

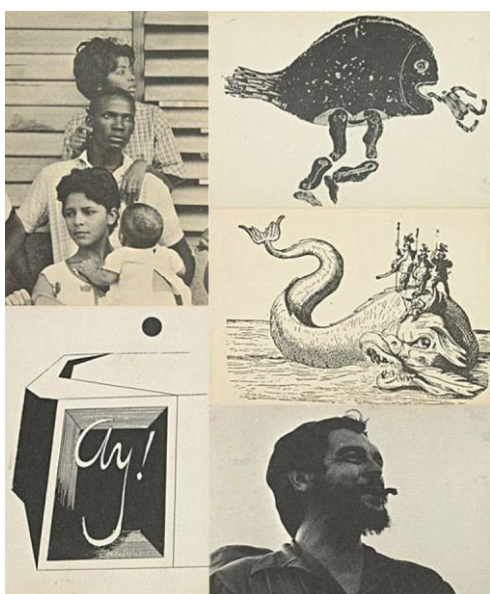
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Sean Nesselrode

Defining the Aesthetic(s) of Negation in El Techo de la Ballena

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Sean Nesseldore



1. El Techo de la Ballena, *Postales intervenidas*, 1967 [detail]

When the Venezuelan artist collective El Techo de la Ballena printed and circulated over one dozen *Postales intervenidas* to commemorate Christmas 1967, the group's dissolution was imminent (**Fig. 1**). Nearly seven years after its inauguration, internal disputes, a turn to more individuated activities, and the weakening of the radical political left in Venezuela all threatened the group's demise.¹ The *Postales* sought to reinvigorate the *balleneros* and reassert their relevance in Venezuelan culture by inserting into public circulation a series of politicized texts and images. To begin a consideration of El Techo with the *Postales* is to begin near the end of the story, but they serve as a fitting point of entry as this

moment sees the group in an uncharacteristically nostalgic mode.

While the *Postales* may be understood as an early form of mail art, which *balleneros* like Dámaso Ogaz would pioneer in the next decade,² as visual emblems of El Techo they are telling in two ways. The first is that they put forth an impressive multiplicity of visual vocabularies and media, even as they are mediated by the postcard format: viewed collectively, the content of the *Postales* ranges from Ogaz's piscine collages, to crude sketches by Carlos Contramaestre, to Siné's typically satirical caricatures, to Daniel González's urban photographs. Another postcard bears an antique print of a sea monster, which by this point had become established as a visual leitmotif within El Techo's publications.³ With such an assortment of aesthetics, the effect is one of dissonance, as if the group could not arrive at a single, coherent visual identity. Further complicating the *Postales*, and the second reason they are quite revealing in terms of El Techo's visualities, is what is missing within this collection—*informalismo*, the style of gestural abstraction with which El Techo is most commonly identified, is nowhere to be found.

Formed in 1961 and boasting, at its zenith, nearly sixty artists, writers, poets, and philosophers from Venezuela, Europe, and Latin America, El Techo was distinguished by its interdisciplinarity and its porosity. The brunt of its activities consisted of polemical manifestoes and publications, but the *balleneros* also convened symposia, staged public protest-performances, and presented exhibitions in their eponymous garage-cum-gallery. Although it may be argued that El Techo functions primarily as a literary or theoretical group, or one grounded more in proto-conceptual innovations,⁴ such an approach to the group glosses over the significance of its visual output, not only in the gallery space but in its publications as well. The distinct lack of any examples of gestural abstraction in the *Postales* indicates that El Techo cannot simply be defined as an *informalista* group, even if it did have deep ties to the movement. Its affinities for photography, drawing, collage, and print ascribe a plurality of aesthetics that resists easy categorization. More than any one style, what defines El Techo, above all else, is its radical position of negation—negation of the status quo, of the hegemony of geometric abstraction and

