Irene Polimante*

AMERISCOPIA: THE KALEIDOSCOPIC POETIC OF EDWIN TORRES BETWEEN SOUND, LANGUAGE, IMAGE

In 2014 the Arizona University Press published *Ameriscopia*, the last collection of poems by Edwin Torres, in the *Camino del Sol: A Latina and Latino Literary Series.* The title is a neologism derived from the fusion of two terms: "Ameri-" and "-scopia." The first one refers to both the country (America) and its inhabitants (the Americans), while the second one is the Spanish name for the English suffix "-scopy,"[1] which indicates the action "to look at," "to examine" something. A careful observation will show that even the term "Ameri-" can belong to both English and Spanish (and not only to these two languages). Hence, the choice to use a linguistic hybrid to entitle the book is the first hint of Torres' quest. He is inviting the reader to join him in the search of his Americanness in order to reach a wider and all-embracing definition of it. And, on the verge of this hard journey, he decides to employ language as a research tool. Almost echoing Glissant's concept of *mondanité*, where the writer from Martinica explained the impossibility of a monolingual approach to language (Glissant 1990), Torres seems to find his identity-making "third space"[2] in the constant encounter and clash of English with Spanish inside his personal experience as well as in the life of other New Yorkers.

On a more detailed observation, these two languages are a very perilous field for the poet, who undertakes new classifications and multiple negotiations of sense and signifier in the endeavor to break old patterns of representation. The knotty relationship "sign-signifier" establishes itself especially in the creation of "names" and in the action of "naming." These two elements, in fact, entrust the human epistemological function to organize and define reality. Torres, then, wonders what could happen if such a function would be deconstructed. To be more precise, he seems to inquire how could change reality, and our understanding of it, not to mention our way to relate ourselves to it, if our prerogatives of definition, control and classification would change. Such a provocative question, expressed in a poetic form, opens the four-section-anthology, as a monition to careless readers who, due to an inattentive reading, might not understand the author's demanding challenge. Moreover, this question, located at the very beginning of the book as some sort of *esergo*, is the key to read the whole collection.

> a man once unmanned
> will man what is man
> but once he is manned
> a man will unman
> me llamo Llame-e-e-e-e-e
> un hombre sin nombre
> me llama Llame-e-e-e-e-e
> y ahora soy hombre
> i live as a ma-a-a-a-n
> a man of no name
> my name is Unma-a-a-a-n

---

* Irene Polimante holds a Master's Degree in Anglo-American Literature at the University of Macerata in 2016, with a dissertation on two minor American performance poets: Tracie Morris and Edwin Torres. In November 2016 she won a scholarship for the Phd in Modern Languages and Literature at University of Macerata. Her research project concerns the origins of sound poetry and its influences on the contemporary poetic panorama, using a semiotic perspective to analyze the transcultural issues of this poetic genre. Her main research interests include: comparative literature, critical theory, interdisciplinary studies, visual studies, post-colonial studies and cultural studies.

[1] For an etymological definition, look at the following website http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=-scopy&allowed_in_frame=0 Last Visited March 10, 2017

[2] For a detailed study of this issue, see Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity" in Soja, Edward W. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, 1996.

> *unman i remain*[3] (Torres 2014)

This text gains its expressive power thanks to a linguistic game of symmetrical couples of opposites, which progressively interchange in a rhythmical sequence of rhymes. The musical pattern is highlighted by the constant language switching from English to Spanish and *vice versa*; the invention of new verbs starting from nouns; and the shifting in temporal perspectives, especially between present and past. Moreover, its tripartite structure recalls the Aristotelian syllogism, where two initial premises are followed by a final thesis. The first stanza deals with the effort of an "un-manned" man who tries to become a man again. Unfortunately, he realizes that, in doing so, he will only enter in another condition of "un-manned-hood," because he is entrapped inside an endless cycle where phases of "manned-hood" perpetually follow to phases of "un-manned-hood." In the second stanza, the author unfolds the problems inherent the relationships "noun-essence" and "noun-existence." Once again, there is an ongoing shifting within past and present tense alongside a play on the Spanish words "hombre" and "nombre." The "syllogistic poem" ends with Torres' provocative and confrontational reflection on the possibility to split the connection noun-essence and noun-existence through the acceptance of a paradox:

