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# TOWARDS AN ART OF LANDSCAPES AND LOANS: SERGIO CHEJFEC AND THE POLITICS OF LITERARY FORM

STEVE BUTTES

During our childhood words were enunciated to us; these words became fixed in our memories, as did their meaning in our understanding, by means of ideas or images, and these ideas or images were accompanied by aversion, hatred, pleasure, terror, desire, indignation, or contempt. Over a period of many years, whenever these words were pronounced, the idea or image came back to us with its accompanying feeling, but in the long run, we begin to use words like coins: we cease looking at their image, inscription, and border treatments to determine their value; in giving and receiving them we pay attention only to their shape and weight:

and I'd say it's the same with words . . . . one  
 scrutinizes a coin only when its value is suspect,  
 only in unusual, rarely encountered instances . . . .  
 thus the pleasure we derive from original works,  
 the fatigue we experience reading books that make  
 us think, the difficulty of holding someone's interest  
 with either the written or the spoken word. –  
 Diderot, *The Salon of 1767*<sup>1</sup>

What does debt look like? And, perhaps more crucially, why should we be interested in representing it today? Making visible the invisible operation of the economic system, of course, has long been a hallmark of narratives coming to terms with capital. But the expanding role of the credit system in recent years, which has developed into a powerful external force on the economy that guides the formation of physical spaces, determines the movements of objects and influences actions taken by individuals, has made this task more challenging as it has been transformed by an ever-growing array of increasingly complex debt tools. This increasing opacity has obscured not only our understanding of the crises that have emerged around the world during the past two decades but it also, and more importantly for the arguments of this essay, has obscured the credit system's persistent influence at the level of everyday life. Without a representation of the operation of the credit system and the knowledge that comes from it, we are limited to sensing debt as simply part of our own experiences, as something natural and determined. In a period in which credit is absorbed into the flow of everyday life, where debt is both everywhere invisible and indeterminate, how can we see capital and map our relation to it?

This question is at the heart of Argentine author Sergio Chejfec's most recent novel *La experiencia dramática* [*The Dramatic Experience*] (2012). The novel narrates weekly conversations that take place between Félix, a relatively poor immigrant, and Rose, a middle-class actress, as they stroll through a large city and discuss ideas for the exercise Rose is preparing for her theater workshop: she must write and stage a scene that depicts with “accuracy the true life events” that made up the most dramatic experience of her life.<sup>2</sup> By structuring his novel around this task, Chejfec articulates an interest in establishing a distinction between experiencing life

and representing it, a separation that proves crucial for making visible the invisible influences of the credit system on the operation of daily life. Indeed, this essay argues that we can begin to map out a form for understanding the global function of debt through a reading of the mundane conversations between the two characters in Chejfec's novel. More specifically, this essay will examine how Félix and his insistence on giving form to his everyday experiences with money function as counterpoint to Rose's Rose and her attempts to escape or ignore her own experiences with debt. In this way, Chejfec begins to develop a concept of literary form that makes visible the invisible influences of the credit system in their abstract operation by coming to terms with the internal experience of indeterminacy and the modes of social being produced by debt. This essay argues that in so doing *La experiencia dramática* establishes new critical possibilities for literature as a contemporary art form.

We already get a sense of this insistence on aesthetic form in Chejfec's essay "Fábula política y renovación estética" ["Political Fable and Aesthetic Renewal"]. Here Chejfec suggests that, if there is a "possibility that [literature] persists as an art form," it lies not in waiting for or identifying "crisis and causality" nor in nostalgia for "the idea of totality and the idea of the fragment" but rather in acknowledging the "contiguity" of literature with reality and developing "abstract procedures" that would "return signs to the centrality of the real by recognizing that they are signs" and in turn make it possible for literature to "[arrive] at a place where other forms of writing are not sufficient."<sup>3</sup> Or, as he would put it more succinctly in an interview with Mariano Siskind: "my literature is premised on the construction of a differentiated object, independent of the world surrounding it, but not so independent that its relationship with that world disintegrates[:] [a] work that is sufficiently autonomous so that it is not a direct, transparent link to social reality."<sup>4</sup> As we will see in what follows, Chejfec aims to establish a specifically literary form of writing by separating the subject's "dramatic experience" from the object that is the "dramatic representation" by way of "abstract procedures" that have much in common with what Michael Fried calls the "dramatic

conception” of painting. As Fried notes, this mode of painting, which often took up figures absorbed in “ordinary, everyday experience” such as “walking [and] conversing,” emerged as a strategy for insisting on the separation between the depicted scene and the beholder’s experience of it.<sup>5</sup> By adopting for literature what Fried calls the “antitheatrical” visual strategies associated with both the “dramatic conception” and (especially important for *La experiencia dramática*) the dramatic conception’s “offshoot” or variant, the “pastoral conception” of painting, Chejfec can move away from the crises, causalities and temporalities of narrative forms such as allegory, and establish for contemporary Latin American literature a “critical potentiality” that may be unavailable to other forms of narrative.<sup>6</sup>

### **How Are You Going to Represent Today? Cash or Credit?**

*La experiencia dramática* has at its center a reflection on and critique of contemporary finance capitalism, but despite being deeply marked by the 2001-2002 Argentine debt crisis and—given Chejfec’s residence in New York City since 2005—the global financial crisis that swept across the United States in 2008, the novel never directly mentions these collective experiences of debt nor the spectacular crises now associated with them.<sup>7</sup> Rather than explicitly depicting the drama of fear, shame, anger, horror or some other affective experience associated with debt default and economic crisis, which the novel’s title would seem to evoke, *La experiencia dramática* instead proceeds by the accumulation of mundane, trivial details and partially remembered anecdotes that Rose and Félix reveal during their long, detained walks through the city, which take place “each week with unshakable discipline.”<sup>8</sup> Their conversations are generally superficial and, to be frank, oftentimes quite boring, with long sections of the novel centering on topics such as the weather, the flow of traffic at certain intersections, complaints that there is no place to sit in their favorite coffee shop, what dish each of them might make for an out-of-town guest, the amazingly low price Rose paid for a mediocre package of veggie burgers, whether the following Monday is the 14<sup>th</sup> or the 15<sup>th</sup> and so on. Yet the weekly,

routine structure of these meetings allows them to perceive each other's reactions to these everyday trivialities as the product of idiosyncratic and seemingly inconsequential habits, character traits that, on the contrary, are central to the reader's understanding of the economic critique at center of the novel.

