

An Archaeology of Digital Aesthetics: Musical Sampling in Rodrigo Fresán's "Señales captadas en el corazón de una fiesta"

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Literary blogs in Latin America have become an important player in the publishing world and have begun to transform how we experience literature. Most obviously, they provide new avenues for publicity, creating virtual discussion spaces in which authors, unknown outside of their countries in an earlier time, are able to gain audiences from across Latin America by virtue of their mention in a blog like Ivan Thays's *Moleskine Literario* or Gustavo Faverón's *Puente aereo*. Indeed, Alberto Fuguet's recounting of the difficulties he and Sergio Gómez faced as they compiled the notorious *McOndo* anthology have been resolved (Fuguet and Gómez 12–14). Authors have also experimented with the creative possibilities that blogs offer, with Cristina Rivera Garza famously attempting a "blogsívela," one of the higher-profile attempts to articulate a blog aesthetic.¹ Edmundo Paz Soldán, who has kept a series of blogs under the title *Río fugitivo*, has also experimented with short-form narratives, some stories are written so that they could appear in print collections while others adopt many of the characteristics of the blog entry as a fundamental aspect of the story.² I have written elsewhere about how his short-story "Casa tomada" places Julio Cortázar's classic story of the same title into a dialogue with Ryan Adams's alt-country song "This House is Not For Sale," becoming a mash-up of the two narratives with line by line borrowings from the story altered by a series of intrusions from the lyrics of the song (Brown, "Parques tomados" 60–63). This story, I argue, suggests a new kind of digital aesthetics in which fiction comments on, integrates and—borrowing a metaphor from music—"samples" various sources in the construction of a piece that is both original and derivative. Paz Soldán's publication of a story in his blog, as a blog entry, suggests a new

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way of understanding intertextuality while at the same time testing the various ways in which digital culture can facilitate artistic expression.

While a good deal of attention has been paid of late to new articulations of digital literature, I am interested in taking this opportunity to explore the articulation of digital aesthetics in more traditional literary acts. That is, with the kinds of digital expressions that now abound, how can we analyze and theorize a continuing dialogue between traditional forms of narrative expression and the digital engagements growing more prevalent. To do so, I will use “Señales captadas en el corazón de una fiesta” (1996) (Signals Received in the Heart of a Party), a short-story by the Argentine novelist Rodrigo Fresán, whose work in the 1990s employed a series of strategies that, I argue, anticipated blog aesthetics even as they grew out of techniques of digital sampling common to 1970s and 1980s hip-hop music. By so doing, I hope to suggest a continuum between Paz Soldán’s mash-up stories and Fresán’s sampled collages of popular music and culture in “Señales captadas.”

By referring specifically to hip-hop and digital sampling in particular, I do not necessarily mean to include the large body of theory and practice that places rap as the focal point of hip-hop. In fact, I hope to show in this article how practices within hip-hop production can help us understand modes of artistic production that do not necessarily participate in the same cultural milieu of hip-hop. In particular, I will focus on the practice of record sampling, in which the producer or MC extracts sounds, beats and other elements from previously recorded material and then combines and layers them in the creation of a new musical piece. While a great deal of work has been done from a literary and cultural studies perspective on the poetry of rap and the ways in which hip-hop artists reflect socio-cultural experiences, I think it is also instructive to follow the lead of Joseph Schloss’s work in examining both the aesthetics and culture of sampling as a musical expression in itself, as a fundamental rather than an extraneous aspect to the poetic act of rap.³ In fact, following Schloss’s lead, we discover more and more theoretical work on digital sampling and its contribution to cultural production. The ways in which hip-hop production creates communities of cognoscenti who are able to identify esoteric combinations of sounds and their origins, repetitions or loops of sampled material, and who find pleasure in appreciating the old and new contexts of previously-recorded material, provide insight into much of Fresán’s narrative project and into how works like Paz Soldán’s were developed. I do not mean to suggest that the traditional themes of hip-hop are either evoked by or provide any kind of model for this writing. Instead, I argue that the creative strategies based on technological instrumentation that we see in hip-hop provide a series of tools for understanding how digital narratives could develop in print form.

