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Osvaldo Sánchez's Art Criticism: An Aesthetics of Reconciliation

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OSVALDO SANCHEZ’S ART CRITICISM: AN AESTHETICS OF RECONCILIATION

By
Dinorah Pérez-Rementería

A THESIS

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OSVALDO SANCHEZ’S ART CRITICISM: AN AESTHETICS OF
RECONCILIATION

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Aesthetic criticism very often has been overlooked and considered a lesser form. However, many interpretations, applications and discernments can be obtained from this kind of art writing. Using Osvaldo Sánchez’s work as a case study, this thesis examines how writerly art criticism offers an active reading framework of the work of art by using philosophical, literary and poetic constructions. In this regard, I will see how the “writerly” condition has contributed compelling insights to the History of Aesthetics, highlighting the connections and disconnections between Sánchez and other writerly critics, which demonstrates the significance of developing a flexible, available and aesthetic learning model of art appreciation. I will analyze as well various models of experience, subjective and objective, that release certain “openness” as a premise for their existences. Here are included the Kantian sublime, Heidegger’s ontological Being, the surrealist cultivation of chance, Kaprow’s happenings, and the attitude of disinterest developed by the vanishing poets as defended by the scholar Rafael Hernández Rodríguez. I will show that, by choosing an accommodating approach to discover forms of knowledge, an assortment of valuable empirical content can be found. Finally, I investigate the writerly work of Cuban critic Osvaldo Sánchez that does not adopt a fixed
critical pattern. Instead, Sánchez’s art writing *passes through* fields, providing us with a heuristic methodology in which the aesthetic emerges not as a preconditioned set of principles/procedures, but as a true lived experience.
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Introduction

What kinds of understandings, interpretations and applications do critical texts of aesthetic quality have? Some scholars mention that aesthetic art criticism has been considered an inferior form. Daniel Siedell, for instance, refers to an accusation made against Harold Rosenberg’s “The American-Action Painters,” published in Art News in 1952, which was perceived as “catering to popular taste” (19). According to critics, Rosenberg’s article did not reach the standards established by the New York art world in the 60s, nor did it assume the proper attitude, which is that art criticism should be indistinguishable from art history (Siedell 29). Rosenberg’s essay posed a real challenge to Clement Greenberg -regarded to be the preeminent “object”-based art critic- and the rest of the critics and historians in New York, for Rosenberg acknowledged that art criticism is not a “second-order discipline” but a literary genre in its own right, as Siedell affirms (21-24). His writing shaped a resourceful context where both art making and interpretation contend, presenting art criticism as an object of critical reflection and scrutiny (Siedell 21).

Certainly, I believe that we can experience art criticism as though it were an artistic object, like a painting, or a novel, or a poem, or a story, or a sculpture, or an architectural building, or a happening, or simply a consciously creative act with critical intentions. In this sense, the art object acts as an ingredient only, an inspirational motif that infiltrates and contaminates every inch of the critical piece. This thesis argues that by choosing a flexible structure of appreciation of art, art criticism develops into a creative, independent, self-sufficient practice that generates pleasure and actively stimulates, intervenes in and enhances the readers’ experience of the artworks, by using
poetic/literary/philosophical constructions. I have chosen Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism as a case study to defend my argument. Osvaldo Sánchez has written about the work of several Latin American artists like Gabriel Orozco, Eugenia Vargas, Martha María Pérez, Carlos Cárdenas, Graciela Iturbide, Gerardo Suter, Mathias Goeritz, among others. Sánchez is also a curator and director of the Museo de Arte Moderno de México, in Mexico City, and was artistic director of InSite 05, a cross border event taking place in Tijuana and San Diego every three or four years. He received the Premio Nacional de Poesía in Cuba, 1981, for his book *Matar al último venado*. Some of his poems have also been published in Cuban Poetry Anthologies edited in many countries.

My text proposes an exercise of contemplation, showing a mosaic that combines, in a relatively free manner, theoretical approaches, aesthetic experiences, and symbolic meanings, which will help us set the stage for analyzing Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism. In other words, it has been conceived as a journey through the multiple, contradictory and playful interstices between the aesthetic and the critical inspired by the written work of the Cuban critic Osvaldo Sánchez. I will study how Sánchez’s texts emerge as writerly instances of art criticism. Instead of stipulating -or adopting- some foreign system to decode and appropriate art from an imposing perspective, his writing dissolves into the aesthetic, causing more vital resources and experiential visions to appear, in addition to making the reader expand his appreciation of the art object examined as well as the art writing itself.

Osvaldo Sánchez’ art criticism has an accentuated poetic quality. Apart from fulfilling informative and theoretical needs, Sánchez’s words contain an evocative intentionality that produces mental images in the reader. Referring to the work of
Mexican artist Yolanda Gutiérrez, he writes: “Gutiérrez trabaja reciclando restos óseos de animales que utiliza como motivo estructurador, a veces combinados con materiales crudos –tierra, paja, piedras- o articulados en el espacio por ligamentos invisibles” (Sánchez, “¿Fuera?” 30). There is a series of possibilities suggested here. First, he emphasizes the material used by the artist (animal bones), giving the sense of something that is “structured” and solid but that also has some kind of moving quality. Next, he speaks of the possible combination of bones with other materials, which may or may not happen in reality as in the mind of the reader. Finally, Sánchez places the bones (or their mixture with other media) in space, without saying what actual form they adopted, which makes us think of many possible forms. The phrase “ligamentos invisibles” refers to another factual material (probably glue or scotch tape) used by the artist that is transformed through a linguistic, figurative representation in Sánchez’s writing. Sánchez’s interpretations of artworks become artistic creations, for they construct a world of ideas, symbols and linguistic representations that relate to but exist independently from the original source of inspiration. In this sense, the artwork is important insofar as it produces a great number of subliminal texts that Sánchez can use as a means to channel his critical writing.

Sánchez’s criticism produces a profound impact on the readers. This effect may be, in part, related to the way in which he chooses to structure the composition of his statements. One interesting thing is the length of his sentences. Sánchez’s statements are neither too long nor too short, to generate the necessary poetic effect. He frequently uses action verbs as playwrights do to describe either an artwork or the context in which it was created that gives a different dynamic to our reading of his texts. Another feature of
Sánchez’s criticism has to do with the creation of an atmosphere to situate the reader in
time and space. In reference to the “NeoMexicanismo” and the emergence of
neoexpressionist tendencies in the Mexican painting of the 1980s, he says: “Un Bad
Painting nutrido de kitsch urbano, de íconos populares, de fantasías oníricas, de nostalgia
retro y de emblemas nacionalistas” (Sánchez, “¿Fuera?” 25). His writing describes the
feeling of nostalgia that arose with Mexican neo-expressionism, but it also transmits an
almost realistic melancholic mood that does not escape from the reader. It is as if
Sánchez’s piece itself had been imbued with a true emotional disposition.

Osvaldo Sánchez uses artworks as inspirations for his writerly imagination.
Sánchez’s understanding of the visual object is combined with his own exploration of the
world and senses that translates into a persuasive, almost kindhearted tone within his
writing. Sánchez discovers in the work of art what Foucault would call “a deep motive,”
and he develops it in a different, most intimate, representational context. The word as a
means of representation seems to be his most indispensable source, as it was for
Baudelaire: word-motif, word-context-story-poem, and word-sensorial image. “Hay
resaca en sus rostros encalados. Tienen maneras inocentes, casi dulces, como de
cybernerds, para explicar que la continuidad está en lo que se pudre, que todo lo
prometedor es carroña,” says Sánchez about the Mexican group SEMEFO whose work
involves the treatment of decomposed bodies (“SEMEFO” 131). The writer plays to
approach the art object with the openness and innocence of a little child, by carefully
choosing words that form architectural blocks filled with color, musicality and
significance.
In an article about the representation of magical-religious cosmogonies in the installation art of Cuban artist José Bedia, Sánchez opens up with a very imaginative story-like narrative:

El Almirante Cristóbal Colón oyó toda la noche pasar volando pájaros. Las West Indies se escabullían entre gigantes remolinos de agua y afilados ramos de fuego. Esa angustia de Occidente por agotar lo sincrónico, hizo de estas tierras desconocidas y cercadas por las aguas –¿islas?- la figura de una ambigüedad imaginal que hoy llamamos periferia. (“La restauración” 63)

Sánchez’s narrative brings to mind a lyrical passage in Alejo Carpentier’s 1962-novel *El siglo de las luces*: “Hallábase Esteban en las Bocas del Dragón, en el alba aún estrellada, allí donde el Gran Almirante viera el agua dulce trabada en lucha con el agua salada desde los días de la Creación del Mundo” (Carpentier 316). Sánchez’s idea of “gigantes remolinos de agua y afilados ramos de fuego” also resembles Carpentier’s description of a magic night in the sea filled with allegorical spectacles:

El Mar Caribe estaba lleno de fosforescencias que derivaban mansamente hacia la costa (...). Sofía estaba entregada a los espectáculos que este viaje (...) ofrecía a sus miradas en valores de vegetaciones viajeras, peces raros, rayos verdes (...) que levantaban alegorías en un cielo donde cada nube podía interpretarse como un grupo escultórico –combate de Titanes, Laocontes, cuadrigas y caídas de ángeles. (Carpentier, *El siglo* 156)

Sánchez’s art criticism provides a space in which the theoretical, philosophical and historical creatively respond to the re-creation and infinite multiplication of the artwork’s universe.

The aesthetic in Sánchez’s art criticism turns into an authentic force that generates an attitude of detachment from schematized ways of saying, interpreting and knowing while releasing an assortment of features that intensify the substance of the artwork. In this regard, Sánchez’s writing reveals a poetic model of criticism that effortlessly opens
up to all the multiple branches related to the question of knowledge, whether academic, philosophical, historical, or communal. One can say that for Osvaldo Sánchez, the true value of knowledge can not be found in the act of arriving at knowledge as a final product or a state of mind, but rather in the asymmetrical learning processes that compose it, that is in our fluctuating moving towards knowledge. I will analyze the experiential disclosure in Sánchez’s critical texts that has to do with the idea of a constant searching, going through the mystery of the work of art and the enterprise of writing about it, in an at-ease manner, without pre-conditioned sets of expectations or rules. Sánchez’s critical model resembles Heidegger’s structure of openness, since his writing does not come out in the form of a controlling and fixed critical pattern but as an accessible writerly procedure, a heuristic outline that is available to change and to be permeated by the unpredictable.

As we will see, the very notion of writerly involves the idea of openness and availability. In his study of Sarrasine by Honoré de Balzac, Roland Barthes defines the concept of writerly texts. For Barthes, the writerly relates to

ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (S/Z 5)

It entails “the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure” (Barthes, S/Z 5). So, the writerly refers to that spontaneous zone of writing in which a variety of connections, associations and images can materialize before being truncated by an indomitable system of knowledge. Historically, there have been many writerly occasions of art criticism. Some of them will be briefly considered in this text, which will serve us to have a clearer idea on the poetic, philosophical and literary trains
of thought where Osvaldo Sánchez’s art writing is located. Indeed, even if art criticism has been used as a system that intersects, traverses, stops, and plasticizes the infinite play of the arts, writerly occurrences of art criticism do exist. One may argue that art criticism turns into a writerly occurrence insofar as it subtly undergoes a process of evaporation that allows for its reintegration to the function of art. That is, the critical model has to surrender to an infinite play and become available to a plurality of languages and entrances as well as an opening of networks.

Many researchers have tried to look for commonalities to fulfill a possible concept of criticism. In the fields of Arts and Literature, for instance, criticism seems to refer to assessing the value of an artistic object or literary text, respectively. In his book On Criticism, the scholar Noël Carroll argues that the philosophy of criticism is “an attempt to excavate the foundations of any critical practice, whether theory driven or otherwise” (5). He notices that the limitations of conventionalist interpretative models should encourage us to search for other ways of understanding art objects in relation to a variety of themes that may even include ordinary life (Carroll 138).

Theories of interpretation have been developed over three conceptual points: the need to properly identify an artwork; the possibility of conflicting interpretations; and the use of rhetoric in interpretation (Carrier 1). In explaining the disagreements of the different theories, Carrier points out the relevance of the contexts in which the artworks are inserted and recognizes the importance of rhetoric as a tool to analyze conflicts in interpretation (9). But, as Carroll suggests, they take “interpretation” to be the essential task of criticism (5). For Carroll, artistic evaluation –evaluation in light of artistic categories- is the most important quality/feature of criticism, making the achievement of
the artist its pre-eminent object (6). We will see how in Osvaldo Sánchez’s writing, the work of art or, in this sense, “the artist’s achievement” becomes a point of departure for an aesthetic opening engendered by a heuristic force. Carroll highlights that evaluation, which inevitably refers to an appreciation of human value, is the primary task of criticism, instead of supporting the art writing as a clinical breakdown and reading of various codes, signifying systems or regimes of power (7). He discriminates other genres of verbal discourses from art criticism to defend the space of artistic evaluation, saying that “in addition to description, elucidation, classification, contextualization, interpretation, and/or analysis, art criticism, properly so called, must involve evaluation” (18).

Carroll mentions the operations related to the act of producing a piece of criticism that provide the frame in which the critic approaches the work of art. These operations, which include description, classification, contextualization, elucidation, interpretation, analysis, and evaluation, are not independent entities but rather influence one another (Carroll 84). Carroll notices, however, that a piece of criticism need not contain all of these operations. In fact, a critical piece can have only one of the first six of these operations, plus, some form of evaluation that is defended by rational arguments (Carroll 84). In contrast to Carroll’s point of view, Osvaldo Sánchez’s open art criticism is motivated by the idea of producing an intense and reconciliatory aesthetic experience rather than of “evaluating” the art piece from an obstinate rational perspective. For Carroll, the act of description, which he considers inherently quixotic, consists in telling the readers something about what the artwork is like, say a cognitive something (86-88).
Classification has to do with situating the work within a particular art category, activity that sometimes comes along with the type of criticism suitable to the object (Carroll 94). By classifying, the critic alerts the readers to different kinds of readings of the artwork (Carroll 98). Moreover, in order to approach the work correctly, it seems that we need to know the category the work instantiates (Carroll 99). Yet, Carroll calls our attention to the idea that placing the object within a certain category beforehand may misguide us and not allow us to see other possibilities in them. In addition, it can turn into a manipulative method for critics to defend their own beliefs. He refers, particularly, to Clement Greenberg’s interest in focusing on flatness or two-dimensionality as the essential or defining feature of painting. Greenberg created the category of Modernist painting and identified candidates as Modernist when he saw artworks that served to provide evidence of what he believed about “the essential flatness of painting,” as in the case of the work of the Cubists (Carroll 103). Greenberg also used Jackson Pollock’s artwork that affirmed its nature as paint, to develop the problematic of self-definition to a new stage (Carroll 103).

Here are the rest of the critical operations defined by Carroll. Contextualization means illuminating the context where the artwork has been produced, with which the critic is better able to contribute to the audience’s understanding of the work and the critic’s evaluation of it (Carroll 102). Elucidation has to do with identifying the literal meaning of the symbols in the artwork, determining the correlation between fixed conventional and iconic symbols and what they symbolize by association or natural recognition like in pictorial representation (Carroll 108-109). One of the valuable features of this operation occurs when the characteristics isolated for consideration combine with
the artist’s purposes and serve as grounds for the critic’s evaluation (Carroll 108). For Carroll, determining the meaning of a word or a sentence falls into the realm of elucidation (109).

Interpretation goes beyond what has been given in order to establish its significance, so it may lead us to hypothesize from the various parts of the artwork to the theme or message or concept that explains why the assemblage of parts before us coheres together as a whole, what theme or message unifies them by uncovering the sense of the work (Carroll 110). Carroll sees in interpretation an instance of analysis, which is the account of how the work operates, that is the method that explains the functioning of the parts in hopes of reaching the point or purposes of the work, to communicate or advance a theme or an idea (111). The analysis shows that the features of the work serve to secure the purpose of the piece –that the parts of the work are arranged to support the artist’s aims (Carroll 112).

As we may infer, the objectives of the critical writing are as elusive, complicated, and somewhat chameleonic as the object of artistic practices can be. In his view of art criticism as a space of artistic evaluation, Carroll highlights: “If there are no general critical principles of the sort that would make an honest or logically compelling argument out of critical reasoning, then the conclusions the critic reaches must be subjective” (165). What is the risk of submitting subjective evaluations? For Carroll, the subjective can be used by critics to express their partiality to the artwork in question as they are not grounding their considerations in a logically accepted manner, and to persuade us readers to adopt their predilections (165). But, Carroll himself supports the idea that “the critic’s job is to inform the rest of us about where and how to look at the work of art in order to
get the richest possible experience out of it” (58), so we can not exclude the possibilities of the subjective space in the amplification of our experience of the artwork. As Phillip Smallwood affirms, the definition of criticism cannot be found by attaching criticism to any particular moment, property or instance of it, for it may develop (or not) according to the nature of the occurrence and our awareness of the kind of occurrence it is (553). In other words, we have to take into consideration the particular set of conditions (occasions) from which a critical piece emerges, in order to recognize (or at least come closer to) its proper value, as it happens when we appreciate the work of art according to its intentionality, genre or intrinsic qualities.

