimentel’s *Kenacort y Valium 10 (Material para ser tomado en cuenta)*. Lima: Ediciones Hora Zero, 1970.}\]
The same can be said of the works of the *Infrarrealista* movement founded in Mexico City in 1976 by a group of poets in close contact with their Peruvian counterparts and spearheaded by Chilean Roberto Bolaño. Although the founding manifesto of the *Infrarrealistas* acknowledges the contradictions inherent to poetic discourse paired with political action, and critiques the cultural machinery that negates the basic reality of most Mexicans, it fails to propose alternate poetic forms and deals with critical issues on a topical level, not a structural one, with the amusingly high dose of histrionics characteristic of manifestos. The mythologizing, and, dare I say, invention of *Infrarrealismo* through Bolaño’s *The Savage Detectives* is another matter. *Infrarrealista* poetry had to wait until Bolaño wrote the novel in order to realize the aspirations of its founding manifesto: to turn marginal poets and poetry into the main protagonists of a narrative in which lettered figures and institutions are symbolically toppled. Bolaño’s cunning move to deal with poetry in the realm of fiction—in his novels poetry is everywhere and nowhere at the same time—echoes Diamela Eltit’s commentary in the essay “Sociedad Anónima” (Anonymous Society) on the condition of poetry in our age: “poetry would be the space that seems incompatible with
consumer society and which, regardless, does not become extinct as a social sign. But, of course, it only persists in the evocation of the sign itself, wandering through public spaces in the middle of a fractured versification that is able to account for, precisely, a void. Thus poetry goes through itself as its own double” (37). This doubling is certainly at the heart of The Savage Detectives (although the hostile environment in the novel is one caused by the spread of autocratic regimes, and not consumer society), yet rather than investigate if poetry per se is incompatible with authoritarianism or consumer society, I will limit myself to study poetry whose structure deliberately seeks not to emulate their specific dynamics.

In this regard, consider the following excerpt of the first Infrarrealista manifesto, “Give it All Up Again,” translated by Tim Pilcher, which finds a more apt correlative in The Savage Detectives than in the poems by Bolaño or Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, another one of the movement’s members: “A new lyricism that’s beginning to grow in Latin America sustains itself in ways that never cease to amaze us. The entrance to the work is the entrance to adventure: the poem as a journey and the poet as a hero who reveals heroes.” Where if not in the realm of the
symbolic can the poet become hero? Only in fiction can this figure be forged. Another passage of the manifesto is revealing: “Movement of the poem through the seasons of rebellion: poetry producing poets producing poems producing poetry.”⁹ The notion of the lyric poet as a hero who in an act of resistance turns his back on society is in keeping with Adorno’s understanding of the dynamic intrinsic to the genre: “The lyric spirit’s idiosyncratic opposition to the superior power of material things is a form of reaction to the reification of the world, to the domination of human beings by commodities that has developed since the beginning of the modern era” (Cook, 345). Furthermore, “The more heavily the situation weighs upon it, the more firmly the work resists it by refusing to submit to anything heteronomous and constituting itself solely in accordance with its own laws” (345). The paradox for Adorno is that this resistance—Bolaño’s rebellion—is one invisibly prescribed or scripted, precisely, by capitalism. And the question for lyric poetry is ultimately whether it “gives voice to what ideology hides” (344) or actually reproduces capitalist ideology. The infrarrealista poem’s inflated “I”—serially perpetuating itself in poems whose effect is to bolster and reproduce the ideal in other poems by

⁹Translations of Infrarrealista works appear on the following blog: http://launiversidaddesconocida.wordpress.com.
equally inflated “I’s”—seems in fact to get in the way of an actual upending of capitalist terms.\textsuperscript{10}

Among the questions guiding this study is the following: Do these movements emerging in the 1970s aimed at undermining the letrado institutions, the lettered cultural paradigm allowing for traditional poetry, represent the continuation of what Octavio Paz coined “the tradition of rupture” at the core of modernism, which turns every revolt against it—including postmodernism—into yet another one of its manifestations? If these late avant-gardes repeated the formal gestures of the various movements that arose successively throughout the 20th century, then one could argue that they were following the script inherent in that very tradition that they sought to disrupt. In reading “A Tradition against Itself,” the first chapter of Children of the Mire—delivered at Harvard University as the 1971–1972 Charles Eliot Norton lectures (translated by Rachel Phillips)—it becomes clear that Paz—not unlike T.S. Eliot in his seminal essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent”—conceives of the Western tradition in teleological terms, regardless of its continual

\textsuperscript{10} Infrarrealismo as we understand it now, in fact, is a market phenomenon which has already spawned a fair share of revisionist views regarding its visibility at the time of its emergence. As emblematic of the Latin American counterculture as it has become—retroactively, for certain—its paradigm, ultimately, is much closer to that of the lyrical poet than it appears in Bolaño’s representations.
negations. Paz sustains that even what might appear to contradict the thrust of modernity is part of its essence: “We can speak of a modern tradition without contradicting ourselves because the modern era has eroded, almost to the point of disappearance, the antagonism between the old and the actual, the new and the traditional” (5). To a 21st-century reader the idea that the antagonism between the old and new had almost disappeared might come across not so much as a historical fact, but as an illustration of a widespread desire to bolster universalizing narratives consistent with the spread of neo-liberalism. If these late 20th-century anti-lyrical models were not a continuation of tradition but its interruption instead, did they introduce lasting innovations to prior modes of cultural production, or simply mark disruptions that were never absorbed by, and consequently incorporated into, the mainstream?

Martin Lienhard’s La voz y su huella (The Voice and its Trace) offers an alternative to the Eurocentric, teleological model purported by Paz. He focuses on parallel Latin American literatures generated by the irreconcilable antagonism between predominantly oral pre-Hispanic cultures and the lettered European tradition, arguing that: “Those literary practices originating on the margins of written culture, open to marginal oral cultures, inscribe
themselves in certain junctures of the clash between hegemonic sectors and the disenfranchised, ‘ethnic,’ or popular sectors of society. Characterized by the entwinement of cultural and social antagonisms, this clash, of variable intensity depending on eras and locations, is the most persistent seen in Latin American history” (61). Therefore, another question that this study will attempt to ask is whether or not these cultural and social antagonisms specific to Latin American postcolonial history are actually at play in the poetics I delineate.11

11 It bears mentioning that the development of this new strand of Latin American poetry parallels the rise of testimonial literature in the region. From their inception, the premise for both genres was a belief in the democratic virtues of either gaining access to representation, in the case of testimonio, or of allowing polyphony and forms closer to actual speech-based practices to enter the text. Frederic Jameson’s remarks on testimonial narratives can very well apply to the writing under examination here: “the using of the speech of someone else in a situation [...] both dispels ‘authorship’ of the old centered-subject private-property type and institutes some new collective space between named subjects and individual human beings” (185). Among those literary works whose methodologies are akin to those of testimonio are El Padre mío (1989) by Diamela Eltit, for which during five consecutive years Eltit recorded and transcribed the startlingly resonant rants of a homeless man excoriating the political and economical shambles of the Chilean nation, and La vida nueva (1993) by Raúl Zurita, in which the author transcribed the retellings of dreams of ten dwellers of a Chilean encampment. Yet this postmodern poetry could be considered the reverse image of testimonial narratives. In the essay “Testimonio and Postmodernism,” George Yúdice writes “testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.) Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity” (44). Postmodern poetry not only does not share the phonocentrism inherent in testimonio—the plurality of voices in the writing invalidates the assumption of a self-present natural voice—it is also neither urgent nor instrumental, which might account for testimonio’s versus poetry’s marketability.
Regardless of what the answer might be, regardless of whether this poetry favors the realm of orality or the scriptural order, it might be useful to go over some received ideas on their binary opposition, some assumptions about the asymmetrical power relationship between the two: for Derrida, Western thought’s privileging of the oral sphere, its phonocentrism, is to blame for a misguided “metaphysics of presence” in which writing is seen as residual. Yet, at the heart of an equally phonocentric critique of the letrado tradition which celebrates “la palabra viva,” is the notion that the written word is the word of authority and the law. For instance, in The Bow and the Lyre (1956) Paz rejects those concepts in structural linguistics that posit language’s structures as independent of semantics: “Human relations […] changed markedly when the book replaced the living voice, imposed on the listener a solitary reading, and took away his right to reply or ask questions. If the book reduced the listener to the passivity of the reader, these new techniques tend to annul man as the emitter of the word. With the disappearance of the one who speaks and the one who answers, language is annulled” (256) (translation by Ruth L.C. Simms). If Paz is correct in pointing out the inextricability of the human, of semantics, from language, his statements fail to
consider that asymmetrical power relations manifest themselves both in oral and institutional (lettered, that is) exchanges—an exchange between a speaker and a listener is, per se, no more equitable than an exchange between a writer and a reader. They also reflect a view of literature in which the book’s becoming a site for a dialogue with readers, a dialogue all the more potent when authors undermine their own authority and attempt to resist reifying themselves as regulators of meaning, is not a possibility. As we shall see in the chapters to come, poets involved in an examination of the book’s potentiality, who attempted to eradicate classic markers of authorship and instead exploited the unsettling possibilities offered by disembodied, acousmatic utterances, were able to put forth models that encouraged readers to interact with the book in dynamic, participatory ways. This is certainly the case with Waly Salomão and Juan Luis Martínez, but also with Ulises Carrión, a Mexican fiction writer turned conceptual poet and artist whose contributions to the theoretical foundation of artist books in the mid-1970s continue to be a reference to this day. In his highly anti-literary work—

12 The chapter “The Politics of the Voice” in Mladen Dolar’s A Voice and Nothing More contrasts the power dynamic of the spoken versus written word dyad in Stalinism and Fascism: in the former, primacy is given to the letter, and in the latter, to the Führer’s voice. Dolar challenges essentialist views that attribute more intrinsically democratic qualities to either of the two.
often but not always appropriation-based—Carrión proposes models based on the Situationist practice of détournement to reactivate and invert the relationship between canonical texts and new ones, performing the obsolescence of a colonial tradition. They will be discussed in the fourth and last chapter of this study.

Now, if some have extolled the virtues of the spoken word, other critics have felt the need to qualify the speech-oriented elements of a given poetics, conveying an anxiety over the possibility that non-literary, prosaic texts might pass as literature without meriting it, therefore contaminating literary forms. In the introduction to *Poets of Contemporary Latin America: History and the Inner Life*, for instance, Rowe writes: “‘Conversational’ means obey or ironize the molding force of the ordinary, rather than attempt something more risky and far-reaching. [Nicanor] Parra’s poetry, for example, uses conversation not to replicate its dynamics but to criticize them, in a radical probing of the language [...]” (17). Rowe’s remarks hint at a belief that work that “replicates” the “dynamics of conversation” is lacking in criticality, and prove useful in illustrating the misconceptions and biases behind the allegedly self-evident distinction between literature and ordinary language.
Stanley Fish in the essay "How Ordinary Is Ordinary Language?" in the volume Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (1980) puts forth a theory of language that is consistent with the implicit views of the poets studied here. He takes apart the myth sustaining that so-called literary language has special status or formal properties setting it apart from the "ordinary language" we use to merely convey information. For Fish, there is nothing intrinsic to literature, it is "the product of a way of reading, of a community agreement [...] which leads the members of the community to pay a certain kind of attention and thereby to create literature" (97). Literature, then, is "language around which we have drawn a frame, a frame that indicates a decision to regard with a particular self-consciousness the resources language has always possessed" (108-109), polysemy and multivalence being its most characteristic. Fish raises the intriguing possibility that ordinary, "message-bearing language" is not the norm but a deviation, that it is "a device we carve out to perform the special, but certainly not normative, task of imparting information" (109). In framing precisely those utterances traditionally used to impart information, poets like Waly Salomão, Francisco Alvim, Raúl Zurita, Juan Luis Martínez, and Ulises Carrión, liberate language from
its utilitarian function and aim to restore its non-instrumentality.

Regardless of Fish’s convincing argumentation, educated, literary language is commonly perceived as having special status, as Pierre Bourdieu explains in *Language and Symbolic Power*, and this perception is worthy of analysis. For him, literary discourse acquires cultural capital and contributes to symbolic domination because of its systematic devaluation of common language. Yet he too, like Fish, refutes the notion of there being such a thing in the first place: “the notion of ‘popular speech,’ like all the sayings from the same family [...] is defined only in relational terms, as the set of things which are excluded from the legitimate language by, among other things, the durable effect of inculcation and imposition together with the sanctions implemented by the educational system” (90). As well as lettered institutions such as academies, literary presses, and journals, one should add. It is impossible to demarcate exactly what comprises popular speech since it functions more adequately as a tool to infer the conventions defining legitimate language in a given context. The legitimacy of using only certain types of language in literary productions—high diction—was exactly what avant-garde poets throughout the 20th-century
attempted to debunk by incorporating into their works vernacular and conversational street language. Yet regardless of what the achievements of vanguard and countercultural practices might have been, it would go against common sense to sustain that the waning of the lettered tradition owed much to developments in the field of literature. The forces that have proved most threatening to this tradition perhaps owe much less to its critique than to developments in consumer technology and their effect on societal practices: the undermining effects of mass media and technological advances are everywhere in sight, rapidly replacing a tradition of letters. In Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1982), Walter Ong identifies the electronic era as one in which mediated orality plays a predominant role in social interaction. Before Internet, cell phones, and text messaging were ubiquitous or even possible, Ong had claimed that mass media had brought secondary orality to the forefront of cultural production, one that depended entirely on written culture for its existence.13 Whether this has brought about

13 On the links between media, technology and written culture see “Talking Heads, Automaton Ears” in Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism (2001) by Steven Connor. The author describes the experiments of oral educator Alexander Melville Bell for the devising of notation systems that could alleviate deafness by making speech visible. These systems “removed speech from the actual and particular human body, but tabulated it in ways that allowed its near-automatic imitation and reproduction in other bodies” (348), yet failed because of “the elaborateness of the training required to employ it” (356). In
more equality in the distribution of cultural capital is highly questionable—especially when taking into account how extraordinarily dependent on giant global corporations the digital era has made us—although undoubtedly mediation has achieved a startling pervasiveness in most aspects of private and public life.

In fact, mediation—and in the case of Brazil, mediatization—plays a key role in the works of Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión that will be analyzed here. In keeping with their sidestepping of traditional loci of enunciation, their texts characteristically bear hardly a trace of a subject’s interiority, in contrast with lyric poems in which the subject’s voice conveys it through an expressive intent. Dolar sums up the relationship between utterance, subject, and voice rather succinctly: besides being the vehicle of meaning, voice is “the agent of enunciation” (emphasis added) (23). For Dolar, “if the process of enunciation points at the locus of subjectivity in language, then voice also sustains an intimate link with the very notion of the subject” (23). Granted, Dolar is speaking of voice as that elusive sound that human beings produce by means of lungs and larynx, that liminal sound “which ties language to the body” but “belongs to neither”

turn, the efforts of A. M. Bell’s grandson, Graham Bell, to find an equivalent to photography as a means of “self-reporting for sound and speech” (356) would lead to the invention of the telephone in 1876.
(72)—a sound produced inside the body that is only perceptible once it has been cast outside, and whose most obvious quality “is that it fades away the moment it is produced” (59). Dolar is not referring to authorial voice, the metaphorical and perhaps equally elusive element of a text that would be the literary equivalent of a visual artist’s so-called signature style, a set of distinguishing traits that, like the human voice, would be “like a fingerprint, instantly recognizable and identifiable” (22). And yet herein lies one of the key issues that concerns this dissertation: if, as we have seen, the poetry of the era manifested a marked valorization of orality and dialogical structures, writing can only mediate spoken language. This process of mediation produces, in the text, voice as “the copy of its own artifact” (132), to use a phrase by Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984). The late avant-garde authors I focus on seem to tacitly acknowledge that transferring voice to writing is an impossibility—only an effect of voice can be produced on the page. Once the supposedly indissoluble bond between subject and voice has been broken, experimentation with acousmatics and polyphony becomes possible on the page. Motivated by their stance against authorship and the genre of poetry, Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión, in an effort to
achieve multiplicity, might either choose to saturate their work with a multitude of voices or, conversely, they might strive to put forth utterances as impersonal as possible by vacating all traces of a subject’s communicative intent. Regardless, their utterances are decentered—as utterances, disembodied or not, always are considering that, as Dolar puts it, it is as if the voice emitting them “were the very principle of division into interior and exterior” (71)—yet in their texts we witness no effort to reverse the utterance’s being out of joint with their emitter.

Thriving in polyphonic perversity, as we shall see in the chapters to come, common framing strategies for Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión include mimicry, appropriation, pastiche, and ventriloquism. Mimicry involves interrupting an exchange, dislocating an utterance, and, in mimicking or mocking the voice producing it, highlighting an element of tone that might have gone unnoticed the first time round. Similarly, appropriation troubles notions of authorship and originality, displaces the utterance, and in doing so, multiplies its meanings. Pastiche, on the other hand, combines registers and utterances and disrupts the conventions regulating their accepted use. When practicing ventriloquism, the poets can pose as somebody else when putting forth an utterance,
therefore playing with the idea of a ventriloquist and a dummy. These are precisely the phenomena observed here, often blending to the point of becoming indistinguishable from each other. Their fundamental aims are to question the source of speech; to call attention to the fact that there is no one-to-one correspondence between utterance, voice, and author; to de-subjectivize expression and consequently maximize a text’s polyvalence. Ultimately, they make evident that “there are no longer innocent words,” as Bourdieu claims (40). “The apparent unity of ordinary language” is shattered, evincing that “each word, each expression, threatens to take on two [at least] antagonistic senses, reflecting the way in which it is understood by the sender and the receiver[s]” (40).

What distinguishes Waly Salomão, Juan Luis Martínez, and Ulises Carrión in particular is that, knowing that expressivity is impossible to eliminate, that “words cannot avoid meaning something, but they can be divested of intentionality”—as Carrión writes in the 1975 manifesto “The New Art of Making Books”—they put their efforts toward removing, or at least complicating, any signs of their own expressive intent from their work. To be sure, they do this with varying degrees of rigor, and they were not the only ones to put forth this new authorial paradigm. Other
contemporary authors grappled with these issues as well. For instance, the notes in Arturo Carrera’s first book of poems Escrito con un nictógrafo ("Written with a Nictograph"), originally published in Buenos Aires in 1972, contain an indicative entry on the impetus to eliminate intent: “I’ve tried continuously to eliminate all intention—the will to express. Which is how Straub defines découpage. [...] Monotony, cutting, nonsense: they’d be for the poem a plurality of meanings—and vice versa—the search for meaning and the meaning of that unending search.”

Carrera, like Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión, believes that the subject is felt in the work, primarily, through communicative intent. If intent is removed, the less the author’s role is to dispense meaning, the more an actual interaction with a reader who co-creates the work is, and the more its multiplicity can unfold. Yet the three poets I will study take this model to its limit—their removal of their own subjectivity is manifest not only in each work but also in the way in which their works are structured within the format of the book. There is no such thing as a typical Martínez poem or an identifiable register for Salomão’s writing—the materials compiled in each author’s books show an unprecedented disparity, each work seeming to

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14 Translated by Craig Epplin, and posted online at: http://craigepplin.com/translation.html
have been penned by a different author, and, in fact, it most likely was, given the amount of borrowed materials they both incorporate—whereas in Carrera’s book a unified vision of poetry is consistent throughout. In the case of Carrión, on the other hand, we see a progressive removal of expressive intent coupled with an increasing openness in the poems, which renders the invitation to participate in the work’s making all the more apparent to readers.

As we know, for Foucault the key to the author function lies not in the individual agency of authors but instead in how they play the part assigned to them by the institutional order—they are the cultural location of voice. Advertently or not, more than speak for themselves, authors are the mouthpieces for the power structures whose function it is to guarantee the proliferation of docile bodies. Authorship is an ideological construct insofar as authors are the opposite of the creative geniuses that contemporary culture holds them to be. For Foucault, they regulate the fictive in a given society and are “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning” (159); and correspondingly, their role is specifically tied to a capitalist economy. They control symbolic exchanges, restricting the supply and ensuring that production is
concentrated on far fewer producers than consumers of the symbolic.

There are more tangible ways in which the participation of authors in the symbolic economy might be understood. In *Textual Disruptions: Spanish American Poetry at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Jill Kuhnheim examines various manifestations of the postmodern in a selection of works by a number of Latin American poets of different generations. She performs close readings of an array of texts that illustrate how different poets have dealt with major cultural issues at the end of the millennium: urban development, globalization, and technology. Kuhnheim identifies relevant shifts taking place in certain sectors of contemporary Spanish American poetry and interprets them as signs of the dismantling of the foundations of the lettered city: the breakdown between high and low art as well as between discourses on the private and the public realms; the intersection of image and text; the drive toward openness and inclusion paired with a favoring of the reader’s more participatory attitude; the reclaiming of public space; the disruptions and reworkings of the lyric tradition; the decentering of the poetic subject; and the aural, visual and performative potential that new technologies are introducing into poetic practices. One she
does not delve into is the emergence of a new mode of authorship contesting the economy behind traditional models. Yet Kuhnheim occasionally touches on the relationship between poetry and the market economy. When discussing the verbal and visual poetry of Raúl Zurita, for example, she argues that he “does not compete in the ‘90s political and economic climate by making his poetry more popular, or by capitalizing on the possible exoticism of a Chilean identity, but through the creation of cultural capital” (80). The claim is undeniably true—Zurita is one of Latin America’s most celebrated authors, yet, problematically, Kuhnheim seems to imply that this cultural capital is one not concentrated in the figure of Zurita himself, or that somehow it trickles down to the field of Chilean culture as a whole, where it becomes distributed more equally. Later, in a chapter devoted to urban poetry, she claims that the Peruvian poets of the Hora Zero movement and others “carry out invasions or ‘raids’ on conventional poetic forms and create other, perhaps informal, poetic economies” (87). Lastly, in the chapter on Neo-Baroque poets she writes that Perlongher’s poetry “increasingly breaks any presumed contracts (with intelligibility or meaning) to disrupt convention and create new kinds of exchange” and supports this argument
with a quotation from Perlongher himself: “En el mercado del intercambio lingüístico, donde los significados son contabilizados en significantes legitimados y fijos, se produce una alteración, una disputa: como si una feria gitana interrumpiese en el gris alboroto de la Bolsa” (“In the market of linguistic exchanges, where signifieds are tallied with legitimized and fixed signifiers, an altercation or quarrel is produced: as if a gypsy caravan interrupted the gray bustle of the stock market” (137)). Kuhnheim relates this way of understanding Neo-Baroque poetry to Severo Sarduy’s notion of a decadent poetics, in which the conventions regulating the exchange of meanings are violated due to the squandering and oversaturation of signifiers. Kuhnheim does not develop an overarching theory relating market economy to the symbolic exchanges underlying poetic practices, yet she hints at one that might prove to be a powerful means to understand poetry’s marginal yet somewhat secure place in consumer culture, given that it avoids the trappings of supply and demand.

One might think that with poetry a process of conversion takes place, one that transforms a public good, language, into cultural capital, which in turn might or might not be converted into economic capital depending on the formal properties of the poetry in question and the
structure of the symbolic exchange it enacts with the reader. In the traditional model, by investing time, labor, and skills into the writing of a poem, the poet bestows surplus on language, endowing it with the literary value that distinguishes the privatized language product—where the commodity traded is meaning or sentiment—from uncrafted, undirected public language. When a poet appropriates readymade utterances or shuns skill and craft and refuses to labor over a work, the traditional model is unsettled and the terms of exchange shift. Understanding the poetic phenomenon in these terms sheds light on the links between radical poetic practices which actually prevent capitalist exchanges from taking place and those in which poetry functions as a commodity whose underlying economy leaves the terms of market transactions intact.¹⁵

¹⁵ An example of the widespread capitalist notion of the poet’s task appears in the 1983 essay “The Pleasure Principle” by Philip Larkin, the popular anti-modernist British poet who understood poetic production in the following terms:

It consists of three stages: the first is when a man becomes obsessed with an emotional concept to such a degree that he is compelled to do something about it. What he does is the second stage, namely, construct a verbal device that will reproduce this emotional concept in anyone who cares to read it, anywhere, any time. The third stage is the recurrent situation of people in different times and places setting off the device and re-creating in themselves what the poet felt when he wrote it. [...] If the second stage has not been well done, the device will not deliver the goods [...] (emphasis added) (338)

The British poet’s commonplace criticism of opaque poetry thus seems to be highly symptomatic of the general reader’s distrust of poetry not dealing in communicable sentiment. For Larkin, by not dealing primarily in emotional goods, modernist poetry has little if not null exchange value and is therefore to blame for the loss of the genre’s profitability: “The cash costumers of poetry [...] who used to put down
Although Kuhnheim’s thorough book touches on a number of issues that will be discussed here, the poetry I study thrives on its marginality; its power derives precisely from its peripheral position both in the cultural and the economic realms. Its mode of operation is not that of an informal economy in which its participants subvert the terms of exchange yet share the same objectives as those incorporated to the formal economy, but the contrary: they seek to prevent those symbolic exchanges whereby meaning or sentiment is dispensed or traded as commodity, and in doing so, enact alternate modes of authorship and prompt readers to experience their work in open, participatory ways.

In this regard, a number of key concepts in Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* are relevant to the theoretical framework of this dissertation, specifically those relating to the scriptural economy, orality, and displaced enunciation, and the diversionary tactics by which individuals subvert the dominant order. De Certeau, like Fish and Bourdieu, acknowledges the difficulty in defining the scriptural economy in contrast with its alleged opposite, orality, since whatever remnant there might be left of it is but the construct of the Western ethnographic imagination and remains inscribed within the

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their money in the sure and certain hope of enjoyment as if at a theatre or concert hall, were quick to move elsewhere” (Cook, 339).
scriptural system. For him, just as for Bourdieu, the thrust behind the scriptural is progress, and orality does not contribute to it but rather “is defined by that (or as) that from which a ‘legitimate’ practice [...] must differentiate itself” (134). The notion of the blank page is the founding myth of the scriptural order: it is conceived as being autonomous, yet its inscriptions produce subjects and aim to alter what exists beyond the confines of the page. Thus, De Certeau argues that the goal of the scriptural is social efficacy and that “combining the power of accumulating the past and that of making the alterity of the universe conform to its models, it is capitalist and conquering” (135). One could argue that perhaps there is no better correlative to the myth of the blank page than the ever-redeemable symbol of money, which has a tendency to “distort our ‘natural’ understanding of the relationship between symbols and things” (7) according to Marc Shell in *Money, Language and Thought* (1993), just like the scriptural order has the equalizing effect of making what it posits—the relationship between signifier and signified, for one—pass for self-evident truth.

Accordingly, even if mass media has brought orality to the forefront of contemporary life, it cannot be said that it has escaped the instrumental hegemony of the scriptural.
The voice mediated by radio and television is “normalized” and “cleaned up” and where it “does manage to infiltrate itself, the sound of the body often becomes an imitation of this part of itself that is produced and reproduced by the media” (132). De Certeau argues that it “is useless to set off in quest of this voice that has been simultaneously colonized and mythified by recent Western history” (132). Yet despite these cautionary statements, the critic does sustain that the voice, as a metonym for the body, can still afford the possibility of suspending or temporarily circumventing the strictures of the scriptural order. He defines the voice as “a marking of language by the body” (155) and stresses that even if within literature it can only appear displaced and in the form of quotation, its specter retains its ability to unsettle the text: “The literary text is modified by becoming the ambiguous depth in which sounds that cannot be reduced to a meaning move about. A plural body in which ephemeral oral rumors circulate: that is what this dismembered writing becomes, a ‘stage for voices.’ It makes the reduction of the drive to a sign impossible” (162).

To exemplify these notions, De Certeau mentions a number of works that erect themselves against instrumental reason and function like the celibate machines of the
Surrealists: Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, Kafka’s *The Penal Colony*, and Raymond Roussel’s *Locus Solus*, to name a few. Their so-called celibacy equals their rejection of the scriptural economy, their refusal to produce edifying and univocal meanings that could justify their necessity or societal value. Duchamp’s masterpiece is exemplary for the critic, for instance, since fragile see-through glass is the opposite of the blank page with its self-contained inscriptions reasserting the author’s illusion of control and mastery over his material and what lies beyond the page. On the other hand, Roussel’s writing resists articulating narratives on the basis of plot, morals or fixed meanings, but instead is triggered by near endless sequences of puns and wordplay that favor language’s plasticity and sonorous properties over signification. It is important to add that, to De Certeau, these texts, be they works of art or literature, are metaphorically disquieted by the mutterings of multiple voices regardless of whether their premise is to capture the spoken word or deal with orality per se. In other words, for the critic, these texts have formal qualities that locate them in a position more akin to the oral than to the scriptural order, regardless of an explicit intent to incorporate displaced enunciations. That said, however, De Certeau’s
writings are especially relevant to the understanding of practices that are overtly anti-foundational and which seek to dismantle the lettered tradition, but which do not distance themselves from the dominant order by attempting to found parallel self-contained alternate utopias. The idea of revolution is, to De Certeau, but a manifestation of the blank page fantasy.

De Certeau’s writings on the capitalist nature of the scriptural order echo the ideas that Foucault suggests in his definition of the author as “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.” The term “thrift” encompasses two seemingly disparate phenomena: both a prosperity and frugality that make the saving or accumulation of earnings, in this case instrumentalized meaning, possible. If it were not for frugality, accumulation would not be possible and earnings would be squandered and not put to use, they would be scattered about like the unintelligible murmurs of bodies momentarily resisting their inscription within the scriptural economy. For literature to have value, supply needs to be limited by allowing only a few to produce it and, concomitantly, common speech needs to be devalued in relation to literary language, which takes us back to Fish’s argument about the artificiality of the common speech/literary speech dyad.
Authors who fail to examine their role are destined to perform this capitalist function, like dummies for the institutional order, which in turn leads to the perpetuation of their societal role and the entrenchment of narrow and traditional views of authorship and symbolic exchange.

Throughout this study I will attempt to show that certain types of tactical literary practices, when obscuring the source of the utterance, allow for the otherwise private utterance’s expropriation and for a momentary suspension of this dictum, since they make possible “the free circulation, free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition” of the symbolic, in Foucauldian terms. We can be sure that these practices have nothing to do with the recovery of a “natural voice,” apropos of which it might be useful to recall Derrida’s ideas in Of Grammatology: “the loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance” (112). Rather, as we have seen, these practices concern themselves with the perversity of polyphony; their underlying economy involves
not the "phallic possession and centering embodied in the idea of the natural voice" but rather the "wasteful and wasting exorbitance of the 'assumed voice'" (Connor, 323), an assumed voice all the more possible given its indiscernible, acousmatic source.

A propos of wastefulness, and De Certeau's comments cited above on literary texts in which "sounds that cannot be reduced to a meaning move about," it is perhaps no coincidence that stuttering is present in the writing of Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión. Specific instances of stuttering will be considered—in all three cases, what we find is a deliberate choice on the part of the authors to emulate stuttering in writing, so as to replicate the effect of language being produced by the body. I mention it here in regard to the natural versus assumed-voice dyad, to show the degree of density with which they each deal with voice and voicings: these poets not only assume voices, they also even copy the so-called natural voice, one which, pertaining to that of the colonized, stutters, for it lacks the colonizer's authority.

If the three authors shared not only the program to shatter the lyrical "I" and expose the ideological apparatus sustaining it that I have outlined above, they also, as a logical extension of such program, performed an
intervention on the most ubiquitous, innocuous, and essential of the lettered tradition’s institutions: the book. Ron Silliman in the essay “Re Writing Marx,” collected in The New Sentence, suggestively mentions that “the poetry of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of books;’ the individual book appears as its elementary form” (19). It is precisely this notion of the book as a cumulative repository (both within its pages and within tradition) that Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión mine with a degree of consistency unmatched in other works of the period. In point of fact, the productions of Martínez, and especially Carrión, are much closer to artist books than poetry books, inasmuch as the artist book “interrogates the conceptual or material form of the book as part of its intention, thematic interests, or production activities” (3), citing Johanna Drucker’s useful definition in The Century of Artists’ Books (1995). But the works of all three authors considered here are “self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form” (4), and consequently deconstruct and explode the potential of the book, in terms both of its production and its circulation, in ways unprecedented in Latin American literature. For Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión, the book is neither a
repository of meaning or cumulative artifact, nor a simple, nearly invisible vehicle for their work—it is itself a decisive part of the work, its structure crucial to the intervention it performs. The same can be said about the ways in which these authors saw their books coming into contact and interacting with the public: both their circulation and the relationship that they establish with the readers are the result of considered deliberations.

As we shall explore in further detail, each author’s interventions concerning poetry as genre and the format of the book bear unique, idiosyncratic traits. Summarily, it can be said that if Waly Salomão’s *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço* positioned itself at the center of the marketplace, if it stepped right into it (lest we not forget how unusual this is for a poetry book), Juan Luis Martínez’s *La nueva novela* sidestepped the market completely, and even now in the age of e-commerce requires an odd degree of resourcefulness on the part of the reader seeking to attain a copy. Ulises Carrión’s artist books, on the other hand, circulated in alternate self-managed circuits that, one could argue, were artworks in themselves.

Yet the works of all three function as sites for the reader to have particular, non-commoditized experiences.
Although expressed in a very different context than the one shared by Latin American poets, Charles Bernstein’s words in “The Dollar Value of Poetry,” an essay taken from *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (1982), succinctly express a common wish: “An experience (released in the reading) which is non-commoditized, that is where the value is not dollar value (and hence transferable and instrumental) but rather, what is from the point of view of the market, no value (a negativity, inaudible, invisible)—that non-generalizable residue that is specific to each particular experience” (492). The way works like *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*, *La nueva novela*, or Carrión’s artist books avoid having the author be the location of voice makes one wonder if it is not the case that the more invisible or inaudible the poet is, the more vacated of an individual “I,” the greater the experience quotient. In the pages to follow we shall observe a progressive removal of the elements conventionally understood as characteristic of poetry—the end point being, not incidentally, Carrión’s nearly invisible and inaudible propositions. Is this an endgame or the beginning of a new paradigm?

I began this chapter writing about a specific moment in Latin American history, and a note of caution is in order. One certainly cannot argue that the conditions that
a military dictatorship imposes on a given society
invalidate all of its particularities, all of its
distinguishing traits, turning it into a generic,
homogeneous entity exchangeable for another one similarly
under dictatorial rule. Making that argument would fulfill
at least one of the fantasies of any autocratic regime:
that of suppressing dissent in order to totalize or
standardize its population. To fail to acknowledge the
subtle differences in the degrees of control and repression
to which authoritarian versus dictatorial regimes subjected
their populations would be equally misguided. The contexts
in Brazil, Chile, and Mexico during the ‘70s varied widely,
and it would be problematic to approach the poets from a
point of view overlooking the local conditions from which
their poetry stemmed. Furthermore, to say that the poetry
of each of the three poets I will examine here is a direct
result of its historical conditionings would be, at best,
disingenuous.

