

JULI HIGHFILL. *Modernism and Its Merchandise: The Spanish Avant-Garde and Material Culture, 1920-1930*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press. 2014. xv + 269 pp.

This handsomely illustrated monograph, part of the Pennsylvania State University Press's series "Refiguring Modernism," stands as a work of prodigious research and analysis. Here, Juli Highfill examines the varied, and often idiosyncratic creations of writers, painters, and other artists, in an attempt to express the vertiginous transformations - cultural, political, and material - of their age. From these aspects, Highfill singles out the "material," although it must be said that the author does not adhere strictly to the definition of "merchandise" foregrounded in her title. While some objects, such as mannequins or the garments they model, comport with the notion of items offered for commercial exchange, others, like apples in a still-life painting or decomposing donkeys, do not serve - at least in the discussion here - as marketable elements, *sensu stricto*. However, the fact that the objects under scrutiny slip beyond the borders of what constitutes merchandise per se enacts the strange mechanism by which inanimate things break from their objecthood to subject us to their emanations.

Chapter one sets up this relationship when it compares two approaches to the *bodegón* (still-life), those of philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna. From that genre painting, Ortega used the common motif of the apple to exemplify the role of pure form in "el arte joven." But even he had to concede that "lived reality" (27) - delectable apples consumed - continued to intrude. Add to this the metaphoric associations and cultural resonances of sin and pleasure, and Ortega's apple bursts from the performance of simple geometry he had ascribed to it. The essay "Botellismo," by avant-garde impresario Ramón, as he was affectionately known, demonstrates both in form and content the unruly nature of what modernist aesthetics sought to contain. In associative, uncontrolled prose, the author underscores the sensuous conviviality just beyond the borders of the table where bottles seem to rest so pristinely (52).

From the everyday items of the *bodegón*, chapter two moves on to "The Still Life of Modern Times" (53) - objects of consumption framed in shop windows or advertisements. Maruja Mallo's paintings *Máquinas y maniqués*, the film *L'Age d'or* by Luis Buñuel, and Francisco Ayala's short story "Medusa artificial" suggest how the commercial aesthetics of display combine commodity and sexual fetishism to "actively solicit the displaced desires of consumers" (57). This chapter, one of those most true to the monograph's title, features an ingenious reading of Ayala's comic text, centered around a hairdo - the permanent wave (68-72).

Ramón Gómez de la Serna returns in chapter three with his own personal genre, the humorous object-based observations he called *greguerías*, for example: “Termos: bala pacífica para los desayunos” (qtd. in 92). Not only does the *greguería* participate in the pithy expression of advertising, aligning two symbolic systems (linguistic and economic), its central trope - the metaphor - perfectly captures the dynamic interchangeability and relativity of modern life; its “free trade” (96) moves readers into new contexts and semantic fields.

Chapter four takes as its point of departure two related ideas: Sigmund Freud’s reference to modern man as a “prosthetic god” (qtd. 112; 141), supplementing his body with his machines, and the concept of language as prosthesis advanced by David Wills. In Guillermo de Torre’s *Hélices*, a kind of futurist *Song of Myself*, the poet becomes a “Colossus of the Machine Age” (118) with antenna ears and radiographic pupils, standing astride rivers like a bridge (138-39). And even as technophilia shades into technophobia - the body as dismembered and deficient (*in need of prosthesis*) (141-42) - (poetic) language persists as “the epitome of the prosthetic relation write large - human sentience projected and shared” (146).

Dedicated to “Fashion Rites,” chapter five surveys the Spanish avant-garde’s approach to clothing, “that most intimate of prostheses” (147). It poses Baudelaire’s observations on modernity’s ephemerality alongside Georg Simmel’s concept of ever-renewing fashion as the phenomenon of social life most capable of accessing our ever-fleeting present (151) to demonstrate how works like the poem “París, abril, modelo” by Pedro Salinas and dress designs by artist Sonia Delaunay destabilize conceptions of beauty and gender with their attention to mutability and the slippery movement of fabric.

Chapter six turns to the other locus of avant-garde fascination - the outmoded and old, flea markets and found objects. Connecting these interests with the creative destruction of capitalism, the relentless imperative of the new ever to decimate its forerunner (168), Highfill explores the novel *Doña Inés* by Azorín (José Martínez Ruiz), Salvador Dalí’s art, and *L’Age d’or*. The former, structured as an archeological ruin in fifty-two fragments, is a parody of a love story. Its indiscriminate focus on objects - large and small, monumental and trivial - speaks to a desire for the anodyne, a leveling sameness forestalling the decaying effects of time (183-85). In contrast, Dalí’s and Buñuel’s images of putrefaction and a debased, decomposing society evoke heterogeneity, the attraction of disgust and its explosive, energizing power (187-205).

The foregoing only gives a hint of the subtle complexity and mobile intellect at work in this book. There are insights on every page, the writing

is witty, and the rich bibliography offers additional food for thought. All of this, though, leaves out one addendum that is perhaps necessary: Highfill considers the Spanish avant-garde “a parenthesis of effervescent experimental activity” (208) and admits that some of its texts have “not aged well” (129). But recognizing that some theorists, including Matei Calinescu, whom the study cites, have identified commonalities among the avant-garde and later movements, such as postmodernism, readers might ask: how and in what measure have post-Franco practitioners re-engaged vanguard techniques (the iconoclasm of director Pedro Almodóvar comes to mind), and have their purposes and outcomes changed or stayed the same? How will these later products age?

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IGNACIO LÓPEZ-CALVO. *Dragons in the Land of the Condor. Writing Tusán in Peru*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014. 242 pp.

With *Dragons in the Land of the Condor*, prolific Latin Americanist Ignacio López-Calvo consolidates his groundbreaking approach to Asian-Latin American literary and cultural studies. Having authored *The Affinity of the Eye: Writing Nikkei in Peru* (University of Arizona Press, 2013), *Imaging the Chinese in Cuban Literature and Culture* (University Press of Florida, 2007), and edited *Peripheral Transmodernities: South-to-South Dialogues Between the Luso-Hispanic World and “the Orient”* (Cambridge Scholars, 2012), *Alternative Orientalism in Latin America and Beyond* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007), and *One World Periphery Reads the Other: Knowing the “Oriental” in the Americas and the Iberian Peninsula* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009), López-Calvo provides with this new book a much needed study of the Chinese-Peruvian literary production.

Thoroughly researched and theoretically grounded, *Dragons in the Land of the Condor* offers a comprehensive view of the Chinese-Peruvian (Tusán) contribution to Peru’s contemporary culture and society through the analysis of major Sino-Peruvian writings. While successfully framing his approach against the background of postcolonial and postmodernist theories, under the tutelage of Homi Bhabha, Walter Dignolo and Fredric Jameson, amongst other cultural critics, López-Calvo tackles his subject matter through a close reading of the works of leading Tusán writers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His analysis of Chinese-Peruvian writings is accompanied by a more personal insight, gained through the critic’s interviews with the authors studied. Thus López-Calvo establishes