

Intersecting Reflections: Huidobro Through Juan Luís Martínez's *La nueva novela*

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“Were it not by contradiction, contraries would cease, if one dares to say it, to exist, and in addition, to contradict themselves.”

—Monterroso (318)

Juan Luis Martínez's (1942–1993) brief but significant poetic legacy consists of two books: *La nueva novela* (*The New Novel*) and *Poemas del otro* (*Poems of the Other*). No less than writers like Juan Rulfo and Augusto Monterroso, Martínez was always highly attentive to the quality of the work he published, and for this reason, the only books he published during his lifetime were *La nueva novela* and a peculiar book-object called “La poesía chilena” (Chilean Poetry). Interestingly, Raúl Zurita questioned the posthumous publication of *Poemas del otro*, a book that includes poems and interviews, on the grounds that Martínez himself always kept a sharp critical eye on the work he published. According to Zurita, “[Juan Luis Martínez] was so careful, so obsessive about the poem's structure, about the poet's absolute control over his materials. [He was] as nobody else I have known.”¹ Any serious study of the work of Juan Luis Martínez must depart from *La nueva novela* and, in this sense, if one wants to pursue the traces of Vicente Huidobro's poetic project in Martínez's writing—that path of interwoven differences—one's reading must focus on this book and strive to establish the ways in which a set of textual reflections shine through such a disconcerting poetic device.² This is what I attempt to accomplish in the pages that follow.

Although *La nueva novela* is the principal point of departure, we might also say that Juan Luis Martínez's “La poesía chilena” offers interesting access to the reflections we have in mind here. “La poesía chilena” was Martínez's way of making explicit his debt to those poets who contributed to give Chilean poetry a solid contemporary reputation in the twentieth century. This book-object consists of copies of the death certificates of Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Pablo de Rokha and Vicente Huidobro attached to card catalogue entries from the Chilean National Library that refer to the

work of each poet—specifically, to poems that deal with death. It subsequently includes 34 more blank cards interspersed with reproductions of the Chilean flag, in addition to a small bag filled with soil, that, according to Martínez, was taken from the central valley in Chile. The final “entry” in his book-object is a copy of his father’s death certificate.

The inclusion of these key names in Chilean poetry along with other blank cards certainly suggests Martínez’s recognition of a diverse range of people who have made possible the process of creation and recreation of poetic writing in Chile. Furthermore, Martínez’s father’s death certificate establishes a link between genetic and poetic paternity, while Gabriela Mistral’s opens up other latent, certainly matriarchal, possibilities. Through “La poesía chilena,” then, Martínez acknowledges Huidobro as a key antecedent for poetic writing in Chile, but not to the exclusion of other prominent figures such as de Rokha, Neruda, and the imposing Gabriela Mistral.³

This point of access underscores a flow of strands that link diverse poetic practices and support a speculative connection between Martínez and Huidobro through a number of key parallels. In *La nueva novela*, for example, the productive bond between creativity and intelligence stands out in a way that clearly evokes the importance Huidobro attributed to this bond, precisely in the context of the image of the poet as a medium taken over by subconscious drives. For Martínez, the book is effective when it turns into an object that has been laboriously constructed, and whose architecture stems from the dazzling visual, literary, and conceptual intelligence of the poet.

Huidobro’s insistence on the creationist value of his work, on the other hand, does not revolve around the simple individualistic will of an avant-garde artist, and takes on a collective dimension if one reads it as a claim the poet needs to make in relation to the avant-garde’s European discursive center.⁴ In addition, Huidobro praises the active value of creationism in the period between world wars, when counteracting a devastating historical impulse was a major task at hand. As Ruben Darío did when presented with the opportunity, here Huidobro asserts that the poet can achieve prominence with the products of his imagination and thus introduce an alternative, unforeseen view shaped by the unbalances of power. The self-sufficient imaginary *qua* poetic object validates its producer, a Latin American “pequeño Dios” (little God) who aspires to and will contribute to redefine the cultural landscape with his inventive capacity. The avant-garde creator is, then, contemporary and Latin American to boot.

Martínez’s poetic practice, I would argue, strongly continues this plural, legitimating, creationist Latin American impulse. The goal is not simply to produce a ciphered text whose target audience is an intellectual elite at the cutting edge of its cultural, philosophical and political moment, but rather to

set in motion a multifaceted, ultra-cosmopolitan work engaged in the global library—a vision largely embraced by Ezra Pound—that enters the book circulation sphere as a unique and efficient product.

