

University of New Hampshire

## University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository

---

Languages, Literatures, and Cultures  
Scholarship

Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

---

1-1-2010

### Huidobro's Absolute Modernity and Futurity

Scott Weintraub

*University of New Hampshire*, [scott.weintraub@unh.edu](mailto:scott.weintraub@unh.edu)

Luis Correa-Diaz

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholars.unh.edu/lang\\_facpub](https://scholars.unh.edu/lang_facpub)



Part of the [Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Weintraub, Scott & Correa-Diaz, Luis. "Huidobro's Absolute Modernity and Futurity." In *Huidobro's Futurity: 21st-Century Approaches*. Eds. Luis Correa-Diaz and Scott Weintraub. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P Hispanic Issues OnLine, 2010. 1-13. [https://cla.umn.edu/sites/cla.umn.edu/files/hiol\\_06\\_00\\_weintraubcorrea-diaz\\_introduction.pdf](https://cla.umn.edu/sites/cla.umn.edu/files/hiol_06_00_weintraubcorrea-diaz_introduction.pdf)

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Languages, Literatures, and Cultures Scholarship by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact [Scholarly.Communication@unh.edu](mailto:Scholarly.Communication@unh.edu).

## ◆ Introduction

### **Huidobro's Absolute Modernity/Futurity: An Introduction**

*Scott Weintraub and Luis Correa-Díaz*

*Il faut être absolument moderne*  
(One must be absolutely modern).  
—Arthur Rimbaud, “Une saison en enfer” (1873)

*Nothing gets old fast like the future.*  
—Lev Grossman

Rimbaud's prophetic remark highlights the difficulties of situating literary and cultural modernity at a specific moment or place, since modernity in and of itself is constituted by, and as, multiple temporal disjunctions. Modernity structurally aims to erase a past that it nevertheless needs to structure its own departure, as Paul de Man suggests, “in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure” (148). At the same time, modernity's disjunctions and breaks in fact make the relationship between literary innovation and historical modernity legible. De Man writes:

The continuous appeal of modernity, the desire to break out of literature toward the reality of the moment, prevails and, in its turn, folding back upon itself, engenders the repetition and the continuation of literature. Thus modernity, which is fundamentally a falling away from literature and a rejection of history, also acts as the principle that gives literature duration and historical existence. (162)

If modernity *qua* concept should dictate the conditions of possibility of the encounter between literature and history—as a dialectical force or pulsion not at all that different from what Octavio Paz described in the context of the Latin American avant-garde in terms of “the tradition of rupture”—then there is perhaps no better approach to Rimbaud's notion of being “absolutely modern” than the critical and meta-critical project undertaken by the poetics and experimental aesthetics of Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro (1893–1948),

**Huidobro's Futurity: Twenty-First Century Approaches**  
*Hispanic Issues On Line 6* (2010)

one of the most influential writers in the Latin American avant-garde movements that lasted from approximately 1915 to the late-1930s. His work is certainly best known for its formal and visual poetic experimentation, and is often discussed in terms of his *creacionista* aesthetic that searched for an autonomous sphere of poetic reality that refused to imitate the natural world in its creative potential, as he stated in an early manifesto titled “La poesía,” read at the Ateneo in Madrid in 1921:

El poeta crea fuera del mundo que existe el que debiera existir. [. . .] El poeta hace cambiar de vida a las cosas de la Naturaleza, saca con su red todo aquello que se mueve en el caos de lo innombrado, tiende hilos eléctricos entre las palabras y alumbra de repente rincones desconocidos, y todo ese mundo estalla en fantasmas inesperados. El valor del lenguaje de la poesía está en razón directa de su alejamiento del lenguaje que se habla.

[. . .] La Poesía es un desafío a la Razón, el único desafío que la razón puede aceptar, pues una crea su realidad en el mundo que ES y la otra en el que ESTÁ SIENDO.

[. . .] Toda poesía válida tiende al último límite de la imaginación. Y no sólo de la imaginación, sino del espíritu mismo, porque la poesía no es otra cosa que el último horizonte, que es, a su vez, la arista en donde los extremos se tocan, en donde no hay contradicción ni duda. Al llegar a ese lindero final el encadenamiento habitual de los fenómenos rompe su lógica, y al otro lado, en donde empiezan las tierras del poeta, la cadena se rehace en una lógica nueva.

