

**Constructing Presence and Pathways between
Juan Luis Martínez and Jean Tardieu**

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In his seminal essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), Roland Barthes proposes that the disassociation of the author from the subjects he pens encourages readers to explore a plurality of textual interpretations rather than remain tied to the assumption that there is a single way to read and understand a text. As a result, the reader is liberated from his/her reliance on the author’s voice to explain the text at hand, demonstrating that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 1977, 148). Envisioning a text as a pathway open to a plurality of destinations becomes a central consideration when confronting the enigmatic work of Chilean poet Juan Luiz Martínez (1942-1993). In minimalizing his presence both on the cover of and within the body of his texts, Martínez has challenged readers to look beyond his authority as they enter into his universe and journey through the collection of materials he offers for exploration. Often referred to as Chile’s best kept secret (Vicuña 2009, 452), Martínez published only two projects in his lifetime, *La nueva novela* (1977) and *La poesía chilena* (1978).¹ The limited circulation of his small corpus and his notoriously

¹ Three more works were published posthumously using unedited materials that Martínez left upon his premature death in 1993. They are: *Poemas del otro* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2003), *Aproximación del principio de incertidumbre a un proyecto poético*

private tendencies might explain his relative anonymity outside of Chile in comparison to his contemporaries and friends, Raúl Zurita (1950-), Enrique Lihn (1929-1988) and Nicanor Parra (1914-2018), all pillars of Chile's neo-avant-garde movement. Notwithstanding, his *La nueva novela*, a book-object comprised of photography, collage, translation and poetry, has continued to fascinate and even bewilder readers long after his death.

Split into thematic sections that deal with a variety of topics including arithmetic, space, time, literature and sense, *La nueva novela* might remind readers of a scrap book as Martínez tests the boundaries of the conventional novel. Stringing together written reflections, photographs, cutouts from other books, media sources, tissue-paper inserts, a plastic window cut into one page and a metal hook taped onto another, Martínez presents a book-object defined by seemingly illogical sequences that eschew “un desarrollo narrativo o conceptual” (Ayala 2010, 166), resulting in the “*bricolage* aspect” (Weintraub 2015, 90) of the text. As Mónica de la Torre explains, the confusion that results from reading *La nueva novela* serves as the catalyst for the reader's poetic production: “Activated, each page becomes the open stage where the reader interacts and dialogues with the material presented on it—the poem is the eventual language event resulting from this engagement” (de la Torre 2013, 148). The way in which Martínez compels his reader to engage with his material mirrors the process by which he himself conceived of the book, with its first two sections featuring an intertextual dialogue between Martínez and French playwright Jean Tardieu (1903-1995). In “Respuestas a problemas de Jean Tardieu” (Martínez 1985, 9) and “Cinco problemas para Jean Tardieu,” (Martínez 1985, 35), Martínez interacts with Tardieu's writing, though the latter's original text is never explicitly named or cited. This *mise-en-abyme* game underscores how the (im)possible process of reading the book is performed structurally by the book itself, underscoring its central tensions of assemblage, destabilization of meaning and metafiction.

Martínez's engagement with Tardieu not only motivates Martínez to question the traditional roles of author and reader amidst his own highly metalinguistic work, but also invites an exploration of how literary representation functions in times of social and political upheaval. In addition to Tardieu, an active member of the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation in France during World War II, Martínez's

(Ediciones Nómada y Galería D21, 2010) and *El poeta anónimo (o el eterno presente de Juan Luis Martínez)* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2012).

allusions to other French poetic figures such as Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Valéry—as well as his criticism of political figures (most notably Adolf Hitler)—gesture toward his political sensibilities. Looking toward his political context, Rebecca Kosick and Jesús Sepúlveda have echoed Scott Weintraub’s discussion of the role of censorship in Martínez’s work, claiming that “the many non-Chilean political actors that appear in the book can be read as ways of avoiding directly antagonizing this regime” (Kosick 2017, 857), particularly when “Martínez finds his way to euphemistically address political issues censored at the time in Chile through an image of Hitler as representation of Pinochet and the notion of nonexistence as a reference to the detained disappeared ” (Sepúlveda 2016, 121). As the dictatorship made clear that “hay ciertas cosas que no pueden ser nombradas” (de los Ríos 2009, 56), Martínez subsequently turns away from language, where he manipulates visual materials such as photography and collage to respond to the unstable nature of representation through artistic and poetic creation dependent on interaction with the reader within the space of *La nueva novela* itself.²

As readers progress through, turn back and scour the pages of *La nueva novela* in search of meaning, they transform the book-object into a site of movement. In this study, I pay particular attention to Martínez’s exchanges with Tardieu as the foundational endeavor by which he encourages the reader to fall into a new artistic space as Martínez utilizes intertextual dialogue as the foundation for literary production and material construction. Within this alternative reality imagined on the page, Martínez’s representations of absence and the unknown, as inspired by Tardieu’s work, are transformed into evocative presences through the use of negative spaces further emphasized by the Chilean’s incorporation of image. As Martínez plays with notions of disappearance and void, I read his ludic undertones as combating erasure and oblivion by constantly inspiring readers to imagine whatever haunting presences such disappearances or absences evoke in them as readers in place of emphasizing his authoritative role as author. Thus, I propose that Martínez’s direct engagement with European literary figures, namely Tardieu, nourishes his reflection on political and humanitarian turmoil, not simply in order to circumvent the authoritarian censorship

² Martínez was not unique in his experimentation with meaning and form. Throughout the years of dictatorship in Chile, many authors and artists experimented with forms of expression. Notable examples include the *Colectivo Acciones de Arte* (CADA) and their radical use of the street and their bodies to redefine artistic expression under dictatorship; founders Diamela Eltit’s (1949-) experimentation with narration and Zurita’s use of the Chilean dessert as an artistic canvas for poetry; and Parra’s proposal of *antipoesía* as a challenge to conventional verse.

of his time. On a more profound level, I argue that he uses his own virtual, transatlantic crossings to build literal pathways in his book that allow for and cultivate the reader's movement across pages, emphasizing freedom of movement as a productive and liberating force born from confusion and chaos. In doing so, Martínez points to imagination as a means of moving beyond traditional materiality, rhetoric and power as restrictive and constraining forces that would be absolutely totalizing in their activation. Furthermore, in examining Tardieu's connection to the French resistance movement as a comparative framework for Martínez's response to authoritarianism in Chile, I envision Martínez's work as anticipating the use of the Holocaust and World War II as a referential lens in studies of authoritarianism and trauma in the Southern Cone. In his invitation of movements forward, backward and sideways as part of the act of reading, Martínez encourages readers to question reality while still obliging them to cultivate a politically engaged mindset for understanding both his context and their own.