Given their obsession for returning to a few select French authors—Nerval, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud, in particular—one might at first characterize Darío, Huidobro, and Martínez as uncritical peripheral devotees of French literature, especially given their insistence on the importance of these writers for the Latin American poet's quest to achieve transnational literary stature. If this were so, the escapism Ana Pizarro posits—which follows an orthodox vision of Latin America's cultural "mestizaje" (hybridity)—would only corroborate this lack of intellectual independence. However, Huidobro's trajectory could not have attained its exemplary importance without his appreciation for "the new" in French literary magazines, his interest in the French poetry written between world wars, the importance that translating and writing in French attained for him, and his careful attention to what was being written in French at the time. Thus, understanding the path Huidobro followed requires inserting his journey in that renewed tradition of writing, and recognizing his will to carve out a unique poetic space for himself while at the same time legitimating a poetic voice in French. His polemic with Pierre Reverdy, for instance, constitutes an evident effort at cultural legitimation. Placing himself at the level of those who were writing in the "First World" and claiming that the cultural space and prestige associated with it originated at productive crossroads or intersections, Huidobro strove to create a unique voice for himself. Martínez's intellectual horizon, on the other hand, always included, as *La nueva novela* demonstrates, key poetic, critical, and philosophical works produced in France as reference points used to orient his poetry. In addition, Martínez broadened the range of the artists' work with which his poetry entered in dialogue by, for example, quoting and referencing works by conceptual artists from the United States such as Yoko Ono and Denis Oppenheimer.

To mention this characterization of cultural dependency on works produced in France is important not because it necessarily uncovers, as Enrique Lihn would brilliantly argue, the peripheral poet's unbearably exasperating lack *in situ* with respect to an alluring and multifaceted cultural center, but because it reveals a productive source of unique alternatives for creative production. If creation starts at a crossroads, the poet needs to avail himself of a nurturing source embedded in a major cultural legacy so as to bring to the forefront a relevant, alternative, diverse writing project. For this reason, and because he prefers to stress the interweaving of voices his own voice refracts, instead of silencing the library he consults, Martínez displays this tendency from the very beginning of the book by dedicating it to Roger Caillois (1913–1978), a writer who played an important role in the

recognition of Latin American literature in French. The book's dedication, I would argue, is a key moment in this explicit connection, because traditionally a writer dedicates his book to friends and so his or her dedication sends the readers outside of the book, to the empirical life of that writing subject. But in this case Martínez's relationship to the French writer is only of an intellectual nature and so the dedication functions both as a gesture of deference toward Caillois and also as a way to legitimate the Chilean's writing project as well as the intricate textuality of his book from the start. If, facing up to formidable linguistic and cultural challenges, Huidobro persisted in writing and publishing, thus reaffirming the possibility of developing his own unique voice as an emerging Latin American writer, Martínez, who always endured precarious economic circumstances and could not count on any major institutional support, accomplished no less. The quotations and references to Caillois, Mallarmé, Blanchot, or Deleuze in Martínez's work engage the voice of the poet in conversation with these authors, and the dialogue that then ensues occurs because of—and against—the obvious differences. This conversation stems, then, from the poet's desire to inscribe his work in a legacy of arresting revelations when not in that "tradición de la ruptura" (tradition of rupture) described by Octavio Paz in the context of twentieth-century avant-garde movements. In Huidobro's, as well as in Martínez's work, one appreciates a reverence for the uncanny streak that runs against the grain of a trivial conception of reality, and submerges the reader in the puzzling workings of paradoxes.

Juan Luís Martínez fashioned *La nueva novela* as a micro-universe in endless flux shaped by a centripetal movement, through which other texts are pulled into the vortex of the book, and also via a centrifugal movement, through which other intertextual knots unravel and spring to life from the central vortices of the book. The very title of his book invites the reader to confront in jest a work that does not conform to a narrative reconfiguration of the novel, much in the way that authors such as Julio Cortázar, whose great sense of humor and playfulness attracted many readers, endeavored to realize. Martínez's book title is so dry, so conceptual, that if a reader were to relate it to *Altazor*, the major book-poem by Huidobro, he or she would be at pains to do so. And, yet, Huidobro's title encapsulates fundamental traits of *La nueva novela*: it is a cipher to be decoded, it stems from a play on words, and humor is the glue that produces the alchemy of the word combination. Furthermore, no less than Martínez's, at its core Huidobro's poetic machine springs forth from a persistent weaving of language games. The title of Huidobro's book acquaints the reader with a hero, a mythical male entity and his tragedy, one that springs to life through language games which both construct and deconstruct him as he falls through space from the start to the end of the poem's seven cantos. On the cover of *La nueva novela*, to counter the hyperbolic affirmation of the title, Martínez introduces both the author's