In this regard, this thesis will focus on how art criticism can produce the effects of an aesthetic object, by means of writerly modes of representation that add more complex (visual, philosophical, poetic, and other sensorial) properties to the artwork content. I will discuss in chapter 1 the ways in which writerly texts, since the XVIII Century, have contributed with powerful insights to the History of Aesthetics by providing critical studies of philosophical, poetic, and literary nature about the question of art and its features. Here we will go on a journey through the writerly as an aesthetic experience, highlighting the place occupied by human subjectivity in art criticism, which situates and expands the understanding of the art object in relation to a variety of issues like the intricate connection among the human faculties, the many expressive possibilities of language, consciousness, ethics and morals, perception and sensibility, material reality and the immaterial world, dialectical thinking, urbanism, the effects of technology in the reproduction era, the impact of mental representations, as well as other intangibles like lightness, happiness and energy.
The first chapter of this thesis will show what understandings, interpretations, and applications critical texts of aesthetic quality have, and it will set up the foundations for our comprehension of the open models of experiential exchanges discussed in chapter 2 as well as in Osvaldo Sánchez’s reconciliatory aesthetics presented in chapter 3. The subjective space in art criticism allows for an array of routes that playfully intermingle with the elements of the art object as such. Kant, Baumgarten and Hegel assessed art with regard to the faculties of human beings, while the aesthetic encapsulated consciousness and sensibility. Lessing and Baudelaire referred to pictorial representation through linguistic interpretative methods that appeal to the complexity of emotional and mental states. Ruskin used architecture to provide aestheticized moral arrangements. Benjamin and Adorno infused a constellative dialectical impulse into their analyses of art, technology, and the capitalist society. Rosenberg’s art criticism is nourished by urban experience, reminding us of Baudelaire’s writings on Paris. John Berger criticized “disinterested art appreciation” by means of short poetic constructions. Calvino, Davenport, and de Botton have made use of different artistic practices that disperse within writerly designs concerning categories such as lightness, imagination, and happiness, respectively. I conclude the first chapter by mentioning the work of Latin American critic Marta Traba whose text on the art of Dubuffet, de Kooning, Bacon, and Cuevas refers to an energetic revitalization (or opening) of the aesthetic.

All these writerly itineraries show how the aesthetic space indeed has the potential to assume a multiplicity of entrances, and so it can eventually transfigure into an open experiential model like the one proposed by Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism where vital exchanges can take place. Before launching into our analysis of Sánchez’s aesthetics, we
will see its precedents in the open models of experience presented in chapter 2. In this regard, I start by examining the Kantian “transcendental” structures because, even if there is a sense of duty to a higher force in Kant and the aesthetic judgment responds to a culturally predetermined notion of taste, there exists a moment in which the experiencing subject, through a free accord of his faculties, liberates himself from his attachment to “a priori” laws, in a subjective way. Kant’s representations of the sublime embody a mental movement that gives us the chance to intuit something that escapes rational fixations. I also study Heidegger’s ontological patterns which are based on the process of meditative openness, a procedure similar to Zen-like contemplation. After analyzing Kant and Heidegger’s happenings of the mind, I approach the Happenings of Allan Kaprow. I pay attention to Kaprow’s art writing and his lived events, which break free of the institution of “art,” looking for the common acts of everyday life. Kaprow’s experience is seen in connection with the surrealist spirit of opening up to the fortuitous as well as the attitude of disinterest developed by Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Pellicer, Xavier Villaurrutia and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, whose poetic work is examined in detail by the scholar Rafael Hernández Rodríguez. In spite of having been “aestheticized,” these models offer the experiencing subject an opportunity to move away from fixed patterns of thought and means-ends purposes. So, the aesthetic itself turns into an experiential occurrence that should not be reduced to calculation, manipulation or aestheticization, allowing for the discovery of infinite resources, exchanges and interactions, as happens in Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism.

Sánchez’s writing is analyzed in the third chapter of my thesis. I read many of his articles and chose those which I considered to be the most appropriate in support of my
argument; some of them still are unpublished. In Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism, the aesthetic operates as a heuristic drive releasing writerly assemblages of poetic, philosophical and theoretical nature that do not respond to a fixed configuration. Sánchez’s art criticism evaporates pre-determined cognitive structures while offering us the chance to appreciate a spontaneous reconciliation of mental, verbal and other perceptual resources that enrich our understanding of the art writing and the work of art. I connect Sánchez’s work with the project of writerly critics analyzed in chapter 1, but I also emphasize the heuristic character of Sánchez’s writing and its value as a lived event, in association with the experiential models discussed in chapter 2. I observe how Sánchez’s writing serves to reconcile the aesthetic (in its entire openness) and the critical (in all its multiple operations, combinations, and intentions), not by adopting a fixed cognitive system but by passing through fields which, in an at-ease manner, accommodate to each other and elicit writerly reflections that make us appreciate art criticism as an unprejudiced and pleasurable journey.

In this sense, I also encourage the reader to approach this thesis as an open journey through its three analytical stages: the writerly in the History of Aesthetics, the experiential models of exchanges, and Osvaldo Sánchez’s reconciliatory art writing. It seems that after all it is impossible to avoid not being influenced by the spirit of the object we choose to write about. Sánchez himself has alleged that his work has been stimulated by the art writing of Italo Calvino, Guy Davenport, and Alain de Botton who “make us appreciate criticism as a journey, a shared experience rather than an established concept or judgment” (Sánchez, Personal Communication). “These writers provide us with a humane, humorous and cosmogonically candid appreciation of the visual arts
phenomenon in their art criticism,” for they know how to describe (the dark side of all) emotions, ideas and ephemeral mental states (Sánchez, Personal Communication).
Chapter 1: The Writerly in Art Criticism & the Construction of Aesthetic Theories

To recognize the true significance of Osvaldo Sánchez’s writerly texts, we need to start by reviewing what types of understandings, interpretations and applications art criticisms of aesthetic quality have had over the years, which will help us situate his writing within a considerably productive framework of poetic, philosophical and literary features. The emergence of art criticism is linked to the apparition of aesthetics that has its origins in the eighteenth century, when –according to some scholars- cultural production begins to suffer commodification and the written word becomes a vehicle to develop a hegemonic project (Eagleton 3; Yúdice and Miller 8). George Yúdice and Toby Miller argue that “hegemony is secured when the dominant culture uses education, philosophy, religion, advertising and art to make its dominant culture appear normal and natural to the heterogeneous groups that constitute society” (7). The linguistic turn in philosophy, where experiences are formulated verbally, was seen as part of the actual object of art criticism (Wright 27). Terry Eagleton mentions that the emergence of aesthetics provoked a situation in which art suffered “something of the abstraction and formalization characteristic of modern theory in general,” making its interpretation an immanent component of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society as well as of human subjectivity (2). According to Eagleton, Aesthetics will always be “a self-undoing sort of project,” which in developing the value of its object risks emptying it of that specificity or ineffability, for the language used to elevate art tends to undermine it (2-3). As we will see in chapter 3, Sánchez’s reconciliatory aesthetics proposes a heuristic outline seeking not to “undermine” but to preserve and even enhance the art experience.
Baumgarten, Kant and Hegel are among the writers who produced the first aesthetic models of comprehension of art, in reference to the processes of interaction among the human faculties. Some of the issues discussed by these philosophers like imagination, sensation, and perception will be used in our analysis of Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism. Kant offered important aesthetic considerations. As a matter of fact, Kant coined the term *aesthetic judgment*, which he saw as a moment resulting from the act of contemplation of the pure form of cognition where human faculties like imagination and understanding indeterminably converged. Kant understood art as a motivation to vividly formulate mental structures that included the transcendental sublime and the beautiful, pleasure and genius, and other related concepts in assorted combinations. For his contributions and philosophical insights which are of great help in our understanding of art criticism as an aesthetic object, Kant’s models will be explored in more detail in chapter 2.

In his formulation of the aesthetic space, Alexander Baumgarten emphasized the value of the human senses and perception. He elaborated treatises on the material and the immaterial objects, the world of feelings and sensations, and the role of reason in aesthetic experiences. In his “*Reflexiones filosóficas en torno al poema,*”¹ Baumgarten says:

> Aunque las representaciones imaginarias propias de las palabras y de la oración son más claras que las de las cosas visibles, no pretendemos establecer la prerrogativa del poema sobre la pintura, porque la claridad intensiva ofrecida al conocimiento simbólico a través de las voces, en sustitución de la claridad intuitiva, no contribuye en absoluto a la claridad extensiva, cuya finalidad es poética. (45)

¹ The original title of this article is “*Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*” (1735). It was translated from Latin by Catalina Terrasa Montaner (*Belleza y verdad sobre la estética entre la ilustración y el romanticismo*).
Eagleton argues that Baumgarten defines aesthetic cognition as a “confused” mediator between the generalities of reason and the particulars of sense—that is, an area where elements of aesthetic representation become units of conceptual thought (15). According to Eagleton, Baumgarten considers Aesthetics “as the sister of logic, or feminine analogue of reason at the lower level of sensational life” (16). Baumgarten’s conception of the aesthetic space draws on a poetic rationalization of the process of thinking. He even goes on to consider it “feminine,” that is an inferior and delicate entity subject to be infiltrated and scolded by reason.

Reason occupies the place of the aesthetic object in Hegel’s account. Eagleton highlights that Hegelian Reason does not only apprehend the good, but so engages and transforms our bodily inclinations, bringing them into spontaneous accord with universal rational precepts (21). In other words, it has a quasi-practical impact on the experiencing subjects. For Hegel, what mediates between the object of perception (reason) and experience is the praxis of human subjects in political life (Eagleton 21). By becoming an active, transfigurative force in material life, reason can not be considered only a contemplative faculty, but a more complex project for the reconstruction of subjects and their inner beings, influencing questions of human happiness and self-fulfillment, knowledge and morals as well as the body’s affections and desires (Eagleton 21-22). As we will see in chapter 3, Sánchez’s aesthetics becomes a heuristic force, a project for experiential exchanges which might offer some resemblance to Hegel’s active concept of reason. Henry Paolucci highlights that for Hegel, reason encompassed art, religion and philosophy, which were considered the three moments of absolute spirit or instances of convergent significance. Before coming together in an aesthetic experience, these three
occurrences are recognizable as man’s commonest activities of making, behaving and explaining (Paolucci xix). As Paolucci confirms, these three events are subject to the discipline of reason, resulting in a technology, or productive science; a rationalized ethical behavior, or practical science; and a disciplined empirical study, or theoretical science (xix).

For Hegel, reason provided a ground for aesthetics’ utility, even if in a spiritual sense. In this regard, Hegel writes “Indeed, artistic productivity belongs as much to mind as thought itself; and thus when mind subjects art to scientific consideration, it is in fact only satisfying its own inmost need” (2). In other words, man’s need for art emerges from the fact that “he is thinking consciousness,” for man is not only immediate like all natural things, but he becomes mind as well by reduplicating himself, existing for himself and thinking himself (Hegel 3). Hegel used the sensuous shapes of art to explain, in a writerly way, that they excite a response in all the depths of consciousness of the mind by being spiritualized in us, and he found the true value of the work of art in its having been processed through mind -that is in its coming into being by a productive activity where the spiritual and the sensuous fused as an undivided unity (4).

The aestheticized reasoning of Hegel allowed him to produce comparisons between the fine arts, with an intensive idealistic and religious emphasis:

Whatever lies in the heart is present to our consciousness in wholly subjective way, of course, even when its specific content is grasped as something essentially objective (…) The aesthetic consciousness through the depths of the heart is indeed what most clearly distinguishes painting from sculpture and architecture and assimilates it to music and poetry at the other extreme (…) The self-subsistent grandeur and serenity of the classical figures whose individuality is completely absorbed in the shapes that sculpture provides will not do for the expression of what lives in the depths of the heart (…) The soul has worked its way through the depths of its own inner life, that is has overcome much, suffered much, experienced
the worst sort of grief and pain, while yet maintaining the integrity to withdraw, finally, out of that soul-shattering experience back into itself. (105)

As Paolucci points out, in reason (moment of absolute spirit or the aesthetic object for Hegel), as if under a higher than human control, rational behavior transforms into obedience to the categorical imperatives of religious revelation and empirical science becomes a speculative philosophy (xx).

Consistent with the aesthetics of the Enlightenment, Lessing’s art criticism extends the visual, textural and thematic properties of art through writerly figures of thought: mental representations, stories and a collection of ideas which may even lack definite contours. In his text *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Poetry and Painting*, where Lessing analyzes the limits of painting and poetry, both signifying systems surprisingly dissolve into one another, yielding a pleasing arrangement of perceptual marks that satisfies the logic of our imagination. While it is true that Lessing’s work concerns the differences between those two artistic media, *Laocoön* constitutes also an examination of the set of complexities of human emotions. E. A. McCormick calls our attention to the idea that Lessing’s arguments are based on reason rather than direct experience since Lessing was inadequately acquainted with ancient painting and lacked the direct knowledge of ancient sculpture (xxvii). In other words, he dealt with his subject only indirectly, through literature and history (McCormick xxviii). But, what McCormick mistakes for rational arguments in Lessing’s text is actually an explosive expedition through the imagination. Lessing did not need to see directly the Laocoön group nor did he need to show too much understanding for the function of color and expression in paintings, for he was more interested in investigating the pictorial and poetic effects of
our senses. The Laocoëonian myth inspired Lessing to create his own representation of the soul that includes emotions as a version of a misleading form (or concept) like poetry and mental constructions which evoke certain tangible completeness like painting does.

Lessing writes the following:

Nothing is more deceptive than laying down of general laws for our emotions. Their texture is so delicate and intricate that even the most cautious speculation can hardly pick out a single thread and follow it through all its interlacing. But even if such speculation were to succeed, what could we gain by it? In nature there are no single, unmixed emotions; with each one thousands of others spring up at the same time, and the least of these is able to change the original feeling completely, so that one exception after another arises until the supposedly general law itself is finally reduced to a mere personal experience. (28)

There is an intrinsic attempt to construct, depict a relatively complete representational space in the mind (Lessing uses phrases like “general laws”, or “cautious speculation” to refer to it) that resembles the properties of a painting, yet the very delicate and intricate texture of emotions generates a different, more elusive, or confusing sort of representation that comes from their own interlacing. One can say that perhaps there is an attempt to describe some sort of unpredictability in the latter representational space, which can show the flexibility of the aesthetic as an experiential model. Lessing provides separate indications, signs, and clues (“with each emotion thousands of others spring up, making the rest of them change,” etc.), which makes us have an idea of how the latter and more open representational process works. In this regard, we agree with David E. Wellbery that the imaginative treatment of the content and the expression material in Lessing’s Laocoën reaches beyond the single, painted moment or the single, designated quality into the content material itself, in order to guarantee the aesthetic experience (112-115).
Art criticism was further developed in the XIX Century, with other writerly critics whose work serves in the process of contextualizing Osvaldo Sánchez’s critical model. Gunter Leypoldt affirms that nineteenth century claims about the public relevance of the aesthetic specialist drew on the foundations of Kant’s artistic autonomy (421). The reception of Kant’s third *Critique* liberated artistic practice from ideological limitations and it also implied that critics could exclusively concentrate on the aesthetic without having to address the political (Leypoldt 421). Playwright and poet Oscar Wilde wrote one of the best known dramatic works concerning the writerly nature of art criticism, in correspondence with the modernist aesthetics of XIX century literature. In *The Critic as Artist*, Wilde supports the meaning and value of criticism as an art in itself, a “creation within creation”:

> That is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one’s own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilized form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one’s life, not with life’s physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind. (1623)

Wilde’s remarks refer to art criticism as a “delightful” space independent from history and other disciplines which reminds us of Kant’s conception of the aesthetic. As Peter Bürger points out, “Kant not only declares the aesthetic as independent of the sphere of the sensuous and the moral but also of the sphere of the theoretical” (43). Wilde’s view on art criticism in relation to the passions of the mind looks like a modernist psychological interpretation of the Kantian sublime in which, by a sudden accord of our human faculties, a brief feeling of pleasure is produced.
Some scholars agree with the idea that modern art criticism used linguistic constructions to emphasize the visual properties of the work of art. Mary Dezember, for instance, has pointed out that the art critics were particularly interested in trying to unveil and understand the symbols of modern art, by promoting its compositional elements as an effective way to grasp meaning (7). Charles Baudelaire has been considered the founder of modern art criticism, which he began publishing in 1845. According to Dezember, Baudelaire used language to enable the reader to “see” the meaning of the images depicted (14). As Dezember emphasizes, his critique “Salon de 1846” was filled with poetic configurations that attracted the public to understand Delacroix’s ability to display color as well as how the color impacted the viewers (14). Of course, Baudelaire is one of the most important precedents of Osvaldo Sánchez, whose art criticism supplies an energetic assortment of colors, emotions and poetic/pictorial symbolisms.