“Señales captadas en el corazón de una fiesta” first appeared as Fresán’s contribution to the *McOndo* anthology and was then included in his

collection *La velocidad de las cosas*. It relates the story of an unnamed narrator who remembers the parties of the early 1980s before AIDS from a post-AIDS 1990s—he refers to that earlier era as “A.R.”: “antes de Rock [Hudson]” (“before Rock [Hudson]” 70). As he moves through a party both physically and in memories, he comments on his evolving mechanized identity, as his biological self gains figurative technological prostheses that arise from the continuing references to his technological ability to act as an antennae and remote control. He encounters the ghosts of his past friends, the most important being Willi, a gay friend who died of AIDS. The end of the story reveals that our narrator is or has fused with Willi, and is narrating from the grave, a trope that Fresán has also used in other texts, most prominently in *Mantra* with the main narrator telling his story from the cargo hold of a plane as his body is expatriated to France. Criticism of the story is scant, focusing mainly on articulations of homosexual identity,⁴ the act of mourning, and interactions between literature and popular culture.

In my book *Cyborgs in Latin America*, I commented on the construction of a posthuman identity in the figure of the narrator, noting specifically the moments in which his self-construction depended on a series of mechanical metaphors (153–58). In the context of mash-ups and sampling, it is also important to draw attention to the kind of bio-technological presence the narrator articulates, one that emphasizes his role as a digital sampling machine. Fresán begins the story with the development of just this kind of cyborg life in which our narrator becomes a human antenna:

Aquí están, estas son, las señales captadas en el corazón de una fiesta. Las metálicas y frías y monocordes señales. El derrotado himno de batalla, la triunfante marcha fúnebre, los sombreros en la mano. . . . Me gusta oír las señales. La cabeza ligeramente torcida sobre un cuello que apenas la sostiene. Sísifo separa unas de otras con cuidado, las ordena por color y por peso, y enseguida empuja y sigue empujando montaña arriba. (65)

(Here they are, these are the ones, the signals received at the heart of a party. The metallic and cold and monochord signals. The defeated battle hymn, the triumphant funeral march, hats in hand. . . . I like to hear the signals. My head lightly twisted on a neck that barely holds it up. Sisyphus separates the signals carefully, organizes them by color and weight and then pushes and keeps pushing up the mountain.)

The beginning sentences act as a continuation of the title: the question of what are the “señales captadas” of the title is answered with an “Aquí están, estas son” (Here they are, these are the ones). That these signals are musical sounds is made apparent in the final sentence of the first paragraph as the signals mix a battle hymn with a funeral march and both already

mashed-up pieces are again mixed with the crossing of modifying adjectives. Fresán introduces the importance of a human subject in the creation of these kinds of musical mixes in the second paragraph, a strong articulation of subjectivity in the ordering of that music. The Sisyphean project of cataloguing that he describes not only mixes the mythological reference into the narrative, but it also seems to evoke the same sort of project as the “digging” performed by DJs in search of old music and sounds that they can then use as raw material for their work.

The story continues with another take on his effort to capture signals for recombination and reuse:

Me gusta pensar—con un autoconvencido vigor del que alguna vez dispuse y ya no volveré a disponer—que las sigo y las alcanzo y las meto en una botella o en uno de esos recipientes especialmente diseñados para soportar los más duros embates del tiempo. Me hace feliz imaginarlas viajando por el espacio como los copos de esta nieve flamante y, aun así, sucia. Latidos digitales, fuegos de San Telmo en la oscuridad de la noche de los años luz. Alejándose. Conscientes de que ya nunca habrán de regresar. Señales resignadas a su condición de resplandor distante que, con un poco de suerte, serán recogidas en algunas otra fiesta, tan lejos de aquí. (65)

(I like to think—with an self-convinced vigor that I once possessed and do no longer—that I follow them and reach them and stick them in a bottle, or one of those receptacles that are specially designed to withstand the ravages of time. It makes me happy to imagine them traveling through space like snowflakes of this new snow that, even so, are dirty. Digital heartbeats, fires of San Telmo in the darkness of the night of the years of light. Departing. Aware of the fact that they will never return. Signals resigned to their condition of distant brilliance that, with a little luck, will be gathered in some other party far from here.)