name and another possible name under erasure (crossed-out), and he also includes the picture of a number of houses unhinged from their base. If one may not, as Gwen Kirkpatrick observes, simply dismiss the intervention of an authoritarian voice eager to impose his reading protocols on the unsuspecting reader of the book, Martínez, who is keenly aware of this voice, not only advances the name of the author through this deconstruction, but also proposes a universe in which the house as a core familiar symbolic space has been decentered, altered, and uprooted.⁵ Other than the essential role that fantastic and humoristic imaginary creatures (such as Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat or Christian Morgenstern's "*Nasobema lyricum*") play in paralleling the clever poetic project of the avant-garde, only the book itself matches the ultra-modern, enterprising poetic displayed by Altazor's accelerated, free-falling game of language disruptions. This is so because *La nueva novela*, in its productive alterity, underscores its hesitations through a ceaseless suspension of its possible assertive formulations, and also demands that "reading," as construct, brilliantly unfolds as a model that in fact deconstructs itself.

In truth Martínez's title echoes Huidobro's in a more precise and at the same time relevant way. *La nueva novela* invites us to reflect not only on our conception of the author but also on our conception of the book itself and the texts it includes. In this case Duchamp's ready-made—his famous urinal being a glaring example—can help us to think through the inclusion of the book in a system that frames it as a product for public consumption, one that must follow a set of established rules and thus conform to the strictures of such a normalizing, regulating procedure.⁶ Keenly aware of the cultural and literary system of expectations that frames the book of poetry, Martínez gave shape to his book title through a lucid and playful move that recalls Huidobro's, and that stresses the operations that pressure the text to make it (purportedly) comply with a given normative identity. Martínez wanted to preserve the book's magic, its hesitations, its antithetical character (anti-poetry, anti-poem, anti-poet), all the moves through which the book anticipates the system of rules and codifications as well as commercial and publishing circulations.

Referring to the historical sources of avant-garde movements, Octavio Paz argues, "Its historical origins are outside the Classical tradition of the West: black art, pre-Colombian art, the art of Oceania" (144). If the avant-garde worked hard at displacing the location of the art object by making it consonant with the alterity of peripheral cultural products, Martínez, whose work originates from the cultural location of the South American artist in the seventies, recognized himself in this effort. After the wild magician's puzzle that Huidobro set in motion, the new savage's word would emerge from a critical gap that reshaped the poet's identity and which the poet as a Latin

American writer embraced, all the while placing that identity under erasure and opening it up to multiple possibilities.

Martínez's book constitutes a cipher or conundrum that displays and deconstructs its own assertions from the start. If the reader wants to play the game its reading entails, he or she needs to consider that both the blank page (in its sheer whiteness) and its corresponding negative facet (a most absolute opacity) trigger such a game. The pleasure of the text, to reference here the Barthesian formula, originates from the reader's engagement with the paradox that asserts the musical importance of the "pajarístico" (bird-like language) or poetic language while at the same time recognizing the utter silence that grounds it. *La nueva novela* organizes itself, then, as a clever device that not only seeks an informed, intelligent reader, but which strives to produce its own reader. The book does so both by requiring the reader to consider the nuanced disposition of its shifting pieces and by requiring that he or she visit that explicit library the book remarkably inhabits.⁷ Similarly, Huidobro's cubist project not only privileged an intelligent crafting of the self-referential metaphorical shifts taking place within the poem, but also demanded of the reader the pleasurable experience of reconstructing such shifts—shifts belonging to an imaginary universe thought to be utterly chaotic, and therefore at odds with the representational artistic mold of the period. The poems from *Horizon Carré*, *Ecuatorial* or *Poemas Árticos*, not to mention those of *Altazor*, compel the early twentieth-century reader to go beyond the representational poetics of the period and engage in the game of the poetic puzzle as a disconcerting device in constant re-composition.⁸ Linking his or her own creative intelligence to the inventive intelligence of the book, the reader comes to postulate a symmetry between the rediscovery of such complicity and an unstoppable, unrelenting imagination. Thus reader and writer become, as poet Enrique Lihn writes, "escriectores" (writereaders).