A Wooden Box as Origin and Destination

Tardieu's play, *Un mot pour un autre* (1951), may appear as a complete non sequitur in a discussion of Southern Cone dictatorship, given that it is a comedy that takes place in 1900 in an unnamed city in France, most likely Paris. Martínez, however, was not the first to draw inspiration from the Frenchman; Julio Cortázar previously featured Tardieu's work in chapter 152 of *Rayuela* (1963), "Abuso de conciencia", (Cortázar 2017, 714).³ As Gwen Kirkpatrick explains: "Tardieu era muy conocido por su lirismo, su sentido teatral, y su cuestionamiento de clisés culturales. También es el creador de un personaje cómico, el Professeur Frœppel, quien emprende una búsqueda paranoica y fársica de un lenguaje utópico y personal que le devolvería al habla su unidad primigenia, en ocasiones evocada como un balbuceo de onomatopeyas" (Kirkpatrick 1999, 230). Associated with the Theater of the Absurd, Tardieu published his aforementioned play alongside the "discovered" notes and personal journal of

³ Part of *Rayuela's* "capítulos prescindibles", chapter 152 presents an excerpt of Tardieu's writing in which a first-person narrator discusses the house in which he currently resides. He affirms that the house looks and feels exactly like his house, "se asemeja en todo a la mía" (Cortázar 2017, 714), but somehow is still not his home. Though the narrator recognizes the space and believes that time continues to pass unchanged, he still exclaims: "Todo es falso aquí. Cuando me hayan devuelto *mi* casa y *mi* vida, entonces encontraré *mi* verdadero rostro" (Cortázar 2017, 714). The house here, just like words in *Un mot pour un autre*, become vacuous signifiers that do not maintain a meaningful relationship to their referents, causing confusion and anxiety in the narrator. Additionally, Cortázar's *Rayuela* seemingly anticipates *La nueva novela* by encouraging non-linear readings in which readers traverse the book by hopscotching around chapters in non-linear order.

Professor Frœppel, a fictitious *persona* who is presented as the author of the play. The play was first published 1951, followed by a second edition in 1978, republished under the more accurate title *Le Professeur Frœppel: Nouvelle Édition Revue et Augmenté de Un mot pour un autre*. The characters of Tardieu's play, a couple and their housekeepers, catch "une curieuse épidémie" ("a curious epidemic"; Tardieu 1978, 49), which causes them to substitute certain words for others while speaking, hence the title, "one word for another."⁴ These substitutions comply with the grammatical structure of the sentences they intend to relay, but otherwise relay no semantic meaning. Thus, Tardieu pushes our understanding of representation to its limits by illustrating the arbitrary nature of words as signifiers, consequently echoing Ferdinand de Saussure's affirmation: "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (Saussure 2011, 66). While the characters seem unaware that their conversations fall into complete absurdity, the audience is confronted by the arbitrariness with which, according to Saussure, "collective behavior" and "convention" (Saussure 2011, 68) have cultivated the association of signifier with signified. To provide further material for consideration, Tardieu published the play alongside a series of commentaries on language. In the third section of the collection, he presents his "Œuvres pédagogiques" ("Pedagogical Works"; Tardieu 1978, 143), which include a series of "Petits problèmes et travaux pratiques" (Tardieu 1978, 154), small problems and practical exercises. These exercises play with meaning, and more specifically, the meaning behind the definition of meaning itself. Consequently, as Martínez engages with the text, he too looks towards questions of metaphor, space and time as reoccurring points of focus in his conceptual experimentation with metalinguistic turns.

Though Tardieu embarks on explorations of science, psychology and mathematics throughout his "small problems and practical exercises," his venture into language in order to dissect the purpose and construction of poetry is my focus. Looking directly at metaphors, Tardieu proposes:

Étant donné une vieille boîte en bois que je veux détruire ou jeter au rebut, ai-je le droit de dire que je la tue, que je l'épluche, que je la fais cuire, que je la mange, que je la digère, ou encore que je l'efface, que je la biffe, que je la condamne, l'incarcère, l'exile, la destitue, la vaporise, l'éteins, la scalpe, l'embaume, la fais fondre, l'électrocute, la dégonfle, la souffle?

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Here, the French word *épidémie* is most commonly translated as "epidemic," but can also be understood as "craze." Tardieu no doubt wanted to play with language so as to illustrate how the characters of his play fall victim to an unknown epidemic that subsequently results in a craze of both humorous and absurd proportions.

Répondez à chacune de ces questions. (Tardieu 1978, 159)

[Being given an old wooden box that I'd want to destroy or throw in the trash, do I have the right to say that I'd kill it, dissect it, boil it, eat it, digest it, or else I'd erase it, cross it out, condemn it, imprison it, exile it, depose it, evaporate it, extinguish it, scalp it, embalm it, melt it, electrocute it, deflate it, blow it away?

Respond to each of these questions.]

Here, Tardieu plays with representation and the materiality of language as he examines an old wooden box. What is this old wooden box? More importantly, what lies within it? Tardieu's entire collection is obsessed with the notion of knowing and, more precisely, the constant need to discover the unknown by putting it into words. Other questions he poses throughout his practical exercises include: What lies behind a wall? How does one describe the specific feeling of a circumstance that escapes description? What is the experience of measuring infinity? His questions are an attempt to grasp—or simply illustrate—the difficulty of representation through language, all the more poignant following a reading of *Un mot pour un autre*, where the reader is left questioning the authority that language holds over human perception. The wooden box is a mystery; its contents are yet to be unveiled and, as a result, its value is yet to be defined. Language, consequently, holds great power to ascribe value onto the box as Tardieu demonstrates how the poet's attempt to assign meaning to the box can kill it, digest it, imprison it, extinguish it or embalm it. Here, Tardieu examines how poetry can both destroy and preserve its subject—in this case, an artifact such as an old wooden box—by using metaphor itself. With his closing proposition—"Répondez à chacune de ces questions"—Tardieu invites the reader to engage with his work by asking how we ascribe value onto the metaphors we use, encouraging the reader to answer his inquiry as both readers and potential poets. By obliging the reader to pick from a selection of possible meanings behind a single metaphor, Tardieu makes a metalinguistic point by emphasizing that none of the proposed meanings can really give the reader access to what lies within the box. The box, just as the text that presents it, is transformed into a toy that stimulates playful exchanges between author and reader.

