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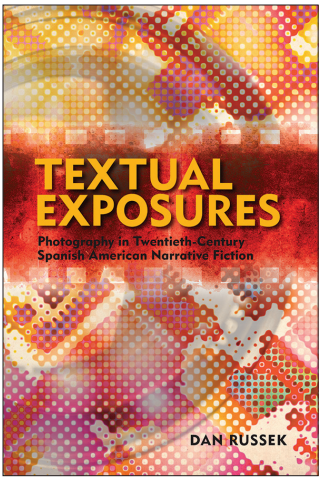

TEXTUAL EXPOSURES: PHOTOGRAPHY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SPANISH AMERICAN NARRATIVE FICTION

By Dan Russek

ISBN 978-1-55238-784-9

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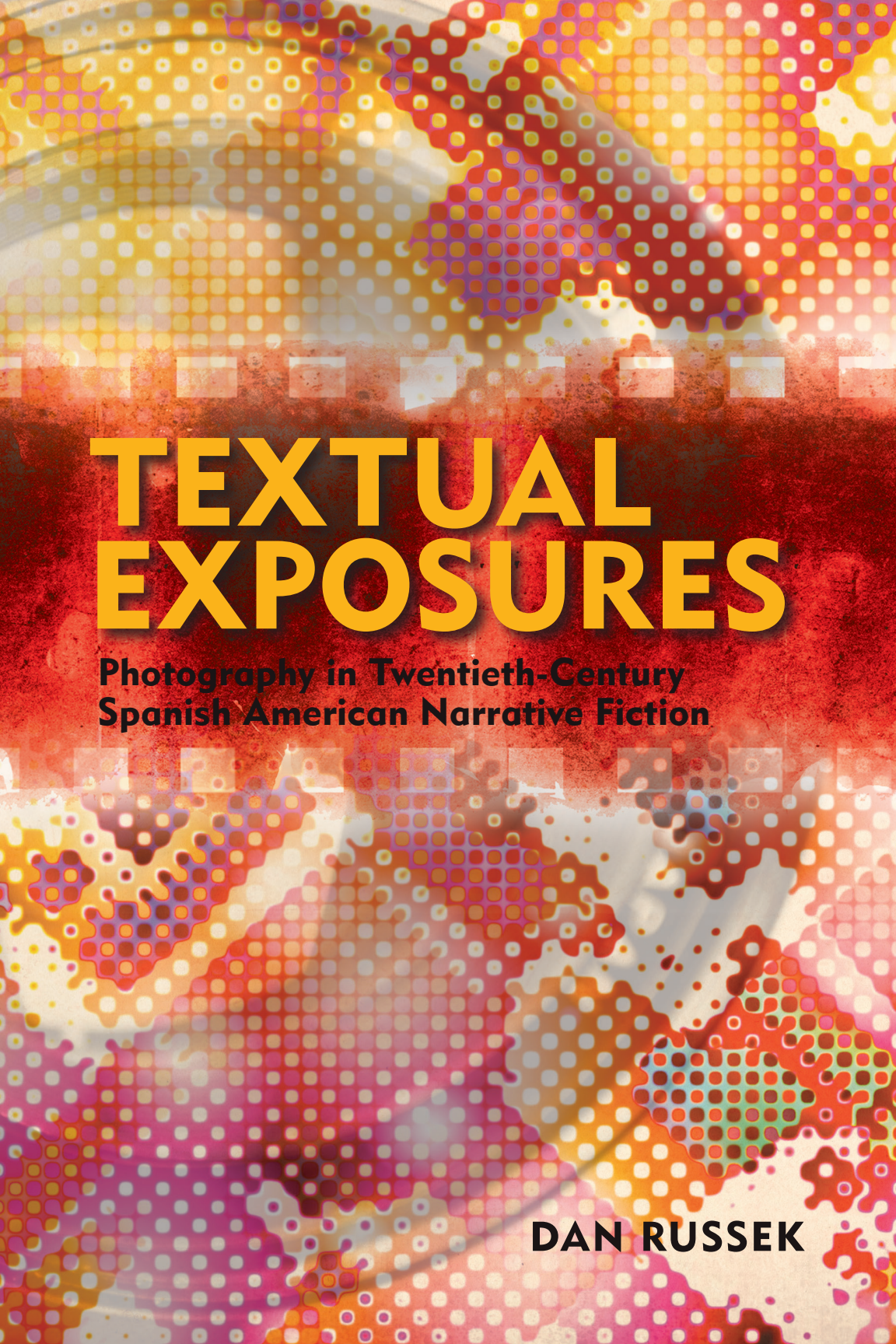
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TEXTUAL EXPOSURES

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TEXTUAL EXPOSURES

Photography in Twentieth-Century Spanish American Narrative Fiction

DAN RUSSEK

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF ARTS
Latin American Research Centre

Latin American and Caribbean Series
ISSN 1498-2366 (Print) ISSN 1925-9638 (Online)

University of Calgary Press
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2N 1N4
www.uofcpress.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Russek, Dan, 1963-, author
Textual exposures : photography in twentieth-century Spanish American narrative fiction / Dan Russek.