The narrator’s bottle, a physical place in which the signals can be kept and mixed—a wink at the vacuum tubes of the original radio signals—becomes the narrator’s music studio where he transforms himself from partygoer into music producer. A place that allows the sounds of the past to recombine and be repurposed, made especially so by the reference at the end of the paragraph in which these captured signals can appear again in another party. Within that particular discussion, we also have the digital beats, beats that are associated both with the signals in bottles and with the physical surroundings of San Telmo.

The beginning of the story, then, presents this moment in which the sounds and vibes that one senses at a party can be gathered, catalogued and stored to then be remixed at other parties. At the same time, Fresán

constructs those passages in such a way as to evoke the mixing act itself. The fusion of the two pieces of music at the beginning anticipates this, a fusion then reinforced by the various acts of combination that occur further on. The glass bottles that are at once radio vacuum tubes and the bottles that carry messages across the sea could also be considered television screens that display the dirty snow the narrator associates with the captured signals. That this snow makes sense, a digital sense that helps him preserve the varied signals, strengthens the links Fresán suggests between party culture, music, and the continual recombination through consumption of party life.

The narrator's configuration as digital sampler sets the stage for the intricate narrative structures of musical reference that Fresán employs throughout the story. "Señales captadas" is an encyclopedia of 1970s and 1980s party music, and constructs a soundtrack for the story that reinforces and acts as counterpoint to what is a rather convoluted narrative. At an early point, the narrator muses:

Nadie se preocupa demasiado—y lo bien que hacen—por la figura de alguien que recuerda sin demasiado esfuerzo canciones sobre fiestas. 'All Tomorrow's Parties,' 'Party Line,' 'There's a Party At My House,' 'I'll Sleep When I'm Dead' y 'Left to My Own Devices,' que siempre me pareció la más lograda de las canciones sobre fiestas. Los nunca del todo bien ponderados Pet Shop Boys. 'Me levanto de la cama / Treinta minutos pasadas las diez de la noche / Llamo a un amigo / Quien es un *party-animal*.' Algo así. (66)

(No one worries too much—and it's good that they don't—about the person who easily remembers songs about parties. 'All Tomorrow's Parties,' 'Party Line,' 'There's a Party At My House,' 'I'll Sleep When I'm Dead' and 'Left to My Own Devices,' that one always seemed the best of the songs about parties. The never fully understood Pet Shop Boys. 'I get out of bed / At half past ten / Phone up a friend, / Who's a party animal.' Something like that.)

The passage suggests a party soundtrack based, at least in the case of the first three songs, on the use of the word "party" in the title. At the same time, these first three songs that, at first blush, seem to just suggest "party" also set up the kind of unsettling dynamic that underlies this story, suggesting more a wake than a party.

The narrator omits the names of the artists in the first four songs, a move that draws lines of connoisseurship within the story, suggesting those groups of people that do easily remember songs about parties and those that do not, those that recognize the songs mentioned and those that do not. Furthermore, it creates a dual level to the reference. On the surface, the list goes by with references to songs that range from the well-known to the unknown and that

act as the setup for the quotation of the Pet Shop Boys song. And yet each song mentioned impacts the reading of the story in significant ways, much as the playing of a song during a scene colors and conditions our interpretation of what happens. “All Tomorrow’s Parties,” is, of course, from The Velvet Underground from their 1967 debut album *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, a song Lou Reed wrote about Andy Warhol’s group of friends. It is a song about parties, but not really a party song due to its slow, almost plodding nature with Nico singing in her inimitable spoken-sung style of the dissonance between flash and despair. The song ends with the lines:

A blackened shroud, a hand-me-down gown
Of rags and silks, a costume
Fit for one who sits and cries
For all tomorrow’s parties (Reed)

The narrator’s use of the song positions him as the “one” who sits and cries in the “blackened shroud,” lamenting the “tomorrow’s parties” that will always remind him of past celebrations with dead friends. This positioning within also strengthens the kind of mash-up aesthetic to which I referred as it creates a textual dynamic in which characters and texts pass through each other, combining in unexpected ways.