El poeta os tiende la mano para conducirnos más allá del último horizonte, más arriba de la punta de la pirámide, en ese campo que se extiende más allá de lo verdadero y lo falso, más allá de la vida y de la muerte, más allá del espacio y del tiempo, más allá de la razón y la fantasía, más allá del espíritu y la materia. (654–56)

(The poet creates the world that should exist outside of the world that does exist. [. . .] The poet changes the life of things in Nature, removes with his net everything that moves in the chaos of the unnamed, stretches electric cables between words, suddenly illuminates unknown corners, and this entire world explodes in unanticipated ghosts.

The value of poetic language is a direct result of its separation from spoken language.

[. . .] Poetry is a challenge to Reason, the only challenge that reason can accept, since one creates its reality in the world that IS and the other in the world that IS BECOMING.

[. . .] All true poetry reaches to the final limit of the imagination. And not only of the imagination, but of the spirit itself, because poetry is nothing other than the final horizon, which is, at the same time, the edge where extremes come into contact, where there is neither contradiction nor doubt. Upon arriving at this final border the usual linkage of phenomena breaks its logic, and on the other side, where the lands of the poet begin, the chain is remade with a new logic.

The poet extends his hand to you to carry you beyond the final horizon, beyond the point of the pyramid, in that field that extends beyond truth and falsity,

beyond life and death, beyond space and time, beyond reason and fantasy, beyond spirit and material.)<sup>1</sup>

A writer of poetry, novels, short stories, screenplays, essays, and manifestos, Huidobro's work marks a series of important passages between the American and European avant-gardes in addition to a key moment in the development of the Chilean and Latin American poetic canon. Critical work on Huidobro's literary production has focused on a number of specific issues: the varied linguistic elements of Huidobro's poetry, the complex relationship between word and image in his *caligramas* and visual poetry, his multiple avant-gardist aesthetic projects, and the canonicity and originality of his writing. Noted critics such as Octavio Paz, René de Costa, Saúl Yurkievich, Guillermo Sucre, Cedomil Goic, George Yúdice, Ana Pizarro, Hugo Montes, Federico Schopf, Jorge Schwartz, and Jaime Concha, among others, have contributed to the sizable bibliography analyzing Huidobro's work.<sup>2</sup> The present book's approach, however, aims to engage, and subsequently respond to, the move from "absolute modernity" to an absolute futurity of Huidobro's textual projects. Very much in the manner of Rimbaud, Huidobro's writings are continually contemporary in an extreme and urgent sense, and they invite constant rereading and recontextualizations. But most importantly, the call emanating from Huidobro's work is an urgent one, considered in light of Altazor's repeated admonition that "there's no time to lose" (in Canto IV of the eponymous poem). It beckons to a reader-to-come exploring new fields, while at the same time this reader must be sure to heed Huidobro's warning: "El lector corriente no se da cuenta de que el mundo rebasa fuera del valor de las palabras, que queda siempre un más allá de la vista humana, un campo inmenso lejos de las fórmulas del tráfico diario" (655) (The common reader does not realize that the world goes beyond the value of words; there is always something beyond human vision, an immense field beyond the formulas of daily traffic).

The essays included here, then, follow this multifarious imperative by appealing to recent theoretical and methodological work done in the humanities and in the sciences—including, but not limited to, cultural and transatlantic studies, ecocriticism, quantum theory and cosmology, media studies, the visual arts, political theory, psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and deconstruction. Rather than conceive of this book as a response to any sort of "stagnancy" in the state of Huidobro's criticism, we envision that the volume's exploratory nature will open new lines of inquiry into Huidobro's writing in the early twenty-first century. And while the central question of rereading Huidobro's work is most often formulated in terms of an approach to poetics, these articles examine representative works from several genres. Additionally, we believe that the essays themselves call into question the

validity of these generic demarcations in the particularity of Huidobro's continuously innovative writing project.