(Latin American and Caribbean series, ISSN 1498-2366 ; 11)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-55238-783-2 (pbk.).—ISBN 978-1-55238-786-3 (epub).—
ISBN 978-1-55238-787-0 (mobi).—ISBN 978-1-55238-785-6 (pdf)

1. Spanish American fiction—20th century—History and criticism. 2. Photography in literature. 3. Literature and photography—Latin America—History—20th century. I. Title. II. Series: Latin American and Caribbean series ; 11

PQ7082.N7R88 2015 863'.609357 C2015-901357-7
C2015-901358-5

The University of Calgary Press acknowledges the support of the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Media Fund for our publications. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund for our publishing activities. We acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Photos on pages 118, 119, 122, and 129 provided courtesy of Siglio XXI Editores.
Cover images: #2358460, #3679918, #5114747 (colourbox.com)
Cover design, page design, and typesetting by Melina Cusano

I dedicate this book
to my late father Salomón, my mother Geula,
my brother Guil, and my sister Dalia.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was long in the making, and I owe a debt of gratitude to many people and many institutions. The research project was supported by grants from the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (Mexico) and a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Research trips were made possible through the generous support of the Tinker Travel Grant, the Center for Latin American Studies Travel Grant, the Doolittle Fellowship, and the Humanities Travel Grant, all from the University of Chicago, as well as Internal Research Grants from the University of Victoria. My thanks go to the directors and staff of the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, the Biblioteca Nacional at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City, and the Biblioteca Nacional and Hemeroteca, the Biblioteca del Congreso, and the Biblioteca Tornquist in Buenos Aires. To these agencies and institutions, my acknowledgement for the invaluable privilege of engaging in serious and enjoyable academic work.

Over the years, I have profited from the guidance, scholarship, and wisdom of professors, writers, and artists in courses and conferences. In Mexico, Rosa Beltrán, Flora Botton, Horacio Costa, Carlos Pereda, Luz Aurora Pimentel and Pablo Soler Frost; in the United States, Alicia Borinsky, Françoise Meltzer, W. J. T. Mitchell, Mario Santana, Joel Snyder, and Yuri Tsivian; in Argentina, Abel Alexander, Sara Facio, Ana María Shua, and Susana Zanetti; and in Canada, my colleagues at the University of Victoria, Lloyd Howard and Pablo Restrepo-Gautier.

I want to acknowledge the photographer Alicia Sanguineti for allowing me to use the portrait of Silvina Ocampo by the late Alicia D'Amico, and Ezequiel and Gonzalo Martínez, from the Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez, for the use of the photograph of their father with Juan Domingo Perón.

I had the good fortune of meeting the late Tomás Eloy Martínez, as well as the late Salvador Elizondo, to whom I am grateful for their teachings in person and in writing.

To my friends, many of them now fellow colleagues, my thanks for the rich conversations we have been engaged in over the years: Irene Artigas, Yael Bitrán Goren, Flavia Cesarino Costa, Josefina Ghiglino, Susana González Aktories, Alejandra González Aktories, Eduardo Gutiérrez, Georg Leidenberger, Marcos Natali, Alberto Nulman, Rosa Sarabia, Alisú Schoua-Glusberg, Michael Schuessler, Ana María Serna, and Alvaro Vázquez Mantecón. My thanks to Susan Abrill, for the exchange of ideas and her proofreading over the years; to the editors of my scholarly contributions, Mary Beth Tierny-Tello, David William Foster, Dawne McCance, and Jesús Pérez-Magallón; and to the editors of the University of Calgary Press, Peter Enman, Karen Buttner, Melina Cusano, and the Latin American Series editor, Hendrik Kraay. Thanks also to Alison Jacques for copyediting the text, and to Reader D, for her thorough reading of the manuscript and her many useful suggestions.

I want to acknowledge in particular Lois Parkinson Zamora and Marcy Schwartz for their professional and personal support over the years. Last, a very special thanks to Patrick O'Connor, my former PhD advisor, a wise, knowledgeable, and kind person—a true mentor—without whom this scholarly project would not have come to fruition.

