

## Infrarealism: A Latin American Neo-Avant-Garde, or The Lost Boys of Guy Debord

ART IN THIS COUNTRY HAS NOT ADVANCED PAST A LITTLE  
TECHNICAL COURSE FOR EXERCISING MEDIOCRITY  
DECORATIVELY

—Mario Santiago Papasquiaro

The above inscription comes from Mario Santiago Papasquiaro's "Infrarealist Manifesto," penned in Mexico City in early 1976. The manifesto, included in full in this special section, outlined key programmatic positions and actions for the then newly founded neo-avant-garde movement. Comprised of Leftist militants, countercultural enthusiasts, and college dropouts, some of whom had met in writing workshops, the *Infrarrealistas* (Infrarealists) came together as a group of young Latin American poets who were deeply dissatisfied with the current literary and artistic establishment. The group first gathered in the summer of 1975 and soon began meeting regularly at Casa del Lago in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park and in downtown cafés, reciting their poems together, exchanging their manuscripts, and sharing ideas, viewpoints, and experiences. Their long daily walks through the city would eventually lead them to a collective ethical position that radically challenged the underpinnings of Mexico City's entire cultural establishment.

Infrarealism was the crystallization of Santiago Papasquiaro's efforts to combine and renew traditions from the European and Latin American avant-gardes. Barely nineteen years old and attempting to form a group in 1973–1974, Santiago Papasquiaro began his neo-avant-garde activity with the January 1974 publication of *Zarazo*, a tabloid that collaged texts from Surrealism, Dada, the Beats, the Peruvian neo-avant-garde *Hora Zero*, and post-1968 Marxist theory.

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Author's Note: I want to express my gratitude to *Chicago Review* for welcoming Infrarealism into their pages, in particular to Andrew Peart for his dedication, vision, and editorial talents. A special thank you to John Burns for his continued collaboration and partnership in preparing this dossier, including his exceptional translations of the manifestos, letters, and poems. My gratitude goes as well to fellow traveler Cole Heinowitz.

This roster articulated a kind of aesthetic and philosophical genealogy for Infrarealism, its organizing principle being a belief in the unification of art and life. Generationally, Santiago Papasquiaro and the Infrarealists felt closest to the Beats and to Peru's *Hora Zero*. In the Beats they found a compelling image of the poet as adventurer, visionary, outsider, and intellectual provocateur. And in *Hora Zero* they found an attractive conception of the literary text as a "*poema integral*," a total or comprehensive poem that would incorporate a mixture of languages and genres into the text as a way of representing the full integration of the poet into all areas of life. A year after the publication of the *Zarazo* tabloid, Santiago Papasquiaro met Bolaño and several other young poets who shared his neo-avant-garde position and became the first recruits of his projected group.

In late 1975 and early 1976, as they bummed around Mexico City together, this new group discussed the writing of a manifesto and the meaning of the name Infrarealism, which Bolaño would soon introduce in his own manifesto "Leave It All, Once More," included in this special section.<sup>1</sup> Bolaño derived the name from Soviet science fiction writer Georgy Gurevich's novelette *Infra Draconis* (1961), where the term *infrasoles* (black suns) refers to stars that are not shown on sky maps because they have a non-gleaming appearance, despite their heat. For Bolaño, the term described the group's position in the "constellation of the literary and cultural field."<sup>2</sup> For Bolaño, Santiago Papasquiaro, and their fellow *infrasoles*, the name Infrarealism stood for their efforts to represent the whole reality (an infra-world) that lies beyond the range of hegemonic regimes of perception.

In his own "Infrarealist Manifesto," Santiago Papasquiaro begins with the following question and answer: "WHAT DO WE PROPOSE? TO NOT MAKE WRITING A PROFESSION." It then immediately identifies the center of the poet's activity: "LIFE MISALIGNED AT ALL COSTS." The poet isn't an historical witness who observes and reflects on the world from his domestic comfort, but rather an active agent

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1/ The Infrarealists wrote four manifestos between 1976 and 1977, though the exact dates are uncertain: Santiago Papasquiaro's "Infrarealist Manifesto," Roberto Bolaño's "Leave It All, Once More" and "Infrarealist Manifesto: Reality's Fractures," and José Vicente Anaya's "For a Vital and Unlimited Art." Anaya left the group in 1976.