In terms of the specificity of the critical contributions to Huidobro's studies that this book proposes, the first section, titled "Culturally Yours, Vicente Huidobro: Cultural Poetics and Politics," explores how and to what extent Huidobro's European travels form part of a diverse linguistic, literary, and cultural encounter between American and European (primarily avant-garde) poetics. Articles in this section examine the way in which the historicity of Huidobro's poetic project *qua* avant-garde writing constitutes a unique cultural recontextualization of transatlantic literary, cultural, and political ideological constructs. These critical operations reconsider Huidobro's body of work by interrogating the material nature of the work of art in the larger milieu of avant-garde formalisms, as well as social and aesthetic ideology. Additionally, essays included in this section dislodge and resituate Huidobro's place in a global/historical context by way of literary and cultural filiations (or disjunctions) between his work and the historical moment of the avant-garde.

The first piece included in this section, "Huidobro's Transatlantic Politics of Solidarity and the Poetics of the Spanish Civil War," by Cecilia Enjuto Rangel, explores Huidobro's poems, political manifestos, interviews, and letters in support of the Spanish Republic during the Civil War (1936–1939). She situates the Chilean writer's contribution to transnational solidarity in the context of the larger avant-garde period by emphasizing the central role that race and tradition play in several under-studied texts by Huidobro, and also compares the tenor of Huidobro's writing to the so-called "committed" art of several notable Latin American and Spanish poets who supported the Republican cause. Her analysis culminates in a close reading of the haunting elegy "España" (1937), in which Huidobro's verse bears witness to the fragmentation and destruction of a previously glorious nation, while at the same time it recuperates the problematic blood ties between Latin America and its (colonial) Spanish forefathers in order to strengthen the bonds within the Spanish-speaking world.

Rosa Sarabia's contribution, entitled "Vicente Huidobro's *Salle 14*: In Pursuit of the Autonomy of the Object," on the other hand, turns to the issue of cultural politics and the work of art via a reading of the 1922 exhibit of thirteen "painted poems" by Vicente Huidobro, billed as *Salle XIV*. Her article presents a nuanced analysis of the painted poems—especially "Minuit"—in terms of the materiality, the originality, and the autonomy of the artistic object. She goes on to consider the works' reinscription in the contemporary, postmodern art scene via an exhibition titled *Vicente Huidobro y las artes plásticas* that took place at the Reina Sofía Art Center in Madrid, Spain, in 2001. Sarabia argues, following cultural critic Eduardo Grüner, that the commodification of the work of art is in fact the condition

of possibility of its autonomy, made possible, in the case of *Vicente Huidobro y las artes plásticas*, through patronage from Telefónica S.A. This demonstrates, according to Sarabia's reading of the exhibition, the way in which expositions such as the reincarnation of *Salle XIV* are commodified and regulated by the larger industrialization of culture, as Néstor García Canclini has argued in other contexts.

Greg Dawes' "Altazor and Huidobro's 'Aesthetic Individualism,'" marks a return to/of the political in our projections of *Huidobro's Futurity*, a current that emerges from the very depths of a work—*Altazor* (1919–1931)—that has been read as the culmination and death throes of the aesthetic experimentation that characterized much of the work of the global *avant-gardes*. Dawes argues, in fact, that *Altazor* in and of itself can be read as the apotheosis of anarchist political aesthetics, insofar as it displaces the political radicalism of anarchism and instead brings out the centrality of Huidobro's left-leaning libertarianism to his larger poetic system. By way of Dawes' careful reading of *Altazor qua* poetic-political manifesto, we might argue that Huidobro's avant-garde aesthetics can be thought of as the *other* of anarchism, in such a way as to cast the triumph of radical individualism as the point of intersection between art and civic/political life.

The second group of essays, collectively subsumed under the title "Huidobro: (Dis)Embodied, Quantized, Musically Inclined, and *Au Naturel*," interrogates the myriad astronomical, biopolitical, musical, and ecocritical features of Huidobro's poetics and textual production. These articles take to task the cosmological, naturalistic, melodic, and corporeal notions that both literally and tropologically structure Huidobro's poetics, in order to stress the insistent, even urgent resonance of Huidobro's work in and beyond current theoretical and critical contexts within Hispanism and literary studies.