The perplexing nature of Tardieu's practical exercises builds off his criticism of language and his exposure of its arbitrary nature, in which the loss of logic displaces the author as an authoritative source of meaning from the

text.⁵ Indeed, Martínez's rejection of himself as author is immediately apparent on the cover of *La nueva novela*, where Martínez lists the authors of the work as both, yet neither, ~~Juan Luis Martínez~~ and ~~Juan de Dios Martínez~~.⁶ Martínez's denial of his identity as author becomes even more apparent in the first two sections of *La nueva novela*, which result from his appropriation of Tardieu's work. In the section titled, "Respuestas a Problemas de Jean Tardieu" Martínez both transcribes Spanish translations of the questions posed by Tardieu and answers or supplements them with his own thoughts, which are presented as original creations when he does not cite Tardieu directly. Eduardo Llanos Melussa explains how in addition to omitting any explicit citation of Tardieu's work, Martínez additionally appropriates someone else's Spanish translation of the original French text: "En cualquier caso, puedo asegurar que Martínez transcribe punto por punto la versión castellana ofrecida por el argentino Eduardo Stilman, quien diez años antes había publicado una notable antología internacional del humor absurdo" (Melussa 2016, 109). His play on authority and authorship in these sections is thus doubly significant. Martínez's unattributed use of Tardieu's writing does not seek to improperly lay claim to the latter's intellectual property, but rather, as Marcelo Riosco proposes, deconstructs and eliminates the notion of authority: "esta estrategia intertextual, llevada al extremo en *La nueva novela*, anula (para este texto, al menos) las nociones de jerarquía, originalidad, veracidad y gusto" (Riosco 2013, 194).⁷ Martínez, thus, not only accepts Tardieu's invitation to dialogue, but willingly places himself within the text as an active and participative reader-turned-writer:

—No importa que usted, utilizando todo el poder que le confiere el uso y abuso de algunas metáforas en el ejercicio de la poesía, tenga o no el derecho de querer destruir o arrojar a la basura una vieja cajita

⁵ As Weintraub asserts, the author is further displaced by Tardieu's claim of Professor Froëppel's authorship, a tactic mimicked by Martínez on the cover of *La nueva novela*: "The myth of Professor Froëppel shares much with the negation of authorship that characterizes Juan Luis Martínez's poetic ethic and also with his inheritance of the apocryphal tradition that includes Cervantes, Pessoa, and Borges, among others" (Weintraub 2015, 38).

⁶ In many of his works, particularly those published posthumously, Martínez frequently plays with his own name, often changing his name or taking on the names of others. Humorously, Martínez has copied poetry from another poet of the same name in other texts. In *Poemas del otro*, he appropriates without citation work from Swiss-Catalan poet Juan Luis Martínez's (spelled without the accent mark) collection *Le silence et sa brisure* (1976).

⁷ Very much in the style of Jorge Luis Borges's "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (*Ficciones*, 1944), Martínez's play with authority, authorship and language through Tardieu additionally deemphasizes the authority of the "original" language in translation.

de madera, diciendo que sólo la mata, la espulga, la cocina, la come, la digiere, o bien que la borra, la tacha, la condena, la encarcela, la destierra, la destituye, la vaporiza, la extingue, la desuella, la embalsama, la funde, la electrocuta, la deshincha, la barre, o bien, decir que sólo la decapita, la escupe, la hiela, la accidenta, la deshilacha, la martiriza, la estrangula, la asfixia, la ametralla, la envenena, la ahoga, la fusila, la atomiza, la recuerda y la olvida, siempre y cuando usted le reconozca a esa vieja cajita de madera el derecho inalienable de morir dignamente en su propia cama y con la conciencia tranquila. (Martínez 1985, 25)

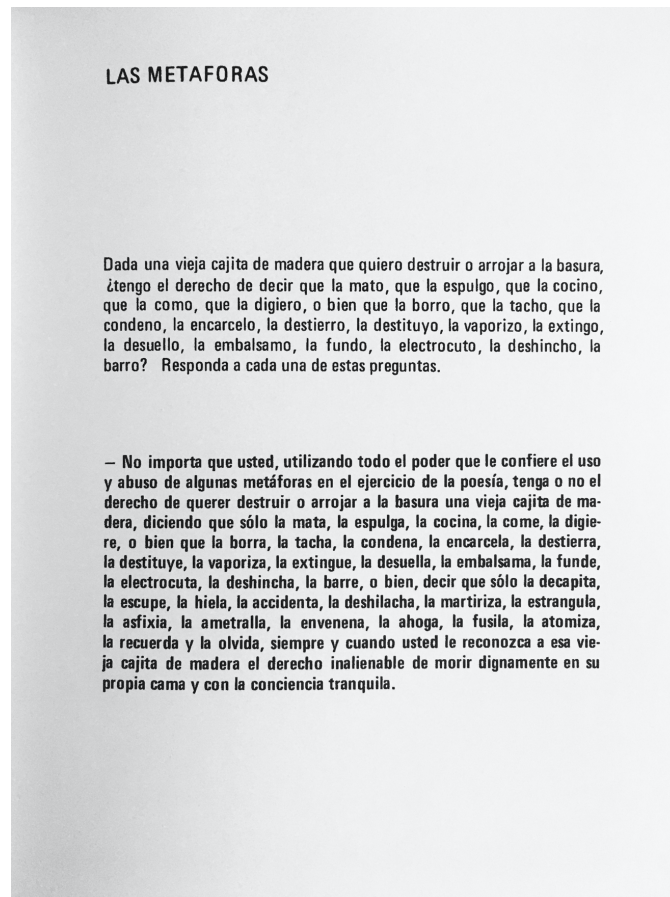


Figure 1: “Las metáforas” (Martínez 1985, 25)

Speaking to Tardieu’s “ejercicio de la poesía”, Martínez affirms that despite all the “uso y abuso” that metaphor may undergo, in the end the metaphor still stands, just as his wooden box. Curiously, Martínez not only responds to each of Tardieu’s actions, but further elaborates by adding his own. His notably more violent and vividly torturous acts—martyrize it, strangle it, asphyxiate it, gun it down—point to his own surgical acts of composition. As he cuts, carves and pastes fragments of text from different origins, Martínez’s process of writing sees his book as the old wooden box being manipulated

and molded in Frankenstein-like fashion. If for Tardieu, the undetermined value of language is symbolized in the unknown contents of the unknown wooden box, for Martínez it is the box itself that additionally encapsulates the purpose of the book as material substance.