Félix, for example, thinks deeply about each action he takes and each word he says, and. as As he discusses how a day measured in 30 hours rather than 24 would change the date of the following Monday, Rose notes that Félix has a tendency to over-intellectualize nearly every social interaction while Félix realizes that Rose “does not like to consider details or think much about them” and typically resolves conversations by speaking in “slogans” and “sayings that explain little” beyond their surface meaning.<sup>9</sup> During their strolls through the city together, Félix notices that Rose cannot help but carry herself as an actress; that is, she possesses “an indistinguishable tic, or a certain tendency in her body to move or show herself in a particular fashion,” which, without her realizing it, “makes her visible” and tends to “attract the views” of passersby, who “detain their gaze on Rose for an instant as if her face were telling them something.”<sup>10</sup> In these moments, Félix, happily fades into the background, enjoying “the strange pleasure of seeming invisible.”<sup>11</sup> Rose “directs their path [through the city each week], deciding to turn at a corner, continue straight or turn back,” making her decisions at times by “pure whim” and at other times by following a “preset path” she had in mind before setting out together, b. But whatever decisions she makes during a given outing, she gives little thought to them once she and Félix part ways. But while Félix “pays little notice to the path” they take while they are together, preferring instead to enjoy “the small pleasure of abandoning himself to the route Rose chooses,” he spends hours after their strolls obsessively tracking on Google Maps the path they took through the city and mapping for himself Rose's whims, plans and decisions, which manifest themselves in the landscapes, angles and lines comprising the map of the urban space they traversed together.<sup>12</sup>

This idiosyncratic obsession with the maps and digital landscapes made available to him by Google Maps, or what Félix himself calls his “addict[ion]” to a “cartographic consciousness,” emerges as one of the most consequential character traits for understanding the novel’s economic critique, but Félix himself, it is important to note, precisely does not understand “what it is that attracts his attention to [these digital maps].”<sup>13</sup> This lack of understanding, as we will see below, is what the novel sets out to resolve, a solution that will emerge through conversation with Rose about her theater workshop and one that will produce an account of the operation of the credit system. But what can be said here is that Félix’s inability to understand what precisely it is that compels him to contemplate these digital landscapes for hours on end can be attributed to the maps’ deep connection to and indistinguishability from the routines of his daily life: Félix “often thinks about digital maps” not because they have in some way “made his life better, or less indistinct or really any different” but rather because they make the things he does on a daily basis “verifiable” and “give his movements—he could say his entire life—a greater consistency” in that he “can recall each step he took” by pulling them up “in an instant via a digital map.”<sup>14</sup> The digital map, then, makes it possible to see and “recall” not only “the paths he takes [and] has taken” but also those “he is going to take,” that is, he can literally see the spaces he will traverse before he occupies them by contemplating Google’s digital landscapes before heading out, for example, to meet Rose at a coffee shop. While “the word recall,” then, “defines only partially the mental processes Félix undertakes” during his daily contemplation of Google Maps, “because the process of remembering also functions as a thought directed toward [a] future” action, the future and the past represented by the map collapse into the indeterminate present of his daily or weekly routine in the city: “Félix is walking toward a neighborhood coffee shop . . . to meet up with Rose . . . [and] feels that he is gliding through the map and at the same time traveling along the surface of city streets,” which makes the “physical objects” he encounters in the city

seem “as if they were little more than lifeless spatial replicas of what is displayed on the maps..”<sup>15</sup>

For Félix, then, the time spent contemplating online maps, at the beginning of the novel, is not understood as a representation of his daily life but rather, through the simulacrum, as simply a re-description of it. In this sense, his “cartographic consciousness” might be understood as just one more in a long series of curious but mundane habits revealed through the trivial and over-intellectualized conversations about daily life accompanying his weekly strolls with Rose. Yet, while it is tempting to compare Félix’s attention to geography to Rose’s attention to her vegetarian diet, or to write off Félix’s interest in these maps as having little more importance than Rose’s preference for herbal tea and his own preference for coffee, Félix’s affinity for mapping their movements in Google Maps, and in particular the odd relationship to temporality in their evocation of past, present and future, bears striking resemblance to another trivial interaction that comes into view through their weekly get-togethers: in taking turns paying for drinks at the coffee shop, Félix usually pays in cash and Rose with a credit card.

This latter point is mentioned just once at the beginning of the novel, and the characters give it little more thought or, perhaps better said, give it more or less the same amount of thought as any of the other mundane topics mentioned above: “Félix thinks Rose pays with her card out of convenience; and Rose thinks the same about Félix [and his decision to pay with cash].”<sup>16</sup> These seemingly inconsequential decisions at the point of sale, however, launch the novel’s lengthy reflection on the functioning of the economic system by contrasting Rose’s credit card, which she views as a mechanism for maintaining “her budget in order,” with what, in Félix’s view, is “the principal cause for [his own] disorder in relation to money:” “the coins” that make up his pocket change.<sup>17</sup> As he sits on a bench outside the café waiting for Rose to return with his coffee and her tea, Félix lets his mind wander to his own routine when it is his turn to pay for the drinks:

[he] longs for an era, although one he has never lived, when all daily activities could be conducted with coins, just as it is depicted in old novels and stories: someone reaches his hands into his pockets, takes out a fistful without blinking, slams them on the counter and resolves the situation. By contrast, the mixed use of coins and bills in daily life produces in him a sense of exhaustion and, in his view, subjects him to an unnecessary disorder that leaves him feeling run down and tired.<sup>18</sup>

Facing the confusing, exhausting and disorganized process of keeping track of his budget in relation to bills and (especially) coins, which are easily lost, Félix, with his limited resources, envies Rose, who “[by paying] with a credit card” can maintain “her budget in order” and need never worry about something so inconsequential as a lost coin. Of course, Rose, for her part, simply “wants to make herself believe” that the credit card organizes her budget when, in reality, she is “more or less resigned to never understanding her monthly balance, one or many pages riddled with any number of minor purchases.”<sup>19</sup> She in turn admires “Felix’s calm practicality in paying for everything in cash and forgetting about any later record or future threat.”<sup>20</sup>

At first glance, these thoughts simply establish the difference between cash and credit as, like the choice between coffee and tea, one of personal preference or comfort with little actual difference between them. Félix’s nostalgia for transactions accelerated by the slamming of coins on the counter very clearly parallels his admiration for the acceleration made possible by Rose’s “wise strategy” of sliding a credit card through a machine on the counter.<sup>21</sup> And it is equally easy to see that the coins that produce disorder in Félix’s budget parallel the small transactions that make Rose’s budget incomprehensible. Yet, while the coin is relegated to the past when exchanged for a cup of coffee at the point of sale, the decision to buy a cup of herbal tea with credit is the decision to agree to allow one’s actions to be shaped and influenced by debt obligations set out for the future.