In "Altazor: A New Arrangement," Bruce Dean Willis examines Huidobro's continual reshuffling of linguistic, musical, and corporeal elements in the long poem's dialectic of creation and destruction. For Willis, the tropes of physical decomposition that accompany *Altazor's* progressive, material breakdown of words demonstrate the poem's failure (insofar as escape from language is impossible), but end up reinforcing the creative potential brought about by *Altazor's* final sonorous silence at the end of Canto VII. In other words, Willis' close reading of *Altazor's* rearrangement and mixing of linguistic and musical interludes carries out a series of structural, tonal, and alchemistic transformations that succeeds in *destroying* in such a way as to unleash the Lazarus-like rebirth of poetry in the midst of the death of meaning.

Moving from Huidobro's synecdochal explorations in *Altazor* to the ecocritical features of his *creacionista* aesthetic, the next article, Christopher M. Travis' "Huidobro's Rose: The Environmental Dialectics of

*Creacionismo*,” takes to task the way in which Huidobro challenges the objectification of nature as aesthetic fetish, and subsequently engages in a more active dialogue with the non-human world. Travis first develops Huidobro’s proposal that the poet must not obey the traditional hierarchy that would place God/Nature over humankind, as evidenced, in particular, in manifestos like “Non Serviam” and the famous poem “Arte poética.” By way of subsequent close readings of several texts that span the trajectory of Huidobro’s poetic career—moving from early *modernista*-inspired verse to the apotheosis of his *creacionista* project that is *Altazor*—Travis brings out the kind of acknowledgement of nature inherent in Huidobro’s search for, loss of, and renewed search for meaning by reevaluating the Chilean poet’s textual and humanist explorations through an ecocritical lens.

The final piece in this section, Scott Weintraub’s “Cosmic Impacts and Quantum Uncertainties: *Altazor* and the Fall ‘From’ Reference,” reconsiders the impact of a series of linguistic, critical, allegorical, and gravitational “falls” in the trajectory of the falling *Altazor*’s “voyage in parachute.” Here, Weintraub stresses the relevance of a linguistic event in the poem’s gravitational field by first discussing myriad critical approaches to the issue of the poem’s “illegible,” ambiguous conclusion. He contextualizes this fall from the linguistic and conceptual referent in *Altazor* by providing a necessary examination of the scientific imaginary that the poem shares with important discoveries in theoretical and experimental physics in the first few decades of the twentieth century. By engaging the historical context of the quantum/relativistic paradigm shift in physics that was contemporary to the poem’s composition, Weintraub explores the ways in which *Altazor* in and of itself demarks the historical and discursive passage between Newtonian and quantum cosmovisions. *Altazor*’s meaning-making activities, read with respect to quantum and cosmological concerns, show how Huidobro’s long poem traces out the falling motion of a linguistic and cosmic event that, nevertheless, is horizon-less and radically heterogeneous in nature—a facet of the poem that is indicative of the kinds of quantum fluctuations whose “path” cannot be accurately predicted or described with total certainty or mastery.

The third and final section of articles, grouped under the rubric of “Huidobro and the Others: Comparative Poetics,” explores Huidobro’s futurity in terms of the impact of his writing project on future poets and poetic environments. In particular, these essays focus on the indelible footprints left by Huidobro on the poetic corpus of more recent Chilean poets Nicanor Parra and Juan Luis Martínez, and explore several under-appreciated North-South (and South-North) currents linking the Latin American avant-gardists and subsequent North American poetic production.

In “Huidobro and Parra: World-Class Antipoets,” Dave Oliphant explores the ways in which Nicanor Parra’s “Also Sprach Altazor” openly

pays homage to Huidobro's groundbreaking "antipoetic" textual production, while Parra at the same time satirizes the underdevelopment of a Huidobro-like irreverent streak in the Chilean poetic canon. Oliphant reads Parra reading Huidobro via the antipoetic "disciple's" comic twists on numerous topics such as historical literary rivalries, shipwrecks, coffins, and Huidobro's abandonment of communism, among several others, throughout the eighty-four section poem "Also Sprach Altazor," published in *Discursos de sobremesa* (2006), and also accounts for Parra's ironic commentaries in earlier books like *Poemas y antipoemas* (1954) and *Versos de salón* (1962). According to Oliphant, then, "Also Sprach Altazor" returns to and departs from the master's *ur-text* in such a way as to permit Parra to riff on Huidobro's foundational, *creacionista* poetics in a playful manner, one that can certainly be read as informing Parra's own mock-heroic and irreverent poetic system. Oscar D. Sarmiento, in "Intersecting Reflections: Huidobro Through Juan Luis Martínez's *La nueva novela*," revisits Vicente Huidobro's literary and visual corpus through a number of key moments in Juan Luis Martínez's seminal art object/poetic collage ironically titled *The New Novel* (1977). By carefully interrogating the impact of Huidobro's *creacionista* project on Martínez's complex weaving of citations and contradictions, Sarmiento reflects on the textual potentialities of both poets' use of humor and irony, visual representations of reality, the context of performance and performativity in the avant-garde encounter, as well as the return of the political amidst a radical, textual aesthetics.