In thinking of Tardieu's old wooden box as a charged symbol, it is striking, thus, that Martínez's second publication, *La poesía chilena*, is not a book, but a small box, albeit made of cardboard. Gathered within *La poesía chilena* are the death certificates of four great figures of Chilean poetry—Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948), Pablo de Rokha (1894-1968) and Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)—with copies of catalogue cards from the National Library of Chile of a selection of their works and small Chilean flags paired with blank catalogue cards.⁸ Additionally, Martínez includes an envelope of soil from the central valley of Chile and the death certificate of his father, Luis Guillermo Martínez Villablanca, who died in 1977, just prior to the book-object's publication.⁹ Gonzalo Montero has written on the object's physical and symbolic likeness to a coffin, affirming the book-object's inclusion of soil as indicative of burial: "La tierra es cuna, lecho, tumba" (Montero 2017, 202). In a similar vein, Weintraub views *La poesía chilena* "as a type of 'corpse' that stands in place of a national 'corpus'" (Derrida qtd. in Weintraub 2015, 122), where a parallel is drawn between the *padre* and *patria*, both of which form an overpowering cultural and poetic inheritance at the national and familial levels. As Martínez suggests in *La poesía chilena*, poets are products of both their country—and her inherent political agendas—as much as of their family, a connection that becomes immortalized in death when bodies are returned to the earth, patria or motherland. The inclusion of a bag of soil in *La poesía chilena* drives Montero's examination of burial, earthing and unearthing in Martínez's corpus. Montero understands the soil as "la posibilidad de leer la bolsa de tierra como restos u osamentas de los desaparecidos, como una forma elusiva de nombrar a los que ya no están" (Montero 2017, 202). As earth and soil offer images of decomposition evocative of unearthed human remains, Martínez's use of Tardieu's old wooden box in *La nueva novela*, alongside the image of the box that is *La poesía chilena*, present coffins and tombs

⁸ The poems presented on the catalogue cards all deal with the subject of death and include: "Los sonetos de la muerte", from *Desolación* (1922) by Mistral; "Solo la muerte", from *Residencia en la Tierra*, Volume II (1935) by Neruda; "Poesía funeraria", from *Gran temperatura* (1937) by de Rokha and "Coronación de la muerte", from *Últimos poemas* (1948) by Huidobro.

⁹ The inclusion of Martínez's father has led Andrés Morales to draw a parallel between *La poesía chilena* and *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* (1440-1479) by Jorge Manrique, a collection in which the author's poetic production is intrinsically tied to the death of his father and the dead's return to the earth (Morales 2006, 111-112).

as symbols of preservative measures that offer sites of mourning, which parallel the process by which literary corpora are returned to the motherland in sites of memory such as archives or libraries where they can be likewise visited, praised, and mourned.¹⁰

The interpretive movement from Tardieu's emphasis on the inability to see what lies within the box, to Martínez's array of torturous acts which relate the box to a silenced body or corpus conjures the image of the *desaparecidos*, whose disappearance denies their return both to their family and to their country when they cannot be brought back to the earth to be buried in a marked grave. Martínez himself alludes to the destructive and sacrificial consequences of authoritarian rule with his epigraph to the final section of *La nueva novela*. In "Epígrafe para un libro condenado: la política" (Martínez 1985, 135), Martínez quotes French surrealist painter Francis Picabia: "El padre y la madre no tienen el derecho de la muerte sobre sus hijos, pero la Patria, nuestra segunda madre, puede inmolarlos para la inmensa gloria de los hombres políticos" (Martínez 1985, 135). Martínez draws readers' attention to the influence and power of politics in civilian life, whereby innocent people can be sacrificed for the purpose of political and national agendas. The title of the section itself further alludes to authoritarian control as Juan Carlos Villavicencio explains: "El título: en 1857 Charles Baudelaire publica *Las flores del mal*, edición que fue censurada y confiscada por el mandato del Tribunal Correccional del Sena. El 'Epígrafe para un libro condenado' aparecerá en ediciones posteriores a la original como primer poema del corpus, aludiendo a la sanación" (Villavicencio 2016, 80). Villavicencio reads this uncited reference as Martínez's own affirmation of the risk of censorship had his text been examined by Chilean authorities. Notwithstanding, Cristián Gómez Olivares has discussed how common readings of *La nueva novela* as responding to Pinochet's authoritarian state often overlook the fact that a significant portion of the text was written before Pinochet's *coup* in 1973. Martínez began work on *La nueva novela* in 1968 and finished in the early years of the dictatorship in 1975. In this vein, he affirms that political readings inscribed on the text more accurately indicate Martínez's prefiguring of scholarship to come, given how the epigraph and ensuing pages have been mobilized in anti-authoritarian discourse (Gómez Olivares 2006, 98-99).

¹⁰ A detailed analysis of the relation between poetry, nation and earth —*tierra*— can be found in Morales' article, "Para una lectura interpretativa de *La poesía chilena* de Juan Luis Martínez" (2006), in which he argues that poetry itself is not written on paper, as evidenced in *La poesía chilena*, because having been born from the earth and the nation (referring to both meanings of *tierra*), it can only be written in the earth or, as Martínez shows, in soil (Morales 2006, 112).