Another parallel between the writing of Martínez and Huidobro stems from the relevant role that the visual component takes on for the creative intelligence of the poet. Furthermore, in rethinking the book object, Martínez highlights the cultural role it plays as a visual art commodity, thereby underscoring its ready-made character.⁹ The movement between visual arts and literature, so significant for Huidobro, achieves a critical edge in Martínez. The reason is apparent: to the extent that this intersection takes place according to a calibrated strategy, it is possible to decenter the book object as much as the individual texts it includes. In a culture saturated by images on display, where literature appears increasingly inserted within the scope of visual territories and not vice versa, Martínez offers that intersection as a starting point for further reflection and creative developments. One finds in Martínez a number of characteristics that Huidobro not only sensed, but actually elaborated, especially the relevance

he assigned to the layout of the text over the blank page, the expressive capacity of typography, the artistic value of blank space, the material quality of the paper and its color, and the compelling visual effect of the calligram and the painted poem.¹⁰ To present the reader with a visual universe that broke free from the representational mold, Huidobro endeavored to develop a unique visual landscape—his poetic practice stemming from the intersection between the poetic and the visual—that went hand in hand with his crafting of a dazzling poetic game.¹¹ This explains why collage became for Huidobro, as was the case for many other early twentieth-century artists, the quintessential tool to assert the relevance of multifaceted texts and books. In *Ecuatorial*, for instance, a number of elements that shift places and recombine in poem after poem compel the reader to recollect other poems featuring the same elements in different contexts, as if the book were but the art of weaving an unending, obsessive combinatorics of elements. Thus while the poem takes place in an ever-expanding universe whose centripetal force seems to originate in the hallucinatory-combinatory art of a collage, the reader navigates as a hyperactive and paradoxically lost subject. In other words, the deep, ultimate meaning of the poem evaporates; it flees the reading trajectory, and what is set in motion now, as a magic that never loses sight of its wit, is the central epistemological significance that this frontal attack on depth and meaning attains for modernity. *La nueva novela* takes up these preoccupations and, thus, it works as a visual-textual device whose axis shifts positions so that the book includes itself in the horizon of the visual arts without excluding itself from the literary space. The fabric of the book presents itself then under the guise of a set of questions or unsolved problems, and also reveals itself according to a conceptual reframing informed by the operations that trivialize and commodify the circulation of books. By so dislodging the book object from the circulation system that constrains it, *La nueva novela* claims its own place in the legacy of artistic disruptions enacted by the (neo)avant-garde. And even if this is due to several causes, the very limited edition of the book suggests that it effectively insists on its presence as a dissonant object, as an enemy of serial, massive production and thus understands itself as a cult object, a fetish of critical resistances. The very fabric of the book object acquires qualitative significance when the status quo strives to mold it into an elitist product, thus keeping the strength of its unique, persistent, and impertinent force at bay.

The visual component—photography and drawing, for instance—in *La nueva novela* is an integral part of the book object. This is also a multifaceted way of advancing the opening of the game for those who read and reread it, since the book, by stressing the repetition of its features, points out to the reader that he or she needs to go back or jump ahead within the infinite game of self-references. To appreciate the playful zest of *La nueva*

novela we need to make use of our tools of visual analysis as much as of our literary library because they are tightly joined. Thus, the reader whose critical reflections stem from training in the visual fields also has something to say in this case, because he or she can describe the ways in which the range and nature of images create an unforeseen or unexpected universe to which we may adapt (and from which we subsequently position ourselves). The pictures of Karl Marx and Adolph Hitler, for instance, are true iconographical monuments the poet mischievously reframes through the savvy composition of each text and the book itself. On the one hand, these images speak to the reader as icons of the twentieth century that he or she recognizes “naturally,” and, on the other, they are seen anew, as enigmas to be deciphered, due to the unusual contexts that encircle them. Thus the goal is not only to reframe the textual but also the visual, according to the sharp intervention of the artist/poet who weaves them together so that a unique and condensed cosmogony of reflections and intersections springs forth and compels the reader to address it fiercely.

