Poetic Vision and (In)visible Pain
in Antonio Méndez Rubio's *Trasluz*

Paul Cahill
Pomona College

"Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 13). One of the key differences between poetic projects of the last four decades in Spain has been their different stances vis-à-vis the visible, and as Jacques Rancière's words indicate, these differences have clear political implications. While poets from the so-called "Generation of '68" or *novísimos* 'very new [poets]' like José-Miguel Ullán (1944-2009) and Jenaro Talens (1946-) have adopted stances that highlight the instability and uncertainty of the gaze, writers associated with the so-called "Poetry of Experience," on the other hand, like Luis García Montero (1958-), Felipe Benítez Reyes (1960-), and Carlos Marzal (1961-), have tended to rely upon more traditional notions of the visible (Díaz 40-49).

The debates between and about these two groups of poets have in large part hinged on the perceived politics of their poetry. Novísimo poetry has been considered by some to be apolitical, largely because it did not deal with explicitly social themes. The more accommodating stance toward the visible espoused by the *poetas de la experiencia* also has political implications, though, and their work has been critiqued on these grounds both by *novísimo* poets as well as younger poets associated with newer tendencies such as the so-called *poesía de la conciencia* 'poetry of conscience' and *poesía de la diferencia* 'poetry of difference.' Jonathan Mayhew argues that practitioners of the "poetry of difference" represent a group whose coherence is derived from its opposition to the hegemonic "Poets of Experience" (37).

Despite this opposition, these younger poets have also generally relied on a traditional understanding of the visible. Unlike the *poetas*

de la experiencia, though, these younger poets rely on this notion of the visible to denounce unjust social conditions and realities. While these two tendencies differ in terms of their reaction to the visible, they nonetheless share a similar understanding of what we see and how we see it. One young poet who breaks with this understanding of the visible, however, is Antonio Méndez Rubio. Born in 1967 in Fuente del Arco (Badajoz), Méndez Rubio is one of the more original and independent voices in the contemporary Spanish poetry scene. The author of twelve collections of poetry as well as a number of critical and theoretical works, Méndez Rubio was also a member of the Colectivo Alicia Bajo Cero, responsible for the polemical and influential *Poesía y poder* (1997) 'Poetry and Power,' which undertook a critique of the poetic and political assumptions of the "Poets of Experience" (Iravedra 122-23). His work has been featured in a number of anthologies, the most recent of which is Ángel L. Prieto de Paula's *Las moradas del verbo. Poetas españoles de la democracia* (2010) 'The Dwellings of the Verb. Spanish Poets of the Democratic Era.' He has also published two anthologies and one compilation of his poetic production to this point.[1]

An awareness of the crucial role played by the gaze in poetry and other discursive fields underlies nearly all of Méndez Rubio's work, but perhaps the most sustained engagement with this issue appears in *Trasluz* (2002) 'Throughlight.' In the pages that follow I will show that the problematization of the gaze, the visible, and the invisible in Méndez Rubio's work represents an articulation of the inherently political nature of what is seen, how we see it, and how we (re)present it linguistically in poetic texts. In particular I will focus on how pain is discussed and presented in this poetry. The multiple references to pain in Méndez Rubio's poems and the lack of duration for their illumination highlights the extent to which representations of pain are excluded from dominant "scopic regimes," to use Christian Metz's term (61).

While the *poesía de la diferencia* generally seeks to restore or provide visibility to elements and phenomena that have been rendered invisible, and therefore continues to operate within this same symbolic economy and scopic regime, Méndez Rubio's work opts instead to interrogate visibility itself. Rather than just hoping to gain recognition and legitimacy for certain causes within an already

established visual and discursive field, then, his work goes further, examining how images of social reality are created: what we see, and what is hidden from us. As Julián Jiménez Heffernan astutely points out in his discussion of the poetry of Méndez Rubio and Jorge Riechmann (1962-), these two poets

> escriben siempre en la frontera: el resquicio de la aparición, la fisura de la desaparición. Sus escrituras ocupan dos ámbitos distintos, aunque en cierto modo complementarios. Cabría decir, retomando un paso litúrgico, que mientras Riechmann trata *de todo lo visible*, Méndez Rubio se aboca a *lo invisible* (148)

> write always on the border: the crack of appearing, the fissure of disappearance. Their writings occupy two distinct ambits, although in a certain way complementary ones. One could say, following a liturgical step, that while Riechmann focuses on *everything that is visible*, Méndez Rubio approaches *the invisible*.

