

Politics, Poetics, Affect

Politics, Poetics, Affect:
Re-visioning César Vallejo

Edited by

Stephen M. Hart

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Politics, Poetics, Affect: Re-visioning César Vallejo,
Edited by Stephen M. Hart

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Stephen M. Hart and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4892-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4892-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
-----------------------------	-----

Prologue	ix
----------------	----

Part I Politics in César Vallejo's Work

Chapter One.....	3
------------------	---

The Political in *Trilce*

William Rowe

Chapter Two	21
-------------------	----

Friends or Foes? The Troubled Personal and Literary Relationship
between Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo

Adam Feinstein

Chapter Three	49
---------------------	----

Some Observations on the Spanish Civil War Poetry of Nicolás Guillén,
Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo

David Bellis

Part II Poetics in César Vallejo's Work

Chapter Four.....	67
-------------------	----

The Author's Favourite, But is it Any Good? Some Thoughts
on 'El palco estrecho'

Dominic Moran

Chapter Five	89
--------------------	----

Vallejo Fragments

Adam Sharman

Chapter Six	101
-------------------	-----

Vallejo's Poetics of Vitality

Paloma Yannakakis

Chapter Seven.....	117
‘Animalestar’: Animal Affections in Vallejo’s Poetry	
Michelle Clayton	
 Part III Affect in César Vallejo’s Work	
Chapter Eight.....	137
Vallejo Forever	
Santi Zegarra	
Chapter Nine.....	147
Vallejo en los infiernos: biografía de una novela biográfica	
Eduardo González Viaña	
Chapter Ten	159
César Vallejo avec ses deux Otilias	
Stephen M. Hart	
Contributors.....	169
Index.....	171

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Vallejo (far right, standing up) in the Soviet Union in 1929
Figure 2: Vallejo in Fontainebleau wood in 1926
Figure 3: Georgette Philippart who married Vallejo in 1934
Figure 4: Vallejo on the left and Neruda (kneeling) on the right during the Spanish Civil War
Figure 5: Vallejo socialising with friends in Paris in the mid-1920s
Figure 6: First edition of *España, aparta de mí este cáliz* published in Mexico (1940)
Figure 7: Vallejo in Madrid in 1931
Figure 8: Vallejo as the young poet in Trujillo in 1917
Figure 9: Vallejo (far right) with members of El Norte on 10 June 1917
Figure 10: Vallejo with his brother Néstor when they studied together at Trujillo university
Figure 11: Second edition of *Trilce* published in Madrid in 1930
Figure 12: *editio princeps* of *Poemas humanos* published in Paris in 1939
Figure 13: Vallejo in Nice in October 1929
Figure 14: Pablo Picasso's sketch of Vallejo (9 June 1938)
Figure 15: an actor standing in front of Vallejo's grave in Montparnasse cemetery, Paris
Figure 16: still from the film *Vallejo Forever*
Figure 17: a scene from the film *Vallejo Forever*
Figure 18: a scene from the film *Vallejo Forever*
Figure 19: *Yvette ou la robe à carreaux* (1907) by Auguste Ellysée Chabaud
Figure 20: María Rosa Sandoval
Figure 21: A photograph taken of Carlos Santa María's premises after they had been arsoned
Figure 22: Map of Santiago de Chuco produced by prosecution in the arson case against Vallejo
Figure 23: *Judith's Beheading of Holophernes* by Lucas Cranach the Elder
Figure 24: Vallejo shortly after his death on 15 April 1938

PROLOGUE

This book seeks to re-vision the life and work of the Peruvian poet, César Vallejo (1898-1938). Our understanding of one of the towering figures within Latin America's poetic canon has changed radically in the last decade or so. New information about Vallejo's life, for example, has emerged recently. We now know more about his family history, his various love affairs in Peru before he fled to Europe in 1923, the role he played in the events which led up to the arson of Carlos Santa María's premises in Santiago de Chuco on 1 August 1920, and his life with Georgette.¹ More information has also surfaced about the pre-history of

¹ Some examples of the works which have enhanced our knowledge of these aspects of Vallejo's life and work are Max Silva Tuesta, *César Vallejo: muerte y resurrección* (Lima: Instituto del Libro y la Lectura del Perú, 2003); *César Vallejo: obras completas*, ed. Ricardo Silva-Santisteban (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1997-2004); *César Vallejo / Poesía completa: nueva edición crítica*, ed. Ricardo González Vigil (Trujillo: Santiago Aguilar, 2005); Oswaldo D. Vásquez Vallejo, *Vallejo y Georgette* (Lima: Centro Cultural César Vallejo, 2006); *The Complete Poetry: César Vallejo: A Bilingual Edition*, edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman (Berkeley & Los Angeles: California University Press, 2007); Danilo Sánchez Lihón, *Vallejo: yo que sólo he nacido: Testamento del padre* (Lima: Instituto del Libro y la Lectura del Perú, 2008); Miguel Pachas Almeyda, *Georgette Vallejo al fin de la batalla* (Lima: Juan Gutemberg Editores, 2008); Carlos Fernández & Valentino Gianuzzi, *César Vallejo: textos rescatados* (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma-Editorial Universitaria, 2009); Ricardo González Vigil, *Claves para leer a César Vallejo* (Lima: Editorial San Marcos, 2009); Santiago Aguilar et al. (ed.), *Dolor, cuerpo y esperanza en Vallejo* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2009); Danilo Sánchez Lihón, *Georgette la golondrina del océano Vallejo* (Lima: Instituto del Libro y la Lectura del Perú, 2009); *Los heraldos negros*, introducción de Efraín Kristal, edición de Marta Ortiz Canseco (Madrid: Castalia, 2009); William Rowe, *Vallejo: el acto y la palabra* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2010); Mara L. García, *César Vallejo: estudios y panoramas críticos* (Trujillo: Instituto de Estudios Vallejanos, 2011); Carlos Fernández & Valentino Gianuzzi, *César Vallejo en Madrid en 1931* (Madrid: Del Centro Editores, 2011); Michelle Clayton, *Poetry in Pieces: César Vallejo and Lyric Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Joseph Mulligan (trans.), *Against Professional Secrets (Book of Thoughts)* (New York: Roof Books, 2011);