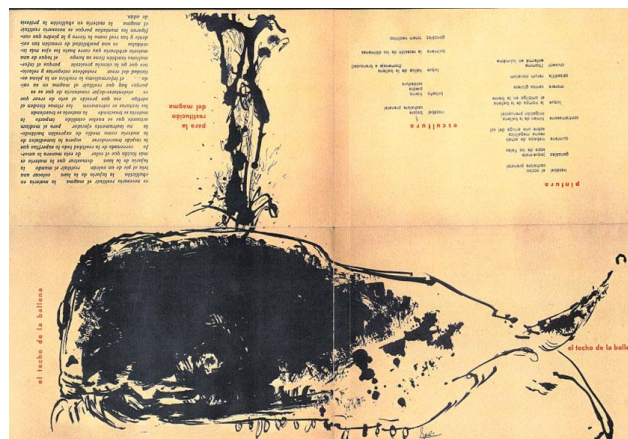
kinetic art, and of the policies of the Betancourt regime. Far from being secondary to the group's radical politics, the deliberately unpredictable visual modes of El Techo are integral to its strategies.

A brief overview of the group's historical as well as artistic context is key to understanding the particulars of its multiple visualities. El Techo was but one leftist artist collective among many that proliferated at the beginning of the 1960s, following the deposition of the right-wing dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–1958) and the subsequent restoration of democracy in Venezuela brought about by the election of Acción Democrática's Rómulo Betancourt in 1959.⁵ Venezuela, like much of Latin America at this time, found itself in a state of transition, but the optimism fostered by the end of the *perezjimenato* and the triumph of Fidel Castro's *Movimiento 26 de Julio* in Cuba soon soured. The Betancourt regime made it official policy to exclude the radical left, including the Partido Comunista de Venezuela, from the political process; it also stood in staunch opposition to Castro, breaking all ties with Cuba in 1961. Political hostilities quickly escalated into physical ones, and numerous student protests set the stage for the formation of the guerrilla resistance group *Fuerzas armadas de liberación nacional* (FALN) in 1962.⁶

Amidst this turbulent political climate, the arts experienced similar shifts. After a decade of struggle to be accepted as a viable mode of painting, geometric abstraction and kinetic art had by the early 1960s become not just legitimate, but hegemonic. The history of the unlikely relationship between abstraction and dictatorship has been well documented,⁷ but what is most relevant with respect to El Techo and its artistic moment is the fact that in the preceding decade the rhetoric of geometric and kinetic art fed a developmentalist agenda of modernizing the country. Somewhat unwittingly, abstraction enabled the *perezjimenato* to acquire what Gabriela Rangel has called “la pátina del progreso.”⁸ The regime was unique in Latin America in that it embraced rather than combated geometric abstraction, so much so that its dominance as an art form persisted even into the 1970s.⁹

Yet the end of dictatorship coincided with a surge of new expressive styles. Grouped loosely under

the rubric of *informalismo*, these new modes came to Venezuela by way of France and especially Spain, as young Venezuelans traveled abroad and became familiar with the work of artists such as Manolo Millares and Antoni Tàpies.¹⁰ Significantly, *informalismo*—a term that encompasses everything from *tachiste* expressivity to assemblage to neo-figuration—was the first Venezuelan vanguard to develop coterminously with its European counterpart, but it constituted less of a coherent movement than a wide swath of styles defined against its geometric antagonist.¹¹ Given El Techo's stated aim to “cambiar la vida, transformar la sociedad” and their concurrent opposition to geometric and kinetic art, it is unsurprising that they would be affiliated with such styles. Indeed, among the most prominent *balleneros* was the artist, poet, and critic Juan Calzadilla, who in 1960 organized the first exhibition of *informalismo* in the country, *Espacios Vivientes*.



