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**Love, Passion, Metropolitan Outcasts, and Solidarity at  
Putando: Diamela Eltit and Paz Errázuriz's *El infarto  
del alma***

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El hospital siquiátrico del pueblo de Putaendo es el resultado del triunfo de la razón,  
de la economía de lo racional, cuyo empeño mayor es dilucidar los límites y  
especialmente los límites de la propiedad. Los asilados, ya expropiados, se entregan  
a la aventura del otro, a la fascinación enamorada ilimitada, desde la trinchera del  
encierro que les plantea la situación hospitalaria.

— Diamela Eltit *El infarto de alma* (39)

(The psychiatric hospital of the town of Putaendo is the result of the triumph of  
reason, the economy of the rational, whose greatest undertaking is to reveal  
limits and especially the limits of propriety [or, property]. The individuals  
housed at the asylum, already expropriated, give themselves over to the  
adventure of the other, to unlimited fascination with love, from the pit of the  
lockup established for them by their hospital situation.)

One of the commonplaces of contemporary debates over prisons and similar  
institutions, mental institutions, homes for the developmentally challenged,  
sanitariums, reformatories, detention centers, boot camps (and, in an earlier  
age, convents), regards the degree to which they are warehouses for the socially  
inconvenient: while there may be for many internees the promise of some  
measure of salvation/redemption/cure/atonement, the over-arching purpose is  
nothing more than to get them out of the way so that the rest of society can get  
on with its life, unfettered by the embarrassment or the danger (or some  
calculus of the two, plus other subjective factors) of what is often an  
impressively variegated array of social outcasts. One of the dimensions of the  
barred and secured institution as warehouse is the way in which it allows for  
the loss of memory as regards the existence of the inmates/patients: they are  
consigned there precisely in order to be forgotten by society as a whole or by

those who are immediately inconvenienced by them. The prison as the abode of living death, the mental institution as the realm of those lost to the world are some of the metaphors we use to describe the alternative universes of where the State (or State-like institutions such as the Church) may confine individuals in the exercise of its control over the body. Public consciousness only returns to a consideration of such institutions in the context of a major scandal, a boot camp death, a prison riot, revelations concerning the mental ward as “snake pit,” and through the media such as investigative and/or sensationalist journalism, B-grade films, and earnest documentaries. One ventures the hypothesis that the public is scandalized, outraged, and appalled not because of the deviation of such revelations from any absolute moral and ethical norms, but because they bring the public in contact with what they would prefer to forget: the deprivation of personal freedom by the State (or State-like apparatuses) is in itself an act of wrenching violence that is only the first link in an unending chain of violence to which the imprisoned subject falls victim. And yet there are many stunning ironies of institutional life, the Bird Man of Alcatraz, in which some measure of spiritual and emotional fulfillment may be achieved and, as Diamela Eltit’s text accompanying Paz Errázuriz’s photographs would have us believe, even a degree of transcendence that is not possible outside the walls of the institution.<sup>1</sup>

Paz Errázuriz (b. 1944) is considered Chile’s most important art photographer, and she has specialized in projects that record the lives of the marginal and the outcast, those who inhabit the fragile zones of social acceptability: boxers, circus people, the aged, gypsies, and even children whose existence violates the sentimentalization of the young. Since she works predominantly in black and white, Errázuriz’s images are mediated by the distancing effect involved in the eschewing of allegedly more “realistic” and immediate color photography. *El infarto del alma* (1994) is perhaps her most famous collection of images. Although Diamela Eltit’s text occupies as much space as do the photographs, the latter typically appear on the left-hand side of the open book,<sup>2</sup> the text on the right, and this important Chilean writer is given first-author credit, the book is principally known for Errázuriz’s thirty-eight images, thirty-six of which focus on apparently exclusively male-female couples in the Putaendo mental facility, located in the eighteenth-century town of Putaendo, some sixty miles due north of Santiago. Putaendo is famous in the history of Chilean independence, the institution in question was originally a tuberculosis sanitarium, although it now serves as a Hospital Psiquiátrico. My point here will be that Putaendo is a reservoir of metropolitan outcasts, a holding tank for those who are no longer fit for metropolitan life, but who reduplicate that metropolitan life negatively in the guise of solidarity in their transcendence of capitalism—the major point of Eltit’s essay—and in their problematical reduplication of metropolitan heteronormativity—the major point of my analysis of Errázuriz’s photographic images.<sup>3</sup> As the Santiago of the Pinochet regime is transformed from a provincial capital into the late-capitalist poster child of

neoliberalism,<sup>4</sup> these images are increasingly dissonant, for both Eltit's reasons and my own, with the twenty-first century Santiago success story, which makes their incarceration all that much more eloquent.<sup>5</sup>