INTRODUCTION

This book explores the relationship between twentieth-century Latin American narrative fiction and the photographic medium. It probes the ways in which literature registers photography's powers and limitations, and how authors elaborate its conventions and assumptions in fictional form. While this is essentially a study of literary criticism, it aims to show how texts critically reflect the media environment in which they are created. The writings I analyze enter a dialogical relationship with visual technologies such as the X-ray, cinema, illustrated journalism, television, and video. This book examines how these technologies, historically and aesthetically linked to photography, inform the works of canonical writers in Spanish America.

Photography holds a special status in the array of modern technologies of representation. From a conventional rubric that defines it as a technique through which a sensitized material surface is exposed to light and developed through mechanical means to produce a picture of whatever is placed in front of the camera, the medium has evolved into a hybrid, protean, multipurpose application.[1] While on many occasions writers have taken photography's conventional definition for granted, on others they have challenged, transgressed, and transcended it.

It is perhaps fitting that this analysis comes at a time when "traditional" ideas about the photographic medium are being challenged and reassessed, if not superseded, in view of the powerful new tools of photographic production, manipulation, and dissemination brought about by

the digital revolution. The so-called "information age" brings with it a paradigm shift from photomechanical to digital technologies, from laboratory work to software, from glass and paper to handheld devices and computer screens, and from the exhibition of images in galleries and museums to their dissemination through the Internet. Inevitable as it may be to speak about a post-photographic age, as a number of artists, critics, and scholars have done, this stance risks missing the distinctive evolution of the photographic medium since its origins as well as its endurance and continuity.[2] Ever since the emblematic but quickly defunct daguerreotype, photography has undergone a steady flux of technical innovations and has seen an ever-widening sphere of influence on modern visual culture. This technical reshaping has created a great variety of uses and contexts where photography is applied and practiced. While issues regarding the truthfulness and objectivity of the photographic image have been at the forefront of modern and postmodern critical debates, the uses of the photographic medium, regardless of the profound changes digitalization implies, do not seem bound for extinction any time soon. Rather than the death of photography, we are experiencing yet another of its incarnations. As Henry Jenkins persuasively argues,

> once a medium establishes itself as satisfying some core human demand, it continues to function within the larger system of communication options. . . . Printed words did not kill spoken words. Cinema did not kill theater. Television did not kill radio. Each old medium was forced to coexist with the emerging media. That's why convergence seems more plausible as a way of understanding the past several decades of media change than the old digital revolution paradigm had. Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies.[3]

In an age of accelerated time, information overload, and constant technological change, it could be argued that the fixed image has acquired a privileged status, one that promises the illusion of permanence and the possibility of easy retrieval. In modern times, photography emblematizes the fixed image better than any other medium. One of the claims of this study is that literary texts often attest to this privileged condition by regularly

employing photographs as representations of last resort for conveying visual meaning.

The emergence of modern Latin American literature since the end of the nineteenth century coincided with the rise and ongoing transformation of photography as a means of communication and visual representation. The American critic and historian Alan Trachtenberg, referring to Lewis Carroll, Emile Zola, and Wright Morris, pointed out that "a history of photographic criticism must take into account the important and largely uninvestigated transactions between photography and formal literature."[4] Since then, a variety of anthologies have been devoted to these links, most notably two groundbreaking collections edited by Jane M. Rabb: *Literature and Photography: Interactions 1840–1990* (1995) and *The Short Story and Photography, 1880s–1980s* (1998). It is worth noting, however, the cultural and linguistic limitations of these volumes, which are mainly concerned with English and French literatures. Texts in Spanish are conspicuously absent.[5] The inclusion of Julio Cortázar's short story "Blow-Up" (originally "Las babas del diablo," 1959) in the second of Rabb's volumes is due in part to the international attention the text received when credited in Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* (1966).[6] However, other than the Argentine writer, whose texts have produced an abundant bibliography, not enough critical attention has been devoted to the systematic study of the wealth of narrative texts about photography in twentieth-century Latin American literature. While an increasing number of studies have been published about particular Latin American authors as diverse as Leopoldo Lugones, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Elena Poniatowska, and Roberto Bolaño, no single book in English has attempted a comprehensive examination of the topic.[7]

In recent years, scholars in the field of Latin American literature have recognized the importance of the links between literature and photography. Daniel Balderston uses photography as a category by which to classify the short story in Spanish America, in an entry in the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*.[8] The collection of essays entitled *Double Exposure: Photography and Writing in Latin America* (2006), to which I am a contributor, advances the study of the links among photography, writing, and a host of social and political practices. Another collection of essays, *Phototextualities* (2003), edited by Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, explores the intersection between photography and narrative. This

collection includes two essays about Latin America, but they do not pertain to literature. The first, by Catherine Grant, is about photographs of the disappeared in Argentine films about the "Dirty War," and the second, by Noble, is a study of a photograph of a *soldadera*. Antonio Ansón reviews the interactions between world literature and photography in his brief but informative *Novelas como álbumes* (2000). Roberto Tejada's *National Camera: Photography and Mexico's Image Environment* (2009) and Esther Gabara's *Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil* (2008) are concerned mostly with the interactions of photography with history and culture. John Mraz's illuminating *Looking for Mexico* (2009) provides a clear exposition of the evolution of the field of visual culture in modern Mexico.