2. El Techo de la Ballena, *Rayado sobre el Techo*, no. 1, 1961

Thus, when El Techo first announced itself in March 1961 with the exhibition *Para restituir el magma* and the first edition of its sporadic journal *Rayado sobre el Techo*, it did so largely as an outgrowth of preexisting political and artistic conditions. Looking at this first edition of *Rayado sobre el Techo*, which doubled as an exhibition pamphlet for a series of *informalista* works, its most striking feature is the presence of a large whale, drawn roughly by Ángel Luque, that derives from the burgeoning style and functions as an insignia for the group (**Fig. 2**). Regarding the symbolism of the whale, Héctor Brioso Santos has argued that its significance for

El Techo lies not only in its embodiment of freedom and ferocity, but also in its associations with the historically demonic Leviathan in literature, from the Bible to *Moby Dick*.¹² The whale and other sea monsters would become recurring symbols for the group: one of the most frequent images that appears in nearly all subsequent publications by El Techo is a deliberately archaic, almost medieval print of an amphibious creature emerging from the water (**Fig. 3**). It may be argued that the later print serves as a more finely wrought version of its predecessor—a formidable sea creature facing left, with a plume of liquid erupting from its blowhole, but rendered with the sharp contours of an antique woodcut rather than the comparatively disordered *informalista* drawing by Luque.



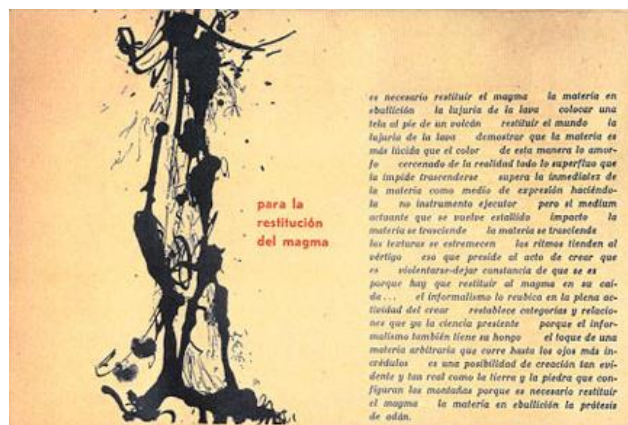
3. El Techo de la Ballena, *Rayado sobre el Techo*, no. 3, 1964 [detail]

If this evolutionary reading treats the earlier version of the whale as a kind of unformed, primordial antecedent for a later, developed image, it is informed by the accompanying text, “Para la restitución del magma,” which exalts raw, elemental material:

es necesario restituir el magma la materia en ebullición la lujuria de la lava colocar una tela al pie de un volcán restituir el mundo la lujuria de la lava ... la materia se trasciende la materia se trasciende...¹³

The concept of *magma* is integral to El Techo’s theoretical foundation. As a substance that introduces, in Carmen Díaz Orozco’s words, “lo orgánico, lo no formal...lo abyecto,” the *magma* bursts forth and threatens to annihilate itself;¹⁴ consider, for example, the spurt of the liquid from the whale’s blowhole as well as the ostensibly spontaneous outburst of text that

accompanies it. That its inherently destructive nature doubles as creative potential imbues it with an instability that, in the activities of El Techo, is rendered as malleability. Here the format of the *Rayado* comes into play, as the graphic legibility of the gush of water—or of ink, petroleum, or some other substance—is reoriented when the pamphlet itself is physically reoriented (**Fig. 4**). As the pamphlet is rotated and folded to read the manifesto, the water is abstracted into an ink splatter reminiscent of a volcanic eruption, or of a Pollock drip painting, or of the expressive *informalista* gestures seen in Venezuela and beyond. The ink becomes a visual representation of the *magma*, the abstract base substance that may be molded into any number of forms but which is most purely articulated through the expressive scrawls and drips of *informalismo*.