Humor is a fundamental trait that links the visual and textual features of *La nueva novela*. For Martínez, as much as for Huidobro, the poet’s—the creator’s—intelligence grounds itself in a knack for contradictions whose objective is to sharpen the unfolding of paradoxes. Yet, Martínez prefers the humor of Lewis Carroll, Jean Tardieu, and Yoko Ono to the kinds of acrid and absurd black humor that, taken to an extreme, would acquire a nihilistic feel. Martínez’s use of Carroll links him to a type of illuminated text supposedly confined to a readership of children, and a literary tradition in which paradoxes “innocently” inscribe themselves in the construction of the text and its language; Tardieu connects him with the practice of a sophisticated literature of the absurd that pays playful attention to a number of philosophical problems; Ono draws him nearer to the twentieth century’s tongue-in-cheek, anti-conventional tumult of the sixties, to the practices of conceptual artists, and to the poem—this no less than Tardieu—conceived as assignment or homework. In this case humor, introduced as an apparently docile mechanism that refrains from emphasizing the virulent edge of its grotesque side, does not lose sight of the critical challenges presented by language, logical discourse, poetic discourse, and its traditions, as well as political and philosophical reflections. No less than for Huidobro, humor is an intrinsic part of Martínez’s creative intelligence. And what brings him even closer to his avant-garde precursor is the type of apparently tame humor he privileges which, in turn, distances him, in a remarkably subtle way, from the more corrosive, Kafka-like humor evidenced in the madness of Nicanor Parra’s poetic version of an insane individual. For instance, the *ars poetica* present in Parra’s “La montaña rusa” from *Versos de Salón* ends with the following lines, “Claro que yo no respondo si bajan / Echando sangre por boca y narices” (71) (I’m not responsible if you come down /

With your mouth and nose bleeding). In other words, the outcome of the anti-poem is violent because of the sharp contradictions at work in the text. In Martínez's view, as the "Pequeña cosmogonía práctica" from the "Respuestas a problemas de Jean Tardieu" (9–33) section demonstrates, conflict does not necessarily have to result in a bleak outcome. When the cartoon character chooses to turn the gun he has aimed at his own head towards the portrait of the woman he loves—and subsequently destroys it—suicide does not resolve the obvious conflicts present in the character's current love relationship. What the poet offers here is not avoidance of a conflictive situation, since the cartoon character experiences it and has to make a decision, but a shift in viewpoint. As Martínez's choice was to represent the character's conflict through one four-frame cartoon piece whose style is necessarily direct and concise, the implied perspective that permeates the representation of the conflict is neither virulent nor grotesque but clearly witty. Here it is possible to observe a close parallel with those "trastocamientos lúdico-humorísticos" (playful-humoristic displacements) that Huidobro's writing triggers, according to Saúl Yurkievich (*Obra poética XVII*). The productive mix of humor and creative intelligence shows in the avant-garde poet's conception of *Altazor* and in his deliberate preference for a type of humor that keeps itself at a distance from the grotesque and from madness as socialized sickness, while at the same time adopting the shape of a meditative and melancholic gesture. Here, one finds a telling difference in tone that similarly distinguished the work of two twentieth-century protagonists of cinematic humor, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

More specifically, *La nueva novela's* humor engages the reader with unexpected, disconcerting alternatives of thought interwoven with fantastic dimensions. As such, humor offers the poet the possibility of adopting a rhetorical strategy inclusive of dissonant and eccentric elements to undertake the renovation of a stereotyped point of view. This is what Martínez's insertion of Christian Morgenstern's "*Nasobema lyricum*," for example, surreptitiously accomplishes. Works of imagination for Martínez, as well as for Huidobro, follow their own disconcerting kind of logic. In other words, they may seem to lack a self-consistent design, but in fact their efficacy depends on a peculiar code that challenges formulaic readings for which non-resolving contradictions would bear no fruit. Martínez expects his reader to fully participate in the game the poet's wit sets up, to engage joyfully in what serious undertakings that game may introduce—its reflections on space, transparency, and literature, for instance—and also to place such undertakings under erasure because they play a role in a more ambitious, unstable puzzle. Huidobro's attentive rewriting of comic passages, on the other hand, demonstrates his concern for incorporating humor as a poetic device and not simply according to the importance that it

attains in the public communication of the joke. Grounding Altazor's voice in sheer musicality in canto seven of his poem, Huidobro ran the risk of making a costly joke at the expense of avant-garde poetry, a sort of cosmetic gesture that would possibly contribute nothing of relevance to the tragic unfolding of the character's trajectory. Placed in context, however, the disconcerting musical game of canto seven and the melancholic humor embedded in the fall of Altazor take on the stature and consistency of an incantation recited at the crucial moment of the character's climactic disappearing. Interestingly, pinpointing the critical distance between the tongue-in-cheek stance and assertive poetic mood in both texts—Martínez's clever citation of Morgenstern's poem and Huidobro's canto seven of Altazor—is difficult because both involve a rethinking of such boundaries through the creation of an unforeseen intersection. If this is so, one must read the positive gaze, that unapologetic sort of "white" humor Huidobro practices and Martínez tenaciously pursues, not simply as a naïve approach to writing but as a conscious choice grounded in a poetics that sets up a telling distance, first, from the solemnity of a grandiloquent pathos and, second, from a virulent, sharply sarcastic, polemic humor. For Martínez, as well as for Huidobro, this distance is paramount because it clearly positions them among poetic discourses for which the game, as a magic formula of pleasure that emulates the playful mischievousness of childhood, is an essential component. The creative subject in this case is "a little God" under erasure because he also understands himself, either by choice or due to an unavoidable strategy, as a tenacious, mischievous, little child, who thrives in the haphazard wonders of language and who finds himself right at home in the poetic productivity unleashed by those sudden, unconventional treasures. Anchored in this privileged locus of creativity, both Martínez and Huidobro share in the utter joy elicited by writing a poetry that pushes language games to the limit.