Baudelaire emphasized:

Quand le grand foyer descend dans les eaux, de rouges fanfares s’élancet de tous côtés; une sanglante harmonie éclate à l’horizon, et le vert s’empourpre richement. Mais bientôt de vastes ombres bleues chassent en cadence devant elles la foule des tons orangés et rose tendre qui sont comme l’écho lointain et affaibli de la lumière. Cette grande symphonie de jour, qui est l’éternelle variation de la symphonie d’hier, cette succession de mélodies, où la variété sort toujours de l’infini, cet hymne compliqué s’appelle la couleur. (qtd. in Dezember 13)

Through a careful selection of words with a heightened emotive quality, Baudelaire induces the reader to become aware of how the act of contemplating an aesthetic object is produced by means of a harmonization of colors, images and sensations. As Carrier suggests, colors stand for emotions (like love) in traditional aesthetics, sustaining charges of value like those of human sexual life so the meeting of mind and body is mysteriously affected (64).
Dezember also discusses Baudelaire’s use of synaesthesia in art criticism. In this regard, she says:

He suggests that what one sees in the world, or in a painting, is color which is synonymous with melodies. Thus Baudelaire claims that the viewer can see music; we can see a symphony playing before our very eyes. In addition, he states that he is seeing simultaneously the symphony with the sunset, by seeing, feeling, noticing color and its intense interplay for itself rather than for what it represents. This was a major step toward modern art, when images became so abstracted that the viewer could see or feel or even nearly hear the colors more so than what the colors depict. (Dezember 14)

In this sense, one can say that Baudelaire’s writerly art criticism, especially his work on the paintings by Eugène Delacroix, might have served to motivate the flexible exploration of colors and lines found in modernist art and the early Avant-Garde movements:

Strictly speaking there is neither line nor color in nature. It is man that creates line and color. They are twined abstractions which derive their equal status from their common origin (…) Line and color both of them have the power to set one thinking and dreaming; the pleasures which spring from them are of different natures, but of perfect equality and absolute independent of the subject of the picture (…) A picture by Delacroix will already have quickened you with a thrill of supernatural pleasure even if it be situated too far away from you to be able to judge of its linear graces or the more or less dramatic quality of its subject. You feel as though a magical atmosphere has advanced towards you and already envelops you. This impression, which combines gloom with sweetness, light with tranquility –this impression, which has taken its place once and for all in your memory, is certain proof of the true, the perfect colorist. (Baudelaire, “The Life” 51)²

If Baudelaire found his perfect colorist in Delacroix, he discovered the “painter of modern life” in Constantin Guys (Mayne xv). For Baudelaire, Guys had been gifted with an active imagination, “ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert” and having

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² This passage is cited by Baudelaire in his essay “The Life and Work of Eugène Delacroix.” According to the scholar Jonathan Mayne, the passage was taken from an article published in the Revue Fantaisiste, September 15, 1861 (The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays, 218).
“an aim loftier than that of a mere flâneur, an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance” (Baudelaire, “The Painter” 12). Baudelaire writes about Guys:

He is looking for that quality which you must allow me to call “modernity”; for I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind. He makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distill the eternal from the transitory (…) By “modernity” I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable. (“The Painter” 12)

Baudelaire identifies “modernity” with the image of a woman who possesses an abstract and indeterminate beauty, which reminds us of Baumgarten’s conceptualization of Aesthetics. For him, there is a mysterious attraction in the things, glances and gestures that human life accidentally presents before our eyes, inciting us to become observers of existence.

John Ruskin is one of the modern British cultural critics of the XIX Century. Ruskin’s The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) treated architecture in terms of seven abstract, spiritual categories, which represented the lamps: Sacrifice, Truth, Power, Beauty, Life, Memory and Obedience (Stein 65). Roger B. Stein argues that the very organization of the book indicates that his method was abstract and moral rather than technical, social or historical (65). In the chapter called “The Lamp of Truth,” Ruskin wrote the following:

True architecture does not admit iron as a constructive material, and such works as the cast-iron central spire of Rouen Cathedral, or the irons roofs and pillars of our railway stations, and of some of our churches, are not architecture at all. Yet, it is evident that metals may, and sometimes must, enter into the construction to a certain extent, as nails in wooden architecture, and therefore as legitimately rivets and solderings in stone (…)Metals may be used as a cement but not as a support (…) The moment that iron in the least degree takes the place of stone, and acts by its
resistance to crushing, and bears superincumbent weigh, or if acts by its own weight as a counterpoise, and so supersedes the use of pinnacles or buttresses in resisting a lateral thrust, or if, in the form of a rod or girder, it is used to do what wooden beams would have done as well, that instant the building ceases, so far as such applications of metal extend, to be true architecture. (40-41)

A writerly critic, Ruskin produced architecture with words. Architecture as an artistic manifestation was only a motivation for him to elaborate on the spiritual construction of man who, according to a biblical principle, should always build his house on the Rock. 3

In Ruskin, the element of stone represents the source of Truth, as it stands for God, wisdom, permanence, and strength.

A representative of the Frankfurt School of critical theorists, Walter Benjamin has been called the quintessential eye of the twentieth century modernity (Bullock 36). Benjamin’s writing was not limited to theoretical expansions on artworks, but it also included studies of urban life, buildings, technology, among other subjects. Benjamin’s art criticism explored how visual artifacts affected people’s sensibility and perception, offering a new understanding of the possibilities of our senses (sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing) through his exploratory model of urban experiences that, as Bullock emphasizes, had an antecedent in Baudelaire (36). Bullock calls our attention to the idea that the effect of encountering human figures acting in the street or reviewing the parade of commodities put on display in shop windows made Benjamin aware of the first law of modern seeing, which is that forms originate under the rule of commercial forces (36).

While Baudelaire’s view owed to classical aesthetics, preserving the traditional place of painting as the site where visual powers concentrate to produce an art of seeing, Benjamin focused on the aesthetic possibilities that practices of reproduction, politics and

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3 The principle is as follows: “Así pues, quien escucha estas palabras mías y las pone en práctica se parece a un hombre prudente que construyó su casa sobre roca.” (La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo, Mateo 7.24, 1843).
economics have to offer (Bullock 36-37). As Bullock highlights, Benjamin placed the focal concern of the modernist eye further away from pictorial representation, developing the idea that mass-produced images destroyed the ‘aura’ of uniqueness of the artistic objects (37). Walter Benjamin delivered a poetic method of assemblage in his writing where a category as a whole seems to consist of graphic images, which playfully (or mechanically?) superimposed on one another before getting imprinted in the psyche of the reader/viewer. Benjamin’s grouping of images might have also influenced Sánchez’s experiential design in which multiple associations and connections can be found. Eagleton suggests that Benjamin’s model of constellation tries to break down concepts into their most minuscule components, using language as a platform where sensuous visions transformed into ideas, as well as moving away from traditional versions of totality (330).

In his article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” written in 1936, Benjamin elaborates on how technical reproducibility affects our experience of the artworks and captures a place for itself among the artistic processes. Benjamin’s prose demands a specific kind of reading that is not mechanical but different from a balanced observation. The thorny poetic tone of his statements generates a disturbing and unfamiliar atmosphere, for it has been constructed using non-poetic words. Benjamin writes the following: “The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology” (626). Benjamin refers here to the shooting of a film, which as he says, “affords a spectacle unimaginable” allowing the mechanical equipment to penetrate deeply into reality (626). Benjamin’s words emerge as if they were extraneous mental or optical
accessories that intervene in, mediate and codify our comprehension of reality, producing a disquieting feeling. Utterances like reality, artifice, sight, technology and equipment serve to reproduce a puzzle-like virtual portrait, a network of entangled images that try to gain some order under a sequential, rational logic.

Benjamin explores how the interference of mechanical tools into reality ends up freeing the equipment from its very (foreign) technological essence. In this sense, we can say that Benjamin appropriates the ontology of a reproductive machine through his writing, exposing the reader to a dangerous repertory of phases where the mental, the verbal, and the real overlap. Yet, we do experience some kind of transitory relief and even a noiseless enjoyment when the image of the orchid is spread over the surface. An orchid reminds us of a living thing. In a later passage, Benjamin says, “The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (629). Again, his words have the effect of a lighting device or a camera lens, taking over the social, historical and theoretically-serialized paraphernalia of the artistic practice. The poetic in Benjamin’s criticism functions as an invisible, or perhaps mechanical, impulse that inevitably refers us to the superposition/repetition of things, ideas and sensations.

One can have a similar experience when reading Theodor Adorno’s critical inquiries. As Eagleton highlights, Adorno’s writing style recalls the concept of a constellation like Benjamin’s does. A critical theorist from the Frankfurt School, Adorno infused an urgent, lively spirit into his Marxist studies on art, life, language and thought, making the aesthetic space transcend its very own limits. According to Eagleton, Adorno’s writing “marks the point at which the high aesthetic tradition is pressed to an extreme limit and begins to self-destruct, leaving among its ruins a few cryptic clues as to
what might lie beyond it” (361). Theory becomes the aesthetic object in Adorno’s model of sensuous receptivity. With regards to the idea of using the sensuous and open possibilities of the aesthetic within theory, Eagleton insists that for Adorno:

> There is a kind of clownish element about knowing thought’s remoteness from its object yet speaking as though one had that object assuredly in hand, and theory must somehow act out this tragicomic discrepancy, foregrounding its own unfinishedness. (360)

Eagleton argues that Adorno considers artifacts to be “internally unreconciled through a certain reconciliation, which is what leaves them irreconcilable: ‘the determined opposition of every work to empirical reality presupposes its inner coherence’” (355). In other words, Adorno noticed that the aesthetic, in the classical sense, had been confined to embody an illusory yet determined opposition to empirical reality so he decided to make it explode. His models of dialectical thinking reproduced the very life of the concepts of things –as independent entities from the things themselves- in all their energetic and contradictory nature.

Along with Roger Foster, we can say that Adorno evokes the spiritual experience within conceptual language. For Adorno, the abuse of conceptual cognition restricts the capacity of language to express experience, which is due in part to a social-historical process of disenchantment (Foster 59). So, the idea of constellation allows him to explore theoretical concepts aesthetically, discovering an infinite number of dramatic opportunities that emerge naturally from within them. We can find an effervescent indication of Adorno’s view in the following passage:

> Forms return only within the interior of works, not as something imposed upon them heteronomously. Such works must consciously measure themselves against the historical situation of their material: they must neither abandon themselves blindly and fetishistically to the material nor mold it from outside with subjective intentions. (Adorno 45)
In an agonizing reflection on the artistic ambience of the 1920s, he writes:

The extent to which the nostalgia for the twenties in fact clings to something intellectual, and not merely to a fata morgana of a period supposed to be at once both avant-garde and not yet enwrapped in the cellophane of modernity, is decided less by the level and quality of what was produced at that time than by the true or putative intellectual posture itself. Preconsciously, one senses how much the revived culture is being absorbed by the ideology it had never ceased to be. Since one does not dare to acknowledge this, one projects an ideal image of a past condition in which spirit supposedly had not yet been forced to admit its incongruity with the forces of reality. In comparison to what has happened since then, spirit altogether takes on an aspect of triviality. It feels culpable because it could not prevent the horror; but its own tenderness and fragility in turn presuppose a reality that could have escaped barbarism. (Adorno 43-44)

Both the forces of the human spirit (an ideal image of a past circumstance, a dream, an intellectual posture) and the forces of reality (the incongruous quality and fragility of such representations of the human spirit) are absorbed successfully into Adorno’s writing, producing a series of affective illustrations, connections and negations.

The aesthetic in Adorno also engulfs/embraces some sort of a depressive or negative enthusiasm that can generate somewhat of an experiential reaction to the subject matter. We will detect many eloquent reactions to both theme and the sensorial properties in the artworks referred to in Osvaldo Sánchez’s critical writing.

Adorno says:

That awkward “intimacy” of television, which allegedly engenders a community through the effect of the television set around which family members and friends sit idiotically who supposedly would otherwise have nothing to say, satisfy not only an avidity that allows no place for anything intellectual unless it is transformed into property but, moreover, obscures the real alienation between people and between people and things. (53)

It looks as if with his very writing, he wanted to produce an allergic effect on the readers that, at the same time, turns intellectually pleasant, as we become aware of the danger of
getting swallowed by the “intimacy” of television and imagine other appropriate ways to be “culturally educated.”

Eagleton suggests that every sentence of Adorno’s texts is forced to work overtime, for it must become a little masterpiece or a miracle of an incarnated dialectics, fixing a thought within the minds of the readers in the second before it disappears into its own contradictory being (342). With Adorno, one can appreciate the form and propensities of dialectics in all their liveliness because of his addiction to language, especially that language of the images and senses that escape the mediation of a concept. Foster highlights Adorno’s treatment of the language’s ability to produce what he calls the “nonconceptual”:

Adorno wants to draw out attention toward the self-reflective process that occurs when language’s ability to say what it wants to say gives out. It is not an insight that is available as a conceptual content, but is rather something that we learn about our conceptual language. In this way, language illuminates the nonconceptual as its condition of possibility. (56)

Other linguistic powers can be successfully explored in aesthetic criticisms. For instance, language’s ability to recreate ambiences in which the art objects circulate openly among a diversity of themes is one of the features of Harold Rosenberg’s art writing. Art criticism in the United States emerged out of the so-called “public intellectual”, with writers who focused on an ample variety of cultural themes, like Baudelaire and Benjamin had done, to enrich their critical texts. Rosenberg developed a particular model instilled with the spirit of the city, accentuating the reader’s experience of the work of art. In his article “The Game of Illusion: Pop and Gag,” Rosenberg referred to the mixing of art and nature in the following terms:

The city dweller’s “nature” is a human fabrication. He is surrounded by fields of concrete, forests of posts and wires, etc.; while nature itself, in
the form of parks, a snowfall, cats and dogs, is a detail in the stone and steel of his habitat. Given the enormous dissemination of simulated nature through window displays, motion-picture and television screens, public and private photography, magazine advertisements, art reproductions, car and bus posters, five-and-ten art, it is plain that in no other period has the visible world been to such an extent both duplicated and anticipated by artifice. (“The Game” 61)

Rosenberg performs as the flâneur, taking pleasure in naming (and invisibly suggesting the effects of) pop-art motifs disseminated along the city, which reminds us of Baudelaire’s writings on Paris. A writerly critic, Rosenberg was not interested in art criticism as a prescriptive revision of art and never gave up his focus on broader cultural issues— including the critic’s problem with fixation itself.

Using the work of Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists, Rosenberg composed a poetically-charged argument against the dogmatism of art criticism in an article called “Style and the American Scene.” Rosenberg writes:

Pollock’s procedure is not a translation of nature into abstraction, as is supposed by those who cannot rid themselves of the ‘objective’ fixation; it is, rather the artist bringing to the canvas an inner landscape that is part of himself and that is awakened in the activity of painting. Since style determines visual reality, he has been able to reach the scene through favoring the canvas over the cornfield. Pollock painted as if he had penetrated the landscape and were working inside it; then he laid the canvas on the floor and walked into it, so that it became literally his landscape. With Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Franz Kline, Philip Guston, Esteban Vicente, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Jack Tworkov and Joan Mitchell, landscapes existing within the artist’s mind and sensibility (including embedded plants, buildings, creatures) have been, so to speak, disinterred by the act of painting, which continues independently of the scene. (“Style” 83)

The sentence “Pollock’s procedure is not a translation of nature into abstraction” sets the beginning of the great metaphor that the whole text is, making us think of the long list of constraints that art criticism has with respect to art, if it tries to translate what is not even translatable in the first place. As Pollock did, Rosenberg also provided imaginative
landscapes through his art criticism that were part of himself which afford the reader/viewer the opportunity to observe how the features of the work of art merge alongside other motifs that are equally valued within his writing.

John Berger is among the Marxist critics who used a poetic approach in his critical writings. Berger’s criticism depended upon an aphoristic mode of expression, alternating between powerful general statements about art, history and close analyses of individual artists (Wallach 43). As Alan Wallach states, one interesting thing about Berger is the fact that he was trained as a painter and he could evoke the appearance of a work of art or the way an artist works, which allowed for a combination of broad historical arguments that were permeated with significant aesthetic insights (43). Berger is also a novelist. Wallach refers to Berger’s volume *Ways of Seeing*, “as an extended critique of the European tradition of oil painting and the way that tradition has been used in contemporary society” (45). In this book, Berger discusses the historical circumstances under which art was produced and seen by exploiting the many possibilities of the aesthetic, and he even finds a method to contemplate what had been conflicting in “disinterested art appreciation.”