When undertaking this study, I decided to consider the
work of Salomão, Martínez, Carrión, and other late
vanguardists first, and then draw conclusions about the
links between the poetic production of each, links that
might shed light on the effects on poetry of the
specificities of the historical moment in which their
poetics took shape. My guiding intuition was that if the utterance had become a problem—what to say when all that has been said is equally pat and ineffective? when “what does it matter who is speaking?”—the ways each of these poets in particular tackled the issue were not only complementary to each other, but also indicative of a new poetics that only could have arisen at this particular historical juncture. I proceeded hoping that in contrasting their different approaches, a larger thesis of the origins and effects of anti-expressive, appropriation-based work in Latin America might emerge. This thesis, moreover, would serve to historicize and enrich a current interest in conceptual writing that tends to focus almost exclusively on North American conceptualism from the 1960s onward, and that, for the most part, attributes the development of an also anti-expressive, appropriation-based writing to digital culture in the 21st-century. Conceptual poetry as understood today in the United States shares numerous traits with the poetry I have outlined in this introductory chapter, to the extent that one could argue that parts of Salomão’s and Martínez’s hybrid writings, and certainly all of Carrión’s, constitute conceptual poetry. Volumes such as Notes on Conceptualism (2009) by Rob Fitterman and Vanessa Place, Kenneth Goldsmith’s Uncreative Writing: Managing
Language in the Digital Age (2011), Craig Dworkin and Goldsmith’s Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing (2011), and Unoriginal Genius (2011) by Marjorie Perloff, all focus on American conceptual art and writing. This dissertation seeks to present a wider view, one coherent with Luis Camnitzer’s propositions on the emergence of conceptual art in Latin America, in particular Conceptualism in Latin America: Didactics of Liberation (2007), whose main argument is that Latin American conceptualism is not derivative, but rather Other to its North American counterpart, which, in an effort to trademark its style, has devoted a bounty of pages to the discussion of the purity of the conceptual procedures at the artist’s and poet’s disposal.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the new poetic paradigm in Latin America was a contaminated, hybrid one—inclusive of multiple points of view—and more concerned with organizing a receptive community than with branding and encouraging the production of works following its model. In fact, this might be the very reason why the corpus under consideration here, despite its cult-status within its small but avid community of readers, has no equals in Latin American letters: Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço, La nueva novela, and Carrión’s poetry are
oddities that spawned few imitators. The disruptions they introduced were only symbolic; they performed interventions on a poetic tradition that, judging from the healthy dose of subject-centered, lyric-inclined poetry still published today, continued its course almost uninterruptedly. Yet precisely because these works were never absorbed by the mainstream, they might still retain their ability to effect further disruptions. They certainly do this when considered alongside North American conceptual writing, which deeming itself apolitical and only possible in the highly localized context of ubiquitous computing, is but another iteration of the blank page fantasy that only money can buy.
Chapter 1: Waly Salomão's *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*:

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This chapter provides the context that gave rise to the radical first book by Waly Salomão (1943–2003) *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço* (Hold Me Back, I’m about to Throw a Fit), published in Rio de Janeiro in 1972—a literary production situated at the crossroads between leftist and avant-garde discourses, which younger generations of writers and artists had begun to deem outmoded since neither addressed the specificities of Brazilian cultural politics vis-à-vis an increasingly global mass media culture. It describes how Salomão’s performative vision of identity—one aimed precisely at avoiding the strictures of earlier models—emulates the production of subjectivity in popular culture and inserts a critique in its very sphere. Salomão’s production situates itself in that site where the largest concentration of symbolic exchanges was taking place and thus eliminates poetry’s characteristic remove from other cultural manifestations. Differing from those procedures of modernist models that incorporated lower cultural registers into the realm of high art, Salomão’s operation moves in the opposite direction: it debunks the hierarchies intrinsic to the notion of literary value and
displaces his production to the realm of popular culture, making it pass for a commodity. Salomão deploys authorial voice in a way that mirrors its acousmatic condition in mass media; he collapses sources and registers and weaves together, to the point of inextricability, his own utterances with those coming directly from mediated sources. This allows him to explode the contradictions at the intersection of the public and private spheres, discourse, and the body. In the introductory chapter I discussed the removal of the traces of authors' interiority and their approach to expressivity and intention. Salomão’s dismantling of the lyrical “I” takes the form not of a shunning of subjectivity but of a radical malleability and deflation of the self. As we shall see here, his “I” takes on so many forms, in an anthropophagic gesture akin to Oswald de Andrade’s “I am only interested in what is not mine,” that it might as well not refer to a self but to the multiplicity of incompatible subjects produced by the contradictions within the cultural apparatus.

A mere glance at the cover Me segura qu’eu vou dar un troço reveals an artifact very different from the politically minded literature that was popular among youth at the time. With its title taken from the biggest hit of the Carnaval of 1962, a march recorded by Jackson do
Pandeiro, a forró musician from Northeastern Brazil popular in the ‘50s and ‘60s,\textsuperscript{16} *Me segura* telegraphed not its author’s political leanings but his text’s appetite for all things pop. In doing so, it announced itself as a production appearing in the aftermath of Tropicália, whose two-pronged emergence was marked, in the visual arts, by Hélio Oiticica’s eponymous installation of 1967, and, in the music scene, by the 1968 release of the concept-album *Tropicália: ou Panis et Circencis* under the direction of Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil (incidentally a friend of Salomão’s since middle school). This was an era in which, despite the 1964 military coup, the “cultural hegemony of the left [was] virtually complete” according to Roberto Schwarz in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (127). It was also an era in which the organized student movement, the União Nacional dos Estudantes, through the Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC)—the nationwide cultural organization founded in 1962 in order to disseminate art and culture that would promote class consciousness—produced copious amounts of traditionally leftist literature that was published in the book series *Cadernos do Povo*

\textsuperscript{16} Some of Jackson do Pandeiro’s songs appealed to Tropicália musicians, who recorded their versions with arrangements distinctive of the movement, using electric guitars as well as traditional instruments. One of these songs is the popular “Chiclete con banana,” recorded by Gilberto Gil for the album *Expresso 2222*, released in 1972.
Although Salomão had participated in his native Bahia’s CPC in the years prior to the military coup, except for its revolutionary spirit, his output would bear few traits in common with the organization’s literature, and neither would the work of the future Tropicália associates he had befriended there a few years before emigrating to Rio in 1967: the musician Tom Zé and poet-lyricist José Carlos Capinam.

Salomão’s idiosyncratic book, with its title’s focus on the emotional state of the subject uttering this somewhat hyperbolic and whimsical imperative aimed directly at the reader, also distinguished itself from the post-Concrete avant-garde poetry movements that had attained a considerable share of cultural legitimacy during those years. *Me segura* certainly does not allude to a production linked with Concrete poetry, for its plea and warning of the subject’s impending outburst of emotion openly defies

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17 The *Cadernos do Povo Brasileiro* (Notebooks of the Brazilian People) series included *Violão de Rua* (Street Guitar), a series of compilations of political poetry. *Violão de rua* rings a tone much less pamphleteering than the titles of other books in the *Cadernos do Povo Brasileiro* series—*Who Are the Enemies of the Brazilian People?*, *Why Don’t the Rich Go on Strikes?*, *How Does Yankee Imperialism Work?*, or *Is the Church with the People?*, are a few examples, all of them displaying the didactic strategy of posing as questions taken straight out of people’s mouths. Some of the titles of the poems compiled in *Violão de rua* also evoke the romantically inflected revolutionary spirit of the era with near-photographic fidelity: “Bring Me a Cuba Libre,” “May 1st,” “Song of a Poet Guarded by the Police,” and “Song of a Tortured Poet” are a few examples.

18 From the essay “Años setentas; cambios en Brasil: minorías en Brasil y el sujeto en la literatura” by Ana Carolina Puente.
the notion of the poem as an autonomous "object in and for itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective sensations." Yet, although Salomão’s book was published fourteen years after the Concrete poets launched the “Plano piloto da Poesia Concreta” in the journal *Noigandres* in 1958—where the poem is defined in this way—it was undoubtedly more in dialogue with the poetics developed by the Concretistas than with the post-Concrete poetry movements that emerged during the ‘60s and were nearly over by the mid-’70s: Poesia Práxis and Poema-Processo, most notably.  

The members of Poesia Práxis rejected the prescriptiveness that, in their view, had tainted all the avant-garde endeavors of the generations following that of 1922, and consequently attempted to reinstitute the Modernistas’ distinctive approach to the creative process, in which primacy was granted to “a permanent right to

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19 The post-Concrete poetry movements owe their designation simply to chronological factors—they came after the Concrete poetry movement. Post-concrete programs are not to be confused with the Neo-Concrete movement in the visual arts, which included Ferreira Gullar, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, and briefly Hélio Oiticica as well, among others. This movement articulated itself around a critique of the premises of Concrete poetry, which was deemed extremely rationalistic: “[T]he concrete rationalists still think of human beings as machines and seek to limit art to the expression of this theoretical reality. [...] The concrete rationalist artist eschews the creativity of intuition and thinks of himself as an objective body in objective space” read fragments of the Neo-Concrete manifesto of 1959 (Ramírez and Olea, 497). Instead, Neo-Concrete artists advocate art in which a phenomenological experience of space and the body predominate.
aesthetic research”20 (160). Its manifesto “Poema Práxis: um evento revolucionário”, written by Mário Chamie in 1964, calls for a poetry whose basis is the national context and not the individual: “[Práxis poetry’s] main starting point was an awareness of the Brazilian reality, on two levels: a) an historical one; b) another autonomously foundational” (161). Poets, according to its founding document, should not focus on particular themes but instead trace “an organic constellation of problems” (166), its alleged organic quality owing to the poem’s formal elements—its structure and its diction—being consistent with the problems the poem seeks to examine. The manifesto’s proposition that “the poem is the field where words are defended, since they, outside this field, are available and subject to being used in an irrational and causal manner” (170) clashes with the desire of the Práxis group to immerse poetry in the realities of the Brazilian context, where undoubtedly word usage would prove as “irrational” as in any other spontaneous social context. It is also

20 When mentioning the modernist’s “permanente libertade de pesquisa,” Mário Chamie, the author of the manifesto, is referring to what Mário de Andrade believed was one of the “main points of the enduring legacy of modernismo: the permanent right to aesthetic research” according to his address “O Movimento Modernista” (Perrone, 9). It is fitting that of the two main figures of the Modernist movement in Brazil, Chamie would align his practice more with the ideas of Mário than with those of Oswald de Andrade, since the focus of the former author’s writings was more strictly national than inflected by a cosmopolitan awareness of the place of Brazil’s avant-garde cultural production alongside the European one, as was the case with latter’s.
redolent of the false dichotomy between ordinary language and literary language covered in the introductory chapter of this study. In the end, despite its attempt to elude the programmatic quality of the earlier avant-garde projects, the group fell prey to it itself.

The other significant yet brief post-Concrete poetry movement, Poema-Processo, went in a direction opposite to that of Práxis and its effort to situate the poem in the, so to speak, protected area of the page. In contrast, the advocates of Poema-Processo sought not only to take poetry off the page: "POETRY TO LOOK AT AND WITHOUT WORDS," reads the "Poema-Processo: Proposição" manifesto published in 1967 (174-175). They also wanted to do away with words altogether and often made of three-dimensional objects in public space a poem: "It is not, as some would think, about rigorously and gratuitously fighting the verbal sign, but of a planned exploration of the possibilities trapped in other signs (non-verbal)"\(^{21}\) (173). Their stance was not exempt from a certain combativeness that they displayed in the numerous happenings they organized, however, one of which was a demonstration at the Municipal Theater in Rio de Janeiro where protesters marched with confrontational banners against Drummond de Andrade and others. One of

\(^{21}\) This text was delivered at an exhibition of Poema-Processo works in Solar do Unhão, Salvador, 1968.
them, which read “There’s more poetry in a logotype than in all the poetry of J. G. de Araújo Jorge, Mário Chamie and Vinicius de Moraes!” (Perrone, 63), foreshadows what is perhaps the most characteristic trait of the Tropicalistas: an uncomfortable, and therefore all the more subversive, proximity to the world of mass media and commerce. The new paradigm put forward by Poema-Processo is perfectly illustrated by their choice of words. What is a logotype but a branding sign meant to be recognized in the quintessential site of social interaction: the marketplace? If the Poema-Processo practitioners had a much better chance at securing an audience for their semiotic explorations, just as the Tropicalistas did, their poetic production was undermined by their rejection of the written word, and its theoretical implications would lead poetry to an endgame. If anything can be a poem, why have poetry at all?

In such an aporetic discursive climate, in which worn-out traditional leftist discourse was no longer capable of articulating the concerns of a younger generation swayed by pop culture’s appeal and in which the programs of vanguard movements aimed at reinvigorating a tradition of artistic experimentation manifested the same weaknesses they sought to correct, the appeal of Tropicália was hardly a surprise.
Mário Chamie describes how the term coined by Hélio Oiticica and used by Veloso and Gil encapsulates the ideological shift that would characterize all Tropicalista productions. Contrasting Gilberto Freyre’s Lusotropicalism, a “telluric vision in which the Brazilian citizen would assume a colonial, metropolitan, and hybrid complexity in order to have a cultural personality,” and Tropicália, Chamie arrives at the following comparison: “The first would join together the word tropical with the suffix ism; the second would bring together the word with the suffix ália. Every ism is an extensive program, loaded with principles and norms, and every ália [...] is a composite of disparate and heterogeneous elements” (Tropicália, 261). Whereas Tropicalism “exposes an already saturated message, establishing a clean passage, and absence of ‘white noise’ between the producer and its reception,” Tropicália “enshrines ‘probability,’ deifies disorder, and for that reason, concedes to its readers and listeners the possibility of creative interference. [...] It proposes a message full of ambivalence, and inaugurates an area of ‘possibilities,’ [...] the open field of entropy” (Basualdo, 262). Similarly, for Flora Süssekind the common denominator of the Tropicália endeavors was an interest “in provoking and exposing the public to its own internal differences and
incompatible experiences, underlying disparities and ideological dissentions. The projects depended on a discontinuous multiplicity of diction, material, and images that unfolded, intertwined, and mutually contradicted one another, intensifying the creative tension and the audience’s response voltage” (Basualdo, 49). In other words, what distinguished Tropicália from Tropicalism, or, for that matter, Concrete Poetry, Poesia Práxis, or Poema-Processo, was that if all of these earlier cultural programs were not exempt of inner contradictions, their theoretical frameworks failed to take them into account. Tropicália, on the other hand, erected itself out of its own contradictions, aiming to expose and explode them.

Let us return to *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*, a book that Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda writes “could be considered one of the most symptomatic and important literary events of the time” (78). Even though Salomão was suspicious of the Tropicalista label—since it lacked specific connotations outside the music and visual arts milieus—the correspondence between his book’s overall countercultural spirit, epistemological inquiries concerning the contradictions of the postcolonial

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22 In an e-mail exchange, poet Francisco Alvim describes this book as one that left a vivid impression in him: “The freshness of *Me segura* always captivated me and brought to literature the most profound and lasting elements of Tropicalismo.”
condition, and compositional methods vis-à-vis those of the Tropicália musicians and Hélio Oiticica’s art of the ‘60s and ‘70s cannot be dismissed. Consider the following excerpt from Me segura’s opening piece “Apontamentos do Pav Dois” (“Notes from Pavilion Number Two”):

Este texto—construção de um laberinto barato como o trançado das bolsas de fios plásticos feita pelos presidiários. Um homem forte digere os atos da sua vida (inclusive os pecados) como digere o almôço. [...] O texto se masturbando continuamente no seu campo descontínuo. O texto mordendo seu próprio rabo. O texto mocózado. Zona ou cidade... lo podrido es la llave secreta en mi ciudad, una fecal industria de jazmines de cera. O texto embaralhando as cartas. Modêlo para desarmar. Charlar a loucura estabelecida. (16-17)

This text—the construction of a groovy labyrinth like the braided plastic-string bags made by jail inmates. A strong man digests his actions in life (including his sins) in the same way he digests lunch [...] The text masturbating itself continually in its

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23 Salomão was indeed a close collaborator of Tropicalistas in both the musical and the visual arts fields. As a lyricist he partnered with numerous musicians and songwriters including Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and Jards Macalé. He also produced albums and shows for Gal Costa and Maria Bethânia, among others, and participated in films and videos by Ivan Cardoso and Hélio Oiticica. His biography of Oiticica, Hélio Oiticia, qual é o parangolé was published in 1996. More information on Salomão’s multiple artistic collaborations can be found on his website.
discontinuous field. The text biting its own tail. The hidden text. A zone or a city... lo podrido es la llave secreta en mi ciudad, una fecal industria de jazmines de cera. The text shuffling the cards. A disassembly kit. Speak of established madness.

The work’s title refers to the pavilion of the Carandiru prison in which Salomão was incarcerated for twenty days in early 1970. Although one would expect that in the turbulent year of 1970 any young intellectual would be imprisoned for political reasons, Salomão’s crime was one that concerned private habits perennially deemed to pose a public threat: “I was arrested for having a stash of marijuana in my pocket,” he admits to Christopher Dunn in the interview “Waly Salomão: Polyphonic Poet.”24 The confining architecture of jails could certainly be described as labyrinth-like, but in Me segura labyrinths are signified positively—indeed, most of the works in the book have an enveloping, labyrinth-like, often provisional and improvisational architecture in which the prose displays either shifting points of view or supports no particular point of view. They demand that readers be willing to immerse themselves in their textual environments and actively wander about them to experience the text’s

multiplicity; only in doing so can the works’ meanings be assembled by readers in any way they please. Salomão posits that there is no meaning outside the text that readers need to decode: immersion equals experience, which equals interpretation, which, in turn, equals assembling meaning. In the excerpt cited above he describes the text as a “barato” labyrinth. The two denotations of the term barato—inexpensive and groovy or high—are equally relevant here. In the interview mentioned earlier Salomão explains the slang term in relation to the lyrics that he wrote for Gal Costa’s “Vapor barato”: “‘Vapor’ is the word we use for someone who smokes dope and ‘barato’ is the effect of smoking...” But to think of Salomão’s text as a labyrinth made of cheap or inexpensive materials is also consistent with his methodology of bricolage, which he shared with the Tropicalista artists.

In the essay “Tropicália” from 1968, Hélio Oiticica discusses the origin of his eponymous installation. Derived from the Penetrável installations that he began developing in 1960—which, as suggested by the title of the overall series, viewers had to walk into in order to experience—Tropicália consisted, precisely, of a labyrinth formed of corridors whose walls were made mostly of curtains of solid colors. Oiticica writes: “For this I created a tropical
environment, as it were, with plants, parrots, sand, pebbles [...] It seemed to me, while walking about the environs and the set of Tropicália, that I was going through the gullies and over the curves of the morro, which were organic, like the fantastic architecture of the slums...” (Tropicália, 240).

Oiticica and Salomão shared more than an interest in the precarious, makeshift architecture of the favelas, which keep reappearing in Me segura. If Salomão was not able to bring actual plants and parrots into his book, he certainly evokes an experiential soundscape capturing Rio de Janeiro’s characteristic cacophony, one in which his authorial voice intermittently makes itself heard and then fades into the background. In terms of the genre of the works in his book, Salomão’s choice of the word “text” in the excerpt “Notes from Pavilion Number Two,” which reflects his defiance of generic conventions: poetry visually announcing itself as such is hardly present in the book. Salomão indeed often resorts to poetic devices such as alliteration, paronomasia, and paragrams, to name but a few, which evince the structuring role of words, morphemes, and phonemes within the works and distinguish his writing from linear, expository prose, be it fiction or non-fiction. The works’ expansiveness and rhetorical devices
are somewhat in line with Haroldo de Campos’s post-Concrete *Galáxias*, which de Campos started composing in 1963. Yet they possess an eerie spontaneity and informality that, despite their palpable artifice, makes them seem almost as transcriptions of Salomão’s inner ramblings, overheard conversations and radio and TV broadcasts, and printed materials stumbled upon. One, however, is persuaded to consider Salomão’s writing to fall within the genre of poetry mainly because of the insistent and recurrent allusions to the writing of poems in the book’s pages. The title piece, “Me Segura Que Eu Vou Dar um Troço” (which curiously lacks the contraction in the book’s title), consists of a dialogue in which a poet and a warrior, most likely a guerrilla fighter, discuss the role of poetry in contemporary society. During the conversation the author makes clear to the reader that he deems himself a poet, albeit a torn one who would rather put his talents to use in mediums other than poetry. But rather than featuring poetry in conventional form, flushed left and containing line breaks, Salomão’s book overall is mostly the result of a kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of paragraphs that neither follow the rules of syntax nor those of punctuation and which are linked associatively, in a manner owing more to cinematic montage than the essayistic tradition.
Let us consider the cover of the book again: it shows a photograph of two undeniably hip youths wearing colorful bell-bottoms accompanied by a girl in her early teens. This is a group photo, not the classic author photo one expects to find either on the cover, back cover, or flap of poetry books. The people in the photo are undeniably hip, their attitude cool, yet one can tell that this is no casual photograph but rather a staged one in which no element is gratuitous. The group is racially diverse. There is a girl, Rubia Mattos, a dweller of the Morro de São Carlos, whose photograph appeared a number of times in poet and songwriter Torquato Neto’s daily column in Última Hora. Salomão stands in the middle. To his right appears a longhaired José Simão, a poet and author of another Tropicália classic, Folias Brejeiras. Sporting a fashionable Afro, Salomão holds an umbrella that we can surmise has been borrowed from a vending cart, for it has a sign listing prices of items for sale, among them bottled

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25 According to an email exchange with artist Luciano Figueiredo who was the art director of and contributor to the single-issue magazine coedited by Salomão and Torquato Neto, Navilouca, which will be discussed in more detail later. Luciano is also coeditor of the second printing of Me segura.

26 Simão’s very campy Folias Brejeiras (which translates loosely into Bucolic Fun) is presented as a magazine riffing off the concept of revue. Each chapter is devoted to a different female entertainer and incorporates an assortment of printed materials—newspaper articles, interviews, and photographs—into the retelling of each showgirl’s biography. Salomão collaborated with Simão on a chapter devoted to Mae West.
Pepsi and Orange Crush. Simão, who seen sipping from a bottle of soda he holds in his left hand, is propping up a sign with the girl’s help: “—FA–TAL—”, it reads, its white letters spelled diagonally across the trio. The viewer of this image first has to reckon with the oddly hyphenated word, whose components mean nothing on their own. The answer to the riddle is simpler than one might expect: “I put in those hyphens to produce an uncanny effect, inspired in part by the Russian vanguards” Salomão admits to Christopher Dunn. Salomão had first used “FA–TAL” as the name of an album and legendary live show of Gal Costa that he had produced while Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil were in exile in London. Taking place during the early ’70s at an area of Ipanema beach that was not regularly policed—the “dunas do barato [groovy dunes]” (253)—Dunn describes it as one of the “key countercultural happenings of the early 1970s” (249). The word was juxtaposed with the neologism “violeto,” and was meant to subliminally elicit the notion of “fatal violence” to the audience and, at the same time, appear as nonsense to the police, who would not be able to read between the lines. By the time Salomão puts the hyphenated and consequently defamiliarized word on the cover of Me segura, it carries the connotation of Gal
Costa’s legendary show and therefore serves the purpose of branding the book as a product of the underground.

The title of the book appears in a black band laid out over the photographic image, diagonally across the group and forming a 45-degree angle with the sign that they hold across their chests. Although the type used in the title is different from that of the sign, it would seem as if both texts were in dialogue: “Me segura que eu’vou dar um troço FA–TAL” invites viewers to think that the fit of whom utters the phrase could be a fatal one. What is more, however, is that the shape formed by the convergence of white text on black bands, at an angle, resembles a clapperboard used in film production (see fig. 1). This graphic effect is a not so obvious meta-commentary on the cinematic procedures and allusions in the book, its recurrent filmic references ranging from Godard to American underground films such as those by Kenneth Anger and Brazilian Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal (“Outlaw Cinema”). What is more, some of the texts in the book, such as “Roteiro Turistico do Rio” (“Guided Tour of Rio”) for instance, even contain passages describing scenes in films
(fictitious or not) whose accompanying voiceover narrations are also provided.\textsuperscript{27}

Just as acousmatic voiceovers in film overlay unlocatable sound from the frame’s exterior onto the scene depicted within the frame therefore collapsing different spatiotemporal planes, the superimposition of the book’s title over the image creates the uncanny effect of making what is within the frame of the picture appear to be in conversation with what is outside it. Without even turning the book’s cover the reader knows that what lies within its pages will be labyrinth-like, a series of Chinese boxes in which inside and outside are entangled and undifferentiated. The frame has been burst open: there is no clear delimitation between the space depicted in the photograph and the space that the book inhabits.

\textsuperscript{27} As an example, consider the following passage “Roteiro Turistico do Rio.” Alternating descriptions of scenes from what is first deemed a horror film and then an action film are each assigned their own voiceover narrations. In the first, a crushed fan of the Flamengo soccer club is seen crossing the street. The sound for that scene is: “Once a flamengo always a flamengo” (55). The second scene features a group of soccer fans near a sewage canal; one fan forces another to drink sewage water. The voiceover for this scene is: “all players should have the same disposition when going after the ball as when approaching a plate of food. do not keep the ball. [...] enter the field to win” (55).
A second doubling is achieved on the cover. There staring out onto the reader is a very real and immediate photograph of the author, whose identity, however, is partially obscured—his last name appears as Sailormoon instead of Salomão. This penname displays at once Salomão’s penchant for wordplay and the English language. Throughout Me segura he refers to passages of works that he presumably has read in English and/or Portuguese translation and he expresses a complicated, almost defeatist desire to learn English—rather unreliably, one should add, since he repeatedly sprinkles the text with passages in English, a
language that does not seem so foreign to him since he is very much in control of these passages’ effect on the rest of the text. Take, for example, the following passage in “Self-Portrait”:

Espero aprender inglês vendo tv em côres. sou um pinta de direita com vontade de poder um baiano faminto baiano é como papel higiênico: tão sempre na merda. eficácia da linguagem na linha Pound Tsé Tung. Sou um reaça tento puxar tudo para trás: li retrato do artista quando jovem na tradução brasileira. [...] Estou afim de aprender inglês. It’s too late… meu destino é o de um irremediável inveterado poeta da língua portuguesa que nunca atravessará os límites das águas territoriais do seu país de origem. (47)

I hope to learn English watching color TV. I look like a rightwing with the willpower of a hungry Bahian. Bahians are like toilet paper: always in shit. the efficacy of language in the Pound Tsé Tung line. I am allergic to pulling everything back: read the Brazilian edition of portrait of the artist as a young man. [...] I’m so into learning English. It’s too late… my fate is that of a hopeless inveterate Portuguese-
language poet who will never cross the limits of his country of origin’s territorial waters.

Additionally, more than once he practices homophonic translations in order to generate text, which is presumably how he arrived at “Sailormoon” as a substitute for “Salomão.” This pseudonym is particularly significant because it manages to summarize some of the author’s main concerns throughout the book: that of writing as a means of unfurling a plurality of polyglot voices and as a vehicle to escape the trappings of identity and of psychological confinement. The metaphor of sailing to the moon might seem quaint to a contemporary reader, yet if we take into account the year of the first moon landing, it is in keeping with the spirit of the era. Moreover, the penname is also indicative of the allure of the English language, which as the excerpt above demonstrates, had begun enticing a global web of TV-viewing and radio-listening youth at unprecedented rates.

What is more, the author’s use of a penname is an effective gesture that instantly communicates one of his most consistent strategies, that of denaturalizing identity, which certainly is reinforced by the author’s desire to abandon his native tongue in favor of English. “My tongue—which is even my tongue, exalted and eluded or
reexamined and corrupted?" he wonders in "Self-Portrait" (27). This sense of linguistic dislocation translates too into a questioning of identity. “Could it be that the idea that each person is him or herself and no one else is but a convention that arbitrarily fails to take into account the passage from the individual to the general consciousness?” Salomão asks (13). In doing so he points out the contradiction inherent in both leftist and conservative views which give primacy to collective welfare—the collectivity in question taking the form of the working class, the family, or the nation—in detriment of pursuits deemed individualistic, but are still predicated on narrow and petit-bourgeois notions of identity as non-transferable. Thus, Salomão understands the subject in a way that is in sharp contrast with the capitalist conception of individuality, but at the same time opens the possibilities for personal expansion: “An open individuality (imitation, succession)” (13). Furthermore, Salomão’s emphasis on the creative potential of imitation underlines one of his book’s most striking devices: it so unabashedly admits to its wanting to be Other and to its imitation of foreign models that this, paradoxically, turns out to be one of its most original attributes. The text is permanently unsettled by its seemingly insatiable desire to
be what it is not: it longs to migrate to other fields, which partially explains its disposition to be invaded, so to speak, by other discursive practices (and even the English language). Articulations being replaced by parataxis, the text can absorb any type of language: that of the American counterculture; of the favelas; newspaper headlines; advertising; television; radio broadcasting; tabloid journalism; song lyrics; tourist brochures; psychoanalytic therapy; drug culture; and macrobiotic dieting which, judging from the repeated allusions to the practice, seems to have been highly popular among Brazilian youths seeking alternative lifestyles. Examples are to be found literally in every page of the book, but consider this other excerpt from “Self-Portrait” which references Allen Ginsberg, the leader of the Black Panther’s Elridge Cleaver, and Yippie Jerry Rubin, as well as appropriates a conservative newspaper headline on the allegedly worrisome popularity of Yemanjá:

28 The Super 8mm film “Rebellion of the Animals, 1975” by artist Nelson Leirner, might provide a clue as to the generational shift to vegetarianism. It features animals being shown animal’s treatment on TV. One section of the film shows men dressed in military uniforms carving and slicing different cuts of meat with a variety of knives, including electric ones. The familiar ritual appears gruesome and highly evocative of the military’s torture techniques. The work was included in the exhibition The Disappeared at El Museo del Barrio in 2007 and is described in a brochure as being “based on Leirner’s drawings of the early ’70s, in which he used codes to be speak about the fight of Brazilians against dictatorships.”
Os melhores talentos da minha geração. Jail and mental hospital. não posso fazer terra com tanta desgraça alheia. o poeta rendido que vai trabalhar para não infligir maiores tormentos aos seus pais. Farmacopéia: Cleaver and Rubin. chá oriental e arroz integral. o nível da literature macrobiótica. contrôle alimentar. [...] epidemia da literatura espírita que assola o país. luz na ásia. setas na encruzilhada. hipnotismo como arma. magnetismo. parapsicologia. o crescimento do culto do Iemanjá inquieta as autoridades da igreja católica. o povo com Iemanjá. inventário: inventação do otário. (48)

The best minds of my generation. Jail and mental hospital. I cannot land given the disgrace that has befallen so many others. the exhausted poet who will get a job to stop tormenting his parents. Pharmacopoeia: Cleaver and Rubin. oriental tea and brown rice. the level of macrobiotic literature. control what you eat. [...] epidemic of spiritist literature plaguing the country. light in asia. arrows at the crossroads. hypnotism as gun. magnetism. parapsychology. the growth of the worship of Yemanjá
worries the authorities of the catholic church. the people with Yemanjá. inventory: invention of the otário [fool].

Yet fully assuming its postcolonial status and with a truly polyphonic impetus, the text assimilates language coming not only from market-driven sources, but, as we have seen, from a host of literary sources as well. Rife with references to works ranging from the Bible to Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*, from Balzac's *Lost Illusions* to Dostoevsky's *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, from the *Cantos* and the *ABC of Reading* of Ezra Pound to Joyce's fiction, especially his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, and from Camões to Oswald de Andrade to Guimarães Rosa and to the Concrete poetry of the Noigandres group with a final stop at Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Salomão's text could hardly be thought of as seeking to dismantle the lettered tradition. Even Salomão's pseudonym can be said to be more a reference to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* than a manifestation of a bohemian sensibility: by using the portmanteau word “Sailormoon”—a “word-ideogram,” a montage—the author could also be identifying with the Concrete poets' esteem for Joyce's verbivocovisual endeavors.²⁹

²⁹ See “Plano Piloto da Poesia Concreta.”
If the sheer volume of the references both to literature and pop culture seems unmatched, what is more unusual is the way in which these are almost randomly inserted into the text. The excerpt of Me segura cited earlier—with the phrases “lo podrido es la llave secreta en mi ciudad, una fecal industria de jazmines de cera” appearing in Spanish—shows the author’s consistent choice to not separate his own writing from that of others. Here he switches from Portuguese to Spanish for no apparent reason, yet the reader is not left in the dark regarding the source of the Spanish phrases since the paragraph itself later presents the key to solve the riddle: the excerpt has been taken from Cortázar’s 62 Modelo para armar. In a similar fashion, when Salomão alludes to works

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30 The part of the novel in which this phrase appears is a poem describing an uninhabited labyrinthine city within a larger city. The spaces within the city of the poem all could be considered prime examples of “heterotopias” in the Foucauldian sense, these are spaces that invert and contest other spaces: hotels and public bathrooms are public stages for those in transit to carry out what is private and should remain outside of public view. In the essay “Of Other Spaces” of 1967, Foucault traces an archeology of space and fittingly writes: “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.” <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.htm>. Moreover, throughout Cortázar’s Modelo para armar, characters allude to their belonging to a phantasmatic city conjured up by certain elements of public space and mostly by the interaction among each other. Salomão’s interest in these ideas seems driven by his belief in the symbolic resignification of the space of the city. Both Cortázar’s novel and Salomão’s approach are indebted to the Situationists’ ideas on détournement and psychogeography. For more on this topic see Nicolau Sevcenko’s essay “Configuring the Seventies: Imagination in Power and Art on the Streets.”
of art by interspersing their titles throughout the book—be it films, books, songs or albums—, he resists using the conventions of punctuation that would signal to the reader that these are references to works by other artists. Displaced and out of context, the titles of these works are camouflaged within the text, just like all appropriated and sampled material, yet the result, ironically, is not that they blend seamlessly with the rest of the text as the lack of differentiation might lead one to think, but the opposite: they introduce dissonance, clash with, and interrupt the flow of any possible narrative thread. Unlike the paragraph containing the excerpt from Cortazár’s novel, often the writing offers little or no clues as to what the sources of the borrowed text might be. By appropriating and camouflaging wide-ranging material, Salomão is not only making his dismissal of the notion of intellectual property known to the readers, he is also inviting readers to connect the dots themselves, in a partial, tentative way paralleling his own bricolaged composition process and the way he himself processes cultural references. Additionally, if by using this strategy he is also deliberately affiliating his practice to the lineage of previous avant-gardists who shared a similar poetics, making sure his tracks will be legible within a tradition, he is also
scrambling the teleology inherent to Concrete poetry’s legitimating discourse—and by scrambling it, in fact, Salomão upends it, invalidates its causal links.

A key figure in the lineage projected in and by Salomão’s writing, via the Concrete poets, is Oswald de Andrade, whose vehemently anti-lyrical poetry rejected illusionism and was often culled from appropriated material ranging from early chronicles of Brazil to historical documents and oral texts. As is the case with Salomão, Andrade prioritizes the methods by which his poems are constructed—montage and the framing of readymades being among his preferred strategies—over the expressiveness of the poems’ specific content. Consider the following poem from the Pau-Brasil collection, characteristically brief and snapshot-like, in which Portugal’s colonization of Brazil and the land coveted by Bandeirantes acquire modern layers of meaning beyond the historical process to which they refer:

*ideal bandeirante*

Tome este automóvel

E vá a ver o Jardim New-Garden

Depois volte à Rua da Boa Vista

Compre o seu lote

Registe a escritura
Boa firme e valiosa
E more nesse bairro romântico
Equivalente ao célebre
Bois de Boulogne
Prestaçôes mensais
Sem juros

bandeirante ideal
Get on this automobile
And go take a look at the New-Garden Park
Then turn to the Rua da Boa Vista
Buy your lot
Register the deed
A solid and valuable estate
And live in that romantic neighborhood
Comparable to the renowned
Bois de Boulogne
Monthly installments
No interest

This poem—consisting of real estate catchphrases that blend the mythical land the Bandeirantes sought and the land marketed by developers catering to a Europeanized sensibility—demonstrates two of the qualities that the Concrete poets most admired in Andrade’s oeuvre. As Haroldo
de Campos remarks quoting Décio Pignatari, on the one hand, it performs a “de-familiarizing operation, by which per force commonplaces are transformed into uncommon places” (22) and it also presents “in the same linguistic space” a “diachronic map of several Brazils coexisting in different time periods” (39). The Concrete poets sustain that Andrade avoids the first person adopting instead the persona of the “observed observer” (39). In the case of “ideal bandeirante,” for instance, Andrade reveals the distortions generated by the rhetoric of persuasion without falling prey to it himself.