his literary works, particularly the earlier versions of the poems which were published in various Peruvian journals and which would in 1918 be brought together in Vallejo's first collection of poems, *Los heraldos negros*. New theories have also emerged in the twentieth-first century which are particularly appropriate instruments with which to tackle Vallejo's verse. Whereas the political poetry of other Latin American poets has a dated feel about it for readers of our post-communist world Vallejo's verse – precisely because of its ambivalent ambiguity and its refusal to separate the personal (including his own body) from the political – has a contemporary feel about it which strikes a chord for readers of poetry in the twenty-first century. To mis-quote Ezra Pound, Vallejo's poems are poetry which 'stays' poetry.

The essays in this volume were originally given at a two-day international conference held at University College London entitled 'Re-visioning César Vallejo in the Twenty-First Century', which was generously funded by the Society of Latin American Studies. The essays are grouped into three complementary sections on Politics, Poetics and Affect.

In 'The Political in Trilce' William Rowe, building on his innovative collection of essays, *Vallejo, el acto y la palabra*,² draws out the latent and even subliminal layers of political meaning in Vallejo's 'pre-political' work, *Trilce* – the 1922 collection is normally seen as an avant-garde or Dadaist piece of work. Rowe seeks to approach Vallejo's poetry as 'material that has become text and as production of sense, rather than as ideology' (p. 4), and his test-case is poem XXXVIII. Working through Julio Ortega's interpretation of the poem Rowe focusses on the enigmatic reference to 'márchase ahora a formar las izquierdas', and argues that the poem 'with its zeros (to be taken as synecdoche of the aesthetic non-symmetry that characterises *Trilce*) works at voiding the Christian metaphysic and with it the whole of the Symbolic' (p. 15). For his part, in 'Friends or Foes? The Troubled Personal and Literary Relationship between Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo', Adam Feinstein extends the

Reynaldo Naranjo García, *César Vallejo en el siglo XXI* (Lima: Universidad César Vallejo-César Aching Guzmán, 2011); *César Vallejo: The Complete Poems*, trans. Michael Smith & Valentino Gianuzzi (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2012); Carlos Fernández & Valentino Gianuzzi, *Imagen de César Vallejo: iconografía completa (1892-1938)* (Madrid: Del Centro Editores, 2012); Stephen M. Hart, *César Vallejo: A Literary Biography* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2013).

² William Rowe, *Vallejo: el acto y la palabra* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2010).

research conducted in his comprehensive official biography of Pablo Neruda,³ and weighs the evidence for and against the case that there was a rift between the two most important Latin American poets of the twentieth century. He quotes and analyses what each of the poets said of the other, particularly of their poetry, compares the similarities between their respective verse and homes in on the Spanish Civil War as the fulcrum on which their friendship balanced (rather precariously it seems). He counsels caution about jumping to the conclusion that Vallejo and Neruda fell out over politics since the main advocate of this position is Juan Larrea and he had a personal axe to grind.

Finally, in ‘Some Observations on the Spanish Civil War Poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda and César Vallejo’, David Bellis carefully compares and contrasts the poetry written by this triumvirate of Latin American poets who were inspired by the conflict in Spain. Though they each took on the travails of Spain as their own, as Bellis shows, they did so in different ways.

The four essays in the Poetics section do of course criss-cross with some of the themes treated in Section 1 but their focus is Vallejo’s poetics, including his praxis of poetry, allusion to poetic convention and use of language. Dominic Moran, in ‘The Author’s Favourite – But Is It Any Good? Some Thoughts on “El palco estrecho”’, takes his point of departure from the paradox that while Vallejo – according to Juan Espejo Asturrizaga – favoured ‘El palco estrecho’ of all his poems most critics have steered clear of analysing or even discussing it. He performs a careful line-by-line dissection of the poem, reviewing its literary resonance, its similarities to other poems Vallejo wrote during this period, and elucidates the problems with the interpretations of the poem published to date. The poem clearly appears to allude to the setting of a theatre which becomes a ‘theatrum mundi’ but, that said, as Moran suggests, ‘Vallejo’s idiom is so clipped and allusive that it is impossible to say for sure’ (p. 83). Adam Sharman, in ‘Vallejo Fragments’, uses the work of Robert Hughes and Stanley Burnshaw as a spring-board to enunciate a sense of how fragmentation functions in modern poetry and then turns to a close reading of Poem XXIII of *Trilce*. Sharman begins by noting that Vallejo’s poem employs an antiquated syntax as well as a *modernista* idiom, but then the ‘poem tears the metaphorical nap’ (p. 98). This tearing, he goes on to suggest, is ‘as much to do with syntax as it is to do with referentiality’, and concludes that Vallejo is not representing, or even misrepresenting, the world but rather ‘mimicking a way of representing the

³ Adam Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

world' (p. 98), which is a different thing altogether.