Of course, this is not exactly what goes through our mind when we use our credit card to buy a cup of tea at the coffee shop or a pack of veggie burgers at Trader Joe's: we do not tend to think of ourselves as taking on debt in these situations. Yet this is precisely the point Marx makes in volume 3 of *Capital*, when he notes that as "the credit system is extended, generalised and worked out . . . [and] commodities are not sold for money, but for a written promise to pay for them at a certain [future] date," these "bills of exchange," as Marx termed these future obligations, begin to "act absolutely as money" despite never undergoing an "eventual transformation into actual money."<sup>22</sup> This is crucial to note because though the credit system, or the circulation of interest-bearing or money capital, is absolutely dependent upon "the actual process of circulation [in which] capital appears always as a commodity or as money, and its movement always is broken up into a series of purchases and sales," in the absence of an economic crisis, those payments and purchases are "obliterated, invisible, not directly included" because "we see only the alienation and the return payment."<sup>23</sup> Put another way, unlike the embodied functioning of the actual economy, represented by the formula M-C-M', the credit system appears to function through the "disembodied" M-M': the return of interest-bearing capital does not "express itself as the consequence and result of some definite series of economic processes, but as the effect of a specific legal agreement between buyer and seller."<sup>24</sup> In this way, by giving the lender "absolute control within certain limits over the capital and property of others, and thereby the labor of others," the credit system not only blurs the line that separates actions taken in the actual economy from those with an orientation toward meeting the requirements of a legal contract, but it also makes the identity of all actions in some sense indeterminate.<sup>25</sup> Under finance capitalism, every action we take and every object we acquire is simultaneously our own and not our own, and the extent to which we can sort out what is ours and what is a response to the powerful external force of debt obligations is precisely what makes the actual functioning (rather than the crisis) of the disembodied process of the credit system difficult to represent.

In locating the origin of his critique of the credit system in the mundane, habitual transaction at the café, simply one more among the many trivial experiences of daily life narrated in the novel, Chejfec can generalize Rose's orientation toward the credit system to her way of seeing and living her life more generally. Indeed, Rose's habit of paying by credit card, that is, her habit of agreeing to act upon and to allow herself to be acted upon by a series of lines on a page—"one or many pages riddled with any number of minor purchases"—allows her to continue to produce the fiction of order when her own financial field is actually in disorder: "[she is] more or less resigned to never understanding her monthly balance." This habit of producing a fiction guided by lines on a page is generalizable to her role as an actress: "as an actress, Rose is accustomed to . . . speaking for others, nonexistent or more or less blurry figures, or, as actors enjoy saying, [she is accustomed to] being spoken by others, that is, to lending her body and her voice in order to bring into the world actions and words that do not necessarily belong to her."<sup>26</sup> Being habituated, then, to a state in which the things she has and does are hers and not hers, or perhaps better said, in being accustomed to a regime of debt and loans that expresses itself through a "natural inclination" toward "performance," she converts these "weekly strolls and meetings for coffee" into a "workshop" for "dramatic events or theatrical derivations" into which "Félix is incorporated."<sup>27</sup> Félix's bills and coins, then, are absorbed into his weekly routine with Rose, which in turn is subsequently mapped out into the geographic space they traverse in the city. The credit system, then, can begin to come into view through a series of representational possibilities emerging from the spheres of economy, theater and geography: lines on the page follow a budget or don't, follow a script or don't, follow a preset path or don't. Yet, as indicated above, the challenge of constructing narratives from Rose's "natural inclination" toward performance, Félix's "cartographic consciousness" or the invisible influence of debt obligations is that these actions or activities are indistinguishable from their daily routines. The challenge that Rose and Félix set out before the reader is how to convert the experience of everyday life into a representation of the operation of contemporary finance capitalism.

One strategy for producing this operation emerges on the first page of the novel, but its centrality to the novel's representational strategies does not become clear until much later. While on his way to meet Rose for coffee and enjoying the simulacrum mentioned above, Félix remembers an anecdote that he often "recalls at random and when he least expects it:"<sup>28</sup>

Not long ago, a parish priest sought to relate during Sunday mass his understanding of God. He explained that it has always been said that God is everywhere, that God accompanies everyone at every moment. What is difficult, he suggested, is to make that presence tangible, to offer practical examples that leave no room for doubt. He paused and then quickly added that God is like an online map (he literally said "Google Maps"). It can give a view from above and from the side, is able to capture and visualize an entire continent or focus on only one house and even zoom in on the patio of a house . . . nothing could escape this surveillance.<sup>29</sup>

Though Félix, as he himself admits, only occasionally "thinks about God" and very "rarely in the terms used by the priest," it does often lead him to think about these digital maps—or "los mapas de Dios" as he sometimes calls them—as not only a simulacrum but also an image that may be observed by another person.<sup>30</sup> That is, this metaphysical fiction becomes a strategy by which Félix, like Rose, can conceive of their strolls "as a theatrical act," which is to say, it makes it possible for him to imagine his movements through the city in relation to a beholder observing both Rose's and his own movements through the city.<sup>31</sup>