Salomão proceeds in a radically different manner: by insisting on using the first person, the pointedness and immediacy of his writing results from the elimination of the distance between the observer and the observed. Andrade coined the phrase cited earlier “I am only interested in what is not mine” (13) as the cannibal’s motto in his 1928 “Cannibal Manifesto”, which encapsulates too Salomão’s attitude behind the desire to incorporate an ever wider discursive totality in Me segura. Yet Salomão uses the first person repeatedly throughout his book in order to infiltrate the discourse he critiques. He becomes what he observes, taking on as many points of view as possible to shatter binary thinking and the illusion of the unitary
subject. Nowhere is this clearer than in “In the Sphere of Production of Oneself,” a prose piece published in *Navilouca* alongside portraits of Salomão and a friend in various guises, pointing not to hybrid but rather clashing identities—Salomão appears as himself sporting a Mickey Mouse T-shirt and a beanie hat, as an Indian with face paint and a headdress, as a sugar-cane worker, and as a man about to put a gas nuzzle into his mouth. An excerpt reads:

I am hungry to become everything I am not I am hungry for fiction [originally in English] ficciones fictionaries I am hungry for the frictions of being against being everything that I am not […] I am hungry
for for for turning INTO everything I am not I am this
person speaking here in the first person I singular
this singular person that I am a first person pronoun
irreducible as a pronoun but that but that but that
hides expands extends itself above or below under the
subsoil of the first person pronoun irreducible...

For Salomão to “produce” oneself equals, first,
consumption of, and the frictions with, an Other, in
keeping with Andrade’s cannibal motto. It is telling that
the first thing he is eager to consume is fictions, in
English—a reference not only to the English-language
literature he leaves multiple traces of being aware of, but
perhaps also to all the fictions and narratives surrounding
English-language countercultural productions. Yet one
cannot fail but notice an element of the text going in the
direction opposite to the absorption of the foreign: the
stuttering—“for for for” and “but that but that but that”—
that creates the illusion of the text’s being delivered
orally, interrupts the textual production, and grounds the
text in the desiring body emitting such complex and
contradictory ideas on subjectivity.

A review of Brazilian ideas of cultural production and
Salomão’s place within this tradition seems necessary. In
both the “Brazil-wood Manifesto” and the “Cannibal Manifesto,” Andrade expresses a desire to go beyond the territory conventionally assigned to poetry. He turns historical and anthropological symbols into the metaphorical pillars of the utopian poetic model he purports, which is not only assigned an economic dimension but is also presented as a cornerstone for the understanding of Brazilian identity. If the “Cannibal Manifesto” of 1928 proposes a cultural model based on Brazilian economic import patterns—foreign cultural products were not to be shunned but rather consumed and assimilated, since, regardless, once digested they would generate distinctively Brazilian fusions—Andrade’s earlier “Brazil-wood Manifesto” of 1924 presents the inverse model, one concerning poetry for export, “Brazil-wood having been the first product sent abroad in the sixteenth century” (Perrone, 9).

The notion of cultural cannibalism as “Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem” (18), which is the axis of the 1928 manifesto, could be seen as the acknowledgment of the failure of the earlier program aimed at capitalizing on Brazil’s peripheral status and achieving an international demand for the nation’s avant-garde literary output—with primitivism as its main asset—at
least on par with the European production. It is telling that by the end of the 1920s an aggressive tone had replaced the optimistic ring of the following propositions in the “Brazil-wood Manifesto”: “The history of the bandeirantes and the commercial history of Brazil. [...] Everything reverting to wealth. The wealth of dances and set phrases. [...] A tongue without archaisms, without erudition. Natural and neological. The millionaire contribution of all the mistakes. What we speak. What we are” (5-6). Both manifestos are considered integral to Andrade’s poetics, but one could argue that, in a way, a real synthesis of the ideals in both would not occur until over forty years later with Tropicália. The movement focused on production and consumption on both fronts—internal and external—and replaced a focus on exotic primitivism as a distinctive Brazilian asset with a critical deployment of symbols of underdevelopment, in full recognition of the failure of Andrade’s two models. Concrete poetry, in their attempt to recuperate and build upon Andrade’s model, managed to produce literature that indeed was met with a healthy international demand, but at the expense of a reduction or simplification of those

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31 For a summary of the relationship between Oswald de Andrade and Blaise Cendrars, for instance, see “Uma Poética da Radicalidade” by Haroldo de Campos, which serves as the introductory essay of Andrade’s Poesias Reunidas (35-39).
elements that would ground the Concrete practice in local culture. What could be more local than the “natural and neological tongue” that Oswald de Andrade had sought to redeem? Yet its international currency, as the Concrete poets were very aware of, proved not to be the one Andrade had envisioned in the “Brazil-wood Manifesto.”

The Concretistas referred to Ezra Pound as their *paideuma*, borrowing the term he used to refer to “the gristly roots of ideas that are in action,” and the economy of their poetics was in keeping with Pound’s dictum in “A Retrospect”: “That part of your poetry which strikes upon the imaginative eye of the reader will lose nothing by translation into a foreign tongue; that which appeals to the ear can reach only those who take it in the original” (86). Accordingly, in the early phases of Concrete poetry during the late ’50s and the early ’60s, the equation between image and text was reduced to a minimum to facilitate translation and the poem’s international flow, its passage to a worldwide forum. The key to the economy of Concrete poetry, in the eyes of the movement’s protagonists, was that their export was not specific

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32 Some of the poems were even written in English, by then the lingua franca for anything related to the entwined worlds of commerce and communications: some examples are the poems “LIFE” (1958) and “Man Woman” (1968) by Décio Pignatari, and “Epithalamium II” by Pedro Xisto (1966), which graphically displays the masculine third person pronoun “he” being embedded in the feminine third person pronoun “she.”
content—what Andrade had emphasized in the “Brazil-wood Manifesto”—but rather their technique, their structural procedures and constructivist approach unconcerned with subjective expression. The following excerpt from the introduction by the Campos brothers to the volume of the anthology Poetas do Modernismo devoted to Concrete poetry summarizes their own position with respect to this issue: “Evidently, when one speaks of a ‘poetry for export’ one seeks to refer to a poetry capable of creating new techniques valid internationally, and not the habitual export of exotic raw materials typical of certain Brazilian literature divulged outside our borders” (135-6).\(^{33}\) The Noigandres group seems to have been keenly aware that had the ratio of text to image been larger, the circulation of their proposed model would have been interrupted. To them, concrete poetry was defined as “a projected industrial art, a know-how of language—and a creation of ‘models of sensibility’” (my underline) (103) as described in the

\(^{33}\) In light of this, it is peculiar that the only time that Brazilian Concrete poems appeared in a widely circulated international journal, such as the Times Literary Supplement, in the September 3, 1964 issue devoted to the avant-garde, two of the poems—“Pelé” by Décio Pignatari and the poem “Brazilian Football” by Augusto de Campos—happened to be about soccer, the sole product, so to speak, for which Brazil had proven to have an international competitive advantage. Décio Pignatari’s “Pelé,” an encoded visual poem in which a black dot represents the celebrity soccer player, a rhombus represents the “amplified family (with television set),” and a rectangle stands for the phrase “everything is all right at the end.” Ironically, to decode the minimal poem, the reader needed to consult a rather convoluted chart accompanying it.
essay “Why Poets in Times of Poverty?” appearing in the volume on Concrete poetry in the series Literatura Comentada. That its foundation was an utopian vision of modernity and technical development which shortly after was proven to be a mirage furthered by the euphoria of the Kubitschek years shortened its lifespan considerably. “The longing for modernity often led the poets to abstractly affirm a vocation for the future, as if the possibility of overcoming underdevelopment was imminent,” write Iumina Maria Simon and Vinicius Dantas, the editors of the Literatura Comentada volume (103). The Concretista’s fetishizing of technology and investment in a poetics of impersonality in which the poet, in the words of Décio Pignatari, was but an “industrial designer” devoted to configuring a message in the most rational and efficient way, caused the Concrete program to develop a blind spot for the text’s locus of enunciation and the message embedded in the very position of the elocutionary subject.

Salomão engages in the import/export/know-how discussion too, and puts forth his own critique of the model in the poem “The Beauty and the Beast” in Me segura. Implicitly, as we can see in the following excerpt, he acknowledges the failure of any national import/export model except that based on the unedifying consumption
abroad of Brazil’s pornography (its tourist industry and exoticism, perhaps?) and with Brazil’s consumption of American technology and the products of its brainwash:

Projeto de export: pornophotos pro mercado progressista.

Construir the english-portuguese dictionary: brainwash and know how.

Projeto de import: gaiest letters. know how.

alargamento dos círculos de relações. (68)

Export project: pornphotos for the progressive market.

Build the english-portuguese dictionary: brainwash and know how.

Import project: gayest letters, know how. widening of a circle of relations.

Salomão acknowledges an aporia that the Concrete poets failed to take into account—just their use of the term “know-how” in English to refer to their export product points to the problem. If this export can only be formulated in those terms that the trade partner understands, can a symbolic exchange effectively be said to be taking place? Would not the model be closer to outsourcing, further promoting the asymmetry between the
two parties involved in the transaction? Or, in other words, what is specifically Brazilian about Concrete poetry? This question certainly cannot be answered here, and it might not even be relevant, but it is pertinent because of Salomão’s insistence on the gap separating Brazil from the American cultural artifacts that had shaped the Concretistas sensibilities, and consequently, of those who followed in their footsteps. Salomão makes recurring statements about the fringe status of his own productions, which at some point he designates as “pop pobre” (“poor pop”). In “Self-Portrait,” for instance, he writes:

Poeta baiano lendo Ulisses no sanitário (enquadramento do papel limpando o cu). [...] poeta recolhe inscrições microriais: cu não é tinteiro dedo não é pincel parede não é papel. as inscrições dos bancos de ônibus. write with merda: cu é tinteiro dedo é pincel parede é papel. (43)

Bahian poet reads Ulysses in the toilet (frame of him wiping his ass with the paper). [...] poet takes down bathroom graffiti: his ass is not an inkwell his finger is not a paintbrush the wall is not paper. graffiti on bus seats. write with shit: his ass is an inkwell his finger is a paintbrush the wall is paper.
Critic Lidia Santos aptly remarks in *Kitsch Tropical: Los medios en la literatura y el arte de América Latina* that with Tropicália the focus of the work moves from the site of production to the site of reception. Up until then, cultural producers were more focused on the paradigms on which to model their approach to production than on understanding the specificities of the sites in which the work would be received. Santos explains that this shift manifesting itself first in Haroldo de Campos’s *Galáxias*, a group of fifty polyphonic prose poems composed between 1963 and 1975 that, in their Baroque rejection of synthesis, are everything-but-Concrete. In these works, Santos claims, Campos “furthers a break with the linguistic domestication performed by the written text” (193). These are works that are open to affect, excess, and popular culture. Referencing Francoist Spain, the American counterculture movement, pop icons such as Marilyn Monroe, and Cola alongside canonical authors including Homer, Basho, Dante, Shakespeare, and Joyce in their original languages and without attribution, as well as including colloquial phrases in a variety of languages, has the effect, according to Santos, of opening the text to “the presence of the quotidian and the subjective” and “displacing *Galáxias* from the empire of autonomous art to
the vital experience of conceptual art" (184). *Galáxias* requires that the reader experience them to assemble its meanings, and in this regard, Campos’s approach had a palpable effect on the Tropicalistas. As a matter of fact, some of the corridors in Oiticica’s first labyrinth-like, multi-sensorial penetrable installation—*Penetrável*, PN1, from 1970—each had their own soundtracks. One of them was a recording of Haroldo de Campos reading from *Galáxias* and another was a segment of Gertrude Stein’s delivery of *The Making of Americans*. Incidentally, Salomão was the first to publish one of Campos’s *Galáxias* in *Navilouca*. What is more, the attributes of the *Galáxias* bring them closer to programs such as the Neo-Concrete one, whose origin, as we have seen, stemmed from a critique of Concrete poetry, than to the Concretista program itself.

Luciano Figueiredo, *Navilouca*’s art co-director, states that the editor for Edições Gernasa had invited them to submit a project featuring the most representative work of the period: “We were concerned with articulating a production based on very new ideas and with the collaboration of some important veterans, and which, in our opinion, would constitute an artistic vision aimed at overcoming the ideological and provincial problems of Brazil’s cultural life in those years. This was a
combination of expressions that represented the best part of the neo-Concrete movement, of Concrete poetry, of Tropicalismo and of the very new poetic and visual arts practices that were emerging. It was a very consistent and radical mixture” (186). Hence, in Navilouca we find a contribution by Lygia Clark, whose perception of Concrete poetry’s formal concerns as positivist and dehumanizing had led her to be a co-signer of the 1959 Neo-Concrete manifesto, side-by-side with one of Haroldo de Campos’s Galáxias.

The fifteenth Galáxia (not featured in Navilouca) presents an interesting peculiarity. It contains the malapropism “circuladô de fulô”—which to mean “surrounded by flowers” would have to be spelled “circulado de flor”—on which Caetano Veloso based the title song of his eponymous album from 1991. A.S. Bessa writes that Campos had heard this song about flower vendor at a street festival in Recife when stopping there on his way back from a trip to

34 Although its contents were compiled in the early 1970s, the magazine was not published until 1975 for lack of financial backing. It was financed by the record company Phonogram, and was the very embodiment of the links between the new developments in music, film, visual art, and writing: it includes contributions by the Concrete poets; artists Lygia Clark, and Hélio Oiticica; filmmaker Ivan Cardoso; Caetano Veloso; and a host of new writers including Chacal, Salomão, and Torquato Neto. The label had initially wanted to release a record by Caetano Veloso, but since he wasn’t ready to record, he along with Salomão got the company to back the Navilouca project instead. From the start the magazine was devised as a single issue only—a highly efficient strategy to not have to cope with censorship or raising the funds necessary to secure the continuity of the publication.
Europe in 1959—he had visited Stockhausen in Germany and Ezra Pound in Italy. This stop in Recife for Campos equaled “rediscovering Brazil via the world,” Bessa tells us. In the “circuladô de fulô” poem Campos, not unlike Oswald de Andrade in the “Brazil-Wood Manifesto,” stresses the role of the vernacular in the replenishment of literary language: “mas o povo cria mas o povo engenha mas o povo cavila o povo é o inventalínguas na malicia da mestria no mateiro na maravilha no visgo do improviso tenteando a travessia [...] o povo é o melhor artífice” (Xadrez de Estrelas, 213). Bessa translates the previous excerpt as: “but people create and people engender and people wonder people are the languageinventor in the malice of the mastery in the smartness of marveling in the vein to improvise stutterttrying to traverse [...] people are il miglior fabbro” (Novas, 125). The text bears the stamp of an era in which “o povo” (the people) was construed as a monolithic entity, yet to some the very term was starting

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35 Caetano Veloso’s song as well as an introductory essay by A.S. Bessa appear in a section of UbuWeb.com devoted to ethnopoetics.

36 Campos’s “o melhor artífice” is a reference to T.S. Eliot’s famous dedication of The Waste Land to Ezra Pound, “il miglior fabbro.” The collapsing of references to high and low culture is characteristic of the author’s approach throughout Galáxias. It bears mentioning that as if to prove the Concretista’s ratio of exportability versus difficulty of the text measured in allusions to local culture, Campos’s seminal Galáxias are virtually all but unknown abroad. This up to very recently was one of the few available English translations. Only four excerpts from Galáxias are included in the author’s Novas: Selected Writings (2007). A translation of the complete volume is forthcoming.
to seem but an empty ideological construct abused by politicians and old-guard leftists. Equally problematic is that the radical intertextuality and impenetrability of the Galáxias posits that the people’s inventiveness is only valuable when transferred to the literary realm by the author who creates the context in which it can be perceived.

In this regard, one of Salomão’s poetics most far-reaching moves, in terms of its symbolic implications, is that he adopts both the perspective of a cultural producer and that of a member of the general public as well, taking the work out of the literary realm and often not metaphorically, off the page and into urban space as well. On the inside cover of Navilouca, for instance, Salomão created an “environmental proposition,” in the words Luciano Figuereido, who collaborated on the project as well, that deftly combines visual and textual elements. The piece consists of a group of people at Ipanema beach holding different letters of the phrase “ALPHA alfavela VILLE;” they are photographed in different configurations spelling out “Alphaville” and “favela” alternately until they arrive at Salomão’s play on the title of Godard’s 1965 film—a coded comment on military surveillance, perhaps, and
also of the Alphaville gated communities that began being built in the 1970s in São Paulo.37

In the prose piece “Ariadnesca,” which appears in Me segura and mimics the style of a tabloid article to highly comical effect, Salomão adopts a dual point of view: he mimics the voice of the reporter authoring the feature and also physically poses as the subject being written about. Below the fictitious headline “THIS MAN LIVES ON GASOLINE. SINCE HE WAS .7 YEARS OF AGE HE HAS DRUNK 2 LITERS A DAY” is a cinematic sequence of frames of Salomão putting a gas nozzle into his mouth (one of these was also published in Navilouca, as mentioned above). Below, the bogus article reads:

Roque Gomes Mariano, who lives in Itapetininga, has already been news in NP [Notícias Populares]. The young man in the photo is the same one of whom we reported, in a lengthy article in May 25 of last year, that he lives solely on gasoline. Not on rice, beans, or beef. Not on chicken or Neapolitan pizza. What he likes is gasosa [literally “gaseous,” the synonym of soda in Portuguese and a pun lost in English translation], the stinky one that works for

37 This piece by Salomão bears link with his later Babilaques (1975–77), photographs of pages of his notebooks—containing polychromatic drawings and writing—placed in different urban settings where they would interact with found materials.
automobiles and trucks..." (79)

Two pages later—after a description of the man’s exposure to the curiosity of visitors from other Brazilian states—the piece abandons the reportorial tone and is interrupted by text in English abruptly departing from the conceit behind the prose preceding it and revealing the issue at the core of its critique: “imported analyses. / CONSTRUCTION. background: world’s disorder” (83). The mention of soda and gasoline, pointing to two of the hallmarks of American imperialism, provides the piece with an incisive critical overtone. “Ariadnesca” is another Coca-Cola piece in the roster of artworks in different mediums that bitingly riffed off the topos of the “wastewaters of American imperialism,” as Coca-Cola was colloquially referred to in those days. 38 By making a subtle

38 Among the most obvious ones are the famous concrete poem “Coca-Cola” (1957) by Décio Pignatari, in which the letters in the advertising slogan “Beba Coca-Cola” (“Drink Coca-Cola”) are permuted a number of times until they end up spelling “cloaca” (sewer) and in the words of the author become an “anti-commercial [...] turning into its opposite the ‘artificial paradise’ promised by persuasion techniques” (154). Another piece is Cildo Meireles’s public intervention of 1970 “Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project”, in which the circulation of oppositional messages, such as “Yankees, Go home!” or a recipe for a Molotov cocktail, was ensured by their being silk-screened onto redeemable Coca-Cola bottles. For an account of the context of Cildo Meireles’s intervention, see Mari Carmen Ramírez’s essay “Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-1980” (53-71) in Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s. Another work to touch on the Coca-Cola topos is Clarice Lispector’s The Hour of the Star of 1977. Macabéa, the novella’s protagonist, subsists on the beverage, so much so that in the first pages of the book the narrator sarcastically makes the following claim: “the record that is about to begin is written under the sponsorship of the most popular soft drink in the world [...]” Remark on the ubiquity and omnipotence of the corporation, the narrator adds: “It is the same soft drink that
equation between Coca-Cola and gasoline, Salomão also references the unprecedented and highly problematic growth of the Brazilian automobile industry after 1956, when in an effort to compensate for the severe drop in international coffee prices, foreign automakers were lured into establishing manufacturing plants in the country by the very favorable economic incentives that the government provided them. One such incentive was the banning of imports of competing automakers, which proved exceedingly effective. With the oil industry in the hands of foreign capital as well, it is no wonder that Salomão would devise the character of Roque Gomes Mariano, the freak who guzzles none other than Shell oil and lives in Itapetininga, in the highlands of the state of São Paulo—the state were most of the automotive plants had been established—to critique unsound economic policies that exposed the nation even more

sponsored the recent earthquake in Guatemala [...] this drink which contains coca is today. It allows people to be modern and to move with the times” (23).

39 As Sylvia Ann Hewlett remarks in the essay “The Dynamics of Economic Imperialism: The Role of Foreign Direct Investment in Brazil,” the automobile industry represented one of “the most spectacular ‘success’ stories of foreign direct investment” in Brazil, which by 1972 was the world’s 8th largest car producer (140). As we now know all too well, this boom did not promote the development of a national industry nor did it cause the wealth to trickle down as is demonstrated by the fact that in 1973 “eight of the ten largest firms were foreign controlled, and these owned 89.7 of the industry” (141). Besides generating more dependency on foreign capital, this situation emphasized “luxury consumer durables as opposed to basic necessities,” neglected sectors such as the agricultural one and “with so few people absorbed into the modern industrial structure” contributed “greatly to social marginality and the underutilization and exploitation of the work force” (147).
to rampant imperialism. Yet there is another target for Salomão’s derision and that, of course, is the media whose voice he adopts. The renowned Notícias Populares, which folded in 2001, was an anticommunist tabloid in São Paulo that had been founded in 1963 by the then president of the liberal political party União Democrática Nacional along with a Romanian journalist who had fled from a Siberian labor camp. Their goal was to sway readers away from the pro-Goulart influence of the Última Hora newspaper. That Salomão chose to mimic the style and blatant bogusness of the articles published in the tabloid, whose improbable headlines were along the lines of memorable ones such as “The Devil Born in São Paulo” or “Young Beauty Gives Birth to a Chimp,” is politically charged indeed.

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40 The pages of Navilouca devoted to Hélio Oiticica contain a few spreads on his collaboration with filmmaker Iván Cardoso on the send-up of a B movie Nosferatu no Brasil (1971). Nosferatu, played by Torquato Neto, travels from Budapest to Rio. One of the frames shows a pair of Brazilian flags waving in the wind, with a sign for Esso looming in the background.

41 In a review of Nada Mais que a Verdade, a book co-written by Celso de Campos Jr. on the origin and immense popularity of Notícias Populares, the journalist claims that the tabloid was groundbreaking in that it was the first to open its pages to minorities by covering “manifestations of popular culture” and was the reader’s “watchdog during the phase of the unhealthy markup of prices in the second half of the ‘80s. It helped pensioners and translated the economic plans elaborated by tie-wearing messiahs who claimed to be saving the Brazilian economy. It was the voice of the workers forced to the periphery in the ‘90s; its coverage of crimes provided statistics more precise than those provided by the authorities.” The review appeared in the Correio Braziliense on July 21, 2002, and can be found online.
By making it seem as if the article had actually appeared in Notícias Populares, Salomão performs a guerilla-type intervention at least conceptually similar to Cildo Meireles’s “Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project.” His critical operation works both ways: by writing a seemingly harmless sensationalist piece that could pass for a Notícias Populares article, he symbolically manages to insert his critique of liberal economic policies in the very heart of a pro-American and anti-leftist ideological apparatus. Yet furthermore, he locates his text at a highly trafficked intersection of the market. Me segura was sold at newsstands, the very same places where Noticías Populares, as well as officially sanctioned newspapers, were sold. The publisher of Me segura was José Álvaro Editor, a progressive publishing house whose titles included books on the social sciences and highly regarded literature by authors Clarice Lispector and Ferreira Gullar, as well as the first book of the marginal poet Cacaso. Me segura was the first title of the Na Corda Bamba series of experimental literature that Salomão and José Carlos Capinam were going to direct for José Álvaro Editor, and it was published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Semana de Arte Moderna in 1922. Another classic Tropicália poetry book, Fragmentos de
*Sabonete* by Jorge Mautner, was scheduled to be the second title of the series, but was never actually published by the press. Torquato Neto describes the publishing endeavor as one resulting from José Álvaro’s interest in “the writing of this generation that is working on new experiences with poetry, with the text, with language….”42

If it seems brave of the publisher to have agreed to launch this series promising more subversiveness than the Ato Institucional No. 5 condoning censorship would allow, it is extraordinary to think that a stunning number of copies of Salomão’s book—the print run might have been perhaps 10,000 copies, according to Cacaso43—were distributed at newsstands and bookstores in Rio de Janeiro by the distributor Fernando Chinaglia, who delivered periodicals and books in

42 From a fragment of an interview of Torquato Neto with journalist Menezes y Morais, published originally in *O Dia, Domincultura* on June 18, 1972, and reproduced in the March 26, 08 entry of the blog Kenard Kruel.

43 There is divergent information on the book’s print run and sales. In a newspaper editorial reprinted in the book *Não Quero Prosa*, Cacaso, the marginal poet whose real name is Antônio Carlos de Brito, stated that the book had a spectacular print run of 10,000 copies, was distributed even at newsstands in Rio, and had a predictable fate: it was a “total commercial failure, José Álvaro Editor closed its doors, and an entire collection that had already been slated for publication (Luis Carlos Maciel, Jorge Mautner) never had time to exist” (71-72). Yet in the preface of the 2003 reprint of the book, Heloïsa Buarque de Hollanda and Luciano Figueiredo claim that the book was “sold at newsstands and rapidly sold out.” In an email exchange Figueiredo does not recall the book’s exact print run, but claims that the 10,000 copies that Cacaso claims were printed is too high an estimate. He argues that even if the actually did well sales-wise, it is inaccurate to claim that it was only sold at newsstands since it was also available at bookstores. That there is a myth about the book’s popularity is proof itself of its exceptional reception.
the very same places where *Notícias Populares* was sold. The political critique of the book was coded to such a degree of subtlety that it must have elided the accusatory judgment of censors.\(^4^4\)

By the same token, Salomão also effectively inserts a critique in another circuit not devoid of ideological distortions: that of the book of poetry as a model and means of dissemination of the values associated with learnedness and a refined sensibility. Salomão’s persona in “Ariadnesca” mines the poetry book as an emblem of high culture and also references some of Oswald de Andrade’s most resilient propositions concerning cannibalism and the, here quite literal, irrepressible consumption of the enemy, which takes the form of gasoline/ Coca-Cola composite and critiques the escapism and lack of criticality characteristic of tabloid journalism. By absorbing the enemy, and subsuming his own voice to the tabloid’s disembodied one—an acousmatic one, to be sure, for everyone and no one seems to associated with it, as if it were

\(^{4^4}\) The underground satirical newspaper *O Pasquim* trafficked in political content, which, like *Me segura’s*, was decodable by a limited segment of society only, managed to remain in circulation from 1969 to 1991. A powerful meta-critical spread on the art of reading between the lines proved the editors were one step ahead of its censors:

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WE ARE AGAINST
all those who say we are against
THE GOVERNMENT. (108)
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issued by a collectivity—Salomão manages to widen the field in which he can perform his poetic interventions.

Salomão developed a poetics accurately reflective of the quandary faced by poets at the time. His was a practice that did not ignore that literature was at a crossroads, a practice whose pillars were precisely the problems endemic to an increasingly media-driven society. The context was one in which those young poets who wanted the attention of readers of their same generation needed to consider who their main competitors were: international mass media conglomerates which by then were fully aware of the lucrative potential of joining forces with the youth movement.45 Those who wanted to reach audiences mesmerized

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45 Art critic Holland Cotter addresses this phenomenon in his review of the Whitney Museum's 2007 exhibition *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*. Describing the function of the loose acid-colored forms characterizing the psychedelic look that became the quintessential marker of countercultural production, be it album covers, posters, clothing items, or home furnishings, he claims that ultimately the exhibition's “net effect [was] less to reveal a depth and variety of creativity than to demonstrate that the main function of alternative art was advertising, that the counterculture started as a commercial venture, which soon became a new mainstream and ended up an Austin Powers joke” *New York Times*, 25 May 2007. The critic has a point if one thinks of the psychedelic look as a way of branding underground cultural production worldwide. Yet, if four decades later distinctions between the different subgroups of the youth movement seem to have blurred, they existed and were signaled by markers that would convey them immediately. In January of 1970, *O Pasquim* published a chart contrasting the traits of bohemians and hippies alongside a hippie manifesto by Luis Carlos Maciel. According to the chart, if you liked the Beatles, Volkswagens, and whisky, for example, you were a bohemian; if you preferred instead Jimi Hendrix, Jeeps, and pot, you were a “true” hippie. These groups’ approach to creative endeavors reflected varying degrees of critical engagement: if Salomão and Torquato Neto’s *Navilouca* bears all the hallmarks of the countercultural products of the time, it also manifests a rare degree of criticality and dialogue with the culture at large. Salomão
by pop music and the liveliest manifestations of youth culture were forced to rethink certain conventions and aspects of their practice. Yet, as mentioned earlier, defying all expectations, many of them actually succeeded in revitalizing poetry and making it an important part of the Brazilian youth movement. As we saw earlier, those who made themselves visible were somewhat paradoxically grouped under the loose label of *poetas marginais*, their marginality deriving primarily from their rebelliousness and lack of participation in the mainstream publishing circuit. Authors personally sold or distributed their offset, mimeographed or photocopied chapbooks, dittos, pamphlets, broadsides, and books “at cafés, schools, theaters, declamations preceding shows of popular music (especially rock) or performance happenings” (Perrone, 119). Their cleverly parasitic strategies—benefiting from the audiences assembled to experience those forms of entertainment that posed the biggest threat for poetry—succeeded to such an extent in creating new readers among the middle class youth that Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda begins her introduction to *26 Poetas Hoje* (1976) with the

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professed distaste for hippiedom—its ultimate herd mentality, its inherent self-complacency and distrust of intellectual activity.
claim: “Curiously, at present, the article of the day is poetry” (7).

Yet, with notable exceptions including Francisco Alvim, Ana Cristina César, and Torquato Neto, their output was the result of a longing for self-expression more than an interrogation and active engagement with language and poetic invention. As illustrative of the self-expressive and informal tendencies of marginal poetry, where the “I” of the poem uncomplicatedly discloses rather common feelings of isolation, consider the following excerpt of a poem by Charles (the poet’s penname) included in 26 Poetas Hoje:

como sinto o coração mais forte nas situações miseráveis
uma casa estranha onde me pergunto que que eu tô fazendo aqui
onde eu posso dizer qualquer coisa ou pular pela janela
que seria como se nada tivesse acontecido
ou talvez um ai histérico se juntasse aos gritinhos da mesa de jogo
e depois trocado o disco tudo continuaria tranqüilo
(183)
how I feel my heart stronger in miserable situations
a strange house where I ask myself what I am doing
here
where I can say whatever I want or jump out the window
which would be as if nothing had ever happened
or maybe a hysterical ay would join the screeches of
the game table
and after having changed the record everything would
remain calm

In contrast, let us examine “Me Segura Que Eu Vou Dar um Troço,” the title piece of Salomão’s book, which provides a thorough example of the debate that could be taking place in the mind of a poet hyperaware of the predicament of anyone devoted to the critical use of language in the particular context of post-‘68 Brazil. The piece features an unresolved exchange between what we can surmise are the author’s split personas: a lyric poet and a poet warrior, a peculiar guerrilla fighter, specifically. The lyric poet, who at some point in the dialogue brings up writing lyrics for songs besides poems, begins the conversation by contrasting two of the extreme roles that he could be playing: that of Christ—the messianic poet seeking to redeem the people—and that of the Devil—the poet
maudit fallen from the grace of bourgeois society. The warrior, at least initially, speaks in materialist terms instead. Being from the interior of Brazil, he refuses to join the ever-expanding ranks of the lumpenproletariat migrating to urban centers. Curiously, though, and in contrast with the lyric poet who positions himself in isolation against a reality that he describes at every opportunity as lacerating, most of the warrior’s utterances allude to forms of infiltration and camouflage that would ensure him a point of entry into the society in which he seeks to thrive. The warrior speaks of having taken a bottle of Vencernil, a neological brand name for tablets that, one supposes, would make him fit for victory. The invention of this name for a prescription drug recalls Pignatari’s coining of the name Lubrax for the Petrobrás oil and underscores early in the dialogue the fine line separating branding and advertising from poetry, which ultimately relies on similar verbal techniques. The warrior also speaks of wearing an iron mask on the street, referencing Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and the metaphor of Louis Bonaparte hiding his true guise under Napoleon’s death mask in order to be taken for his uncle’s doppelgänger. Though the reference to this period of French history points to the Paris Commune and
consequently to the May ’68 movement, in the Brazilian context, whom the warrior might be trying to pass for or whose farcical stand-in he would be in order to bring about the revolution is not immediately clear. It is possible that Salomão could be referring to Che Guevara, who at the time was best to avoid mentioning directly if one wanted to escape the military’s coercive measures.46

The sensibility of the lyric poet is a Catholic one—his metaphors involve the Biblical flood and concepts such as repentance and guilt. He is a devotee of romances, and why not, a marginal poet who, unlike the Machiavellian warrior, values authenticity over artifice and deception. He describes himself in bookish terms, alluding to the lettered tradition and claiming that he is a “character in a Romance novel, never traded dreams for drug-induced trances. future epitaph: I dared to aim higher. Don Quixote, my format is like the book’s” (86). On the contrary, the warrior is a street figure acknowledging that he is a jackal profiting from other people: “I am the

46 Lydia Santos explains in Kitsch tropical: Los medios en la literatura y el arte en América Latina that given military oppression in Brazil “Ellipses and codes were easily recognized by the public as necessary circumlocutions given the impossibility of direct denunciations...” (74). As an example, she mentions Caetano Veloso’s “Sou louco por ti, América,” which cleverly alludes to Che Guevara in code, by cynically including the following lyrics in Spanish: “el nombre del hombre muerto ya no se puede decirlo” (“the name of the dead man one can no longer say it”). The song also contains a reference to José Martí: the phrase “cuyo nombre sea amarte,” whose last word produces a sound in Portuguese indistinguishable from the revolutionary hero’s last name.
brother of jackals. from the theater of the streets [...] I took the following moral: if I don’t look out for myself I’m screwed” (86). He sidesteps poetic pieties and extols the praises of organization in the face of the “absence of a politics of reserve and anti-dispersion of forces: weakness indolence laziness a provincial upbringing of the spirit” (86). If this seems provocative given the trend of socially committed poetry that had prevailed during the ‘60s in Brazil—and Latin and Central America, for that matter—what follows is, to say the least, scandalous. This warrior is not as ideologically coherent as he might initially have seemed, since a couple of pages later he makes a few unexpected claims: “pain is not a valid warranty. the fat bourgeois poet already took all of the remaining bills to pay for the hired wailers. [...] the one who accumulates pain without reinvesting it, without capitalizing on it, without applying himself and obtaining a profit from it, is a fool” (87-88). After the poet responds to this with abstract and poetically imaginative assessments of what his mission is, equating anarchism with narcissism, for instance, “my occupation is to invent goals that I can go beyond, to see through things—a current example: anarchissim,” the warrior argues:
my pain is my debt in money—all of my actions are judicial pleas demanding my right to eat. [...] I will create the company GROOVY PROMOTION that will offer translation services to publishing houses, a series of journalism pieces to the big newspapers, [...] ideas banners slogans phrases for t-shirts, glossaries for researchers, reviews, copyediting etc. I will get some money and take a taxi in the plaza and become a director to earn a living. any of these days I’m going to the States to make one two three plenty of underground films. [...] when I speak sure of myself I can make intelligent arguments, I know how to make deals, I’m astute, I learned to understand what gives businesses potential, I learned to talk with the bank’s manager or the agent of expired loans... (88)

As provocative as the warrior’s statements linking emotional pain and financial profits might seem to the average poetry reader, they accurately characterize the engine driving the symbolic economy of lyric poetry. If affect is one of the commodities that the genre offers the public, and of all affects, the many forms that human affliction can take is the most prevalent, then the lyric tradition certainly can be said to be capitalizing on pain regardless of the actual monetary profits involved in
literary transactions (just like Philip Larkin claims in “The Pleasure Principle,” mentioned in the first chapter.)