4. El Techo de la Ballena, *Rayado sobre el Techo*, no. 1, 1961 [detail]

The playful nihilism of El Techo, particularly in its approach to art making, would reach its apex with the scandalous 1962 exhibition *Homenaje a la necrofilia*. Alfredo Chacón has identified *Homenaje a la necrofilia* as El Techo’s one true successful provocation, and it is perhaps the single most famous act ever committed in the name of the group.¹⁵ The show lasted only nine days before being forcibly closed by the Health Department, and given the nature of the exhibition it is not difficult to understand the reasons for this censorship: it consisted of twelve abstract paintings and one sculpture by Contramaestre, constructed in part from garbage and rotting animal remains. With shocking titles that related to the taboo of necrophilia, the works

pushed the logic of a magmatic *informalismo* to its logical conclusion—the literal self-destruction of the art object, achieved through its metamorphosis into a decaying, corporeal body.

In the progression from *Para restituir el magma* to *Homenaje a la necrofilia*, the initial celebration of *magma* is sharpened into a weapon against contemporary Venezuelan culture; the group's activities, that is, have become aggressively, radically politicized. The *necrofilia* paintings function not only as a simple case of *épater la bourgeoisie*, as was believed by many critics of the time,¹⁶ but instead manifest a critique that operates on two levels: the brutality of the paintings indicts the multiple scales of literal and metaphorical violence perpetrated by the state, while the destruction of the works themselves effectively kills the art object that had been historically complicit with such a legacy. That Contramaestre purposefully confuses the legibility of the organic and the inorganic in paintings such as *Estudio para verdugo y perro* traps the works in a state of ontological flux; they slip from object to body and back, suggesting a much more ambivalent attitude toward *informalismo*—and art making in general—than was first glimpsed in the 1961 *Rayado sobre el Techo* (Fig. 5).



5. Carlos Contramaestre, *Estudio para verdugo y perro*, 1962

But if Contramaestre's paintings maintain a visual dialogue with *informalismo* and its penchant for both abstraction and assemblage, the theatrics of its opening and the polemic generated by their titles, their decay, and their political stance places them closer to a Dada tradition of provocation. Dada serves as a critical point of reference for the *balleneros*, who were vocally familiar with its history, as it had been introduced to Venezuela via publications like *Sardio*, the predecessor to *El Techo*.¹⁷ The *balleneros* interpreted the movement as providing a host of new artistic strategies, purposefully positioning themselves as successors to the historical avant-garde:

Pareciera que todo intento de renovación...o de experimentación en el arte, tendiera...a la mención de grupos que prosperaron a comienzos de este siglo, tales Dadá o el Surrealismo.¹⁸

Yet *El Techo* recognized that, separated by an ocean and half a century, Dada could not simply be transplanted in its original form to Venezuela, nor was this its intention:

no pretendemos revivir actos ni resucitar gestos a los que el tiempo ha colocado en el justo sitio que les corresponde en la historia... No pretendemos situarnos bajo ningún signo protector...¹⁹

Dada—and Surrealism, for that matter—introduced an alternate point of origin for the Venezuelan vanguard, one that resisted the heroic tendencies of hard-edge abstraction (and its kinetic corollary), and one diffuse enough to be applied to the political context of the 1960s: at a moment when the developmentalist dream of the 1950s splintered into political strife, and when this disillusion was made manifest by the turn to guerrilla violence by the radical left, the decentering strategies of *El Techo* may arguably be seen as constituting an artistic equivalent.²⁰ To be sure, *El Techo* was by no means unique in its rediscovery and refashioning of Dada, especially in conjunction with current tendencies in abstraction on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet its open-ended status as a group and its insistent refusal to define any single political or artistic agenda, much less a codified aesthetic, suggests that the *balleneros'* initial embrace of *informalismo* treated it less as a distinct style than as but one tool in an arsenal of creative

weapons that derived from their historical forbear.