In a similar vein, while I envision the unknown void represented by the mystery of what the wooden box contains as reflective of the negative space left in the wake of a disappearance, potentially read in retrospect as that of the disappeared, I affirm that Martínez's intent in "Las metáforas" lies in the apostrophized "you," which may be read as any political authority seeking to silence and eliminate the voice or language of dissonance. Enacting acts of silencing and erasure, the apostrophized "you," however oppressive, can never undercut "el derecho inalienable de morir dignamente en su propia cama y con la conciencia tranquila" (Martínez 1985, 25). While the box/body may be tortured, (s)he does not lose his or her inalienable right to die with dignity. To die in one's own bed with a clear conscience underscores the importance of recognition, identity and belonging inherent in this inalienable right; that is, to die in a familiar place, with the opportunity for final words. Yet, because the box itself never speaks, I assert that Martínez is gesturing to subjectivities that are never unearthed, and thus never receive the right to speak for themselves. When aspects of identity and belonging are not recognized, Martínez offers a second instance of muting through the instrumentalization of absence. Martínez does not speak for the voiceless; he obliges readers to read silence as silence instead of attempting to restore or redeem an irrevocable void.

Vanishing Acts: Image as Presence

Featuring the old wooden box in *La nueva novela* as a reimagination of Tardieu's inquiry into metaphor punctuates the book-object with political force. Rather than taking on the precarious act of speaking on behalf of those who have been silenced, Martínez reclaims violent compulsions—the acts of torture, mangling and manipulation highlighted by Tardieu's examination of the old wooden box—as productive forces, as these acts are the very impulses Martínez employs for the construction of collaged pages in *La nueva novela*. When absence cannot be resolved through language, image allows for an examination of the productivity found in negative space, which is explored through the additional visual presence of Tardieu throughout the text.

As Benjamin proposes in his "A Short History of Photography" (1972), photography allows the viewer to travel through time in order to look at an instance from the past as if it were a moment in the present: "the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture; to find that imperceptible point at which, in the immediacy of that long-past moment, the future so persuasively inserts

itself that, looking back, we may rediscover it” (Benjamin 1972, 7). The “here and now” of the photograph—its persuasive power in transporting the viewer across time and space—is what gives the photograph value. Benjamin’s words prove particularly poignant in the context of Southern Cone authoritarianism in light of Nelly Richard’s *Margins and Institutions: Art in Chile Since 1973* (1986), which examines the role of photography as bodies of proof:

The introduction of photography coincides with the end of that period of silence after the 1973 coup, when the artists had to carefully rethink the meaning of their practice in terms of new instruments of communication that could refer to the socio-political environment in a more explicit or actively critical way. Thus[,] photographic information became privileged in that it enabled the work to present its relation to the context by turning all signs of reality into evidence or the *proof* of its accusations. (Richard 1986, 35)

In Chile, the photograph could challenge the voices of authority that first carried out kidnappings, tortures and disappearances, and later denied or refused to bring such violations to justice, as illustrated by the numerous examples of protests in which family members later used photographs to give a face to disappeared loved ones in their demands for truth and justice. As these protests underscore, no matter what the government might say, or not say, a photograph of a person stands as proof of their existence, and more importantly, as evidence of a state of being that can be used in an accusation of forced disappearance. This critical potential of photography in the context of the dictatorship not only allows the silenced or erased past to emerge in the present—in the “here and now” productivity of the photograph—but also invites a questioning of the future, of potential reconciliation.

While Martínez conceived of the book-object prior to the wave of disappearances that would define Pinochet’s dictatorship, his use of photography seemingly anticipates the image’s imminent, intimate relationship with demands for truth and justice, though initially introduced in *La nueva novela* as tools for memory work. Alongside a photograph of Tardieu at age four, Martínez posits: “Tardieu, el niño que se observa en la fotografía no es Usted, sino su pequeño hijo que ha desaparecido. A fin de averiguar en qué casa, calle o ciudad volverá a encontrarlo, continúe con el pensamiento o la memoria, el jardín que ciertamente debe prolongarse más allá de los bordes recortados de esta fotografía” (Martínez 1985, 36).

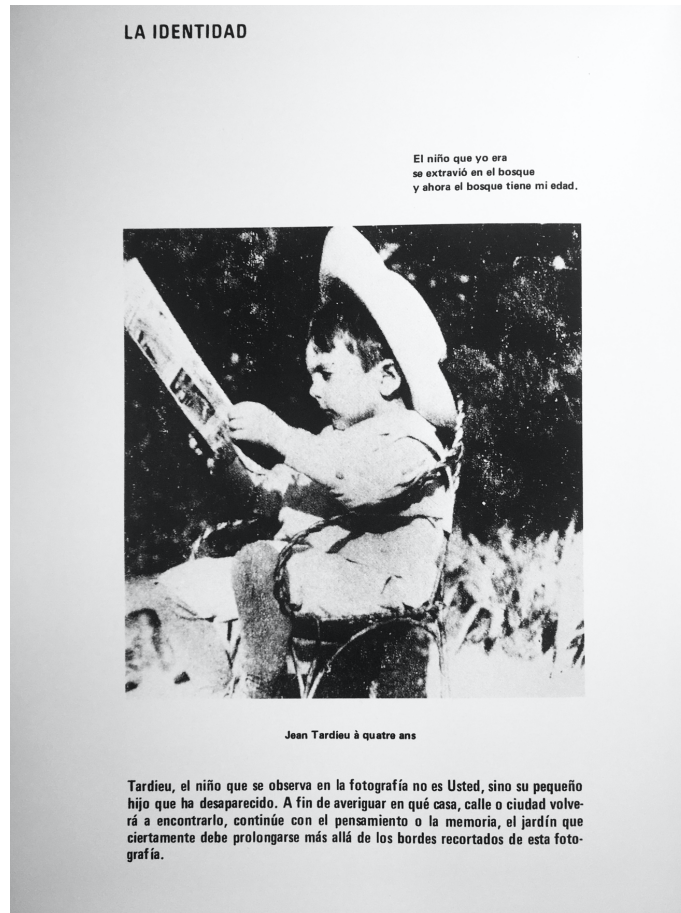


Figure 2: “La identidad” (Martínez 1985, 36)