2/ See Andrea Cobas Carral, "La estupidez no es nuestro fuerte: Tres manifestos del infrarealismo mexicano," *Osamayor: Graduate Student Review* 17 (2006): 11–29.

in transforming everyday life “at all costs.” The manifesto’s general statements and principles are underscored by a telegraphic assessment of the current situation, with particular attention paid to new forms of Leftist politics in Mexico City, from independent trade unions to the gay liberation movement. For Santiago Papasquiario, the mid-1970s represented another moment in the cycle of social crisis, repression, and violence that governed history under Mexican capitalism: “AT A TIME WHEN MURDERS HAVE BEEN DISGUISED AS SUICIDES.” In such a setting, he contended, art cannot be impervious to the way these convulsive processes affect everyday life. The poet must take an interest in social, political, and affective eruption.

Because the primary objective for Santiago Papasquiario was the unification of art and life, he effusively reclaimed a tenet from Surrealism: “TO RETURN TO ART THE NOTION OF A PASSIONATE & CONVULSIVE LIFE.” By the same token, in his daily life he sought to take literally a dictum he derived from Antonin Artaud: “A CULTURE MADE FLESH / A CULTURE IN FLESH, IN SENSITIVITY.” More than simply adopting the principles of earlier avant-garde formations, Santiago Papasquiario established a new dictum for Infrealists: assimilate those principles into your flesh in order to test their truth and validity in current historical experience. In the process he rewrote the history of the avant-garde as a phenomenon extending beyond the borders of Europe. It was a history of Guy Debord’s lost children.

Infrealism as a movement erupted publicly in March 1976 with a series of poetry readings at Gandhi’s Bookstore in Mexico City, including the debut of Bolaño’s and Jose Vicente Anaya’s Infrealist manifestos. A string of articles followed. In 1976, Bolaño published an essay on the *Estridentistas*, Mexico’s original avant-garde movement, and an interview with three of its members. (The *Estridentistas* had emerged in the 1920s but by the 1960s had been effaced from literary history.) Later that year he published an incendiary review of José Emilio Pacheco’s book of poems *Islas a la deriva* (1976), in which he claimed Pacheco no longer represented a viable literary alternative to Octavio Paz—for the Infrealists, the ultimate establishment poet. For the December 1976 issue of the Mexican journal *Plural*, meanwhile, Santiago Papasquiario wrote a short essay introducing a section on Mexican Infrealist poets (see p. 13). In the next two years, Infrealist poetry appeared in three important magazines published in Mexico and Spain:

*Pájaro de calor* (1976), *Correspondencia infra* (1977), and *Rimbaud, vuelve a casa* (1977) (see p. 49). All the while, Infrarealism asserted itself through a series of incendiary political acts, such as the disruption of readings, book presentations, and literary cocktail parties.