“Party Line” is a much more upbeat song from Prism’s 1980 album *Young and Restless*. It was not one of Prism’s singles, and so it appears as an obscure song by a group from Canada that was never well known. The inclusion of this song as one exemplary of parties is at least as strange as the earlier one, as the party referred to in the title is not actually a party at all, but a reference to the kind of communal party-line telephones from the mid-twentieth century. The song begins:

Operator got a party line
Havin’ trouble gettin’ to that girl of mine
Gotta stay in touch,
I don’t want to lose her
She’s really too much,
I gotta talk to her
It’s a mighty long way to Louisiana . . .
G.T.E. is messin’ up my plans
Lines get crossed every time I call her
I can’t get through at all (Harlow & Mitchell)

So while the word “party” figures prominently in the title and the first line of the song, it is really about the desire to communicate and the frustrating dependence on electronic means to achieve that communication. And yet the song does work in a story that is also about the ways in which

the narrator receives “señales” that are transmitted by the living and the dead in these parties. The acts of communication facilitated by electronic means are central to the narrative, with those signals culminating in the transformation of the narrator in the dead Willi (or at least his revelation as such). At the same time, it suggests the kind of consumption of popular culture, and especially music, as it crosses national and linguistic boundaries. That is, a song about a party-line telephone becomes a song about parties in a context in which the words become less important to an audience unable to understand all of the lyrics. The word “party,” then, combined with the dance rhythms, repurposes the song in an act of creative consumption on the part of the Argentine partygoers.

“There’s a Party at My House,” is a song from Randy Newman’s 1983 album *Trouble in Paradise*. It starts off as a song explicitly about parties, unusual more for its inclusion in a list of songs that do not actually seem to be about traditional parties. It takes an extremely disturbing turn as it digresses into misogynistic leering and then intimates sexual violence (with no apparent condemnation of it) in a conclusion that makes listening to Newman’s more recent children’s songs a little difficult. The shock of the party that turns to degradation, though, again fits with the dismantling of the party that occurs both in the story as well as, in broad terms, in the idea that death waited below the surface of the parties of the early 1980s.⁵ “I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead,” by Warren Zevon, cements the association of party and death, though in this particular case, the song emphasizes partying as a way to stave off death.

The final track in the playlist is distinguished by a series of factors that go beyond its position at the end of the sequence and the narrator’s singling it out as “la más lograda de las canciones sobre fiestas” (the best of all the songs about parties). The rest of the songs appear by title only; one must depend on musical knowledge (or, in some cases, Google) to figure out the artists behind them and to value the interplay between lyric and story. In the case of “Left to My Own Devices,” we have both the naming of the band and a translation of key lyrics. With this foregrounding, we can appreciate a structural function to the song that also allows us to understand the ways in which Fresán introduces a sampling aesthetic into the story, an aesthetics that would prefigure work by Edmundo Paz Soldán and Mike Wilson.

Of all the bands mentioned, The Pet Shop Boys most closely resonate with the themes of the story. Founded in the early 1980s as a part of New Wave electronic music trend that included bands like New Order, Yaz, Depeche Mode, Erasure, the Communards, and Bronski Beat, the duo of Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe quickly established a successful run of albums known for a surprising mix of dance electronica and socially committed lyrics (a marked oddity for the genre). A dance club favorite, the genre and the band also became a mainstay of 1980s gay culture, a label that the band neither rejected nor accepted completely.⁶ The band’s cultivation of

synthesized pop, its stage presence—that of Tennant singing and Lowe operating the various technological devices that provided the instrumentation—is a particularly apt choice of focus, with the music itself evoking the kind of digitally produced combinations that Fresán uses in the story to meditate.