Two recent books, both in Spanish, are noteworthy contributions to the field. The first is Valeria de los Ríos's *Espectros de luz: Tecnologías visuales en la literatura latinoamericana* (2011). It is a collection of essays that deals with the impact of photography and cinema upon modern and contemporary Latin American literature. It includes analyses on Leopoldo Lugones, Salvador Elizondo, Juan Luis Martínez, Roberto Bolaño, Horacio Quiroga, Julio Cortázar, Edmundo Paz-Soldán, Vicente Huidobro, Roberto Arlt, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, among others. Photography and film are seen as triggers that unleash fantasies, desires, and anxieties thematized in the literary text. Though the group of essays could be more tightly knit, and there is some unevenness in the arguments they develop, the collection, relying on a host of cultural critics and postructuralist theorists, has the virtue of throwing new light on the impact of modern visual technologies upon the work of important Latin American writers. The second book, entitled *Pliegues visuales: Narrativa y fotografía en la novela latinoamericana contemporánea* (2013), by Magdalena Perkowska, is a thoroughly researched and theoretically solid investigation of the *fotonovela*. This literary subgenre refers to a hybrid form: novels that include actual photographs along with the text. Perkowska argues that in the works she studies—*Mil y una muertes* by Sergio Ramírez, *Tinísima* by Elena Poniatowska, *La llegada (crónica con "ficción")* by José Luis González, *Fuegia* by Eduardo Belgrano Rawson, and *Shiki Nagaoka: una nariz de ficción* by Mario Bellatín—photographs should not be read merely as illustrations or supplements, because they are indispensable elements that invite, or even force, the reader to develop new strategies of reading

and interpretation, given the semiotic and aesthetic match between literary word and photographic representation.

Interactions and analogies between literature and photography occur on multiple levels. On the most elemental one, photography, like painting, cinema, and other visual arts, has been a constant source of creative inspiration. It has also been a discursive model: writers creatively exploit the snapshot and the postcard as forms of verbal/visual representation, and the photo album has been employed as a useful literary device for conjuring memories, weaving stories, and constructing identities. On another level, very much like the notebook that accompanies the novelist, the camera has functioned as a shorthand device, a portable machine that provides the means to immediately register a spatial setting and a moment in time.[9] Conversely, as Shloss notes, there is an analogous creative impulse in literature and photography, since, for the writer, "constituting the text, finding its material, is similar to using a camera."[10]

Authors frequently mention photographs in poems and stories, make the photographer a recurring character, and place the photographic act at the centre of the plot. Narrative texts often refer to the topical uses of photography, such as the preservation of life against the action of time and death, the latency of memory, the power of visual reconnaissance, the extension of vision, the aesthetic and erotic capacity to shock and to excite, the social and political aspects of visual testimony, and the many specific cultural uses of the medium, ranging from portraiture and the ethnographic survey to fashion, advertising, and travel. Ambivalent fetish or endearing token, a photograph embodies the constructed nature of personal and collective identities. Photography, as applied to a style or to memory, connotes a supposedly accurate, neutral, matter-of-fact depiction, which was articulated in its classical version by Emile Zola, referencing the scientific ideas of Claude Bernard, in his 1880 essay "The Experimental Novel": "The observer relates purely and simply the phenomena which he has under his eyes. . . . He should be the photographer of phenomena; his observation should be an exact representation of nature."[11] Endowed with these connotations, actual photographs have themselves been understood in metaphorical terms. For Bazin, they are akin to mummified remains; Barthes saw them as a theatrical act and McLuhan as a medium endowed with the qualities of gesture and mime.[12]

As for their affinities, the intellectual acts of decoding, interpreting, and inspecting in a sustained effort of reflection apply to reading verbal texts as well as photographic images. Some of the most frequently quoted pieces of photographic criticism, such as Barthes's essays "The Photographic Message" and "Rhetoric of the Image," address the issue of photography's readability. Both the printed word and the photographic image elicit an immediate scanning and require a sustained act of attention for their interpretation. Contrary to the moving images of cinema, television, video, and media streaming, photography can be compared to writing in that both media constitute a portable storage of fixed symbolic forms. They are nomadic media that are tasked with fixing, while inscribing in a material substratum, a stream of thoughts or an event in space and time.

