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why is that woman screaming?  
why is she screaming?  
why is that woman screaming?  
*don't even try to understand*

that woman, why is she screaming?  
*don't even try to understand*  
*look at what beautiful flowers*  
why is she screaming?  
*hyacinths            asters*  
why?  
*why what?*  
why is that woman screaming?

and that woman?  
and that woman?  
*just try and understand*  
*she must be crazy that woman*  
*look            look at the little mirrors*  
could it be because of her steed?  
*don't even try to understand*

*and where did you hear*  
*the word steed?*  
it's a secret            that woman  
why is she screaming?  
*look at the asters*  
the woman  
*little mirrors*  
*little birds*  
*that don't sing*

why is she screaming?

*that don't fly*

why is she screaming?

*that don't intrude*

the woman

and that woman

and was she crazy that woman?

she's not screaming any more

(do you remember that woman?)

you  
who've read Dante in folio  
you let yourself drift  
through those little drawings  
so-called illuminated miniatures  
and you swallowed it all  
all  
from ay  
to bi

but it's a lie

that hellish bin of complications is pure rubbish  
made on purpose to make you waste time  
calculating in which circle  
the bones of your soul  
will end up

and you know something?  
this famous inferno  
has an admirable simplicity  
it's not for nothing, the master's cunning

you get there and they tell you

*you're free*  
*go ahead and do as you like*

## OMNES GENERATIONES

let's go with one in vitro  
and one in polyurethane  
from Stockholm

I'll educate them as much as possible

I won't educate them

*benedice carafam et monitorem  
quia mineralia sunt et  
penes mineralia burstitur*

or better three  
in formica  
in cobalt

or four or six or a shard in love

## ***OVA COMPLETA: A FEAST OF MEANING***

This book is an acid, a linguistic witches' sabbath, a diatribe against politically correct thinking. When Thénon published it in 1987, Argentina had only recently returned to democracy, leaving behind one of the bloodiest dictatorships in history.

Up to that time, poets had resisted the discourse (and the practices) of terror, entrenching themselves in an extreme condensation of language. They had found a way of saying more with less, eluding the pincers of censorship and its deadly risks. To the *desaparecidos*,<sup>1</sup> to the death flights,<sup>2</sup> to the policies that persecuted and abandoned the most vulnerable, they had answered with a kind of asthmatic syntax, made of taut phrases and spasmodic rhythms. Thénon herself had written *distancias*,<sup>3</sup> saturating the white space with meaning, opening subterfuges, making the poems dance across the page like skeletons or material ghosts.

Now, with the political opening, there was space to explore less gloomy terrain, to move toward play and insolence, and *Ova Completa* was, without a doubt, the most extreme example of this change.

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1 From 1976 to 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military junta. During those years of state-sponsored terrorism, the junta persecuted people it suspected of being political dissidents aligned with leftist, socialist, or social justice causes. The junta clandestinely kidnapped, tortured, and killed an estimated 30,000 people, disposing of their bodies as a way of seeking impunity. These individuals came to be known as the *desaparecidos*, or “disappeareds.”

2 “*Vuelos de la muerte*” were one of the methods used by the military junta to disappear people: victims were thrown alive, drugged, from aircraft into a river or the sea.

3 Susana Thénon, *distancias*, (Buenos Aires: Torres Agüero Editor, 1984); *distancias / distances*, the English translation by Renata Treitel, was published by Sun & Moon Press in 1994.

This book has everything: quotidian speech; cursing; utterances in Greek, Latin, French, and English; invectives; jargon (legal, soccer, racetrack, tango); references to the Malvinas War; sacrilege; scatology; sex; neologisms; free association; chaotic lists; temporal dislocation and furied attacks on every kind of cliché, including those that come from the paternalistic gazes of the Northern hemisphere.

if you don't like "and my Peripherals"  
you can choose from these leftovers:

"and my Kits"  
"and my Gadgets"  
"and my Accessories"  
"and my Tassels"  
"and my Replacements"  
"and my Trinkets"  
"and my Chess Pieces"  
"and my Agoraphobics"

It could be said that, in Thénon's gesture, language is a stammering puppet, full of sonic contaminations, always on the point of veering off, from one letter to another, from one seme to another, from one idea to another. Or even—and which amounts to the same thing—that in that indecipherable and carnivalesque that unfolds in writing, a syntactic explosion weaves dispersion together with fortuitous encounter, in order to impede any attempt at homogenous discourse.

I repeat: *Ova Completa* is a ferocious assault on social, formal, genre, and gender conventions. A true consciousness of language that is exacerbated, if it's possible, with the use of irony, often self-directed.

taking a chance with "wrecked" or "incontinent"  
it's a passport to marginality

whilst you want to be the prize of crackpot anthologies?  
to have a wart in the curriculum?