Martínez’s request serves initially as an exercise in memory that begins within a familial context. Using the photograph, Martínez reminds Tardieu, and by extension the reader, that a portrait taken by a photographer is vulnerable to the subjectivity of the artist, given his/her ability to stage and frame the photograph. As readers and viewers do not share the photographer’s ability to see beyond the camera frame, they are compelled to assume an active role. Martínez uses Tardieu to show the reader how interpretation requires the use of imagination when Martínez asks Tardieu to envision the space in which the child sits in order to retrace the child’s steps, the personal memory of which has been blurred with the passage of time. By expanding the space in his imagination, Tardieu might be able to see where the child (his younger self) went when he got up from his chair. In the process, Martínez reminds the reader that photographs, while they might provide viewers with a snapshot of reality from a single moment of space and time, are not necessarily limited to a single instance. They encapsulate a metamorphosed past-present state. As a result, they must be considered a piece of a greater whole or continuum. Thus, Martínez encourages readers not to waver before

the confines of a frame, “los bordes recortados”. Though attempting to expand these borders can only result in an imaginary state, imagination is a powerful tool, particularly when imagination and memory become intertwined. By involving Tardieu specifically in this exercise in memory work, Martínez demonstrates that imagination is often involved in the process of reconstructing the narrative of a past that has been silenced or erased. Once Tardieu, or any viewer looking toward childhood, turns to imagination as an act of remembrance, memory and imagination might become indistinguishable. As a result, Martínez suggest that while the image, just as the single page it lays upon, are limited, the value of the book-object exists beyond its materiality.

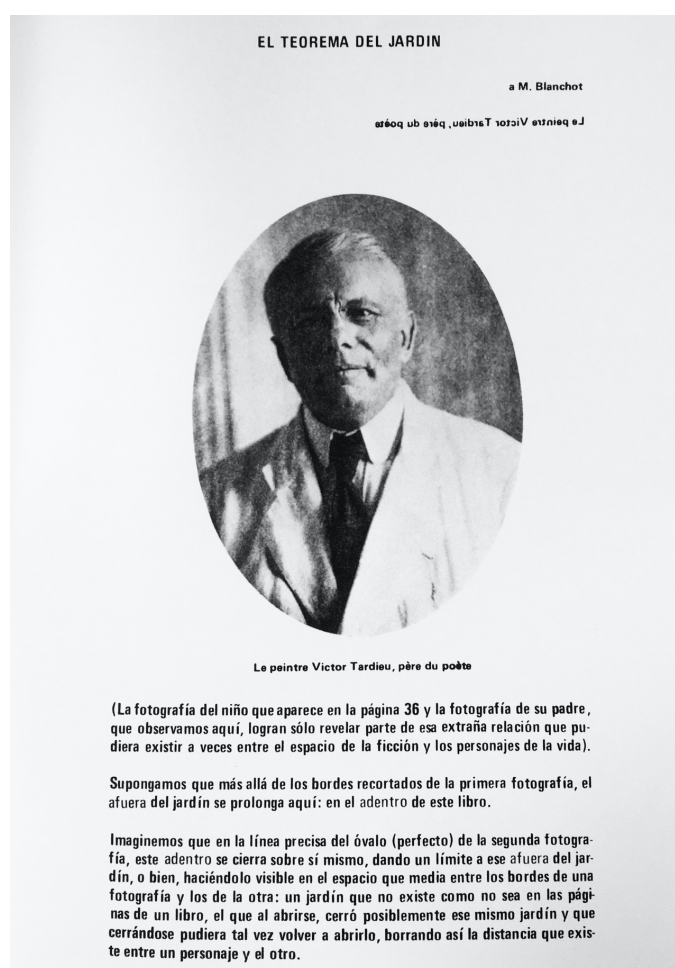


Figure 3: “La teorema del jardín” (Martínez 1985, 65)

Later on, Martínez returns to Tardieu with a photograph of his father, Victor Tardieu, a renowned painter in his own time. The portrait, enclosed in an oval frame, is not placed alongside that of his son, but rather some thirty pages later. Their distance within the text of *La nueva novela*, according to Martínez, serves to remind the reader of

“esa extraña relación que pudiera existir a veces entre el espacio de la ficción y los personajes de la vida” (Martínez 1985, 65). Here, Martínez asks the reader to imagine that beyond the trimmed edges of the previous photograph of young Tardieu, the background depiction of the garden extends itself into the second photograph of Victor Tardieu:

Supongamos que más allá de los bordes recortados de la primera fotografía, el afuera del jardín se prolonga aquí: en el adentro de este libro.

Imaginemos que en la línea precisa del óvalo (perfecto) de la segunda fotografía, este adentro se cierra sobre sí mismo, dando un límite a ese afuera del jardín, o bien, haciéndolo visible en el espacio que media entre los bordes de una fotografía y los de la otra: un jardín que existe como no sea en las páginas de un libro, el que al abrirse, cerró posiblemente ese mismo jardín y que cerrándose pudiera tal vez volver a abrirlo, borrando así la distancia que existe entre un personaje y el otro (Martínez 1985, 65).

Martínez is proposing that the two photographs exist within the same realm, which we understand to be the confines of the book itself. These characters or “personajes de la vida” have now been brought into an imaginary reality within the book, “el espacio de la ficción”. At first, it appears that father and son are separated both by the frames of their portraits—space—and by the moments in which Martínez introduces them to the readers—time. Nevertheless, Martínez argues that within the confines of the book, the natural and traditional limitations of time and space are abolished, particularly when the oval frame of father Tardieu and the square frame of the garden can be extended or shrunk simultaneously until they create an overlapping space within the book where father and son can be reunited. As a result, reading is no longer depicted as a sequential process; limits are no longer limitations. At first, this imaginary and visual exercise appears to be inconsequential. However, returning to the first hypothetical scenario in which Tardieu is told to imagine that his son has disappeared, the pair of photographs and their accompanying explanations can be seen as Martínez’s solution to the very problem he initially exposed: although photography is limited in real life, insofar as it cannot give answers as to where a missing person can be found, even if it originates as proof of their existence and evidence of their subsequent disappearance, photographs within books are not as limited, and their parameters not as confined within the reality of this artistic space. The space is not governed by authoritarian political regimes or strict censorship, or more simply, by reality itself. As Martínez reminds the reader, “Construya un mundo coherente a partir de NADA, sabiendo que: Yo = TU y que TODO es POSIBLE” (Martínez 1985, 33). He encourages readers to embrace the

imaginative force of unconventional modes of expression that can be mobilized to prove the continued existence of those who cannot be seen and are not able to speak for themselves.