In reference to Seymour Slive’s aestheticized way of understanding *Regentesses of the Old Men’s Alms House* by Frans Hals (1580-1666), in which the writer uses phrases like “subtle modulations of the deep, glowing blacks contribute to the harmonious fusion of the whole…,” Berger offers the following meditation:

The compositional unity of a painting contributes fundamentally to the power of its image. It is reasonable to consider a painting’s composition. But here the composition is written about as though it were in itself the emotional charge of the painting. Terms like harmonious fusion (...) transfer the emotion provoked by the image from the plane of lived
experience, to that of disinterested ‘art appreciation.’ All conflict disappears. One is left with the unchanging ‘human condition’.(13)

Berger objects to the passivity of a “disinterested art appreciation,” using words that are charged with short poetic remarks instilling energy within the text. He also seems to be calling for interpretations filled with emotional conflicts that take our comprehension of the art work to the plane of a “lived experience.” In this regard, we will discuss in chapter 3 how Osvaldo Sánchez’s heuristic methodology allows us to realize that art criticism is in fact a lived experience.

Other writerly art critics like Italo Calvino, Guy Davenport and Alain de Botton have contributed with the aestheticization of issues such as lightness; happiness; and imagination, using art manifestations as inspirational motifs. With regard to Milan Kundera’s novel The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Calvino writes:

The weight of living consists chiefly in constriction, in the dense net of public and private constrictions that enfolds us more and more closely. His novel shows us how everything we choose and value in life for its lightness soon reveals its true, unbearable weight. Perhaps only the liveliness and mobility of the intelligence escape this sentence –the very qualities with which this novel is written, and which belong to a world quite different from the one we live in. (Six Memos 7)

For Calvino, lightness does not mean to immerse us into the realm of dreams or into the irrational, but rather it inspires us to look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification (Six Memos 7). Lightness engages with the poetry of the invisible and other infinite expected possibilities that may even include the philosophy of nothing, which arises from the writing itself, from the linguistic power, independently of whatever cognitive pattern has been set out to be followed (Calvino, Six Memos 9-10). Lightness connects to the idea of quickness of style, health, agility, pleasure, mobility and ease. For him, all these qualities infuse such a
liveliness into the writing that it seems natural not to follow schematized linguistic formulas, but to digress, to jump from one subject to another, to lose the thread a hundred times and find it again after a hundred more twists and turns (Calvino, *Six Memos* 46).

Following Kant, Guy Davenport used art to trace the geography of the imagination. For Davenport, art has not evolved, and so “it has always been itself, and artists have notoriously learned more from the archaic discovered in our time than from the immediate centuries” (67). One can argue that in Davenport’s view only our imagination evolves, by constantly changing focus within its own structure, “from the rods and cones in a pigeon’s eye to the drift of continents” (Davenport 82). For Davenport, all the arts are in the same predicament, and only what happens in the minds has a true substantial significance, for it keeps other minds alive and stimulated to create (134). Davenport, who values a great deal “what happens in the mind” in the aesthetic experiences, must have been also very fond of the Hegelian thought concerning the spiritual impact and productivity of rationalization processes. Davenport writes:

The tremendous is in the distance. There are no dates in the myths; from when to when did Heracles stride the earth? In a century obsessed with time, with archeological dating, with the psychological recovery of time (Proust, Freud), Pound has written as if time were unreal, has, in fact treated it as if it were space. William Blake preceded him here, insisting on the unreality of clock time, sensing the dislocations caused by time (a God remote in time easily became remote in space, an absentee landlord) and proceeding, in his enthusiastic way, to dine with Isaiah. (150)

Here *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound serves Davenport to expose his own theory of the infinite possibilities of the mind, especially through the faculty of imagination, where there is an open, free, and pleasant redistribution of time and space. For Davenport:

Geography –lands, seas, climates-is overlaid with the second geography of political groups, empires, linguistic conglomerates. The geography of the
imagination would be a third construing of cultural division, showing, for instance, the areas of the portrait, the epic, the novel, symphony. (270)

While architecture inspired Ruskin to dwell in the spiritual construction of man, it served Alain de Botton for aesthecizing the question of happiness. For de Botton, architecture becomes an inconsistent entity in its capacity to generate the happiness on which its claim to our attention is founded (17). De Botton says:

We may need to have made an indelible mark on our lives, to have married the wrong person, pursued an unfulfilling career into middle age or lost a loved one before architecture can begin to have any perceptible impact on us, for when we speak of being ‘moved’ by a building, we allude to a bitter-sweet feeling of contrast between the noble qualities written into a structure and the sadder wider reality within which we know them to exist. A lump rises in our throat at the sight of beauty from an implicit knowledge that the happiness it hints at is the exception. (22)

Does our mental state have influence on our appreciation of the object of perception? Yes, it does, mainly when we talk about an aesthetic experience. In de Botton’s view, architecture has the power to connect with the complexity of our requirements for happiness, and so the significance of a building rests on its capacity “to render vivid to us who we might ideally be” (13).

Marta Traba is among the Latin American writers, with a strong poetic legacy in art criticism. By paralleling art history narratives, art criticism started in Latin America in the 1930s. The so-called “specialized criticism” would emerge twenty years later when the complexities of the visual thought required the presence of other sorts of writings that aimed more effectively in the construction of the artistic proposals. As Juan Acha argues, this critical tendency developed strong philosophical theories to explain the existence and transformations of art (52). According to Efrén Giraldo, Marta Traba defended criticism as a creative space in which philosophy, literature and aesthetics converge to enrich our
cultural references (44). In her book *Los cuatro monstruos cardinales*, Traba makes somewhat of an imaginative constellation among four artists who worked on making what she calls “las antiformas abstractas”: Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, Willem de Kooning and José Luis Cuevas. Giraldo emphasizes that “el texto es rico en metáforas, alegorías y personificaciones, acercándolo más a una dimensión lírica que a una propiamente argumentativa” (131).

With regard to the images of Cuevas, Traba writes:

El dibujo de Cuevas no tiene capacidad de definición. Definir sería terminar un concepto, afirmar. Esto va contra su misma naturaleza. Pero su ambigüedad tiene un carácter muy distinto a la de Francis Bacon. La de Bacon nace de sus contenidos oscuros, cripticos, de sus turbios sobreentendidos. La de Cuevas surge de la completa falta de resignación que toda forma tiene de ser solamente esa forma y no ésa y la de al lado, y la que aún no se ha inventado, y la que estaba antes y la que se suscitará algún día, después. (…) Entre la invención, la movilidad y la disolución, las formas de Cuevas hallan un triple poder, una energía triple. La vida multiplicada por tres, obsesionada y perseguida por esa perturbadora multiplicación. (72)

The powerful abstractions of Cuevas do contaminate Traba’s work. Her text becomes a short-lived vehicle, a transitory receptacle for the anti-forms to get accommodated under a determined formal illusion, before they disappear into the stream of shapes that are hidden within our brains. Are the *words* forms or anti-forms? Well, one never knows. For that is the secret of the aesthetic: it can reconcile us with the possibility of true learning by having the potential to open up to different kinds of systems, contents, forms, and anti-forms.
Chapter 2: Setting up the Stage for the Aesthetic Gateway: Open Models of Experiential Exchanges

In this section of our thesis, we will study flexible experiential structures, both subjective and objective, that serve us as guiding prototypes for understanding the countless transforming possibilities of Osvaldo Sánchez’s open aesthetics as well as its value as a lived event. From our analysis of the work of writerly critics in the first chapter, we have learned how the aesthetic ideally can provide us with certain freedom by liberating us from fixed methods related to cognition, since the aesthetic itself is an undetermined project, that is, a venture (or a spirit?) in constant transformation. So, in the aesthetic, we are able to detach ourselves from schematized perceptions, interpretations and knowing arrangements. Sarah Garland sees the aesthetic as a way of experiencing things, a space of consciousness where we can value our abilities to observe, sense the world (205). Each second in life ought to become consciously subject to experience as it is irreversibly ephemeral. In this sense, Carpentier’s notion of magical realism will help us characterize the aesthetic experience as a whole insofar as it entails “una revelación de la realidad, una iluminación inhabitual de las inadvertidas riquezas de la realidad, una ampliación de las escalas y categorías de la realidad percibidas con particular intensidad en virtud de una exaltación del espíritu que lo conduce a un modo de estado límite” (Carpentier, El reino 11). Aestheticism, says Garland, offers a complex series of human concerns like the interrogation of the responsibilities of subjectivity, the place of desire, objects and appearances in intimate levels of consciousness as well as other dilemmas (205).
Since the beginning, the aesthetic was taken as a subordinate space. We know that the father of Aesthetics, A. Baumgarten, saw it as the “sister” of logic or a feminine analogue of reason condemned to produce representations that somehow parallel reason’s proper (and manly) operations. Terry Eagleton affirms that the aesthetic was constructed in the image of a woman, inferior to man but with her own humble, necessary tasks to perform (16). Yet, with British empiricist thinkers like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, the aesthetic gained some “practical” power. These philosophers were skeptical of the impact of rational comprehension to move men and women to virtuous action so they understood the aesthetic as a medium to promote ethical ideology (Eagleton 40). In other words, the aesthetic achieved recognition by being a vehicle of internalization of authority through the education of people’s feelings and senses that could spontaneously translate into social practice. Of course, Osvaldo Sánchez’s aesthetic model is by no means based on promoting authoritative principles, but it rather suggests that many creative learning possibilities can unexpectedly emerge from developing an accommodating and receptive aesthetics.

Conceived as a subordinate field, the aesthetic must have had to increase its capacity of flexibility and mutability, so as to affect neighboring spheres of human experience. Terry Eagleton points out that Aesthetics, as opposed to the languages of art themselves, preserved a root in the realm of everyday experience while raising and elaborating itself as a natural and spontaneous expression to the status of a complex intellectual discipline (2). According to Eagleton, the aesthetic started to contaminate art with abstract and formal characteristics that had belonged only to the field of theory (2-8). Eagleton’s observation can be corroborated by Peter Bürger’s comment: “The works
in which the aesthetic offers itself as a special object of pleasure may well have been connected with the aura emanating from those that rule, but that does not change the fact that they not only made possible a certain kind of pleasure (the aesthetic) but contributed toward the creation of the sphere we call art” (39). With the constitution of aesthetics as an autonomous sphere of philosophical knowledge, the concept of art came into being, resulting in an artistic production that was divorced from social activities and also confronted them abstractly (Bürger 42). Eagleton argues that Aesthetics emerged “as the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought” (9). The aesthetic signified a creative turn to the sensuous body, an inscription of that body with a subtly oppressive law, a liberatory concern with concrete particularity, and a misleading form of universalism all together (Eagleton 9).

In this respect, we can argue that there indeed exists an intrinsic quality in the aesthetic that can generate flexible models of experience, whether subjective or objective. In Osvaldo Sánchez’s writerly art criticism, both of these realms (subjective and objective) converge in the production of a lived occurrence. But, in order to accurately assess the experiential dimension of Sánchez’s criticism, we shall analyze the significant contributions of subjective and objective experiential models that have attempted to open up to the mystery (and infinite resourceful options) of the unpredictable, regardless of its transcendental, ontological, artistic, or ordinary status.

Immanuel Kant offered the first relatively unbound structures of experience at a (subjective) transcendental level. Kant’s aesthetics recomposes the subjective realm as an
indeterminate pathway to freedom, which releases us from our eternal and schematized
dependence on knowledge. As Gilles Deleuze states, even if schematism can be seen as
an original act of the imagination, it only happens in relation to a concept determined by
the understanding, so without a concept of the understanding, the imagination does
something other than schematizing: it reflects the form of the object (61). In this regard,
Eagleton notes, “The subject, the founding principle of the whole enterprise, slips
through the net of representation and figures in its very uniqueness as no more than a
mute epiphany or pregnant silence” (72). For Kant, the aesthetic places the subject in a
privileged (transcendental) space in which it can observe the world and bring the system
of cognizable objects to presence in the first place. According to Eagleton, all cognition
of others in Kant’s aesthetics is frustrating, and so knowledge of human subjects is
impossible—not because they are devious, multiple, and opaque, but because it is simply
a mistake to think that the subject is the kind of thing that could ever possibly be known
(75). Kant’s structures suggest that even if the act of knowing produces satisfaction, there
is also pleasure in imagining how the unknowable (our journey to knowledge) might be
like. We will see a similar intention in Osvaldo Sánchez’s open model of experience
which is nourished by different spheres of knowledge, while it itself turns into a
multiplicity of learning paths.

In the aesthetic, we all have an opportunity to become “the experiencing subject”
who can contemplate, reflect on, and even receive an account of his place in the world.
These three moments (or components) of the aesthetic experience connect us with
Heidegger’s account of meditative thinking, an ontological structure of subjective
openness that has an operative function in our investigation about the heuristic force of
Sánchez’s art writing. In contrast to the calculative thinking—which is characterized by human methods of approaching and dealing with things in our terms for our advantage—, meditative thinking does not represent a world of objects but begins with an awareness of the field within which these objects are, an awareness of the scope rather than a recognition of the objects of ordinary understanding (Anderson 24). John M. Anderson confirms that “meditative thinking begins with an awareness of this kind, and so it starts with the content which is given to it, the field of awareness itself” (24). Meditative thinking as a fundamental property of human nature (the property of openness) does not involve what is ordinarily called an act of will, for people do not will to be open (Anderson 25). As Anderson points out, meditative thinking requires an annulling of the will, which has to be performed by means of a higher activity since man does not come to be open through indifference or neglect (25). In other words, there has to be a subjective human disposition to enter the space of openness which cannot be forced by an act of our will neither can it be a result of our apathy or unresponsiveness.

Heidegger uses three main concepts or states that offer a complex web of relations in his account of meditative thinking: releasement, in-dwelling, and that-which-regions. *Releasement*, which is a defining characteristic of man’s experience of openness, involves the idea of being released *from* while being released *to*. It can be expressed through an act of waiting that does not absorb our desires and needs, but a sense of not knowing exactly for what we wait (Anderson 22; Heidegger 72). As we will see in the third chapter, the heuristic aptitude of Sánchez’s aesthetics encompasses a subtle impartiality that has its origins in the idea of waiting for “anything.” According to Heidegger, waiting is the relation to *that-which-regions*, since waiting means “to release
oneself into the openness” of it (72). For Heidegger, *that-which-regions* surrounds us and reveals itself to us as the horizon –that is the possibility, the scope, the other- which generates the very nature of thinking (72-74). In *releasement*, there is a hidden steadfastness related to a resolve for truth that, when fully comprehended, is called *in-dwelling* (Anderson 26). *In-dwelling* resides in the fact that *releasement* becomes increasingly clearer about its inner nature; it is a behavior that collects itself into and remains the composure of *releasement* (Heidegger 81). Heidegger summarizes the active interconnectness of these three aspects of meditative thinking, saying: “The in-dwelling in releasement to that-which-regions would then be the real nature of spontaneity of thinking,” or a “going toward” (82-88).

One can detect a few slight connections between Heidegger’s ontological structures and Kant’s transcendental prototype and his estimation of the sublime, mainly in what relates to the capacity of having certain imaginative freedom through which we release ourselves *from* cognitive determinations *to* the realm of intuition. For Kant, imagination is a vehicle (a faculty, an opportunity) towards representing in intuition “another nature,” an object that is not itself present, which allows us to free ourselves from the determinations related to cognition (Banham, *Kant and the Ends* 48; *Kant’s Transcendental* 101; Kneller 52). Imagination becomes indispensable in connection with the human mental state, and one important outcome of Kant’s notion of imaginative working is a new consideration for the way in which imaginative freedom contributes to our attentiveness with regard to our own cognitive operations (Kneller 3). In the development of this process, there exists the idea of “a-priori sensibility” or somewhat of an immediate awareness of sensation (intuition) which is different from the cognitive
sense we build on in relation to an object (Banham, *Kant and the Ends* 18). At a subjective level, this awareness of sensation or realm of intuition does not operate like an “a priori” enforcing law but exists there only as an “a priori” sensibility (or taste) functioning as an equivalent of the horizon or *that-which-regions* developed by Heidegger. Of course, certain knowledge of relations independent from the representation of the object itself is also generated within the content of pure intuition in Kant, producing a judgment, an act that occupies a middle ground between understanding and reason, of aesthetic nature (Kant 4; Banham, *Kant and the Ends* 29). Even if the aesthetic judgment can not be considered as an open experiential proposal per se as the meditative thinking, we will see how there exists a *moving towards* a “sublime” instance, which evokes, at least, a simulacrum of a mental gateway through subjectivity.