Before examining Errázuriz's photographs, which is the principal interest of the essay, it is important to understand how Eltit, with the particular eloquence of her stature as one of Chilean's most important living authors and its leading feminist voice in literature, frames her colleague's work. Perhaps the most striking of Eltit's takes on Putaendo as a site for the forced reclusion of social subjects, for reasons of mental illness (and it is never made clear what the prevailing medical and legal definitions involved are), is to the effect that reclusion there allows the inmates to attain a level of human dignity, through the loving relations that they forge with each other and that are represented by Errázuriz's photography, that transforms the official way in which they are placed outside of everyday Chilean society into a spiritual transformation that is a form of unplanned and unimagined spiritual liberation<sup>6</sup>:

Sólo después de la condena que les infligió la historia social, se les permitió la entrada en el amor. Como herejes o en extremo religiosos, a la manera platónica o excesivamente hedonista, señalados como apáticos o rebeldes sociales, los asilados en el manicomio del pueblo de Putaendo aman el amor a través del delirio del otro y cultivan el ritual de la muerte en una ascensión lírica. Cultivan su lirismo para mantener la última ausencia, la más alta renuncia como es la pérdida de ellos mismos. (39)

(Only after the sentence imposed by social history were they permitted the entrance into love. As heretics or religious in the extreme, in a Platonic fashion of excessively hedonistic, those confined to the madhouse in the town of Putaendo love love via the delirium of the other and cultivate the ritual of death in a lyrical ascension. They cultivate their lyricism in order to maintain the final absence, the highest renunciation that is the loss of themselves.)

Eltit's words, here and elsewhere, are grounded on the Marxian principle that, in a capitalistic society, human bodies are commodities locked within the structural machinations of society. Those machinations condition and control the utilization by a society, no matter how much illusion there may be that one disposes freely of one's own body. But the double expropriation of the body of the mentally infirm, first the base expropriation of capitalist society and then the expropriation of a legal system that can judge one to be mentally insane and confined one to a mental asylum/prison, actually affords a "sudden" moment of extracapitalist liberation, since the body, as long as it remains within the confines of an institution such as that at Putaendo,<sup>7</sup> is no longer under the overarching structural machinations of the capitalist economy.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, it is significant to remember that, while *El infarto del alma* was published

in 1994, the photographs it contains, as well as both the institution and the lives of the patients it records, well antedate the early years of Chile's return to democracy and, indeed, evoke the bleak years of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–90), one of whose guiding ideological principles was the imposition of “classic” capitalism (in its neoliberal guise). Since anyone who failed to accept the divine naturalism of capitalism, must necessarily have been insane, the insane asylum was one of the various dumping grounds (albeit less literal than the mass graves of the disappeared) for various neofascist regimes in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, Eltit has no supposedly romantic proposition that insanity is a proper strategy for opting out of a repressive (in this case, capitalistic) society, neither that one should seek insanity (although one can refer to various degrees of insanity provoked by authoritarian and neofascist regimes) nor that one could subscribe to the rather appalling proposition that insanity (especially that provoked by authoritarian and neofascist regimes) is to be praised as a form of liberation.<sup>10</sup> In addition to glorifying mental illness (as opposed to accepting behavioral difference), such a position would be in the dreadful position of legitimating military dictatorship as having the “beneficent” corollary of the liberation of the human spirit, as unleashing a transcapitalist experience of love. It may be true that the sort of “infarction of love” represented by the subjects of Errázuriz's photography is a magnificent consequence of their institutionalization. And, this is a highly metaphoric title by which I assume is meant the way in which the loving relationships depicted in these photographs and which Eltit attempts to contextualize in institutional terms constitute a sort of sentimental thrombus or embolus, but one that leads not to the death of tissue but to the rehumanizing of the subjects' lives. But it can never justify the indignity, the sheer violence against human integrity, represented by the enforced incarceration the State is able to effect: hence the way in which Eltit speaks of a double expropriation. Rather, it is a beatific outcome that is the unplanned, unimagined consequence of the operations of the oppressive State, as well as a testimonial to the degree to which the human spirit cannot be crushed so simply:

Desertores, prófugos de las leyes de la razón, enfermos irreversibles antes las órdenes que les imponía su pobreza, el cuerpo indigente y loco, llegó a eximir al cuerpo tuberculoso de todos sus fines y decaídas obligaciones. Putaendo, lugar de encuentro de dos formas sociales en las que se establece el naufragio del sujeto; lo físico y lo mental, espacio de confrontación de dos miradas colectivas divergentes: una mirada teñida de condescendencia inducida por la simbología amorosa, la otra, inflexible ante el delito de la no pertinencia. (61)

(Deserters, fugitives from the laws of reason, incurably ill in the eyes of the orders imposed on them by their poverty, their indigent and mad

bodies, the tubercular body came to be exempt of all of its goals and decayed obligations. Putaendo, a place of encounter of two social forms in which the shipwreck of the subject is established; the physical and mental, a space of confrontation of divergent collective glances: one glance tinged with the condescension induced by amorous symbology, the other inflexible in the face of crime of impenitence.)

Errázuriz's photography, which is interspersed through Eltit's very eloquent and (for her) quite transparent text, typically as the left-hand, even-pages sidebar to her prose, constitute an alternative way of seeing these inmates. That is, the photographic eye sees them not as marginalized outcasts, to be viewed in a condescending fashion, but as amorous subjects. Errázuriz's photographs place them before us in terms of what is putatively the most ennobling of all of our human sentiments, that of love. Let us now examine some of the key images in *El infarto del alma*.

An iconic image of *Infarto* is constituted, as are all of the images in the book, by a couple (30).



One of the unquestioned assumptions in both the images and the accompanying text is the grounding of the privileged human relationship of love on the patriarchal dyad, such that intimate relations (sexual or otherwise: it is never clear whether "love" here means genital sexuality, and there is no reference to whether such sexuality is permitted by the hospital rules and/or whether it occurs, clandestinely or otherwise) involve a pair of individuals. The stereotype here is very much that of the love birds, with the implication of monogamous

devotion; I address subsequently the question of the heterosexist presumption.<sup>11</sup> In the case of my inaugural image, it involves an elderly couple, one whose presence could almost be used on the cover of a collection of local-color writings about senior citizens. Errázuriz's photograph is layered in, as far as the other images of *Infarto* go, a rather uniquely horizontal fashion, with what one could count as five or six bands of visual depth, each one farther away than the last from the camera's eye. Since the two individuals look intently toward the camera (which is not always the case with the remaining photographs, such that there is often the impression that they are candid, at least unposed), the way in which that eye, the instrumental grounding of the photographer and her viewer as external to the situation being photographed and the way in which the couple appears to know of the importance of that Otherness sustain ideologically this photographic moment and, indeed, become its Barthian studium, in the sense that it structures our understanding of the outside of our viewing in the world-at-large and the inside of the institutional confinement of the subjects of the photography.

For this reason, the first plane or band of the photograph involves something like a meter-and-a-half of open space (to judge by the size of the tiles): the photograph is taken on something like a tiled terrace that is surrounded by a wall. Rather than framing the two individuals fully within the scope of the lens, the photographer has stepped back and somewhat to the side, so that they are filmed at a mid-range distance and off center. This explicit physical distance is a visual correlative of the respective distance of the two groups of social subjects, the couple and the photographer and her audience. If it were not for the fact that the couple stares intently at the camera, one could almost speak of a photographic fourth wall, by which, as in the case of realist theater, we are to pretend that the actors/subjects are to pretend we are not there viewing them. While this is precisely what happens in other images in *Infarto*, in keeping with spying documentary eye, in the case of this image, the subjects have been posed in a conventionally formal fashion.