A photograph is an invitation to narrate, as writers widely recognize.[13] But photographs are not purely visual signs that inspire stories; they are also defined by, and embedded in, the multiple stories a culture generates. As Victor Burgin argues, "photographs are texts inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse,' but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the 'photographic text,' like any other, is the site of a complex 'intertextuality,' an overlapping series of previous texts 'taken for granted' at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture."[14]

While the photograph has been frequently read as a text, literary writing and photographic image nonetheless remain heterogeneous regimes of representation, ruled by different codes and modes of reception and interpretation. The word may contextualize the image, and the image may provide information to illustrate the text, but the visual specificity and materiality of the photograph stand in opposition to the abstract power of the literary imagination to suggest and evoke. Even if the materiality of the sign is implied in any signifier, the ideality and intelligibility of the text stands in contrast to the material nature and impact of the photograph.[15]

European and American writers, such as Victor Hugo, Lewis Carroll, George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Jack London among others, took up photography as a hobby.[16] A number of renowned Latin American authors also engaged in photography as a means of visual production at some stage in their careers, such as Horacio Quiroga, Juan Rulfo, and Adolfo Bioy Casares.[17] Julio Cortázar, a committed practitioner,

even published his pictures in his later years. They appear in *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), *Ultimo round* (1969), and *Prosa del observatorio* (1972), as well as in *Los autonautas de la cosmopista* (1983), written with his then partner, Carol Dunlop. Though for Cortázar photography remained largely a personal, non-professional enterprise, the impulse to visually capture his surroundings attests to a photographic sensibility that is reflected in a variety of ways in his work. Photography, both as actual practice and as artistic subject, is an endeavor particularly well-suited to a writer who railed against the boring habits of civilized life and embraced the insights of intuition and spontaneity, whose literary work chronicled the fragmented pace of modern life, and whose creative process, deeply indebted to Surrealism, depended not on the development of predetermined plans but on the encounter with the random and the unexpected. The three volumes of Cortázar's correspondence provide ample evidence of a photographic hobby that became a decades-long practice.[18] In an interview with Evelyn Picón Garfield in 1973, he mentions that he took three hundred pictures of the observatories of the Sultan Jai Singh in Jaipur and New Delhi. He also refers to his early photographic practice and dwells upon the art of photography, which he links to an underlying literary interest.[19]

Though I refer to some actual photographs in my analysis of the works of Cortázar and Elizondo, this book is only partly concerned with real pictures that appear in literary works. Scant attention is paid either to illustrated works or to the collaborative effort between writers and photographers, a relation that has yielded a significant number of works in Latin American letters.[20] Rather, the focus is on the thematic, structural, cultural, and political imprints the photographic motif leaves on narrative texts. Organized as eight case studies, it highlights the evolution of the uses of the medium in literature by drawing an arc that spans from the fantasies of the technological uncanny in Rubén Darío at the end of the nineteenth century to the social roles photographic images play in the late twentieth century in texts by Cortázar and Tomás Eloy Martínez.

Theorists of photography have understood the medium in two different, though not necessarily incompatible, ways.[21] The first emphasizes what Barthes called the photograph's "analogical plenitude," that is, its objective, direct, or transparent link to a referent and its attendant power to certify, authenticate, or bear witness.[22] Contemporary critics such as Bazin, Arnheim, and Sontag have advanced versions of this point of view,

which is attuned to the common understanding of photography as a sign that "proves" the reality of an event. The second way stresses less what the photograph shows or purports to show, focusing instead on the contexts that make it possible, such as the social, political, and historical conditions that are not apparent in the purely visual information the sign conveys. This position takes a critical stance with regard to the alleged transparency of the medium, arguing that photographs always depend on contexts of production and reception. Language, with its powers to shape and reshape meaning, is never absent from the way we consider photographs. Theorists such as Berger, Burgin, Krauss, Sekula, Tagg, and Sontag have advanced this position as well. When it comes to fictional literature, writers are less concerned about determining the "ontology" of the photographic image as such. However, they operate in the environment of a visual culture that makes them both sensitive to the power of photographs and aware of their potential use in their works. In this sense, they exploit the "blind spots" of the image. On the one hand, the photograph's realist assumption (its direct link to a referent) is upset or challenged by writers who explore its potential fantastic or demonic uses; on the other hand, they comment and interpret the social, historical, and political conditions that lay beyond the frame of the photographic sign.