The next essay maintains the guiding thread of comparative poetics, but deviates slightly towards the practice and politics of literary translation. Fernando Pérez Villalón, in "Huidobro/Pound: Translating Modernism," traces the paths of Vicente Huidobro and Ezra Pound's physical and linguistic displacements via travel as well as translation, highlighting the tension between mother tongue and other languages in their work and also engaging the otherness of language itself in poetry written by Huidobro and Pound. He reevaluates each poet's self-insertion into the context of European modernism in light of the role that translation played in the composition and the reception of their works, and further explores each poet's own theoretical reflections on the (un)translatability of poetry and its cultural ramifications.

The focus of the book's final article, Cedomil Goic's "*Poèmes Paris 1925*, Vicente Huidobro and Joaquín Torres García: Visual Image and Poetic Writing," centers on Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres García's original rewriting of Huidobro's book *Tout à coup* in *Poèmes Paris 1925*, in which the painter intersperses the poems with symbolic drawings. Goic analyzes the ways in which the encounter between visual imagery and poetic writing sheds further light on the poems and represents an original instance of creative dialogue between poetry and painting, and between poet and artist.



If in fact the essays and bibliography included in this book should represent a significant update to Huidobro studies, they by no means seek to close off or preclude further readings of Huidobro's continually relevant creative project. The ethic of "new approaches" to which these articles respond gave rise to a sampling of possible approximations that are the outgrowth of contemporary theoretical approaches to literature and the visual arts, among other disciplines. At the same time, further rereadings might explore in more depth the following issues and questions, among a myriad of possible critical avenues:

1. *A Digital/Digitized Huidobro*. In what ways do Vicente Huidobro's poetics and literary work simultaneously anticipate and evoke the particular technological (re)configurations of literature in the Digital Age? In this section one might also consider the ways Huidobro's work has been or ought to be digitized.
2. *Word and Image/Visually Huidobro*. The fundamental relationship between word and image in Huidobro's theoretical proclamations and in his poetry plays out in a radical and transgressive way—especially in his *caligramas* and other visual media during the height of the *vanguardias'* formal experimentation. How might we continue to recontextualize and reevaluate Huidobro's visual preoccupations in light of recent theoretical approaches to media studies and visual culture?
3. *Rereading (My Own) Huidobro*. More than sixty years after the death of the Chilean poet, critics who have written on Huidobro might be interested in rereading and evaluating their published work in terms of recent theoretical methodologies or approaches. By the same token, we anticipate that reflection on one's own work *vis à vis* rereadings of Huidobro's writings will produce new and surprising critical encounters.
4. *Wrestling with Huidobro*. Additional critical reflection is needed with respect to the polemics that involved Huidobro personally (including his exchanges with Pablo Neruda, Pablo de Rokha, and Guillermo de Torre, among others), as well as those conflicts, debates, or even impasses that his work has produced in larger artistic, critical and academic contexts.
5. *Humo(u)rous Huidobro*. In what ways do Huidobro's poetry and manifestos configure the multiple relationships between the corporeal and the interruptive potential of laughter? Essays on this topic might explore laughter's involuntary physiological response and its paroxysmal interruption in Huidobro's fluid conception of poetry and poetics. If the rhythmic circulation of humours or elements in Huidobro's writings is continually exposed to the threat of parabasis, then what is the status of the Subject and the poetic body in his writings?
6. *The Future of Huidobro's "Futurity."* In light of the "updating" and "new approaches" proposed in the current volume, we might continue to (re)consider the traces or footprints left by Huidobro in Latin American and world literature in the post-*vanguardias* literary context—in addition to conjecturing about the future of readings of Huidobro's work.