> *i live as a ma-a-a-a-n*
> *a man of no name*
> *my name is Unma-a-a-a-n*
> *unman i remain* (Torres 2014)

And the paradox is the starting point of Torres' ideal and imaginative journey, whereas this collection of old and new poems arises from the author's attempt to explore the city where he lives, New York, in order to discover the *latino* belongings of such a cosmopolitan and hybrid metropolis. What makes this experiment highly interesting is Torres' ability to mediate between personal and collective instances, acting as the *trait d'union* of these two occurrences. The anthology, therefore, develops on two levels of representation that constantly intertwine. For this reason, from the beginning the reader is challenged by the author, who seems to enjoy sharing his unusual journey between the city and his mind, the reality and his memories, the public space and his private sphere. In this way, every snapshot of the most famous places of New York may evoke an episode of Torres' adolescence, or pave the way to myriads of thoughts, reflections, impressions. Conversely, moving from an idea and a consideration, readers could easily find themselves catapulted into a crowded, motley street; or, even more bizarrely, they would assist to an impossible conversation between the author and eclectic artists like Duchamp and Tanguy.

All this crossing of visionary and self-referential planes is part of a wider narrative structure whose cornerstone is language. For Torres is a bilingual poet and a member of the Nuyorican community, he deeply feels that status of liminality which is generally experienced by who lives in-between two cultures and two languages. Poetry, therefore, as "a very anxiety-provoking genre of discourse" (Damon 1998, 479) does not simply develop as a subjective-lyrical thought, but it becomes the most accomplished and dramatic expression of the borderline condition. "The borderline condition is one of a constant anxiety productive, creative tension as well as destructive, soul-killing anxiety — a no-place utopia, a limbo of nightmare and dream possibilities" (479). Moreover, Torres' poetry works on a wider spectrum: it builds bridges between the poet's individual "I" and the collective "We" of the community to which he belongs. Unfortunately, if such a community is forced into a social and political subaltern condition (as it is for the Nuyoricans and the Chicanos), the poetic genre enacts a double function. On one hand, "poetic-subjective language can and often does provide a sort of laboratory for experimentation for new forms, new consciousnesses, new communities" (479); on the other hand, it explicits those relations of power which are negotiated over and over again inside and throughout language. Consequently, language is turned into "the object of and not just the medium for representing the struggle for power, representation, and expressive freedom" (479). In this twofold role of both object and tool of investigation, Edwin Torres' poetry "address the problematics of

---

[3] Emphasis in original, as for all the other quotes from the same volume.

bilinguality and interlinguality, of living in two languages which are in a highly volatile, politically charged relationship of domination and subordination" (481).

Thus, in Torres' poetry, Spanish and English are both the expressions of the poet's two souls and the ground for a compelling research, analysis and creation of a new identity-making bond between the poet's self and his community. For this reason, the vast use of neologisms, code-switching, plays on words, and inter-languages has to be seen as Torres' intention "of dramatizing political at-homeness in the otherwise forbidding culturescape of the US" (479). Poems like *I Wanted to Say Hello to the Salseros but My Hair Was a Mess*, *I Am Trying to Perfect My Assént*, and *Me No Habla Spic*, are not only utter examples of it, but they state Torres' personal re-discovery of language as an ideal "space," where are possible infinite contaminations, mutations, compositions and re-constructions, insofar as they are located "in the migrant, morphic body and in the corporeal process of making sound, making up language, verbing nouns, and reworking negative stereotypes" (482). Furthermore, Torres yearns to show this "migrant, morphic body" and its "corporeal process of making sound" at work, like in the poem *I Am Trying to Perfect My Assént:*

> *I'd like to sliver A-mer-ica*
> *live in a separate A-mer-ica*
> *one that is more of a-ME-rica*
> *the one that I don't THAT'S America* (Torres 2014, 51).