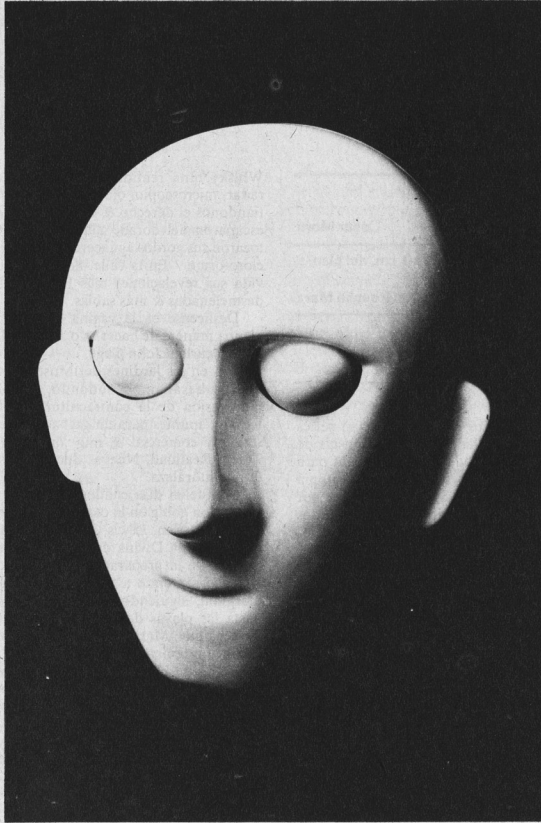
Crucial to understanding Infrarealism as a movement is the fact that it emerged in the periphery at a time in the 1970s when, in the global centers of cosmopolitan culture, the avant-garde was thought to be a phenomenon of the past. Indeed, by the beginning of the 1960s, several European critics considered the avant-garde to be dead. This was certainly true for Roland Barthes, and the reason, as Matei Calinescu has noted, was that the avant-garde had been “recognized as artistically significant by the same class whose values it so drastically rejected.”<sup>3</sup> More recently Evan Mauro has described what he calls the “narrative of the death of the Avant-Garde in the twentieth century” as a story about “the end of any kind of autonomy for art, and the ultimate failure of avant-gardes to define some spheres of life outside of the commodity world to which they were eventually assimilated.”<sup>4</sup> If by the 1960s the death of the avant-garde had become one more chapter in European art history, what made a group of very young Latin American poets living in mid-1970s Mexico City want to reclaim key principles of the historical avant-garde movements? Or, as the female narrator says of the young poets at the end of *Amulet* (1999), Bolaño’s short novel about the aftermath of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, what pushed this group of Latin Americans to walk “toward the abyss...marching shoulder to shoulder toward death”? In this regard, how should Infrarealism itself be defined—as a delayed expression of the historical European avant-garde in Mexico, as a local imitation of the Beat movement and *Hora Zero*, or as a practical engagement with the avant-gardes of the past as a way to come to terms with their limitations and failures?

The local literary and cultural milieus can provide some answers. As Infrarealism emerged in the mid-1970s, literary production in Mexico was defined by the following: 1) the absence of a Mexican counterpart to Dada and Surrealism that could serve as an historical precedent from the early twentieth century; 2) the erasure of an alternative avant-garde group, *Estridentismo*, from literary history;

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3/ Matei Calinescu, *Faces of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 120.

4/ Evan Mauro, “The Death and Life of the Avant-Garde: Or, Modernism and Biopolitics,” *Mediations* 26 (Fall 2012–Spring 2013): 122-123.



SEIS JOVENES INFRARREALISTAS MEXICANOS

*Selección y nota de Mario Santiago*

Title page for “Six Young Mexican Infrarealists,” a selection of Infrarealist poetry that Mario Santiago Papasquiaro edited, with a short introductory essay, for the Mexican journal *Plural* (December 1976).

3) the exclusivity of all literary production up until this point as an activity for the upper classes;<sup>5</sup> 4) the full dependency of writers on private business and the state to sponsor all literary activities, from publications and events to jobs and travel; 5) the outsized authority and influence of a single figure, Octavio Paz; 6) and, consequently, the supremacy of a complacent poetry lacking formal experimentation and an engagement with the social world. This literary and cultural environment was the context in which Santiago Papasquiario delivered his stinging rebuke of Mexican art past and present as “a little technical course for exercising mediocrity decoratively.”

When it first emerged, Infrarealism sought to produce a radical break with the Mexican literary and cultural establishment and offered a new vision of the poet’s role in culture on both aesthetic and ethical grounds. Infrarealism’s approach was to assimilate and circulate principles of the major historical avant-garde movements, Surrealism and Dada, but also to take into account the Situationists’ critique of these movements.<sup>6</sup> The original group comprised the Chileans Bruno Montané Krebs, Roberto Bolaño, and Juan Esteban Harrington; the Peruvian José Rosas Ribeyro; the Argentine Claudia Kerik; and the Mexicans Mario Santiago Papasquiario, Mara Larrosa, José Peguero, Rubén Medina, Cuauhtémoc and Ramón Méndez, María Guadalupe Ochoa Ávila, Jorge Hernández Piel Divina, Geles Lebrija, Víctor Monjarás, and José Vicente Anaya. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, due largely to Santiago Papasquiario’s presence and activity, the movement attracted a new group of poets living in Mexico City: Pedro Damián Bautista, Edgar Artaud Jarry, Mario Raúl Guzmán, Eduardo Guzmán Chávez, and Rafael Catana. Since Bolaño’s death in 2003, various young Latin American poets have become affiliated with Infrarealism and/or have adopted the aesthetic and ethical orientation of the movement. This second generation of Infrarealists and fellow travelers includes Matías Ellicker and Nibaldo Acero in Chile, as well as the so-called *Poetas salvajes* group in Mexico City and Monterrey, among whose