Acts of movement and invitations to traverse the space of the book-object are taken to a literal extreme throughout *La nueva novela* through the use of characters that appear, disappear and reappear throughout the text. A notable example includes Lewis Carroll's Cheshire cat from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), a *leitmotif* throughout *La nueva novela*, no doubt for his ability to disappear and reappear in Carroll's text. Just as Alice falls down the rabbit hole and must confront the nonsensical and at times magical beings in Wonderland, so too must Martínez's reader upon opening the book-object. In discussing the alternative logic behind the organization of Martínez's works, Ayala affirms: "*La nueva novela* sugiere, alude, acaso alegoriza, pero jamás intenta nombrar lo real. A pesar de que el libro en su totalidad aspira a 'significar'—se mencionan ideas, se puntualizan temas, se ensamblan elementos—, no se van uniendo los conceptos, los temas no parecen ir agrupándose de manera coherente, los elementos no muestran una lógica" (Ayala 2010, 165). While such confusion allows Martínez to experiment with and satirize the parameters of the conventional novel, I would like to emphasize that confusion constitutes a fundamental aspect of the work by forcing the reader to think of the book in its totality, rather than in isolated pieces, which in and of themselves might appear meaningless. The lack of coherence in fact disorients in order to, in turn, engulf the reader in the total experience of reading and in all the sensations that are evoked.

The materiality of the book is presented as a universe within which the author and his readers can engage when Martínez depicts the movement of human figures from page to page. On page sixty-one, Martínez presents a column composed of five panels. Two are left blank and three hold the images of human legs. Describing the first panel, which is left blank, Martínez begins: "A. En este cuadro hubo personas que ya no es posible encontrar en esta página, pues ellas se dirigen a presenciar los acontecimientos de la página 99" (Martínez 1985, 61).

Surely, when turning to page ninety-nine, the reader finds another five-paneled column, although the ordering of the panels is different. Once again referring to the first panel, also blank, Martínez states: "A. En la página 61 usted debió suponer que las personas del cuadro A llegarían a presenciar los acontecimientos de esta página. Esas personas se encuentran ahora en el cuadro B de la página 61 después de haber estado algunos días en esta página" (Martínez 1985, 99).

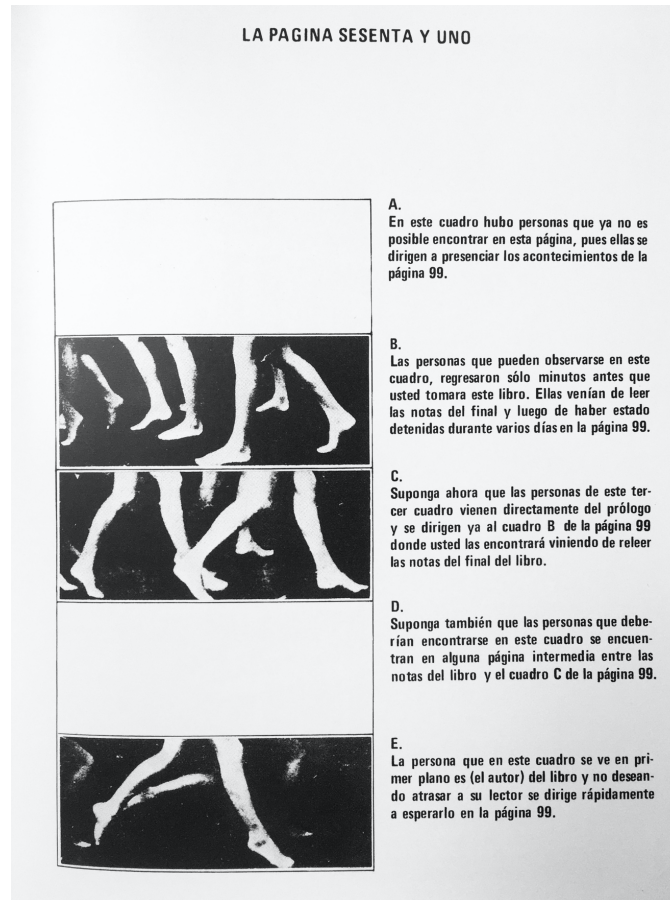


Figure 4: “La página sesenta y uno” (Martínez 1985, 61)

For Martínez, the parameters of the page must be constructed as he pushes the limits of the physical page as a space for literary exploration while questioning the purpose of the author within it. Here, caught in a game of hide and seek, readers find themselves chasing these human figures back and forth between pages sixty-one and ninety-nine, never managing to catch them. Ayala envisions Martínez’s frequent use of ludic undertones throughout his work as a response to censorship, given how “menciones indirectas, alusivas, encriptadas” (Ayala 2010, 154) allow Martínez to play his own linguistic game of hide and seek to name what could not be named. Consequently, Martínez’s uses ludic images to combat erasure. With this game, Martínez simulates the sensation of walking amongst a dense crowd, looking for the familiar face of a friend or family member and thinking, for a moment, that you have seen them, but never having enough time to stop and make sure. Rather than tell the reader how to feel, he opens a space in which a feeling can be felt and shared by recreating the lived experience

itself; the desperate chase after someone who, disappeared both in a ludic and political sense, is always just beyond reach.