This opening stanza displays the poet's action in dismantling and dismembering the name "America" in the pursuit of a more revolutionary action, that is: to sliver the social, cultural and political American *milieu*, grounded on unequal forms of differentiation, in order to define a different type of country. In the process of fractionating the name "America," Torres reproduces that same practice of separation, which has been historically imposed on minorities. However, this time the result of such a proceeding is not segregation, but the search for a new "a-Me-rica," which presents itself closer to "THAT'S" part of society to which the poet himself belongs too. This initial desire is extensively sounded throughout the poem and, only at the end, it discloses the reason of such a work.

> O Merdre-Rica
> O Mer Rica
> O Sea of Rich Chica-CACA
> O-WHO-sica
> O-YOU-sica
> OHMMMM-MALAVA
> PALA-BRAVA…MU-sica
>
> O-CooCOOM-bia
> Hum-BOMB-bia
> Afri-SUM-pica
> Come-COME, miha
> O-MA-MA-rica
> O-PA-PA-rica
> O-WHO-WHO-sica
> O-YOU-YOU-sica
>
> OH… *I wanna mixup A-mer-ica*
> *live in the other A-mer-ica*
> *maybe discover a-ME-rica*
> *because I'm alone…I'm America* (Torres 2014, 52)

The mournful and declamatory tone of the last verse evokes another famous cry for recognition: Langston Hughes' *I Too* (1926). While Hughes started his call singing to America (Hughes in Piccinato 1971, 66), Torres' plea is an act of splintering the name of a country that, in the new millennium, is still unable to embrace all its people. Moreover, the other two stanzas magnify the relevance of such an issue in showing Torres' visual and phonic experimentation on and between languages. As a matter of fact, both the two texts seem to follow a contrapuntal pace, given by the rhythmic press of a double linguistic game. Firstly, the constant repetition of words, whose consonant and vowels change over and over again, in order to mix together sounds of different languages together. The "Merdre-Rica," a crossbreed between the Spanish "rica" (rich, nice, tasty) and an improbable hybrid between the French "mer" (sea) and the Spanish "madre" (mother), gradually becomes a sea rich of "chica" (girl). In this way, the sound-play goes on with the word "musica" (music). Focusing on the sound of the first syllable "mu-," the poet stresses the affinity of this sound with two others: "who" and "you." The same thing happens with "palabra" (word), that is split in two elements: "pala" (shovel, blade, stick) and "brava" (bold). The repetition of words constantly modified in single parts or that are drastically turned into something else, let the author establish new connections between sound and signifier and, in this way, to create original patterns of sense. Secondly, there is an extensive use of glossolalia. However, in this case, the repetition of specific syllabic unities is only in appearance a nonsense. The regular reiteration of words and syllables, with little or heavy manipulations effectively builds a coherent structure of sense, which lays on different and divergent patterns of sound-sign and sign-signifier. The acoustic redundancy of a definite set of sounds, that reverberates throughout the poem, is an operation of meaning-making. Moreover, every personal discovery of Torres' language system has in Spanish the starting point, because it is a sort of "safety net," a special open door towards all languages and, on a wider *spectrum*, to sound itself (Damon 1998, 483). For this reason, Spanish is something more than the simple counterpart of English, since in Torres' endeavor to define new contact zones among different language-systems and their own culture-systems (where to find countless possibilities of expression and myriads of connections), the poet "sends Anglo centrism on a kamikaze mission […] defying both traditional notions of the (Eurocentric) avant-garde and a politically real linguistic borderguard. Torres, therefore, deconstructs, manipulates and mixes numerous languages in order to find a universal and inclusive linguistic domain" (482-483). In doing so, his poetry opens to an exploration of both the bilingual and inter-lingual condition of whom, like the poet, is forced to live at the same time inside and in-between two languages, that are located in a binary dimension of domination and subordination (481). Hence, the extraordinary use of neologisms, code-switchings, and play words represents and dramatizes Torres' need to feel a sense of "home-hood," otherwise impossible to reach in the colorful cultural panorama of the United States. Furthermore, in the attempt to elaborate a new linguistic reference frame, this linguistic research helps the poet to pave the way for new understandings and categorizations of belongings and identity, insofar as he states:

> America is freedom and so is my poetry, to me at least — my poem is the open road of possibility which categorizes both America and her citizens. However, I do think poets are citizens of language more than nationality. Ours is a shared humanity, our shoulders, our lineage, our language — beyond territory. I am a poet before I am an American poet.[4]

Language is depicted as a system which lies outside the common categorizations of nationality and territory. Hence, language could become a possible identity-label, which might overcome all those distinctions and discriminations of gender, race, believes and belongings, in the name of the Americanness that all the minorities are craving. But this is a very remote possibility; a utopia which collide with the extremely segregated and unequal American reality. Thus, deeply aware of it, Torres continues examining borders, edges and margins of language and among languages. These elements are pivotal to his poetry, as he reveals in the talk poem *Border Talking, Edge Listening*, 2014.[5]

---

[4] Edwin Torres, "American Poetry" in *Poetry Society of America* www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/qa_american_poetry/page_32/ Last Visited January 3, 2017.
[5] This talk ended Torres' reading of a long poem of his own, which were part of the speech *On The Edge with Edwin Torres*, held on April 7th 2014 at the Poet House. The recording can be heard at the following

Out of the layers presented in the form of our bodies, in the guise of our skin — are the valleys between each layer. The peaks at the center of each motion, from step to step, is the movement that calls itself human. The layers we present are the edges that make us human. To be human is not to define but to be. To be poet is to un-define…beginning with the edges we present. The imaginary page — my identity, my story — the one at the margins. The corners I view from safe distances, such as — not here. […] Your edge is incredibly porous, your existence, unfolding within it. Your skin doesn't keep the universe away. Instead it is the edge that joins your existence to everything else.[6]

1. Torres' *Lingualisualism*

The edge properties of porosity and permeability are keywords in *Ameriscopia*. In this anthology, the poet traces an ideal connection between the geographical contact zones, symbols of the encountering of people from different countries, cultures and languages, and the "spaces" between languages, that are ideal places where cultures and identities meet, blur and blend together, opening the way to infinite possibilities of hybridization. Thus, in poems like *Sutra*, *Apartment 5D*, *Under Venus's Hair*, *Moroccan Highway*, *Rinse Cycle*, *Essaouira* or *Coney Island 1969*, Torres displays an astonishing variety of colors, perfumes, gazes and voices which reminds of different, sometimes very distant, territories. Conversely, in texts like *Territory*, *Terra Quad*, *Migration*, *A Story for America*, *Three Spots Under the Shade*, and *Air Is Sham for Light*, what meet, confront, divide as well as unify are different identities; a multitude of dissonant "self," whose diversity in terms of color and language is a discriminatory identity marker. It seems like if the poet has added to the Du Boisian problem of "the color line" (Du Bois 1903, 12) another issue: "the language line." An obstacle, the linguistic one, for all those people whose citizenship is not fully recognized and accepted, because of linguistic frameworks that stress "impure" and multiple belongings. Thus, as Torres reveals in *Terra Quad*, the American soil becomes an ungrateful country:

> *… for you — terra non grata*
> *… with molten being*
> *… drilled into my dna — I waited*
> invisible prayer embedded
> to invisible palm
> […]
> with all us inbetweeners
> inside
> the bordered *Before*
> *… all you nowandthen'ers*
> *… at the edge*
> *… all the same — terra sin mecca* (Torres 2014, 82).

But language is a dangerous and unstable reference guide, which constantly deceives speakers as well as listeners, both entrapped inside a denotative language-game, which does not allow them to see the real language functions (Wittgenstein, 1953). Thus, in *Territory*, Torres defines his "dictionary/as reliable as it is/mercurial. A shifting table/of pulsing glossaries/whose index has yet to rust/but needs to be/watered, weeded/ on every listen" (Torres 2014, 95). In addition, the poet goes even beyond that, underlining how this blind faith in the denotative and connotative power of language could also seriously affect our relationship with the surrounding reality. As a matter of fact, poets, as words-creators and language-manipulators, have

---

website http://www.poetshouse.org/watch-listen-and-discuss/listen/2014-edge-edwin-torres-full-audio. The transcription is mine. From now on it will be quoted as (Torres 2014, *PH*).