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5/ See John Burns, “La fragmentación como técnica de representación en *Consejos de 1 discípulo de Marx a 1 fanático de Heidegger*,” in *Consejos de 1 discípulo de Marx a 1 fanático de Heidegger*, edited by Rubén Medina (Mexico City: Matadero, 2016), 113–126.

6/ This critique is evident in Guy Debord’s 1957 manifesto “*Rapport sur la construction des situations et sur les conditions de l’Organisation et de l’action dans la tendance Situationniste Internationale*” (“Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency”).

members are the poets Sandino Bucio, Genkidama Ñu, Luna itaj nam, Daniela Rey Serrata, María Villatoro, Joana Medellín, Ki Ka Briones, Frizia Guerrero, Mavi RoCa, and Juan Manuel Zermeño Posadas.

From its beginnings Infrarealism proposed a unification of poetry and life through the poet's commitment to a radical new ethics, one that stressed constant movement between the margin and the center and valorized the poet's nomadic existence. (By the end of the 1970s, several members had migrated to Spain, France, Chile, and the US.) In the broader social and political context, the emergence of Infrarealism coincided with the massification of higher education in Mexico after 1968, itself a result of mass migration from the countryside to the city during the previous two decades. Other factors behind the movement's emergence were the increasing politicization and polarization of Latin American culture in the 1970s; the initial euphoria for the Cuban Revolution, followed by a sustained critique of Stalinism among younger Mexican Leftists; the growing consciousness of the middle class; and the subaltern population's disappointment with local modernity, its cosmopolitan elites, and the complicity of the official Left. For the Infrarealists, these years also brought the diffusion of several major currents of the global counterculture movement: the birth of a new conception of the body as a site of rebellion, desire, and sexuality; a significant change in the perception of sexual and ethnic others; the collapse of the boundaries between high culture and popular culture; and an internal critique of the Left. Infrarealists at the time paid close attention to these changes and the new subjective formations they enabled, seeking to create a new structure of feeling through their writings and their actions. Their legacy is an alternative image of the poet, one that is shaped by the interaction between the center and the margins of culture, the permeability of the local and the global, their own rejection of hegemonic forms of writing, and ultimately a new relation between the poet and the reader or listener.

From its beginnings, too, Infrarealism was not only a movement that opposed a poetic tradition but also, more broadly, a movement against the whole literary and cultural establishment. It questioned dominant conceptions of the poet as an egocentric and solitary being struggling with language and solely interested in promoting his or her individual oeuvre, gaining recognition through publications and awards, and pursuing friendships as gateways to upward mobility.

Its basic impulse, as translator and co-editor of this section, John Burns, has said, was to reject a refined poetry that did not do justice to the current, brutal reality. For this reason, a main tenet of Infrarealism continues to be the rejection of state dependency. Infrarealists broke with the traditional practice of Mexican writers throughout the twentieth century of pursuing job positions in state institutions as a way to facilitate their writing activity. For Infrarealists any such dependency would destroy the poet's true creativity and undermine the movement's radical rupture with tradition, serving instead to reproduce cultural hegemony and existing groupings of power. Breaking with state dependency, Infrarealism broke with the image of the writer as an apolitical social climber.