The warrior’s discontinuous dialogue with the lyric poet in “Me Segura Que Eu Vou Dar um Troço” illustrates the polarities between the lyric and the modernist paradigms, on the one hand, and, on the other, the unfeasibility of the latter’s resulting in an ethical writing practice, which would logically imply some degree of cohesive intentionality. That is, the warrior’s speech—despite his mention of the various forms in which his command of language could be instrumental—serves no purpose. It explodes the manifold, contradictory ways in which he could put his skills to use without imposing values or a hierarchy onto them, and, quite evidently, without actually engaging in any activity other than enunciating the many different options. The warrior signals the different guises that the task of manipulating language to be put to use in the public realm can take, addressing them as potentialities, as polymorphous desires whose ultimate fulfillment is only conjectural. The warrior’s formulations are original on many counts, but especially in the bluntness of their economic analysis and their refusal to grant poetry a higher or purer status among the other practices in which he seeks to become engaged. All
language-based practices—say, compiling a glossary, writing slogans or texts for t-shirts, or translating—are made radically equivalent. There is also a cynicism to the warrior’s honest acknowledgement of being under the sway of the media, be it mainstream—as that of the advertising companies or the major newspapers to which he says he intends to submit his journalism—or marginal, as manifested in his references to American and local underground films. Pointing to the limitations of the lyric model and avoiding to present himself as the hero of the resistance that some ranks of poets believe to be mounting when shunning worldly affairs, the warrior identifies the rationale for the migration of poetic practices to other fields capitalizing on pleasure instead of pain. Why profit from suffering when one can do without misery and monetize one’s verbal skills at the very sites where social transactions are taking place, by producing subjectivities either through promotional catchphrases or by making films that put one in control of the make-believe scenario of one’s choice? What is most noteworthy, however, is that the options that the warrior delineates in the text are only that: alternatives unfolding within the confines of a literary production, of a self-proclaimed book of poetry featuring works that appear to be everything but poems. In doing this, the
warrior Salomão, then, again could be said to be both
sacredly absorbing the enemy—the world of instrumental
reason and the media—in an effective act of ritual
cannibalism of the type prescribed by Oswald de Andrade—but
also deflating and undermining his own role as author.

If the lyric poet ends the dialogue in the title poem
stating his self-defeating dream to write a book that might
become an instrument of liberation—“like the local twerp’s
drivell”—and claims to share the faith that the nation
relies on, for “the thing in Brazil is faith” (161), the
warrior proposes a less wishful but more far-reaching
tactic not to serve the world but to simply “support
himself through his production” creating “the conditions
for delirium to become the measure of the universe” (162).
And what delirium might this be? Given the warrior’s
clashing assertions, it would have to be the delirium of
non-hierarchical, polyvalent language where everything can
mean what it is intended to mean and its opposite; the
delirium of boundless denaturalized desire that can be
uttered multilingually; the delirium of De Certeau’s
polyphonic, disembodied, acousmatic universe of the oral.
In this regard, it is fitting to stress that although
Salomão refers to himself as a warrior throughout Me
segura, in the next-to-last piece of the book, titled
“Integral Production Unit: Ricamar Report,” he refers to himself as a technician, that is, a “person who knows how to put some forces in movement and how to explode others” (184). This idea—a revision of Pignatari’s previously cited definition of Concrete poetry—shatters the notions of a technical knowledge and a sensibility that could be both the prerequisites and results of developmental progress. The warrior instead of centering on how certain technologies can be applied and directed to produce specific results and sensibilities, promotes a poetics that deliriously swings back and forth and, in oscillating, creates the conditions for indeterminate language events to take place.

The dialogue between the warrior and poet leaves no room for doubt about what the actual stance of Salomão might be regarding the dilemma between a static vision of poetry that might offer respite and solace from the harshness of social inequities, on the one hand, and, on the other, a poetic practice—in the full sense of the term—predicated on immersion in the social fabric and its contradictions. For Salomão does not only present us with the warrior, his utterances alternate with those of the poet who is, as an archetypal figure, perhaps equally if not more resilient than that of the warrior. Salomão’s
poetics thrives on this aporia, it is not about a dismissal of poetry but about fully adopting a stance that captured the genre’s uncertain status in the culture of the time.

“One Minute Commercial,” one of the last texts in the book, serves as a rhizomatic *ars poetica* establishing the author’s wavering, yet ultimately consistent, position regarding the high versus low art dyad. Here Salomão, even more radically than in “Ariadnesca,” positions the work in the same field as any mass-culture product and obliterates any trace of the distance between poetry and pop culture. By now it has become a cliché to even mention such a polarity since a hallmark of modernist poetry both in Brazil and the U.S. was precisely the blurring of the two categories by carrying popular references over to the field of poetry. What is unprecedented here is the movement in the opposite direction, one in which literature situates itself in the domain of low art and, at least rhetorically, embraces its commodity status. If there is any doubt of the type of displacement Salomão effects, “One Minute Commercial” resolutely settles the issue. Aptly titled except for its duration (it might take not one but six or seven minutes to deliver), the piece is what a rambling, if incongruous, advertisement for the book. Early on it commands the reader’s attention by trying to define the
product, so to speak, in appealing and accessible terms, although the commercial’s very premise is undermined by its being the penultimate text in *Me segura*. Its hyperbolic, insistent sales pitches escalate from “buy it collaborate with me buy Me segura, recommend it” (103) to “buy it collaborate with the author in the death hour pulling his hair out banging his head against the wall—I’m about to throw a fit. avoid it: buy Me segura” (103). That readers probably have gone through most of the book before they get to “One Minute Commercial” undercuts the urgency of the poet-as-advertiser’s intent. Most likely, in fact, those who get to read the commercial probably own the book already. Adding to the irony, brief and catchy sound bites are not part of this lengthy text refusing to stay on topic. It mixes copious references to pop culture and switches modes of elocution, and is chockfull of utterances rendered acousmatic given their missing attributions. Materials sampled include, for instance, set phrases (“the party is over”); excerpts of song lyrics from local and foreign rock bands (among them Jefferson Airplane’s “Somebody to Love” and Os Incríveis, a Jovem Guarda band whose biggest hit was an album called “Era um garoto que como eu amava os Beatles e os Rolling Stones” and which a few years later allowed its music to be used in military
propaganda); DJ Big Boy's distinctive greeting on the show that revolutionized Brazilian radio by catering to the young and trendy ("Hello Crazy People!"); a voiceover narration for an underground film shot in a favela praising its dweller's panoramic vistas of city: "God, the grace of my still being able to see many things in this life. in this world" (105); and evocative coded references, such as his playful riff on the Caetano Veloso's "Irene." Caetano may sing "Eu não sou daqui, eu não tenho nada," but Salomão appropriates his lyrics and writes "Eu não sou daqui, eu não tenho NAGRA" ("I am not from here, I don't have a NAGRA".) If he lacks the popular recording device, he certainly has the will to bring into the text the overabundant mediated and immediate sounds enveloping him.

"One Minute Commercial," in a Tropicalist fashion consisting upon exploiting contradictions instead of suppressing them, locates itself in a liminal position where it is both what it claims to be and its counterargument, a crass commercial and a critique of commercials simultaneously. In point of fact, all the way through, the text alternates between a parody of a commercial, a pastiche of different genres, and an exposé

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47 Nagra brand tape-recorders "were the de-facto standard sound recording systems for motion picture and single-camera television production from the 1960s until the 1990s" according to a Wikipedia entry.
of the inflation of literary value and the figure of the author. One of the initial voices in the piece, for instance, extols the modernity of Salomão’s endeavor by claiming that like most autobiographical books it follows “the demand for consumption of personalities” (172), Anne Frank’s or a volume of Who’s Who in Brazil, for example. However, even though the first person prevails throughout, the collection hardly discloses details about the author’s autobiography. What we find instead is Salomão’s mockery of marketing slogans when he markets himself with a silly jingle here freely adapted into English: “An image for sale: buy Salomão’s noodles, Salomão’s greens in oodles” (“Uma imagem à venda: comprem o macarrão de Salomão, salada de Salomão”), a deprecatory metaphor for the work, to be sure, since later he talks about a “macrotoxic restaurant” serving “non-integral rice” whose “method of preparation” is the “miserable work in progress” whose ingredients are “crap bullshit stupidity and nonsense” (102).

Furthermore, if a voice in the “commercial,” initially claims that the author’s personal experiences possess a “symptomatic singularity,” it soon undercuts the author figure by making all manners of connections between Salomão’s and other people’s autobiographical narratives and by constantly alluding to what he does as cheap copies
of works by others. The acousmatic, anonymous voice of the PR agent—there is even an alleged quote from the book’s press kit in the poem—argues that the book, in some sense, could be considered not only modern but also “very traditional,” a version of the novels *Lost Illusions* by Balzac and *The House of the Dead* by Dostoevsky in the hands of a barely gifted “lumpendelirious” author. If the reason why these novels are mentioned is not immediately apparent, their basic plotlines indicate the direction of Salomão’s analogy: Dostoevsky weaves fact and fiction in an account of life in a Siberian prison camp, where he actually spent four years, and, in his novel, Balzac tells the story of an aspiring poet’s descent into hack journalism and the Parisian underworld.

Yet, despite the links between these European fictions and Salomão’s actual imprisonment and participation in Rio de Janeiro’s underground, Salomão, as we have seen, constantly calls attention to the dissimilarities between the Brazilian context and the contexts of the different cultural products interwoven in his text. It is as if one voice believed that the text could blur the boundaries between the local and international context, and another one were intent on reminding the reader of the impassable
fault line between Brazil and the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{48} This voice—clearly distinct from the one tracing analogies with Balzac and Dostoevsky’s fiction—laments the underdeveloped world’s “landscape of disintegration” and clearly does not share the hope in progress that historically had bolstered the Brazilian avant-garde’s programs. It might be the warrior’s voice claiming that “it is written in my car: BUGRE [...] The interior goes to the capital” (172), bugre being a pejorative denotation of South American indigenous people. Even if Salomão escapes his own immediate context—and later in the “commercial” he makes a reference to Kerouac’s On the Road by saying that he will copy that book’s premise and “belatedly rewrite relive repeat reedit reprint the reportage ‘penniless saga of the Beats’”—what is in store resists glamorization, it is “the hell of Latin America”:

Groovy Promotion sponsors the pariah and beggar protagonist of the Travels of a Tramp in the Andes. a South Am. panhandler. Amerindicancy. (102)

A curious “commercial” Salomão’s is, refusing to exoticize or inflate the value of the product it is trying to sell and instead deflating it repeatedly until it

\textsuperscript{48} Ron Silliman in a loose entry for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E collected in The New Sentence writes: “Collage is a false democracy” (57). Salomão would certainly agree.
reaches a “de-sublimating end” (101). In his view, the Beat generation’s romanticized defiance of bourgeois values, for instance, once displaced lacks the aesthetic veneer it has in its original context: in pauperized Latin America it is imposed, widespread, and not an alternative. In any case, even if the main plotline of Salomão’s life could slightly resemble the narratives of the lowlife protagonists of the novels by Balzac and Dostoevksy, or even Kerouac’s, its treatment in Me segura could not be more distant from a novelistic one. Salomão, in what appears to be closer to his own authorial voice, forsakes literary illusionism and instead exposes the unoriginality of the procedures at his disposal when writing:

The delirious punctuation and the atomizing construction (through certain suspicious “avant-garde” procedures, unoriginal and outmoded) don’t hide that the author skids the colonialienating myth of the great artist. [...] Notes appropriating authors read, synopses and bookish set phrases, conversations, the hysteria of sensations, the infantile disease of the leftist drop out. a remedy for suffocation. (100-101)

What is noteworthy of his recounting of these different techniques is that he recognizes them as being
classic de-familiarization strategies used by previous vanguards, yet deems them passé and even suspicious. Again, shattering that inherent teleology, he claims his production lacks any value: "as a writer I am nothing" he argues. The only "remedy for suffocation" is to be found in reading and in keeping provisional notes of things read, overheard conversations, and set phrases—none of which have been produced by him. Even when referring to himself as a reader, he denies himself any attributes in that respect as well. Alluding to Pound’s ABC of reading, Salomão sustains that:

I’m but an A-sinine B-rainless C-onfined reader
defying letter by letter the ABC of foolhardiness
until getting to the p of pretentious […] pretentious
of Sousândrade Oswaldrândade Guimarosa in other words
a reader of a precise portion of the Concretists. a
reader of fragments 45 and 81 of the bilingual
Brazilian edition of the Cantos. (101)

Salomão’s critical move in the previous paragraph is essential in understanding the poetic paradigm put forth in Me segura. In belittling himself, he is also failing to show reverence for his predecessors, and here, specifically, for Pound—the pillar of modernism for
Concretists. His scorn is not mere affectation, though. The last line in “One Minute Commercial” is an innocuous-seeming correction stating that what Salomão has read, in the Concrete poets’ Portuguese rendering, is not fragments of Pound’s Cantos 45 and 81, but the entire Canto 45, which concerns usury, and a fragment of Canto 81. The errata appears shortly after a highly unusual list of printed matter labeled by Salomão as “complementary documents providing the critics of Our Classics with guidance/historical information” and including the following:

1 – cover – an article on the stock market
2 – a poster of a stock market magazine
3 – a page of an important stock market newspaper
4 – a poster of an important stock market newspaper
5 – newspaper headlines with the highs and the records of the biggest highs in the daily stock market—the plunges of stocks
6 – studies on the saving habits of the general population—a savings notepad
7 – the synopsis of a jurist’s lecture: the public’s generalized belief that eradicating reckless banditry would justify the Death Squad if it is associated with a conscious or unconscious distrust of the existing penitentiary system – with an
inadmissible disrespect for judicial activity. (106-107)

The list itself makes sense as a paratactical exposé of the close ties between the military, judicial, and economic orders, but it does not reveal how these might be intricately tied to the formation of the literary canon, the nation’s classics referred to by Salomão. It appears as if in the preceding excerpt Salomão attempts to call double attention to the collapsing of reality and the imaginary in mainstream media representations of the Brazilian nation. That is, it is not only that the stock market functions as an index of the self-fulfilling fabrications of a limited segment of society, but that when it is reported in print media it is presented as a veritable sign of the overall economic wellbeing of the nation. By referring to classic works of literature, Salomão might be signaling his awareness of the fact that, similarly, certain foundational fictions, to borrow Doris Sommer’s term, cast representations of national identities and, in doing so, in turn become the literary classics to which those seeking to understand the nation’s character will perpetually return. These fictions, held to be autonomous, are conveniently
perpetuated as classics by the institutional order that, in turn, they tend to support.

Additionally, Salomão makes an analogy between the accretion of value in both the financial and the literary realms. His gesture in this section of “One Minute Commercial” is in keeping with the ideas that Benedict Anderson sustains in *Imagined Communities*—he not only alludes to the speculation intrinsic to the stock market but also to the validation of the conjectural carried out by print media, here newspapers, magazines, and posters multiplying the reality effect. This section juxtaposed to the poems’ ending referring the reader to Pound’s poem on usury, Canto 45, achieve an eloquence and concision that would have been unattainable had Salomão spelled out or narrated his conclusions instead of enacting them.

If Salomão’s vision would seem to coincide with Anderson’s claim that through print media there is “continual reassurance that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (35-36), might we not argue that this is precisely the goal of publicity as well? Let us not lose sight of the fact that Salomão is remarking on the reality effect of print media not only within the pages of a book, but also within a text titled “One Minute Commercial,” which turns out to be hawking the book in
question. After exposing the underlying ties between the validation of imaginary notions through ideological apparatuses such as classic books of literature, to name only one of them, Salomão refuses to end his commercial on a literary note. His rectification of his previous claim to have read an excerpt of Pound’s Canto 45 is entirely lacking in expressive qualities. This corrective move by Salomão, in conjunction with the preceding text, prompts one to think that he has set out to prove that literature, like the stock market, invents literary value where it does not exist. Salomão is aware that decrying this fact would be disingenuous; he cannot critique speculation by uttering a statement that would inevitably and artificially generate “ethical value.” Hence his gesture is a critique of Pound’s ultimately contradictory condemnation of usury in Canto 45:

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with usura [...]
no picture is made to endure nor to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly
with usura, sin against nature,
is thy bread ever more than stale rags
is thy bread dry as paper, [...]
with usura is no clear demarcation [...]
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49 A variation of Ernest Gellner’s claim that “nationalism… invents nations where they do not exist” (6), as cited by Anderson.
Stonecutter is kept from his stone
weaver is kept from his loom
WITH USURA
wool comes not to the market
sheep bringeth no gain with usura (229)

If a discussion of Pound's economic views—which found their basis in C.H. Douglas's *Economic Democracy*—would be out of place here, suffice it to point out those issues that Salomão contests in "One Minute Commercial" both through the poems' utterances and formal devices. As the previous excerpt shows, for the modernist poet there was no difference between what the painter, the stonecutter, the weaver, and the baker produce when usury plays no part in the process. If self-reliance is the alternative to the money market in the Poundian universe, it "entails the construction of a space (the OIKOS) in which man can decide freely what he needs," according to Peter Nicholls in *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing* (58). This freedom ought to characterize not only the oikos but the artistic process as well, one which Pound ingenuously assumes to be disengaged from social relations of production and commodification. Hence he can sustain, in the same canto, that:
If there is one conventional notion that Salomão coherently challenges throughout his book and especially in “One Minute Commercial,” it is the fallacy that art inhabits a space outside or beyond that in which social transactions take place. For Salomão the notion of literary value and capitalist ideology are inextricably linked, and, therefore Pound’s canto 45, despite the equitable values it purports to uphold, represents a contradiction in terms. Salomão’s view of this poem might have been similar to Nicholls’s, for whom Pound’s “handling of his theme is rhythmic and emotional rather than analytical [...]” and meant that he was still “trapped in the aestheticism he was trying to reject” (23-24).

For Salomão too, Pound’s blind spot is more than apparent; poetry and art are as close to usura as any of the trades mentioned in Pound’s canto, if not more so, given the invisibility of the mechanisms bestowing value to art. Salomão keenly avoids putting himself in the position
of the outcast lyric poet who “speaking from his alienated and highly individuated experience, insists that his lyric expression, having escaped from the weight of material existence, evoke the image of a life free from the coercion of reigning practices,” citing Adorno in “On Lyric Poetry and Society” (344-345). Yet Pound’s reaction to the commodification of the modern world aligns him with the lyric model he intends to debunk. Salomão, instead, holds a mirror to the power networks that create classic literature, nationalism, the economic and judicial order, and the stock market, making them converge. Busting open the text’s frame, the best way to rid it of the “value” it has been invested with is to debunk its reality effect at every turn. This explains why the end of the poem Salomão intermittently announces in the last two pages of the book question his utterances’ agency until the poem finally ends. Salomão uncovers the ideological distortion converting Pound’s enduring pictures into the soul’s bread and proves that language, power, and the creation of value are inextricable. Attempting to generate no surplus, he vacates the work and claims his book wrote itself: “UN LIVRE EN TRAIN DE SE FAIRE” (“A book in the process of making itself” (107).
Salomão’s work was absorbed by the machine: his book was a best seller and was reprinted in 2003 as a canonical text of the countercultural era. We have seen that Salomão sought to rectify the inflation of literary value by diminishing both his role as author and the merits of his own production at every opportunity—to him, his work is trash, shit: “Me segura que vou dar um troço apocalipóptico. TRASHico. RetarDADAico” (101). Me segura, in fact, is a performance of its own deflation and consequently that of the literary utopias that led to it: Modernismo, Concrete poetry. It owes its continued critical potency to its unsolvable contradictions: Salomão resignified underdevelopment and devaluation and effectively inserted Me segura into the market channels and the canon by making it pass as a commodity. Did Salomão’s intervention then convert failure into success? How to measure success, if it is predicated on failed utopias? Salomão has left in Me segura ample proof of his unreliability as narrator—what we are left with, in the end, is a form of liar’s paradox.
Chapter 2: Juan Luis Martínez’s La nueva novela: A Pataphysical Workbook

In this chapter I will examine the strategies through which Chilean Juan Luis Martínez (1942-1993) problematized the condition of the printed utterance in La nueva novela (The New Novel) (1977). These strategies perform a double authorial removal, one on the level of the individual works assembled by Martínez, and the other on the level of the works’ constitutive parts: visual or textual materials culled from various printed sources and authored by writers, illustrators, and photographers who go unacknowledged in La nueva novela. The book is divided in sections harkening back to textbooks devoted to different subjects—arithmetic, space and time, zoology, literature, and politics—but its artisanal qualities, the way it combines text and image, and the disparateness of the materials collected in it give it the appearance of a scrapbook or miscellany of found texts.

Some of La nueva novela’s most salient and original attributes relate not only to the degree to which it is based on appropriation, but also to the degree in which Martínez’s utterances blend in with the borrowed materials. This he achieves through mimicry, by making his own utterances resemble the acousmatic, anonymous utterances
found in printed matter, be it paratextual elements such as marketing copy, editor’s notes, bibliographies, and photographic captions, for instance, or the impersonal instructions one finds in textbooks and do-it-yourself manuals.

The materials blend in so effectively that in the context of *La nueva novela*, Martínez makes his own writing appear to have been found just as much as he makes writing by others appear to have been penned by him. Given that a large portion of his sources come from the French literary tradition, his operations have a special redistributive significance, since they help to spread the cultural capital concentrated on international cultural production and also institute an equality between local and foreign texts.

The type of relationship that *La nueva novela* establishes with the reader is also redistributive. Rarely are there texts in the book in which an exchange takes place. More often, the materials on the page function as prompts for the reader to participate in language events or experiences beyond the linguistic. Readers are summoned to interact with them and, through the active engagement of the imagination, generate their own texts or have experiences incommensurable with writing.
In a certain way, *La nueva novela*’s circulation, to this day, parallels the type of relationship that its texts establish with the reader, since traditional exchanges through the market’s impersonal channels are not possible. Given the institutional and logistical obstacles that *La nueva novela*’s publication and circulation first faced, Martínez had to find alternate channels for the book to reach a readership, these will be considered in this chapter as well.

During his lifetime Martínez published two works only: after *La nueva novela*, he produced the book object *La poesía chilena* (Chilean Poetry) (1978), a funereal-seeming box containing a sample of soil from the central valley of Chile in a little plastic bag and photocopies of the death certificates of the “Four Greats” of Chilean poetry—Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, Pablo Neruda, and Pablo de Rokha—as well as of Martínez’s father. The box also contains miniature Chilean flags and a stack of library index cards: the top four feature records for each of these poets’ best-known elegiac poems, while the rest of them are left blank. The context in which this radical, multivalent book object was produced only increases its possible readings. A spinoff of the biblical “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,” it is a lapidary critique of
grand narratives and a quiet declaration, following Adorno, of the death of foundational literature and the impossibility of poetry in the political climate of Chile during the military dictatorship.\footnote{As critic Roberto Merino aptly has pointed out, all of the four poets in Martínez’s \textit{La poesía chilena} had pen names. Vicente García-Huidobro, Lucila Godoy, Neftalí Reyes, and Carlos Díaz Loyola all “negated their paternal last name,” and consequently distanced themselves from the patriarchal order that links the nation, the \textit{patria}, with the familial order. Martínez’s perplexing gesture seems to be both an homage to and a disavowal of both orders.} Martínez’s performative gesture, however, points not to an endgame but is itself a resourceful answer to literature’s exhaustion: the recombination of words, images, and objects open up paths barred to those literary practitioners adhering to purer modes. Martínez has left numerous library index cards blank: there is yet much to write and rewrite. The soil from Chile points, too, to the continuation of the genre’s lifecycle.

Composed between 1968 and 1975, Martínez’s \textit{La nueva novela}—which like \textit{La poesía chilena}, was self-published—is more artist book than poetry book, containing a variety of readymade objects inside, among them a Chinese scroll, a Chilean flag, and fishhooks, to name a few. Not unlike Waly Salomão’s \textit{Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço} discussed in the previous chapter, it is a book traversed by a cacophony of disembodied voices, a deliriously intertextual patchwork of found printed matter as well as literary allusions. It
immediately communicates a rejection of poetic conventions and a systematic questioning of notions of literariness and authorial voice. If the book’s very title warns the reader about the author’s ambivalence toward poetry as a genre, and raises the question of why a collection of text/image poems would be designated as “the new novel,” its cover also troubles the notion of authorship with a gesture that would seem to contemporary readers almost a cliché of writing informed by critical theory (by Foucault, Barthes, and, especially, Derrida): Martínez’s name appears doubled and in both instances between parenthesis and struck-through, under erasure (Juan Luis Martínez, and Juan de Dios Martínez). Which one is the real name? By crossing out both names, Martínez emphasizes his dubious status as the author of La nueva novela and acknowledges his primary approaches to composition: appropriation and quotation. These strategies are so prevalent in La nueva novela that for critic Eugenia Brito the book is a “museum of quotations” in which the cited material loses its “hic et nunc” (27).

In an interview conducted by Erick Polhammer in 1987 that appears in Martínez’s posthumous collection Poemas del otro, the poet famously declared: “My ideal is to author a book for which I have not written anything but which I can
claim as my own” (106). Martínez has not written the entire contents of his book, yet he has carefully compiled, selected, and arranged them, displacing them to a new context. By performing these activities he exercises a particular brand of authorship, not unlike the writers discussed by Kenneth Goldsmith in *Uncreative Writing*—such as Pound in the *Cantos* or Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*—who shift their creative focus “from content to context” (123) and in doing so anticipate the practices of contemporary conceptual poets who shun composition altogether. Similarly, in an interview collected in the posthumous volume *Poemas del otro* Martínez subscribes to a vision of authorship in which “to write is to read and to read is to write,” and “an author is a reader who reads and efficiently transfers certain texts that have not been brought to the fore” (75).

For poet Raúl Zurita, an early collaborator of Martínez, the crossed out names on the cover signal another operation as well: a questioning of the legitimacy of names. Zurita sees Martínez’s move as a performative one underscoring his textual presence, the production of an alternate, unique sign pointing to the author that, in the

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51 Zurita delivered remarks on Juan Luis Martínez, and in particular on *La nueva novela*, on the occasion of a screening of the documentary on the poet *Señales de Ruta* (Dir. Tevo Díaz, 2000). A video of Zurita’s talk can be seen on YouTube.
manner of Borges’s “Borges and I,” asserts him as a self-generating entity within the text, as the text’s production, that is. It is true that Martínez’s striking words through and leaving visible traces of only partial erasures is in keeping with one of the strategies he uses systematically throughout the book: that of saying and simultaneously taking back or denying what he says in order to unsettle the text’s status and highlight, perhaps even dampen, the violence of the naming act at every utterance.

The text/image piece “La grafología” (“Graphology”) (see fig. 2) is perhaps the most direct manifestation of the author’s stance on this issue: the epigraph, from the Tao Teh King, reads “El nombre que puede nombrarse no es el verdadero nombre” (“The name that can be uttered is not the true name”) (91).
The image on the page is of a saw whose teeth spell the word "Martínez;" its caption obliquely providing a context for the interpretation of the picture:

Through disjointed syllables he sought to repeat a name: (Jxuan de Dios). Ah, that, indeed, would have been a true name! but more like a saw stuck on a hidden nail (which the woodworker curses), he could only stammer—painstakingly and choking on the sawdust of his words—the screeching syllables of his last name: (Mar-mar-tí-nnez).
The signifier and signified divide is alluded to twice in “La grafología”: the subject’s praising of the virtues of the name “Jxuan,” whose phonetic spelling tries to replicate the sound of a Chinese word, expresses a longing for a non-Western ideogrammatical writing system that would cancel the arbitrariness of the relationship between word and image. On the other hand, the mention and actual inscription of stuttering in the piece—(Mar-ma-rtí-nnez)—signals the subject’s hesitancy toward names, particularly his own. (Martínez himself was a stutterer, incidentally.) He visually represents the faltering utterance of his name in a manner that is anything but self-assertive, contrasting the precariousness of the body emitting a vacillating, redundant series of sounds with the faultless rationality of the written word and the patriarchal, legal order implicit in surnames. Signaling his awareness of the fact that in print he can only insinuate the actual stuttering vocal performance, he cleverly titles the piece “La grafología,” implying that, unlike typeset words, handwriting links utterances to particular bodies with distinct voices and personality traits. In a footnote to the piece, the author adds: “the presence of that symbol of the saw is of a negative category and can only be explained
as one of the signs that best translates the coercion to which structure subjects modern poetry and art..." (91).

Consequently, Martínez's prowess in La nueva novela consists of releasing poetry from any constraining structure, mainly by refusing to put forth self-contained and definitive texts. On the page rarely do his texts even look like poems. A majority if not all of the works in the book announce themselves as incomplete until the reader carries out the instructions they contain; they point to other texts (footnotes with bibliographical references abound, for instance); or they contain images which are often in friction with the captions or supplementary texts supposedly elucidating them. It is as if each text were a potential, as-of-yet unfulfilled attempt to reach a poem on the brink of happening, a vehicle toward a poem that resists manifesting itself on the page—as if Martínez delivered to the reader the open possibility of a poem that he himself declines to utter. Each page of La nueva novela, then, contains works that function like riddles or puzzles that the reader is invited to figure out. Activated, each page becomes the open stage where the reader interacts and dialogues with the material presented on it—the poem is the eventual language event resulting from this engagement.
It is no wonder that so many pieces in *La nueva novela* actually concern silence (in particular, in the form of the author’s reticence)—the condition on which the openness of the text rests. The poem “La locura del autor” (“The Author’s Madness”) ends with a stanza in which the author ponders the notion of absence:

**c. LA AUSENCIA DE SU OBRA:**

El silencio escucha silencio
y repite en silencio

lo que escucha que no escucha. (92)

*(c. THE ABSENCE OF HIS BODY OF WORK:)*

Silence hears silence
and repeats in silence

what it hears itself not hearing.)

This poem points to the absence or void that poetry makes visible; its rhetorical twists are an integral part of an often metaphysical, often semiotic preoccupation with silence that runs throughout *La nueva novela* which is informed by Blanchot’s notion of poetic language in *The Space of Literature*. For Blanchot, narration and description aim at giving us the presence of things, representing them; in contrast, poetry moves things away, transforming them into their “vibratory, almost-
disappearance" (39). Martínez subscribes to Blanchot’s idea of poetry in which words “are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone” since “they have their ends in themselves” (41), and his approach to the pure poem in La nueva novela is two-pronged: if some texts make palpable an absence of referential meaning, others, the most prevalent, signal a removal of the poetic subject. Martínez, a reader of Mallarmé, surely must have coincided with the French author’s assertion in “Crise de Vers” (1985): “The pure work implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who cedes the initiative to words, mobilized by the collision of their difference....” What is more, however, is that for Martínez pure poetry might also imply the removal of poetry itself, in favor of mere conduits for the poem to happen beyond the page—a poem whose purity, it should be added, depends on its condition of being ineffable, non-utterable.

Martínez’s most direct elaboration on pure poetry as traditionally understood is the poem titled “Observaciones relacionadas con la exuberante actividad de la ‘confabulación fonética’ o ‘el lenguaje de los pájaros’ en las obras de J.P. Brisset, R. Roussel, M. Duchamp, y otros” (“Observations related to the exuberant activity of the ‘phonetic confabulation’ or the ‘language of birds’ in the
works of J.P. Brisset, R. Roussel, M. Duchamp, and others"), which follows a pentagram with musical notation for birdsongs and drawings of singing birds:

a. A través de su canto los pájaros comunican una comunicación en la que dicen que no dicen nada.

[...]

e. Para la naturaleza no es el canto de los pájaros ni su equivalente, la palabra humana, sino el silencio, el que convertido en mensaje tiene por objeto establecer, prolongar o interrumpir la comunicación para verificar si el circuito funciona y si realmente los pájaros se comunican entre ellos

[...] (89)

(a. Through birdsong birds transmit a transmission through which they say they don’t say anything.

[...]

e. For nature it is not birdsong nor its equivalent, the human word, but silence, which turned into a message aims to establish, extend, or interrupt communication
to test whether the circuit works
and whether birds truly communicate amongst
themselves)

The allusions in this essayistic poem are manifold:
one immediately thinks of Saussure’s semiotics; of Valéry’s
definition of poetry as “prolonged hesitation between sound
and sense;” and of Pound’s understanding of the distinction
between melopoeia, poetry built around the musical
properties of words, and logopoeia, poetry in which the
role of words in the poem is determined by their
referential meanings. To the human ear, birdsong may sound
as meaningless music, yet it has a communicative intent
transparent to birds. Birdsong and writing, especially the
writing that Martínez seeks to produce, mirror each other—
they represent a surplus, an aural exuberance. But as
Martínez states in the poem, its condition of possibility
is silence.

For him, silence is integral for meaning to be
assembled, for the meaning-making process to complete
itself. Rejecting logocentrism, the writing he aspires to
and champions—Roussel’s with its double entendres and word
puzzles; Duchamp’s with its puns and palimpsests—might seem
opaque and non-reflective to the uninitiated. Martínez
described himself as a manipulator not of signifieds or meanings, but of signifiers. He included the illustration of a Schnauzer on the book’s title page and colophon. This dog is the guardian of La nueva novela, and his name is Sogol: logos spelled backward. The palindromic operation he performs with the term logos, which he deals with as material, is itself a demonstration of his stance on logocentrism. At the end of the book this reversal comes full circle with the image of the dog appearing again, yet as the photographic negative of the one at the beginning. The dog’s name might appear as non-referential, yet word play in Martínez’s writing, as well as in Duchamp’s and Roussel’s, underscores the plasticity of language and aims, in Mallarmean fashion, to achieve the purity and autonomy of music and the natural world, both which, according to Martínez’s working definition, communicate, primarily, their beingness, polyvalence, and malleability. Strictly speaking, in the symbolic realm, these language games communicate, overall, the possibility of playing with

52 In an interview with María Ester Roblero reprinted in Poemas del otro, Martínez argued, not without a dose of ambivalence in regard to using the verb “manipulate,” the following: “Unfortunately, from a certain point of view, I am a poet who manipulates signifiers. I don’t know if it is worse to manipulate signifieds in the service of particular ideologies” (68).
language, a readymade if there ever was one, and of reversing the overdetermination of the sign.\textsuperscript{53}

Duchamp's readymades, in this sense, are relevant—they do not represent, they communicate their production, their self-evident presence as objects. Silence in poetry, then, is to the utterance what the pedestal or the walls of the exhibition space are to the readymade—both frame the verbal or physical objects in question and resignify them by isolating them from the quotidian context from which they are extracted. It is only within this controlled environment that polysemy can unfold: without silence there is no possibility of feedback and poetic language closes in on itself. Likewise, only when an everyday object is

\textsuperscript{53} The piece "Un problema transparente" on page 41 visually resolves this paradoxical notion. Martínez has covered a rectangle that has been cut out of the page with a strip of Mylar, making the surface of the page itself partially see-through. In keeping with the idea of transparency, the page's verso features the exact same text as the front. The text on page 40 reads: "¿Si la transparencia se observara a sí misma, qué observaría?" ("If transparency observed itself, what would it see?"). It is placed in the same position facing the Mylar as the text on page 43, which in response to the question claims that "La transparencia no podrá nunca observarse a sí misma" ("Transparency will never be able to see itself"). Because of the see-through window on page 41, these two texts face each other. What might be Martínez's intent? If in the realm of literature the notion of language's transparency implies the denial of the opacity or materiality of the medium, here, in contrast, transparency is literalized and made visible. Yet it does not afford the reader a view of anything but the device of transparency itself, the illusion of autonomy that the symbolic helps to produce—the possibility of the medium to conceal itself and produce the illusion of immediacy, that is. Martínez again seems to be alluding to Blanchot's The Space of Literature here: "Language has within itself the moment that hides it. It has within itself, through this power to hide itself, the force by which mediation (that which destroys immediacy) seems to have the spontaneity, the freshness, and the innocence of the origin" (41). Martínez's playful translation of these otherwise abstract and intangible, yet pervasive and fixed linguistic notions onto the physical space of the page proves them to be artifacts.
removed from its immediate context and displayed as art do its functional attributes become subordinated to its aesthetic qualities. Ultimately, the pedestal supporting the readymade and the silence framing the no longer message-bearing utterance (in the form of the white space of the page) display the possibility of an ordinary, anonymous object to morph into an art object, language’s ability to speak itself. The framing, re-contextualizing operation evinces the possibility of altering or suspending the use value or currency of the readymade word or object. This is not enough for Martínez, though. He is interested in going beyond self-reflexivity in order to access alterity. For him writing releases language from its message-bearing function and maximizes its inherent multiplicity through the exploration of its infinite combinatorial possibilities.