[6] Extract from Torres' speech "On the Precipice of Edge and Trigger," given as contribution at the radio debate *Co-locating the material and the Immaterial*, on Blast Radious, on March 27th 2015. www.andnow2015a.sched.org/event/2A1v/co-locating-the-material-and-the-immaterial· Last Visited December 20, 2016.

the extraordinary ability to craft the world and, even more, to deeply influence our capacity in understanding and interpreting it. This capacity invests poets with great responsibility, because, given that "the limits of our language mean the limits of our world" (Wittgenstein 1922, 5-6), inside those limits there are infinite possibilities for poets to bend reality to their will, as Torres exemplifies in another excerpt from *Terra Quad*:

> orbit sage, omnipresent calliope
> jesters in funeral gear
> poets, poets, poets
> *… easy to invent a word*
> *… if language*
> *… is what makes you*
>
> *… if all I am*
> *… is something to listen to*
> *… something to step through*
> slow down planet, your myth —
> a smoke of contradictions
> releasing debate
> as healthy spillover — our only travel
> an undercurrent of hidden language
> that redefines *condition*
> *as human* (Torres 2014, 83).

Although Torres is aware of such a responsibility (and besides Wittgenstein's linguistic impasse), the poet still endures working on and among languages in the inner conviction that "a poem's invention/is both remedy/and opening" (Torres 2014, 85). An opening to several investigations into the fractures of languages, as he previously showed in his work *Fractured Humorous* (1999), where he started his linguistic exploration and experimentation, playing with language in the attempt to twist, break up and overturn it. In this poetic game, which reach its apex in *Ameriscopia*, Torres displays what is the role and the mission of poets in society. Ideally, this figure enshrines two distinct souls which, despite the juxtaposition, carry on a worthwhile collaboration. On one hand, there is the Roamer, who wanders both in the real world and in the realm of mind, looking for splits, interstices produced by two or more cultures and languages which collide with one another. On the other hand, there is the Fracturist, that is a broken, fragmented person, whose duty is to investigate and analyze all his internal lacerations; all those fractures, and contact zones, originated by the continuous shifting from English to Spanish and from Spanish to all the other languages. However, this fractured soul of the poet is also the one who starts a sort of path to recovery, a route from the roamer condition to the healer one: "the fracturist/calling himself *fracturist*/is no longer fractured/is now the healing" (Torres 1999, VI). This *scrutatio* of the poet's inward takes place in the blank and uniform space of the page. To the all in one with the sheet of paper is opposed the black trait of the pen. Words trace grooves, paths which fill the page in a disordered manner. The choice to draw a non-linear development of his writing reproduces the very act of thinking, which proceeds inside a sequence of analogies, comments, conclusions. In this way, thought and writing go on in parallel while, in this shifting between inside and outside, the poet creates a sort of tension which questions the I of Torres himself.

> this page - containing
> the bits
> that have broken off
> - my pen - my self (1999, VI)

The writing process, so, turns to be a private moment, the representation of the poet's vicissitudes, which brings him to investigate into the linguistic meanderings; roaming among its various manifestations and ramifications. According to Torres, the visual aspect of this kind of work has to strongly emerge. He wants