The song itself is the first track of the band's third album, *Introspective*, released on November 14, 1988, making the song also the most recent of the set list that the narrator proposes. Notably, the song was released simultaneously in the UK and Argentina, where it was part of a three-song EP, and while all songs were in the original English-language versions, the titles were in Spanish so that “Left to my Own Devices” became “Abandonado a mi suerte.” The song narrates a day in the life of a person who aspires to being a “party animal.” The chorus emphasizes themes of loneliness—made explicit in the title as a person left to themselves and their “own devices” and of the apparently frustrated attempts to love:

I could leave you, say goodbye
 Or I could love you, if I try
 And I could
 And left to my own devices, I probably would. (Tennant & Lowe)

The song also incorporates memorable, though odd, lyrics that include an appearance by Che Guevara in lines like:

I was faced with a choice at a difficult age
 Would I write a book? Or should I take to the stage?
 But in the back of my head I heard distant feet
 Che Guevara and Debussy to a disco beat (Tennant & Lowe)

And:

Drive the car, if you're with me
 Che Guevara's drinking tea
 He reads about a new device
 And takes to the stage in a secret life (Tennant & Lowe)

Che Guevara's appearance in the song sets up a hook for the Argentine audience, clearly one taken into account in the single's marketing strategy. Given Fresán's earlier introduced idea of the selective consumption of foreign language lyrics in the example of “Party Line,” one can appreciate here the cross-cultural possibilities of a song by a British band, no less, who in the midst of the mix of English language and synthpop dance beats speaks the name of the famous Argentine revolutionary not once, but twice.

And yet, while the song resonates strongly with the themes of homosexuality, loss, loneliness, and parties, it also creates a structure for the rest of the story. Fresán then begins to repeat the phrase “party animal” several times over the course of the rest of the story and includes places like “El Gran Mausoleo de los Party-Animals” (76) (“The Great Party-Animals’s Mausoleum”) and a section on “La prehistoria del party-animal” (72) (“Party-Animals’s Prehistory”). Given the repetition and expansion on a term introduced by the song, we can begin to perceive the sampling aesthetic I mentioned earlier. Fresán has not merely included a song as an intertextual reference, he has taken an element of the piece and repeated it rhythmically at different points of the story, effectively placing the phrase “party-animal” in a loop. Schloss describes the importance of looping in hip-hop aesthetics in this way:

Virtually all hip-hop music is based on a cyclic form. [. . .] this form is derived from the approach of early hip-hop deejays, who used turntables to repeat drum breaks from funk and soul records. When sampling became the tool of choice in the mid-1980s, the process became more complex as these drum loops were augmented with nonpercussive musical material. Soon both percussion and melody were being pieced together from ever-smaller samples, often a single note or drum beat. But the formal characteristics remained the same—the loop continued to reign. (136)

In Fresán’s case, the lyric is the beat, and the steady pulse of the party animal creates the kind of repetitive structure that evokes that sampling aesthetic. At the same time, this kind of looping also allows a note’s translation into new contexts and situations to provide a house beat that reminds one of the original song even as it constructs an entirely new aesthetic experience. Schloss explains further:

On the most basic level, looping automatically recasts any musical material it touches, insofar as the end of the phrase is repeatedly juxtaposed with its beginning in a way that was not intended by the original musician. After only a few repetitions, this juxtaposition, along with the largely arbitrary musical patterns it creates, begins to take on an air of inevitability. It begins to gather a compositional weight that far exceeds its original significance. (137)

And effectively, the narrator has modeled a deejay’s role in his construction of narrative rhythms, revealing his source material at the same time that he transforms it through the various loops he introduces into the structure of the story.

Fresán provides another example of this kind of intertextual technique in his use of Che Guevara later in the story. In this case, he uses an element of the song that is not included explicitly in the sample of the song that he translates at its first introduction, but that nevertheless links back into this structurally important piece. Later in the story, we find a list of the different conversation topics that are overheard at the party, a sample of which I include here:

Alguien llora; le preguntan por qué y no le queda otra que llorar más fuerte para esconder la ignorancia sobre el origen de sus lágrimas.
 Alguien dice que escuchó una grabación de La Roca Argentina ‘que te re-juro que no re-escuchó re-nadie’; una canción titulada ‘Atropellado por una Ambulancia,’ re-agrega.
 Alguien explica la sinopsis de una comedia musical ‘homo-porno-revolucionaria’ que se titulará *Che Gayvara*. (75)

(Someone cries. When asked why, the person can only cry harder to hide the fact that they don’t know why they’re crying. Someone says that they had heard a recording of La Roca Argentina ‘that I *know* that *no one* has ever *heard*’; a song titled ‘Run Over by an Ambulance,’ they *add*. Someone explains the synopsis of a musical comedy ‘homo-porno-revolutionary’ that will be called *Che Gayvara*.)