In a note to “Observaciones relacionadas con la exuberante actividad…” which appears at the end of the book, Martínez expands on the relationship between birdsong, polysemy, and writing. Consider the following excerpt:

A través del canto de los pájaros, el espíritu humano es capaz de darse a sí mismo juegos de significación en número infinito, combinaciones verbales y sonoras
que le sugieran toda clase de sensaciones físicas o de emociones ante el infinito. (Develar el significado último del canto de los pájaros equivaldría al desciframiento de una fórmula enigmática: la eternidad incesante compuesta de un jeroglífico perfecto, en el que el hombre jugaría a revelarse y esconderse a sí mismo: casi el Libro de Mallarmé). (126)

[Through birdsong, the human spirit is able to achieve for itself a countless number of plays on signification, verbal and aural combinations that may suggest all manner of physical or emotional sensations before infinity. (To unravel the ultimate meaning of birdsong would be comparable to deciphering an enigmatic formula: the endless eternity reconstituted in a perfect hieroglyph in which man playfully reveals and conceals himself: almost Mallarmé’s Book).]

Martínez shares an interest in the infinite combinatory potential inherent in language with Oulipo, the French group of mathematicians and writers of the Ouvroir de littérature potentielle movement founded in Paris by François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau in 1960. How their work got to be known in Chile and how much Martínez
actually knew their writing is uncertain. In *La nueva novela* there is evidence that he was familiar with their manifestos—aiming to expand the forms available to writers through constraints and the application of mathematical formulas to literature—and also with some of the works of Queneau, who before founding Oulipo had been a Surrealist and a member of the College of Pataphysics. The latter, an alleged academic group—its nomenclature and conceptual underpinnings being a send-up of the scientific method—was formed in 1949 by writers and philosophers “interested in exploring ideas deriving from the works of Alfred Jarry” who studied what their admired author “variously described as the science of exceptions, of imaginary solutions” (127). The excerpt from the note to the poem “Observaciones relacionadas con la exuberante actividad de los pájaros” cited above, whose very title rehearses a humorous pseudo-scientific tone, as well as Martínez’s dedication of the poem “La grafología” to Le Lionnais, are indicative of his familiarity with Oulipo’s main precepts, even though he did not actually follow their procedural (and rather rigorous) approach to writing. Each of the works in *La nueva novela* has been composed according to its own distinct logic and not in strict adherence to a rule or formula determined a priori. Regardless, Martínez was highly interested in
achieving a work whose virtual potential could be infinitely multiplied.

Martínez intended to title his book "Pequeña cosmogonía práctica" (Small Practical Cosmogony); when he admitted to his interviewer Erick Polhammer that his ideal was to be author of a book for which he hadn’t written anything, he reasoned that “Mallarmé referred to the book as a ‘small practical cosmogony’” (31). The provisional title of the book, as a matter of fact, is a literal translation of the problem “Petite cosmogenie pratique” appearing within a series of pataphysical exercises and problems titled “Petits Problèmes et travaux pratiques” by Jean Tardieu, the French poet and Theater of the Absurd playwright. The “petits problèmes” constitute a section of Tardieu’s book Un Mot pour un autre (One word for another) (1951), and, actually, nearly all of them were translated by Martínez and featured in the first of the seven sections of La nueva novela, entitled “Respuestas a problemas de Jean Tardieu” [“Answers to Problems by Jean Tardieu”]. Despite the obvious disclosure of the source of the texts in the very title of the first section of the book, the reader is not fully alerted to the fact that most of the texts appearing in it are originally Tardieu’s. Except for differentiating Tardieu’s instructions and problems from
his own responses by setting the latter in bold, Martínez avoids clear attribution of the originals.\textsuperscript{54} That the texts by both authors appear almost indistinguishably interwoven in \textit{La nueva novela}—to the point that even critics have overlooked that the first thirty pages of the book are mainly translations from the French—in fact is in keeping with the radically dialogical quality of Tardieu’s \textit{problèmes}.\textsuperscript{55} Any reader of Tardieu’s is invited to approach his work in the manner of Martínez; the key here is Martínez’s decision to make a poetry book out of his responses. Martínez takes his hypothetical conversation with Tardieu one step further in the second section of the book, “Cinco problemas para Jean Tardieu” (“Five Problems for Jean Tardieu”), by posing, in turn, a new series of pataphysical problems to the French author, his

\textsuperscript{54} Martínez does this regularly throughout \textit{La nueva novela}. In some instances only a few clues point to the authors of the works he cites, often without attribution. An example: a series of poems titled “Poetry Assignments” dedicated to Alejandra Pizarnik, consist of assignments/instructions by Jean Tardieu along with Martínez’s responses to them. One instruction is: “A drunken boat tells what it remembers of its voyages. That boat is you. Tell it in the first person singular” (27). Martínez responds with a line lifted from a poem of Pizarnik’s: “To remember, with words of this world that left from me, a boat, taking me along.” Another excellent example of this has fooled many a critic. The flaps of the book contain two centos titled “Reality I” and “Reality II”; although at the bottom of the poems appears the name of KOBAYAKI, the lines of the poems come from Wallace Stevens, Enrique Lihn, Nicanor Parra, and Louis Aragon.

\textsuperscript{55} Martínez’s treatment of the “petit problèmes” parallels too Tardieu’s repurposing of these texts in the later book of his own: \textit{Le Professeur Froeppel} (1978). This second book is supposedly a compilation of the scholarly papers of an obscure polymath, Prof. Froeppel, discovered and edited by Tardieu.
interlocutor. The dialogue between reader and writer implicit in the act of reading is personalized and made explicit in the book's two first sections, evincing the potency of the conversation between reader and writer, original and translation.

A feature that is particularly striking about the problems that Tardieu poses to his readers and those that Martínez poses back to Tardieu, and consequently to the readers of La nueva novela, is their performativity: they straddle the line between instructions and stage directions which elicit a sense of estrangement from and defamiliarization with the quotidian. Martínez must have been struck by the plotlessness and indeterminacy of Tardieu's poems and plays, language events which the absurdist author bent on exploring the limits of theater and triggering "a new logic of association" (271) deemed "poems for acting" that demonstrated the relativity of language. Fittingly, Martínez's responses to Tardieu are not final, but rather pose yet other questions that the reader is invited to ponder. Consider the following poem, all of which was originally written by Tardieu, and whose translation appears in the first part of La nueva novela:

Martínez met Tardieu in a trip he took to France a few years before his death, and is said to have delivered a copy of La nueva novela to him. Tardieu's response is not documented.
El lenguaje

Tome una palabra corriente. Póngala bien visible sobre una mesa y describála de frente, de perfil y de tres cuartos.

Repita una palabra tantas veces como sea necesario para volatilizarla.

Encuentre un solo verbo para significar el acto que consiste en beber un vaso de vino blanco con un compañero borgoñón, en el café de Los Dos Chinos, a las seis de la tarde, un día de lluvia, hablando de la no-significación del mundo, sabiendo que acaba usted de encontrarse con su antiguo profesor de química y mientras cerca de usted una muchacha le dice a su amiga: "¡Sabes cómo hice que le viera la cara a Dios!"

(24)

Language

Take an ordinary word. Display it visibly on a table and provide front, side, and three-quarter angle descriptions of it.
Repeat a word as many times as vanishing it might require. Analyze the remnants.

Find the single verb that refers to the act of drinking a glass of white wine with a friend from Bourgogne at Los Dos Chinos café, at 6 P.M., on a rainy day, while speaking about the world’s meaninglessness, having just run into your old chemistry professor and overhearing a young girl nearby say to a friend, “You know how I made him see the face of God!”

Or this poem from a subsection titled “El espacio” (Space), where the text in bold represents Martínez’s reply to Tardieu’s question:

Dado un muro, ¿qué pasa detrás?

(Given a wall, what goes on behind?

—There are men building another wall. Before this new wall, return to the question “Given a wall, what goes on behind? —There are other men building another wall before which you ask yourself: GIVEN A WALL, WHAT GOES ON BEHIND? ... GIVEN A WALL, WHAT GOES ON BEHIND?)

Incidentally, Jean Tardieu’s Un Mot pour un autre was published by Éditions Gallimard under the editorship of Raymond Queneau. It is likely that Tardieu’s problem titled “Petite cosmogonie pratique” might itself be an allusion to the Queneau’s early poem Petite cosmogonie portative (1950). La nueva novela is studded with references to both Queneau and Tardieu: both of them, besides a friendship, shared an anti-Surrealist sentiment and an aversion to the first person.

Martínez’s “Pequeña cosmogonía práctica” is also the title of a succinct manifesto-like piece appearing at the

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57 Petite cosmogonie portative (1950) predates Queneau’s Oulipian endeavors yet still follows strict formal constraints: it is written in alexandrines, France’s heroic verse, and constitutes a hyperbolic rewriting of Lucretius’s De Rerum Natura, which narrates the origin of the universe as beginning with the random swerving of atoms (the clinamen) instead of the act of will of a divinity. Accordingly, in Queneau’s poem, which in the essay “Science Into Poetry” Marjorie Welsh describes as “a kind of encyclopedia whose subject was the emergence of life from chaos through the coagulation of biologically informed physics and the repeated emergence of newer life,” the Earth gives birth to itself. This is relevant in the context both of Tardieu’s Un mot pour un autre and Martínez’s appropriation of some of its parts, given both works’ rejection of the extra-literary in the signifying process.
end of the section “Respuestas a problemas de Jean Tardieu.” The piece begins with a translation of Tardieu’s instruction to “build a coherent world out of nothing” and “make a drawing” of it taking into consideration that “I = you” and that “EVERYTHING is POSSIBLE” (33). In response, Martínez offers two solutions to the problem:

Solución 1.

PÉRDIDA DEL OBJETO LIBIDINOSO
DESEO DEL YO DE RECUPERAR EL OBJETO PERDIDO
IDENTIFICACIÓN DEL YO CON EL OBJETO PERDIDO
IN MEMORIAM † (33)

Solution 1.

LOSS OF THE LOVE OBJECT.
DESIRE OF THE SELF TO RECOVER THE LOST OBJECT.
SELF’S IDENTIFICATION WITH THE LOST OBJECT.
IN MEMORIAM †

In the first solution he lists basic Freudian psychoanalytic axioms: the perceived loss of the love-object is followed by the desire to recover it. This, in turn, leads to the self’s identification with the love-object. The subject identifies with this loss and attains self-definition through it to such an extent that the
outcome of the process, necessarily, is death. Hence the slightly humorous “In Memoriam” that concludes the axioms. Yet Martínez offers an alternative to the doom of the first solution to the problem of building a coherent world on the basis of nothingness in a comic strip constituting solution number two. This solution bears the title of Martínez’s book (La nueva novela) in parenthesis, indicating, therefore, that the comic strip tells the story of its origin: a bald man contemplates a portrait of his beloved while holding a gun in his right hand; he points the gun to his head but then puts it down and stares at the portrait once more. The strip reveals the man’s hesitation; on second thought, he shoots the portrait (representation) and spares himself.

Who is the beloved here? If lyric poetry is the genre through which the poet addresses the desire for the lost or never attained beloved, Martínez coherently explodes the genre in a piece that skirts the lyric tradition’s conventions and sets the tone for the type of text combining word and image as well as high and low registers so distinctive of La nueva novela. Yet the hallmark of the book is also present in this brief text: the initial instructions for the reader, as mentioned before, include the premise that “I = YOU.” The equation presents an
interesting dilemma. Just who is this “you”? One might be tempted to think it is the beloved in the portrait, yet the comic strip makes clear that the woman is absent, her very absence is represented in the framed picture—she, per force, can only be a third person. The second person addressed in the equation cannot be anyone but the reader, who, upon setting eyes on the text in question, is instantly summoned to participate in its construction. The comic strip’s character blowing up the picture frame with the portrait of the loved one enacts the elimination of the third person. The text allows only for the interplay between the alternating “I” and “you” of the text—that is, the author and the reader whose roles are indistinct not only because the pronouns addressing them are, by definition, shifters, but because, as we have mentioned before, the content itself of a significant part of the texts in La nueva novela appear in the form of instructions for the reader. The coherence of the world the text calls for is ensured: the text is performed anew every time each reader activates it, pointing only to the drama that is being enacted on the page.

Furthermore, given that the phrase “small practical cosmogony” encapsulates references to such a specific literary tradition going from Mallarmé to Queneau—the ex-
Surrealist, pataphysician, and founder of Oulipo—to the absurdist Tardieu, Martínez’s borrowing of it also can be interpreted as the strategic move of a marginal subject to insert and position himself within the center’s lineage. Tardieu’s very proposition “I = YOU” points to the equivalence and non-hierarchical relationship between author and reader, at the level of the individual, or at a broader cultural level in terms of the center and periphery. The politics of the text in both Tardieu and Martínez shatter such divides and enact an inclusive model where the approach to tradition is a do-it-yourself one denoting both independent, self-managed production and also the emulation of a template (as when one copies sewing patterns in a magazine, for instance).

Critics have failed to trace connections between the nouveau roman and Martínez’s book, yet there actually is a great degree of correspondence between Alain Robbe-Grillet’s lineaments for the new novel in *For the New Novel: Essays on Fiction* and the strategies deployed in *La nueva novela*. If Robbe-Grillet advocates for the total subjectivity of the new novel, the puzzles and instructions for the reader that Martínez puts before the reader, despite their pseudo-scientific and impersonal tone, cannot be solved but subjectively. In the aforementioned interview
conducted by Erick Pohlhammer, after being asked if indeed he had described *La nueva novela* as “perfectly objective perfect subjectivity,” Martínez admitted that he always tried to express himself “in a very objective way about subjective sensations.” Similarly, Robbe-Grillet advocates for a novel in which illusionistic representation is cancelled by the narrator’s reports on what the eye perceives, on what preoccupies his mind: “the book reports nothing but his experience, limited and uncertain as it is. It is a man here, now, who is his own narrator, finally.”

(139) Time is experienced phenomenologically, not chronologically, and therefore there is no accumulation: Robbe-Grillet’s new novel unfolds in the present tense indicative, which parallels cinema’s perpetual present. For him, meaning can only be assembled through the active practice of memory and the imagination. The adjective, so decisive in lyric poetry, is shunned from the space of the new novel since it presupposes symbolic accrual and a property system: Robbe-Grillet argues it “attempted to unite all the inner qualities, the entire hidden soul of things. This word functioned as a trap in which the writer captured the universe in order to hand it over to society” (24). The French author sees more connections between writing and property systems: “Not only do we no longer
consider the world as our own, private property, designed according to our needs and readily domesticated, but we no longer even believe in its ‘depth’. (24) Depth would be but a textual illusion always presupposing dominion over a territory that the text has managed to articulate coherently.

Without explicitly admitting to a similar distaste for adjectives, but certainly rejecting depth, Martínez shuns descriptions and instead sets the conditions for readers to focus on the subjective experience of reading. The texts in La nueva novela are fundamentally incomplete without the reader’s participation, and their very format guarantees multiple ways of responding to them. The page ceases to function as backdrop for the content dispensed and instead becomes the stage for an event in which the reader plays the lead role. Partly owing to the book’s structure, to engage with a single page of La nueva novela does not require reading the material prior to it. With a few exceptions articulating precisely a meta-commentary on sequentiality, each work’s completion is independent of the

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58 Martínez performs a demonstration of the fallacy of the notion of literary depth in a poem he titles “El cementerio marino” (“Marine Cemetery”) in a nod to Valéry. This poem includes a black box in which is printed an inverted version of Nerval’s poem “El desdichado.” Nerval’s poem is printed correctly in the recto page, so in “El cementerio marino” it appears as if the page were transparent and we were seeing the poem’s backside. Martínez tells us he is presenting us with an “absolutely flat poem, a text without any other meaning beyond its own surface” (30).
material preceding or following it; the lack of sequential logic of the pieces prevents accrual from occurring. Of course one could say that most poetry collections have a similar non-sequential structure; what distinguishes Martínez’s book, however, is these issues’ thematization.

In a summary of critical studies appearing in Juan Luis Martínez: El juego de las contradicciones (1998), Patricia Monarca explains that Enrique Lihn and Pedro Lastra’s reading identifies the main strategies by which Martínez overcomes “the linearity of articulated verbal language” (32) in La nueva novela: “the superposition of linguistic fragments and visual images, and more radically, the inclusion of literally blank spaces and pages” (33). The presence throughout the book of discrete, unrelated instructions for the reader constitutes another infallible strategy to bypass linear language and its implicit articulation of sequential time, given that the completion of the instructions is always in the realm of the virtual.

Consider the piece called “La página siguiente” (“The Next Page”). Below a photograph of cyclists seen from above, the following caption and instructions appear:

La distancia se aleja de nosotros para seguir siendo ella misma.
a. Suponga que los ciclistas que observa en la fotografía viajan a una velocidad promedio de 40 Kms./Hr.

b. Calcule cuántos Kms. han recorrido desde el instante que usted tomó este libro.

c. Calcule cuántos Kms. más recorrerán hasta el instante que usted deje u olvide este libro. (58)

(Distance moves away from us
To continue being itself.

a. Suppose that the cyclists in the photograph travel at an average speed of 40 km/hr.

b. Estimate how many kilometers they have traveled from the moment you picked up this book.

c. Estimate how many more kilometers they will travel until the moment you put down or forget this book.)

Whoever reads these somewhat absurd, yet plausible, instructions is forced to return the cyclists depicted in the picture to the context in which the photograph was taken: one instantly imagines them traveling at an average speed of 40 km per hour regardless of whether the second part of the instructions can be carried out. The
instructions, delivered without any interference on the part of Martínez that might distract the reader’s focus, manage to activate the image made literal but also the page itself. First, the fact that the type size decreases with the mention of distance moving away from the reader brings perspective to the forefront: it is as if distance were actually moving further away from the reader/viewer, who, rightly so, is assumed to be stationed in a fixed position. Yet the perspective of the reader of the instructions conflicts with that of the cyclist’s viewer, who is seeing them from above. The piece requires that the reader engage in both activities—seeing and reading—and, fittingly, Martínez affords the reader multiple vantage points. Thus, the surface of the page is dynamized, it moves before the reader’s eyes. Perhaps for this reason a cryptic note of caution is hinted at in the piece’s dedication (which, incidentally, appears slanted) to Henry Arthur Case, a 12-year-old American schoolboy who, having lost his balance, fell out of the first floor of the leaning tower of Pisa in 1975. The piece is cleverly titled “La página siguiente” (“The Next Page”) and readers are dizzyingly prompted to think of the cyclists’ travel in terms of the time span of their flipping through the pages of the book: cyclists’ travel parallels the readers’ passage through the space
within *La nueva novela*’s front and back covers. If Martínez urges readers to look back and think about how long they’ve been holding the book, he also propels them to keep moving forward, onto the next page.

Contributing to the reader’s spatial disorientation, the text/image piece following the one entitled “The Next Page,” is logically called “La página anterior” (“The Previous Page”). It begins with an appropriate epigraph from Ionesco’s diaries: “The past is behind us and the future ahead of us. We cannot see the future; we see the past. Yet, curiously, we lack eyes on our backs” (59). Here, in “The Previous Page,” to the estimates of the distance that the cyclists have been traveling mentioned in the previous page, Martínez adds the rate at which the tower of Pisa is leaning (1 cm per year) and the speed of Henry Arthur Case’s calamitous descent. Readers are asked to calculate how much more the tower of Pisa will lean and how many more kilometers the cyclists will have traveled by the time they’ve put down the book and forgotten about Henry Arthur Case. A clipping of a newspaper article on the schoolboy’s death is glued vertically alongside the reproduction of the tower.

Poignantly, the temporal and spatial discrepancies between the circumstances of the reader and the subjects
depicted in both “The Next Page” and “The Previous Page”—
the cyclists, Henry Arthur Case, the tower—are eliminated
by the author’s instructions. Time and space are collapsed
on the page. As is the case for all the materials
juxtaposed in a collage, they all become, if only
symbolically, simultaneous. This simple device abolishes
linear time and heightens the book’s insistence as an
object to engage with in the perpetual present of its
unfolding at the moment of reading. The readers’ active
participation in the exercises that Martínez prompts them
to perform, regardless of the specificities of anyone’s
particular biographical circumstance, contributes to the
book’s constantly in-the-making meanings to unravel.

The most representative examples of this device
securing the book’s unfolding in the perpetual present
appear on pages 61 and 99 of the book. Very much in
dialogue with Cortázar’s Rayuela (Hopscotch), each page
displays text/image compositions titled, respectively, “La
Alongside an incomplete strip of photographs of a group of
people’s bare feet pointing in the same direction appear
captions indicating the different locations within the book
toward which the depicted subjects are heading or have
headed over. A typical caption reads: “B. Las personas que
pueden observarse en este cuadro regresaron sólo minutos antes que usted tomara este libro. Ellas venían de leer las notas del final y luego de haber estado detenidas durante varios días en la página 99.” (“B. The people featured in this figure came back to this page minutes before you took this book. They’ve returned from reading the endnotes and being detained for a few days on page 99”) (61). Whenever there appears an empty picture box, the reader is told that the subjects have gone to a different page where they might be awaiting the reader’s arrival: “A. En este cuadro hubo personas que ya no es posible encontrar en esta página, pues ellas se dirigen a presenciar los acontecimientos de la página 99” (“A. This figure once featured people who are impossible to locate on this page now, since they are headed to witness the events taking place on page 99”) (61).

These compositions are perfect illustrations of the paradoxes of verbal and visual representation: the photographs necessarily show us still images of moving bodies, yet their juxtaposition produces the cinematic illusion of movement. However readers know nothing of these subjects inhabiting the book by virtue of their visual representation only—there is no story attached to them except that of their being tethered to the surface of the page, to the book object. As characters they are as fluid
and in transit as they could possibly be, and, needless to say, are at the mercy of an exceedingly unreliable narrator: if readers are told to go to page 99 to look for them, they’re not to be found there at all: “D. Las personas que usted ya no encuentra en este cuadro se han alejado rápidamente de esta página en dirección a la página 61. (Si usted ha leído ordenadamente este libro debería haberlas encontrado en alguna página intermedia).” (“D. The people whom you can’t find anymore in this figure have left this page and are rushing to page 61. [If you’ve read this book in an orderly fashion, you must have encountered them somewhere between that page and this one]) (99). In keeping with the devices that the author uses to produce the illusion of simultaneity—like that in the composition containing the photograph of cyclists—, Martínez also makes himself present and, to be sure, equally absent in “La página 61” and “La página 99”: “E. Las intenciones del (autor) eran esperar al lector en este cuadro, pero habiéndose el lector atrasado demasiado en su lectura, (el autor) ya se encuentra nuevamente en la página 61, esperando a un siguiente lector, que más rápido en su lectura, alcance a encontrarlo en esta página”. (“E. The [author’s] intention was to wait for the reader to arrive at this figure, but given that she has fallen behind in her
reading, [the author] is again on page 61, awaiting the next reader, who hopefully will be faster and will be able to catch up with him on this page”) (99).

The impact of Martínez’s strategies transcends the realm of representation—if the characters in this “novel” resist stillness, and therefore absorption, the subjectivity of readers as they inhabit the ever-shifting terrain of the book is itself fluid, always in transit, and in the process of actualizing itself. This book does not posit a utopia devoid of contradictions, however: the same impulse that frees subjectivity and prevents it from becoming static violently threatens it at every turn, precluding it from integrating itself, forcing it to remain fragmentary and inchoate. The characters in La nueva novela hide from the scrutinizing gaze of the reader and are mysteriously detained or confined to certain inaccessible regions. Mirroring the paranoid political climate of Chile in the 1970s and ‘80s, in La nueva novela informants cannot be trusted, subjects are protected or repressed; they are puppets; they fall out of unstable constructions, fade into oblivion, are denied a discourse as subjects. As a matter of fact, when not trapped on the page, they are confined to the realm of nonbeing, like the Cheshire cat to which Martínez devoted a number of poems in the book: “The cat’s—
body is immersed up to its neck/ in the ‘infinity of nonbeing’” (struck through in the original) (78).

In the majority of his instruction pieces, Martínez adopts the acousmatic, impersonal voice of institutional authority that, as we saw in the previous example, cannot but help prodding the reader. Yet impersonality and the removal of authorial voice take another form in La nueva novela as well, and manifest themselves especially in the many texts comprised of acknowledged and unacknowledged citations and found texts and images. The very beginning of La nueva novela features three highly charged texts lifted from other publications. The first is a double inscription taken from a copy of the Antología del verdadero cuento en Chile (Anthology of the True Chilean Short Story) (1938). The volume’s controversial author, Miguel Serrano, an occultist thinker and diplomat who professed a belief in Esoteric Hitlerism, first dedicates the copy to the Count of Keyserling, a Lithuanian philosopher who was also a Nazi sympathizer. The verbose dedication, from 1939, seems all the more preposterous since the anthology was never delivered to the count: “Usted es uno de los pocos europeos que ha adivinado nuestra distancia y nuestra diferencia. Es también porque es más hombre, es decir, menos filósofo que la mayoría de los occidentales” (“You are one of the few
Europeans to have deduced our distance and our difference. It is also because you are more of a man, that is, less of a philosopher than the majority of Westerners”). A decade later, the same copy of the book was given and inscribed to a man named Carlos Ugalde, whom with Serrano acknowledges to have shared “acontecimientos que han sido tan fundamentales para nuestras vidas” (“events that have been fundamental in our lives”). Besides the lifted inscriptions, Martínez includes as a footnote an incomplete quotation from an unacknowledged source that reads: “El clima psicológico que envuelve a Chile es denso y trágico. Una fuerza irresistible tira hacia el abismo e impide que ningún valor…” (“The psychological climate surrounding Chile is dense and tragic. An irresistible force pulls toward the abyss and prevents any value from...”). The grim tone of the passage appears to comment on the repressive climate endured by society during the military dictatorship, but it is also eerily in keeping with Serrano’s introductory text to the selection of Chilean stories he compiled in the 1930s, as the following excerpt demonstrates: “El artista de nuestra generación –y en general– vive una vida de perro negro, en desconsideración, en vejaciones económicas y espirituales, en Santiago de
Chile” 59 ("The artist of our generation—and in general—lives a black dog’s life, amidst inconsiderateness and economic and spiritual strife, in Santiago de Chile"). Overall, in the introduction to the compilation, Serrano neglects to discuss any of the works it contains on the basis of their literary attributes and instead advocates for a libertarian society comprised of Nietzschean supermen for whom class struggle and political representation via the party system is useless. It also claims that short stories, in their finiteness, are intrinsically Chilean: Chile’s geography and landscape force its secluded inhabitants to imagine that there is nothing beyond the mountain ridges encircling the national territory, to imagine Chile itself as a monad. The beyond is an invention, which makes Chile a particularly auspicious ground for the fabrication of constantly interrupted fictions which, according to Serrano, seldom sustain themselves long enough to become novels—hence Chile’s being fertile ground for short fictions.

59 Incidentally, Serrano’s entire introduction to the Antología del verdadero cuento en Chile can be found at a website for Chilean skinheads: <http://www.estirpeoirac.es.tl/Antologia-del-Verdadero-Cuento-en-Chile.htm>. Regardless of Serrano’s problematic politics, Martínez openly acknowledged his admiration for the writer, and separated his political views from his literary achievements. Contradictory as it may seem, it is coherent with the general indeterminacy permeating Martínez’s oeuvre.
The inclusion of these dedications in La nueva novela almost proves Serrano’s point on the country’s isolation, since Martínez must have found them in a copy of the Antología del verdadero cuento en Chile that never having reached its first intended recipient was recycled and then, in turn, cast aside by, or never delivered, to its second recipient. This inclusion also adds another variety of found text to the different types that Martínez displaces to the context of La nueva novela: besides printed matter already endowed with a certain degree of homogeneity and anonymity through typesetting, he borrows handwritten inscriptions intended to evoke the author’s physical presence more vividly than his or her name printed on the book’s cover and title page. (Serrano’s inscriptions are typeset and not photographically reproduced in La nueva novella, however.) That Serrano’s dedication appears where one might expect La nueva novela’s own dedications to appear only makes Martínez’s hide-and-seek and his desire to upend literary conventions all the more apparent.

The dedication page in La nueva novela is followed by an equally unexpected collage-based piece titled “El eterno retorno” (“The Eternal Return”) which also recycles found materials, yet this time, anonymous, acousmatic ones: it combines clippings of a pair of mail-order
forms/advertisements most likely found in American publications and a supplementary bibliography in fine print (see fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Page 7 of La nueva novela.

Upon reading the second mail-order form—for a pamphlet of anti-Marxist propaganda by Richard Wurmbrand titled Was Karl Marx a Satanist?—we realize it echoes the paranoid views of Serrano. Its most sensationalist portion reads: "Was Marx a member of a London based Satanist Sect? Were hymns of praise to the Devil sung in his home? Why atheism
is the key to Marxist philosophy!” (unnumbered). It speaks to the context in which La nueva novela was originally published; we know all too well that communism was vilified at the time. By exposing a verisimilar, extreme example of his demonization and refraining from commenting on it at all, Martínez leaves the question of whose views he shares open; in a way, the “Was Marx a Satanist?” mail-order form mirrors the viewpoints and biases of the reader. If the difference between Martínez’s views and those espoused in the anticommunist propaganda might seem obvious to initiated readers, to the right-wing elite and censors, as well as to communist-fearing masses, Wurmbrand’s hysterical rhetoric would have seemed reasonable and perhaps even an unbiased proof of Marx’s evil. Appropriating the mail-order form and presenting it without any commentary except a bibliographic note which itself might have been displaced from another text allows Martínez’s stance to remain indeterminate.

The second mail-order form in “El eterno retorno”—for posters featuring either the classic portrait of Rimbaud by Étienne Carjat or a picture of cyclists—is more confounding than the first. Customers who might wish to acquire the posters are instructed to send the mail-order form along with a check for $2.50 to a business on Perry Street in New
York, while those seeking to purchase the anti-Marxist pamphlet are asked to send $1 (or a $1.75 for a cassette tape) to Diane Books in Glendale, California (the press that indeed published the Wurmbrand’s book).

Martínez’s collage raises fundamental issues that recur in *La nueva novela*. It illustrates Marx’s dictum that history is destined to repeat itself, first as tragedy and then as farce, first and foremost. Yet most strikingly it also invokes the market, and not the market in general, but a market where books (*Was Marx a Satanist?*) and recycled cultural symbols (the contemplative, neutered image of the poète maudit Rimbaud) are the commodities repeatedly traded and re-circulated via the serial production afforded by the printing press. Rimbaud’s rejection of bourgeois sensibility is deactivated as much as his poetry is obliterated, overshadowed by his iconic image, one so palatable that members of the very same class against which his poetry erected itself might find in good taste to have adorn the walls of their homes. Rimbaud’s “I Am Other” ominously continues to access different types of otherness—even the most contrary to its original spirit—given its vertiginous circulation and consequent re-contextualizations. Martínez speaks about the removal of the author that Rimbuad’s “I Am Other” effects and points
to the acousmatic condition of language in print in his written answers to a set of questions that the editors of the magazine Lo had sent him in the early '90s. He wrote, apropos of the poètes maudits: "After The Flowers of Evil no modern poet attempts to write poetry about their personal experience. The poet becomes a tool so that language can speak or write itself. Rimbaud's affirmation making the poet and language analogous—'I Am Other.' [...] Poets have always been keenly aware that it is language that writes them, that they will pay a high price for this complimentary gift" (101).

This dynamic is also present in the anti-Marxist propaganda of which Martínez gives us an example in the mail-order form for Was Marx a Satanist? Marx's views are erased, what speaks through the form, and of course the book in question, is the commodification of the suspicion toward them. Such views are spun from being the result of a valid critique of a property system to a fanatical manifestation of his superstitious belief system (a rationale that, curiously, parallels Marx's understanding of the role of religion in a capitalist society).

Another salient issue a propos of "El eterno retorno," of course, is that by invoking not only the market but

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60 Martínez never returned these answers to the editors. They are included in the posthumous collection Poemas del otro.
academic conventions as well (those dictating footnote usage), Martínez underscores the fact that the paratext is also a part of the text and dismantles the fiction of literature’s autonomy, and doubly so. By recycling the mail-order forms, he announces, even before we get to the book’s table of contents, that recycling is a key component of his practice, therefore proposing a palimpsest-like model of production that goes against the capitalist myth of the blank page. He also exposes literature’s desire to be consumed, so to speak, its desire to reach an audience with whom to establish contact, and the channels regulating such consumption. The potential reader of Wurmbrand, for instance, has encountered the mail-order form while reading (a magazine, perhaps), and, if the marketing copy has done its job effectively, will send money to the press in order to read Was Karl Marx a Satanist? But let us not forget the supplementary reading list appearing in the footnote: “El eterno retorno” fully acknowledges that the market and academia are the sites of encounter (and perhaps mis-encounter) for authors and readers, yet, at the same time—and this is the key operation here—it cleverly invalidates the market’s logic by plagiarizing the material and canceling its marketing potential. Once these mail-order forms are transferred to a different medium, the context
for their use and interpretation has shifted to such a
degree that they no longer retain their operational status.

It does not invalidate academic discourse however, despite the seeming incongruity between the footnotes and the clippings, since both the Nietzschean title of the piece and two books mentioned in the footnote point the reader to texts that serve to elucidate Martínez’s gesture. In particular one of these texts, George D. Thomson’s “Marxism and Poetry,” from 1945, is meant to offset the rhetoric of the blurb for Wurmbrand’s book—Thomson was a Classics scholar whose Marxist readings of Greek dramas had earned him international notoriety. It is particularly relevant that the “early writings” utilized by Wurmbrand in *Was Karl Marx a Satanist?* as proof of Marx’s devil-worshipping activities are his unfavorably received early poems and the play *Oulanem* (an anagram of Emmanuel).

Wurmbrand’s outrageous claims go as far as to argue that “Marx abandoned poetry for a career in revolution in the name of Satan against a society which had not appreciated his poems. This is conceivably one of the motives for his total rebellion” (18). One wonders whether Martínez ever actually laid eyes on Wurmbrand’s book and chose to actually comment on his ludicrous argument precisely in a book of poems. What is certain is that both mail-order
forms point to revolutionary figures who, confronted with poetry’s inability to effect change at both the individual and societal levels, chose to stop writing it. In this sense the academic reference to Marxism and poetry serves to communicate something that Martínez might deemed either risky or unnecessary to articulate himself. Regardless, the ghost of poetry’s rebellion is a persistent one. “El eterno retorno,” besides announcing the recycling of found materials that will ensue throughout La nueva novela, is also a comment on itself. Those same images of Rimbaud and Marx reappear later on. The penultimate piece of the book is titled “El poeta como Fantômas (El autor) como Rouquine” (“The Poet as Fantômas [The author] as a redhead gal”) (see fig. 4) and consists of a WANTED poster including those same photos of Marx and Rimbaud. A note on the serial killer Fantômas—the “man of a thousand masks,” protagonist of the French crime fiction novels published from the 1910s onward—reads as follows: “La imaginación burlona y pintoresca de Fantômas pudo encontrar en el exceso mismo de su vulgaridad, un valor agresivo y que adquiere en esta página y en las siguientes su máximo poder en la expresión exacerbada de la impotencia literaria” (“The sardonic and picturesque imagination of Fantômas could find, in its own excessive vulgarity, an
aggressive value that achieves its maximal power, here and in the following pages, in the exacerbated expression of literary impotence") (145). The conflation of Fantômas, Marx, Rimbaud, and the language in the WANTED poster offering a "$2,000 REWARD for information leading to the arrest of" someone whose names and aliases have been crossed out and rendered illegible are a cunning joke on the notions of identity that Martínez, ever masking himself as author figure, explodes throughout La nueva novela. Poignantly the piece is a self-deprecating acknowledgment of the ultimate impotence or lack of consequence of the subversions that occur merely at a symbolic level.