The fundamental principles of the aesthetic judgment are explained in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, judgment is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal -the rule or law (18). As universal laws have their ground in our understanding, which prescribes them to something (an object, nature, etc.), particular empirical laws must be regarded according to a unity as if understanding had supplied them for the benefit of our cognitive faculties, so as to render possible a system of experience according to particular natural laws (Kant 19). Kant’s affirmation that judgment is equipped with an *a priori* principle for the possibility of nature, in a subjective respect, situates us, even if for a brief moment, within a place of convergence of imagination and reason. One of the main concepts developed by Kant is the idea of pleasure (or displeasure), which he calls “the subjective side of a representation incapable of becoming an element of cognition” (29). As pleasure connects with the mere
apprehension of the form of an object of intuition, the representation is referable only to the subject (Kant 30). It is through the aesthetic judgment that the task of deciding the conformity of a thing (in its form) to our cognitive faculties takes place, as a question of taste—which is the feeling that arises apart from any interest (Kant 35, 50).

The aesthetic judgment is the conceptual platform in which the sublime experience appears. The sublime refers us to the representation of limitlessness, greatness, an arrangement of an indeterminate concept of reason. Kant describes the sublime as a feeling of pleasure which only arises indirectly caused by the idea of a momentary check to the vital forces followed by a powerful emotional discharge in the realm of the imagination (91). The sublime cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which may be called into the mind thanks to the presentation of their very own irrepresentability (Kant 92). Notice that Kant calls our attention to the fact that these ideas exist independently from representation, which suggests that they somehow abstract (or escape) from the aesthetic judgment into an experiential or in this sense “ontological” dimension. However, Kant is not interested in the “ontological” status of the irrepresentable ideas that generate sublimity, but in the transcendental measurement of the experience. Yet, as Frances Ferguson emphasizes, although these transcendental episodes are seen in the aesthetic as external to individuals, being caused by an effect similar to a higher will or force, the imagination insinuates that “they are only incidentally external,” being analogues to internal (subjective) impressional states (6).

In this sense, the inference of the sublime requires an attitude of mind, a mental movement combined with the estimate of the object that has to be subjectively final since
the sublime pleases. According to Kant, the movement has to be referred through the imagination to the faculty of cognition or to that of desire, apart from any end or interest (94). The sublime is a greatness comparable to itself alone –that is in comparison with which everything else is small-, and it has to be found in our ideas. According to Kant, in its estimate of a thing as sublime, imagination appeals to reason so as to bring out its subjective accord with rational ideas in hopes of inducing a temper of mind conformable to the state that emerges when feeling has been influenced by definite (practical) ideas (104). Banham corroborates that the movement produced by the sublime “relates the imagination’s presentations to either the understanding or reason, although always (given that the feeling of the sublime is a feeling about ideas) through a direct relation to the power of reason” (Kant and the Ends 81).

True sublimity only happens within the mind of the judging subject, after receiving a perceptual motivation. If the experience of the sublime does not directly depend on the object of perception, then any objects –even the most ordinary ones- can serve as a potential stimulus for the sublime movement of the mind. For as Kant points out in the contemplation of the object, the mind abandons itself to the imagination, finding itself elevated in the exploration of its unreachable scope (104-105). Kant highlights that the proper mental mood for sublimity postulates the mind’s susceptibility for ideas, so it implies an attractive reference to our way of thinking that gives the intellectual side of our nature and the ideas of reason supremacy over sensibility (115-127). Following Kant, one can argue that in the process of entering sublimity, thanks to the free accord of his faculties, the experiencing being goes through a brief discovery that is both pleasurable and painful as it involves an intuited realization of the infinite and
unreachable proportions of the mental space, that which has been interpreted as a “higher entity” and becomes a subjective liberating force, for it allows us to move away, if at least for a moment, from our attachment to the physicality of the sensible world.

As Kant reaffirms, the idea of the impossibility of representing the sublime in the sensible world provides our imagination with an accentuated feeling of boundlessness which can be read or inferred as a picture of the infinite, a negative presentation that expands the soul (Kant 127). In this regard, Kant emphasizes:

The feeling of the sublime constitutes a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and an awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain these is for us a law. (106)

Banham notices, “The impotence of the imagination to present intuitions in accord with the demands of reason arouses the mind to the feeling of its own sublimity given that it can transcend any determination of sense with its necessary demand for an affinity” (Kant and the Ends 85).

Even though Heidegger seems to take thought to a pre-reason stage while Kant speaks of the irrepresentability of ideas of reason (that is, the impossibility of representing the immensity of the process of thinking), there is certain resemblance between their models. Both experiences require a special predisposition or attitude of the mind, which cannot be forced by means of a determined methodology. As Frances Ferguson highlights, “The experience of the sublime pleasure is seen as transcendental because of its not needing to be taught and because of the way in which the construction of a plan to approach that learning is itself unimaginable” (4). The feeling of the supersensible faculty in the Kantian sublime which occurs as a sudden awakening or
enlightenment refers to an evoked “disposition of the soul” (Kant 97-98), bringing up with it a sense of duty. The idea of the evoked disposition of the soul in Kant might associate with the sense of “steadfastness” or commitment to a resolve for truth in Heidegger. While in Heidegger’s ontological structure of thinking there is the indication that the property of openness does not emerge out of an act of one’s will, neither is it a sequel from indifference or neglect. The question of the annulling of the will implies a secret staying/waiting/surrendering that connects to the idea of contemplation. Kant and Heidegger’s structures are like living happenings of the mind that operate as vehicles to the pleasure of knowledge.4

In his introduction to Allan Kaprow’s *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelly referred to the fact that “even the capacity to have an aesthetic experience had been estheticized, becoming the purview of experts” (xiii). Kelley’s statement has to do with the “idealization” of aesthetic experience by means of transferring it to “certain classes of culturally sanctioned objects and events,” which are moved away from the flows of common life “according to the boundaries of taste, professional expertise, and the conventions of presentation and display” (xii). In other words, Kelley seems to call our attention to the restrictions entailed when considering art as the exclusive site/incentive of aesthetic experience.

While his argument presents a discouraging view on the aesthetic, it also makes us wonder about the many (flexible, renewable, and open) possibilities aesthetics can offer. As we have seen, the aesthetic can metamorphose into authentic experiential exchanges like the Kantian sublime and the ontological structures of Heidegger, which

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4 I am referring to the kind of knowledge that cannot be totally apprehended, although it can be imagined or intuited, inspiring us to a constant search.
take place at the subjective level. Even if these mental experiences have been aestheticized, becoming the purview of experts, their true nature is in fact very far from the aestheticization processes that rein them in, for they are happenings of the mind constantly pointing to the horizon, the unknowable, the enigma. In this sense, the aesthetic can be considered as a disinterested journey (or play) through the mystery of knowledge, feelings, perceptions and sensations, where receptive models of experience can emerge.

According to Kelley, Allan Kaprow’s model of operation in arts dealt with the shapes, thresholds and durations of experience itself that provided the frames in which the meanings of life were intensified and interpreted (xiv). Kaprow considered these frames as “metaphors of interactivity” that served for a participatory art inserted within everyday experience in the process of acquisition of consciousness, knowledge and meaning (Kelley xiv-xv). For him, the aesthetic dimensions of common experience could be found beyond the media of art and in the materials of everyday life, the places of human exchanges, and the shared moral environment where every single action, whether conscious or incidental, had significance (Kelley xx).

Not surprisingly, Kaprow’s art writing is filled with a long list of actions combined with poetic insights and intuitive constructions that give a pleasing spontaneity to his work. In his essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” included in the volume Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, he wrote: “I am convinced that to grasp a Pollock’s impact properly, we must be acrobats, constantly shuttling between an identification with the hands and body that flung the paint and stood ‘in’ the canvas and submission to the objective markings, allowing them to entangle and assault us” (Kaprow 5). Kaprow’s
suggestion of his constant oscillation, as well as of the action of submitting to the secrets of the artwork links with Heidegger’s structure of releasement in which an effortless infiltration of significance occurs. In fact, we can say that Kaprow’s art writing and interventions are founded upon the principle of openness. He believed that by accepting the usefulness of any subject matter or event that may naturally happen in time and space, like the sound of a bird or the flight of a butterfly, models for more imaginative forms, contents, and meanings could appear.

These creative forces not only prepared the ground for Kaprow to develop his art writing “as an empiricist and expressionist, scientist and prophet, academic and visionary, statistician and storyteller” but they also generated the rhythms of his Happenings, an invisible participatory art indistinguishable from the currents of life (Kelley xxi). Kaprow’s poetic definition of Happenings appeared in an article from 1961⁵:

Happening is not a commodity but a brief event, from the standpoint of any publicity it may receive; it may become a state of mind. It may become like the sea monsters of the past or the flying saucers of yesterday. I shouldn’t really mind, for as the new myth grows on its own, without reference to anything in particular, the artist may achieve a beautiful privacy, famed for something purely imaginary while free to explore something nobody will notice. (Kaprow, “The Happenings” 59-60)

Notice that Kaprow defines the Happenings as a state of mind that lets the artist explore something that nobody will see, which symbolically alludes to Kant and Heidegger’s subjective structurations. Kaprow also makes a slight reference to the limitless geography of the imagination, where both time and space unreservedly disperse, saying that the Happenings can become like the sea monsters of the past or the flying saucers of yesterday.

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⁵ In his 1966- essay “The Happenings are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!” published in Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life, Kaprow clarifies that this passage is taken from an article written in 1961.
For Kaprow, “Happenings are the one art activity that can escape the inevitable death-by-publicity to which all other art is condemned, because, designed for a brief life, they can never be overexposed; they are dead, quite literally, every time they happen” (“The Happenings” 59). He discovered that happenings, in the 1960s, offered a freedom from the strictures of publicity and the institutionalization of art. They could take place as objective occurrences dispersed over different areas, and their materials were borrowed from anywhere. Even though happenings themselves, like performance after them, became institutionalized and subject to publicity, they were originally conceived as evanescent experiential models.

Infused with the passing spirit of the Happenings, Kaprow’s texts show certain independence from the conventional context of art criticism, releasing the energy of real life, like Osvaldo Sánchez’s work does. He once referred to the idea that “The dream of the return to innocence has been part of history for a long time (...) but the innocence of an adult is always the product of a struggle” (Kaprow, “Experimental” 72). Here Kaprow makes an insinuating critical statement, without the need for framing his words within the context of art criticism as such. He might be calling for either a return to childhood or the detachment from full-fledged art theories. In any case, one senses an implicit invitation for the readers to freely contextualize his words, according to their own sets of references, whether artistic, theoretical, moral, psychological, personal, historical, or of other kinds.

Kaprow also suggests the sublimity of innocence as an object of the mind: “It is an intellectual invention, which we are forever in danger of losing as soon as we seem to attain it” (“Experimental” 72). The use of words like danger, losing, forever, and
invention facilitates the transition to (or conformation of) an emotional state that generates an aesthetic experience in which the happenings of the mind and the happenings of life generously converge. Kaprow’s art criticism serves as a participatory game in which the reader discovers, experiments with, and even produces creative devices applicable to his experience of art and life. Osvaldo Sánchez uses a similar procedure for his aesthetic art writing, allowing us to meaningfully contemplate ourselves in the very acts of thinking, living, blending, passing through knowledge, and evaporating into something else.

These experiences arise when there is an (un)willing disinterest for controlling or scheming the object of perception. Ironically, in the very process of vanishing we also free ourselves from preconditioned norms that make us dependent on the object and become aware of the boundless creative space that appears in front of us. A discreet feeling of joy that emerges out of this practice reconnects us with Kant and Heidegger’s subjective positions. Kant, for instance, makes reference to a passive pleasure that enters into the mind through sense called the pleasure of enjoyment or simply a pure disinterested delight which appears in the judgment of taste. Kant’s definition of taste involves a similar view: “Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight apart from any interest” (50).

The philosopher highlights that since this sort of delight is not based on any inclination of the Subject (who feels free to experience aesthetically), he can find no predetermined conditions as reasons for his delight, except for subjective ones (Kant 50). Heidegger, on the other hand, uses vivid descriptions of how the feeling of delight relates to the actions of waiting and resting in that do not imply a kind of passivity but are
sequels instead from a higher activity. He also provides an equivalent idea when recounting our relation with respect to technological devices in which we have the freedom to either accept them or not. Heidegger says, “Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher” (54).

In his book *Una poética de la despreocupación: modernidad e identidad en cuatro poetas latinoamericanos*, the scholar Rafael Hernández Rodríguez presents a useful study that takes into consideration how an intentionally-designed plan of disinterest transforms into a point of departure for an imaginative literary enterprise. Hernández Rodríguez examines the poetry written by Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Pellicer, Xavier Villaurrutia and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, discovering in it an objective attitude of conscious disinterest with respect to competing for a space within canonized literary systems, which gives these poets, in turn, a space of freedom where their own intimate meditations begin. Hernández Rodríguez affirms:

> En este sentido es importante notar que dicha conciencia sólo se da cuando el poeta opta por la experiencia mínima, cotidiana, antigloriosa de cada día, la cual se manifiesta más evidentemente en un deseo de disolución en el universo que se descubre en el hecho sencillísimo de desaparecer calladamente, sin que importe. (Hernández Rodríguez 16-17)

The idea of vanishing into something greater than ourselves causes us to think for a moment of the transcendental journey towards the Kantian sublime or Heidegger’s ontological Being, at a subjective level. But, here the emphasis is not on the transcendental or ontological dimensions of the human faculties (like imagination and thinking) but rather on a natural, objective and ordinary decision to evaporate, to make
ourselves disappear into the universe, as if nothing had happened. For the vanishing poets, like in Kaprow’s Happenings, it is in this quiet and voluntary act of disappearance in everyday life where something extraordinary can happen.

The action of evaporating ourselves into the universe originates other resourceful and liberating ways of contemplation. In this regard, Hernández Rodríguez notices that “la despreocupación puede ser vista como una estrategia de desmantelación cultural, una opción del poeta, no fatalismo; una despreocupación por el juego de poder que implica la visión de las tradiciones literarias en términos de mayores y menores, canónicas y no canónicas (…); hacerse a un lado” (24). So, here a humble attitude of submission and subordination to a greater entity—an essential feature of the aesthetic—allows the poet to expand his vision through the exploration of other imaginative spaces. Of course, the greater entity here is none other than life itself. The experiential design proposed by the vanishing poets recalls the functioning of Heidegger’s open structure of meditative thinking. According to Hernández Rodríguez, thanks to their immersion in the quotidian aspects of life, the vanishing poets have the chance to “redescubrir el sentido y el sonido de las palabras, y también su color y su material (…); abrirlse, dispersarse (…); abandonar el bagaje cultural y dejarse llevar; huir en busca de otras posibilidades” (110-112).

Hernández Rodríguez’s words on the work of the vanishing poets recall Kaprow’s emotive confessions on the un-art:

But I took a cue from stories of monastic practices in which dissatisfied persons, seeking the proverbial meaning of life, give up the real world and its temptations for a presumed spiritual, and better, one. Could this be done in art without physically going into a monk’s cell for life? I thought it could and called it ‘un-arting.’ Essentially this was accomplished by taking the art out of art, which in practical terms meant discarding art’s characteristics (…) Leaving art is the art. But you must have it to leave it.
I define it as that act or thought whose identity as art must forever remain unknown. (Kaprow, Preface xxix)

Kaprow’s Happenings as manifestations of the un-art reveal a deliberate willingness to escape from the institution “art,” and blend within (or evaporate into) life, that which is artless or in this sense ordinary. A parallel impulse emerges out of the work of the vanishing poets that discloses their voluntary disposition to disappear and an intentional disinterest with respect to occupying a place within the specialized literature. In both cases, as it happens in Sánchez’s art writing, the idea of searching for the minimal and simple aspects of our existences generates a pleasure of enjoyment.

So, one can argue that a true, vital (and even critical) model of aesthetic experience is released insofar as it willingly dissolves into, or exchange with, other processes or fields, which guarantees its constant check and transformation. Kaprow’s renewable experiential design is divided into situations, operations, structures, feedback and learning which work in friendly accord with one another, as the human faculties do in Kant’s aesthetic judgment, or Heidegger’s ontological stages in his account of meditative thinking. Of course, Kaprow’s model has an operative and visible “objectivity” in the sensorial world, in contrast to Kant and Heidegger’s happenings of the mind, although Heidegger does refer, in other occasions, to the ordinary/objective quality of beings, that what he calls the “thingly aspect” of the work of art or the “thingness of things.” Kaprow’s model of experience concentrates in revealing the extraordinary effects of the ordinary, dissolving itself in the current events of everyday life. Jeff Kelley notices that Kaprow’s prototype involves environments and occurrences, systems of nature and human affairs, situations that recirculate with the possibility of change -such as eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book- and processes
like philosophical inquiry, sensitivity training, and educational demonstrations that constitute his own measure of experience (xvi). As expected, his experiential model supplies inexhaustible resources for the Happenings and his art writing.