In a characteristic example of this strategy, Rose and Félix have come to a place at "the edge of the sidewalk, next to a fence" where they stop and "without speaking" gaze at a three-story building.<sup>32</sup> In moments such as these, both Rose and Félix invent observers who are watching them absorbed in their contemplation of these buildings: "Félix maintains his gaze fixed on the second floor and imagines himself with a cleared head, observing a figure that is in reality himself, observing

himself from that other position, from behind the curtains.”<sup>33</sup> Throughout the novel they invent fictional observers for themselves—such as Félix’s fictional alter-ego on the second floor—in order to convert their real experiences into scenes produced for a beholder, scenes that not only begin to articulate the forms necessary to stage with “accuracy the real life events” that should comprise Rose’s dramatic scene but also make visible “what [they] did before but could not see with [their] own eyes:” their daily routine as representations of the operation of the credit system.<sup>34</sup>

### **An Anti-theatrical Art of Landscapes and Loans**

If these scenes are theatrical in the sense of being imagined to take place for a beholder, the strategy Rose and Félix employ to produce them—adopting the fiction that they are simultaneously a beholder and physically present in the scene—can be understood as what Michael Fried calls “an off-shoot” or “special case” of the absorptive techniques at the heart of antitheatrical painting.<sup>35</sup> In his seminal study *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), Fried analyzes Diderot’s endorsement of strategies employed by painters to de-theatricalize the relationship between beholder and object and thereby re-establish for painting its “status as a major art.”<sup>36</sup> This primarily took shape in what Fried calls the primary or “dramatic conception” of anti-theatrical painting, or, as it is more often described, the technique of absorption. This strategy, Fried notes, establishes a fiction of separation:

the fiction of the beholder’s nonexistence in and through the persuasive representation of figures wholly absorbed in their actions, passions, activities, feelings, states of mind . . . . in a unified compositional structure [that gives] the painting as a whole the character of a closed and sufficient system.<sup>37</sup>

As he goes on to note in the third chapter of his study, however, to discuss only absorption would give an “incomplete” account of de-theatricalizing fictions of separation. Analyzing Diderot’s discussion of “pastoral scenes, landscapes with figures, depictions of ruins, still lifes” and other “lesser genres” that are successfully antitheatrical despite not

“[providing] the painter with the means that were needed radically to exclude the beholder from the painting,” Fried develops what he calls the secondary, or pastoral conception of antitheatricity.<sup>38</sup> These landscape paintings with figures must establish the “fiction of the beholder’s physical presence within the painting, by virtue of an almost magical recreation of the effect of nature itself.”<sup>39</sup> While Fried acknowledges that Diderot’s endorsement of the fiction of the beholder’s physical presence within the painting seemingly contradicts his preference for absorptive paintings that explicitly deny the presence of and exclude the beholder, Fried goes on to point out that the pastoral conception is “surprisingly consistent with what has gone before, in that according to that fiction the beholder *is removed from in front of the painting* just as surely as if his presence there were negated, neutralized, indeed just as surely as if he did not exist.”<sup>40</sup> This mode of antitheatricity, this particular fiction of separation, which emerges from landscape paintings, as we have already begun to see with Félix’s physical presence in the scene he imagines from the position of his non-existent alter-ego, is central to *La experiencia dramática*. Indeed, as we will see in a moment, the pastoral conception of antitheatricity is the mechanism by which Chejfec can bring into view the operation of the credit system in order to establish contemporary literature’s critical potentiality.

As Félix imagines himself as a beholder of the landscape he physically occupies as he and Rose stand at “the edge of the sidewalk, next to a fence” gazing at a three-story building, Rose is remembering, that an old friend had an apartment in that building and that Rose and her husband had rented the apartment for the occasion of their wedding ceremony. This encounter with her friend’s apartment building, however, does not bring back memories of her vows or of a first dance but rather of the “absorptive” experience she had with a strange children’s toy she found on the shelf in her friend’s apartment during the wedding reception: a piggy bank that took the form of a mailbox.<sup>41</sup> This mailbox-piggy bank had attached to its front a faded sticker displaying a series of coins “from another, probably forgotten, era . . . that could perhaps only have its

origin in books” and next to the coins “one could see the value of each, and closer to the edge, a series of numbers that, at first glance seemed arbitrary and incomprehensible, but that after a detained observation revealed themselves to be the number of coins that would fit inside the bank if someone proposed filling it with only coins of that single value.”<sup>42</sup> What produced that “detained observation,” however, was not the numbers themselves but rather the various landscapes with figures depicted on each coin. Particularly compelling for Rose was the 50-cent coin, which featured a river and a young nude diving into the water from the riverbank. “Around the image there are some branches . . . [that] serve as a frame,” and Rose found herself “absorbed in contemplation . . . [and] in a state of wakeful slumber.” The narrator continues:

the image seemed close to nature . . . . She feels that she is present in that moment at the edge of the river, that she sees the leap, she smells the air and perceives in a nearly physical way each one of the diver’s ribs as he sails toward the water, as if she were facing a venerated body and that it was unnecessary to touch it to know that it is real and that she adores it.<sup>43</sup>

Like the antitheatrical pastoral landscapes Fried describes in his study, which are predicated upon “an almost magical recreation of the effect of nature itself” that compels the beholder to imaginatively remove himself from in front of the canvas and fictionally enter the space of the depicted landscape, Rose, in finding in these landscapes something “close to nature,” equally removes herself from in front of the canvas and from the space of her wedding, and adopts the fiction that she has physically entered the space of the image on the sticker. Like paintings depicting absorption, the landscape paintings with figures praised by Diderot, Fried notes, “stopped and held [the beholder], sometimes for hours at a stretch if contemporary testimony is to be believed, in front of the painting.”<sup>44</sup> In the same way, Rose too, in her pastoral fiction, was stopped and held in absorbed contemplation of these numismatic landscapes.