In the case of this reference, again we have a repetition of an element of the song, this time a clear answer to the kind of stage that Che Guevara was contemplating as he drank that tea, even as it also invokes the homosexual themes explicit in the short story and implicit in *The Pet Shop Boys* and “Left to My Own Devices.” In highlighting that particular moment of the song, Fresán also reintroduces the kind of punning that frustrates translation and the consumption of foreign-language popular culture. In the song, when Guevara thinks about taking to the stage, he “reads about a new device.” The pun between device as “aparato” and device as “suerte” functions particularly well in a story in which Fresán is constantly using characters to think through mechanized life in an electronic age.⁷ Once again, then, the story creates the kind of dialogue between media that is inherent to the sampling aesthetic and that situates *The Pet Shop Boys* as central to the structuring of that dialogue.

The *Pet Shop Boys* are not the only band mentioned by name and discussed in detail; a second developed set of musical references occurs a few pages later:

Mis ideas nunca son mis ideas. El CD de David Byrne, por ejemplo. El CD de David Byrne se llama *David Byrne*. Alguien acaba de regalar el CD de David Byrne al dueño de esta fiesta y le dice que *David Byrne* ‘es

re-bueno.’ El CD de David Byrne es triste y es feliz y se ocupa—en esencia—de la memoria de las fiestas que ya fueron. Las fiestas—me veo obligado a situarlas con cierto fastidio en el tiempo y el espacio—de los años ochenta. Los años en los que las fiestas eran *auténticamente* inolvidables y David Byrne lideraba una banda llamada Talking Heads. Una banda que alguna vez estuvo de Moda. Una banda que—estábamos casi seguros—se dedicaba a componer música para nuestras fiestas. No importaba la distancia y menos aún la diferencia de idiomas. La *Wild Wild Life* era la misma aquí, allá y en todas partes. Ahora puedo oírlo sin dificultad por encima del sonido ambiente de esta fiesta. Escucho la casi dolorosa paradoja de David Byrne descubriendo en *David Byrne* que sólo puede volver a ponerse de Moda cantando sobre la Moda de entonces. (68)

(My ideas are never my ideas. The CD by David Byrne, for example. The CD by David Byrne is called *David Byrne*. Someone just gave the CD by David Byrne to the host of the party and says that *David Byrne* ‘is excellent.’ The CD by David Byrne is sad and is happy and is about—essentially—the memories of parties of times gone by. Parties—I’m obligated to situate them in time and space, though it bugs me to do so—from the eighties. Those years in which parties were *authentically* unforgettable and David Byrne fronted a band called the Talking Heads. A band that was once in fashion. A band that—we were almost certain—dedicated itself to writing music for our parties. Neither the distance nor the difference in languages mattered. *Wild Wild Life* was the same here, there and everywhere. Now I can hear it easily over the ambient sounds of this party. I hear the almost painful paradox of David Byrne discovering in *David Byrne* that one can only be in fashion again by singing about what was in fashion then.)

The use of David Byrne and The Talking Heads is particularly effective as it takes the reader from the 1980s version of The Talking Heads as the party band of the alternative crowd, to Byrne’s meditative and melancholy eponymous album from 1994. The structure of the presentation of Byrne’s album with Fresán’s several asides, inserted in with em-dashes, contributes to the building of this sampling aesthetic in which literature, music and life are continually mashed together both by character and text. In that, one can perceive the dialectical relationship between subject and cultural text that results in the transformation of both. Willi’s thoughts on The Talking Heads, an American band who wrote specifically for a group of partying Argentines, evince this kind of active consumption of foreign pop culture. The claim that either language or distance was an obstacle to this importation of pop culture both situates the act as outside of national identity

even as it highlights precisely those transformative processes that turn a song about a shared telephone line into a song about parties.