While neither is dressed in anything approaching an elegant fashion, by contrast with the almost slovenly workday clothes of other subjects, this couple is dressed in a dignified fashion as though conscious of some sort of celebratory event. The man wears pants and a jacket, the woman a print dress; both wear a scarf around their neck: this is a detail of formal dress as much, to be sure, as it is protection against chilly weather. Of greatest formal detail, however, is the fact that the woman is carrying a purse, while the man is wearing a hat: these two details signal that the couple is being photographed in other than everyday circumstances, such as might be the case with Sunday or another festive outing. Yet, the formality of this photographic record is disrupted by the immediate background of the subjects. If the latter constitute the second plane of the photography, the third plane is constituted by a clothesline that bisects the back of the subjects and extends outside both the right and left borders of the photographic frame; the line is festooned with the

usual domestic array of clothing: shirts, towels, pants, a skirt. Clotheslines are high on any list of the icons of domestic economy and are signs of tidiness and cleanliness, indicating that the everyday work of life on the home front is being efficiently accomplished. That this is the clothesline of a state mental institution, with the pathetic stories of the inmates and the inescapable violence of confinement bespoken by the mere existence of the institution contextualizes this couple in a very real way that complements the distance of the first band.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth planes of the photograph are made up of the natural setting beyond the low wall of the terrace, which may or may not also mark a boundary of the institution (it appears that there is a drop-off beyond the wall, since the wall runs along a point of the trees notably higher than ground level). These three planes include, in receding order, a proximate range of hills and a stand of trees; a remote mountain (these two planes are defined by different shades of gray); and then the sky: wall, hills, mountain all mark physical boundaries of containment that underscore the physical space of the Putaendo institutional setting. Of particular note, and in line with the formality of the couple's pose, is the recurring geometry of this image, which provides for a tension between planned space and a circumstantial human couple who conform to a different sort of planning: the conventions of a semi-formal portrait. I am referring to the regular outline of the perfect terrace tiles; the parallel lines of the shadows cast by objects both within and outside the eye of the camera; the strategic gaps in the hung clothes, such that there is nothing behind the couple but the extramural natural setting and such that we clearly see the left side of the stand of trees; and the way in which the right side of the neck of the woman intersects a point of confluence of the line of the hills and the farther mountain range. This is a carefully studied photograph, one that articulates the privileged intrusion of the photographer into the otherwise remote and closed world of the mental institution.

The couple in the image above, as noted, posed in a semi-formal fashion, such that there is a physical distance between them. Other images are equally posed, but with some measure of physical proximity: in the image on p. 34 a couple, both dressed in work clothes (the man wears the sort of peasant beret that is, in Chile, part of the uniform of both the farm worker and the day laborer), holds hands as they face the camera; in this way they display manifestly their mutual physical attachment, and the woman smiles nicely at the camera. In the image on p. 38, while this couple does not hold hands, they stand shoulder to shoulder. This couple is more nattily dressed, he in a shirt and vest pullover, she in a jogging suit with a nice sweater on underneath the jacket. He looks toward the camera with great seriousness, hands held rigidly to his side, while the woman looks down demurely. In both cases, the relationship between the two subjects is manifest, but in no way violating conservative Chilean decorum.

By contrast, in the image on p. 32, the couple is snuggling together in bed, and here more of a sexual narrative insinuates itself:



True, the couple is fully clothed, and perhaps their presence in bed together approaches the colonial American concept of bundling, whereby fully clothed individuals occupied the same bed in order to keep warm on the long winter nights (a practice of millennial dimensions that is unquestionably a world-wide domestic detail antedating efficient heating). Yet, whether they are fully clothed because of the cold or because of institutional restrictions on intimacy between residents, there is no question that there is an important measure of physical contact between the man and the woman: they are holding hands; she is snuggled down with her head on his chest; and he has an arm around her, his hand cupping her upper arm. Although he looks in straight-faced seriousness toward the camera, the woman is relaxed in an almost beatific smile at the comfort of her nesting position in the man's arms. Of considerable significance is the fact that they do not occupy a standard-size matrimonial bed, but rather the narrow single bed one is likely to find in an institution, one made of ugly metal tubing with the paint nicked in various places. That is to say, this is clearly a bare-bones institutional piece of furniture and intended for one occupant at a time. The institutional character of the bed is reinforced by the way in which neither the pillowcase nor the sheets cover fully, respectively, pillow and mattress, and the quality of the top cover is what one could call a horse blanket because of its weight and coarse texture. It is not clear if the appointment of the bed includes a top sheet or if the blanket (which appears to be doubled in two) is meant to be the totality of the bed covering. In any case, the narrowness of the bed, no matter how the bodies are disposed (side-by-side, spooned, head-to-toe, back-to-back), means that physical contact and, consequently, physical intimacy are unavoidable. Since we know that this is