We find a slightly different tack in Paloma Yannakakis's essay on 'Vallejo's Poetics of Vitality', in which the author looks at the role played by the human body in Vallejo's poetics. She argues that the body 'poses a challenge to the signifying inscription of codes insofar as the signified cannot be detached from the body on which it is inscribed, and insofar as the body in itself is devoid of signification' (p. 112) and shows how this paradox underwrites a significant number of Vallejo's posthumous poems. This is, indeed, why Vallejo seems to speak to the twenty-first century reader because 'in taking his body as a subject of writing and an object to be destroyed and re-made, Vallejo effaces the distance between his time and ours' (p. 116). Finally Michelle Clayton, in 'Animal Affections in Vallejo's Work', building on her ground-breaking monograph, *Poetry in Pieces*,⁴ begins by citing Derrida's famous comparison of a poem to a hedgehog which is crossing the road; 'Any inquiry into its nature – into its poetry or poetics – Derrida tells us, would prompt the hedgehog-poem to roll into a ball, presenting only its spines to a potential aggressor' (p. 117). She reviews the ways in which animals are represented in Vallejo's poems and shows that, by forcibly fusing soul and animal within a single word and thereby creating an 'etymological monster' – as in the poem 'Los arrieros' from *Los heraldos negros* – Vallejo is in effect dismantling the binary logic of western thought (pp. 121-22). The exploration of the animal is taken even further in *Trilce* which 'jolts' the reader with its *guano* emitted by a 'brackish gannet' as occurs in the opening poem of the collection (p. 124). In *Poemas humanos* Vallejo 'with a sly wink' presents the animal as a stand-in for the human, which amounts to a 'lateral poetics which hopes to be a politics' (p. 130). Her conclusion is compelling: 'For in all this lack of communication, there is a great deal of affective traffic, a sense of the meaningfulness of a spiny silence, a waiting with baited breath for a response whose failure to arrive is itself a response' (p. 132).

Clayton's essay provides a perfect segway for the third section on Affect in Vallejo's work. In his essay on 'Vallejo Forever', Santi Zegarra demonstrates how Vallejo's poetry was the matrix for a number of his film-making projects. He was inspired by Vallejo's minimalism to replace narrative with gesture, namely the 'gesture as a logic of postures and positions', which is rooted in a 'minimalism' which achieves expression through the 'conquest of gestural dissonances' (p. 145). In his essay on his 445-page novel, *Vallejo en los infiernos* (Vallejo in Hell) Eduardo

⁴ Michelle Clayton, *Poetry in Pieces: César Vallejo and Lyric Modernity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

González Viaña delves into the why and wherefore of how he re-created Vallejo's state of mind when he found himself in prison in Trujillo from November 1920 until February 1921.⁵ Finally Stephen Hart, in 'César Vallejo avec des deux Otilias', comparing and contrasting the two main muses of Vallejo's early poetry, argues through the premise that biographical events (such as falling in love) provided a hermeneutic archive for Vallejo's poems which runs parallel to the archive of poetic conventions which Vallejo – like other early twentieth-century Peruvian poets – sourced. The essay provides new information about two of Vallejo's Peruvian lovers who had the same name (Otilia) and whose identify had been obscured for a number of years by Vallejo's biographer, Juan Espejo Asturrizaga, who believed he was acting in Vallejo's best interest.

S.M.H.

⁵ Eduardo González Viaña, *Vallejo en los infiernos* (Lima: Universidad César Vallejo, 2007), 445 pp.

PART I

POLITICS IN CÉSAR VALLEJO'S WORK



Figure 1: Vallejo (far right, standing up) in the Soviet Union in 1929

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICAL IN *TRILCE*

WILLIAM ROWE (FBA)

Inflected by utopian desire, literary criticism, in one of its major tendencies, has, in the aftermath of 1968, sought to locate in the literary text a means of production capable of sustaining an emancipatory space. If it is to have any force, literature of course needs to be open to the outside, in other words to engage with actually existing historical forces and forms. Thus, if there has been a tendency in certain critics to celebrate the making of sense as such, in other words to find in literature the production of sense in abundance, as if this were enough to characterise the aesthetic function, it follows that the meaning produced will rest upon and remain within the existing social production of sense (or distribution of the sensible, to use Rancière's terms).¹ The production of meaning will be subsumed into the logic of commodity production or, in the later twentieth century, into the logic of the spectacle,² which is the dominant cultural form of post Second World War 'growth' in its articulation with the politics of social democracy. As Walter Benjamin has noted, reading rests upon a 'perilous critical moment' of possibility which, if not grasped, is lost.³ The fact that growth is now in crisis offers an opportunity to reconsider how to read *Trilce*.

The main critical tradition has consisted of seeking ways of interpreting *Trilce* as a production of meaning. Escobar and Martos and Villanueva are

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 12-19.

² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 463.

the best representatives of that tradition.⁴ Ortega's commentaries, in his edition of *Trilce*,⁵ stand at the cusp where that tradition reaches its limit. His emphasis on *Trilce*'s work of non-representation or un-representation draws attention to a prime characteristic of the book, and is one of the starting-points for Michelle Clayton's more recent work with its recognition of the extent to which Vallejo avoids semantic determinacy and instead opts for unlimited metonymy.⁶ However, I will argue that Ortega, while opening the act of reading to the consequences of the non-representational poetics of *Trilce*, takes those consequences to consist of an act of re-naming. In this respect, I will seek to show that this notion, which falls back on the poetics of Octavio Paz, is not adequate for a full understanding of the radical opening that *Trilce* makes in modern poetry. To put it differently, Ortega's invaluable book gives the best available account to date of the break that *Trilce* makes with traditional poetic language but does not give an adequate account of the alternative language that begins to emerge. He takes us to the point where the specific poetic work of *Trilce* begins, without properly accounting for that work as an aesthetic and political practice. In fact, as I will argue, it's only by giving a proper account of the book's engagement with the political that its aesthetics can be adequately presented.