However, sobering topics such as political power as historically experienced by the individual—along with a distanced, caustic viewpoint—also play a role in *La nueva novela*. The section "Epígrafe para un libro condenado: La política" (Epigraph to a Condemned Book: Politics) may appear to be an extraneous addition to a book that invests so much time and effort in cleverly exploring poetic and philosophical questions through visual and textual features. But the author has left traces of the careful incorporation of this "outside" in several preceding instances: the book cover, which includes the picture of houses stricken by a catastrophe, as well as the back cover, where the reader is asked to complete an assignment that consists in devising "two exit routes" from a prison house symbolically represented by squares of graph paper;¹² the section "El desorden de los sentidos" (Disorder of the Senses) which includes a drawing of Napoleon and a picture of Hitler; the iconic faces of Marx and Rimbaud that appear

together in three different sections, thus giving shape to a structure of citations unique to *La nueva novela*. Thus the consideration of power in its broader or more historical sense is an important facet of Martínez's book.

If one pays attention to the reoccurrence of the Marx-Rimbaud pair in more detail one observes that such repetition characterizes the pair's insertion in the public imaginary as trivial objects of massive popular consumption. As the "El eterno retorno" (The Endless Return) section shows, this insertion may even take on the dimension of an esoteric absurdity. The faces of both men appear next to each other in commercial advertisements in English: one that advertises a poster depicting a cyclist Rimbaud and another that shows a pamphlet describing Marx as a likely representative of a satanic sect (7). Next, the same portraits of Marx and Rimbaud reappear twice in the section "Tareas de aritmética" (Arithmetic Assignments), thus revealing themselves as crucial pieces of a formidable cultural heritage whose gravitas and symbolism dissolve through the collage's wicked, irreverent mixing of purely visual signs. Thereafter, in "El poeta como Fantomás (el autor) como Rouquine" (The poet as Phantomas, the Author as Rouquine) the same faces reappear as border-town outlaws on a poster in English that offers a reward of two thousand dollars for their capture. By choosing to depict the ultimate, transcendental weight of the characters' iconic faces through a whimsical twist, Martínez conveys their zest for self-exclusion and resistance to the status quo. Lastly, Martínez represents in cartoonish fashion the two characters in "La nueva novela: el poeta como Superman" (147) (The New Novel: The Poet as Superman). To Marx's face, Martínez attaches the body of Superman, and to Rimbaud's, the cartoonish, naked body of a woman. And though the note at the bottom of the page emphasizes the playful equivalence between Superman and "a young Chilean poet" who could be no other than Martínez himself, the reader cannot put aside the fact that the Superman figure comes linked to Rimbaud's as a naked woman. The cartoon joke, if one delves a bit into its possible implications, performs not only a parodical feminization of Rimbaud and a hyperbolic re-masculinization of Marx, it makes evident the ludicrous subordination of an idealized individual (Rimbaud) to an overpowering older man whose thick and grayish beard is the seal of a benign patriarchal figure (Marx). As one can see, the friction between philosopher and poet is not solved but exploited: Martínez playfully highlights the conflict to dramatize the cartoonish subjection of one figure by another.¹³

La nueva novela, then, tellingly suggests the damaging subordination of the poetic to the philosophical-political through cartoonish renditions of gender. As he does in other moments, by allowing the reader to choose among multiple reading options, Martínez does not resort to a vocal declaration of principles but to a veiled, detached perspective he articulates