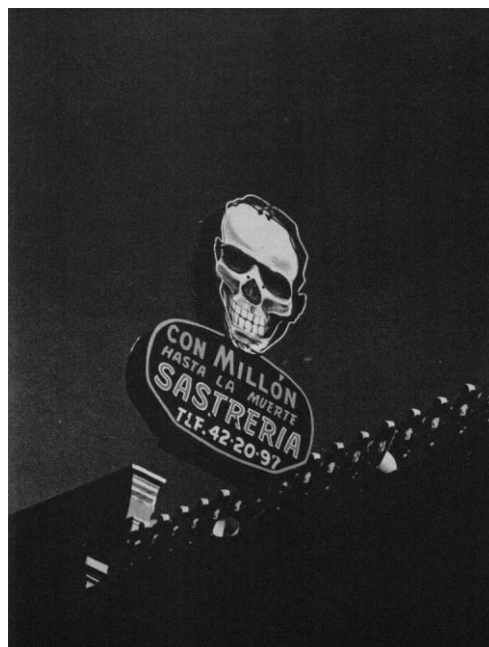


6. *Homenaje a la necrofilia*, exhibition pamphlet designed by Daniel González, 1962

This plurality, even impurity,²¹ of style can be identified as early as the 1961 *Rayado sobre el Techo*, with its interplay of text and image. The exhibition pamphlet for *Homenaje a la necrofilia* displays an even more ambitious collection of texts and images linked only by their fetishization of death. (Fig. 6) In this document, a series of essays celebrating necrophilia is accompanied by reproductions of Ligier Richier’s *Transi de René de Châlon* (1547), an illustration by Jan Wandelaar for the *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani* (1747), El Greco’s *El entierro del Conde de Orgaz* (1586–88), Contramaestre’s *Flora cadavérica*, and photographs of the artist posing with animal remains.²² Printed several times beside, below, and within the exhibition title is the emblematic sea monster. These many appropriations and juxtapositions are surprising for an exhibition that is so invested in an interrogation of *informalismo* and the imbrication of art and politics, and they amount to a conceptual maneuver that exists parallel to the exhibition itself. Designed by Daniel González, the pamphlet places Contramaestre’s intervention as the latest in a long line of disparate instances that have been willfully misread as individual components of a larger historical necrophilic tendency. It is not without reason that some scholars have read *Homenaje a la necrofilia*—both the exhibition and the pamphlet—as

constituting the first, seminal instance of installation art in Venezuela.²³

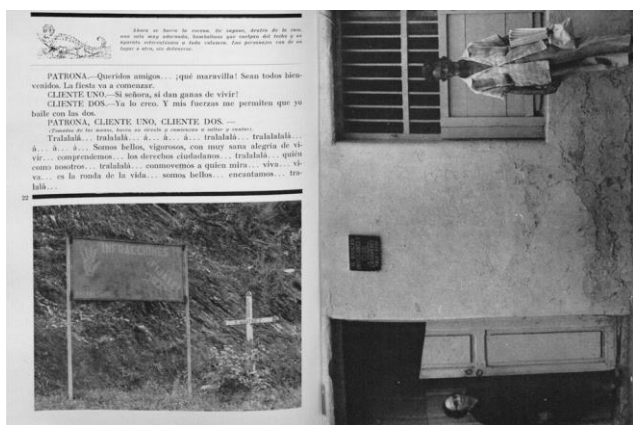
A consideration of El Techo’s playful intermingling of style and media, particularly under the direction of González, leads me to a final case study—a 1963 publication of photographs by González with accompanying text by Adriano González León. Titled *Asfalto Infierno*, this book intersperses photographs of the industrial landscape of Caracas with sardonic vignettes that describe scenes of urban alienation. Once again the sea monster logo proliferates, but more importantly González explicitly foregrounds the politically contended medium of photography.²⁴ Focusing not on the famed monuments of Caracas—those “fetishes of modernity” as described by Fernando Coronil²⁵—González instead produces an aesthetic of banality by photographing the unphotographable: *barrios*, urban signage, and instances of graffiti (Fig. 6).²⁶ Even the prologue by Francisco Pérez Perdomo seeks to distance the project from “uno de esos libros usuales...de los grandes valores nacionales.”²⁷