Importantly, however, the absorbed contemplation resulting from this anti-theatrical appeal, had the effect of producing a “detained observation,” which in turn made possible Rose’s

recognition that the numbers appearing alongside these landscapes were not “arbitrary” but rather were part of an intentional decision on the part of the creator of this object: “the number of coins that would fit inside the bank if someone proposed filling it with only coins of that single value [e.g. only 30 cent pieces].” This is crucial because it is the part of the experience that “accompanied her even after she left [the bank] in the place where she had found it.”<sup>45</sup> What accompanied her was the thought that it would have been, perhaps, more instructive to have “the sticker provide expanded information, such as the amount the bank holds measured in money: the total amount of money represented if it was filled with five-cent coins or 30-cent coins, etc.”<sup>46</sup> What this line of thinking produces is not only contrasting ways of calculating the collected coins but also differing historical relationships to money. On the one hand, there is Rose, formed by the contemporary financial system and its opaque bank statements filled with minor purchases, who can only contemplate complex calculations and the weight of incomprehensible future promises rather than the obliterated, invisible, intermediate actions of the everyday decision to save or purchase. On the other hand, there are the makers of this bank from “another, probably forgotten, era,” in which “people . . . [were] distanced from complex calculations,” who, in choosing to represent the number of coins rather than the amount of money represented by those coins, articulate each coin as a decision and the total number on the bank as an accumulation of consequential concrete actions.<sup>47</sup> What emerges from the absorbed contemplation of this antitheatrical landscape, and what accompanies Rose long after viewing it, is a model to replace the indeterminacy of the credit system, in which the focus on the end result (M–M’) obliterates or renders invisible the intermediate actions that constitute history, with a detained, concentrated, absorbed focus on each decision, each step that was taken in the past, a recognition that proves consequential as Rose moves from her position as only an actress, living lives loaned to her by others, to her position as author and dramatist of her own dramatic scene.

Indeed, in the same way past decisions materialize as lines on the page of Rose's credit card bill and influence her future, so too must Rose's past dramatic experience materialize in the lines on the page of the script she writes for her theater workshop: "it is not sufficient to have simply experienced your dramatic situation," Rose notes, "the teacher has asked for a representation."<sup>48</sup> In other words, this representation, like the pastoral images on the coins that highlight the accumulation of minor decisions, must also come to terms with the series of decisions that created her dramatic experience. In Rose's case, she decides to stage the loss of a professional opportunity, in which she "simply decided to say no and it turned out that it was consequential [for her life]" in that she received fewer and fewer opportunities to play major roles.<sup>49</sup> The experience only became dramatic after the fact, that is, through a series of "dramatic microscenes [that] lack . . . a staging pertinent" to "the concrete moment [of the decision] . . . [which] was not dramatic and did not leave a memory as such."<sup>50</sup> In this sense, the dilemma at the heart of her dramatic scene parallels Chejfec's evocation of the credit system through Rose's purchase of tea. The point of sale, as part of her weekly or daily routine, is not dramatic in the least. However, to the extent that an incomprehensible state of debt came into being not through a plan but rather through the whims and microscenes of consumption, daily decisions that never register as decisions to take on debt obligations, the weekly purchase of tea undoubtedly proves consequential for her life. In other words, Rose's dramatic representation, which must represent in all of its drama a scene which has no drama whatsoever, would also stage a representation of the operation of the credit system and its series of minor decisions made in the past, which laid out a future resulting from subsequent decisions characterized by a tension between the planned and the unplanned. As with Fried's description of successfully antitheatrical landscapes, then, Rose's dramatic representation can only come into view through a "temporal reading of the scene," which is characterized by a "fracturing of perspectival unity" but at the same time remains a "success as a unified" and autonomous work of art.<sup>51</sup> In much the same way, then, that there are very

few successful antitheatrical landscapes or still lifes because these genres generally lacked the means to de-theatricalize their relationship to the beholder and produce their autonomy as a work of art, so too does Rose find difficulty in staging a dramatic scene that could produce a visualization of the temporality necessary to bring into being her conception of drama (and the drama of the credit system) as a coherent work of art: “[it is] impossible to represent it [as a scene] in a way that will follow closely the guidelines set out by the teacher.”<sup>52</sup>

This dilemma parallels closely what Patrick Dove, in his study of Chejfec’s earlier novel *Boca de lobo* (2000) [*The Dark* (2013)], describes as the author’s “narrativa de contratiempo:” “we are not only the authors of our own history; we are also products of our past, often in ways that exceed our own capacity for understanding and awareness.”<sup>53</sup> As Dove notes, in Chejfec’s work, it is unclear if the present is being controlled and shaped by remembrances of the past or if the past simply provides the raw material from which the present can be constructed and differentiated from the past. But this narrative interrogation of the odd temporality of the present provides us with what Dove calls, “a powerful aesthetic alternative . . . [a] literature that interrupts the dominant logic and distribution of the social as it functions today.”<sup>54</sup> The figure Dove evokes for visualizing Chejfec’s “narrativa de contratiempo” is Walter Benjamin’s famous re-description of Klee’s “Angelus Novus” as the angel of history, an image scholars have now made classic for representing and understanding our relationship to history in modernity: gazing towards the ruins of the past, the winds of history push the angel ever forward into the future.

Yet, while Dove’s concept of “contratiempo” is useful for understanding the temporality of the credit system as it is evoked in this novel, it is not Benjamin’s “angel of history” and its allegory of economic crisis that brings this visualization to the fore in *La experiencia dramática* but rather Félix’s “mapas de Dios” and their representation of the credit system through his tracking of their weekly strolls together. Rather than the contemplation of destruction and ruins, or we might simply say, crisis as the visualization of the “points in the not too distant past [when] things could have taken a completely different

path,” *La experiencia dramática* instead re-directs that reflective temporality to the “active digital map,” the Google Map of the present that manifests Rose’s whims and plans as representations of the decisions comprising the credit system, decisions that could easily have been different and led them down a path with vastly different results.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, Rose’s scene might look like one in which Félix is manifesting his “cartographic consciousness,” seated in front of a computer screen, obsessively tracking their movements through the city, over-intellectualizing each decision she made and thinking about how a different mundane choice might produce the world he envisions, in much the same way that re-imagining a day measured in 30 hours rather than 24 would literally change history, making the following Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> (as he imagines) rather than the 15<sup>th</sup> (as the calendar states).