the readers to participate in this dismantling and manipulation of the language. Thus, the distortion-game to push language at its most remote limits is shown through a provocative use of the space in the page, as well as through a wide employ of different fonts: cursive script, bold type, capitalization. But it is also expressed by the presence or absence of punctuation, a wide use of the *enjambement, glossolalia* and syllabification. All these efforts show what is Torres' first aim: to give relevance to the visional aspect of his work on language which, on one side, goes along with the linguistic analysis but, on the other side, it is also part of such a process. From this marriage between visual elements with a phonic and semantic search originates Torres' neologism to define himself as a "lingualisualist." This union between graphic and language features finds in *Ameriscopia* is most sophisticated and mature accomplishment. In this collection, for example, is amplified the idea that "to heal from a fracture" does not mean to come back to a state of integrity; but, on the contrary, it deals with the awareness and need to accept the borderline condition. The reason is that who lives in-between the "fractures" of thought and language has the privilege to observe those sets of phenomena that produce the frictions, the short circuits, which are fundamental to disclose the ideological dynamics intrinsic in the relationship margins-centre, which is expressed and embodied by language itself. As a matter of fact, for Torres, artists and poets have to posit themselves at the margins of the cultural system. He firmly believes that only through the perspective of those who live and undergo social and political discriminations, which are expressed by the language of the dominant culture, could find a way to "cross," deconstruct and build it again. The keystone of Torres' poetry, then, is his standing in those contact zones among languages to better articulate, or rather to fractionate, the spaces where the relation sound-definition takes place. As the poet affirms: "What I try to do is break language down, make it a level playing field, then build it back up" (Torres in Damon 1998, 484). However, the proceeding of acknowledgment and definition of reality by means of language founds the "Margins Policy," or what Maria Damon, in *Postliterary America* (2011), calls the "Border Condition." Clearly in Torres' opinion, the procedure of defining reality and our own thoughts, mental patterns, establishes the foreground of the margins policy. Given that, the operation of determining the meaning of an object is an operation of demarcation, that is: to delineate the perimeter of the object in order to pinpoint an outside and an inside, a field of pertinence and of non-pertinence, fixing, in this way, a first distinction between this object and another one, which, in turn, will have its perimeter of action as marked as well, with its outside and inside perfectly limned. Therefore, the edge helps not only in defining what it circumscribes but it also identifies all that is external to the reference system; whatever insinuates in the space in-between, to the extent that "every edge is a line break that decides how to read the bits between." The same thought is caged inside precise bits of edges, which follow established directives of the language system; and every language has its own edges, perimeters, definitions that enable new divisions. According to Torres, therefore, it is essential to undertake a journey on the margin, or rather, across the margins shaped by languages, in order to reinstate a connection and to bring unity again, especially where separation was imposed. The margin, hence, turns to be a

> […] case shall that receives the act of understanding, the skin of cognition. Why would I give you my thinking in bits? Why so much space between? Again, do not I say could it be that I don't know where all these points lead to? And that I need to place these points in space for both of us to look have what we got together? This talk together an object to define, the skin of the shall an object, the everything edge the embodied word assumes the form of its genesis. The memory of bits that make up the all. The history of your edges, they connect to whatever identity you need right now. The moment made alive back when the word first became a membrane, a thought before form (Torres 2014, *PH).*

Furthermore, the poet asserts that, paradoxically, there is a general and overwhelming lack of awareness about those "borders" in which the whole world and our own person too are entrapped and constantly shaped. Going on in this effort to define and divide everything, even the "self" has been circumscribed and limned. In this manner, the skin has also been turned into a point of separation between the self and something "other-from-the-self."

> Skin as edge. It's convenient to think the human skin as a membrane that separates, preserving the boundary between self and not self. But from the moment your DNA forms this ego that would develop into you, everything you say, you are has been created from matter and information imported across your body extra the membrane. […] your edge is incredibly porous; your existence unfolding within it; your skin does not keep the universe away. Instead, it is the edge that join your existence to everything else (Torres 2014, *PH).*

Another important reason for Torres' interest in the visual aspect of this incessant pursuit to overturn, twist and recompose the linguistic edges of meaning concerns a convoluted and challenging issue: Torres' attempt to combine the stillness and finiteness of the poem in its print form with the ephemeral and protean nature of the performance. The result of this peculiar combination is a sort of *hircocervus*, which liquefies the boundaries among genres, keenly demanding a new balance between praxis and theoretical analysis. The performative action allows the author to reach two main goals: firstly, the creation of a collaborative balance among poetry, acting, music and language; and secondly, the opportunity to corroborate a new relationship with the text as well as with the audience too. The poetic performance, so, is not only a creative laboratory where the poet texts new linguistic experimentations or elaborates incredible artistic solutions, but it also enables a sort of show, a poetic event, where the public is called to assist and actively participate to it. Amazing examples of this peculiar interaction are *The Poets Neurotica* exhibitions. The idea rises from Torres' great admiration for Albert Ayler's work on improvisation and from a legitimate desire to emulate one of his favorite musicians.[7] Torres' enterprise, therefore, translates into a polyphonic dialogue among audience, musicians, poets and, sometimes, dancers too. In this scenario everybody are encouraged to act according to their own feelings and emotions, which goes to interact and mix together *in extempore*. For all the time Torres directs the many interactions without abusing of his position of "director." The success of such a poetic event, in fact, lays on the freedom of action of each participants who, despite the pre-determined structure prepared by Torres, are exhorted to live the moment and resonate with all the others in the room.[8] The relation language-vision is pivotal to Torres' unlimited research on the different and multiple forms of sense created by language. In this case, the term "vision" identifies two main elements: the communicative power of the image that is emotionally engaging; the capacity to imagine and re-create new linguistic patterns for a representation of reality in perpetual transformation. This is another way in which the author elaborates that fusion between language and visual items which compose his *lingualisualism*.