As Bolaño notes in "Leave It All, Once More," the original Infrarealists knew the appeal of the early twentieth century avant-garde movements, particularly Dada and Surrealism, even if these movements did end up assimilated into the official canon. Infrarealists were attracted to Dada and Surrealism for the virulent and radical approach to artistic practice they found there, but they criticized both movements for having resulted merely in novel aesthetic explorations and new power- and position-seeking strategies. Even André Breton lamented seeing Dada's rebellion reduced to the bookstore's front window. Infrarealism, for its part, was conscious of not becoming merely a movement of aesthetic renewal or an adolescent expression of rebellion against the symbolic power of the Father. Though the movement's identity was based on neo-avant-garde practice, poetry was not the only battleground: Bolaño, Santiago Papasquiaro, Ramón Méndez, Piel Divina, Peguero, Larrosa, and their peers would also resort to public confrontation wherever possible. In response, the literary and cultural establishment of Mexico City condemned Infrarealism throughout the 1970s and 80s as a nonsense movement whose members were incapable of articulating ideas or writing correctly because they were ignorant, depraved individuals, or even drug addicts. To this day the Mexican literary and cultural establishment still holds this view of Infrarealism, despite the wide recognition earned by Bolaño and Santiago Papasquiaro, the movement's impact on a younger generation of poets throughout Latin America, and the increasing interest in Infrarealist writing outside the Spanish-language tradition.

In its patricidal attitude towards previous literary generations, Infrarealism explored other ways to be a poet at a time when all paths



appeared to be closed or to end up in the same place. In the manifesto published here, Bolaño calls on a younger generation of poets to “leave everything behind.” He challenges them to overcome their fear of losing the privileges and social comfort that had come with state dependency. In the Infrealist ethos, poets should embrace marginality and embody an absolute otherness and difference. In Bolaño’s words, “Infrealists propose Indigenism to the world: a crazy, shy Indian,” envisioning “[a] new lyricism that begins to grow in Latin America.” To the literary and cultural establishment, and to the state, indigenous people are the absolute other. After five centuries, Native Americans on this continent still lack full citizenship, representation, and voice; their culture and knowledge remain in the margins and on reservations. For Bolaño, an Indian is a dystopian, urban postcolonial subject, representing a deep and ongoing opposition to European modernity and capitalism. This oppositional subject is epitomized by Chief Bromden, a main character in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, who is narrator of the novel but mute in the film—a double condition quite familiar to Infrealists. In their ethos not only does the poet emerge from different social, cultural, and daily experiences, but that difference also becomes a guide marking different possibilities of life. “It’s hard times for poetry,” Bolaño writes in his manifesto. But also: “It’s hard times for mankind.”

As Bolaño’s manifesto suggests, Infrealism stands out from the historical avant-garde by proposing a transformative ethics that would change the way culture itself operates in society. This is ethics itself, as Foucault redefines it: “a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.”<sup>71</sup> For over two decades the Infrealists maintained coherence and a sense of belonging as a group, creating a culture through the actions each writer took to define his or her material position in society. This critical ethics had been absent from Dada and Surrealism and their attitudes toward the artist’s agency and social positioning.

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71/ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” translated by Catherine Porter, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 309–310.

Bolaño's manifesto, it's been noted, takes up Breton's declaration, "*Lâchez tout*" (1922). Included in *Les pas perdus* (*The Lost Steps*) (1924), Breton's text is part of a series of testimonies and reflections on the avant-garde in which he explains his break with Dada and sets forth various aesthetic elements of Surrealism. "*Lâchez tout*" ends with the following declaration:

Leave Everything.  
Leave Dada.  
Leave your wife, leave your mistress.  
Leave your hopes and fears.  
Drop your kids in the middle of nowhere.  
Leave the substance for the shadow.  
Leave behind, if need be, your comfortable life and promising future.  
Take to the highways.<sup>8</sup>

Breton is highly critical of Dada's anarchism and its non-dialectical opposition to all artistic and literary activity. He finds a lack of efficacy in what Tristan Tzara called Dada's dictatorship of the spirit ("*dictature de l'esprit*") and argues, instead, that more important is the permanent transformation of the human being: "I'm dreaming," writes Breton, "of what I still might become" ("*je songe à ce que je puis encore devenir*"). Such transformation represents a constant subversion of bourgeois society. What Breton proposes in Surrealism, then, is a nomadic practice (an idea he takes from Francis Picabia) that eschews everyday life's logic, behavior, habits, and memory for other realities, all the while avoiding the tendency to fix these realities into systems and identities.

For Bolaño and the Infrarealists, however, Surrealism left out the question of ethics and of the writer's material position in society. Breton's nomadic attitude does not include the writer's life (his or her existence as an ethical subject), which reduces the Surrealist adventure to just another intellectual experience within the space of the literary text. Surrealism, then, becomes merely a literary practice with a set of familiar resources (collage, ideograms, automatic writing) and characteristic obsessions (eroticism, the unconscious, spiritualism, and convulsive beauty).