The narrator continues in the above passage to quote songs from the album,

‘No es el fin del mundo / Es apenas el cierre de una discoteca / A la que yo solía ir tres veces por semana / Pero eso fue mucho mucho tiempo atrás,’ canta David Byrne. ‘Ese rugido que ahora oyes / Es tan sólo la sangre circulando sin cesar / No, no es un aplauso, mi querido / No, eso fue mucho tiempo atrás,’ diagnostica David Byrne. ‘Y si nuestras células son nuestro destino / Yo quiero estar libre de toda biología’ concluye David Byrne. Completamente de acuerdo con esto último, pienso. (68)

(‘It’s not the ending of the world / It’s only the closing of a discotheque / I used to go three times a week / But that was a long long time ago,’ sings David Byrne. ‘And that roaring that you hear / Is only the blood that circles constantly / No it is not applause my dear / No, that was a long long time ago,’ David Byrne diagnoses. ‘And if our cells are our destiny / I want to be free of biology’ David Byrne concludes. Completely in agreement with that last bit, I think.) (English song lyrics are Byrne’s originals)

The songs quoted are “A Long Time Ago” and “Crash.” In the first we have the themes of parties and dancing that recast those we saw in the earlier soundtrack, the second emphasizing the instability of the corporeal when faced with traumatic loss. When placed side by side and within the context of the story, the songs negotiate a new meaning based on the death of the narrator’s friends, the death of the party culture of the 1980s, and the resulting feeling of transformation from living organism into mechanical being.

Fresán’s story acts as a key for understanding his patterns of musical and pop cultural references in much of his work, from The Beatles in his novel *Esperanto*, to The Twilight Zone, Nick Cave, Fat Boy Slim, Godzilla, Star Wars (this list is interminable) in his novel *Mantra* to Peter Pan in *Jardines de Kensington*, an approach to intertextual collage that is more usefully understood within electronically-produced music than with theories of literary intertextuality. At the same time, this mode of writing, in which pop culture is introduced and then explicitly consumed both by characters in the narrative as well as by the narrative structure itself, helps us appreciate the ways in which Edmundo Paz Soldán’s mashed-up blog narratives and their relationship with the production of a digital literature are anticipated by print narratives. Print narratives that have learned from advances in pre-

Internet digital artistic production and that show the kinds of surprising continuities between storytelling in digital and print media.

Notes

1. Rivera Garza describes her experience with that project in her “Blogsívela.”
2. Paz Soldán’s first blog was on *blogspot.com* and was conceived as a blog with entries, links and commentaries. He then moved to *El Boomerang*, a site that collects blogs by Latin American writers and intellectuals and transformed it to a kind of clearinghouse for the articles and newspaper/magazine columns that he publishes throughout Latin America. His experimentations with digital narrative appeared in the first blog.
3. Schloss describes this division in hip-hop culture in the following way, a division that also illustrates the kind of phenomenon that I am addressing:

Beats—musical collages composed of brief segments of recorded sound—are one of two relatively discrete endeavors that come together to form the musical element of hip-hop culture; the other element is rhymes (rhythmic poetry). This division of labor derives from the earliest hip-hop music, which consisted of live performances in which a deejay played the most rhythmic sections of popular records accompanied by a master of ceremonies—an MC—who exhorted the crowd to dance, shared local information, and noted his or her own skill on the microphone. (2)

See, for example, Théberge, Gunderson, and Chang for perspectives on sampling from theoretical, historical and cultural perspectives. Potter focuses on both parts of the hip-hop experience (rhymes and beats as Schloss has it) and productively incorporates current literary and cultural theory in his discussion.
4. See Billard and Hidalgo for examples of such criticism.
5. I do not mean to associate AIDS-related deaths to what Newman describes in his song. I merely want to point out the structure of a superficial celebration hiding a disturbing reality, something we also see articulated in “All Tomorrow’s Parties.”
6. Ben Thompson conducted an excellent interview with Neil Tennant that reflects both on Tennant’s view of the band’s position in the gay iconography of the 1980s as well as on various other aspects of the band’s career. Also see the more recent interviews conducted by Andrew Sullivan with Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe for *The Atlantic*.
7. See *Cyborgs in Latin America* for more on this subject.

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