The relationship between literary word and photographic image can be framed, at least initially, in reference to the traditional comparison between poetry and painting, which dates back to classical antiquity.[23] The concept of ekphrasis is employed in this study as an interpretive tool that helps to illuminate the links between verbal and visual representations. A rhetorical and literary device, ekphrasis was defined in its modern sense by Leo Spitzer as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art" and "the reproduction, through the medium of words, of sensuously perceptible *objets d'art*."[24] Following Spitzer, Murray Krieger considers ekphrasis a topos "that attempts to imitate in words an object of the plastic arts," but he expands this notion to refer to an impulse and an aspiration, an ekphrastic principle which, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, makes the visual arts "a metaphor, not just for verbal representation of visual experience, but for the shaping of language into formal patterns that 'still' the movement of linguistic temporality into a spatial, formal array."[25] Mitchell's own definition considers ekphrasis "the verbal representation of

a visual representation."[26] Wagner extends it to all verbal commentary on images, be it "poems, critical assessments, [or] art historical accounts."[27]

In its modern incarnation, ekphrasis has been considered a paradoxical concept, a complex knot that simultaneously invites and resists semiotic fullfilment. In the words of Krieger, "to look into ekphrasis is to look into the illusionary representation of the unrepresentable, even while that representation is allowed to masquerade as a natural sign, as if it could be an adequate substitute for its object."[28] In this respect, photography itself has been understood on paradoxical grounds, mingling the referential power of the natural sign and the conventions of a coded message.[29] The analysis of photographic representations in literature may provide a useful window through which to elucidate the complex figures drawn by the interaction of verbal and visual media.

While ekphrasis is a useful interpretive tool for delving into the links between the realms of the verbal and the visual, it must be noted that the photographic medium introduces a new regime of representations with regard to traditional visual arts such as painting, graphic arts, and sculpture, as Benjamin's classic essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction pointedly asserts. Contrary to the uniqueness and static condition of the traditional work of visual art, photography's widespread dissemination and potentially endless reproduction, the discovery it allows of new visual realities through optical and mechanical devices, and its integration in everyday cultural practices and social contexts add a new dimension to the ekphrastic model in which a writer describes an object of visual art. In this context, photography allows for an extraordinarily rich and dynamic incorporation in literary texts.

My analysis relies mostly on "notional ekphrases," that is, verbal renderings of imagined photographs.[30] As it will become clear, fictional photographs often share the qualities of actual pictures. Of course, these have an important role to play in my study, but ekphrastic creations will play the most prominent role. Understood this way, photographs become textual knots or narrative folds: figures that complicate the representational *mise-en-scène* of a short story or novel. They become verbal renderings of visual representations that lend their concise powers of communication to a work of verbal art. While literary texts register some of the conventional features of the photographic medium, they also invent or recreate them, as noted above, for their own ends.

Contemporary scholars such as James Heffernan and Peter Wagner have advanced the notion of a struggle among media, a concept that can be traced to the Renaissance notion of the *paragone*, or contest among the arts. This competition has been framed by Heffernan as "a perpetually contentious kind of marriage whose very antagonisms provoke the ambivalent urge to resolve and to sustain them."[31] With regard to my analysis, Leonardo da Vinci's arguments about the superiority of painting over poetry,[32] or the visual over the verbal, could be employed, *cum grano salis*, to assert the (paradoxical) superiority of the photographic sign over its verbal representation. It would seem that, when it comes to literary texts, the last word, if the pun is acceptable, belongs to the verbal. However, my interpretation shows how often in the writings I examine the text seems to yield its powers of description and narration to the photographic image. Even if they remain textually rendered, photographic representations are endowed with an intensity to affect and haunt that seems to transcend the verbal. In this sense, they become privileged signs that, even if made out of words, enjoy a heightened authority in the establishment of meaning and truth.

No tailor-made, cross-disciplinary framework covers all possible links between literary writing and the photographic medium. My close textual and cultural readings rely on an immanent approach, in which I analyze the selected texts according to their own specificities and make relevant thematic and structural connections among them. Insights from contemporary theorists and historians of photography as well as media and film scholars allow me to develop a conceptually informed interpretation. I also employ the work of critics who have explored the role of visual arts and media, particularly photography, in the Latin American context. I draw from the works of Jean Franco, Carlos Monsiváis, Beatriz Sarlo, Marcy Schwartz, and Lois Parkinson Zamora, among others. These authors recognize photography's impact on contemporary culture and reflect upon its importance as the foremost modern visual medium, one that decisively shapes our ideas about memory, death, truth, and identity.