Fig. 4. Page 145 of La nueva novela.
The last piece of the book is another mordant text/image composition titled "La nueva novela: El poeta como Superman" ("The New Novel: The Poet as Superman") (see fig. 5). Again, the pictures of Marx and Rimbaud appear, yet here they are grafted, so to speak, onto drawings of bodies: Marx's is glued to the body of Superman (surely a nod to Nietzsche and Serrano), and Rimbaud's to the body of a naked woman. The collage's caption is revelatory: "Superman se hizo extremadamente popular gracias a su doble y quizás triple identidad: descendiente de un planeta desaparecido a raíz de una catástrofe, y dotado de poderes
prodigiosos, habita en la Tierra: primero bajo la apariencia de un periodista, luego de un fotógrafo, y por último, tras las múltiples máscaras de un inquietante y joven poeta chileno, que renuncia incluso a la propiedad de su nombre, para mostrarse como un ser a la vez tímido y agresivo, borroso y anónimo. Este último es un humillante disfraz para un héroe cuyos poderes son literal y literariamente ilimitados” (“Superman became extraordinarily popular thanks to his double and perhaps triple identity: having descended from a planet that disappeared due to a catastrophe, and being bestowed with prodigious powers, he dwells on Earth: first under the guise of a journalist, then a photographer, and, finally, behind the multiple masks of a young and disconcerting Chilean poet who even renounces the property of his name in order to show himself as a being both shy and aggressive, blurry and anonymous. [This last disguise is a humiliating one for a hero whose powers are literally, and literally, unlimited]”) (147). No text in the book speaks more eloquently about Martínez’s penchant for assuming multiple voices and identities, of course resulting in the blurring of his own, in La nueva novela. One could even argue that the guises this alien being admits to have taken—of a
journalist, a photographer, and a poet—relate as well to Martínez’s procedures in the book, as we shall see.

As one of Martínez’s primary aims is the redistribution of symbolic wealth, he can be said to share both Superman’s and Marx’s goals. Rimbaud’s reappearance, on the other hand, represents the flipside of this longing, a shunning of societal values, and an affirmation of individual freedom and art for art’s sake. Yet these goals are neither unambiguously daring nor heroic, as the prosecutorial register of the WANTED poster would have readers believe. The tone of the last piece of the book is ultimately defeatist: although he has “unlimited powers,” as the passage quoted above reveals, the poet-cum-revolutionary also admits to being but another nostalgic modern man “que aunque se sabe débil y limitado, sueña rebelarse un día como un ‘personaje excepcional’, como un ‘héroe’” (“who despite knowing himself to be weak and limited, dreams to reveal himself one day as an ‘exceptional figure,’ as a ‘hero’) (147).

Read in unison, “The Poet as Fantômas (The author) as a redhead gal” and “The New Novel: The Poet as Superman” cast authorial ambition in an ambivalent light, capturing both the ambitiousness of revolutionary aims and their disarming, caricaturesque failure beyond the scope of the
symbolic. If heroism is out of the realm of the author’s possibilities, then the option is a scaled-back, micro-level approach concerning discrete exchanges with the reader. Hence *La nueva novela*’s refusal to sustain the fiction common to most lyric poetry of utterances emitted in a private, intimate space, which the reader is privy to overhear. *La nueva novela*’s reader is actively summoned to the performative spaces opened up in the book’s every page, whose dialogical materials depend entirely on the encounter with a readership. This might be another reason why Martínez chose to include Serrano’s dedications and the mail-order forms at the beginning of the book. These opening works represent two opposite ways in which a book may circulate: hand-to-hand, via personal connections, through a gift economy, or impersonally, through the channels of the market. In either case, however, the presence of the beckoned reader is required for the actualization of the page’s inscriptions or for the completion of the transactions that they signal.

A propos of the economy of *La nueva novela*, palpably Martínez rejects both the notion of cultural capital as private property and of cultural capital as finished product. This produces particular economies of meanings, as indicated in a statement by Nelly Richard quoted in the
essay “El texto en ruinas: La política del reciclaje en La nueva novela” by Laura García Moreno: “In La nueva novela we have [...] the pieces of an economy of sense which are no longer valid, they either have relinquished their role or their function as services have degenerated.” (77)

These discarded pieces do not add up, their disparate ness prevents the accumulation required to produce the type of meanings that tie everything together retroactively, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the third section of La nueva novela, titled “Tareas de aritmética” (“Arithmetic Assignments”). The four text/image works comprising it—a sum, multiplication, subtraction, and division—partake of the spirit of Surrealist games and deliberately unfinished haikus, yet their linguistic economy is a much more restrained one, as communicative intent seems to be suppressed to the point of impenetrability. In them, non-verbal images, on the one hand, and on the other isolated noun phrases coexisting rather than being subordinated to the logic that their articulation to other parts of speech would impose on them. What is more, if there is a logic behind the seemingly absurdist, pataphysical assignments in this section of the book, it is a difficult one to surmise—and should not the logic inherent in basic mathematical operations be rational
and transparent to the point that it be perceived as self-evident?

Martínez’s assignments are governed by an opaque, arbitrary reasoning that resists being induced. His authorial intervention in “Tareas de aritmética” is reduced to literally cutting and pasting images and emulating that same disjointed effect with the verbal phrases that he uses. They seem to be aimed at signaling the incommensurability of signifiers and signifieds, of the indexical and the referential realms, all the more patent when it comes to numbers and their role in scientific discourse. Numbers manifest science’s contradictions: as signifiers, they are an arbitrary convention, as signifieds, even though they operate in the realm of ideality, they offer proof and corroboration. Numbers are per force symbolic and infinitely virtual—what they represent can be anything and everything. By adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing signs—both pictorial and verbal—Martínez playfully depicts the infinite potential of signs to be filled and emptied of meaning and at the same time de-naturalizes mathematical logic. He refutes it by refusing to articulate propositions that would meld together the equation’s disparate signs, which, regardless of the mathematical operations being performed
on them, persist in their integrity. This is apparent in the examples appearing in facing pages within the book.

On page 46 we find illustrations of four items being added: a boater hat, a bowler hat, a shoe, and an umbrella.

The illustrations in the collage most likely were found in a vintage fashion catalogue, given that Martínez created a series of collages using the same imagery titled "El lenguaje de la moda" ("The Language of Fashion"). Under the line denoting the objects added, appear more
illustrations representing the result of the sum: Marx’s photo yet again, a shirt collar, a tie, a shirt cuff, and the left half of a man wearing a suit, holding a glove and a walking stick. To complement the illustration, page 47 features a poem called “The Sum”:

Ejemplo:    Un día Jueves
            + Una partida de Ajedrez
            ---------------------------
            La Batalla de Waterloo

Ejercicio 1 Un grupo de almohadones
            + Un gato de porcelana
            ---------------------------
            Buddha

Ejercicio 2 Una golondrina
            + La Revolución Francesa
            ---------------------------
            Las Obras Completas del Marqués de Sade

Example:    A Thursday
            + A game of Chess
            ---------------------------
            The Battle of Waterloo

Exercise 1  A group of pillows
            + A porcelain cat
            ---------------------------
            Buddha

Exercise 2  A swallow
            + The French Revolution
            ---------------------------
            The Complete Works of Marquis de Sade
The collaged components, whose expressive intentionality has been removed or reduced to an imperceptible minimum, constitute open-ended invitations for the reader to articulate the propositions that could possibly link them. Hence, one could surmise the association between the added images in the first exercise—a porcelain cat and pillows—that connote perhaps stillness and Buddhism, or between the images in the second exercise—a swallow, a migratory bird, and Marquis de Sade, whose mutinous shouts from his prison cell at Bastille prompted the crowds outside to riot during the French Revolution, and whose body of work constitutes a radical defiance of or departure from the Enlightenment’s positivism. Yet nothing within these collages proves or challenges this reading.

Moreover, if one would think that the pictorial arithmetical operations might provide an illustration for the verbal ones on the facing pages, this is far from being the case. There is even less of a relationship between the illustrations and words in these pieces as there is a relationship between the elements summed, subtracted, multiplied, or divided. In the case of the pictorial operations, at least all the images except for the Marx and Rimbaud cutouts come from a similar source—fashion illustration. One wonders if Martínez is not making a
statement on each figure’s fashionableness. Yet the juxtaposition of words and images seems arbitrary, and, incidentally, very much in keeping with the logic of the Dadaist collages that inspired Martínez’s writing and visual art, which he saw in person in a traveling Dada and Surrealist art exhibition originally organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York that travelled to Santiago’s Museum of Fine Arts in 1972. Martínez saw it in the company of his artist friend Hugo Rivera, who in an interview recalls that the poet was more interested in Dada than Surrealism, and that his preferred gallery in the show had on display some of Duchamp’s readymades, along with works by Man Ray and Francis Picabia and collages by Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters.

Some of the images in the arithmetic assignments are recycled throughout La nueva novela—the porcelain cat and pillows, for instance, not to mention Marx and Rimbaud again. Of their appearance in this section of La nueva novela we can certainly say one thing: that they demonstrate their potential for being multiply recombined. Critic José de Nordenflycht, in his book El gran solipsismo (2001), which focuses on Martínez’s visual work and relates the poet’s experience of Dada and Surrealism, attributes a small dose of intentionality to the gesture when noting
that since the mathematical operations in “Tareas the aritmética” linked to Marx are those of the sum and multiplication, and those linked to Rimbaud are that of the subtraction and division, then, within the book, Marx’s image is additive and multiplying, and Rimbaud’s, on the contrary, is subtractive and divisive. Although it is tempting to accept this hypothesis and extrapolate it, arguing that Marx’s thought indeed focuses on collectivity whereas Rimbaud’s on individuality, there is nothing in the equations themselves that is uttered in declarative form.

As Hugo Rivera summarizes in the aforementioned interview included in Nordenflycht’s book, the impact of seeing collages in the Dada and Surrealist exhibition as follows: “We thought that since the eruption of collage the work of art had acquired true autonomy by displacing representation as a problem” (68). The materials utilized in a collage, that is, are readymades that allow their users to not concern themselves with the problem of representation. Martínez’s materials in these works are illustrations of ready-to-wear fashions, and as such they constitute double readymades.

In El gran solipsismo, Nordenflycht stresses the importance of the publication of the journal Manuscritos for Martínez. Published in 1975, this journal set off a
seminal debate on photographic reproducibility and its implications for the relationship between text and image that would inform the work of the visual artists within the Escena de Avanzada, and particularly, Eugenio Dittborn’s as much as Martínez’s. For Nelly Richard, *Manuscritos* “opens up a new field of editorial possibilities that rethinks not only the graphic display of printed materials (breaking the ‘illustrative’ bond traditionally linking word and image in the space of magazines), but also the function of critical experimentation with textuality, which now processes the photographic and visual theoretically, instead of simply commenting on it” (54).  

The journal, which contributed significantly to define the terms of the era’s avant-garde graphic/textual production, was published by the Departamento de Estudios Humanísticos of the Universidad de Chile. At the time the department, according to Raúl Zurita, was a temporary haven for writers and intellectuals seeking to develop work dealing with semiotics and poststructuralist critical theory in freedom both from traditional leftist academic discourse and the regime’s official rhetoric. Shortly after the first issue of *Manuscritos* was published, however, the

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61 For more on the catalogues and journals for which layout and other editorial conceptualizations became a critical response to developments in critical theory, read the chapter “La escena de la escritura” (“The Writing Scene”) in Nelly Richard’s *Márgenes e instituciones.*
building that housed the humanities department would be taken over by the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA), Pinochet's secret police, marking the end of a period of relative creative freedom.\footnote{Zurita, recounting attending theater rehearsals for the Experimental Artaud Group that took place there, relates that "it was a big house on the Calle República which had belonged to the Spanish Embassy; when we were there the University of Chile had bought it. Later the army took over the building and it became the general headquarters of the DINA. I knew that house inside and out, I'd go to the basement where there was a printing press. It then became a place for torture, disappearances, and death. We preceded these screams, we inaugurated them from a point of terror that others would consummate" (79). Currently the building houses the Salvador Allende Museum.}

Martínez was directly affected by the journal’s demise. A selection of poems from what would become La nueva novela were to appear in the aborted second issue—and they could not have appeared in a more appropriate context. The first and only issue of Manuscritos, whose art direction was in the charge of Catalina Parra, included, among other features, selections from El Quebrantahuesos, Nicanor Parra’s famous collaborative newsprint collages with Enrique Lihn, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and a team of editors and designers. Consider the following excerpts: "El mensaje presidencial contiene/ mármol/ dulce de membrillo zanahorias lechuga o repollo" ("The presidential message contains/ marble/ quince paste carrots lettuces or cabbage") and "Los muertos entraron veinte días de heroica, huelga" ("The dead completed twenty days of a heroic/
Also included in the issue is an essay on the readymade and *El Quebrantahuesos* by Ronald Kay, editor of the journal; a series of absurdist sums by Nicanor Parra titled “Misión cumplida” (“Mission Accomplished”), which very much like the ones in *La nueva novela* but without the visual component; and Raúl Zurita’s first published poems, from the collection *Áreas verdes* (Green Areas).

Both Zurita and Martínez, who back then were bound by friendship and family—Zurita was married to Martínez’s sister—were pushing to the limit Parra’s ideas concerning antipoetry, the rejection of the private property system.

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63 More on El Quebrantahuesos can be found on the website letras.s5.com (Página chilena al servicio de la cultura).

64 Akin to Surrealist games, Parra’s additions defy mathematical logic and bear the stamp of his irreverent humor. An example which appeared in *Manuscritos*:

| joyas literarias | 1 | literary gems | 1 |
| padres de la Iglesia | 1 | fathers of the church | 1 |
| globos aerostáticos | 17 | aerostatic balloons | 17 |
| | 149 | | 149 |

65 This publication catapulted Raúl Zurita into the spotlight, if one can say this at a time in which writing literary activity relegated to the margins. Martínez, whose work had not been published at that time, might have also had a fair share of attention had he been included in *Manuscritos*. Fate had it that his work wouldn’t have much visibility until *La nueva novela* was reprinted in 1985. Current discourse, perhaps erroneously, seems to hint at the fact that they both were actively engaged in an exercise of one-upmanship, where one’s success was in detriment of the other’s. Eugenia Brito, for instance, argues that “The history of Martínez’s path through Chilean literature was blocked by the advent of the military regime, which, among other things blocked the market for literature in Chile, and specifically for poetry, and by the impact of Raúl Zurita’s work, primarily, on intellectuals, with the appearance of his first book *Purgatorio* and then with his second book *Anteparaiso*” (24). According to Brito because of this Martínez, as well as Gonzalo Muñoz, another conceptualist poet, had to wait until to ‘80s for their work to attain visibility.
and its manifestation in notions of common versus literary language usage, and the experimentation with different supports for poetry. In the spirit of Parra’s text/image Artefactos (1972), originally printed on postcards, the two were also trying to take poetry off the page and expand the genre’s material supports. In the first chapter we have seen how Zurita achieved this through his work with CADA (Colectivo Acción de Arte). Whereas appearing in Manuscritos gave Zurita’s poetry instant visibility, Martínez would have to wait until the ’80s to gain a readership. (Even to this day, he is a “poets’ poet” in Chile and remains largely unknown abroad.)

Regardless of publication in the journal, Martínez enjoyed a fruitful conversation with its contributors, and especially with Ronald Kay. Kay’s writing on semiotics, photography, and the readymade sheds light on the way in which Martínez dealt with image and text, and points to another way in which his unique collage-based practice relates to acousmatics. In his book El espacio de acá: Señales para una mirada americana (The Space Over Here: Signals for an American Gaze), Kay lyrically sustains the idea that photography is a sort of “cosmic catastrophe: the isolation, the incomprehensible emancipation of the image from the immediacy of things and beings” (20). Like the
violence inherent in naming to which Martínez devoted many lines of poetry, photography is but the “cruel birth of an image” (20) tearing images from “organic oblivion, making them appear mute and doubled in the stable surface of the picture” (21). If a defining aspect of photography is that “the lens drains all noise, extracting the ear of what is photographed; in solidarity, the ear loses touch with the voice, the live organ…” (21), the key operation the medium performs, for Kay, is the “invisible inscription of a potential witness” (23) into the photo, the imbedding of the “latency of another voice, a distant, remote, and successive one” (22). This operation beckons compulsive repetition—that “other voice” per force takes multiple forms, all disembodied, and is bound to recontextualize the image repeatedly. Hence, photography, for Kay, restores to things their inherent, “original virtuality”—that of things in language, which are perpetually resignified. Kay’s book appeared in 1980; three years after Martínez self-published the first edition of La nueva novela, but as mentioned, the poet was in close dialogue with the critic as well as with other artists and writers working within the intersection of image and text.

There is a series of works in La nueva novela that deal with photography and the convention of the caption.
All of these works underscore the missing voice of the image and its inadequate substitution with the acousmatic voice in the caption emitting impersonal, objective, and seemingly self-evident utterances on the images at play. The use of captions traditionally rests on two assumptions: a) that the photograph never sufficiently speaks for itself, and hence requires the inscription of distant, other voices that will successively speak of or for it; and, b) that captions supply the context that has been removed from the image, thereby executing a circular operation in which the photograph provides the evidence supporting the caption that then, in turn, points at the photograph as evidence of what it states.

With a gesture that mimics the serial repetition that photographic reproduction affords, Martínez rehearses different framing utterances that riff off the conventions of the medium. Interspersed throughout La nueva novela, the same caption, with only slight variations, contextualizes an array of different photographs. One comments on “El Hipopótamo” (“The Hippopotamus”), a collage appearing in the book’s section titled “La zoología” (“Zoology”) which consists of an airline advertisement glued onto a photo of a hippopotamus (see fig. 7). Its caption reads: “The photographic equipment did not add major illusionistic
details to reality, for it was the photographer, in his desire to make less visible this animal's pathetic beauty, who had to invent even its stupid, pained gaze whose impact is but a simple optical fraud”) (emphasis added) (71).

Curiously, the animal's "pathetic beauty" is but a subjective appreciation not contained in the photograph itself, but rather supplied by the distant and only seemingly objective author of the caption. It is an effect of the text, not the image.

Fig. 7. Page 71 of La nueva novela.
The book’s section "La literatura" ("Literature") opens with "Portrait Study of a Lady" (see fig. 8), which features Lewis Carroll’s well-known photograph of Alice Liddell and fails to give it credit. The epigraph asks: "What is a girl?" And the photo’s caption reads: "The photographic equipment did not add major illusionistic details to reality, for it was the photographer, in his need to make more tangible the sensual beauty of this little girl, who deciphered in her an inquisitive, daring gaze whose impact could perfectly not just be a simple optical fraud" (emphasis added) (86).

Fig. 8. Page 105 of La nueva novela.
The book’s section closes with the same photograph of Lewis Carroll’s muse, now titled “Portrait of a Lady” (this is no longer a study) although its straightforward caption contradicts the one framing the first. Here the photographer, “far from registering reality, administered an image that only expresses his personal vision: the world like a small stage for the picture of a little girl” (emphasis added). As for the little girl, “we are uncertain as to whether reality was or was not modified by the photographer since it was he who, in making her pose, placed her in a specific setting, and since his disturbing presence also might have modified his little model’s behavior and gaze” (105). The contradictory captions only highlight Alice’s muteness and the impossibility of the interpreter of the photograph—the captions’ author as well as the reader—to access her interiority. Only here is the very presence of the photographer mentioned as modifying the conditions in which the subject is being photographed, although clearly that could be stated in all of the captions.

A fourth variation of the caption shows up under a photograph of William Butler Yeats whose contrast is so high that the poet’s features are almost lost. A fifth and last one appears in the section of the book “Epígrafe para
un libro condenado: La Política" ("Epigraph for a condemned book: Politics") (see fig. 9). Here the caption frames the photo of a black woman in tears: "The photographic equipment did not add illusionistic details to reality in the least, for it was the photographer, in his desire to witness this young woman’s pained and sentimental expression, who faithfully photographed a gaze whose impact we do not recognize as a simple optical fraud, even when we know that there are no traces of humidity in the drying paper and that her tears remain in place" (emphasis added) (140). As if, in fact, a sheet of drying paper had been applied to this page of the book shortly after printing, the facing page printed on pink cardstock features the title of the piece, also "Portrait of a Lady" but one very different from Alice Liddell’s, the epigraph by T.S. Eliot “Eyes that I saw in tears,”66 and the photo caption, in reverse. The image of the woman has disappeared; instead, we find traces of her tears printed on the paper.

66 Martínez misquotes the title of T. S. Eliot’s "Eyes that I Last Saw in Tears": “I see the eyes but not the tears / This is my affliction.”
Curiously Martínez does not delve in the technical issues of how camera devices manipulate reality. He keeps stressing that those elements not present in the original were not introduced by the camera itself but by the photographer. Yet regardless of the language in the captions, the context for each image has been removed twice over and thus points to the condition of work subjected to mechanical reproduction. Not only does each frame eliminate everything surrounding the focus of the photograph (including the photographer); additionally, the photographs
interspersed throughout La nueva novela have themselves been extracted from their primary printed sources and then displaced to a new context. This operation Martínez does not speak about, since in these works he shifts the focus to the operations surrounding the photographs themselves, and not the ulterior reproduction of those photographs within the context of his book.

As we have seen in the captions quoted above, their language points to some of photography’s different uses: advertising, portraiture, and documentary. Martínez’s precise choice of words concisely exposes the assumptions underlying these different uses and evinces, yet again, his skepticism of language. The photographer is said to have invented the hippopotamus’s gaze in an effort to conceal its stupidity—how a photographer could invent a subject’s gaze is a mystery, only in language is this articulation possible. With respect to portraiture, the interpersonal relationship between photographer and subject, as well as the photographer’s hidden motives, is brought into focus: the photographer deciphered his subject’s sensuality, intuiting it and capturing it in the photo, or determined, by his sheer presence, his subject’s coy gaze. The documentarian is exempt from this type of relationship to his subject; the genre’s convention dictates that only he
can faithfully capture his subject, so effectively, in fact, that the crying woman’s tears have actually left their mark in the facing sheet of paper. The documentary photo has an urgency and immediacy that is in stark contrast with the punctum inherent to portraits, which necessarily record what has ceased to be: Alice Liddell’s girl is said to be standing in front of a climbing vine covering “a wall in England that has ceased to exist even though we still contemplate it as a backdrop” (105). The note is tinged with a bit of sardonic humor: the comment would certainly be more apt in regard to the girl than the wall, whose likelihood of remaining is much larger than hers. Yet there is also a cognitive dissonance to the utterances in these works’ captions—let us not forget the photographs of cyclists mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that readers are asked to look at as if the cyclists were actually moving while they are contemplating the book’s pages.

Martínez’s play with the conventions of photography is indebted to the tradition of collage. For him, the photographic image is first and foremost a material that can be cut up and juxtaposed with other materials, such as text, in unexpected combinations freeing photography from its duty to provide a record of consensus reality. Ronald
Kay’s insight concerning *El Quebrantahuesos*, Parra’s collaborative 1952 collages, applies to Martínez as well: “Because it re-assembles exclusively printed matter, *Quebrantahuesos* leaves out any subjectivity or initial interiority; to calculate effects through pre-fabricated writing means to surpass one’s own subjectivity in order to access the scriptural thought which is itself imparted by the cut, the assemblage, the method and syntax of montage: in sum, by the production or staging of the page” (27). In Martínez these notions are somewhat complicated, since he himself, in mimicking the tone of captions and adopting the persona of the journalist commenting on photographs, becomes a key performer in the staging of the page, a performer whose subjectivity indeed plays no role, and is only hinted at by the doubling effect of the utterances he delivers. We know that behind the voice narrating these captions Martínez is pulling the strings with a palpable degree of humor, therefore not affectless, and choosing to make these works appear to be found, anonymous.

The photographic subjects’ interiority is, indeed, not only out of the picture, but completely inaccessible, as stated before. A statement of Kay’s on *El Quebrantahuesos* corresponds, in part, to the economic logic behind Martínez’s photography-based pieces in *La nueva novela*:
“Anonymity and rewriting bestow on textuality the inescapable, copied, and automatic evidence corresponding to serially produced mechanic artifacts” (30). Moreover, in an effort to deflect authorship yet again, he collapses these serially produced artifacts—the actual photographs lifted from other sources—with utterances by him that strive to appear as if they too shared their automaticity and anonymity.

In the context of the programmatic production of subjectivity that defined the political and economic climate of Chile in the 1970s and ‘80s, Martínez’s *La nueva novela* was potentially explosive. His complete disrespect for private intellectual property, his blatant dismissal of petit-bourgeois pieties concerning poetic depth, and mostly, his extreme unreliableness and refusal to speak from a position that would posit him as an innate so-called legislator of the world—from a lyric poet’s interiority, that is—openly defied the views so promoted by Pinochet’s regime. Yet Martínez knew how to play it safe: he masterfully managed to make his utterances acousmatic, muddling their sources and disassociating himself from them, but also bestowing on them a radical degree of indeterminacy and polyvalence that left it up to the reader to decide their meaning.
Even those poems in the last, brief section unambiguously titled “Epígrafe a un libro condenado: La política” (“Epigraph for a Condemned Book: Politics”), and whose beginning is marked by the Chilean flag insert have been vacated by the poet to a degree not found in traditional political poetry. Martínez refrains from openly denouncing military oppression and instead resorts to allegory, which in its ambiguity invites readers to read between the lines. The section is dedicated to Daniel Thérésin, a pseudonym for Jean Tardieu in L’Honneur des poètes (juillet 1943), an anthology of poems against the Nazi occupation edited by Pierre Seghers, Paul Éluard, and Jean Lescure and published by the French Resistance. It includes a poem with a suggestive title and narrative, “The Disappearance of a Family,” in which family members and pets inexplicably vanish inside their home. Each of the poem’s five stanzas ends on a dire variation of the adage “al menor descuido se borrarán las señales de ruta y de esta vida al fin, habrás perdido toda esperanza” (“at the slightest lapse the route’s signals will be erased and you will lose, in the end, all hope in this life”) (137). If los desaparecidos are the obvious reference, Martínez refrains from making general statements by providing, in each stanza, particulars about the vanished family members.
and the improbable location of their disappearance—“Antes que su hija de 5 años / se extraviara entre el comedor y la cocina...” (Before his 5-year-old daughter / would become lost between the dining room and the kitchen...”)—alongside abstract formulations about time and space, such as: “por las ventanas de esta casa entra el tiempo, por las puertas sale el espacio” (“time enters through the windows of this house, space exits through the door”). These juxtapositions bestow ambiguity on the poem, opening it to the possibility of referring to political disappearances as much as constituting a meditation on existential or metaphysical matters. Those who pick up on the poem’s subversion—as well as that of the entire book—necessarily make themselves complicit with such reading.

As much as Martínez removed himself from the poems, he controlled the circulation of La nueva novela. So much so, that the boundaries of his project included activities other than the book’s writing: laying it out and coordinating its printing, as we have seen, as well handling its distribution. One is tempted to trace a parallel between his poetics and the artistic practices that two decades later Nicolas Bourriaud coined as “relational aesthetics”: “relational art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and
its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space), [that] points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art" (14). We have seen how, in the realm of the symbolic, Martínez institutes a free zone within La nueva novela, an interstice in which symbolic transactions of a mercantile nature between the author as producer and the reader as consumer are obstructed and forced to take a distinct form unmediated by the marketplace. The ideal reader posited by Martínez contributes as much to the making of the work as the author does. Besides, Martínez cannot claim authorship of the book in a traditional way given that he posits himself as a reader recycling and manipulating a copious amount of preexisting texts.

The story of La nueva novela’s publication in part accounts for its distribution mode, which coheres too with Martínez’s poetics and the symbolic exchanges of which it partakes. Editorial Universitaria, based in Santiago, had been considering Martínez’s manuscript for publication for a couple of years when Pinochet’s coup overturned the Allende administration. Consequently, the press abandoned its plans to publish the manuscript. Though La nueva novela’s composition began in 1968, Martínez decided to
self-publish it almost a decade later, in 1977, in a limited edition to which he added a couple of small yet significant changes: he inserted, for instance, the colored page with the Chilean flag before the section “Epígrafe a un libro condenado: La política,” thus overtly signaling that its contents could stand for a national allegory. It was not until 1985 that the book became somewhat available to the public in an also self-published facsimile edition of one thousand copies, most of which to this date have never circulated in the market’s traditional channels.

_La nueva novela_ has been sold selectively to those readers interested in the book to the degree that they figure out how to go about attaining copies. According to the poet’s relatives and friends, originally Martínez himself would decide whether a reader was worthy or not of having the book. Nowadays, Sergio Vega, the owner of the bookstore Metales Pesados in Santiago, acts as intermediary between Eliana Martínez, the poet’s widow, and those seeking to purchase the book, which is delivered to the bookstore on consignment. Its demand is closely monitored by Eliana Martínez, who also determines the book’s pricing. As the book has gained cultural capital and copies have become, at least theoretically, scarcer, its prize has
steadily been on the rise, yet readers have been willing to pay for the costly edition given its artisanal quality.

Martínez performed a curious intervention on the market by participating in some of its transactions only—the book, ultimately, is sold and not gifted to its readers—but at the same time, avoiding its trappings, particularly in the case of distribution and, for lack of a better term, publicity, since to circulate La nueva novela relies entirely on mouth-to-mouth communication, an informal communication channel if there ever was one, and a critical apparatus that has been building steadily over the years. It might seem a contradiction that the book acknowledges itself as the site in which contact with readers is established when it is practically impossible to find copies unless one knows whom to turn to, and when a relative degree of uncertainty as to price and availability surrounds the process of attaining it. Yet precisely because transactions between those selling the book and those seeking to acquire it are not anonymous and require a personal effort, its seller can be sure that the demand for it is real, not abstract or speculative, as it tends to be (and certainly was before print-on-demand technologies became available). As a result, La nueva novela's
circulation in an alternative network has gradually generated an expanding, tangible reading community.

One cannot help but consider another important issue regarding the circulation of La nueva novela in the Chilean context: given that the book is sold under the table, it is not taxed. In Chile books are subject to a tax of 19 percent—instituted during Pinochet’s dictatorship, it is one of the highest in the world for books—which contributes to the large volume of pirate editions circulating underground. That a book with the degree of symbolic subversion of La nueva novela exists outside this punishing institutional framework is significant on numerous counts, although its skirting of this prohibitive tax was perhaps not the goal but an unintended and lasting consequence of a tactic developed in the adverse context of the military dictatorship.

Given that deflection is one of La nueva novela’s most distinctive approaches to the utterance, a contemporary reader is bound to imagine that literary censorship was prevalent during Pinochet’s dictatorship. Yet Diamela Eltit, Martínez’s contemporary, argues in an interview with Robert Neustadt that the military had opted for seizing the channels of distribution and dissemination of culture instead of censoring individual artistic productions. She
estimates that ninety percent of what was produced at the time was against the dictatorship, and therefore reasons that “even from ’76 to ’79 there was a lot of production that spoke against the coup and the dictatorship, but it had no social reception, none” (98). Writers were not worth going after given that “there was no publishing market […] The dictatorship did not need to keep an eye on what a poet wrote, simply because no one read, distribution channels had been completely cut off” (98). Books were self-published and there was no market for them. This might explain the mode of production and original distribution of La nueva novela, which has proven to be advantageous even vis-à-vis the current conditions of the market; so much so, that the keepers of Martínez’s estate have consistently refused offers from established poetry presses in Chile and abroad to reprint the 1985 edition of La nueva novela, thus perpetuating the book’s cult-status. It is almost as if La nueva novela’s modes of production and distribution would have been devised to restore to the book the aura that mechanical reproduction necessarily stripped off it.

Ironically, La nueva novela’s condition of possibility is, of course, mechanical reproduction, and doubly so: for its very existence as a hybrid, serially produced object, and for the appropriations and manipulations that Martínez
performs throughout. The book’s very contents could not have been appropriated by Martínez if he had not already found them in serially manufactured books circulating freely in the market, detached from their respective authors. The apparent contradictions between the book’s modes of production and distribution seem, then, impossible to overlook: the zealousness with which Martínez’s book (in quotation marks, under erasure, as the book’s cover announces) has been prevented from circulating in the market ends up protecting *La nueva novela* from other authors’ desire to subject it to the very same interventions Martínez performed on the range of printed materials he borrowed. That is, if the book is a critique of authorship, of the unidirectional communication that conventional books establish with readers, then the way in which it has erected itself as a perhaps precious, one-of-a-kind volume might seem perplexing.

Curiously the book itself as object is implicated in the hide-and-seek games Martínez performs throughout its pages—precisely its slipperiness allows it to resist commodification. Perhaps ensuring that the reader is up to the task of interacting with *La nueva novela* in that reciprocal, co-creative way that Martínez had originally envisioned justifies the monitoring and screening of its
potential readership. If the book were to circulate in the market, a dialogue with a reader would only be virtual. Martínez’s model, by playing a role in the creation of its interpretive community, guarantees that the type of exchange posited in *La nueva novela* begins as soon as the reader takes hold of a copy, and that his book will not meet the fate of Serrano’s undelivered *Antología del cuento verdadero en Chile*.

We have seen how *La nueva novela* insists on its own materiality—through Martínez’s manipulations the space of the symbolic and notions of transparency, literary depth, and interiority are proven to be constructs within the book. Martínez does not deny these notions; he simply proves them to fall outside of realm of the text. We have also seen how Martínez removes all traces of his own and other people’s subjectivity from his poems, delivering acousmatic utterances that leave them open and ready to be activated by the readers who will invest their own subjectivity when interacting with the book. In opening section of *La nueva novela*, Martínez, via Tardieu, tells readers the basic premises of canonical French poems—Rimbaud’s “The Drunken Boat,” Mallarmé’s “Afternoon of a Faun,” Nerval’s “El desdichado,” and Valéry’s “Marine Cemetery”—and then instructs them to “say it in the first
person singular." Reader and writer made equal in this operation that leaves open what exactly it is that needs to said in the first person. In addition, the most basic approach to literary texts, that is, through the reader’s identifying with their plots and characters, is made manifest. In this sense, La nueva novela delivers no meanings. Rather, it exposes the mechanism through which meaning is assembled and provides materials with which the reader can make their own new novel.
Chapter 3: Testing Testing: ¿Es paño español español? Ulises Carrión’s Bookworks

In regard to endeavors seeking to generate an interpretive community and alternate communication channels, the works of Ulises Carrión (1940–1989), a Mexican-born fiction writer turned conceptual artist, achieved a remarkable coherence. Carrión was perhaps more invested than Martínez and Salomão in re-examining, expanding, and even exploding traditional notions of the book, and in ridding his own production almost completely of traces of his own subjectivity and of symbolic content that might interfere with the reader’s access to the open structures that he puts forth. Carrión’s practice owes much to appropriation, although the brand he performs always acknowledges the sources of the materials he intervenes, partly because his projects enact the sequential elimination of literary elements from a text. The initial presence of literary markers is crucial to its latter removal, that is. Carrión’s operations could be thought of as step-by-step demonstrations on how to turn an authored utterance into an acousmatic one positing new conditions of reception. As we shall see, once subjectivity and the literary has been methodically eradicated from Carrión’s
works, readers are invited to do as they please with the remaining texts.

First let us consider the seminal 1975 manifesto "The New Art of Making Books" in which Carrión contrasts traditional books with “bookworks” or artist books positing a new relationship to the book’s materiality and embodying a new approach to production: “A book may be the accidental container of a text, the structure of which is irrelevant to the book: these are the books of bookshops and libraries. A book can also exist as an autonomous and self-sufficient form, including perhaps a text that emphasizes that form, a text that is an organic part of that form: here begins the new art of making books” (non-paginated.)