To consider the political in *Trilce*, in other words the way the political is constituted, as opposed considering politics, which would denote the political aspect of particular representations, requires approaching it as material that has become text and as production of sense, rather than as ideology, including the ideology of form. We might begin with the one poem of *Trilce* where there appears to be, as Neale-Silva notes,⁷ a direct reference to politics, although, as will become clear, direct reference is not the best guide to this book's engagement with the political. Consideration of this poem will allow me to stake my claim that Vallejo's poetics in *Trilce* is a materialist poetics, though of course the validity of the claim will depend on what is understood by materialist.

⁴ Alberto Escobar, *Cómo leer a Vallejo* (Lima: P.L. Villanueva, 1973); Marco Martos and Elsa Villanueva, *Las palabras de Trilce* (Lima: Universidad de San Marcos, 1989); see also Eduardo Neale-Silva, *César Vallejo en su fase trilcica* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

⁵ Julio Ortega (ed.), *Trilce* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1991).

⁶ Michelle Clayton, *Poetry in Pieces: César Vallejo and Lyric Modernity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles University of California Press, 2011); see especially p. 101.

⁷ Cited by Ortega, p. 188.

The poem in question is XXXVIII, and the apparently explicit reference to politics comes with the line ‘y márchase ahora a formar las izquierdas’, the subject of which is ‘este cristal’. Where ‘march’ obviously gives to ‘form’ a sense of social mobilisation, anything we can say about the ‘cristal’ – apart from the fact that it doesn’t refer to a particular Peruvian beer – will get caught up in the philosophical presuppositions that explicitly or not run through our commentary. I mean what consequences are produced if we call the ‘this’ that the poem indicates a ‘substance’ or even ‘material’, when that would be, according to the poem’s statement just quoted, the material of leftism and at the same time, in the phrase the immediately follows, of ‘los nuevos Menos’.

Julio Ortega’s excellent gloss on this poem opens up the question of what the politics of *Trilce*, specifically its politics of representation, might be. Ortega speaks of an allegorical process whereby the poem ‘busca poner en crisis la representación objetiva de la nominación’ (p. 189), a phrase whose ambiguity allows us to think about the representation brought about by naming together with the representation of naming itself. It’s worth mentioning in relation to naming that the allegorical method, for Walter Benjamin, who in the 1920s was reviving the notion of allegory against the prevailing poetics of symbolism, serves precisely to break apart the symbol which stands in for and unifies the object; allegory thereby makes possible a properly historical critique of representation, specifically by recognising that temporality splits the unity of the object. It’s also worth noting that Benjamin began to develop his work on allegory in a book he wrote between 1924 and 1925 but which was first conceived in 1915: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.⁸ Michelle Clayton has noted how close Vallejo’s thinking comes to Benjamin’s, and

⁸ See Benjamin’s remark in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009): ‘The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, because death digs most deeply the jagged line of demarcation between physical nature and significance’ (pp. 165-166). Note the similarity between this and *Trilce* LV: ‘Vallejo dice hoy la Muerte está soldando cada lindero a cada hebra de cabello perdido, desde la cubeta de un frontal, donde hay algas, toronjiles [. . .]’. Since Benjamin could not have read *Trilce*, the resemblance points to an epochal shift in literary language. In both, it’s death that solders together the elements of the temporal series: for Benjamin, this is made evident by placing modern natural history alongside seventeenth-century drama, and for Vallejo, by the juxtaposition of the modern administration of the body (in institutions of health) alongside time within the word (where early twentieth-century avant-gardism intersects with seventeenth-century Spanish poetry, especially Quevedo).

I will be coming back shortly to how allegory, as a specific mode of the production of sense, is a case of this closeness.⁹

First let me go back to Ortega's exposition, since here he not only describes how we might understand the politics of *Trilce*, he also sets out a view of what would be the generic work of poetry. The key passage is the following:

Ese sujeto de una poética transfiguradora, recodificadora, carece de nombre porque carece aún de discurso; pero está hecho de la capacidad que tiene el poema de 'desanudar' el lenguaje, explorando la matriz del habla; [. . .] La boca por venir, la palabra haciéndose, completará este proceso de gestación al asumir el nuevo lenguaje que este sujeto de la materia desnombrada y por renombrar figura del lado de los menos, en el espacio donde lo real puede rehacerse. (pp. 189-190)

'El nuevo lenguaje' denotes precisely the utopian thrust of Ortega's commentary. What are its assumptions about the production of sense? The terms 'transfiguradora' and 'recodificadora' connote two distinct realms of thought, theological and linguistic. In other words the poem, when it comes to finding critical terms adequate to the transformation it presents, poses a problem. What's at stake in 'la materia desnombrada' and its relation to 'the subject to come' is how to think about poetry as practice, what is its relation to action, in particular, historical, i.e. political action? What is the specific work of poetry? What answer does *Trilce* give to that question? Does the answer call on theology and linguistics or does it depend upon other types of thought?