In *Ameriscopia* Torres has to solve a crucial problem: the transposition of his sound, vocal experimentation in written form, since he is not able to reproduce the physical act of the performance. *Puerto Rican Astronaut*[9] is a poem that can help in showing a possible solution to such a critical need because of its original structure. It seems to be an excerpt from a monologue, where it is not clear whether Torres is simply speaking to an audience, as he was on stage, about an episode of a reality show, or he is performing the role of a TV viewer who comments on it. The poem seems the transcription of a I. E. Monologue: a piece prepared not only to be delivered in public but, above all, it is thought to be adjusted and modified according to the audience's response. Unfortunately, this printed text cannot be changed or re-shaped in any way; so, the author can only imagine a possible interaction with a hypothetical public with whom he establishes a dialogue. This is the reason for the dialogic structure of a text that has very little in common with the

---

[7] "It was inspired by the musician Albert Ayler. He did improvisational music in the 50's and 60's. He died in the 70's. He played with Ornette Coleman. His musicians had real conversations amongst themselves within the music. It was all happening at once but separately. And it had a real spirituality to it, an understanding… this chemistry that was just so great. And it wasn't even always the same musicians. He was the driving force. To explain his music he used to say: 'It ain't about nothing'" (TGCET, Phipps).

[8] "Rehearsals are pretty wild. It is all improv. But there's a structure. The personnel is important. It wouldn't work without the right musicians. These musicians are able to make sound as well as music. And they're very sensitive to all ranges of human emotion. A lot of it is the chemistry. But then there's some structure, so I have to lead them without leading them. I'm the conductor but I still want there to be room for exploration" (TGCET, Phipps).

[9] Maybe Torres refers to Joseph Michael "Joe" Acaba: the first American astronaut of Puerto Rican belongings. In 2009 he was on board of the *Space Shuttle Discovery*. He eventually came back to space with another mission in 2012.

monologue sample. Throughout the poem there is the presence of a pervasive "you," who is constantly asked but whose answers are not reported. The reader can imagine the dialogue only thanks to the author's comments, questions, invectives, and through the answers he gives to this hypothetical addressee. To this extent the poet makes extensive use of rhetorical questions, interjections and imperatives.

> "Listen […]" "right?, Lookit up," […] "Just sayin'!," […] "Okay whatabouta,"[…] "ya got it!," "Huh!,"[…] "You kiddin'? She any good? (pause) That don't count," […] "Ya with me?," […] "Lookit up buddy," "Huh! (pause) Fine, Long Beach, whatever!," "So listen […]", "This is gold baby!,"[…] "yur right there," "Now, okay ready […] get this!,"[…] "hear me out!," "help me out! Whatever!," […] "You know, Beaver […]" "did I say?," […] "So get this […]," "[…] what? It's been done? Okay, how about this […]" (Torres 2014, 55).