For Carrión, the book artist is not an author who writes a text that will be laid out by others—“the servants, the artisans, the workers, the others”—in a lesser position within the production hierarchy, but rather someone who makes books and “assumes the responsibility for the whole process.” The “whole process” in the “chain going from the writer to the reader” involved, for Carrión, not only the

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67 The English version of manifesto “The New Art of Making Books” originally appeared in the Amsterdam-based magazine of visual and concrete poetry Kontexts, no. 6-7, in 1975. The same year it was also printed by the Center for Book Arts in New York and distributed to its members. The original text in Spanish was published earlier; Octavio Paz had run it in the February 1975 issue of the magazine Plural.
making of books but also their distribution and promotion, so to speak, for he developed a multidisciplinary practice that was based on words, certainly, but taken as further away from the, for him, confining realm of literature as possible, and that hinged on his active participation within, and his fostering of, a community of likeminded practitioners. In a characteristically anti-literary text from 1980 reflecting on the 1975 manifesto, he writes: “Printed words are imprisoned in the matter of a book […] This sounds better in Spanish, where ‘printed’ is impreso and ‘imprisoned’ is preso. I don’t regret that loss. Playing upon words is a typical lyrical device and therefore I reject it” (13).68

Carrión had not always been averse to literature and traditional literary institutions, however. In Mexico City he had studied literature at UNAM and had been involved with highly regarded literary circles. In the early ’60s he received a grant from the Centro Mexicano de Escritores. Later he published two short-story collections that attained some notoriety: La muerte de Miss O, with the prestigious Editorial Era in 1966, and De Alemania, with the equally reputable press Joaquín Mortiz, in 1970. Carrión’s stories cannot be said to foreshadow their

author’s later stance against literature, although their narrators and protagonists display dissatisfaction with, and a stilted relationship to, language—it is never a vehicle for interiority—as well as a characteristic and rather small-minded ennui and a frustration with Mexico.  

After spending study periods in France (at the Sorbonne), Germany, and England, Carrión moved to Amsterdam in 1972. He was imbued with the “post '68 cultural environment” in Europe, as Jaime Moreno Villarreal states in the essay “Liminar” in ¿Mundos personales o estrategias culturales? (a comprehensive two-tome volume on Carrión’s work edited by Martha Hellion), where critical discourse had become oriented toward “desire and pleasure against power, and also against left-wing intellectualism and socially committed literature” (9). By the time he settled in Amsterdam it was clear that Carrión shared, with his European counterparts, skepticism toward the institutions of art and literature, leftist rhetoric, the professionalization of artists, and the market. He participated in collaborative projects, mainly the In–Out Center, one of the first artist-run spaces in Europe.

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69 Traces of Mexico’s mounting social upheaval are palpable in some of the stories. The story “Las palabras,” from La muerte de Miss O, deals with the rising repression of Mexico’s student movement. One of its characters, after being beaten up by the police along with other five students, exclaims: “Mierda de país […] nos niegan todos los medios de protesta” (“Shit country… all forms of protest are denied to us”) (65).
founded in 1972 by Colombian artist Michel Cardena and whose members included other Latin Americans—among them the multidisciplinary artist Raúl Marroquín, a video-art pioneer from Bogotá—as well as international artists.

Amsterdam at the time was a magnet for emerging conceptualists from around the world, as Christophe Cherix, curator of the 2009 exhibition *In & Out of Amsterdam: Travels in Conceptual Art, 1960-1976* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York explains in the catalog essay: “In the 1960s and ’70s artists came here [Amsterdam] from all over the world, attracted by innovative museums, an up-and-coming gallery scene, progressive socio-political policies, and by the city itself, whose history had been shaped by progressive waves of both emigration and immigration” (18). Cherix cites a local curator who mentions the relevance of the In-Out Center, which in the two years of its existence developed into “a meeting place” for artists interested in conceptual, performance, and body art—all art forms that Carrión eventually would engage in (19).  

70 In his essay for the exhibition’s catalog, Cherix goes on to mention that Amsterdam was not nearly as appealing to Dutch artists as it was for those coming from abroad. Artists such as Jan Dibbets and Bas Jan Ader, among others, eagerly left an environment they saw as provincial and became immersed in the burgeoning conceptual scene of the U.S.’s West Coast, whose key figures were artists including John Baldessari and Allen Ruppersberg. Regardless, they maintained close ties to the scene in Amsterdam, which resulted in fertile crosspollinations. The “progressive socio-political policies” that Cherix mentions must have included those pertaining to gay rights.
Another collective Carrión had become associated with was the England-based Beau Geste Press. Founded in 1971 by a group of artists and writers including Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg and his spouse Martha Hellion, Beau Geste was devoted to exploring do-it-yourself printing technologies such as mimeograph machines, offset printing, and saddle-stitching in order to publish visual and neo-dadaist poetry, conceptual books, and Fluxus works. The conditions that led to the press's foundation are emblematic of the nuanced ways in which those seeking alternatives to the production modes of official culture were articulating a practice at the intersection of politics, new technologies, and formal experimentation. In the paper "La editorial como proyecto artístico: Beau Geste

Carrión was victim of AIDS. Although his sexual orientation was never explicitly part of his oeuvre—except perhaps for the subtle 1983 poetry book Amor, la palabra, which he dedicated to his Dutch partner and consists of a parsing of the dictionary definition of the word "amor"—one supposes he rejected Mexico’s social values. According to Guy Schraenen in the introductory essay for the exhibition catalog We have won! Haven’t we?, if Carrión “always spoke of his country with an obvious reserve, it was because he was unable to accept the intolerable issue of class difference” (15). In non-explicit terms, Carrión was vocal about his unease with society’s mores, as the following quote in the same essay demonstrates: “As a four- or five-year-old child I often asked my parents if they would like to give me away to another family, to the neighbours or to some relatives. Not that I disliked my own family. Far from it. But I found the idea vulgar, intolerable that one could not choose one’s own family. It was only much later that I came to realize that I was not opposed to the family as such, rather I simply couldn’t stand not being able to decide one’s own destiny, I loathed having boundaries placed on one’s own personal freedom. Even at an early age I knew I would go away. In the beginning this usually meant ‘away from this city’ from my birthplace. Later when I had learned the concept of nationality it meant ‘away from this country’” (17).
Press/ Libro Acción Libre,” (“The Press as an Art Project: Beau Geste Press/ Libro Acción Libre”) which Ehrenberg presented at the conference “Conceptualismos do Sul/Sur” in São Paulo in 2008,\(^1\) he discusses the press’s origins in the aftermath of Mexico’s 1968 student movement and the massacre of Tlatelolco. “Given the government’s muzzle on printing presses, the bases turned to the mimeograph to circulate all kinds of slogans, denunciations, and dates for mobilizations. The flyers and bulletins attesting to their demands were expressed in images created by artists. [...] The graphic works of 1968 are an entire imaginary of emergency; their dynamism is surprising.” Yet having a mimeograph in one’s possession was seditious enough to the authorities—Ehrenberg mentions that a close friend of his in Mexico City was sentenced to fourteen years in prison for transporting one in her car. Ehrenberg and his family fled Mexico’s political climate for London, at first, where he was offered a Gestetner mimeograph at a bargain price: “We are penniless but I buy it nonetheless, since it is forbidden in Mexico. [...] I discover later on that I can use it to make prints.” He would use it also to print collaborative projects and to publish a single issue of the

\(^1\) The conferences proceedings are gathered in the volume *Conceptualismos Do Sul/Sur* (Annablume, 2009), edited by its organizers Cristina Freire Cristina and Ana Longoni.
magazine *DT* (*Documento Trimestral*, which he describes as “field notes from the Mexican friends passing through London”\textsuperscript{72}).

Eventually, in 1970, along with David Mayor and Chris Welch, he and Hellion founded Beau Geste Press—with “geste” standing for Gestetner—in Devon, England. His coeditors had connections to Fluxus artists as well as to some of the participants in the Destruction in Art Symposium that artist-activist Gustav Metzger had organized earlier, in 1966, in London. Gathering a roster of international artists, poets, and scientists, this symposium’s main objective, according to its press release, had been to: “focus attention on the element of destruction in Happenings and other art forms, and to relate this to destruction in society.”\textsuperscript{73} Thus, Beau Geste’s titles would prove indicative of a number of attitudes distinctive of the countercultural productions of the time: an anti-art ethos, artisanal production values\textsuperscript{74}, collaborative modes of production stemming from and reinforcing deterritorialized

\textsuperscript{72} Ehrenberg claims that after the Tlatelolco massacre 10,000 people left Mexico in voluntary exile.


\textsuperscript{74} Ehrenberg writes, in the aforementioned essay: “In practice my main reference was—and continues to be—the powerful artisanal tradition of my country, whose miraculous artistic production has developed with the poorest of resources.”
social networks, and a palpable euphoria at the ability to cheaply reproduce and disseminate unconventional works bypassing traditional distribution channels.\textsuperscript{75}

Although uninterested in developing a practice that would directly give voice to political concerns, Ulises Carrión’s artists books and subsequent practices fully participate in the zeitgeist. His first book, \textit{Sonnets} (1972), appeared in Amsterdam, and Beau Geste Press published his second, \textit{Arguments} (1973). Carrión’s interest in the double nature of the verbal sign—as both conceptual and visual signifier, as well as his non-hierarchical approach to book production and authorship—is manifest in both of these works.

For \textit{Sonnets} he borrows Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s sonnet “Heart’s Compass” and subsequently performed forty-four interventions on it—akin to Situationist signature method of the \textit{détournement}, defined as “the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble”\textsuperscript{76}—by altering its

\textsuperscript{75} The internationalism of the press cannot be overstated. Its founders organized the legendary 1972/1973 traveling exhibition \textit{Fluxshoe}, which included works by the likes of George Maciunas, George Brecht, and Yoko Ono, among others. Among those artists who published works with Beau Geste Press were Cecilia Vicuña (her first book, \textit{Saboramí}); the American feminist performance artist Carolee Schneemann; the British musician/artist Genesis P-Orridge, a seminal figure whose band Throbbing Gristle was at the forefront of industrial music and its convergence with the literary avant-garde as manifested in William Burroughs and Brion Gysin; and the American Fluxus artist Ken Friedman.

typesetting and punctuation. If we cannot sustain that Carrión was directly inspired by Situationist writings or that his appropriations are primarily political in nature, in both their theoretical justifications and their desired effects on the texts appropriated and treated or vandalized, they cohere with the Situationists’ aims. The implications of this correspondence will be analyzed later in the chapter.

The procedures by which Carrión treats the sonnet are playfully announced in the titles of the variations; hence it hardly surprises one that the first sonnet in the series is called “Borrowed Sonnet.” As we shall see, what the poem might actually be saying appears to matter very little to Carrión, who does not interact with the borrowed materials in terms of meaning. In this regard, his procedures are intent on actualizing the title Carrión has given them only. The “Borrowed Sonnet” reads as follows:

Sometimes thou seem’st not as thyself alone,
But as the meaning of all things that are;
A breathless wonder, shadowing from afar
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon;
Whose unstirred lips are music’s visible tone;
Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,
Being of its furthest fires oracular;—
The evident heart of all life sown and mown.

Even such Love is; and is not thy name Love?
Yea, by thy hand the Love-god rends apart
All gathering-clouds of Night’s ambiguous art;
Flings them far down, and sets thine eyes above;
And simply, as some gage of flower or glove,
Stakes with a smile the world against thy heart.

True to form, the sonnet is identical to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s—it is reproduced without modification of the original. The second sonnet in the series is titled “Capital Sonnet” and is set in upper-case letters, while the third, “Underlined Sonnet,” is underlined in its entirety. If the initial variations (a question mark at the end of “Questioned Sonnet,” an exclamation mark at the end of “Exclamatory Sonnet,” ellipses at the beginning of “Suspense Sonnet”) might lead one to think that the complete series will follow a similarly tautological approach, Carrión introduces numerous unexpected changes that indicate a more nuanced treatment and also nod to postmodern literary discourse and critical theory. For the “Cautious Sonnet,” for instance, in a clever move, he introduces quotation marks around the word meaning:
“Sometimes thou seem’st not as thyself alone, / But as the ‘meaning’ of all the things that are....” In the “Annotated Sonnet,” he ironically provides a footnote explanation for the least obscure term in the poem, the word **cloud** (“Visible condensed watery vapour floating high above general level of ground”) and in the “Exhaustive Sonnet” he supplies the reader with a preposterously numerous quantity of synonyms for **meaning** (“sense, significance, signification, import, point, tenor, purport, drift, pith, meat, essence, spirit; implication, denotation, suggestion, nuance, allusion, acceptation, interpretation, connotation, hidden meaning, **arrière-pensée**, substance, effect, burden, gist, sum and substance, argument, content, matter, text, subject matter, subject”). In doing so, he obfuscates a term whose very murkiness and opaqueness become all the more apparent when it is explicated through its synonyms.

Carrión’s handling of the borrowed text as material to play with becomes increasingly exacerbated in the second part of the book: aware of the circulation of his materials mainly through the postal service—that mail art was at the height of its vogue then is worth noting—he treats “Packed Sonnet” as if it were a packed artwork ready to be shipped, the first two quartets being designated as “This side up,” and the last two tercets as “This side down.” He then
proceeds to push the variations in the book to the point that the sonnet’s legibility is relinquished: its lines are alphabetized and its associative logic compromised in “Alphabetical Sonnet;” its words are written backward in “Mirrored Sonnet;” and, by the time the poem is laid out in vertical columns instead of horizontally, in “Vertical Sonnet,” it becomes impenetrable if one attempts to read it conventionally.

In *Sonnets*, then, Carrión equates authorship not with writing, but with a whole gamut of activities ranging from plagiarizing, typesetting, tampering with, and framing. His strategy as author calls attention not to the actual content of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Heart’s Compass,” which one could argue remains the same in each iteration of the piece except for when Carrión indeed adds text to it, but to the dissonance of repetitive copying paired with a systematic effort to exploit all the possible ways in which a text could be intervened through the use of a typewriter. We shall see that in all of Carrión’s conceptual body of work, in fact, authorship’s main contradiction is that though its goal will be to methodically question and reduce to a bare minimum those values commonly associated with literariness, primarily originality among them, only through inventive procedures will these be undermined. In
other words, in Carrión’s appropriation-based works, the mode of authorship he proposes reflects a displacement: its locus no longer will reside in the uniqueness of what is being conveyed but rather in the ingeniousness invested in proving both the unoriginality of what is being conveyed, its derivativeness, and the obsolescence of traditional authorship functions.77 For Carrión, however, the derivative, residual artwork, through its dislocation to a new context, certainly becomes non-equivalent to the original, as *Sonnets* elegantly exemplifies.

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77 Carrión, in this sense, belongs in a long tradition of authors who have radically tested the limits and redefined the terms of authorship, a tradition that in Latin America certainly includes Nicanor Parra, Juan Luis Martínez, Diemela Eltit, and a number of Brazilian Concrete and post-Concrete authors including Waly Salomão. In *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*, critic Marjorie Perloff examines the works of a select group of current writers in North America and Europe—Kenneth Goldsmith, Caroline Bergvall, and Susan Howe, among others—for whom *inventio* has given way to “appropriation, elaborate constraint, visual and sound composition, and reliance on intertextuality” (11). She also discusses these practitioners’ forebears in the modernist tradition, authors whose unprecedented writing partook of widespread citation such as T.S. Eliot in “The Waste Land,” Ezra Pound in the *Cantos*, and Benjamin in the *Arcades Project*. She relates appropriation-based and intertextual practices to those of the Brazilian Concrete poets, for their “revolt against the transparency of the word” (13), and also to the members of Oulipo, since they often generate new texts by treating borrowed ones according to strict and carefully considered procedures. What concerns this note is that even if within this new model of authorship the author claims to be utterly unoriginal, a displacement but not the invalidation of some values distinctive of authorship is effected. In other words, this new model is not exempt from a hierarchy that privileges the audaciousness and/or inventiveness that an author might deploy when seeking to demystify conventional literary values. Hence, Perloff writes: “If the new ‘conceptual’ poetry makes no claim to originality—at least not originality in the usual sense—this is not to say that *genius* isn’t in play. It just takes different forms” (20).
Arguments, Carrión’s second book, introduces an element that will from then on be integral to all of his subsequent bookworks but which, for the most part, is absent in Sonnets. The poems comprising the book—whose appearance is very much like that of concrete poems—are displayed on the page in such a way that the blank spaces surrounding the words, all of them proper names, are assigned a larger role in the meaning-making process than the words themselves. Suggestive of the variety of configurations that interpersonal relationships might take, each poem is formed of repeating proper names whose layout on the page and relation to each other shifts from line to line. The proximity or distance of the names on the page evokes degrees of closeness between the poem’s protagonists. Consider the following excerpt of “Argument 10” as an example:

Iris

Iris

Frank Iris

Frank

Iris Frank

Iris

Frank

Iris

78 Neither Sonnets nor Arguments are paginated.
The poem is so minimal it is certainly open to multiple readings, yet since it appears in a book titled Arguments, it is also charged with a significant degree of allegorical meaning—it is as if the poem were speaking of the fact that people’s paths intersect at a given moment in time and then drift apart. The structure of this poem elicits an archetypal narrative in which a female protagonist, Iris, is approached, briefly supplanted, and then left behind by a male counterpart, Frank.

All the poems in the book are similarly archetypal. Another potent example is “Argument 24,” in which a list of proper names appears in a line that is repeated eight times; for every repetition a letter in each of the names

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79 In an interview published in We have won! Haven’t we?, the filmmaker Danniel Danniel, with whom Carrion collaborated to film his 1982 performance The Death of the Art Dealer, tells Annie Wright that most of the poems in Arguments “were based on existing stories,” some of them well-known myths, such as that of Oedipus. One cannot but wonder if the rationale for the book’s title was not the misguided impression that the words “argument” and “argumento” were cognates, and that “argument,” like the Spanish word, was synonymous with “plot.”

Danniel and Carrion had planned to make a film based on some of the pieces in Arguments. This film never materialized, but their discussions, as recalled by Danniel, are revealing of Carrion’s ideas concerning structure and narrative: “Of course, we had real faces for the film but we wanted them to be expressionless [...] The idea was that the story was to be told by the combination of the faces, the direction in which they look and the way the camera moves that in turn parallels the position of the original names on the printed page” (113). The film version of the poem based on Oedipus was to feature two characters, Eddy and Mama; Danniel stresses that in the book it would be nearly impossible to guess that the poem whose characters’ names are Maurice, Caro( )line, and Alan was actually a variation of the Oedipus myth. Carrion removed all traces of the source stories—character’s names, narrative accounts—and left only graphic signs to represent their main structural elements.
is subtracted, until all the letters in all the names have been removed:

John    Mary   Lawrence   Helen   Alfred   Sylvia   Thomas  
Joh     Mar    Lawrenc    Hele     Alfre    Sylvi    Thoma  
Jo      Ma     Lawren    Hel      Alfr     Sylv    Thom  
J       M      Lawre    He       Alf      Syl      Tho  
        Lawr    H       Al      Sy      Th  
        Law     A       S      T  
        La  
        L  

All of the names are in English—a certain familiarity between the people in this poem is implied. The single letters that remain at the bottom of each column spell out the word “LAST,” a word that, like the poem itself, alludes to the passage of time, loss, and mortality—Lawrence is the last one to vanish. The poem enacts a narrative in which the simultaneous presence of the names at an initial moment is undermined by the text’s temporal and spatial unfolding: some names vanish sooner than others. Again, the narrative here, as well as in the other poems in Arguments, is an archetypal one whose generality is exacerbated by our not knowing anything about the bearers of the proper names comprising the poem: they are empty indexicals conveying
little else but gender and perhaps a linguistic community. The empty space around the words, the page itself, that is, is activated to the point that its interplay with the signifiers printed on its surface is more integral to the poems than the proper names themselves. Throughout *Arguments*, the brunt of the narratives implied by the layout of the signifiers on the page rests almost exclusively on the space left blank, vacant. What we witness is precisely, then, the radical but not total removal of literary elements, of the conventions indicating a text’s literariness, so that the book’s material support may be foregrounded. Authorship here, then, is posited as the possibility of devising graphic solutions in order to economize the expenditure of language.

For Carrión it was not enough to signal the removal of the literary—in all its symbolic and material connotations—within the space of his bookworks. From the get-go, the type of artistic output that he became committed to developing once he left Mexico was multidisciplinary and designed to bypass, and even defy, traditional literary and art distribution networks as well the most basic medium for him to circulate his ideas up until then: the Spanish language. The majority of his artists books, and neither *Sonnets* nor *Arguments* are an exception, were not written in
Furthermore, in a letter to Octavio Paz dated Oct. 22, 1972—a propos of a series of poems and critical texts of his that were to be published in issue 16 of Plural in January of 1973—Carrión explains why he has chosen to relocate to Amsterdam: “I am in Amsterdam because it seems more feasible to me to realize the practical consequences of [the ideas we have been discussing] here. For instance, now I can (anyone can) work in many languages at once. It is not even necessary to master the language. Also, books have become smaller, more affordable, easier to read and easier to make. A writer can now make his own books. It is enough to have a mimeograph (rich writers can buy an offset press and, if they are generous, lend it to the poor ones). Also, books have become only one of the ways in which to publish. There are, for instance, art galleries where it is possible to hang a series of texts, and where, coincidentally, painters have nothing to hang”\(^1\) (143).

\(^1\) Tellingly the online Diccionario de Escritores en México, a state-sponsored initiative, includes an entry for Ulises Carrión, but under his works, lists only those published in Mexico—his short-story collections, an essay in a collection, and a play: <http://www.arts-history.mx/sitios/index.php?id_sitio=7851&id_seccion=3426&id_subseccion=9737&id_documento=1239>

Paz and Carrión’s correspondence is reproduced in ¿Mundos personales o estrategias culturales?
Shortly after the In-Out Center closed, Carrión’s penchant for this new production mode led him, in 1975, to found a bookstore and artist space along with his partner Aart van Barneveld and, according to some accounts, the help of eighteen friends who donated enough funds to pay for the first six months of rent.\(^{82}\) Named Other Books and So, it was “a space for exhibition and distribution of other books, non books, anti books, pseudo books, quasi books, concrete books, visual books, conceptual books, structural books, project books, statements books, instructions books” as well as multiples, posters, records, cassettes, and other objects (see fig. 11).\(^{83}\)

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\(^{82}\) According to Gerrit Jan de Rook in the Dutch magazine *Metropolis M*, No. 5, 2010.

\(^{83}\) The flyer is part of artist’s Davi Det Hompson archive at the James Branch Cabell Library at Virginia Commonwealth University.
Reflecting on his mindset when founding the bookstore, Carrión states in the 1983 text of his “We Have Won! Haven’t We?” that: “To start, books had to be liberated from literature. Then, they had to be liberated from letters. From then on, I considered everyone who didn’t read books an ally, and anyone who wrote books, my enemy” (6). Besides a glaring and, as we have seen, consistent aversion toward the lettered tradition, one can sense in Carrió’s statement the sense of urgency and militancy that tends to characterize all avant-gardes purporting to usher in a new era. Carrión’s stance required of him a degree of participation palpable in many of his community-building endeavors. According to Guy Schraenen, Carrión’s rejection of conventional literature was such that “one day he simply decided to distance himself from all the literary works he owned and distributed his entire library amongst his friends” (15). A significant part of his practice consisted in, and relied exclusively upon, the creation of alternate networks for dialogue to emerge in and the work to circulate within. Other Books and So became crucial in this regard, for its existence depended on Carrión’s development of personal contacts with the artists and independent publishers who were active in the artist-book circuit.
It seems only logical, then, that the bookstore would become a hub of social interaction and that it would gradually, later in the 1970s, lead Carrión to become engaged in mail art both as a vital participant and theorist. Carrión wrote extensively on mail art and its relationship to artist books, exhibited mail-art projects at Other Books and So, and published them in the twelve issues of the magazine *Ephemera*. Because mail art allows for collective creation through a self-sustaining network of international artists among whom there are no distinctions between viewers or audience members and participants, and because it circumvents all traditional institutions except for national postal systems, for Carrión, the practice “shifts the focus from what is traditionally called ‘art’ to a wider concept of ‘culture.’” And this shift is what makes Mail Art truly contemporary. In opposition to ‘personal worlds,’ Mail Art emphasizes cultural strategies” (77). Invested as he was in exploring the “complex mechanisms (the postal system) that allows for the transmission of messages,” eventually he would—if you forgive the pun—push the envelope of the form unlike other artists who were part of the circuit.\(^4\) In 1977 he penned a

\(^4\) Numerous Latin American artists were part of this network, and in many cases their involvement was a direct response to the censorship and repression to which dictatorial regimes were subjecting them. The Uruguayan poet Clemente Padín, a key figure in the mail-art circuit,
manifesto for an Erratic Art Mail International System (E.A.M.I.S.) which would do without official postal services altogether, and depend exclusively on its own networks of participants to circulate “messages in any format,” under the condition that a copy of whatever was circulated remain in the organization’s archive. The last statement in the eight-item manifesto pretty much summarizes Carrión’s position: “By using the E.A.M.I.S., you contribute to the only alternative to national bureaucracies and you strengthen the artistic community” (Artecorreo, 246).

Upon closing in 1978, Other Books and So would become an archive. Worth examining here is the fact that Other Books and So’s mandate, according to its concrete poem-cum-motto, was the “exhibition and distribution” of, among other types that might be easier to fathom, “non books,” “anti books,” and “pseudo books.” This premise can be traced back to what Carrión had expressed to Paz about devoting gallery walls to exhibiting texts; his “non books” was in fact jailed for having in his possession mail-art materials considered subversive by the regime. This did not prevent him from founding, in 1984 in Argentina, the Association of Latin American and Caribbean Mail Artists sometime after his release. Among Padín’s cofounders were Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, Verónica Orta, and Jorge Orta, from Argentina. More on Latin American mail artists can be found in the volume Artecorreo. Other important mail artists were Edgardo Antonio Vigo, from Argentina, and Guillermo Deisler, from Chile, and the Brazilian Paulo Bruscky. Felipe Ehrenberg was also an important mail artist.
or “anti books” might be literally anything departing from, and reacting to, conventional notions of the book.

In fact, Carrión’s first video, *A Book* (1978), is exemplary of his radical reimagining of the parameters of the book. Initially one sees a pair of hands tearing out the pages of a book. Once the book has been dismantled, someone is shown shuffling the torn out pages and assembling a new book with them. The video bears the hallmarks of many of the artist’s works: it is appropriation-based (the book dismantled is not a prop that was fabricated in order to shoot the video, but an existing volume); it involves the translation or transference of a work from one medium or support structure to another, and constitutes a record of this process; and, lastly, it embodies a critique of the medium from which the work departs. The video is intricately related to Carrión’s “The New Art of Making Books,” a manifesto whose deceptively simple title pays tribute to Lope de Vega’s *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias* and which embodies, just like Lope’s verse defense of his innovations to the genre of theater, a form of institutional critique and an antinomy: it is aimed at those both establishing and following the conventions of a practice that is already in place. Carrión acknowledges that books are nothing new, yet in the text’s very title,
he coopts and resignifies the notion of the book by using the verb "making" instead of "writing," axiomatically calling attention to books' conditions of production and signaling the obsolescence and artlessness of the traditional practice of writing books for someone else to assemble them. Moreover, by referencing Lope de Vega, he frames his own break with convention within a tradition of rupture (to use Octavio Paz's phrase) harkening back to most innovative era in Spanish literature.85

If the video evinces Ulises Carrión's disregard for the inviolability of books, at the same time it shows the artist not only destroying a book but also putting it back together again, albeit in a different form. It emphasizes the tearing apart of the book as much as its reassembly, showing that the bond between the form of a book and its contents need not be fixed. That is, as suggested by the video's title, A Book, a video can be a book and a book can be a video. An awareness of the book being "a space-time sequence" is precisely the element that distinguishes old

85 In Second Thoughts (1980) Carrión reflects on the impact of his manifesto and regrets the fact that its readers were seldom writers: "This text has been published in art magazines and has been quoted in an art context, but it was originally intended for a literary audience. Nowadays my interests have become interdisciplinary, and this means that I appreciate the response my texts have had among artists, but also that I regret that the reactions from writers have been so infrequent" (7). A neglect on the part of fiction writers and poets that seems entirely predictable, or at least justifiable, given that the manifesto explicitly mentions that "literary language (prose and poetry) is not the best fitted to the nature of books."

books from the new books he advocates for. Consider the following excerpts from "The New Art of Making Books":

A book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment—a book is also a sequence of moments. A book is not a case of words, nor a bag of words, nor a bearer of words.

[...

To make a book is to actualize its ideal space-time sequence by means of the creation of a parallel sequence of signs, be it linguistic or other.

Carrión links the book to video and film because they both involve temporal and spatial sequencing—pages are to books what frames are to film and video. Also, all of them, in the pre-digital age, relied on mechanical reproduction for their existence.86 Yet, importantly, in practice, he equated the book with video because the type of book he advocated for, as mentioned earlier, is one in which the book artist is engaged in most stages of production. Given the state of moving-image technologies at the time, the burgeoning technology of video was much more compatible

86 Most of Carrión’s bookworks were rarely one-of-a-kinds.
with Carrión’s propositions than film\textsuperscript{87}—by the mid-’70s artists were using the Portapak, which had been introduced by Sony in 1967. It had special appeal to artists given its portability and its built-in microphone, which made it possible to capture both image and sound simultaneously, and therefore granted its users a fuller control of the process.

Conventional literary texts, Carrión stresses in “The New Art of Making Books,” are oblivious to their support structure, to the space of the page: “A literary (prose) text contained in a book ignores the fact that the book is an autonomous space-time sequence. A series of more or less short texts (poems or other) distributed through a book following any particular ordering reveals the sequential nature of the book [...] but does not incorporate it or assimilate it.” But poetry is less foreign to bookworks because it uses “the real, physical space whereon [...] words appear, in a more intentional, more evident, deeper way.”

\textsuperscript{87} The In-Out Center played an important role in terms of helping to develop and exhibit new-media projects. Raúl Marroquín, a key member of the In-Out Center, had been a student of the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, which had video production facilities and was one of the first art schools in the Netherlands to provide a context for new-media productions. Marroquín’s most important video-installation piece, for the exhibition space in Amsterdam The Bank—which had been a former bank—was First World TV convention (1980). For the installation, 280 television sets appear to be dialoguing among themselves and envelop the viewer in an elaborate narrative involving the robbery of the bank. For more information on the development of video-based projects in the Netherlands, see “Looking back. The roots of video production at the Jan van Eyck Academie” by Jennifer Steerskamp: \url{http://dare.uva.nl/document/171066}. 
Yet it is not proximate to the "new art" because it posits itself as a vehicle for "inter-subjective communication" taking place in an "abstract, ideal, impalpable space." On the other hand, concrete and visual poetry, by emphasizing their materials, represent the culmination of the deliberate use of visual and spatial elements in the poem, and therefore anticipate Carrión's new art, in which "communication is still inter-subjective, but it occurs in a concrete, real, physical space—the page."

An early book by Carrión enacts the sequential articulation of time, space, and inter-subjectivity with striking concision: *Tell Me What Sort of Wallpaper Your Room Has and I Will Tell You Who You Are*, published in 1973 by In-Out Productions. It consists of a brief sequence of different wallpaper swatches used as pages, with each one referring the reader to a particular space: that of the room it supposedly belongs in. The only text printed on each page is a label of sorts, beginning with "My room," and continuing with "My parent's room," "My sister's room," "My teacher's room," "My psychiatrist's room," "My accountant's room," and so on. One of these rooms, "Your room," is open to the reader, and is consistent with Carrión's addressing the reader in the book's title.
In keeping with his view in "The New Art of Making Books" that if in traditional books every page is, "as such, identical with the preceding ones and with those that follow," then in the new art every page "is an individualized element of a structure (the book) wherein it has a particular function to fill," the pages in Tell Me What Sort of Wallpaper Your Room Has literally, then, are equated with specific, non-interchangeable physical spaces. The bookwork could also be thought to literalize the spatial metaphor of a poem being comprised of stanzas, a term whose origin, as we know, comes from the Italian word for “room.” The book as a whole would be analogous to a book-length poem with stanzas laid out on different pages or to a collection of one-stanza poems. Regardless, its title promises something that is never delivered: the book tells nothing. The laconic labels on each page invite but do not spell out connections between wallpaper patterns and personality types. Associated with the patterns are different identities in relationship to the fictional subject of the book. The direct exchange implicit in the title—readers telling the author what wallpaper they have and the author consequently revealing to them something about who they really are—is suggested but, it goes without saying, not actualized. Something like a dialogue between
the book and its readers does indeed take place when they read into the associations. It is as if the material of the book were made to speak to the beholder, like a ventriloquist’s dummy, and thus prompt a transaction that ultimately foregrounds the readers’ own preconceived ideas about societal roles, the character traits associated with them, and the manifestation of such traits in personal taste. Again, the effectiveness of *Tell Me What Sort of Wallpaper Your Room Has* rests on the removal of the literary within the very space of the book—the less the author speaks, the more than page can function as the reader’s own sounding board. This is a partial and contradictory removal, however, since the bookwork’s non-tautological title, like that for *Arguments* discussed earlier, already suggests a literary move, a metaphor, as opposed to, for instance, the titles for the bookwork *Sonnets* and the video *A Book*. Even so, these latter titles are only ostensibly descriptive; they do not shun playing with signification: the miscellany of works implied by the plural in *Sonnets* is at odds with the repetitions of Rossetti’s sonnet, albeit with variations, and, as we have seen, *A Book* is not a book but a video.

At the crux of Carrión’s book projects, then, is a complex semiotic question concerning what it is that they
actually seek to communicate and to what end, a question which conventionally has been associated with authorial intention. Although Carrión, albeit ambivalently, claims that “the author’s intention is unfathomable” in “The New Art of Making Books,” he proposes an alternate model of intentionality which is also tied to a belief (albeit qualified) in the book as a site for inter-subjective communication. In the manifesto he writes that words are not “the bearers of the message, nor the mouthpieces of the soul, nor the currency of communication,” as in traditional literature. In contrast, “in a book of the new art words don’t transmit any intention; they’re used to form a text which is an element of a book, and it is this book, as a totality, that transmits the author’s intention.”

In the aforementioned correspondence with Octavio Paz, Carrión, conscious of his probable arrogance, compares himself to an abstract artist, a comparison that makes sense if we take into account that each and every gesture in an abstract work is not something whose meaning viewers need to decipher in order to grasp the work. In fact, in its refusal of figuration, the overall effect of such a work on the viewer would underscore the futility of such an enterprise. “The abstraction of specific contents is, precisely, the best (if not the only one, certainly the
best) way for a literary message to contain its own negation. Here indeed the message is a plural one. In that other literature the message is falsely plural,” Carrión writes to Paz (143). He proclaims an active antagonism toward literature but we see again and again that he does not reject all of its elements—in fact, he aims for dialogue and polysemy. In fact, it is the dominant strain of literature that he is against—that in which the author, as Foucault puts it, is “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning.” Underlying his rejection of those elements commonly associated with literature might be his belief that they actually constitute obstacles for the sign’s unfolding and indeterminacy: “On the other hand, structures (I insist, revealed, set in motion, and in touch with one another) do not transmit one message but any message. Many. All of them. And none at the same time” (143).

The structures that Carrión might he be referring to are alluded to in his first letter to Paz from September 1972. Carrión mentions he has read El nuevo festín de Esopo, Paz’s book-length, ultimately critical, gloss of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s writings. As a believer of the poem’s transcendence, Paz finds structuralism’s emphasis on the relational value of the elements within systems of signs
lacking when it comes to explaining the ultimate, immanent meaning of signs and their relationship to being. Carrión disagrees with Paz regarding the role of poetry in structuralist thought: “I believe that poetry is invited, but that it has to be a new poetry. A poetry that is aware of the distance that separates language from reality. But not one that only says that it is aware. Hamlet was already aware: ‘Words, words, words.’ [...] Now poetry has to be the very manifestation of this awareness, of this distance, but it has to convey it without using the words that suffer from the very distancing that they are denouncing” (142).