There's an objective side and a subjective side to the question; there's the material to be changed, and the subject that produces that change: 'la materia desnombrada y por renombrar', and the subject of that action. The poem, if we look more closely, doesn't speak of matter as such but presents the material thing in four different modalities: linguistic, spatio-temporal, political, and mathematical. There's firstly a linguistic aspect, as when 'este cristal [. . .] tomaría la forma de los sustantivos / que se adjetivan de brindarse'. Then the element appears in its temporal and spatial aspects. This occurs from the beginning of the poem but is most emphatic when 'pasado' and 'futuro' are mentioned and followed by 'si él no dase por ninguno de sus costados'. The political aspect comes in with

⁹ See Clayton, *Poetry in Pieces*, especially p. 228.

‘márchase ahora a formar las izquierdas’, and finally the mathematical immediately follows it, with ‘los nuevos Menos’.¹⁰

The first thought I would like to propose is that the linguistic is only one of four ways in which the transformation of the material thing is presented. This raises a question about literary theory and practices of reading, as to whether giving primacy to the linguistic produces an adequate way of reading *Trilce*.¹¹ I will come back to this problem. First I would like to draw attention to the way in which naming is placed before a reader. To quote the lines in question: ‘se melaría / y tomaría la horma de los sustantivos / que se adjetivan de brindarse’. There’s no naming subject here nor a God, as in the Biblical account of naming.¹² The nouns simply offer themselves as a gift (‘brindarse’). But that’s only one side of the process. *Melar*, as well as referring to honey, denotes the phase of refining in the industrial production of sugar, just as *horma*, as well as relating to the word *forma*, also indicates the mould for making hats and shoes, but more pertinently relates to the mould for producing *pan de azúcar*, echoing the *pan* of line 4. So it would be accurate to say that on the one hand the metaphysics of matter and form, as in Aristotelian hylo-morphism where form is higher than matter, is at work in these lines while on the other hand this topic of classical thought is re-articulated through the first form of industrial production in the New World. I would also suggest that this re-articulation does not simply give a postcolonial inflection to Aristotle, it actually changes the thought: the form of objects is produced historically, it’s not timeless. Vallejo replaces Aristotle with Hegel and Marx: it follows that the horizon of possibility is not given by language but the opposite. Ortega’s utopian nominalism falls short.

With regard to space and time, there are in the poem a great many spatial and temporal determinations of the element ‘este cristal’. The spatial ones mainly have to do with the mouth but don’t stop there, and the temporal ones are constant, including as they do the tenses of the verbs and the ideas of past and future. So the material un-named and waiting to be re-named, if we keep to Ortega’s formulation for the moment, is not precisely undetermined, or a-historical, or simply natural. It is not some

¹⁰ Note that Benjamin (*Origins*, p. 27) counterposes mathematics and language, the non-temporal *matheme* against the historical inflection of linguistic material. However, as we shall see, this is not the position of Badiou nor, as I will propose, that of Vallejo.

¹¹ At stake is of course ‘the linguistic turn’ in philosophy and literary theory but also a still influential turn in poetic practice, that of Language poetry.

¹² Genesis 2:19-20.

sort of pure substance as such. I would therefore like to suggest that in Ortega's notion of indeterminate matter or 'virtuality' waiting for the discursive dimension, for the name, we find the traces of a linguistic idealism, which gets in the way of thinking materiality historically.

The element has no extension ('no dase por ninguno de sus costados') but it does have temporality ('venida', 'todavía', 'cuando', 'pasado', 'futuro', 'ya no', etc.) or, more precisely, it is given temporality by the 'boca venidera'. 'Amor', 'pasado' and 'futuro' form a series: the articulation of time arises with affect, located in the mouth. It should also be noted that the futurity of transformation (the subject to come), which the element is waiting for ('aguarda') and which is figured as 'boca venidera', places us in a situation which is contrary to the idea of development or maturity. Development towards the goal of maturity is inherent to Enlightenment versions of time and thereby to the time of modernity.¹³ The 'boca venidera' is specifically 'sin dientes. No desdentada': this can be read as distinguishing the infant's mouth from the toothless mouth of age. So the poem has it that the future passes through the infant's need, its first absorption of material substance as food. The future of transformation returns through the first needs of the human being. The infant's mouth is 'horma' or 'forma' of the bread (i.e. satisfaction of social need) to come. The poem rejects the linear, bourgeois idea of achieving maturity, whether individual or social.

The third stanza, however, performs a reversal: the 'cristal', now transparent and colourless, will be sipped, absorbed, once again by the 'boca venidera', but this time it's a mouth 'que ya no tendrá dientes'. Why is the mouth of the future now that of a person who has lost their teeth through age? Time has buckled:¹⁴ by a rhetorical reversal typical of the seventeenth-century sonnet, where syntactical inversion brings negation of the concept, the past has become the future. Once again, the similarity with Benjamin's thought is striking. The emergence of the past as future is similar to Benjamin's messianic time, in which a revolutionary chance for justice is (in)formed by the irruption of the past in the present.¹⁵

¹³ See John Kraniauskas, 'Difference Against Development: Spiritual Accumulation and the Politics of Freedom', *Boundary 2*, 32.2 (2005), 53-80.

¹⁴ I take this expression from a recent talk by Sean Bonney on Free jazz (Marxism and Culture series, Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2 November 2012).

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of History', in *Selected Writings* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 389-400.