through the silent working of images barely disturbed by surrounding words. Thus his writing participates in a literary project in which history becomes a poetic feature kept at bay from the symbolic as well as the literal reverences of a dulling pathos by a carefully calibrated humor that is more campy than kitschy. The strength of Huidobro's writing, on the other hand, resides in a sense of humor that opens the door to fantasy, to language games, to a vision of the poem and the book—*Altazor* would be the paradigm here—that exalts the whimsical side of the avant-garde word and turns it into a poetic device seeking to bring about a cultural liberation of great magnitude. The forward-thinking poet's goal is to push his playfulness to the highest possible degree of expressivity and creativity. Thinking through the political and cultural relevance of Huidobro's avant-garde commitment, one becomes aware of its uniquely Latin American design. This delight in the foundational word associated with the luring quest of the riddle—with the musicality inherent in the spellbinding alchemy of a strategic punning—goes hand in hand with the conception of the poet as an international citizen, whose voice comes out of that vortex where linguistic, artistic, and political boundaries crisscross. For this reason, Huidobro's interest in the revolutionary project of the political avant-garde, as evidenced by his "Elegía a la muerte de Lenin" (Elegy to the Death of Lenin), does not simply obey an empty cosmopolitan whim but an actual appreciation of the representative, dignifying, legitimating role the aesthetic object (the poem) plays within the concert of international voices. Thus, if to celebrate a majestic symbolic figure of the revolution (as is the case in "Elegía a la muerte de Lenin") Huidobro does pay his debt to a blatantly hyperbolic rhetoric, he also makes sure to reintroduce a dash of veiled cleverness as it transpires in the line that closes his elegy. After the poem's lengthy panegyric enumeration, the text ends by precisely echoing that initial formulation—"El poeta es un pequeño dios" (the poet is a little god)—so intimately linked to Huidobro's creationist poetics and yet often considered a peculiar seal of naiveté, individualistic pretension or sheer poetic affirmation. The fact is that the last line of the poem, "Desde hoy nuestro deber es defenderte de ser dios" (From now on our obligation is to protect you from being god), unexpectedly re-introduces a healthy dose of critical detachment that runs counter to the grandiloquent rhetoric of his elegiac text. And this helps Huidobro to crucially displace the loaded rhetoric his own writing was advancing so ostentatiously. Regarding Juan Luís Martínez's self-effacing attitude, Pedro Lastra and Enrique Lihn have written: "[la conducta de Juan Luís Martínez] es más bien la de un 'sujeto cero' que se hace presente en su desaparición, y que declara e inventa sus fuentes, borgeanamente"¹⁴ ([the location of Juan Luis Martínez] is rather that of a 'zero subject' that comes to presence through his disappearance, and that declares and invents his sources, in a Borges-like fashion). In a similar vein, Huidobro's poetic disappearances may have anticipated Martínez's

placing of the author's name under erasure in *La nueva novela*, and the intrinsic antiauthoritarian cleverness of that move allowed his own poetry, his own ludic word games, to carve out a healthy unorthodox space in which to flourish.

Notes

1. Zurita made these remarks while participating in the presentation of Tevo Díaz's *Señales de ruta/Road Signs* documentary (2000: 34 minutes) at the Gonzalo Rojas bookstore, in September 2007. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Spanish into English are mine.
2. The description of an interval in "Differáncé" by Jacques Derrida brings us back to the figure of the trace: "An interval must separate the present from what is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject" (13).
3. Martínez does not attempt to deny the worth of those who preceded him nor deny the worth of those who along with him contribute to poetic writing in Chile. Neither does he intend to make his writing subject to his predecessors and, for this reason, he criticizes, in Note 5 from *La nueva novela*, the search for a simplistic paternal filiation in the work of young poets. At the end of the first paragraph he states, "Los pájaros más jóvenes como también así algunos escritores y músicos sufren hoy por exceso de libertad y están a la búsqueda del padre perdido" (126) (The youngest birds as well as some writers and musicians suffer today from an excess of freedom and keep searching after their lost father).
4. Jaime Concha observes this self-positioning of Huidobro in the very unfolding of the writing of *Ecuatorial*: "Lo que antes era instalación centrípeta en un obelisco cultural, ahora es consciencia de confines. Huidobro percibe en este instante los límites interiores del centro, que se vuelve, de este modo, remoto. De ahí entonces el salto a la periferia, en un prodigioso recorrido, fugaz y sorpresivo para nosotros que nos creíamos en Europa..." (73) (What was before a centripetal inscription within a cultural obelisk, now is awareness of borderlines. Huidobro perceives in this instant the interior borders of the center that, thus, becomes remote. For us, who still believed ourselves in Europe, this explains the leap to the periphery through such prodigious, fleeting, surprising path).
5. Gwen Kirkpatrick underscores the parody of the "subject who knows" whose function would be to directly counteract the dissemination of the deconstructed subject at work in *La nueva novela*: "Una voz autoritaria pretende guiarnos por este laberinto, impartiendo instrucciones, postulando los problemas (proveyéndonos espacios en blanco para obtener las soluciones), incluyendo notas y referencias, y asume una posición similar a la voz de Virgilio en el viaje de Dante, o por lo menos la de un instructor competente" (229) (One authoritarian voice pretends to guide us through this labyrinth, giving instructions, posing problems (inserting blank spaces to obtain solutions), including notes and references, and assuming a voice similar to Virgil in Dante's journey, or at least the voice of a competent instructor).
6. According to Octavio Paz, the ready-made has a manifest critical function: "en un clima de no elección y de indiferencia, Duchamp encuentra el ready-made y su gesto