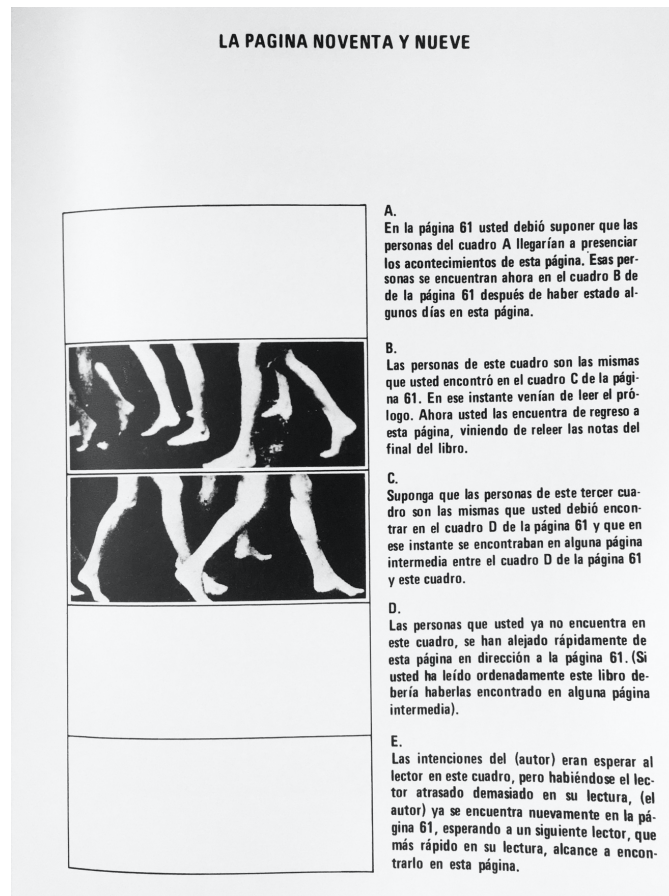


Figure 5: “La página noventa y nueve” (Martínez 1985, 99)

Nevertheless, it is important not to lose sight of that fact that the legs depicted in motion are not simply people appearing and disappearing, but more precisely, as Lucas Margarit underscores, “otros lectores” (Margarit 2016, 41). Indeed, Martínez draws the reader into an ambiguous space and time constructed within the page that seeks to engulf the reader in an experience. Falling into his world, as Alice into Wonderland, the reader experiences a feeling of loss and confusion, not only produced in his/her hoppedotched attempt to read, but further by the meta-representative image of other readers doing the exact same thing. As the depicted readers and actual reader alike finally arrive at the concluding box on page ninety-nine, after being told on page sixty-one that the author awaits them, they are left with no resolution: “E. Las intenciones del (autor) eran esperar al lector en este cuadro, pero habiéndose el lector atrasado demasiado en su lectura, (el autor) ya se encuentra nuevamente en la página

61, esperando a un siguiente lector, que más rápido en su lectura, alcance a encontrarlo en esta página” (Martínez 1985, 99). In his playful taunt, Martínez leaves the reader contemplating the disappearance of the author, who can no longer be chased in the hopes of endowing the final word. The author’s decentralization is further affirmed through his near disappearance from the page when the word *autor* only appears within parentheses. Furthermore, Martínez’s almost taunting tone hints at readership as a learned skill that can be improved to become more productive. In this first attempt, the reader has been too slow, but the next reader, or even the second attempt might provide a different outcome if the reader learns not to foolishly chase after the vanishing author. By exposing the reader’s unfruitful reliance on the author, Martínez reveals that the ultimate destination does not exist because he will not confirm its singularity, and thus, subverts the absolute authority of his voice as author. As a result, the reader’s constant return across pages highlights a return to what is left unresolved, or in other words, what has been purposely represented as that which cannot be represented. Elusiveness becomes an experience rather than a meaning to be deciphered, penetrated or resolved.

The image of an empty coffin, the use of photography in search of a missing child and the haunting chase after a vanishing person are easily read in retrospect as allusions to the *desaparecidos* whose loss continues to be felt and fought for in the aftermath of Pinochet’s regime. While this was not necessarily Martínez’s intention, the very intentional ambiguity of the meaning behind his dizzying and playful acts of intertext and collage allows for readers to see what they may, inspiring their autonomy while transforming the author into yet another teasing figure within the text. Though the poet can shape or guide the reader’s movements, as illustrated by Martínez, the pathways he forges are not always clear or straightforward. Martínez’s creation, as a result, contributes to Richard’s proposal on the power of art to serve as a possible vehicle through which voice can endure oppression:

In fact, the coup that shattered the preceding framework of social and political experiences, also destroyed all the language and models of signification by which those experiences could be named, a language thereafter powerless to designate or symbolise what was, after all, a real crisis of intelligibility. Once the Chilean subject was severed from that earlier reality, once the codes were scattered and the ability to interpret signs broke down, the only recourse was to seek alternative ways to recover the meaning of that history which had been replaced by the Grand History of the Victors. (Richard 1986, 17)

For Richard, intelligibility manifests when authoritarian rule introduces a logic of sense that is violently exclusive by forcing into erasure a plurality of “social and political experiences.” Meaning is broken when authoritative “language and models of

signification” leave no possibility for articulating any subjectivities that run counter, thus generating a need for new modes of representation to emerge in order to combat “the Grand History of the Victors.” In this vein, Martínez’s dialogue with Tardieu’s existential project seeks to craft a world in which lived reality has very little to do with hegemonic rhetoric, mimicked in the very unstable presence of the author as authority in *La nueva novela*. In turning to Europe, to the resistance movements of World War II, Martínez seemingly anticipates the prominent role that Holocaust Studies would come to play in Southern Cone memory work.¹¹ More poignantly however, Martínez models for his readers the importance of interpretive liberty and of questioning any form of hegemonic discourse that seeks to oppress, silence and marginalize. Martínez demonstrates that artistic production does not have to reflect reality in a literal or direct sense, as indeed such a feat may be impossible. By purposefully turning to absence and void, Martínez models how artistic production can call upon feelings or experiences of loss so as to create projects that activate such sentiments while transcending time and space.

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¹¹ A notable example is found in Marianne Hirsch, who in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012) introduces the term postmemory: “Postmemory’ describes the relationship that ‘the generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (Hirsch 2012, 5). As demonstrated in her own studies of intergenerational trauma, postmemory offers an entryway into examining the complexities of intergenerational memory through the lens of inheritance and familial responsibility. While postmemory was conceived and pioneered within Holocaust Studies, the term has proven effective in contemporary Latin America to study the relationship that “the generation after” has with the legacy of authoritarian regimes in Southern Cone literature, film and cultural production. More recently, scholars such as Geoffrey Maguire, in *The Politics of Postmemory: Violence and Victimhood in Contemporary Argentina* (2017), have continued to mobilize, and also problematize, the use of postmemory outside of Holocaust Studies in order to examine the term’s ongoing productivity in Latin American Studies.

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