My study covers the years 1895, the date of the discovery of the X-ray, to 1985, the peak of television's reach and the cusp of the digital revolution. It is divided into three chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 1, "Uncanny Visions," analyzes the demonic aspect of photography in texts by Rubén Darío ("Verónica," 1896), Julio Cortázar ("Las

babas del diablo," 1959, and "Apocalipsis de Solentiname," 1977), and Salvador Elizondo (*Farabeuf*, 1965). This chapter, the longest in the book, highlights how photography, as both technique and representation, is employed by these authors to advance a sense of the uncanny, experienced, as Laura Mulvey states, as "a collapse of rationality."[33] Associated primarily with all that arouses dread and horror, the uncanny is defined by Freud as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[34] The concept of the uncanny has acquired, especially in the last two decades and often beyond its psychoanalytical context a renewed critical currency in fields such as cultural, media, and film studies, art history, aesthetics, architecture, and of course literary studies.[35] Freud recognized the potential of the uncanny to be used as a critical tool for literary criticism and even pointed out that "fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny feelings than are possible in real life."[36] I begin with Darío's "Verónica," a short story that I read as inaugurating a literary tradition in terms of its treatment of the photographic medium. Though photography was mentioned by late-nineteenth-century writers such as Eduardo Holmberg, José Martí, and Clorinda Matto de Turner,[37] Darío is the first major writer who seized photography's potential as a literary motif in a narrative text. I bring to the fore the background of Darío's text, especially the discovery of the X-ray, its introduction in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century, and the author's literary elaboration under the guise of a critique of modern science. Next, I analyze the photographic medium in Cortázar's widely known short stories "Las babas del diablo" and "Apocalipsis de Solentiname." I show how, on the one hand, Cortázar employs established practices of modern photography to articulate the plot of these texts, and on the other, the way the medium contributes to their fantastic *dénouement*. I conclude the chapter examining the central role of photography in the poetics of Salvador Elizondo. I analyze the ways in which the photographic medium becomes the focal point of an obsessive delirium in his major novel, *Farabeuf*. I explore how the intricate narrative structure of this novel, in its complex network of connections between memory, perception, and representation, is organized by the photographic image. Chapter 1 attests to the ways in which Darío, Cortázar, and Elizondo upset and transgress the conception of the photograph as a flat, fixed, and realist representation. While reflecting on notions of embodiment, the tactile, and the moving image in relation to

photography, these authors highlight the materiality of the photographic sign.

Chapter 2, "Family Portraits," focuses on texts by Horacio Quiroga ("La cámara oscura," 1920), Juan Rulfo (*Pedro Páramo*, 1955), Silvina Ocampo ("Las fotografías," 1959, and "La revelación," 1961), and Virgilio Piñera ("El álbum," 1944). The chapter examines the ambiguities of memory and the illusory power of the image to overcome death in family portraits. By exploring the material conditions in which photographs are taken, developed, and archived, this chapter throws light on aspects of these texts that have been overlooked by most critics. I show how the four authors work within the conventions of the medium while simultaneously upsetting them for literary effect. Some topics from chapter 1 are touched upon again in the analyses of chapter 2. The concept of the uncanny provides a useful transition to the interpretation of the short story by Quiroga. I reinterpret "La cámara oscura," despite its flaws, as one of Quiroga's most emblematic texts. Its importance lies in making prominent not only sudden death (a central concern, as is well known, of Quiroga's work) but also its representation. In the case of Juan Rulfo, I focus on a passage in *Pedro Páramo* that mentions a portrait of the protagonist's mother. Examination of this "textual photograph" reveals the desolation and anguish that underpins Rulfo's literary world. In the case of Silvina Ocampo, I study her stories "Las fotografías" and "La revelación" as exemplars of photography's power to disrupt, rather than preserve, social conventions. Finally, in the case of Virgilio Piñera's "El álbum," I read this absurdist story as a social critique that targets ceremonies of remembrance such as the collective viewing of a photographic album.

Chapter 3, "Politics of the Image," presents the aesthetic and political dimensions of photography in Julio Cortázar's *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos* (1967), *Ultimo round* (1969), and "Apocalipsis de Solentiname" (1977), and Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón* (1985). The chapter examines how late-twentieth-century illustrated journalism serves as a discursive model in these texts, and how the fixed image competes with the rise of new technologies such as television and video. In the case of Cortázar, I analyze the pivotal role those texts play in his shift toward a politically committed intellectual stance, an attitude reflected in the use of photography in his writings. In the case of Martínez, I display the rich panoply of references to photography in a novel that has been read mainly

as a fictionalization of historical events. I claim that this is a paradigmatic novel with regard to the ways it develops the photographic motif in literature, on the cusp of the digital age.

The Conclusion assesses the general trends outlined in the preceding chapters, highlighting the creative links made by these authors between word and photographic image. It also addresses the interactions between literary texts and visual media within the current paradigm shift to a digital media environment. It suggests that, while "traditional" (i.e., photo-chemically produced, paper-based) photography might be outdated, the photographic archive of the last two centuries will still be a fertile ground for stories spun by writers.