The considerable use of slang emphasizes the phatic function of the text and helps the author to get closer to the public, establishing an informal and knowing atmosphere. The work appears as a monolithic *unicum*, where comments and lines follow one another in a non-stop flux, as if Torres would reproduce a realistic transcription of the speech, which is characterized by a structure far from being regular and uniform. The choice of the fonts mirrors this intent too. The Roman type, for example, refers to the narrative parts, while the Italics has a double worth: when in brackets, it works as a part-marker to underline the speech absence or a scenic expedient; conversely, on the textual string it highlights certain words or expressions. Thanks to such a stratagem, Torres is able to transcript all set of acts typical of the performance, including intonations, pauses, onomatopoeias, and gestures which could hardly find space and realization without the physical presence of the artist. In particular, three directions continue to happen in the whole poem: "*knock three times, pause, slap-slap.*" For the absence of a real speaker, the rhythm of this peculiar discussion between the poet and his public is given by pauses that juxtapose Torres' lines. They are shown employing the word "pause" put in brackets, or they are symbolized by suspension points, which are immediately followed by the next comment. Moreover, the poet writes few words in block letters in order to stress a stronger intonation over there. Thus the reader receives suggestions on how to "participate" in this phantomatic dialogue, for example, accentuating words like "HAH!," "ONLY HE NEVER SHAVES!," "ZIP!." When the emphasis is even more underlined, the author adds to a word a sound-extension, always realized through the repetition of a single vowel, as in "THE HOOOORNS […]." To this group of words written in block letters belongs the couple "FACT! TRADITION" - "FACT!" which is often repeated in the first part of the text. It is used to close a long series of racist commonplaces on the roles and jobs, which are commonly attributed to certain classes of people, whose gender and ethnicity are overmarked.

> That the *new black*? Hole-insky! (*knock three times*) Just sayin', got it all figured out. Listen…a sushi chef, right? Always a guy, right? FACT! Lookit up, just sayin' ya got yer deep ocean-clan tradition, right? Top o'which (*slap-slap*) hand o'the woman (*pause*) all wrong temperature t'mold fish. FACT! Just sayin'! Okay now, whataboutamatador…always a man right? FACT! TRADITION, ya got it! Huh? (*pause*) You kiddin'? (*pause*) She any good? (*pause*) That don't count. Plus, yer woman's basic killer instinct, all maternal. *Poor bull, someone's baby, oh diaper*, THE HOOOORNS… […] Okay, now ya got yer white-collar African-American who can't swim or play hockey…'cuz o'that small bone in his heel (Torres 2014, 55).

The sushi chef, therefore, is "traditionally" an Asiatic male, as well as a male is supposed to be the matador; not to mention the fact that Afro-American people have an aptitude for some sports. Torres builds a sort of mirrors-game to deal with the most common stereotypical clichés on the working field and their counterparts, such as the female sushi chef or matador and the Afro-American Olympic champion in swimming and hockey.[10] In this game of doubles and overturnings, the poet displays his sardonic and harsh attack against all those common clichés that slyly inhabit everyday expressions and speeches. These stereotypes,

---

[10] In these two sports, notoriously "colored" with "white," the presence of Afro-American athletes is still quite limited.

according to Torres, should be unmasked and critically analyzed in order to stop nourishing that circuit stereotype-race, which is at the core of the racist thought.

Works Cited

Benvenuti, Giuliana e Remo Ceserani. *La letteratura nell'età globale*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012.

Damon, Maria. "Avant-Garde or Borderguard: (Latino) Identity in Poetry." *American Literary History*, 10.3 (1998): 478-496.

---. *Postliterary America: from Bagel Shop Jazz to Micropoetries*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2011.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls Of Black Folk*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.

Hughes, Langston. "I, Too." Milano: Edizioni Accademia, 1971.

Torres, Edwin. *Fractured Humorous*. Berkley, California: Subpress Collective, 1999.

---. *In The Function of External Circumstances*. Nightboat, 2010.

---. "American Poetry," *Poetry Society of America*, 2010. https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/crossroads/qa_american_poetry/page_32/ Last Visited December 10, 2016.

---. *Ameriscopia*. Tucson: Arizona University Press, 2014.

---. *On The Edge with Edwin Torres.* Poet House, April 2014. www.poetshouse.org/watch listen-and-discuss/listen/2014-edge-edwin-torres-full-audio Last Visited February 11, 2017.

---. "On the Precipice of Edge and Trigger," *Co-locating the material and the Immaterial*, Blast Radious, March 2015. https://www.andnow2015a.sched.org/event/2A1v/co-locating-the-material-and-the-immaterial Last Visited January 20, 2017.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigation*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1958.