Figure 2: Vallejo in Fontainebleau wood in 1926

The poem does not therefore allow us to place its materials inside the schema of time as an arrow, which is of course the conception of time that the idea of progress, currently called growth, rests upon. Nor does the poem allow us to think space as abstract, unspecified extension: its approach to space approximates to Vallejo's later idea that parallel lines are not simultaneous but successive.¹⁶ The poem reverses the geometric habit of separating space from time: the water will receive the mould of nouns specifically 'si se le apasiona'. So space is understood as made of up the myriad affective torsions of the body, as historical force or passion,

¹⁶ 'El movimiento consustancial de la materia', in *Contra el secreto profesional* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1973), pp. 23-25 (p. 24).

where subjective will is a force in history; it's not an empty region to be filled.

How does the poem embody this thought in its materials? A brief discussion of sound and time will enable us to set out the ground for thinking about the location of subjectivity in the poem, after which we can broach the issue of how to think about its apparent opposite, mathematical space. Let's begin by asking what is the location of the subject of naming. The principle to keep in mind is that the subject – the vehicle of subjectivity – is as much in the concatenation of the phrase as it is in the word 'I', just as space is made by affect. Space is to affect as linguistic concatenation is to subjectivity, concatenation being the linguistic form of iteration. The argument about subjectivity and the phrase links up with the question of political emancipation and will take some time to elaborate. Let me say at the outset that it involves the question of sound and musicality and that the order of sound in *Trilce* is equivalent in musical terms to twelve-tone composition's rejection of any tonal centre as well as its use of timbre in timbral melody. All of this implies work of listening (the ear is the most intelligent of the organs, as Charles Olson puts it)¹⁷ at the level of the smallest relationships of sound (as in chromatic music) in real time. Real time here means present time, the temporal now of the poem.

Paul Verlaine, one of the late nineteenth-century poets whose aesthetic *Trilce* traverses and voids, in his famous 'Art poétique' poem states: 'nous voulons la Nuance [. . .] , / Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!' (we [. . .] want Nuance, not Colour, nothing but nuance). The equivalent in music (the poem opens with 'De la musique avant toute chose') would be chromaticism, i.e. composition that works with the smallest possible variations permitted by tonal music. 'Nothing more precious than the grey song / where the Undecided is joined to the Precise', to quote another two lines. It's interesting at this point to note that despite this assertion of infinite variation – and indeed of the 'Impair' (uneven, 'impar') which of course Vallejo picks up in *Trilce* XXXVI – the deployment of variation in Verlaine's work is controlled by a temporal structure of melancholy, consisting of the alternation of fullness and emptiness of words deployed as symbols. This corresponds, in music, with chromaticism which hasn't gone as far as twelve-tone composition because the octave is still in operation in the background. In other words the uneven in Verlaine corresponds with the chromatic notes heard against the desired fullness of

¹⁷ Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse,' in *Collected Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 239-49 (p. 242).

the conventional scale, the prime example being Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.

Trilce frequently echoes the music of Verlaine's work, reproduced for example in 'un té lleno de tarde' (XXXIV),¹⁸ precisely because it interprets Verlaine as locating himself at the limit of symbolism. Vallejo, however, abandons the alternating fullness and emptiness of the symbol, which organises the music of Verlaine and instead locates the subject in the infinite, 'el dolor sin fin'. Which infinite? This is not the Romantic infinite (the sublime of matchless subjective intensity) but the infinite of multiplicity and heterogeneity without transcendence. The subject in space corresponds, as I stated earlier, to the subject distributed in the phrase. To state the extreme case: the subject is no more in the word 'I' than in any other word.¹⁹

Once we've established this correlation between the spatial relations of syntax and the poetic self, it's possible to make an approach to the use of mathematical space in XXXVIII. Ortega has argued convincingly that to name 'las izquierdas', as 'los nuevos Menos', is to echo the colloquial phrase 'cero a la izquierda' (189) which is an expression of non-value. But where do we go from there? Ortega links zeros to the left, a spatial, mathematical determination, with 'la noción poética central' of *Trilce*, 'la orfandad', i.e. they constitute 'una respuesta agónica, existencial, que confronta los discursos establecidos con su misma desnudez,' and this proposes 'a new discursive economy'.

This is an excellent summary of *Trilce*'s poetics and I would simply like to try to take it a little further by thinking about the mathematical and spatial implications. The question that Ortega does not answer is what's the relation between void, in a more strictly mathematical sense, and affect. Zeros to the left indicate void, not number, but is that void infinite in that it includes no quantitative determination of how far it goes? For the classical atomists, Lucretius and Epicurus, the void is, as Alain Badiou puts it, 'the first name of the heterogeneously existent'.²⁰ To express it simply, void is where something isn't, so that matter can move, i.e. change: 'For Badiou, the void is what enables us to "subtract ourselves from the normative power of the One". Through [...] the imposition of an

¹⁸ Note how this is similar to the repeated *eur* sound in Verlaine's 'Il pleure dans mon cœur'.

¹⁹ See Gertrude Stein's attitude to the sentence, Stein being another contemporary of Vallejo's, a fact that's not often recognised.

²⁰ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 105.

empty mark [...] “being and nothingness are the same thing”.²¹ The void therefore is not number but what number cannot enumerate. Number in this case is not quantitative value, just as affect in *Trilce*, by dint of being prior to it, can overrule the count of time in spite of the regulation of space (‘Ya la tarde pasó diez y seis veces por el subsuelo empatrullado’, LV).