As for the criteria used in selecting the texts, I have chosen a number of well-known writings as well as other, lesser-known works. My intention is to show how these texts, when read together, shed light on a number of issues that would not come to the surface as forcefully if considered separately. On occasion, the chosen text may seem marginal to the author's overall literary output or to his main contributions to literary history ("Verónica," by Darío, is a case in point). My hope is that my analysis will advance a new appreciation of the chosen works. The choice of authors also aims to offer a broad view of the interactions between Spanish American literature and photography. While the inclusion of writers such as Cortázar and Elizondo is obvious given the centrality of the photographic medium in their works, the reason for including other texts may not seem so evident. On the one hand, texts about photography by canonical authors have been somewhat forgotten or not deemed representative (such as "Verónica" and "La cámara oscura"). On the other, my analysis of a novel that deals mainly with the rise and fall of a political figure (*La novela de Perón* by Martínez) aims to reveal and interpret the pervasive presence of the photographic medium in a text that critics have read mainly as a historical and political novel. By assembling this array of writers from different periods who are linked by similar concerns, I showcase a literary tradition that has not been fully recognized by scholars in the field.

Cortázar's work stands at the centre of this study, like a hinge that connects a number of common themes and textual strategies. Though an extensive critical bibliography has emerged around his writings on the subject, few critics have attempted a systematic close reading of his texts in terms of the specificities of the photographic medium.[38] While

acknowledging his prominent role in the field, I leave aside two of his illustrated books.[39] The first is *Prosa del observatorio* (1972), where the photographic images not only enhance but structure the poetic effect of Cortázar's prose.[40] Since my primary concern is an analysis centred on ekphrasis and the impact of photography as a medium, *Prosa del observatorio* does not readily lend itself to this interpretive perspective. The second book, *Los autonautas de la cosmopista* (1983), includes photographs that document the playful journey made by Cortázar and his companion Carol Dunlop from Paris to Marseille. Here, the photographs are essentially dependent on their captions and the entries in the travelogue. In the same vein, only selective use will be made of the prologues and other items Cortázar wrote for a number of photography books. In most of his texts about actual photographs, Cortázar comments on the images on his own terms, letting his intuition and sense of lyrical association lead the way. The photographs become points of departure for fashioning a personal literary commentary.[41] It is worth mentioning here that he advanced a famous analogy between the genres of the short story and the novel understood, respectively, as photograph and film.[42] Even if he did not systematically develop this analogy, his idea contains an insight about the economy of visual and textual representations and points to an affinity between diverse media in terms of artistic effects.[43] It could be said that if the short story is understood as a photograph, Cortázar's own short stories, where photography prominently appears, bring a metafictional reflection and a narrative density that add a new layer of meaning to the texts. In this sense, "Las babas del diablo" and "Apocalipsisis de Solentiname" enjoy an emblematic place in Cortázar's poetics.

Needless to say, references to photographers and photographs abound in modern Latin American literature, and many other writers could have been included in this book. As in a photographic album or museum display, the act of selection already implies a creative and critical stance. My project is restricted to narrative fiction. Mexican writers such as Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis, who have written mainly within the frameworks of the journalistic chronicle, the testimonial essay, and the history of photography, are excluded from this study, despite the extensive use of the photographic medium in their works.[44] A sample of authors who have made references to the topic would encompass, among others, canonical authors (Adolfo Bioy Casares, Jorge Luis Borges, García

Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, José Donoso, Juan Carlos Onetti, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Isabel Allende), writers mostly known in their home countries (Enrique Amorím, Angelica Gorodischer, Ana María Shua, Rodolfo Walsh) and more recent writers from a variety of regions and cultural contexts (Mario Bellatín, Roberto Bolaño, Sergio Chejfec, Sergio Ramirez, Cristina Rivera Garza).[45]

My book intends to open up a new line of interpretation in a field where literary criticism, the theory of photography, and communication and media studies intersect. This revisiting and reinterpreting of Latin American authors and texts takes place in the context of the consolidation of visual culture and media studies as fields of academic study. Given our current cultural and academic environment, there is a need to redefine and reassess the disciplinary areas in which scholarly work about the image can and should take place. This environment has witnessed a ceaseless parade of new technologies of representation, a global market where signs and pictures pervade everyday life and circulate as never before, and the impact of mass culture as opposed to the traditional sites of privilege of the work of art such as the gallery and the museum. New lines of inquiry emerge from this cultural context, creating a space for critical reflection on the links between literature, arts, and media. In this sense, this project looks with renewed interest to a body of literary works from Latin America, highlighting otherwise neglected themes, strategies, and relationships. My intention is to offer a novel reading of texts that have not been analyzed in terms of their media import and to advance an interpretation that reads literature in terms of current issues at the centre of contemporary visual culture.