The guiding thread of these new directions seeks to disrupt what is often conceived, in literary studies, as the linear trajectory of critical moments giving rise to literary history. But as the essays in this book show, the insistent emphasis on the question of Huidobro's modernity takes the "new" as an interruption that is the condition of possibility of the metaphorical narration that constitutes history itself (de Man 159). And while Huidobro himself suggested, in a 1938 interview, that "Modern poetry begins with me," our interrogation of the Chilean poet's absolute modernity perhaps brings out the ways the narrative constructed by the critical enterprise reading Huidobro's contemporaneity can never efface its own origins or its end, even while proclaiming its constitutive futurity.

Perhaps no one has more precisely described this kind of Huidobrian "futurity" than Eliot Weinberger in the introduction to his translation of *Altazor* (2003),<sup>3</sup> a poem in seven *cantos* that is the product of its time—temporally situated between two world wars, it is a poem that belongs to an "age that thought of itself post-apocalyptic" and was aesthetically "obsessed with celebrating the new" (vii). This was an age that posited a new conception of time, as Octavio Paz suggested in the 1970s when he coined the phrase "the tradition of rupture": "Nuestro tiempo se distingue de otras épocas y sociedades por la imagen que nos hacemos del transcurrir: nuestra conciencia de la historia" (1981: 27) (Our age is distinguished from other epochs and other societies by the image we have made of time. For us, time is the substance of history, time unfolds in history). The tradition of rupture, which Huidobro certainly epitomized, "por una parte, es una crítica del pasado, una crítica de la tradición; por la otra, es una tentativa, repetida una y otra vez a lo largo de los dos últimos siglos, por fundar una tradición en el único principio inmune a la crítica, ya que se confunde con ella misma: el cambio, la historia" (1981: 25) (It is a criticism of the past, and it is an attempt, repeated several times throughout the last two centuries, to found a tradition on the only principle immune to criticism, because it is the condition and the consequence of criticism: change, history [1974: 9]). One of the key aspects of this new tradition, according to Paz, is the (illusion) of the celerity of time (a perception that certainly structures our lives): "el tiempo transcurre con tal celeridad que las distinciones entre los diversos tiempos—pasado, presente, futuro—se borran o, al menos, se vuelven instantáneas, imperceptibles e insignificantes" (21) (time passes so quickly that the distinctions among past, present, and future evaporate).

The same terms are present in Weinberger's introduction—which again confirms, on the one hand, the long-lasting validity of Octavio Paz's essay, and on the other, the influence of Huidobro in this matter. Although Paz does not name him here, it would be difficult to deny the presence of the Chilean poet in Paz's ideas—after all, he describes Huidobro in his 1956 book *El arco y la lira* in the following way: "contempla de tan alto que todo

se hace aire. Está en todas partes y en ninguna: es el oxígeno invisible de nuestra poesía” (1993: 96)<sup>4</sup> (he contemplates from such heights that everything turns into air. He is everywhere and nowhere: he is the invisible oxygen of our poetry [1973: 81]). Weinberger observes the same acceleration that pushes everyone—particularly artists and poets, “the citizens of international progress”—towards the “task of making the new out of the new.” Writing more than five decades later (in our always vanishing present), Weinberger definitively repositions Huidobro’s masterwork’s uniqueness when he suggests that

all time collapsed into the single moment of now. “Speed,” said Norman Bel Geddes, who redesigned the world, “is the cry of our era,” and *Altazor* is, among other things, surely the fastest-reading long poem ever written. What other poem keeps reminding us to hurry up, that there’s no time to lose? (vii)

Thus with *Altazor*, Huidobro wrote the poem of, and for, the future—but it would not be fair to simply read his work as a sort of futurist (although creationist) text in the modern sense. What is a poem of and for the future? It is simply a poem that puts forth a call, an urgent one in Huidobro’s case, to face and start taking full charge of “our cosmic future,” very much in the way suggested by Olaf Stapledon (qtd in Nikos Prantzos in the conclusion to *Our Cosmic Future. Humanity’s Fate in the Universe*): “To romance of the far future, then, is to attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting, and to mould our hearts to entertain new values.” It is an attempt in which “our imagination must be strictly disciplined,” and this imaginative attempt is closer to art than science in the “effect that it should have on the reader,” since science should always be the source of both potentiality and humility in humanity’s unavoidable fate (272). And it is a fate that poetry should embody, as is the case with Huidobro, clearly a leading poet in this particular respect.<sup>5</sup>