7. Daniel González, photograph reproduced in *Asfalto Infierno*, 1963

González does this in part by framing and cropping his photographs in an intentionally disorienting manner. The vignette titled *Q.E.P.D.* establishes a scene of three individuals who greet each other and dance, and the accompanying photographs seem to function as illustrations:

the first image sets the scene—a nondescript funeral home—and is followed by an image taken seemingly moments later, when the owner has stepped into the doorway. (Figs. 7–8) She looks to her left, preparing the viewer for the third and fourth images, which illustrate the monologues of the second and third characters who greet the owner. As in the first two photographs, the camera remains static in these latter two, but the distance between the first location and the second remains unclear. The signage is the only continuity, but it is not until the fifth image that González confirms this continuity by distancing the camera far enough to capture two individuals in a single shot (Fig. 9). Yet as he confirms the spatial relationship between the characters, he thwarts the temporal one: if the progression of the four images reads as a linear chronology, wherein each image succeeds the next, the fifth photograph collapses the second and the fourth movements into a single moment.



8. Daniel González and Adriano González León, *Asfalto Infierno*, 1963, pages 22–23

Q.E.P.D. is laden with death not only in its title (*Que en Paz Descanse*) and the photographic setting, but also in its narrative punch line: the scene ends with the collective heart attack of the characters.²⁸ Indeed of particular interest is the manner in which *Asfalto Infierno* thematizes the mundane omnipresence of death. Much of this is established by the repetitive nature of the photographs, which frequently return to advertisements for funerary services, motorway billboards commemorating accident victims, and enigmatic roadside graffiti that consist of the words “el suicida” and a skull and crossbones. In these instances as well the settings are decontextualized, and the monotony of images

ensures that they, over the duration of the book, eventually lose their potency as the reader becomes acclimated to their content. But when viewed sequentially alongside González León’s text, the photographs build into a mordant rebuke of the entire developmentalist project. Like *Homenaje a la necrofilia* and in accordance with El Techo’s embrace of potentially destructive *magma*, *Asfalto Infierno* looks to death as thematic counterpoint to the hegemonic rhetoric of progress and development that continued to direct Venezuelan political discourse in the early 1960s. Yet while Contramaestre nullifies the supposed beauty and permanence of the art object, *Asfalto Infierno* takes aim at photography, redirecting the aesthetics and ideological coordinates of the medium against itself.

It is ironic that one of González’s images, of a figure wearing a Santa Claus mask atop a tank, would be reproduced as part of the *Postales intervenidas* in 1967, since the prologue to *Asfalto Infierno* asserts that the book does not contain “los fotografiados y consabidos aspectos de la vida nacional, exportables a menudo en tarjetas postales para amigos y familiares distantes” (Fig. 9).²⁹ Yet it is important to remember that El Techo was never a static entity, and indeed by the time *Asfalto Infierno* was published its engagement with *informalismo* was waning—perhaps a consequence of the extremity of *Homenaje a la necrofilia*. Certainly by 1967 El Techo may have been willing to make some compromises in an effort to secure its status at the vanguard, but the contradiction between the terms laid out in *Asfalto Infierno*’s prologue and the book’s later revocation of those terms, materialized in its entrance into an ideologically compromised system of public circulation, hint at the broader contradictions of El Techo itself. Just as the *Postales* seem to refute the group’s intense affiliation with the *informalista* movement, the inclusion of the González photo questions the stability of any aesthetic taken up by the *balleneros*. This versatility extends to the group’s very identity, as an artistic vanguard, a literary collective, or a radical political entity. To attempt to define the aesthetics of El Techo is to reduce their endeavors to the realm of the purely visual, and it bears repeating that the *balleneros* participated equally in the realm of literature, politics, and theory, as well as non-visual modes of artistic production such as public

performance. Yet a consideration of some of the most salient characteristics of their visual output begins to facilitate an understanding of their strategies of critique. The practices of the historical avant-garde did not simply provide El Techo with a counter-aesthetic, or even a series of counter-aesthetics; rather, it provided the *balleneros* with the tools to interrogate and potentially undo the conditions of the status quo in Venezuela.