one of the spontaneous pairings that the environment, again, one does not know the extent to which this is encouraged by official police nor the degree to which it might contravene it, allows for, the photographer undertakes to capture the evident bond between them as framed by the institutional bed: if the bed is a synecdoche of the institution, in the way it is a part of its necessary landscape, the couple that occupies it are icons of the privileged intimacy the institution generates. Eltit's accompanying text, befitting her stature as one of Latin America's most important feminist writers, underscores the greater role of women in this arrangement, which may well explain why Errázuriz captures many of the women with knowing smiles, smiles not permitted the serious Chilean male:

El sujeto se conforma desde la desmemoria de su habitación en el interior de un cuerpo que ha debido enloquecer somáticamente para conseguir ampliar el trazado de sus fronteras. Proviene del olvido de una antigua pasión corporal. El olvido de un antiguo habitar donde se ha necesitado la ejecución de una toma de terreno y el deber ser erradicado. La amplitud de la constitución somática de la mujer porta el deseo posible de un paraíso, en el cual la unidad es omitida por la sinrazón de un mítico cuerpo compartido que será cómplice en sus flujos, en medio de un estado oscuro, entregado sólo al esplendente juego de perfilar y, a la vez, de intercambiar los límites. (33)

(The subject adjusts, beginning with the failure to recall her room within the confines of the body that must have gone systematically crazy in order to achieve the expansion of the outline of its boundaries. She comes from the oblivion of an ancient bodily passion. The oblivion of an ancient habitat where it was necessary to execute a claim over a piece of land and the need to be eradicated. The expansive nature of the somatic constitution of the woman brings with it the possible desire for a paradise, in which unity is omitted by the nonreason of a shared mythic body that will be an accomplice of its fluxes, in the measure of a dark state, given over only to the splendid game of outlining and, at the same time, exchanging the limits.)

In this context, the shared bed may be the paradise made possible by the expanded horizon of their mental illness, but the bars of the bed still, nevertheless, remind us grimly of their equally shared institutional confinement.

The majority of Errázuriz's thirty-eight images insistently reinscribe the heterosexist presumption dominant in Chilean urban society, whereby the conjugation of one man and one woman as viewed as the ground zero of "natural" physical intimacy, no matter what the exact details of that intimacy may be in its complex array of physical and emotional manifestations.

Conventional decorum imposes a restricted range of actual contact between these couples: standing side-by-side, holding hands, reserved kissing, and, at the most, snuggling together in bed. Not that Errázuriz would be incapable of expanding the range of her representation of the material behavior of intimacy between human beings (as a couple or as an expanded conjugation of bodies): Eltit's writing can certainly be much more graphic than these photographs in matters of sexuality. It's just that the heterosexist presumption can settle for only this degree of explicitness and, indeed, might well be scandalized if more is provided, especially in the more explicit genre of photography (concomitantly, Eltit's dense writerly texts are likely to leave the casual reader clueless). Unquestionably, Errázuriz's limited range of physical representation of intimacy allows for the viewer to engage in a completion of the full range of the semantic sphere, whereby strategic details allow for one to "get the whole picture": one would have to be especially reticent or unimaginative not to go beyond the immediate photograph to wonder what full range of sexuality is made possible by the sturdy bed of the image above.