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8/ André Breton, "Leave Everything," in *The Lost Steps*, translated by Mark Pollizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 78–79.

In relinquishing everyday life and its mental patterns, what Surrealism privileges instead is the aesthetic field. As a result, the writer remains comfortably within the same tradition that he or she rejects or seeks to destroy. In spite of Breton's criticism of traditional sites of culture (museums, galleries, the academy), Surrealism remains confined to the aesthetic sphere without creating alternative social spheres for art's activity.

Whereas Breton highlights his break with Dada in "*Lâchez tout*," what Bolaño stresses in "Leave It All, Once More" is Infrarealism's break with the entire notion of the avant-garde that had dominated Western art since the 1920s. When the interest in uniting art and politics emerged with the Commune writers in France (Rimbaud foremost among them) and then became articulated within the Marxist-Leninist paradigm in the ensuing revolts of the historical avant-garde, the avant-garde itself was conceived of as an intellectual aristocracy that knows and explains to the masses everything that has been and is still to come in the march toward utopia. In direct opposition to this view of the avant-garde, however, is the ethical orientation of the Infrarealists. They replaced the intelligentsia with the social and economic being of the poet at the center of action.

For the Infrarealists, it was the upheavals of 1968 that threw into question the authority of the intellectual's theory and practice. Reflecting on the events of 1968 and their outcomes, Foucault wrote: "[T]he intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge; they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge"—a system, he observed, in which the intelligentsia itself participates.<sup>9</sup> Infrarealists were well aware of those who block, nullify, and distort the expressions of others from a position of elite privilege and within the centers of power. If the main principle of Infrarealism has been never to participate in or create groups of power, then the primary tactic has been not to publish—not through the official channels of the Mexican literary establishment, but also often not at all.

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9/ Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze," Libcom.org, 9 September 2006, <http://libcom.org/library/intellectuals-power-a-conversation-between-michel-foucault-and-gilles-deleuze>.

As a consequence, the Infrarealists' record of publication from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s is quite scarce.<sup>10</sup> In fact from the 1970s onward, the Infrarealists often refused to be included in anthologies and magazines either individually or as a group. Remaining unpublished brought the Infrarealists a fragile existence as poets; with no legitimate presence in the Mexican literary scene that the cultural establishment could recognize, they were seen as "cultural terrorists" merely expressing a Romantic infantilism that sooner or later they would have to overcome. But remaining unpublished solidified their ethics: more fundamental than receiving any recognition the establishment could bestow was exploring the coupling of life and art and placing poetry at the heart of all rebellion.

Santiago Papasquiario's widow, Rebeca López, provides a telling account of his approach to publishing and what it says about the ethical foundation of Infrarealism: the unification of life and poetry, not least through creating a separate social sphere for poetry outside the establishment. Santiago Papasquiario, after more than two decades of writing poetry, published his first book of poems, *Beso eterno* (*Unending Kiss*), only in 1995, and then with an underground press. López writes:

He published his first chapbook in 1995, and later on, in 1996, his book *Aullido de cisne* [*Swan's Howl*], because of his set of circumstances and worldview. Even though he had published in magazines, newspapers, and some broadsides starting in 1973, what is certain is that for him poetry was, above all, his way of traveling through life, crossing a path of light-filled essence, on which he bet every breath, stride, and soul; it was his perpetual "horse ride on the crests of waves" and "suicidal visions," always in perpetual eruption, living life to the fullest, in the absolute combustion of his cardinal points: poetry, walking, dreaming, and fraternity. He didn't look to publication of his work as the prime motive for carrying it out; he did it above all to cross through life, with the certainty that can be read in it.<sup>11</sup>

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10/ In addition to the three magazine publications in 1976–1977 mentioned above, the publishing activity of the Infrarealists in this period includes Bolaño's collection of poems *Reinventar el amor* (1976) and his novel *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce* (1984); Pedro Damián Bautista's *Sexto paladar* (1985); José Rosas Ribeyro's *Curriculum mortis* (1985); and Rubén Medina's *Amor de lejos = Fools' Love* (1986).