One of the great criticisms of El Techo is that for all its attempts to shock the Venezuelan public, it never triggered any substantial societal change and, paradoxically, perpetuated the country's cultural subordination to Europe.³⁰ Yet the very existence of El Techo in the Venezuelan 1960s was revolutionary in and of itself, as it unleashed an entire repertoire of artistic gestures that sought nothing less than the negation of the previous decade's geometricization of Venezuelan art. The paradigmatic nature of geometric and kinetic art must not be forgotten, despite the ascent of *informalismo*, and in this light El Techo's resistance to aesthetic codification may be read as a rejection of visual

ossification. The anxiety regarding artistic relevance that yielded the issuing of the *Postales intervenidas* was, with the benefit of hindsight, unfounded. More than fifty years after the *balleneros* redefined the possibilities for artistic production in Venezuela, their legacy retains its significance—and continues to elude definition.



9. Daniel González, photograph reproduced in *Asfalto Inferno* and *Postales intervenidas*, c. 1963

Notas

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¹ For a more detailed account of the history of El Techo and the reasons for its eventual disbanding, see Héctor Brioso Santos, *Estridencia e ironía: El Techo de la Ballena, un grupo de vanguardia venezolana (1961–1969)*, Sevilla, Universidad de Sevilla, 2002.

² Recently, in September 2011, the Galería de Arte Nacional de Caracas presented the exhibition *Dámaso Ogaz: Mail art, poesía visual y conceptualismos*, which foregrounded Ogaz's postal interventions.

³ The *Postales intervenidas* consisted of postcards that reproduced the following: Ogaz, "Esquema majamámico de uso profiláctico"; Ogaz, "Veledades balleneras de Mesalina"; Carlos Contramaestre, "Los caballeros de San Vicente"; Contramaestre, "Confinamientos"; Perán Erminy, "Autogermación según Alfonso El Sabio"; Pedro Alcántara, "Testimonios"; Humberto Peña, "¿Por qué te ríes?"; Siné (Maurice Sinet), "El intelectual es la anarquía"; Siné, "Nada"; Chago, "¡Ay!"; Daniel González, "Venezuela primero: Feliz año" (in two versions); González, "Una disyuntiva: la gastronomía o el hambre"; an uncredited print of a sea monster; and Cuban photographs by Paolo Gasparini, with titles by Edmndo Desnoes: "Hay más de

siete millones de cubanos. La isla de Cuba parece un cocodrilo en el mapa," "El Ché y su pedazo de muerte," and "Con el amor en la mano."

⁴ See for example Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999, pp. 53–72; Gabriela Rangel, "An Art of Nooks: Notes on Non-Objectual Experiences in Venezuela," in *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960–2000*, exh. cat., ed. Deborah Cullen, New York, El Museo del Barrio, 2010, pp.114–32.

⁵ These groups included, as noted by Alfredo Chacón, *Intento, Contacto, Subterráneo, El Pez Dorado, Lam*, and in HAA. Chacón, *La izquierda cultural venezolana, 1958–1968: Ensayo y antología*, Caracas, Editorial Domingo Fuentes, 1970, pp.14–16.

⁶ For a brief overview of this period in Venezuelan political history, see Alejandro del Corro, *Venezuela: la violencia*, Cuernavaca, Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1968; Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp.201–36; Antonio García Ponce, *Sangre, locura y fantasía: La guerrilla de los 60*, Caracas, Editorial Libros Marcados, 2010.

⁷ See especially Coronil, pp.166–200; Marguerite Mayhall, "The Dissolution of Utopia: Art, Politics, and the City of Caracas in the 1960s", PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001.