In reality, there is a range of issues regarding the relations between the institutionalized subjects of Errázuriz's photography. I have already alluded to the use of the unanalyzed concept of "love," which covers such a range of sememes,<sup>12</sup> in Spanish as much as in English, that it is difficult to know exactly what is understood by love here, what the subjects understand by the love attributed to them (and even if they do and on what grounds, since their semantic universe must, at least on the base of a legitimate conjecture as regards their understanding of human experience), and what the conjugation is between love among the intersections of emotional need, physical intimacy, and rank desire. When one factors in issues relating to exactly what is understood by sexuality, between the emotional and the physical, and within the parameters of countless scripts of erotic desire, such images of these residents holding hands or snuggling in bed may be as much an intense erotic experience as genital and other couplings (which, in turn, may be complicated by questions regarding their medical and psychological condition, their diet, their medications, and their overall well being, in addition to the various forms of monitoring and vigilance of the residents by their keepers and by other residents). In short, one simply cannot contemplate the possibility that Putaendo (despite the inevitable contemplation of the false etymology of the name's first two syllables) is a Love Hotel in a conventional sense of the phrase. Finally, I return to the matter of the heterosexist presumption, exceptions to which might be raised by few viewers, for whom the unabashed contemplation of the residents of a mental institution is likely to be disturbing enough (and for many of whom the contemplation of homoerotic relationships can still be, in itself, a manifestation of psychosomatic unbalance, particular in a still quite pronouncedly homophobic Chile).<sup>13</sup>

Yet, there are two of the approximately thirty couples portrayed in *El infarto del alma* in which gender ambiguity is patent. Once again, it is

reasonable to believe that the heterosexist premise will impose a man/woman identity upon the couples in question. Yet, where there are clear secondary sexual characteristics (physical features<sup>14</sup>) and tertiary ones (clothes and other accoutrements) that allow for such an identification elsewhere, no such categorical markers are present in these latter cases. Take, for example, the couple shown on p. 36 and p. 38 (the following image is from p. 37).



Perhaps the partner on the left is a man, although it is difficult to know if there are traces of facial hair among the deep wrinkles of “his” face: many of Errázuriz’s subjects, because they are Chileans of humble extraction, have indigenous or mestizo blood, which guarantees the likelihood, for men of scant facial hair and for men and women scant body hair in general. Yet, several of the men in these images do have clear traces of a male beard. Conversely, the subject on the right may be a woman: there are traces of the smile that is a characteristic of other women, and “her” haircut, which in English would be called a pixy, is likely to be privative of a woman. Yet this is not categorically clear, because there is no reason to believe that at the older age of both subjects, gender markers, those that are biological and those that are social, will be quite so categorical. Hormonal changes with age, which may be complicated by, once again, medical condition and medications, blur some of the secondary sexual features: men may lose facial hair and skin texture may change; women may develop larger hands and feet (not to mention the deformation caused by rheumatism and arthritis) and even larger ears.<sup>15</sup> In the image on p. 38, the couple is seen from a distance and at an angle lower than the camera: both have their feet extended in front of them, and both sets of sneakers look to be about

the same size, although “she” is wearing a design that is potentially “feminine,” while we cannot see “his” clearly except for the soles. If categorical sexual identity is frequently a constellation of semiotic features that share common semantic markers, that is, primary, secondary, and tertiary characteristics reinforce each other in a reduplicative fashion, the gender binary is often weakened under certain social conditions and/or in old age: there is less of a taboo, for example, in men and women exchanging certain items of clothing, such as, perhaps, sweaters and sneakers.<sup>16</sup> In these two images “he” is wearing a sweat shirt with the marking “Unidad Hombres” (Men's Unit), although “she” has no similar female-marked item of clothing. But, in the context of swapped clothing under the conditions I have just mentioned, this is not enough of a marker to bear the entire semantic burden of the sememe {male}. Furthermore, it is not clear if this is part of any obligatory clothing of the two gender groups at Putaendo, since no one else in the thirty-eight photographs wears such an item of clothing. Lastly, one could argue that the subject on the left has more the shoulders of a man, while the subject on the right has less expansive shoulders that are rounded. Yet again physical changes in old age does not make the latter a categorical marker of {female}.