Although admitting that he is not thinking in terms of linguistics “(I practically know nothing about linguistics)” (142), Carrión’s answer to the conundrum of creating works that by eschewing words may reflect an awareness of the distance between the signifier and the signified will be structures activated through sequential works. “For me each text is a mathematical problem: there is an unknown to figure out. Such unknown is the possibility of saying something. Words are only the terms of an equation. The x is the possibility of saying something, and it needs to be figured out each time. And there are thousands of ways to figure it out” (142). Poetry, for him, is just one of the structures allowing for
one to figure out the unknown, or to test the ability to say something; other such structures include jokes, onomatopoeias, and any other form of language that might allow for one to “go beyond words.” For Carrión only that which goes beyond words thus points to the irrevocable truth that anything with the structure of a language can mean something. What it means is of no consequence: “But what do structures emit? That depends on each reader. I am not willing or able to impose content because I do not even know what words mean (and how would I know if the reader knows what they mean?) I am not absolutely sure of anything. Absolutely not. What I do know for sure is that the structures are there, that I understand them the same way the reader understands them, that they move if I touch them, and that then, yes, they ‘emit’” (142).

Carrión’s correspondence with Paz concerned the forthcoming publication of a theoretical text and a group of sequential poems in the January 1973 issue of Plural, number 16. Such works are highly indicative of his thoughts on structures and their ability to “go beyond words,” seriality (per force necessary to convey patterns or structures), and the notion of the bookwork as a “space-time sequence.” The selection featured in Plural was part of a 1972 manuscript titled Poesías that was not published
until 2007 by Taller Ditoria in Mexico City. This collection contains twelve sections—"Rhythms," "Rhymes," "Punctuations," "Refrains," "Graphs," "Plagiarisms," "Derivations," "Associations," "Repetitions," "Functions," "Words," and "Elisions"—all following a similar template: each begins with a lyric poem or excerpt borrowed from the Spanish canon which is used as a model that Carrión deforms or distorts through six subsequent variations. Most common among the treated works are poems dating from the Spanish pre-Renaissance and Renaissance periods, by authors ranging from the first Spanish poet known by name, Gonzalo de Berceo, to Jorge Manrique, Juan del Encina, Gil Vicente, and Lope de Rueda. Just like the nearly unreadable variations to Rossetti's "Heart's Compass" toward the end of Sonnets, Carrión's variations will depart further and further away from the borrowed text—by performing a sort of reductio ad aburdum of some of its most salient qualities—to the point of becoming impossible as propositions for poems. Consider the first series in the book, "Rhythms." Carrión uses the following excerpt of the eight-syllable

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88 The reason why these works were not published in an artist book is unknown. Certainly Carrión did not lack the resources or contacts to do so. One cannot help but speculate about his motivation to keep these works out of circulation except for their appearance in Plural. It is likely that the fact that all of them spring from Spanish-language canonical texts was decisive—he was, after all, in Europe—although, in the end, all of Carrión's Poesías skirt language in some way or another.
pastoral poem “Montesina era la garça” by Juan del Encina

(1468-1529) as a model:

Montesina era la garça
y de muy alto volar:
no hay quien la pueda tomar.

Mi cuidoso pensamiento
ha seguido su guarida,
mas cuanto más es seguida
tiene mas defendimiento;
de seguirla soy contento
por de su vista gozar:
no hay quien la pueda tomar. (non-paginated)

From the mountain was the heron
and its flight was very high:
there is no one who can take her.

My careful reasoning
has followed her lair,
yet the more she is followed
the more defense she mounts:
I am happy to follow her
to take pleasure at her sight:
there is no one who can take her.\textsuperscript{89}

The first variation Carrión introduces is a result of scanning the excerpt’s rhythm and faithfully rendering it as a combination of stressed and non-stressed syllables: “tá” and “ta” respectively, “ta” being the syllable in Spanish that one would use in order to convey a song’s rhythm without singing its lyrics, for instance, and which would be comparable to English-speakers’ “da”:

```
Tatatá tatatatá ta
tatá tatatatá
tatá tatatatá
tatá tatatatá
tatá tatatatá
tatatatá tatá
tatatatá tatatatá ta
tatatatá tatatatá ta
tatatatá tatatatá ta
tatatatá tatatatá ta
tatatatá tatatatá
tatatatá tatatatá
```

\textsuperscript{89} Another one of Carrión’s early bookworks is \textit{Looking for Poetry} (Beau Geste, 1973). A bilingual book, each verse is formed by rows of words in Spanish and English that could be thought of as synonymous with or metaphors for the poem’s lines. Take for example: “lines/ threads/ wires/ strings/ cables/ hairs/ arteries/ canals/ rivers/ roads.” Like Juan del Encina’s heron, poetry is sought, but not apprehended—the proof is that the structure never settles, but rather continues throughout the book.
The Carrión will recombine stressed and unstressed syllables six times, introducing extraneous elements which will prove challenging to decode as descriptive of the source text’s rhythms. But the process goes even further; he will also put forth rhythms for texts that are simply impossible in the Spanish language since there are hardly any words (except for perhaps adverbial forms ending with the suffix -mente) that contain more than one stressed syllable, let alone four, five, or seven, and there is no polysyllabic word lacking a stressed syllable. The second variation is particularly indicative of Carrión’s strategy:

2

Tátátátá tatata tá
tátátátá tatata (tá)
tátátátátátátá (tá)

Tátátátá tatata tá
tátátátá tatata tá
tatatatatatatata
tátátátá tatata tá
tátátátá tatata tá
tatatatatatata (ta)
tátátátátátá (tá)

From the fourth variation on Carrión begins to replace syllables with hyphens, signaling punctuated silences. As an example, take lines two and three in that variation: “-- -- -- -- -- -- (--)/ tátatatatatata (ta).” The sixth and last variation in the series consists of a minimal poem made up of four monosyllables where the removal of all of the other syllables is not indicated, as opposed to in the previous example, where the hyphens signal deletions:

6

ta

ta

ta

ta

A poem following that rhythmic pattern would indeed be possible in Spanish, and is easy to imagine, if those unstressed syllables were prepositions, articles, pronouns, and/or a select number of monosyllabic nouns and verbs. In such a poem all that would be left would be particles of
utterances left open to the multiple relations that readers could establish between them. This poem would mirror Carrión’s strategy of offering templates for virtual poems that the reader is invited to provide.

A few questions arise when performing the reading operations that Carrión’s variations beckon the reader to partake of: 1) Are the variations poems themselves or schemes for poems that the reader contributes? 2) If the variations are schemes for unwritten poems, are readers intended to supply the poem’s contents by taking its components from the borrowed poem that led to the variations? That is, are readers encouraged to rip apart the source poem, in this case, Juan del Encina’s, and recombine its elements so it matches Carrión’s template? Or, 3) Are readers simply invited to fill in the template’s blanks in whichever way they see fit? Of course there is no single answer to this question; all four options are valid. Carrión’s variations unfold in such a way that they allow for the reader to engage with them in any or all four of the approaches they put forward.

Other sections of Poesías leave less room for doubt regarding Carrión’s procedures and goals. The section “Rhymes” takes as a model an earlier text, the sonnet “En lloor de Sancta Clara, virgen” (“In Praise of Saint Clara,
Virgin”) by Iñigo López de Mendoza (1398-1458), Marqués de Santillana, whose assimilation of Petrarch and Boccaccio led him to lay the foundations for the Castilian sonnet:

Clara por nombre, por obra e virtude
luna de Assís, e fija de Ortulana,
de sanctas doñas enxemplo e salud,
entre las veudas una e soberana:

principio de alto bien, e juventud
perseverante, e fuente de do mana
pobreça humilde, e closo alamud,
del serápico sol muy dina hermana.

Tú, virgen, triumphas del triumpho triumphante
e glorioso premio de la palma:
assí non yerra quien de ti se ampara

e te cuenta del cuento dominante
de los sanctos, o sancta sacra e alma;
pues hora ora pro me, beata Clara.90

The first variation for this model replaces all the text preceding the rhyming syllables with ten hyphens,

90 Since Carrión’s treatment of this text seemingly avoids any engagement with its content, a translation of the sonnet seems unnecessary.
perhaps misleadingly since in this particular section hyphens do not stand for syllables (if they did, they would add up to more than the eleven syllables comprising every line in the original). Only the rhyming syllables are kept, resulting in the following poem:

1

- - - - - - - - - - ud
- - - - - - - - - - ana
- - - - - - - - - - ud
- - - - - - - - - - ana

- - - - - - - - - - ud
- - - - - - - - - - ana
- - - - - - - - - - ud
- - - - - - - - - - ana

- - - - - - - - - - ante
- - - - - - - - - - alma
- - - - - - - - - - ara
- - - - - - - - - - ante
- - - - - - - - - - alma
- - - - - - - - - - ara
If here readers are invited to riff off of the original to compose a new poem that follows the source text’s rhyme scheme precisely, in subsequent variations Carrión does without any of the Marqués de Santillana’s rhymes and even presents the reader with last syllables that, being overdetermined, could either pertain to one or a couple of words only or to nonexistent words in the Spanish language. So, for example, if the variations’ rhyme schemes remain abab abab cde cde in all cases, in the fourth variation the rhyming syllables will be “-ájaros,” “-ébol,” “-od,” “-azre,” and “-uin.” Despite how difficult it might be to conjure Spanish words ending with “-od” or “-azre,” Carrión, again, takes this beyond and presents the reader with puzzling figments in variation five, where a, b, c, d, and e are “-arr,” “-oiu,” “-í,” “-ésclunt,” and “-ódguiupsa.” This version has cut all its ties to the source text to become a sound poem with the structure of a sonnet. Readers may conceive of the hyphens as non-uttered syllables or phonemes whose sound might be a mere hum, or might fill them in with whatever they please. Regardless, the sonic qualities of the syllables Carrión has put forth—their harshness and oddity—already bestow the variation with an intense, if indeterminate, expressivity.
Similarly, in the section “Punctuations,” whose model is an excerpt of the arch-canonical poem by Jorge Manrique (1440-1479) “Coplas por la muerte de su padre” (“Stanzas about the Death of his Father”), the inquiries about the ultimate meaning of life and worth of earthly pleasures in the source text lead to a, despite its wordlessness, highly communicative visual poem by Carrión where inquisitiveness is magnified:

Carrión’s reflections on the distance between the sign and the signified conveyed in his epistolary exchanges with
Paz seem particularly appropriate here. Manrique’s metaphysical questions are extended to the nature of words themselves, with this visual poem elegantly embodying Carrión’s dictum that poetry should manifest an awareness of the gap between words and reality without relying on words to do so—since they are per force untrustworthy vehicles for the transmission of their own insufficiencies. The next variation will be even more economical, and is a critique of Carrión’s very authorial gestures: appearing on the page we find a simple “¿6?” questioning its own conditions of possibility, its validity as well as that of the variations that preceded it, and quietly begging the question: “Can this be a poem?” Its unique placement at the end of the series of six variations on a poem undoubtedly frames it as one.

It is this type of inquiries and reductio ad absurdum propositions that actually propel the engines of Carrión’s “structures in motion.” The question that prevails in the “Rhythms” section of Poesías, then, might be: If rhythm—or melopoeia, in Poundian terms—distinguishes poetry from prose, can it be the sole constitutive element of the poem? If suggestion and ambiguity, as opposed to linear, declarative statements, differentiates poetry from prose—thus making poems the prime vehicles for metaphysical
inquiries—how far can uncertainty be taken? It seems only logical that a section of the book, “Graphs,” would tackle the poem’s morphology and visual presentation. If a poem first and foremost announces itself as such through its lineation, can its mere shape constitute a poem? Can we sustain that one of the most immediate effects of rhyme and repetition in the poem is that they help to harness it, to give it its shape? These are the questions at the core of this section of the book, whose model is the poem “Villancete” by Gil Vicente (1465-1536), with its first and last mirroring stanzas and its sing-song rhyme scheme:

¡A la guerra,
caballeros esforzados!
Pues los ángeles sagrados
a socorro son en tierra,
¡a la guerra!

Con las armas resplandecientes
vienen del cielo volando,
Dios y Hombre apellidando
en socorro de las gentes.

¡A la guerra,
caballeros esmerados!
Pues los ángeles sagrados
a socorro son en tierra,
¡a la guerra!

If in this poem Carrión seems again to be unconcerned with the poem’s content, he is certainly engaged with its morphology, which partially results from the poem’s repetitions and rhyme patterns. It seems, therefore, that its translation into English (albeit forced and rather incompetent) is relevant:

To war,
striving knights!
For the holy angels
relief on earth are,
to war!

With their armor beaming
flying from the heavens they come
God and Man forming one name
to bring relief to earth’s beings.

To war,
zealous knights!
For the holy angels
relief on earth are,

to war!

In the first variation of this poem Carrión traces the outline of each stanza and arrives at the following geometrical shapes:

1
As we might expect by now, Carrión’s subsequent variations will be templates for poems whose shapes have cut themselves loose from the constraints that the model text could impose on them. Carrión will arrive at some playful, rather implausible, shapes, such as the one for variation number four:
Or this one for variation number five:

Variation six again will subvert the proposition implicit in all of the previous works in this section—the proposition equating poetry with meter and lineation, with the patterned arrangement of words—and instead of presenting neat and contained geometric forms that we could identify as corresponding to a poem’s stanzas, it presents a large rectangle delineating the page’s perimeter. The number six appears inside this rectangle, instead of framing it, the gesture denoting that the literary work is both paratext and text, that the text owes its literariness more to paratextual elements, the conventions framing it as literature, than to its inherent characteristics.
Every one of the works in *Poesías* conveys this message, but nowhere is it more apparent than in the section of the book called “Plagiarisms,” in which Carrión focuses on the simple and enormously complex convention of using bylines to designate a given’s work intellectual property and hence signal the commodification of language. Here Carrión claims authorship of a few anonymous lyric poems—again, canonical Spanish texts—as well as other works in the public domain. For the section’s model he borrows the 16th-century mystical poem “A Cristo Crucificado” (“To Christ on the Cross”). And as for variation number three, the header says it all: “Bamba by Ulises Carrión.” A transcription of a fragment of the song follows—“Para bailar la bamba, para bailar la bamba se necesita una poca de gracia”—an operation perhaps less targeted to undermine the authorship of the folk song in question than to underline its openness to collective co-creation: no song, in fact, is incomplete as a work until someone interprets it, and, in the case of this specific son jarocho from Veracruz, Carrión’s home state, popularized by Ritchie Valens in the late 1950s and later Los Lobos, interpretation demands that singers improvise added lyrics when rendering the song. The fourth variation in this section is indicative of a similar dynamic where the
completion of a saying depends on its being uttered: it is titled “Various,” and is comprised of lineated proverbs and clichés or set phrases.

4

Varia
de Ulises Carrión

Tanto monta, monta tanto
Isabel como Fernando.

Rápido como el rayo.

Lo vi con mis propios ojos.

Comer
y rascar
todo es
empezar.

Various
by Ulises Carrión

As much as the one is worth
so too is the other.
Fast as lightning.

I saw it with my own eyes.

Appetite
comes
with eating.

Translating the poem reveals an interesting dichotomy: if the clichés in it are not specific to Spanish, the proverbs in the first and last stanzas most certainly are. The first one "As much as the one is worth so too is the other" was the motto for the prenuptial agreement for the Catholic Monarchs Fernando II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile, the origin of the second one is unknown, but it is popular in Spain and, if translated literally to "With eating and scratching it is all about starting," it would certainly provoke more of a cognitive dissonance than the translation I propose, which aims to convey the familiarity of the sayings utilized. Stock phrases, proverbs, and clichés are the equivalent to linguistic readymades whose staidness is refuted every time a speaker resorts to them. They constitute an inventory of ostensible
insight stored for future deployment whose author is nobody and all. Yet in Carrión’s poem, they are stripped of their commonsensical veneer and are rendered almost entirely unfamiliar—the exchanges they are meant to facilitate are blocked, precluded by their being presented as non-sequiturs—everything but transparent ones, at that. Variation number five plays with parataxis as well: the poem is a list of seemingly random words, at the end of which appears the word “psychoanalysis,” as if to tease a zealous reader looking to discover the hidden logic behind Carrión’s free associations.

If Carrión can appropriate a host of diverse linguistic phenomena and recombine them at will in order to exercise his particular brand of authorship, his tool to do so is language broken down to its most minimal and pliant particles, the most acousmatic of all utterances: the alphabet’s letters, which in Spanish total 27 since “ñ” is counted as a letter of its own. So, for the sixth variation, Carrión borrows the alphabet—a condition of possibility for modern societies and a public good if there ever was one.

6

Abecedario
de Ulises Carrión
Craig Dworkin's *Reading the Illegible* examines strategically illegible works that are overtly intertextual in nature and whose "radical formalism" stems, in part, from paragrammatic misreadings of the texts with which they are in dialogue. Taking the notion of the paragrammatic from Ihab Hassan, Dworkin describes these misreadings as: "any reading that challenges the normative referential grammar of a text by forming 'networks of signification not accessible through conventional reading habits'" (xx). He examines how the Situationist's détournement constitutes a form of paragrammatic misreading; despite its re-framing of a source text, it is "the antithesis of quotation" Dworkin writes (130). He studies English-language avant-garde texts—palimpsestic works by John Cage, Jackson MacLow, Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, Robert Smithson, Tom Phillips, and many others—that have utilized analogous methodologies and have resulted from erasures, récritures, and defacements of appropriated intertexts.

A work whose procedures partially relate to Ulises Carrión's in *Poesías* is Marcel Broodthaers's 1969 eponymous rendition of Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, to which he added
subtitle "*(image).*" Broodthaers’s artist book is a series of spreads in which the content of Mallarmé’s poem has been substituted by ink blocks of varying widths that chart the visual display patterns of the original: the placement of each line on the page and its different font size. Dworkin writes, "*(image)* is more a logical extension of Mallarmé’s poetics, recognizing not just the obvious fact that *Un coup de dés* is a visually marked poem with a uniquely significant layout, but that Mallarmé’s work was predicated—even in its most transcendentally spiritual aspirations—on the materiality of the letter" (150). Undoubtedly Broodthaers’s book is not a book to be read but one to be looked at. Dworkin adds, “With this thorough illegibility, Broodthaers thus establishes what Jacques Derrida would call [in *Dissemination*] ‘a text, that is, a readability without a signified’” (150).

The same can be said about the series of alterations to the visual, semantic, syntactic, and rhythmic patterns of Spanish canonical poems in *Poesías*, which Carrión zeroes in on at the expense of the poems themselves. As we have seen, only through a paragrammatic misreading of the source texts, and their subsequent erasures, are Carrión’s variations possible. Not a single variation grapples with the normative referential grammar of the borrowed texts. Is
not what these variations embody precisely “a readability without a signified”? A double one, at that? The readability allowing for the source text to be distinguishable as a poem, given its patterned arrangement of signifiers, regardless of what it seeks to convey, and the readability of Carrión’s variations, which although aimed at distorting the very patterns ensuring the legibility of the source texts, become themselves readable as texts thanks to the serial logic of which they partake. No matter how outlandish and parodic Carrión’s variations may be, the fact is that they are not only readable, but they also convey a readability, as the pages devoted to them in this chapter have made clear.

The plagiarized alphabet poem is the prime example of a text that is “a readability without a signified,” and so is the series “Functions,” where the patterns formed by parts of speech used in the poem “Duelo de la Virgen” (“The Virgin’s Mourning”) by Gonzalo de Berceo are parsed and recorded in the first variation and consequently scrambled or overridden in later variants. Witness the discrepancy between the first stanza of variation one:

verb preposition article noun adjective preposition noun

noun
And the first stanza of variation four:

verb verb verb verb verb
verb verb verb verb verb
verb verb interjection verb
verb verb verb verb verb

By now readers should not be surprised by the reversal and preposterousness of the second stanza of variation four:

interjection interjection interjection interjection interjection
interjection interjection interjection interjection interjection
interjection interjection verb interjection
interjection interjection interjection interjection interjection

Situationist détournements and Carrión’s works in Poesías, as well as Sonnets, share a trait whose criticality cannot be overstated: they do not conceal the origins of their source texts so that the works may appear to have been generated autonomously. Not only is the derivative status of a work resulting from a détournement
or of a work by Carrión evinced, this status is also considered exemplary. Carrión would no doubt agree with the Situationists that, "the idea of pure, absolute expression is dead; it only temporarily survives in parodic form..." (10). His works also possess the propagandistic quality inherent to the détournement since they so economically and efficiently demonstrate the appeal of the procedures whereby they were generated. That is, like the détournement, Carrión’s method is the best advertisement for itself; at every turn it shows its practicality "because it is so easy to use and because of its inexhaustible potential for reuse" (55).

Carrión could have easily not included the Spanish poems in Poesías, instead presenting only each series of variations as templates for virtual poems toying with the possibilities of whatever rubric they fell under: “rhythm,” "rhymes," “punctuations," “functions," etc. Yet he deliberately chose to expose to the readers the certainly cost-effective procedures—in the sense that they hardly required any labor—through which he arrived at his variations. Why? As much as Carrión questioned

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91 The Situationists famously claimed of the détournement that “the cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding [...] the first step toward a literary communism” (11). Carrión’s aim is not to turn everyone into a writer or artist, but his method certainly dismantles the convention
conventional notions of intentionality, noting in the manifesto “The New Art of Making Books” that “words cannot avoid meaning something, but they can be divested of intentionality,” let us not forget that in the same manifesto he also claims that a bookwork “as a totality [...] transmits the author’s intention.” Further down in the same text he writes: “the author has no other intention than to test the language’s ability to mean something.” And in doing so, one might add, reveal a “readability without a signified,” or, in Carrión’s lexicon, the communicability of the structures that he sets in motion in his works. That this communicability be transmitted and received is enough; it matters not that readers interact with bookworks thoroughly: “The reading may stop at the very moment you have understood the total structure of the book.”

Carrión’s is no endurance art, where the limits of the audience’s attention span or ability to occupy the position of spectator for an extended period of time are tested. The bookwork is not a repository for accumulated information that might lead to a revelation or to a big picture either. The climax of the experience of interacting with a book is to “get it,” to understand its core, organizing structures. Key to Poesías, then, is the reader’s understanding that that dictates that a work’s value equals the labor its maker has invested into its crafting.
the works comprising it are predicated on an undirected distortion of the Spanish canonical texts. Like the Situationists, Carrión puts forth models that the reader is invited to emulate; models dismantling the hierarchies and values implicit in the literary canon and which, importantly, do not erect themselves as authoritative texts. On the contrary: they flaunt their residuality and provisionalism, they establish a dialogical relationship with texts that a tradition has disseminated unilaterally, monologically, through the exercise of authority. It is by design that Carrión chose to intervene, distort, and render acousmatic these Spanish canonical texts only, and by design that he consequently devaluates these texts, or if not, at least reminds readers of their detachment from a canonical corpus, their obsolescence, and their quality of being “forgotten originals.” He seeks not to erect a body of work that would seek to supplant what came before it. Carrión’s *Poesías* ultimately negate themselves too, insisting on their marginality—they present themselves as vacant, emptied out vessels, or structures, for the reader to in turn distort, fill back up with meaning, or apply to the source texts of their choice.

Liminal texts, in their anti-logocentrism, bespeak time and again of an excess or surplus of non-instrumental
communicability. Take for instance the neological rhymes he proposes in the “Rhymes” section of *Poesías*, mentioned on page 51, or poems made up of interjections, like the one cited above, or onomatopoeias as they appear in the following poem from the “Associations” section of the book:

```plaintext
------toc---------
------pas---------
bang-------------
------crash-------
hip--------------
miau-------------
------pst---------
---chis-----------
------tras--------
--ring-----------
----pum-----------
------crac--------
------glu---------
------mmh---------
-arg-------------
rrr--------------
------mua---------
--guau-----------
-------achís------
```
A body haunts these poems, a body able to produce an excess of expressive sounds at the edge of language's confines. In *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language*, Daniel Heller-Roazen reminds us that it is precisely the sacrifice of this surfeit, or the "atrophy of phonic abilities" (10) in Roman Jakobson's terms, which makes the acquisition of a mother tongue possible during infancy. And it is these repressed sounds and body's rumblings that ghost Carrión's poems. Onomatopoeias, interjections, exclamations, imitations of animal sounds all appear in the poem cited above. According to Heller-Roazen, exactly in this category of utterance "the intensity of a language is nowhere as great [...] Nowhere is a language more 'itself' than at the moment it seems to leave the terrain of sound and sense" (18). Carrión knew this intuitively, proving it not only in his poems in *Poesías*, but in the sound texts he performed and recorded on a cassette tape for *The Poet's Tongue* (1977). Perhaps for our purposes the best example is the piece "First Spanish Lesson," which consists of a recording of Carrión asking and responding questions meant to determine whether different permutations of the phrase
“¿Es español?” (“Is it Spanish?”) constitute proper Spanish or not. Consider this brief excerpt as an example: “¿Es pañol español? No, pañol no es español. ¿Es paño español español? Sí, paño español es español. ¿Es paño españoles español? No, paño españoles no es español. ¿Es paños españoles español? Sí, paños españoles es español...” (“Is pañol Spanish? No, pañol is not Spanish. Is Spanish lace Spanish? Yes, Spanish lace is Spanish. Is Spanishes lace Spanish? No, Spanishes lace is not Spanish. Is Spanish laces Spanish? Yes, Spanish laces is Spanish...”) As the sound piece reaches hilarity, the language straddles the line between sense and nonsense. The threat of language’s particles descending into utter gibberish when being recombined through a seemingly endless number of possible patterns is precisely what confirms the structures of Spanish grammar and the communicability of Carrión’s structures.

Carrión’s at its core was an anti-authoritative, moderately scaled practice. It is safe to say that none of Carrión’s works—his bookworks, videos, performances, mail-art projects—aspired to reach anyone outside of a self-selected network of likeminded practitioners. Both in their production and dissemination they relied on self-managed networks of individuals who were summoned to complete their
dialogical propositions—whether in his poems; performative projects such as Gossip, Scandal and Good Manners (1981), for which he invited a group of participants to spread and individually contribute to gossip about him and keep track of how the hearsay was distorted during its propagation; or mail-art initiatives like Definitions of Art (1977) for which correspondents needed to send in responses to the question “What is art?” It is therefore not surprising that upon Carrión’s death in 1989, his work faded temporarily into oblivion: his books were not in libraries and only a handful of people had witnessed his performances. A large portion of his endeavors was ultimately ephemeral and institutions were not invested in Carrión’s legacy because they had not been privy to his work’s development in the first place. Yet decades later a new history began being written. In 2002 the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City presented the retrospective Ulises Carrión: ¿Mundos personales o estrategias culturales?, which emphasized Carrión’s videos, mail art, newspaper art, and ephemera, somewhat neglecting his poetry-based bookworks and sound poetry. This is understandable given that after 1973 Carrión’s bookworks began dealing less and less with poetry. Of the twenty that he published, most of those dealing with poetry—seven out of about ten—were published
in 1972 and 1973. He became more involved with media that the realm of visual arts ultimately embraced—video art and performance—and the anti-literary stance he had manifested when immersing himself in Amsterdam’s conceptual art milieu remained firm.

Agents in the fields of literature and sound would eventually embark on a project of recuperation of Carrión’s legacy as well. In 2007 the Mexico City-based independent press Taller Ditoria published Carrión’s 1973 *Poesías* in a costly edition. Also, a group of sound poems originally available on cassette tape only, *The Poet’s Tongue*, have recently been put out on vinyl by the prestigious Italian record label Alga Marghen, which is devoted to releasing and rereleasing seminal experimental and avant-garde recordings.

If the politics of Carrión’s entire body of work are consistent with the autonomous and self-sustaining modes of production and distribution that he developed, one wonders what their relationship is to the politics of contemporary independent organs and institutions invested in unearthing alternate, until now forgotten histories like his. On the one hand, when it comes to reception, a community currently interested in Ulises Carrión’s production is still limited and self-selecting—his work has hardly become commoditized
or admitted into the canon. This interpretive community might find Carrión’s DIY art production and distribution model exemplary in the context of the corporatization of contemporary culture.

On the other hand, when it comes to Mexican institutions, one senses a different type of investment at play. In 2000 the major travelling exhibition Global Conceptualisms: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s, curated by Jane Farver, Luis Camnitzer, and Rachel Weiss opened at the Queens Museum of Art in New York. This was a steadfastly international exhibition of works proved to owe their conceptualist strategies more to the politics of the contexts from which they emerged than to the formal concerns that preoccupied the first generation of North American conceptual artists. Although the exhibition included artists from Japan, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, North America, and Australia and New Zealand who had been “spurred by local conditions and histories,” no Mexican artists were represented. The Latin American section included primarily artists from Argentina—the collective behind the 1968 multi-part intervention Tucumán Arde especially—92—and Brazil (among them Cildo Meireles, Lygia Clark, Antonio Manuel, Hélio Oiticica). The

premise of the exhibition, to a degree, excluded work that was not expressly political and that was not made under extremely adverse conditions, which partially would explain the omission of Carrión, one of Mexico’s seminal conceptualists. This type of exclusion is not unusual. *Points of Origin* itself was seen as corrective of a partial and exclusionary view of the development of conceptual art, and its criteria for inclusions and exclusions could no doubt be subjected to the same type of inquiry that gave rise to the exhibition itself. Regardless, *Points of Origin* signaled a shift in the distribution of cultural capital which began to be assigned to practices that were previously invisible in the international arena. It hardly seems surprising, then, that Mexican institutions would be invested in unearthing a figure whose body of work would help to prove that Mexico had produced an artist who, on the level of discursive sophistication, equaled his counterparts in Europe and North and South America.

We have seen how from an off-kilter perspective Carrión adopted and mined rational-sounding discourse—applied to his interest in “structures”—in order precisely to undermine the instrumental reason supporting the book, the canon, and the literary text. The acousmatic structures in which Carrión’s own voice is absent constitute post-
literary works whose legibility, ironically, depends on their relationship to those traditional literary elements that he intervenes, such as the canonical poem’s attendant metrical patterns and rhyme schemes, for instance. Yet these structures are almost entirely devoid of literariness. They are so open and have been so vacated of the symbolic and Carrión’s subjectivity, that they can be resignified at will. They almost could be said not to pose any resistance to their being instrumentalized by the reader, which would be their most radical possibility. Carrión claimed he aimed for his works to contain their own negation; in this volatility resides their most subversive quality.
Conclusions

In the introduction to this dissertation I considered the ways in which the poem may signal its being politically motivated, and mentioned that the different approaches may manifest themselves as the politics in the poem, the politics through the poem, and the politics of the poem, according to Jed Rasula’s useful categories. The first two approaches risk reducing the poem to its topicality, whereas the third reflects the way in which the text actually enacts its politics regardless of whether its content deals with political issues at all. I mentioned the aporia that those poets seeking to respond to the upheaval and power shifts taking place in the late ’60s and ’70s in Latin America encountered when wanting to make a statement that avoided the rhetorical trappings of a leftist discourse that by then had become irreparably splintered.

I have provided, thus, examples of works from this era by Waly Salomão, Juan Luis Martínez, and Ulises Carrión that deal with this predicament first and foremost by refusing to speak for others. Instead, these works aspire to be vehicles through which others may speak. Moreover, in line with Ron Silliman’s arguments in the essay “The Political Economy of Poetry” discussed in the introduction,
these works posit a novel relationship to their readership: "The primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though that may be, but in the attitude toward reception it demands of the reader" (31).

Specifically, the three-part tactics adopted by Waly Salomão, Juan Luis Martínez, and Ulises Carrión consist of problematizing the source of the utterance in the text, vacating the poem in order to present readers with materials whose meanings could be assembled without the mediation of the poet’s voice, and upending notions of literary production and value stemming from the capitalist property system. We have seen how all three authors declined to play the societal role expected of them—that of being "the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning," as Foucault puts it—by offering the reader open, multivalent works resulting from the manipulation of materials appropriated (Martínez and Carrión, especially) and/or misread and misquoted (Salomão). The manipulations that these writers subject their materials to, whichever they are, constitute verbal performances in print.

In their aim to prompt the reader to engage in the language events that their poems trigger, these authors sought precisely to multiply meanings, not regulate them, as did a host of other authors of the period. Here I have
shown how Salomão's *Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço*, Martínez’s *La nueva novela*, and Carrión’s bookworks open themselves to this possibility not only through their mode of production (appropriation, misreading), but through their own production ethos as well. That is, these works are open too in the sense that they are the result of a writing process in which skilled labor and the crafting of texts plays no part. If the books have acquired cultural capital and added value, it is because of their critical reception over time, but not because they themselves make any claims to being valuable as literary texts. The works that we have studied, as we saw ample demonstrations of, all attempt to devalue literature in order to invalidate the lettered tradition’s hierarchies.

We have seen, then, that for each of these authors reading equals writing and writing equals reading, and meaning is generated by the experience of the text and not much else. Yet, as I have demonstrated, besides questioning the lettered tradition’s conventions regarding writing, they questioned and redefined reading practices as well. As a result of their critical inquiries, they each propose alternate reading models. For Salomão, reading is not different from watching television or underground films, or from listening to the radio and immersing oneself in a
soundscape of acousmatic utterances: utterances which detached and displaced from their sources acquire a special significance, so to speak. Martínez, on the other hand, complicates the terms regulating conventional approaches to texts and images, forcing the reader to read images and see texts and thus proving that both activities are inextricably linked. Additionally, through his mimicry of acousmatic institutional utterances, Martínez instills in the reader skepticism toward those disembodied, instrumental utterances whose motives authority tends to conceal behind the veneer of impersonality. Lastly, Carrión dissolves all hierarchies between listening, seeing, and reading. Ironically, however, his operations could be seen as beneficial to the lettered tradition he seeks to dismantle. By performing paragrammatic misreadings of canonical texts, Carrión gives them an extended afterlife. By ridding them of their instrumentality, and turning them into visual or sound poems calling attention to their being delivered and received by the body, Carrión revitalizes and returns these texts to the realm of the virtual. Their polyvalence and instability is restored.

What is more, the readers of Me segura qu’eu vou dar um troço, La nueva novela, and Carrión’s bookworks are encouraged to contribute to the proliferation of meaning by
subjecting these books to the very textual manipulations they contain.

Each of these works posits a type of relationship with the reader that, regardless of its particularities, shares a key trait: a confidence in the reader’s desire to participate in the meaning-making process and hence co-create the text. In this regard, these works are utopian. They do not consider the option of the work not being of interest to the reader. Neither do they consider the option of the readership’s demand for carefully packaged meanings. One wonders if fulfilling it is even possible in the realm of the symbolic.

Regardless, this utopianism might be the very hallmark of works emanating from the countercultural communities of poets and artists that were developed in the 1970s with as much fervor as the works stemming from them. We look back with nostalgia at an era in which selling out was not even an option for works emerging from these grassroots, DIY communities. Yet to understand the origins of dialogical, participatory works we must bear in mind an essential contextual element. For writers like Salomão, Martínez, and Carrión the reader was not an abstract entity, a commentator on their books’ Amazon pages. Each of these authors was a participant in a relatively discrete
community of likeminded practitioners on whom dialogue depended exclusively, given that all other channels had been intervened by the military (as in the case of Salomão or Martínez) or voluntarily abandoned (as in the case of Carrión, who among other artists from all over the world was in voluntary exile in Amsterdam). The artists and writers who were part of these DIY communities were making work for each other; they were the readers or audience members asked to complete their peers’ projects. In this context, it makes sense for their works to mirror the dialogical conditions in which they were produced.

Yet here we are forty years later reading these works and deeming the unity of purpose of their formal strategies and political ethos, and their openness and currency exemplary. We have been summoned to play a part in the co-creation of these liminal works that continue disrupting the realm of the literary, widening its frames, and making room for all. Our presence proves the efficacy of their findings.
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