11/ Roberto Careaga, "Mario Santiago, perpetua erupción: entrevista a Rebeca López," December 2009, *Rebeca López García*, 10 June 2011, [http://rebecalopezgarcia.blogspot.com/2011\\_06\\_10\\_archive.html](http://rebecalopezgarcia.blogspot.com/2011_06_10_archive.html). Translated by Rubén Medina.

For the Infrarealists, it was not possible to adopt a strategic approach to the centers of literary power and to forge an alternative poetics within them. That would have meant accepting or negotiating with dominant and traditional aesthetic criteria; it also would have meant legitimizing the authority of the professional class who direct journals, magazines, and publishing houses. Instead, the Infrarealists' strategy was to subvert that authority and reveal the ignorance underneath it: there were occasions when Infrarealists invented French or English poets and published pseudonymously under their names in the literary supplements of major journals and magazines. To do otherwise would have reproduced the elitist vision of art and literature, separating art from life by separating the individual genius from the tribe. From the outset Infrarealism declared itself out of the game, an enemy of literary mafias.

With these early provocations as their groundwork, the Infrarealists in the past twenty-five years have pursued two simultaneous paths. Bolaño, who remained an unknown and marginal writer in Barcelona until the early 1990s, represents one path. After the publication of his novel *La literatura nazi en América* (*Nazi Literature in the Americas*) (1996), however, he stepped into the role of a professional writer fully integrated into commercial publishing. Within a period of less than a decade until his death in 2003, Bolaño published a string of novels, including *The Savage Detectives*, that would shake the whole literary canon in the Spanish-speaking world and earn him extraordinary recognition and visibility as an author. As I have written elsewhere, Bolaño's entry into the publishing market did not change his writing, his worldview, or his ethical stance.<sup>12</sup> His novels are characterized by a constant, virulent critique of literary institutions; he explores ethical questions by taking up diverse forms of narrating the dark and brutal modernity of the twentieth century.

Santiago Papasquiaro represents Infrarealism's other path. I consider him the most radical figure of the Latin American neo-avant-garde: he carries to their logical conclusion the main principles of unifying life and poetry and of creating a social sphere for poetry outside the establishment. (With Bolaño's help, a complex image has emerged of Santiago Papasquiaro as a neo-avant-garde poet, most notably as

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12/ See my essay, "Bolaño and Infrarealism, or Ethics as Politics" in *Critical Insights: Roberto Bolaño*, edited by Ignacio López-Calvo (Hackensack, NJ: Salem Press, 2015), 167–188.

Ulises Lima, the main protagonist of *The Savage Detectives*.) While some Infrealists stayed true in principle to the pairing of life and poetry but reformulated their survival strategies in the late 1980s, when some of them began to start families and saw their means of support to be quite limited, Santiago Papatzi pursued the unification of life and poetry in an absolute sense and remained an “unproductive member of society.” And while other Infrealists in later years took up professional careers to live a life of movement across nations, some as film directors, sculptors, painters, and academics, Santiago Papatzi reclaimed the poet’s identity not only as a wanderer and an adventurer but also as a rebellious cultural sniper and conspirator. The dedication to “LIFE MISALIGNED AT ALL COSTS” and the conviction “TO NOT MAKE WRITING A PROFESSION” became the existential principles he lived by, without helm and in delirium, until his death in 1998.

Since then the remaining members of Infrealism in Mexico, Chile, Spain, France, and the US have continued the movement’s ethics of strategic marginality. In addition to writing poetry and novels and working as translators, they are making films and other artworks, initiating small, independent publishing projects in Mexico City and Barcelona, and publishing anthologies of Infrealist poetry in various Spanish-speaking countries. The Infrealists living in Mexico today join the many younger poets who invite them to read their poems in the underground poetry scene.

This special section of *Chicago Review* is the first gathering of Infrealist writing in the English language. It contains the movement’s two major manifestos, a series of letters exchanged among several Infrealists during the movement’s nomadic first decades, and a selection of Infrealist poetry in which the women of the movement take the central position. In the photo portfolio accompanying this special section, readers have a glimpse of the lives the Infrealists united with their poetry.