For this reason, we must go beyond a reading of *Altazor* as (simply) an antiepic poem tracing metaphysical/metalinguistic failure and (the human) fall, as Weinberger suggests: “*Altazor* is a poem of falling, not back to earth—though certain critics have insisted on reading it as a version of the Icarus myth—but out into space” (x). In the present volume, while Weintraub’s article most directly explores this new critical paradigm, other contributors engage related concerns from different theoretical positions, insofar as they all recognize that there is more to *Altazor* (and by extension Huidobro the poet), this “cosmonauta, aviador que se desplaza a través del cosmos en paracaídas en vertigo y ascension metafísica” (Pizarro 11) (cosmonaut, aviator who moves through the cosmos in a parachute, falling into vertigo and metaphysically ascending), as Pizarro concisely describes in her “Preámbulo a Huidobro, jugador aéreo.” All previous critical approaches tend to stop at this point and do not push the reading experience much

further into the future—with the notable exception of the falling-failure pairing—and usually return, as Pizarro does with such critical subtlety, to elaborate issues that structure and inform European and Latin American modernity. The time of this other reading has arrived, a time in which these epithets are not only modern imperatives, but also, and most importantly, they provide a vision concerning history at an almost unimaginable scale. That is why the “root transformation” that Huidobro advanced, as Pizarro accurately describes, “forma parte de un proceso mucho mayor. Su virtualidad de pionero es percibirlo, impulsarlo, su grandeza de escritor es proyectar en él su máxima potencialidad estética, su virtud de escritor latinoamericano es haber construido con éste un discurso de perfil propio” (12) (forms part of a much larger process. His pioneering potential is perceiving it, promoting it; his greatness as a writer is projecting his maximum aesthetic potential in this process, his potential as a Latin American writer is to have found himself and his own writing in this process). However, that “major process” in which Huidobro’s work participates is not restricted to cosmopolitanism, the boom of technology and all the other nuances that encompass modernity. It is even more complex, insofar as it speaks of a more pressing adventure for the whole of humanity: that of embracing our (definitively reversed) mythical era, the present-future, if we agree with Jean-Paul Martinon that “futurity constitutes the *present space* of the future, what can be seen *today* as the future” (xi).<sup>6</sup>

It is already time to critically remove or dislodge Huidobro from his allegedly absolute modernity—even more so given that Paz, in his 1990 Nobel Lecture, realized that modernity and its future/progress was always already canceled, and postmodernity was a parenthesis, as Gilles Lipovetsky would later suggest in *Hypermodern Times*. We must read Huidobro in his absolute futurity, which is not that of the modern impulse, fascinated with the new (airplanes, etc.), but that of “falling into space” and embracing humankind’s cosmic fate. This call is present and is in fact constitutive of Huidobro’s poetry—it is not just Altazor’s call, it is Huidobro’s as poet and cosmonaut *avant la lettre*, who despite wanting to be transubstantiated into trees to finally rest in peace at the bottom of the sea, he did not forget to tell us in “The Return Passage” that he possessed for us “a love much like the universe” (1981: 221).

## Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are ours.
2. Refer to Laura D. Shedenhelm's bibliographic project updating critical studies on Huidobro, included at the end of this volume.
3. As is well known (and Weinberger does not hesitate to remind us, given its importance theoretically and practically for his own work as translator of the poem), it is likely that "the original of this untranslatable poem may itself be a translation" (xii). Whether or not this belongs to the myth or is a fact, the important thing here is that this situation links *Altazor* to *El Quijote* and, therefore, this relationship can be used to predict the place that the former will have in the (future) history of Spanish-language writing. If Cervantes' masterwork—which opened the door to modernity in many ways and thus was critical of the past—is still constitutive of the dream to return to a golden age impossible to find except in a mythical time, then *Altazor* is the culmination of the revisionist and modern critical attitude, one that leaves behind and forgets all nostalgia. Consequently it becomes an urgent call to definitively cancel the past and launch the conquest of a forthcoming golden age, already in progress, as Weinberger astutely notes: "Once upon a time, the new was sacred, space became the unexplored territory, and the future was the only mythical era" (xi).
4. It is significant that Weinberger's translation is accompanied by a blurb by Octavio Paz: "Huidobro's great poem is the most radical experiment in the modern era. It is an epic that tells the adventures, not of a hero, but of a poet in the changing skies of language. Throughout the seven cantos we see *Altazor* subject language to violent or erotic acts: mutilations and divisions, copulations and juxtapositions. The English translation of this poem that bristles with complexities is another epic feat, and its hero is Eliot Weinberger."
5. As in the case of the widely-studied transformations of modern life, Ana Pizarro synthesizes these notions as far as Huidobro is concerned: "El discurso del arte en su asimilación privilegiada de las transformaciones en el universo simbólico no podía dejar de textualizar la nueva relación del hombre consigo mismo y con el mundo que establecía la nueva conformación del universo urbano y el cosmopolitismo que se abría como fenómeno de la tecnología y de la guerra europea" (12) (The discourse of art, in its unique assimilation of transformations in the symbolic universe, could not stop textualizing man's new relationship with himself and with the world that established the new structure of the urban, as well as with the cosmopolitan impulse begun as a technological phenomenon and by the war in Europe).
6. Martinon stresses the (absolute) focal point of the present, a present that privileges its new relationship with the future more so than with the past: "From this understanding of the word 'futurity,' one can then proceed to 'gaze' or 'peep' *into* futurity, while knowing all too well that this gazing, or peeping, is only that afforded by our present situation. Alternatively, if one is more inclined to take action, one can either 'proceed carefully' or 'throw oneself' *into* futurity, again from the basis of options available to us today. The meaning of the term is therefore unambiguous: that which can be identified *here* and *now* as the future" (xi). This understanding of futurity takes us again to Stapledon's words (qtd in Prantzós), when he warns us that in this openness to the future "our imagination must be strictly disciplined. We must endeavour not to go beyond the bounds of possibility set by the particular state of culture within which we live" (272). We see this "disciplined imagination" not in contradiction with our proposal in this book, nor with Huidobro's creative work.

## Works Cited

- De Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Grossman, Lev. "Back to the Final Frontier." [A movie review of *Star Trek* (2009)] *Time* 173: 17 (2009): 51–52.
- Huidobro, Vicente. *Altazor or a Voyage in a Parachute: Poem in VII Cantos*. Bilingual edition. Trans. Eliot Weinberger. Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Manifestos/Manifest*. Trans. Gilbert Alter-Gilbert. København: Green Integer, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Obras completas*. Prólogo de Braulio Arenas. Tomo I. Santiago de Chile: Empresa Editora Zig-Zag, 1964. [See also: [www.vicentehuidobro.uchile.cl](http://www.vicentehuidobro.uchile.cl)]
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Selected Poetry of Vicente Huidobro*. Ed. David M. Guss. New York: New Directions, 1981.
- Lipovetsky, Gilles. *Hypermodern Times*. Trans. Andrew Brown. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
- Martinon, Jean-Paul. *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Paz, Octavio. *El arco y la lira*. Novena reimpresión. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Bow and the Lyre*. Trans. Ruth C. Simms. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Children of the Mire*. Trans. Rachel Phillips. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Los hijos del limo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *In Search of the Present*. 1990 Nobel Lecture. Bilingual Edition. Trans. Anthony Stanton. San Diego, CA: A Harvest/HBJ Original, 1991.
- Pizarro, Ana. *Sobre Huidobro y las vanguardias*. Santiago: Instituto de Estudios Avanzados/Universidad de Santiago, 1994.
- Prantzos, Nikos. *Our Cosmic Future: Humanity's Fate in the Universe*. Trans. Stephen Lyle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Euvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2009.

---

Weintraub, Scott and Luis Correa-Díaz. "Huidobro's Absolute Modernity/Futurity: An Introduction." *Huidobro's Futurity: Twenty-First Century Approaches*. Ed. Luis Correa-Díaz and Scott Weintraub. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 6 (Spring 2010): 1–13. [http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010/00\\_Huidobro\\_Weintraub\\_Intro.pdf](http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010/00_Huidobro_Weintraub_Intro.pdf).

---