It has been the argument of this essay, however, that Félix can only see these maps as representations, that he can only see with his own eyes the invisible series of loans and debts become geography and landscape by separating the representation of the credit system that is his imagined “mapa de Dios” from the experience of using Google Maps in everyday daily life. This project of separation is made possible through a process of narrativization that mobilizes the temporality evoked by antitheatrical aesthetic forms paralleling those described by Fried and elicited by the remembered anecdote about the parish priest. As stated at the outset, however, Chejfec claims these antitheatrical narratives specifically for the literary, a characteristic made clear as Félix remembers the parish priest’s revision of his analogy:

God functioned like digital maps, but better, because God wasn’t reduced to visual representation and its various forms (map, terrain, traffic, etc.): literally everything could be encompassed, from voices and sounds in the air to the deepest, most shameful feelings, in such a way that God could forego visual representation altogether without the slightest problem, something that was impossible for Google Maps.<sup>56</sup>

By constructing a novel that completely mobilizes the antitheatrical visual tradition through this metaphysical fiction but at the same time also “[foregoes] visual representation altogether,” Chejfec’s novel achieves “something that [may be] impossible” for other forms of narrative such as film, theater, dance, painting and so on, all of which are “reduced to visual representation.”<sup>57</sup> In this way, Chejfec establishes for literature an important “critical potentiality,” one that asserts that it isn’t enough to simply see and experience the everyday as we watch it take place on a computer screen. Whether on the screen or not, debt and its manifestations in its ordinary, mundane, temporal operation must be represented; it must be narrated; and however partially it may happen, it must be understood.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art: The Salon of 1767*, vol. 2, translated by John Goodman, introduction by Thomas Crow (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 115-116. I first encountered an abbreviated version of this passage in Tatiana Smoliarova’s discussion of the confluences of Diderot’s thought with Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of “defamiliarization” or “estrangement” in art. See her discussion of the roots of Russian Formalism in Diderot’s thought in Tatiana Smoliarova, “Distortion and Theatricality: Estrangement in Diderot and Shklovsky,” *Poetics Today* 27.1 (2006): 3-33.

<sup>2</sup> Sergio Chejfec, *La experiencia dramática* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2012), 156. “la regla de fidelidad de los hechos verdaderos.” Unless otherwise noted, translations from Spanish to English are my own. It should also be noted that Félix is a character who first appeared in Chejfec’s 2004 novel *Los incompletos*.

<sup>3</sup> Sergio Chejfec, “Fábula política y renovación estética,” *El punto vacilante: Literatura, ideas y mundo privado* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2005): 115, 116. “Una de las opciones para la literatura—y cuando digo opciones me refiero a la posibilidad de que perdure como arte—es conseguir una regulación a través de la vía negativa: que la literatura llegue hasta donde las otras escrituras no alcanzan. Para ello habría que redefinir la potencialidad crítica que la caracteriza durante el paradigma moderno, y para ello también habría que abandonar tanto la idea de totalidad como la de fragmento; las narraciones deberían avanzar por contigüidad antes que por quiebre o causalidad, por expansión antes que por concentración, por elevación antes que por profundidad. Es cierto que sería difícil reflejar el compromiso moral con procedimientos abstractos. . .”; “quiero decir que los signos vuelvan a la centralidad de lo real descubriendo que son signos, que pueden ser leídos pero también leerse a sí mismos.”

<sup>4</sup> Mariano Siskind, “Entrevista a Sergio Chejfec,” *Hispanamérica*, 100, (2005), 40. “mi literatura supone la construcción de un objeto diferenciado, independiente de la vida corriente, pero no tan independiente como para que se desintegre total relación. Una construcción suficientemente autónoma para que no sea referencia directa, transparente a lo social, sino más bien una connotación o una metáfora.”

<sup>5</sup> Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of*

*Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1980: ), 61, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality* *Ibid.*, 105, 132.

<sup>7</sup> Upon multiple readings of the novel, I find that the word “debt” [“deuda”] appears only one time (93), in reference to an emotional debt that Rose feels toward her husband’s family. The words “prestar” [to loan], “préstamo” [a loan], “prestado” [loaned] and so on appear more often but in relation to items of clothing and, importantly, Rose’s status as an actress, loaning her body to a role. As we will see, “credit” (in the form of Rose’s credit card) is also mentioned only once, at the beginning of the novel, but it proves consequential for understanding the function of these other terms and the novel’s economic critique more generally.

<sup>8</sup> Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 126. “cada semana con inmovible disciplina.” Though it is never specified, the city where the novel is set is likely modeled on New York City, though, like many of the cities described in Chejfec’s novels, it is anonymous enough to be characteristic of many large cities. In fact, the novel literally notes that “the city could be any city” [“la ciudad podría ser cualquier ciudad”] (12). But, the country where the city is located is described as “wide and extense” [“ancho y extendido”] (87) and Félix is described as “one more foreigner” [“un extranjero más”] (87) among many. The architecture described is a mix of mirrored skyscrapers, old warehouses, contrasting areas with short streets and wide avenues, and areas marked by a river and a canal. Rose is an actress who finds opportunities and laments not having bigger roles, which are presumably available. Like many native New Yorkers, Rose prides herself on never leaving her city: “She never left the city for more than a few days at a time . . . and within the city she always walked in areas that, according to her, she had always known. Her life took place in predictable and circumscribed spaces” [“Nunca dejó la ciudad por más de pocos días . . . y dentro de la ciudad siempre anduvo por lugares que, según ella, conoce desde un principio. Su vida se fue dando alrededor de espacios circunscriptos y previsibles”] (92).

<sup>9</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*, *Ibid.*, 130, 160, “No le gusta considerar detalles ni pensar en ellos;” “A Rose le gusta ir sembrando frases que explican poco y parecen conclusiones de compromiso, casi eslóganes.”

<sup>10</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia* *Ibid.*, 30, 31, 29. “una actitud, una inclinación o presencia, algo así como un aire o hasta un mohín discreto, o un tic indistinguible, o cierta tendencia en su cuerpo a moverse o revelarse de determinada forma, etc., cosas que la tornan visible;” “atraer las miradas;” “detienen un instante la mirada en Rose como si su rostro les dijera algo.”

<sup>11</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia* *Ibid.*, 29. “el extraño placer de parcer invisible.”

<sup>12</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia* *Ibid.*, 35. “Ella dirige la marcha, decide doblar por una esquina, seguir derecho o regresar. A Félix le gusta que sea de esta manera, siente un pequeño placer en abandonarse a la ruta de Rose porque tiene la ilusión por unos momentos de estar a resguardo en un mundo que, como muchos saben, raramente brinda protección. A la vez, Rose no siempre tiene un camino prefijado, en ocasiones avanza, cruza, dobla o retrocede por puro capricho.”

<sup>13</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia* *Ibid.*, 90, 88. “él mismo será uno de esos adictos o beneficiados de la así llamada conciencia cartográfica;” “ignora qué es lo que más lo atrae de ellos.”