In an article from 1971 called “The Education of the Un-Artist, Part I,” Kaprow writes the following:

Art. There’s the catch. At this stage of consciousness, the sociology of Culture emerges as an in-group ‘dumb-show.’ Its sole audience is a roster of the creative and performing professions watching itself, as if in a mirror, enact a struggle between self-appointed priests and a cadre of self-appointed commandos, jokers, guttersnipes, and triple agents who seem to be attempting to destroy the priests’ church. But, everybody knows how it all ends: in church, of course, with the whole club bowing their heads and muttering prayers. They pray for themselves and for their religion. (103)

Kaprow uses allegorical language to compare the institution of art with a church that exercises authority when there should be none. His phrases fill that subjective space of secret nearness given to actions, places, and characters, in our daily life. It is important to notice that he uses words like catch, sociology, struggle, jokers, triple agents and religion which may not be considered as lyrical remarks per se, yet they do produce a lively though stinging effect that becomes eventually poetic.

In this sense, his writing parallels that of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Does Kaprow whisper or shout? Is he narrating a detective story, a reproducible image of the mind, or a catastrophic prophecy? Jeff Kelley points out that in Kaprow’s writing, his eye evolves from empiricist to witness, his memory from historian to storyteller, his mind from intelligence to wisdom, and his heart from biblical surges of passion to passages of Zen-like contemplation (xxv). According to Calvino, the storyteller puts together phrases and images “to the point at which something not yet said, something as yet only darkly felt by presentiment, suddenly appears” (The Uses 18). Kaprow’s art writing, like
Sánchez’s, gains meaning as a lived experience, an occurrence that is substantially valuable as it is simple: like many things in life are, like a trace in the snow.

In his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger refers to the surrealists’ attempt to bring the dimension of life into the aesthetic. In his prologue to Bürger’s volume, Jochen Schulte-Sasse affirms that Bürger sees an intensive experience in the concept of intoxication, which is crucial to understanding the surrealist style that seeks to regain the experiential element of the aesthetic when society tends to eliminate the possibility of it (xliii). But, Bürger seems to have reduced the lived-experience potential of the aesthetic developed by the surrealists to the act of acquiring mere “consciousness” about their technical/conceptual material and its inherent aptitude for effect (Schulte-Sasse xiii). For Bürger, the experiential dimension of surrealist aesthetics materializes only in this “conscious,” practical, and conceptual revelation of artistic means. That is, in the act of demonstrating “artistically” that art had become detached from life praxis through institutionalization and a process of aestheticization. In Bürger’s view, the surrealist aesthetics gained an experiential dimension due to the very fact that art had been previously institutionalized, which allowed the creators to see that the artistic sphere was not relevant to life anymore. In this regard, he says, “only after art has detached from everything that is the praxis of life can the progressive detachment of art from real life contexts and the crystallization of the aesthetic experience be seen” (Bürger 23).

According to Schulte-Sasse, Bürger’s analysis diminishes the experiential impact of surrealist works. He highlights:

The definition of experience as worked-through event proceeds from a premise leading back to Adorno, and the belief that the subject in mass society is entirely determined by the conditioning social context, which prevents Bürger from focusing on the discrepancies between sensuous-
material experiences and general interpretation patterns that create contradictions and tensions of the psyche as ruptures in the union of subject and society. (Schulte- Sasse xlv)

Bürger’s comprehension of the surrealist concept of experience has to do with immediacy and intensity, so he does not consider it a socially relevant sort of experience (Schulte-Sasse xlv). In this sense, Schulte-Sasse prefers Benjamin’s way of interpreting the surrealist practice which suggests that “the loosening of the self by intoxication is the living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication” (xlv).

However, I would like to mention a good moment in Bürger’s account. Bürger argues that the citizen who had been reduced to a partial function (means-ends rationality) in everyday life found his place as a “human being” in Aestheticism (48), which again suggests, even if at the cost of institutionalization, the latent possibilities of the aesthetic as a life-like force, in a spiritual sense. It looks as if the aesthetic became an empirical vehicle for people to be released from the fixed patterns of their everyday lives to another dimension of subjective fulfillment. In this sense, Bürger calls our attention to the fact that even if the surrealists, like the rest of the avant-gardistes, rejected the institutionalization of the aesthetic, they did adopt an important principle of Aestheticism that had to do with the negation of means-ends rationality, in carrying out their conceptual enterprise of embracing the sublation of art in the praxis of life (49-51).

There is a fluid releasement (openness) to impressions and elements of the unpredictable in these occurrences, as the art of the surrealists uncovered. Bürger refers to the idea that the surrealist artists turned their attention to those phenomena that were not organized in society, according to the principle of means-ends rationality and so, the
discovery of the marvelous in the everyday constituted an enrichment of the experiential possibilities of man (65). Kaprow himself must have been very fond of surrealism as an *attitude* insofar as it implied a renunciation to see art as a predetermined entity and the only space for aesthetic experience. As Bürger points out, the surrealis.ts attempted to rescue the extraordinary of life, without wanting to control it but in the predisposition to see in chance a realistic meaning (66).

Again the inspection/contemplation of meaning, whether elusive or not, takes part in the common experience, so it can be considered an action, a happening of life. With regard to this idea, Bürger states the following:

> The positing of meaning is always the achievement of an individual and groups; there is no such thing as a meaning that exists independent of a human communications nexus. For the surrealists, meaning is contained in the chance constellations of objects and events that they take note of as an ‘objective chance.’ That such meaning cannot be specified does not change the Surrealists’ expectation that it might be encountered in the real world. (66)

Kaprow’s idea of regaining our innocence and the dissolution of art into a practical game adapts very well to the playful surrealist spirit, which points to life as an unexpected site of aesthetic experience. There is a sequel of the surrealist humor in Sánchez’s art writing as well, a blending of words with a lively poetic quality, envisaging perhaps through the aesthetic a chance reconciliation between art criticism and the work of art.
Chapter 3: An Aesthetics of Reconciliation in Osvaldo Sánchez’s Art Criticism

One can argue that the nature of a critical piece is influenced by the character of art, even if in partial ways. Since art is an entity in permanent mutation, it is hard to believe that the task of writing about art would not open up to experience, to exchange different verbal combinations and strategies of seeing. As we learned from our exploration of writerly art criticisms presented in the first chapter of this thesis, the aesthetic renders a great number of interpretations, understandings and applications, which suggests that it has indeed the potential to be “open.” Later, in chapter 2, we discussed subjective models of “transcendental” (Kant) and “ontological” (Heidegger) features as well as objective prototypes of “artistic” (surrealists) and “ordinary” (Kaprow, the vanishing poets) character. All these proposals show us how many experiential possibilities/exchanges there are in producing free/open structures of knowledge. Now we can move onto our discussion of Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism that provides an open and reconciliatory aesthetic model revealing the heuristic force both of the art work and of his own writing.

Osvaldo Sánchez understands the project of writing about art as a lived event. In contrast to Carroll, who limits art criticism to contextualization, elucidation, analysis, interpretation, and/or rational evaluation of the artwork, Sánchez offers a spontaneous critical approach that gives us an opportunity to have/engage in an intense aesthetic experience when reading his texts. For him, art criticism becomes a living journey, a poetic happening, a passing through fields which in an amicable way accommodate to each other so as to avoid being depressingly attached to their stationary determinations, interpretations and formalisms. In this sense, we may say that Sánchez’s art criticism
operates as a unique, flexible, and pleasurable learning project, like the object of reason was for Hegel, fulfilling the critical tasks in creative ways. Yet, the aesthetic in Sánchez emerges not by making the object of perception undergo an aestheticization process, as happens in the work of many other writerly art critics. In fact, Sánchez himself fears the limitations, imperfections, and weaknesses involved when dealing with aestheticized points of view. In Sánchez’s art criticism, the aesthetic surfaces thanks to a spontaneous reconciliation of verbal, visual and mental resources which effortlessly enlarge the viewer’s experience of the work of art.

In Sánchez’s art criticism there is, like in Heidegger’s ontological structures, “a releasement toward things” and “openness to the mystery.” Through flexible arrangements of forms, contents and practices, Sánchez’s model invites us to approach art criticism –a discipline that has grown austerely academic- from new, revelatory, and motivating points of view. In this respect, Sánchez’s criticism has indeed an intrinsic valuable significance at the experiential level, which sets it apart from other writerly aesthetics, for within Sánchez’s model some sort of healing power is released: it naturally encourages us to appreciate art criticism as an unprejudiced and pleasurable journey. To some extent, Sánchez’s aesthetics links with the disinterested attitude of the vanishing poets, bringing in fresh content to the artwork’s subject matter. Hernández Rodríguez has highlighted, “la despreocupación implica una dis-tensión (…) que no es otra cosa que el descubrimiento de una nueva zona de la experiencia, en la que ya no valen las medidas habituales” (16).

Like in Kant and Heidegger, the aesthetic experience in Sánchez requires for the arrangement of a mental predisposition which by no means can be forced. We notice that
there is a reconciliatory tendency in Sánchez’s aesthetics, with a great dose of lightness, mobility and ease, as Calvino would say. In his essay “Reading a Wave,” Calvino affirms, “For contemplation you need the right temperament, the right mood, and the right combination of exterior circumstances” (135). John M. Anderson points out that Heidegger urged his hearers and readers toward a kind of transmutation of themselves and the acknowledgement of man’s temporal existence by transcending to Being (13-23). Transmutation implies the idea of a journey, an experience of movement, which happens to be originated within structures that constitute the horizons of human awareness (Anderson 17). Sánchez also seems to exhort his readers toward the conversion of themselves, not by progressing to Being as Heidegger does but by becoming a simple passenger in the journey. For Sánchez, as for the vanishing poets, “la esencia de todos los misterios, incluso del misterio artístico, que lleva a la sabiduría, es cotidiana” (Hernández Rodríguez 218).

Sánchez contemplates the artwork (deeply and quietly) from different angles, combining it with a collection of subjects and instances associated with personal readings, obsessions and occurrences of everyday life that connect to the readers in an intimate way and produce a secret sense of satisfaction. Sánchez reacts eloquently to the work of Alfonso Mena:

¿Cómo llevar a su último ancladero la visión del acontecimiento? ¿Cómo desmantelar el espectáculo glorioso de una realidad y de un orden, convocando sus límites; hasta hacer de esa aniquilación un territorio posible? Limbos visuales rastreados en el humo del incendio o en la bruma del naufragio (...) Una visión inaudita ha de ser acarreada hacia su propia destrucción. Pintar así, es el proceso de deconstruir, de transportar cada forma, cada canon, cada borde, hasta su último ancladero. (“La obra” 200)
By evading a schematized use of frameworks and dogmatic assumptions with respect to theory, evaluation, and other verbal discourses, Sánchez’s critical model seems an amenable reservoir that preserves the natural flow of the viewer’s experience. The rhythmical spontaneity of his writing evokes Calvino’s words: “Is this perhaps the real result that Mr. Palomar is about to achieve? To make the waves run in the opposite direction, to overturn time, to perceive the true substance of the world beyond sensory and mental habits?” (“Reading” 136). While many critics scrutinize and/or aestheticize the art object for the sake of their own methodological conjectures, Sánchez’s criticism advocates for the openness of representational spaces that cannot be anticipated or calculated beforehand, for they exist insofar as they allow multiple contents to emerge through actions, objects and states that may be of an elusive, undefined, or even ordinary nature.

In this sense, his approach to art (that is the art object as such) is never planned out ahead of time neither does it have to be predictable. With many successful interventions in the fields of poetry and script-writing earlier in his career, Sánchez chooses to put aside the authoritative attitude (mask) of the critic, agreeing to play the role of the regular, humble and simple spectator, when coming into contact with the art piece. As in the case of the vanishing poets, one can say that this is a fruitful strategy for him to move away from the “critical,” very often limited, position so as to get permeated with the most furtive meanings of the artwork, which later are lyrically conveyed within his writing. With regard to the work of Alfonso Mena, Sánchez says:

Las superficies están sobrepuestas a manera de bolsas amnióticas, membranosas y traslúcidas, como una materia híbrida que contamina sus humedades hacia la profundidad del cuadro. No hay un dato que no sea ese cloning, apenas animado. Son formas blandas o duras, en devenir,
Sánchez makes the viewer/reader participate in the visualization of lightness through his descriptions of imprecise pictorial surfaces that recall organic/mutable forms floating in the air. In addition, his words allow us to associate the work of Mena with the biomorphic (sometimes translucent) installations of the influential Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto. Through a lightening of language, Calvino argues, meaning is conveyed by means of “a verbal texture that seems weightless, until the meaning itself takes on the same rarefied consistency” (Six Memos 16). Sánchez’s words appear to refer not merely to the pictorial motifs but also to the various forms and textures of our senses and emotions which regenerate unconditionally through operations of human exchanges. His language gives a texture, particularly, to the experience of apprehending things. In his Laocoôn, Lessing affirms that our senses perform a variety of operations with such a rapidity that they look like one single move, and “this rapidity is absolutely necessary if we are to receive an impression of the whole, which is nothing more than the result of the conceptions of the parts and of their combination” (86). Can art still be considered something that impresses us? Through Sánchez’s eyes and writing, it can. In fact, Sánchez’s criticism produces the effect of an artistic lived event itself, enabling an encounter with the thingness of things – thingness expressed in his figurative language.

The aesthetic in Sánchez’s art criticism surfaces in an organic, detached, or in this sense, neutral way. That is, as an experience-in-process. Hence, one can argue that his critical model supports an open configuration resembling the functioning of Kaprow’s “metaphors of interactivity,” which provide the frames where the meanings of life are
measured and interpreted. Instead of using the term “metaphors of interactivity,” Sánchez speaks of a heuristic methodology that serves to have an estimation of what produces experience. As did Kaprow through the Happenings, Sánchez has made a good use of the heuristic model through his curatorial projects involving artists who intervene in public spaces by producing surprise. These artistic events blend organically with the currents of life, taking unexpected turns. Osvaldo Sánchez highlights:

La relación entre heurística y dominio público, queda sugerida por el propio carácter de sistema complejo que subyace en la naturaleza de ‘lo público.’ Es decir: una trama constituida por elementos disímiles, desconocidos unos de otros, altamente interrelacionados, con un desempeño temporal, sin acuerdos previos de comportamiento grupal, con dinámicas de subsistemas particulares en roce. El dominio público implica intervenir en esas condiciones. (“Bypass” 2)

For Sánchez, an occurrence of any sort articulates its very own logic of existence, in which the final product is not as important as the discovery of all the elements that shape it. In this respect, the experience (whether art criticism or a public artistic intervention) constitutes a revelation of itself as well as of those (extra)ordinary spaces and creative networks of motivations that are commonly hidden or ignored. Indeed, Sánchez seems to have inherited the good-humored surrealist spirit. According to him, one of the most important features of the artistic consists of its ability to generate instances that are as rich as they are intrinsically volatile, irregular and impulsive (Sánchez, “Señuelos” 346-347). So, his curatorial projects have been intended “not as representations or parodies but to produce real experiences” (Sánchez, “Señuelos” 348). He emphasizes that “por lo general este tipo de piezas comisionadas ‘para la ciudad’ funcionan como inserciones estéticas o como desplegados ideológicos en el cubo de
basura del escenario urbano” (Sánchez, “Bypass” 3). In this regard, the element of surprise plays an important role in the progress of the action.

The heuristic prototype aesthetically illuminates those (in)visible connections, simple modes of behavior, and streams of images which silently arise and accommodate by themselves within any circumstance (Sánchez, “Señuelos” 347). Sánchez’s view of heuristics implies the rejection of any intellectual expectation of what is considered successful, valuable or significant in ordinary standards while inciting us to understand the question of value from another perspective, that is by focusing on our human capacity to give and find extra-ordinary revelations of meaning in simple operations and momentary actions that sometimes do not even have a defined perceptual dimension (Sánchez, “Señuelos” 347).

Here the subject dissolves into the other, the unexpected, the minimal, the spiritual dimension of our simplest actions, the unstable zones, the linguistic traps that are indispensable components of the human experience. In a fashion similar to Kaprow, Sánchez explores the meanings of life which are grounded in the common events, in our daily routines. As we may infer, the heuristic model is not concerned with providing any concluding pattern or design of experience, for its very object of desire, which is experience itself constantly changes. In this sense, we can say that one of the intrinsic values of the heuristic model consists of capturing and preserving experience, like Releasement contains an In-dwelling in Heidegger’s account, as well as of fulfilling its very own neutral purpose –that is to measure, study, and attempt to describe what sorts of arrangements and reactions those experiences propose. Sánchez refers to the public projection of images with a heuristic purpose as follows: “no es presentación de un
producto final, sino que como parte de un proceso, abre el momento performático a una experiencia contextuada, en tiempo real, de dominio público” (“Bypass” 4).