My point here would not be to disagree with the viewer who saw the couple under discussion as conventionally heterosexist, especially on the basis of the suggestion of a smile on “her” face, in conformance with Eltit’s commentary. Yet, my comments on this couple must serve to open up the discussion that *El infarto del alma* centers on with regard to the privileged amorous intimacy that occurs between couples constructed (presumably spontaneously) at Putaendo. Eltit’s words on the face page of the first image speak of how “en el encuentro [en Putaendo ellos] construyen una escena que no puede sino ser paródica” (37) (In the encounter [with them now in Putaendo] they construct a scene that can be nothing other than parodic). Nevertheless, in terms of the institutional constraints operant in mental hospitals, a heterosexual couple is as parodic of extramural heterosexual couples as homosexual couple is of both extramural homosexual and heterosexual couples.<sup>17</sup>

The image include on p. 12 involves a couple where categorical markers are even less useful.



While all viewers might agree that the man standing with his back to the trunk of a tree is clearly a man, for, among other reasons, his moustache and the size of his hands, I would insist that the individual who is leaning back against his chest is also a man: the size of the ears and the mouth, the thickness of the neck and the suggestion of muscled arms, along with the shape of the nose. Significantly, both subjects are smiling, which means that what I would call Eltit's Mona Lisa-like smile, less than serving to extend this quality to men (actually, the man on pp. 50 and 52 has the slightest hint of a smile) serves more to homologize both social subjects in the way that other bodily features are homogenized to underscore their same-sex identity.<sup>18</sup>

Paz Errázuriz's photographs have received extensive exposure and *El infarto del alma*, along with Graciela Iturbide's *Juchitán de las mujeres* (with texts by Elena Poniatowska) are two of the most famous and most difficult to obtain photographic dossiers in the Latin American canon. Since at least the days of visits to Bedlam as part of the social rounds of the upper class, mental institutions have exercised a grim fascination on those on the outside as yet one more articulation of the self-congratulatory principle of moral superiority, "But

for the grace of God, go I.” Photographers like Errázuriz make it possible for those of us secure in our late-capitalist, urban lives to not have to make the trek to Putaendo to view these social subjects and to muse on their fate and what it means at a distance: in my case, in the comfort of an urban research studio over 5,000 miles away from Chile. It is for this reason that the value of photographs and texts would be a trivial one if it were only to reinforce the inside/outside binary that controls so much of our social life, or, better, the social imaginary that structures it. The power of *El infarto del alma*, both as literary and photographic text lies, rather, with the way in which Errázuriz and Eltit find in their lives a potent counterpart to the abjection of their mental illness and their state-mandated confinement, in the form of an amorous intimacy that transcends, and, indeed, is enabled, by their institutional residency.

## Notes

1. Because of Eltit’s prominence as Chile’s premier feminist writer, most of the attention *El infarto del alma* has received dwells in detail on her text (Forcinito; Ramos; Tierney-Tello). Forcinito still pays attention to the testimonial nature of *El infarto*.
2. Catalán devotes his essay to the particular qualities of the conjunction of text and photographs in *El infarto*. Forcinito provides a superb characterization of the testimonial nature of *El infarto* and of the interplay between text and photographs, especially as regards the role of testimonial in post-dictatorship Chile, and she complements Tierney-Tello and Ramos in the localization of the testimonial aspect of the Eltit-Errázuriz collaboration. Because of their work, my study has no new insights to add in this matter.
3. As Rubilar Lagos insists, “*El infarto del alma* puede también leerse como metáfora de la ciudad, el país o la sociedad contemporánea” (95) (*El infarto del alma* can also be read as a metaphor of the city, the country, or contemporary society).
4. Loss reads *El infarto* in the context of the contradictions of neoliberalism and its narratives of madness.
5. This dissonance echoes Catalán’s recommendation that we not take “El libro de Eltit y Paz como un texto ilustrado” (116) (Eltit’s and Paz’s book as an illustrated text) but rather as what I would call a semiotic process, what Catalán calls “un ‘agencialismo’ del régimen de signos” (116) (an agentivity of the regime of signs).
6. It is for this reason that Tierney-Tello makes such a cogent and tightly argued defense of the way in which these individuals are not passive victims, but creating subjects: the testimonial is not *about* them, but *by* them.
7. And from now on I will metonymically call that institution Putaendo, even though that is not its name, but rather the name of the city where this state mental hospital is located.
8. The concept of the body and love in Eltit’s formulations is discussed by Labanyi.
9. In turn, redemocratization brought an interest in examining those citizens warehoused in insane asylums and prisons; see the photography of Eduardo Gil (referencing the Argentine mental asylum, the Borda) and the photography of Adriana Lestido (referencing the La Plata, Argentina women’s prison). Previously Alicia D’Amico and Sara Facio, in a volume with prose texts by Julio Cortázar, had concerned themselves with women inmates of the Borda; this text dates from the earlier authoritarian regime in Argentine, from 1966–73.