<sup>14</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia* *Ibid.*, 10, 11. “piensa con frecuencia en los mapas digitales;” “[n]o piensa que desde la aparición de los mapas digitales su vida haya mejorado o sea menos indistinta, ni siquiera diferente . . . [sino] algo verificable. . .”; “puede evocar sus pasos y de este modo darle a sus recorridos—podría decir a su vida entera—una

mayor consistencia . . . . la caminata para encontrarse con Rose es más cierta en la medida en que puede evocarla diseñada en ese mismo momento en los mapas digitales.”

<sup>15</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 11, 12. “la palabra evocar define parcialmente la operación mental de Félix, porque la evocación funciona también como un pensamiento proyectado hacia el futuro;”; “Félix camina hacia un café de barrio . . . para encontrarse con Rose . . . [y] siente que se desliza por el mapa y al mismo tiempo navega por la superficie de la ciudad . . . como si los objetos físicos no fueran más que una réplica espacial medio adormecida de aquello señalado por los mapas, y encontrarán su justificación en esa existencia complementaria [en la pantalla].”

<sup>16</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18, “Félix piensa que Rose paga con tarjeta por comodidad; y Rose piensa lo mismo que Félix.”

<sup>17</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18, “su economía organizada;”; “La causa principal de desorden vinculado con el dinero, aparte de su limitado presupuesto, siempre, para Félix son las monedas.”

<sup>18</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18,. “[a]ñora, aunque sea un tiempo que no haya vivido, la época en que todas las actividades del día podían hacerse con algunas monedas, tal como viejas novelas o cuentos recuerdan: alguien metía las manos en los bolsillos, sacaba a ciegas un puñado, las golpeaba con fuerza sobre la tabla y se resolvía la situación. En cambio, el uso mixto de monedas y billetes en las cosas de todos los días le produce una especie de cansancio, lo somete a un desorden según él innecesario y que le quita fuerzas.”

<sup>19</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18,. “[al pagar] con tarjeta . . . [tiene] su economía organizada, según ella quiere hacerse creer . . . [a pesar de estar] resignada a no entender jamás las liquidaciones mensuales de su tarjeta, una o varias páginas plagadas de gastos ínfimos.”

<sup>20</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18,. “la tranquila practicidad de Félix al pagar siempre en efectivo y olvidarse de cualquier registro o amenaza posterior.”

<sup>21</sup> Chejfec, *Experiencia*bid., 18,. “sabía la estrategia.”

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume III: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, ed. Frederick Engels, (New York: International Publishers, 1968): chapter XXV, 400.

<sup>23</sup> Marx, *Ibid. Capital, vol. III*, chapter XXI, 344, 348, 349.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, *Ibid. Capital, vol. III*, 348. Michael Hudson, “From Marx to Goldman Sachs: The Fictions of Fictitious Capital,” *Critique* 38.3 (2010): 419-44. accessed November 1, 2013, <http://michael-hudson.com/2010/07/from-marx-to-goldman-sachs-the-fictions-of-fictitious-capital/>..

<sup>25</sup> Marx, Marx, *Capital, vol. III*, chapter XXVII, 439.

<sup>26</sup> Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 36,. “como actriz Rose está acostumbrada a . . . ponerse a hablar por otros, sujetos inexistentes o más o menos borrosos, o, como les gusta decir a los actores, ser hablada por los otros, o sea, prestar el cuerpo y la voz para propinar palabras o acciones que no necesariamente le pertenecen.”

<sup>27</sup> Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 32, 146,. “una inclinación natural . . . la actuación es en ella algo parecido a una forma de carácter;” “A lo mejor estos encuentros casi del todo conversados sean simplemente, para ella, una puesta en ejercicio junto con Félix de eventos dramáticos o derivaciones teatrales, como llama a las caminatas y cafés semanales.”

<sup>28</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 10,. “la recuerda en cualquier circunstancia y cuando menos lo espera.”

<sup>29</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 9,. “No hace mucho, un párroco quiso graficar en la misa dominical la idea que tenía de Dios. Explicó que siempre se ha dicho que Dios está en todas partes y que acompaña a todo el mundo en todo momento. Lo difícil, sugirió, es hacer tangible esa presencia, ofrecer ejemplos prácticos que no dejen lugar a dudas. Hizo silencio y en seguida agregó que Dios es como los mapas en línea (dijo textualmente ‘Google Maps’). Puede observar desde arriba y desde los costados, es capaz de abarcar con la mirada un continente o enfocarse en una casa, hasta hacer zoom sobre el patio de una casa. Y así, como todos los presentes en ese momento podían imaginar, nada escapaba su vigilancia.”

<sup>30</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 10, 161,. “En realidad son muy pocas las veces que piensa en Dios, y raramente en los términos usados por el párroco;”; “los mapas de Dio, como de un tiempo a esta parte los llama cuando recuerda la anécdota del párroco.”

<sup>31</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 124,. “Caminar es algo que para Félix lleva tiempo, es un hecho teatral y de características que pueden llegar a ser épicas.”

<sup>32</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 37-38,. “Los dos ocupan el costado de la vereda, junto a un cerco provisorio que limita el paso. Sin hablar, Rosa apunta con la mano hacia una casa de tres pisos que se levanta enfrente.”

<sup>33</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 59,. “Félix mantiene la vista hacia el segundo piso y se imagina a sí mismo con la mente en blanco, vigilando a una persona que en realidad es él, observándose desde ese otro lugar, detrás de las cortinas.”

<sup>34</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 10,. “lo que antes hacía pero no podía ver con sus propios ojos.”

<sup>35</sup>. Fried, Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 132.

<sup>36</sup>. Fried, *Ibid.Absorption and Theatricality*, 105.

<sup>37</sup>. Fried, *Ibid.Absorption and Theatricality*, 131-32.

<sup>38</sup>. Fried, *Ibid.Absorption and Theatricality*, 130, 131.

<sup>39</sup>. Fried, *Ibid.Absorption and Theatricality*, 132.

<sup>40</sup>. Fried, *Ibid.Absorption and Theatricality*, 131.