⁸ Rangel, *El Techo de la Ballena*, Caracas, Espacio Unión, 1999, p.6.

⁹ The elitism of this mode of art has been the subject of substantial criticism, most forcefully by Marta Traba in “Venezuela: cómo se forma una plástica hegemónica,” *Revista Medellín*, 1978, reprinted in *Marta Traba*, ed. Emma Araújo de Vallejo, Bogotá, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Planeta Colombiana Editorial, 1984, pp.216–19. See also Traba, “Finale: Allegro con fuoco: Cinéticos y experimentadores,” in *Mirar en Caracas*, Caracas, Monte Ávila Editores, 1974, pp.123–33.

¹⁰ Rangel, 12.

¹¹ Ángel Rama, “El Techo de la Ballena,” *Antología de El Techo de la Ballena*, Caracas, Fundarte, 1987, pp.11–37. See also María Elena Ramos, “Venezuela en los 60: expresionismos calientes,” in *La década prodigiosa: el arte venezolano en los años 60*, Caracas, Fundación Museo de Bellas Artes, 1995.

¹² Brioso Santos, 50–60.

¹³ El Techo de la Ballena, “Para la restitución del magma,” *Rayado sobre el Techo 1*, March 1961, reprinted in *El Techo de la Ballena: Antología 1961–1969*, ed. Juan Calzadilla et al., Caracas, Monte Ávila Editores Latinoamericana, C. A., 2008, p.3.

¹⁴ Carmen Díaz Orozco, *El mediodía de la modernidad en Venezuela: Arte y literatura en El Techo de la Ballena*, Caracas, Editorial venezolana, C.A., 1997, p.66.

¹⁵ Chacón, 43.

¹⁶ See in particular the newspaper articles “Aberraciones eróticas difunde panfleto pornográfico hecho en la universidad,” *El mundo*, Caracas, November 16, 1962; “Nauseabundas aberraciones sexuales elogia folleto hecho en la Universidad,” *La esfera de la cultura*, Caracas, November 17, 1962; Marco Chacín, “¿Necrofilia o iracundia histórica?” *La esfera de la cultura*, Caracas, November 17, 1962.

¹⁷ In its penultimate issue *Sardio* published a translated version of Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, “Dada,” *Sardio: Revista bimestral de cultura*, Caracas, n° 5–6, January–April 1959, trans. Rodolfo Izaguirre, pp.340–75.

¹⁸ *La esfera de la cultura*, Caracas, March 25, 1961.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ This notion of “el terrorismo de las artes” is the crux of Rama’s essay, pp.11–37.

²¹ In describing El Techo’s formal innovations, Díaz Orozco argues that “su producción artística y literaria se halla constatemente amenizada por impurezas,” p.13.

²² *Homenaje a la necrofilia*, Caracas, Ediciones El Techo de la Ballena, 1962. The texts include an essay by Adriano González León, a series of historical texts in defense of necrophilia, and an interview with a self-professed necrophile who frequented local cemeteries.

²³ Rangel, 21; Juan Carlos Palenzuela, *Arte en Venezuela, 1959–1979: De El Techo de la Ballena a 11 Tipos*, Caracas, Mercantil, 2005, p.283.

²⁴ Lisa Blackmore has identified the particular political valences of photography in Venezuela, particularly as it was mobilized for propagandistic purposes on behalf of the Pérez Jiménez regime, and she has specified the ways in which *Asfalto Inferno* inverts the logic of the medium. Lisa Blackmore, “*El Techo de la Ballena* and *Asfalto-Inferno*: the Logic of Inversion in an Attack on Venezuela’s Cultural Establishment”, MA Thesis, University of London, 2005.

²⁵ Coronil, p.173.

²⁶ Blackmore, pp.14–15.

²⁷ Daniel González and Adriano González León, *Asfalto Inferno*, Ediciones El Techo de la Ballena, 1963, p.1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

³⁰ Chacón, p.43.

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