es la disolución del reconocimiento en la anonimidad del objeto industrial. Su gesto es una crítica, no del arte, sino del arte como objeto” (223) (in an atmosphere of non-choice and of indifference, Duchamp finds the ‘ready-made,’ and his gesture is the dissolution of recognition in the anonymity of the object).

7. In “Señales de ruta de Juan Luís Martínez,” Pedro Lastra and Enrique Lihn, writing with no little sense of humor about the reader of *La nueva novela*, state: “La amplitud de las referencialidades produce la reducción voluntaria del corpus de lectores, destinados a integrar un tipo de cofradía como la de los sabios de Tlön, que repite su identidad de generación en generación” (*Merodeos* 41) (The breath of references produces an expected reduction of the corpus of readers destined to integrate a kind of brotherhood similar to that of the sages of Tlön, which repeats its identity generation after generation).
8. Regarding the poems in *Horizon Carré*, George Yúdice writes: “La lectura de estos poemas es, en realidad, una circularidad remisiva mediante la cual se destacan códigos que remiten a otros códigos que a su vez remiten a otros y/o devuelven la remisión a los primeros” (42–43) (The reading of these poems is, in actuality, a looping circularity through which some highlighted codes loop back to other codes which, in turn, loop back to others and/or loop back to the first ones).
9. In this instance one should keep in mind the parallels between *La nueva novela* by Martínez and *Purgatorio* by Raúl Zurita.
10. The reader may consult the dossier “Salle XIV,” also see the essay “Vicente Huidobro’s *Salle 14*: In Pursuit of the Autonomy of the Object” in this volume, appendices, and more in *Obra poética de Vicente Huidobro*, where the range of painted poems illustrates the significance of visual games in the poet’s work.
11. Regarding the structural function of the visual design of the poem “Matin” from *Horizon carré*, René de Costa writes, “El texto no es simplemente una ilustración gráfica del contenido del poema sino un evento estético más definido: un evento que adquiere sentido completo en el proceso de ser leído y visto al mismo tiempo” (53) (The text is not simply a visual illustration of the poem’s content but of a more defined aesthetic event: an event that in the process of being simultaneously read and seen makes full sense).
12. In an interview Martínez offered a polysemic interpretation of the house in *La nueva novela*: “Ahí esas casas aluden también a nuestro paisaje, a nuestra catástrofe permanente chilena. Aunque es la situación de la literatura contemporánea también: esta catástrofe del lenguaje, la desconfianza en los lenguajes, incluso [. . .] La casa, el derrumbe de la casa como espacio sagrado, podría venir a representar un símbolo” (*Poemas del otro* 97) (There those houses allude also to our landscape, to our permanent Chilean catastrophe. Though this is also the situation of contemporary literature: this catastrophe of language, the distrust in languages, even [. . .] The house, the collapse of the house as sacred space might come to represent a symbol).
13. In “La redefinición del contrato simbólico entre escritor y lector: *La nueva novela* de Juan Luís Martínez” (The redefinition of the symbolic contract between writer and reader: *La nueva novela* by Juan Luis Martínez), Eugenia Brito reads this segment as follows: “El resto es un comic que reproduce la unión del héroe contemporáneo—impotente, homosexual, anónimo, sin nombre—con su alter ego. Unión del capitalismo y el arte: toda producción se absorbe por el sistema parece decir este abrazo paródico, cita de Saldo, poema de Rimbaud” (*Merodeos* 19) (The rest is a comic that reproduces the coupling between the—impotent, homosexual, anonymous, nameless—contemporary hero and his alter ego. A coupling between capitalism and art: the system swallows up any transformative work, this parodical embrace seems to say—quote from “Saldo,” poem by Rimbaud).

14. See Pedro Lastra and Enrique Lihn, “Señales de ruta de Juan Luís Martínez” (*Merodeos* 40).

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