Perhaps this explains why the book had, at the very moment of its release, such an enthusiastic reception on the part of the new generations of poets. *Ova Completa* was read and appreciated in all its splendor, in all its aggressive seriousness, in all its hilarious novelty. I don't think it's absurd to claim that Thénon opened the way for what was known later in the Argentine poetry scene as the "poetry of the 90s," on the condition that it is remembered that she arrived at desacralization and colloquial outburst *after* an arduous path of semantic and formal condensation, and that the presumed "triviality" of her discourse was always unfailingly political, visceral, and genuine.

\*

"The poem is concerned with everything, even the most ungrateful earth," Susana Thénon wrote.<sup>4</sup>

Maybe because of this, in that obsessive arc that goes from *Edad sin tregua* (1958) to *Ova completa* (1987), the "strange places" are repeated as signs that allude to the "tragic and tender expiration of language," understood as that "minimum distance that exists between us and ourselves, or between ourselves and the other,"<sup>5</sup> to say the mark of every solitude, estrangement, or uprootedness.

There is in this work, it seems, a geography that turns outward in order to immerse itself in the abyss of what isn't seen, what is ignored or silenced for reasons of taste or good manners, perhaps in the confidence that only a

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4 See Ana María Barrenechea, "La documentación marginal para *distancias* de Susana Thénon," *Filología* 27 (1994): 79-80.

5 Thénon says this in relation to *distancias* in a letter from February 17, 1968 to Ana María Barrenechea included in *La morada imposible*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2004), 193.



deformed map can yield the skeleton of a soul. The sensation is one of being lost, of the painful loving of what's been abolished. Always one more step. Always an intervening crack, like a fold where it is possible to go to look for what the poems can't explain, but can understand.

These will be poems for poetry, she wrote, trying to explain how she wrote.

And in one sense, they are. Poems unrefined, debased, erect like a monument in a black sun world, like music boxes or sonic homelands. As if the objective of the process were to stage the always unrealizable project of meaning, to remember that, as Severo Sarduy said, the desiring language of poetry doesn't recognize functionality, transgresses the useful, insists on failure. This is desire *par excellence*, a desire for what does not exist, blind and in the void, bringing forth the impossible: a feast of meaning.

If the seed of this conception of the world-as-enigma and language-as-blindness is present from the beginning, it is in *Ova Completa* that it reaches the climax of its corrosive ability. There, the carnivalesque zeal—that multiplies the profanations and palimpsests—gives as a result a language that, exhausting intertextuality and parody, intensifies the boustrophedonic character of the poem to its very limits. The effect is one of radical estrangement. As if the signs (not the emotions) revealed a disequilibrium between the experience and the world that only a stark music, ambivalent, could transcribe. And yes. What could be better for unexpressing reality—that opacity that needs to be spoken—than a music made of familiarly unrecognizable particles like Stockhausen's *Mikrophonie*, halfway between crystal architecture and the mysteries of a film still?

It's almost unnecessary to add that the author of *Ova Completa* draws on both “vulgar” and “refined” language equally. Aristophanes, Apuleius, Catullus, Boccaccio, Pietro Aretino, Rabelais, Góngora, and Joyce are her

masters. Undoubtedly, Gironde's *En la masmedula*—that, in the style of the phonetic mosaics of Haroldo de Campos, invents, pluralizes, or superimposes words, providing a spectacle of a split subjectivity—deserves to figure in the list of precursor texts. Also, of course, the “very cacophonous little music” of Alejandra Pizarnik's *La bucanera de Pernambuco o Hilda la Polígrafa*. Although the parallels between the two poets hasn't yet been noted, it is obvious that they share various textual procedures (the sexual charge of the signifier, the degradation of culture, the mix of speech registers, the deformation of Latin, or banal usage), even though, in Thénon, the coarseness is always kept at a less intense coordinate, the lyricism is absent, and the obscene has a more acidic appearance, at times, more political.

As if united with what was lost, her voice speaks to say nothing, or better to say, to be the voice of what is absent. There is no other world, it seems to affirm, because there is no world. Or even, in words the order of death always sings, that is to say, has already been sung. It is better to abandon the expressible (that exiles us from ourselves) and then remain unsheltered, in those arid landscapes where the roofless house of poetry is, its center unplaceable and in a hurry to conquer precarity, its trembling of nightmares and light.

Poet and spy, Susana Thénon (1935–1991) dreamed of a literature that could fit in the hollow of a child's hand. Her aim always consisted of not giving accounts, of running suddenly to the encounter with the splinters of the self to fulfill loss, not to cancel it, to shine on it like a lighthouse.

*María Negroni*

*Buenos Aires, May 2020*

*tr. Silvina López Medin and Rebekah Smith*