10. Eltit (51ff.) does engage in a clever fugue in which she relates tuberculosis, referring to how Putaendo was originally a TB sanitarium, to a “modelo amoroso” (51) (amorous model) and the idea of heightened emotionalism. If Putaendo is no longer a sanitarium for tuberculosis patients but rather a warehouse for the mentally infirm, it remains a site of an amorous transcendence: “El sanatorio cambió de signo con la violencia de cualquier guerra territorial. De sanatorio en manicomio. La indigencia pulmonar [which also allowed for an escape from the machinations of productive capitalism] fue sustituida por la inopia mental [ . . . ]. De sanatorio en manicomio; sitio definitivo de clausura, hospital maldito, impuesto y terror de las mentes trabajadoras” (59) (The sanitarium changed sign with the violence of any territorial war. From sanitarium to madhouse. Pulmonary indigence was substituted with mental deficiency. From sanitarium into madhouse; the definitive site of closure, cursed hospital, imposition and terror of working minds.)
11. The single word “heterosexist” might well do here, but my discussion at this point which to factor out the way that a fundamental principle of heterosexism presumes the primacy of man/woman unites and that, concomitantly, any and all amorous/erotic/committed relationships are necessarily to be viewed as heterosexual, so much so that, unless they are particularly scandalous, no other such relationship or unit is even remarked (see Griffin; Katz). Nelly Richard examines the role of sexual difference in Chilean culture of resistance during the dictatorship and in the culture of redemocratization; Errázuriz’s work on transvestite prostitutes (*La manzana de Adán*) is discussed in the fourth chapter, “Contorsión de géneros y doblaje sexual: la parodia trasvesti” (especialmente 68–70) of her *Masculino/femenino*.
12. A *sememe* is a unit of semantic meaning, composed, in turn, of *semes* (the unreducible building block the distinctive features of meaning (see Greimas and Courtés 279–80).
13. See the reports of MOVILH: Movimiento Chileno de Gays, Lesbianas, Bisexuales, Transgéneros y Transexuales (<http://www.movilh.cl>); these reports regularly rank the official Chilean medical establishment as among the most homophobic entities in the country.
14. Quite evident in the case of the one multi-frame sequence ([54, 56, 58, 60]), where in the last three frames the woman is shown in the nude, in which her female breasts and pubis are evident.
15. These issues may be researched in the *Handbook of the Biology of Aging*.
16. In Latin America in general, there is a threshold age before which men will not go to market with a typical market bag, and there is a threshold age after which men accept the performance of such a task with such a domestic item in hand. One might speculate that this threshold age is retirement.
17. Elsewhere Errázuriz has devoted her camera to queer subjects in the world outside institutional confines. *La manzana de Adán* is an eloquent collection of images of transvestites and their social spaces. While transvestites are not necessarily driven by homoerotic desire (and even less necessarily are their transgendered counterparts, in the sense that the latter have surgically and hormonally undergone radical sex reassignment), they are certainly queer in terms of a hegemonic patriarchal heteronormativity. The images of *La manzana* were taken between 1982–87, toward the end of the Pinochet dictatorship.
18. Another image ([48]) also contains an ambiguous body: the subject on the left may be read as a woman under the force of the heterosexist presumption (and “she” is smiling), but it could equally well be read as an effeminate man on the basis of hand size and facial characteristics. But, I repeat, I am less interested in “finding” same-sex couples in *El infarto del alma* than I am in confounding the unquestioned suppositions of the metropolitan heterosexist presumption.

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