The production of a true experience constitutes a focus of attraction in Sánchez’s art writing. His criticism uses the space of the aesthetic to detach from the inflexible and enclosed critical approaches that have been canonized over the years, while passing through them, say, as a free particle. Sánchez intervenes, mediates in art history, theory, everyday life and other spheres that easily reconcile with each other within his aesthetic text, opening up new venues of the artwork and the art writing. Most of all, Sánchez intervenes in the minds of the readers through a spontaneous art criticism that can be understood as an act of an unprompted poetic thinking and behaving. In this sense, Sánchez (the critic) transforms into a cautious yet effective interventionist. I say “cautious interventionist,” for Sánchez is not really interested in the aestheticization of heuristics per se but in the infinite, exchangeable, and unsteady possibilities and processes of experience heuristics can offer, through interactivity and acquisition of consciousness. As Sánchez highlights, there has to be “una renuncia a la representación como discurso de compromiso y un enfoque máximo en aquellos factores y sujetos relacionados con el proceso de producción de la experiencia” (“Señuelos” 346).

In the article “Eugenia Vargas: The Body as Memory,” Sánchez refers to Vargas’s photographic installations as follows: “These are large-format color photographs whose images are made up of photos, of objects, of little spaces; brief stories; a personal grammar assembled from old fragments, like cloudy palimpsests newly restored” (44). Sánchez infuses a soft, vulnerable, and almost vanishing sense into his writing, letting the reader experience Vargas’s work freely through his own
imagination—that is as a dispersed collection of images generated by objects, spaces and stories of whatever nature that seem subject to convene and spread out simultaneously under a larger framework. As Davenport says, “True imagination makes up nothing; it is a way of seeing the world (…) There is the world to be seen, with its hidden harmony, and there is the poet (or painter, or composer) to perform the magic whereby we can posses the artist’s vision” (193). Not only poets, painters, or composers but also art critics like Sánchez can invite us to see the world from multiple, aesthetic angles of vision, calling our attention to what many people mira but no ve everyday.

One can say that through the aesthetic, Osvaldo Sánchez quietly refrains from perpetuating the dogmatism of art criticism, as the vanishing poets “negate to accept the inflexibility of literary systems” (Hernández Rodríguez 54). Our experience of Alfonso Mena’s body of work expands into an intuited dimension:

Cuadrículas, rayas, esferas, cubos…. ahogados en un ordenamiento catastrófico y sutil de planos, calidades táctiles y temperaturas disímiles, conforman la arqueología de una visión imposible. No parece quedar nada en esta fugacidad arbitraria. Sólo sombras que manchan la extensión de la mirada, trágicas e inasibles, como nubes de fin de siglo. (Sánchez, “Nubes” n. pag.)

By not caring to follow any schematized critical patterns, Sánchez’s art writing relies on both subjective and objective realms in searching for an experiential dimension through his “open” model, as Kant, Heidegger, the surrealists, and Kaprow attempted to do by means of their transcendental, ontological, artistic, and un-artistic indeterminate structures, respectively. Sánchez presents a flowing grouping of pictorial elements (shades, stains, planes, tragic temperatures, and floating clouds) which happen to generate their own intimate modes of (dis)organization. There is a vindication of the
aesthetic as a space or a model or a tool where the sounds, meanings, and intensities of
the words can come forward and evolve as though they were living organisms.

Sánchez writes about the Mexican exhibition *Punto de partida*:

Hoy esas viejas etiquetas de identidad ya no sirven como plataforma estética, no hacen sino camuflar una aculturación forzada, una carrera insustentable. El propio título de esta muestra pareciera estar amenazado por un tipo de desplazamiento dentro de las coordenadas de esa vieja geografía de intercambios. Punto de partida. Generalmente este tipo de direccionalidad metaforiza sobre alguna progresión. Una progresión –ah, el desarrollo- entendida como la oportunidad de negociar todo el pasado a cambio de un poco de futuro: el sacrificio de contemporaneizar. (22-23)

Sánchez’s art criticism is nourished by historical, poetic, philosophical, and literary domains as well as from the irregular rhythms of simple motivations, becoming not a prescriptive formula that evaluates, theorizes, elucidates, interprets, classifies or analyzes aesthetically an art object or, in this sense, an object of perception. Instead, his critical writing transforms into an enlightened, revelatory experience, a moment of absolute spirit in the Hegelian sense, a learning process, an enjoyable journey in which the uneven, the random, and the humorous, also fit.

One can argue that by means of accommodating itself to an open structure of meaning, say an in-progress learning process, Sánchez’s art criticism shows us (readers) the availability of the object of perception. That is, it can truly assist in our comprehension of the work of art, for it avoids the limitations associated with the strenuous and intensely-regulated productions of significance, which are an essential component of any theoretical discipline. In reference to the artwork of Carlos Aguirre, he writes, “sus más recientes obras intentan imponer frente al mundo devorador de la máquina, de la técnica, del control y del progreso un pequeño gesto de insubordinación humana” (Sánchez, “¿Fuera?” 30). Sánchez’s words are committed to create that small,
lateral space where the experience of writing about art finally releases from the controlling theoretical machine by becoming a metaphor of interactivity. Kaprow’s model of the un-art was founded upon a similar principle. Jeff Kelley affirms:

If Greenberg had written of a modernist law by which conventions not essential to the validity of a medium ‘be discarded as soon as they are recognized,’ then Kaprow turned that prescription on its head—not by setting to chaos but by setting out to eliminate precisely those conventions that were essential to the professional identity of art. (xvii)

It seems that Kaprow suspected that Greenberg’s understanding of art would limit both the artistic practice and its production of meanings. For Kaprow, the notion of patterns or forms has to do with mental imprints, metaphors of our ways of thinking, templates that have to be constantly renovated and open to learning (Kelley xvii). Likewise, Sánchez’s art criticism operates as a fluctuating agency, which smoothly takes on an unlimited number of forms that link to visual, mental and spatial content, producing verbal expressions that stimulate the reader’s full connection to the art piece.

Sánchez’s critical routes harmoniously intermingle with the components of the work of art. With regard to artist Melanie Smith, Sánchez writes:

Su obra escultórica afianzó en el contexto mexicano el uso de residuos urbanos pobres en función de la exaltación de nuevos materiales y de formas brutas, marcados por el uso, en una combinación de minimalismo y de nostalgia kitsch. Melanie en los últimos años ha escarbar las ‘subculturas’ urbanas del reciclaje. Aquí el color naranja con su cualidad plástica y seriada, es el protagonista anárquico de una industria indetenible. Sus últimos trabajos asumen a la historia del arte como un molde donde vaciar el presente, con toda su profusión de naranja y de reciclajes. (“¿Fuera?” 28)

Here the set of actions, motivations, and colors used by Smith (the artist) are given a playful and inviting experiential reconfiguration in the aesthetic criticism. Notice that, by reading Sánchez’s writing, we can also make our own personal associations. For instance,
the phrase “formas brutas,” inevitably refers us to the art of Jean Dubuffet, an important French artist of the XX Century who coined the term art brut –that is an art produced outside the academic circuit by people who were mentally ill, children, etc. Plus, Sánchez’s commentary about the color orange as the “protagonist” in Smith’s artwork resembles Baudelaire’s notes on the role played by colors in the paintings of Eugène Delacroix.

Very often, the content of Sánchez’s texts may be invisibly pointing to the “experience-in-process” nature of his art criticism. Sánchez says about the work of artist Boris Viskin:

Su obra debe ser leída como una reconstrucción arbitraria de lo real, a partir del enrarecimiento de su presencia física. Todo se reduce a ese exceso de aire que uno siempre ve, según Viskin. Tras la desolación de una torre, o de una figura humana, está esa persistencia de mapa en su manera de extender el plano-vacío. El vacío, como sensación de desarraigo y de efímero, es el argumento emocional de la pintura de Viskin. Nada parece durar mucho en estos cuadros. La anécdota es casi una utopía. (“¿Fuera?” 27)

The idea of “an arbitrary reconstruction of the real” reminds us of the concept of heuristics that refers to experiences randomly collected, transformed, and reproduced. The word heuristic means “discovery” and it also has to do with problem-solving techniques that are based on experience. For Sánchez, heuristic practices “están dirigidas a intervenir en la (in)estabilidad de una estructura; o a aumentar el nivel de borrosidad de los sistemas de aprehensión” (“Bypass” 2). Sánchez’s passage makes an emphasis of an in-between, obscure space –that which separates the mental from the real, a space whose most tangible feature consists of its very own intangibility.
There is a discreet reference to ephemeral events, images that vanish into one another, multiple sensations, emotions and motifs that evaporate. Sánchez writes about Betsabé Romero:

Volcanes, rosas y altares –íconos mexicanistas- se exhiben como la memoria crítica de un saqueo cultural. Tal sentido de ruina histórica, que otorga cierta pobreza aparente a la obra de Betsabé, no alude sin embargo a una devastación de lo real sino a una devastación de los emblemas de adoración y la sitúa en el borde impreciso entre religiosidad y restauración síquica colectiva. (“¿Fuera?” 29)

Again, here emerges an aesthetic combination of planes involving Sánchez’s critical interpretation of the pictorial themes and other broader issues that relate to the common experience. Sánchez’s art writing evokes the effect of a soft, indeterminable space, an area that, as he himself argues, functions “como una membrana, un tejido poroso a través del cual los procesos se filtran, se contaminan, y se expanden” (“Bypass” 1).

That very quality of vulnerability gives Sánchez’s criticism an unexpected sense of intimacy and proximity. With regard to the poet Carlos Pellicer, Hernández Rodríguez has pointed out: “La poesía de Pellicer no manifiesta, ni es producto de, la actividad del que controla (y se controla) sino de la que se disuelve, construyéndose a sí misma (…) y borra todo determinismo” (138). Sánchez seems to use an analogous strategy that gives his critical writing a poetic and engaging immediacy. In his article “José Bedia: La restauración de nuestra alteridad,” Sánchez communicates the emergence of an anthropological interest in the visual arts in Cuba during the 1980s: “La palabra cedió su terreno a la actitud. Los jóvenes plásticos se empeñaron en la búsqueda de un arte instrumental que implicara una fe restauradora, capaz de sacralizaciones más internas y personales, así como de sustituir lo retórico por lo ritual” (64). Sánchez’s words have the power to move away from an empty rhetoricism, long descriptive scenes, and
evaluations. The writer makes a careful selection of words, in search for more vital and dynamic ways of saying. Hernández Rodríguez writes the following about the work of the vanishing poets: “es una proyección hacia otras posibilidades de entender el arte y la existencia, sin que primen los juicios certeros, sino la emoción, la alegría de lo inesperado y lo desconocido” (187). One can say that Sánchez’s texts also give us the opportunity to understand art criticism as an enjoyable and self-motivated learning piece. His minimal statements vibrate and become active, ritualistic instruments that serve to fuel and stimulate our thoughts.

Through Sánchez’s art writing, one senses the art objects as nearby entities, as if they really inhabited our individual cosmos, our personal world. He tells us about the work of Cuban artist José Bedia:

José Bedia ha desplegado un trabajo de restauración imaginal y ritual desde fuentes cosmogónicas disímiles (...). Las piezas de Bedia apuntan hacia una misma finalidad cosmológica –también antropológica- dirigida a la reconciliación emocional y lógica del hombre con el Cosmos (...) Bedia es un etnógrafo con sensibilidad para la recuperación de imágenes. (Sánchez, “La restauración” 67)

Why do Sánchez’s words disturb our sensibility? Could it be perhaps that we all are in desperate need of being reintegrated, reconciled to the Cosmos? If Bedia (the artist) is a true ethnographer collecting images for his artwork, Sánchez performs as a mystical writer reinstating valuable human meanings to the words. His statements draw on the geography of the spiritual, the psychological, and the poetic, as if they were in charge of carrying out not a critical aestheticized undertaking but a secret, more personal mission that has to do with releasing writerly arrangements as an opportunity to experience the aesthetic, like the surrealists did, in the role of a changeable, open, and unintended occurrence.
In this regard, one can say that Sánchez’s art criticism emanates an attractive humility that engages the reader, for it never operates as an irrefutable or conclusive analysis of the work of art. In reference to the work of poet Carlos Pellicer, Mauricio de la Selva suggests that “Pellicer descree del valor de su poesía y confiesa no haber producido nada artístico excepto los nacimientos que colocaba en su casa todas las Navidades, ya que estos estaban hechos con mucha humildad y amor a Dios” (qtd. in Hernández Rodríguez 140). According to Hernández Rodríguez, Pellicer appeals to themes which have been rejected by other writers because of their ordinary nature (141). Though Sánchez’s criticism does not necessarily turn to artworks and subjects of, say, quotidian character per se, it indeed provides us with writerly assemblies that can be perceived, like Kaprow’s Happenings, as part of the common experience. Sánchez’s criticism gives the impression of an ephemeral installation-work made up of stories and labyrinthine figurations that evaporate before becoming a prearranged set of principles.

In an essay about the work of Cuban artist Martha María Pérez, he writes:

Algunos trabajos de Martha nos remiten a una otra historia ancestral, olvidada. Los hijos del Rey Tarquino, acuden al Oráculo de Delfos para saber cuál de los dos reinaría. ‘El primero que bese a su madre,’ responde el oráculo. Sólo uno entendería el sentido: el que besa la tierra. La relación Madre-Tierra en Martha, está establecida intuitivamente. (Sánchez, “Martha” 4)

Sánchez’s sentences are short and concise, combining action verbs that give them a dynamic tempo. An evocative reminiscence of an old Greek tale and a confession of the love for one’s land are also included. Notice that Sánchez does not act as the dictatorial critic wanting to disarticulate, control and manipulate the meanings of the art piece, but he humbles himself to do as a simple storyteller welcoming the readers to enter the world of the work of art through a creative, subtle narrative. As Calvino has pointed out, “the
storyteller explores the possibilities implied in his own language by combining and changing the permutations of the figures and the actions, and of the objects on which these actions could be brought to bear” (*The Uses* 4). If we look at Sánchez’s art criticism from this perspective, we will see that his writing affords the opportunity for us to read a story about a female character named Martha, like Lazarus’s sister in the Bible, whose artwork involves the idea of maternity.

Sánchez’s writing eludes the use of dense theoretical/historical interpretations, evaluations, classifications, contextualization, and analyses within the aesthetic. The critic plays with these referential systems in an invisible way so as not to let them obstruct the satisfying fluidity of his sentences. So, one can say that all these verbal itineraries appear easily reconciled within his art criticism. Sánchez writes in his essay about Martha María Pérez’s work:

> De los universos míticos no-europeos, de las analogías entre los más diversos sincretismos presentes en Cuba, la joven plástica de los 80 asumió el contrapunto lógico imagen/texto como un préstamo funcional que, de algún modo, permitía rastrear las huellas de Magritte y Duchamp; en la estructuración tanto de la representación como de los significados. (“Marta” 1)

As noticed, the idea of borrowing/appropriating concepts and images focuses on postmodern approaches to art. But, Sánchez chooses not to use the tedious tag which the concept of “postmodernism” has become. Instead, he mentions the acts of borrowing, assuming, and readjusting “el contrapunto lógico imagen/texto” that reminds us of the Surrealists and Dadaists, which infuses more liveliness and immediacy into his writing. The allusion to Magritte and Duchamp is also introduced in a discreet and pleasing poetic way -that is by saying: “un préstamo funcional que, de algún modo, permitía rastrear las huellas de Magritte y Duchamp.” In addition, the whole linguistic structure, with its
phonetics and meanings, seems to have been impregnated with the quintessence of the French post-structuralist thought. The expressive amalgamation of issues/terms like image, text, significance, representation and functional structuration reconnect us with the quality of Barthes’s standards of interpretation. Sánchez’s oblique treatment of referential systems gives the reader the opportunity to dialogue with theoretical/historical precedents, without hindering the aesthetic effects of his critical writing.

Sánchez himself affirms that he has been very influenced by theorists like Barthes and Kristeva. These two post-structuralist writers have contributed with studies about the topics of language and interpretation. In his book *Image, Music, Text*, Roland Barthes writes: “The image is felt to be weak in respect of meaning: there are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image’s ineffable richness” (32). Mary Bittner Wiseman explains Barthes’s theory of interpretation as an activity performed on whatever an agent is trying to understand, engage with or “read,” so it is an enterprise that seems productive and creative at the same time (16). As Bittner Wiseman highlights, Barthes distinguishes two ways of reading: one of them is passive (when the reader only consumes what is already written) and the other is active –and it results from the interaction between the reader and the text (16). In this sense, content is never assumed to be complete until the active reader generates his own writing or interpretation of it. For Barthes criticism is the record of an interaction between object and writer, developing the idea that the artwork and the critic are sorts of “works-in-progress” (Bittner Wiseman 16). Sánchez’s heuristic tendency, which relates to the idea of an
experience-in-progress, links to Barthes’s theory of the intermittent dealings between the 
critic and the work of art.