The question remains, what is the relation of the subject to this void that is the place where change comes from? Badiou points out that, for the atomists, ‘the void is [. . .] splendidly indifferent to subjects and to gods’. But if this is the case, how then does the Subject come in? What binds together the subject (‘orfanidad’), the void (zeros to the left), and change (‘las izquierdas’, the political)? The situation is complicated because ‘orfanidad’ is a highly overdetermined Andean seme. To embrace ‘orphanhood’ as a new power, as *Trilce* XXXVI does, is to affirm epochal as well as subjective change. If in *Los heraldos negros*, suffering is the basis of the will to epochal change (‘La cena miserable’),²² then *Trilce* is different in that it traverses and voids Christian eschatology in order to move towards a different position.

But before elaborating that idea, it will help, for the sake of clarity, to consider possible approaches to the problem of the Subject, politics and number. There seem to be three main approaches. The first would be to follow Deleuze’s commentaries on Bergson and to say that passion and affect, i.e. qualitative intensities, come before quantification and number. I have argued this myself in a recent essay titled ‘El tiempo de *Trilce*’.²³ The problem with this stance is, to state it simply, that it would not distinguish between zeros to the left and zeros to the right, it would simply prioritise affect over numbers without establishing any specific relation between them. The second would be to follow Alain Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject* and propose that the Subject is a force that disturbs structure and brings about a dislocation of space.²⁴ The third would be to follow Badiou’s later book *Being and Event*, and to hypothesise that the Subject of *Trilce* is the subject of an event, where the event is taken to be a ‘creation ex nihilo, a chance to begin again from scratch, to interrupt the order of continuity and inevitability’, and where ‘what is encountered

²¹ Hallward, pp. 101-02.

²² This poem follows the logic of Christian eschatology: ‘cuándo nos veremos con los demás, al borde / de una mañana eterna, desayunados todos’. i.e. the torsion of historical time towards redemption depends on the deployment of suffering in the rhetorical form of an address to God.

²³ *Alba Londres*, 2 (2011), 18-27.

²⁴ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (London: Continuum, 2009), Part 1.

through an event is precisely the void of the situation, that aspect of the situation that has absolutely no interest in preserving the status quo as such'. Also relevant is the statement: 'an event can be affirmed only through [. . .] pure subjective decision.'²⁵

As indicated, the shortcoming of the Bergson / Deleuze stance is that it doesn't give any status to the void. The second approach, drawing on Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, values the void as an interruption of structure and at the same time takes the subjective as force that creates scission, that splits the object.²⁶ It brings the two together in the idea of the void as 'outplace', i.e. what is out of place. However the void here stands for absence, which is linked to the erasure of the word, 'the sonorous void of the signifier' (p. 101), as in Mallarmé; there's no doubt that something of this is to be found in *Trilce*, with its pitching of noise and materiality against the symbolic efficacy of the word (see XIII). But this version of the void as the power of absence is linguistic not mathematical. It speaks of the voiding of the word, not the voiding of space.

The third approach, that of Badiou in *Being and Event*, has the virtue of linking the void with the heterogeneous multiplicity of being. In other words, it offers a mathematical ontology. It's this heterogeneity that makes the event possible, if we understand that it founds (makes possible) the void as existing at the boundary of any situation.²⁷ Event, in this context, should be taken in the strong sense of an epochal change which breaks with the order of the status quo, i.e. breaks the order of what can be numerated in the situation. We would also need to remember that, as quoted earlier, 'an event can be affirmed only through [. . .] pure subjective decision'. If the event in this sense opens the possibility of a universal truth, and it's in that truth that the Subject finds its existence, then the problem with this third stance, which is the most difficult one to work out, is the question what would be the event in *Trilce*? In other words, one can speak of an event in the later poems, especially of course those of *España, aparta de mí esta cáliz*, but that's not the case with *Trilce*.

On the other hand, to read the zeros to the left as a void or voiding which is a condition of being that allows us to think the radical openness of history, does offer a way of bringing together mathematics, space and

²⁵ Hallward, pp. 114-15.

²⁶ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, p. 41.

²⁷ Strictly speaking, the void is an 'unplaceable point' and the site of an event 'is on the edge of the void'. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 526, 175.

politics. Moreover, it's not true to say that there's no event in *Trilce*. There's the strange poem (XXIV) that appears simply to repeat the Gospel narrative. It ends: 'Del borde de un sepulcro removido / se alejan dos marías cantando. / / Lunes.' The poem obviously solders the everyday time of the weekly cycle with the great time of a new epoch. But what's the need to repeat the Gospel if the Church does it all the time? The reason must be that Christianity still gives that dimension of the event which marks a break in time. *Trilce* traverses Christian eschatology without completely voiding it.²⁸

The Church's interpretation of the Christian event makes a value of suffering. *Trilce* is more concerned with pain than with suffering: in XXXIV, as with LV, we move from a universe where suffering is present in symbolical objects to one in which pain falls out of symbols. Pain exceeds the identity of the Subject, exceeds identity as such. This is explicitly worked out in the prose poem 'Voy a hablar de la esperanza' (written some 6 years later) but not yet in *Trilce*. This later poem opens the door to the subjectivity of a definitively post-Christian – and post-Buddhist – era. In it, pain, which is something not narrated or subjectified, is the site of the collective. History, however, is missing from this poem: it's as if Vallejo at this point had only been able to develop one side of the poetics of *Trilce*. The event that would complete pain as site of the collective with a sense of historical agency, is above all the one presented in 'Masa': a new communist universality which takes the place of the Christian universal and makes suffering into a communal element. Thus if the site of the Subject in 'Voy a hablar de la esperanza' is made radically open to the masses to come, we can read the zeros to the left in *Trilce* as the place, as yet to be filled, of the masses.