<sup>41</sup>. This hybrid object is evocative of the “teas-maid,” the combination alarm clock and tea kettle that W.G. Sebald mentions in his novel *The Emigrants* and that Chejfec discusses in his essay “Brief Notes on Stories with Images,” trans. John Beasley-Murray, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 11.3 (2002), which appears in the original Spanish in *El punto vacilante*, 135-44.

<sup>42</sup>. Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 44,. “mostraba monedas de otra época y probablemente olvidadas, ajenas a la memoria de casi todos los presentes en es momento, pensó ella . . . el dinero que podía sólo aparecer en los libros;”; “se aclaraba el valor de cada una, y más al costado aparecían otros números, a primera vista arbitrarios y que no se entendían, pero que después de una observación detenida se mostraban como la cantidad de piezas que cabrían en la alcancía si alguien se propusiera llenarla sólo con monedas de ese mismo valor.”

<sup>43</sup>. Chejfec, *Experiencia*Ibid., 49-50, 50-51,. “En la moneda de 50 centavos Rose ve un río con su barranca empanada. Allí alguien acaba de lanzarse y se proyecta hacia el

agua. Es de cuerpo delgado y no lleva ropas, con toda probabilidad muy joven . . . . Alrededor de la imagen hay algunas ramas . . . [que] vienen a ser el marco.”; “la imagen le parece natural . . . . Todavía absorbida por la contemplación de la moneda, Rose cae en una especie de entresueño. Siente que pertenece a ese momento en el costado del río, que ve el salto, huele el aire y percibe de un modo casi físico cada una de las costillas del bañista en el vuelo hacia el agua, como si se tratara de un cuerpo venerado y no hiciera falta tocarlo para saber que es real y que lo adora.”

44. Fried, Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 132.

45. Chejfec, *Ibid. Experiencia*, 51,. “la alcancía la acompañó aun después de dejarla en el lugar donde la había encontrado.”

46. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 51,. “que la calcomanía diera información ampliada, como ser la capacidad medida en dinero: el total de dinero representado si estaba llena con monedas de 5 centavos, o con monedas de 30, etc.” One might question whether the novel takes place in New York by noting the appearance of the 30-cent coin. It should be noted that the bank depicts coins “from another, probably forgotten, era which remained distant from all those present at the wedding . . . . [and] that could perhaps only have its origin in books.” But perhaps the more important point is to note that the strangeness of the 30-cent coin parallels Félix’s re-imagined day comprised of 30 hours rather than 24. It is unclear to me what Chejfec might specifically be noting with the choice of the number 30, but it does pair these two examples with an interest in finding moments when other choices or ways of being might have been possible, which I discuss in terms of geography below.

47. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 51-52,. “personas . . . alejad[as] de cálculos complejos.”

48. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 99,. “no es suficiente con haber pasado por la experiencia dramática”; “[e]l profesor ha pedido una representación.”

49. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 158,. “simplemente decidió decir que no y fue consecuente.”

50. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 55,. “microescenas dramáticas, carentes . . . de pertenencia escénica;”; “en el momento concreto . . . no resultó dramático ni dejó ese recuerdo.”

51. Fried, Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 134.

52. Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 159,. “imposible de representar si busca ser leal con las consignas del profesor.”

53. Patrick Dove, “Territorios de la historia del presente y contratiempo literario en *Boca de lobo*,” in *Sergio Chejfec: Trayectorias de una escritura*, ed. Dianna C. Niebylski (Pittsburgh, PA: ILLI, 2012),: 186. “No somos simplemente los autores de nuestra propia historia, también somos productos de nuestro pasado, y a menudo de maneras que exceden nuestra capacidad de conocimiento y de conciencia.” Sergio Chejfec, *The Dark*, trans. Heather Cleary (Rochester, NY: Open Letter Press, 2013). Sergio Chejfec, *Boca de lobo* (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2000).

54. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, 184,. “una poderosa alternativa estética . . . [una] literatura como interrupción de la lógica predominante y de la distribución de lo social en vigencia . . . .”

55. Chejfec, *Experiencia* *ibid.*, “Territorios,” 186,. “en ciertos puntos de un pasado no demasiado lejano, las cosas podrían haber tomado otro rumbo por completo diferente.” I should reiterate here, however, that Chejfec is not interested in discovering causality or reflecting on or lamenting the crisis of the dramatic situation. By re-orienting our

attention to the decisions made everyday, Chejfec is asserting the contiguity of history with the present. The mundane daily details of life are the points at which history is being made and are the stuff Benjaminian ruins are made of. His goal, then, is to compel us to think about how the decisions we make everyday are or are not producing the history we want to make, are or are not a product of debt obligations and so on. In other words, the antitheatrical image and the possibilities for interpretation that it makes available are crucial to producing this contemplation of both the past and the present.

<sup>56</sup> Chejfec, Chejfec, *Experiencia*, 9, “. . . Dios funcionaba como los mapas digitales, pero mejor, porque no estaba reducido a la representación visual y sus distintas modalidades (mapa, relieve, tránsito, etc.): estaba en condiciones de abarcar literalmente todo, desde las voces y sonidos en el aire hasta los sentimientos más inconfesables, de un modo tal que podía prescindir de la visualización sin mayor problema, cosa imposible para Google Maps.”

<sup>57</sup> The dialogue Chejfec’s novels develop between literature and the visual arts (and photography in particular) has been gaining increasing attention. Chejfec himself has discussed the role of images in relation to literature in his essay “Brief Notes on Stories with Images.” In analyzing Sebald and Uruguayan writer and visual artist Joaquín Torres-García, he implicitly questions to what extent the literary and the linguistic might be able to overcome their own limits and recover their relation to the real without directly including the visual text as “external validation.” A number books and essays comment on these issues, and many of them, such as those by Craig Eplin, Luz Horne, Alejandra Laera and Mariana Catalin are printed alongside Dove’s in an anthology about Chejfec’s work edited by Dianna Niebylski: *Sergio Chejfec: Trayectorias de una escritura* (Pittsburgh: ILLI, 2012). A version in English of Horne’s essay is available as “A Portrait of the Present: Sergio Chejfec’s Photographic Realism,” *Hispanic Review* 78.2 (2010), and h. Her excellent book, *Literaturas reales: Transformaciones del realismo en la narrativa latinoamericana actual*, (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo, 2011), deals extensively with these issues in Chejfec and other contemporary South American writers.

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