Kristeva sees language as an artistic medium that occupies a vital place in the 
process of representation, dwelling in the elusive character of figurative systems. For 
Kristeva, poetic language can show that the process of representation is made up of 
semiotic and symbolic elements, and poetic language displays the process of 
representation itself (Oliver 147). Kristeva writes about the poetry by Mayakovsky:

On the one hand, then, we have this rhythm; this repetitive sonority; this 
thrusting tooth pushing upwards before being capped with the crown of 
language; this struggle between word and force gushing with the pain and 
relief of a desperate delirium; the repetition of this growth, of this gushing 
forth around the crown-word, like the earth completing its revolution 
around the sun. (Desire 28)

For Kristeva, the aesthetic encompasses experiences that separate from repressive 
schemes, techniques and procedures for interpreting art and literature, allowing 
revitalizing incidents to appear. According to Kelly Oliver, Kristeva believes that only 
through imagination we can enter into relations with others generating aesthetic 
occurrences that are indispensable part of the human experience, for they allow us to find, 
create and give meaning to our lives and representations of ourselves (148).

Like Kristeva, Sánchez’s art criticism looks as though it were absorbing or 
assimilating the theoretical through an aesthetic means. In his essay “The Ministries of 
Space,” Sánchez reflects on the use of space in the work of Mexican artist Mathias 
Goeritz: “He conceived the space as an enormous negative sculpture (the corporeality of 
the void) and marked its containing walls in a manner similar to that in which van 
Doesberg had used planes of color to define countless angles, depths and illusionistic
There is also an artistic configuration in the concluding thoughts of the article:

To see *The Sculptural Space* from above, with the city behind wrapped in a mist of ozone, is a moving and apocalyptic vision. To be in the middle of the circle is an atavistic experience of uncontrolled telluric flow, an experience of disembodiment of the sort produced by the hallucinogen peyote. Goeritz materialized the concept of an emotional architecture as a concrete physical experience with *The Sculptural Space* – a place from which it is perhaps still possible to learn to learn to fly, or at least to shift our sight upwards. (Sánchez, “The Ministries” 165)

Here as in Kristeva’s dramatic reaction to Mayakovsky’s work, an aesthetic design of words, senses, and rhythms exists. Noël Carroll points out that “An essential function of art is to afford aesthetic experience – valued for its own sake – by encouraging the imagination of the reader, listener, or viewer of the artwork to enter into lively interpretative play” (143). By reading Sánchez’s art criticism, we notice how aesthetic experiences can be as well valued for their own sake within theoretical passages that go through an active and creative exchange with their object of study, cautiously interceding in the reader’s appreciation of the art piece.

The mixture of utterances in a passage about the work of Martha María Pérez associates with the tincture of Barthes’s meditations on the function of images and texts. Sánchez writes:

A través del mito se hacía más orgánico cumplir con las exigencias discursivas del Post-conceptualismo, presentando la producción de significados muy sofisticados como un juego naïve de renombrar las cosas, propio de estadios cosmovisivos animistas donde la imagen tiene a la vez un peso cognoscitivo y ontológico. (“Martha” 1)

Sánchez’s words explore an image – that which belongs within “estadios cosmovisivos animistas,” or in this sense, our very own elusive imaginaries– in eternal transformation. The substance of the expression (meanings that are as naïve as they are sophisticated)
cannot totally apprehend it. What is the runaway image anyway? Note that Sánchez, in a playful gesture, never says what the image is or how it might look like, because the image itself—not the words to describe it—performs as the only reliable evidence of its own existence. The quality of his words makes us think of Barthes’s analysis about the relationships between texts and images in photography:

The closer the text to the image, the less it seems to connote it; caught as it were in the iconographic message, the verbal message seems to share its objectivity (...) It is true that there is never a real incorporation since the substances of the two structures (graphic and iconic) are irreducible, but there are most likely degrees of amalgamation. (Barthes, *Image 26*)

Sánchez’s aesthetic exploration of the elusive character of images (whether mental or real) in his art criticism points to the mysterious matter of representational systems as well as to the words’ indeterminate role in the naming of things.

Sánchez’s art writing is filled with irreverent literary remarks, which soften difficult segments that contextualize the object of study. In exposing the background conditions related to the notion of myth in Martha María Pérez’s art, Sánchez writes:

El espacio místico en Cuba cuenta con hábitos mentales y con regularidades históricas que alimentan la superstición. Nuestra idiosincrasia se acrisola en la ferocidad punitiva del esclavismo y en la férrea moral jesuítica; dos factores que fortalecen el status represor y preventivo de las supersticiones en nuestra cultura. Recordemos que: las supersticiones son sanciones socioculturales que reprimen en forma de maldición, regulando cada acto de la vida cotidiana a partir de una ‘palabra divina,’ que adquiere carácter de ley. (“Martha” 2)

As we observe, all verbs in the paragraph are conjugated in present tense, which gives an appealing nearness to the socio-historical circumstances described by Sánchez. Noël Carroll has emphasized, “Critics should be respected for their skill in arguing their case—for grounding their evaluations in good evidence, good reasons, and good reasoning which audiences can reproduce and expand upon on their own” (46). Carroll’s
understanding of art criticism reduces the critic’s job to imitate the work of a lawyer, or any representative of the law when, in fact, the act of writing about art may lead us in a different and more creative direction, in hopes of avoiding being subject to the law. Note that words like superstición and maldición permeate Sánchez’s writing with a vigorous and sacrilegious tint. We will detect also an insinuating proposal that has to do with the identification of the law with a repressive curse or superstition that causes people to be mentally dependent and unstable. Sánchez’s irreverent commentaries attract the readers to familiarize with, reproduce and even deepen the subject matter offered throughout the text.

The idea of being open and receptive to multiple zones of experience (spatial, mental, emotional) represents one of the focal points in Sánchez’s art writing. There is an intuitive, flowing relationship between the intentionality of the work of art and Sánchez’s own poetic, philosophical, literary and critical concerns. In this sense, one can say that Sánchez’s writing becomes an entity that parallels the art piece, with some critical intentions. Sánchez says about the work of Mena: “Hay un movimiento vago —la inquietud— que procede de esta contaminación lenta e irremediable de una forma que constantemente se evacua en otra. Es el agua estancada bajo el resplandor de los cuartos de tono en las pétalos de las ninfeas” (“Nubes” n. pag.). By delving into an aesthetic dimension that releases his text from critically-determined modes of appreciation of art, Sánchez encounters an occasion to deliver messages related to the poetic aspects of our journey through life, as though he were inviting us to reintegrate ourselves to the natural, flexible spirit of creation. As Guy Davenport has pointed out, the poet is a wanderer
uncovering the curious transformation of shapes and the things of the world which are always at one’s doorstep (131, 188).

With reference to the work of Gerardo Suter, Sánchez writes:

Detrás de cada mito fundacional hay un viaje. Y detrás de cada cosmogonía está el cuerpo devastado de un viajero. El colapso de un tiempo mítico y de su divina inmortalidad siempre se nos revela como consecuencia de un viaje fundacional. Fundar (fecundar) es comenzar a morir. Un nuevo ciclo de destrucción es inaugurado allí donde se establece un nuevo contrato. La misma idea de reino esta comprometida con la fragilidad carnal del héroe mítico. El viaje se prestigia como la manifestación inmortal de un principio discontinuo del ser. (“Cuerpos” 3)

Sánchez presents an obsessive listing of motifs that relate to the artist’s representation of the cycles of life and death, which belong within the collective experience. Motifs like myths, times, bodies, heroes, travelers, etc. are in fact placed “at one’s doorstep,” being an intrinsic component of the context of life, where an infinite number of sensorial, spiritual, and other referential systems can be found.

For Sánchez, it is in this journey through the unpredictability of knowledge that a true act of creation originates. He affirms that “sólo viajando somos continuos” (“Cuerpos” 3) which brings to mind the phrase coined by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, “Navegar é preciso; viver não é preciso.” It seems that our pathway towards knowledge entails an endless, poetic metamorphosis that makes available extensive sources of fertility and energy. As Hernández Rodríguez points out, “la voluntad viajera del poeta está marcada por constantes desplazamientos alrededor del mundo: se trata de un constante no establecerse, ni comprometerse” (137). Using Suter’s art as an inspirational topic, Osvaldo Sánchez gives some philosophical considerations related to the ephemeral condition of our existences and the obstinate structuration of knowledge:
El uso de la máscara, en Suter, subraya esa obsesión de tránsito, esa angustia por la fugacidad perpetua de la presencia, que desdice de la fijeza de su puesta en escena. Es vieja, por sabia, la idea de vencer el tiempo, de no ser reconocido por la muerte, con el ardid de una máscara: parodia del rostro erosionado, a tal punto, que su devastación lo convierte en otro, lápida de eternidad y muerte (…) Las imágenes de Suter se refieren continuamente a un cuerpo ajeno, y a la vez autorreferencial, divinizado por una piel-corteza, una carne-barro, una mortaja telúrica. El fotógrafo se disfraza (se esconde) tras una imagen que ha sido desarrollada para servir de atributo virtual. (“Cuerpos” 5-6)

Sánchez’s reflection on mutability and the use of a “virtual” mask that allows the artist to expose himself through the other constitutes a revealing indication about the nature of Sánchez’s art criticism, which has been modeled as a reconciliatory space. As Guy Davenport suggests, “the imagination, like all things in time, is metamorphic” (4).

Sánchez’s writing provides an experiential interstice where the artist’s philosophical intentions easily meet, combine with, and nurture from both the writer and the reader’s personal concerns, providing a set of poetic and very effective relational exchanges. Such exchanges recall what Hernández Rodríguez defines as a lively mechanism of influence. That is, “una relación dinámica en la cual tanto los que son influidos como los que influyen se afectan, modifican y en última instancia se desdoblan y proyectan en otras direcciones” (Hernández Rodríguez 293).

Sánchez’s criticism takes the form of a happening in which there is an interchangeability of things, images and words, a mixture of the psychological, the abject and the poetic. In this passage, he refers to things that undergo a process of disintegration, images of aging and corrosion:

Los cuerpos de Suter exhiben sus secreciones como estigmas de un tránsito. El cuerpo se enloida, se petrifica, se lubrica, se integra, se inmortaliza, se disuelve…El cuerpo se enmascara –¿se desmoraliza?- detrás de sus secreciones. En la serie de imágenes de Anáhuac, las secreciones son sustituidas por la textura despiadada de la carne
envejecida. Es la tactilidad de la carne como interdicto. La exhibición sacrificial de una textura corporal, como prueba implacable de la irreversibilidad del tiempo. (Sánchez, “Cuerpos” 6)

As Kristeva has pointed out, we are confronted very often by those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal, and so the poetic language emerges as a medium to reconcile with what the verbal messages were separated from—the imaginaries which disturb systems, identity and order (Powers 12, 61).

For Sánchez, such border lines have an emphasized aesthetic quality, because they are “pliegues, resguardos que usan el grado de (no) exposición y de presencia (mínima) como una táctica de preservación y/o mutación identitaria” (“Rito” 166). The images of the artworks enable Osvaldo Sánchez to produce language that assimilates materiality in process, making his words acquire an expressive corporeality:

La Madre atrapada por –un bloque de adobe- el peso de la tradición, de los prejuicios. Aquello que reta lo que ha de cumplirse en el dispersarse de los hijos. El nudo que puede ahorcar. El peso de pertenecer. El bloque de adobe que es la Casa del Señor, el Beth-El, la piedra de fundación, la piedra del templo, el dolmen, el punto histórico y lógico que marca el momento de comenzar a ser otro. La angustia de la madre por ser y no ser el omphalos. El egoísmo de no ceder a un otro destino: el destino de su reencarnación. (“Martha” 4)

Here there is an unstated reference to Freudian psychoanalytical categories like the taboo (un bloque de adobe, el peso de la tradición, de los prejuicios) and the fetish woman (la madre angustiada, atrapada, ahorcada, castrada) which disperse into other arrangements with a religious and poetic tone.

Certainly, we can conclude that the search for images, contents, and forms of expression in Sánchez’s art criticism emanates a tender fluidity, a poetic neutrality characteristic of an experience that benefits from vital impulses. With regards to the Mexican artist group SEMEFO, Sánchez notes:
Aunque de día fingen vender libros, viven como oficiantes góticos, sumergidos en el vano de la morgue hasta el amanecer, cuando los muertitos más extravagantes comienzan a llegar sin registro. No fui a su taller, porque el taller de SEMEFO es esa morgue exquisitamente provista de artificios de violencia, la preferida de Joel-Peter Witkin. Los invité a mi casa. (No sin antes comprar flores, a fin de neutralizar la energía fatídica de una visita así.) Nunca seré fan de SEMEFO. Cuando encendí el play de la grabadora ya un olor a cloroformo empañaba los cristales. (“SEMEFO” 132)

The critic looks at the scene from an aesthetic perspective in the Kantian sense –that is as an occasion for the free harmonization of his faculties. Sánchez’s art writing affects us (readers) in the same way. We no longer see his criticism as an operation that merely evaluates, describes, analyzes, elucidates and interprets the art object, but as an evolving entity, a learning project with a transforming sparkle, an imaginative adventure itself.
Conclusion

The journey through Osvaldo Sánchez’s art writing, where literary, poetic, philosophical, and theoretical routes creatively reconcile, delivered many valuable resources that can enlarge our comprehension of critical texts. First of all, we saw how the aesthetic quality allows us to appreciate art criticism not as “a second order discipline” but as a literary genre in its own right. In this regard, significant and numerous interpretations, understandings and applications of writerly art criticisms were located within the History of Aesthetics which helped set up the foundations to develop an argument in defense of aesthetic critical texts. From the first chapter, we also learned to evaluate the intrinsic potential of the aesthetic to become an open structure of knowledge. That is, an assembly of connections, associations and images which generate their own spontaneous rhythms of existence.

In chapter 2, we studied notable experimental models, both objective and subjective, through which the experiencing subject comes into contact with a feeling of openness as a lived event, by detaching from fixed patterns related to cognition, thought, aestheticization processes, institutionalization, and canonization. Here were included the Kantian sublime, Heidegger’s ontological Being, the surrealist cultivation of chance, Allan Kaprow’s un-artistic frames of interactivity, and the disinterested enterprise of the vanishing poets as discussed by the scholar Rafael Hernández Rodríguez. We examined the relatively free and undetermined functioning of these “structurations” to have a sense of the life-like supplies these experiences involve, which contributed with useful material relevant to our investigation of the empirical value of Sánchez’s aesthetics.
Finally, in chapter 3, we analyzed Osvaldo Sánchez’s art criticism as a space where the philosophical, the theoretical, and the poetic accommodate in a reconciliatory way, releasing writerly assortments of exchanges, entrances, and meanings. Here we found out that Sánchez’s writing escapes from the authoritative, predetermined, or aestheticized critical approach that interprets, analyzes, classifies, elucidates or evaluates an art object for the sake of conceptual conjectures, which sets it apart from other writerly aesthetics. Sánchez’s art criticism operates as a lived experience, having a heuristic character that is available to change and to be permeated by the unpredictable. Sánchez’s heuristic methodology renders a neutral, spontaneous estimation of what produces experience in art and the task of writing about it, while detaching from the mania of supplying concluding patterns of thought.

According to Calvino, philosopher Ernest Gombrich once referred to the idea that the processes of poetry and art are analogous to those of a play on words, so it is the childish pleasure of the combinatorial game that leads the painter to try out arrangements of both lines and colors as well as guides the poet to experiment with juxtapositions of words (Calvino, *The Uses* 21). A large number of meanings and effects can rise out of these combinatorial processes, taking us (poets, painters, critics, readers) by surprise and turning the procedures themselves into pleasurable learning experiences. As Calvino underlines, we start from the particular pleasure given by any combinatorial play, and at a certain point, out of the countless mixtures of words, one becomes charged with special significance (*The Uses* 21). The free accord between concepts, images and forms unexpectedly uncovers new materials that generate other sorts of understandings, interpretations, and purposes.
As an aesthetic object, art criticism recuperates the possibility of play. That is, it transforms into what Barthes calls a *writerly* text, providing a mosaic of relationships between different fields, whether theoretical, literary, philosophical, or others that take part in the common experience, and agreeing to all the exchanges practicable on a certain matter. Calvino calls our attention to the idea that “words, like crystals, have facets and axes of rotation with different properties, and light is refracted differently according to how these words crystal are placed, and how the polarizing surfaces are cut and superimposed” (*The Uses* 40). In this respect, Osvaldo Sánchez’s texts constitute an effective, fluid and reconciliatory space for the aesthetic and the critical. Through a flexible structure that opens up to the exploration of the philosophical, the visual, the poetic, and many others, Sánchez’s critical model develops into an active practice that engenders personal satisfaction and awareness while it dynamically assists us (readers) in enriching/deepening our experience of both the art writing and the work of art.
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