Yet even from the perspective of *Poemas humanos*, and indeed of *España, aparta de mí este cáliz*, the event is still incomplete. And this incompleteness of the event relates of course to the problems of socialism in the Soviet Union and the impending defeat of the Republic in Spain. So the Resurrection of Christ is not itself the event of *Trilce*, it offers a formal anticipation of the event to come (its form in language, derived from a production of space and time); it's an index of the incompleteness of the event. In this sense, if the 'horma' of the material of history is linked with

²⁸ Vallejo's is a Hegelian reading of the Gospel: his Monday is similar to Hegel's idea of 'the speculative Good Friday in place of the historic Good Friday'; in other words, resurrection comes into its truth if we fully assume the consequences of the absence of the Father. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 90.

passion, i.e. suffering, connoting the crucifixion event of Christianity, this would lead one to read the subsequent presentation of the element to be taken by the mouth ('si se apasiona [. . .] / triste individuo incoloro / lo enviarían por amor [. . .] / si él no dase por ninguno de sus costados') as recasting Christ's body of the sacrament as sugar. So, we could say that Aristotle's hylo-morphism is recast ('se melaría / y tomaría la horma') through an intersection of industrial production, avant-gardist aesthetic production, and the Christian event. The poem, with its zeros (to be taken as synecdoche of the aesthetic of non-symmetry that characterises *Trilce*) works at voiding the Christian metaphysic and with it the whole of the Symbolic, but without completing the work. Yet, as already stated, given the last hundred years of history, the work is necessarily incomplete.

This incomplete emptying of the language of an epoch is necessarily so because it is tied up with the incomplete realisation of the project of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, a situation that postmodernism, with its supposition that the modernist project is finished, of course covers over. A symptom of the situation is that the term avant-gardism, currently, has come to denote, simply, a style among other styles. The emancipatory content of the modernist project has been abandoned. Just as with Ortega's celebration of naming as such, in this move a form of expression has been disconnected, alienated, from the production of sense and the social relations that sustain it. This reduction of an aesthetic-political project to style depends on the hyper-commodification or spectacle-effect of capitalism since the 1950s. Specifically, the disjunctive effects of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, especially cubism and surrealism, have become neutralised by the capacity of the spectacle to make anything consumable, to join everything, even the most disjoined words and images, in a new continuity called growth. At least, this was the case until the financial collapse of 2008.

Let's consider further the presentation of the event in *Trilce*, this time more specifically in its relation with emancipation, in order to open up some directions for further thought. Not surprisingly, emancipation arises as a theme predominantly in those poems that deal directly or indirectly with the situation of prison. If the question is what is the specific work of poetry, then the case can be made that here in *Trilce* this work is the emancipation of the Subject. The letter of 1922 to Orrego confirms this: 'siento gravitar sobre mí, una hasta ahora obligación sacratísima, de hombre y de artista ¡la de ser libre!'

First, it will help to establish briefly the difference between *Trilce* and *Los heraldos negros* in terms of the rhetorical stance each book takes vis-à-vis the political, since this is an index of how the subject of political

action might be constituted. The earlier book speaks of an end to intolerable injustice ('desayunados todos') but does so through the stance of a complaint to God ('Y cuándo nos veremos con los demás, al borde / de una mañana eterna, desayunados todos').²⁹ *Trilce*, however, speaks from a situation that renders the appeal to God inoperable. The injustice of hunger, and the situation that prevents the subject from giving to the other in need, is ascribed to a social form, prison, which functions as a synecdoche of the social production of alienation. Prison presents injustice as a question of social relations and reveals how it's the latter that inform, mould, the work of the senses: 'hasta qué hora son cuatro estas paredes' (XVIII).³⁰ This alteration of time and space includes the isolation of the person from any communal, shared existence ('y el único recluso sea yo', III). In other words, time and space are not given a priori, as in Kant, nor is isolation an existential given. Prison is the motor of these conditions ('bomba aburrida del cuartel achica / tiempo tiempo tiempo tiempo', II); they are not a universal situation.

It's particularly in sound and the music it can become, as durational formation of the subject as will, that the intimate formation of the subject of emancipation is fought out. XXXIII makes an explicit statement about freedom: 'Haga la cuenta de mi vida / o haga la cuenta de no haber aún nacido, / no alcanzaré a librarme.' The whole poem is a struggle with the structure and the materials of time. It also has a close relation with the group of poems by Baudelaire entitled 'Spleen' in *The Flowers of Evil*. A brief comparison will allow us to take account of the different inflexion of the 'I' in Vallejo and Baudelaire. Vallejo's poem begins: 'Si lloviera esta noche, retirárame / de aquí a mil años', which is in effect a reworking of the first line of 'Spleen II': 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans'. Vallejo's lines, in addition to the direct quote of 'mil años', are very close to Baudelaire in terms of sound and sentiment but above all with respect to rhythm. Vallejo mimics Baudelaire's classical alexandrine then humorously punctures it with the vulgar phrase, 'Mejor a cien no más': Vallejo's humour ruptures the paralysing horror of Bourgeois accumulation.

In another of the poems of this group, Baudelaire presents his own voice in the figure of a cracked bell: as against the venerable bell that

²⁹ 'La cena miserable', *César Vallejo: poesía completa*, I, ed. Ricardo Silva-Santisteban (Lima: PUCP, 1997), p. 126.

³⁰ See Jacques Rancière's assertion that political aesthetics consist precisely of a redistribution of the sensible, the point being that it is marked by social division. See above, note 6.