The title of Méndez Rubio's collection has several possible meanings according to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*. All three share a common emphasis on light and its interaction with objects. This relational dynamic highlights the necessarily linked nature of illuminating and the objects of any such illumination. The first definition refers to a light capable of passing through translucent objects. The second, on the other hand, suggests a tangential rather than translucent relationship, referring to a "[l]uz reflejada de soslayo por la superficie de un cuerpo" ("Trasluz" 2015) 'light reflected tangentially off of the surface of a body.' The same *DRAE* entry also lists an adverbial phrase, "al trasluz," which has the following meaning: "Con el objeto puesto entre la luz y el ojo, para que se trasluzca" ("Trasluz" 2015) 'With the object placed between light and the eye, so that it is translucent.' It is worth noting that unlike its counterparts in other languages, "trasluz," a noun, refers to the light itself that either penetrates through or is deflected off of objects, rather than a property or state of objects.

This greater power attributed to light in the Spanish language allows greater potential to explore the implications of allusions to this sort of light in poetic texts. The noun *trasluz* thus signals a way of looking, a way of seeing through objects and exposing and

exploring the fissures and interstices existing within them. Rather than positing an individual object's fragmentary and porous nature—which would imply that some objects are fragmentary while others are not—as the adjective "translucent" would, terms like "translight," "throughlight," or "afterlight" denote a way of seeing through even purportedly solid objects and discursive constructions. The critical gaze employed and developed in Méndez Rubio's poetry lays the groundwork for a way of looking that articulates the markedly political character of his poetic practice.

One of the principal characteristics of sight is its inherently focused and limited character. The result of such a focus, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues, is a "localized vision" (263), and this ability to focus the eye necessarily entails the existence of a variety of "ways of seeing," highlighting what Martin Jay has referred to as "the inevitable entanglement of vision and what has been called 'visuality'—the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes. Observation, to put it another way, means observing the tacit cultural rules of different scopic regimes" (9). This institutionalization of the gaze and sighting echoes Louis Althusser's declaration that vision and sighting are not individual faculties but instead belong to a structural situation. "Sighting" is therefore "no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' which he exercises either attentively or distractedly," but is instead "the act of its structural conditions, … the relation of immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and *its* objects and *its* problems" (Althusser and Balibar 26).

The sighting of certain elements, then, like the "localized vision" described by Merleau-Ponty, implies the inevitable exclusion of other localized visions or ways of seeing. As Althusser argues, this exclusion is anything but innocent, for

> the invisible of a visible field is not generally *anything whatever* outside and foreign to the visible defined by that field. The invisible is defined by the visible as *its* invisible, *its* forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible … , the outer darkness of exclusion—but the *inner darkness of exclusion*, inside the visible itself because defined by its structure. (Althusser and Balibar 27)

Pain and representations of suffering are what seem to inhabit the "inner darkness of exclusion" in the scopic regime presented and simultaneously critiqued by Méndez Rubio, revealing a structural inattention to the representation of pain as a visible phenomenon; pain is therefore invisible within this system, actively excluded for political reasons. Méndez Rubio's poetry highlights the mechanisms at work in dominant scopic regimes that exclude representations of pain. This gesture thereby illustrates the political potential of poetry to both oppress and resist such oppressive efforts by intervening politically and discursively in surrounding reality.

In "S.O.S.," the poetics he contributed to Isla Correyero's anthology *Feroces* (1998), Méndez Rubio links visibility and politics by virtue of what is hidden by political regimes, arguing that "[e]n la época de la política de la desaparición como táctica represiva, ningún desafío de transformación (poética y política) debería dejar de tener en cuenta lo no visible" (qtd. in Correyero 217) '[i]n the time of the politics of disappearance as a repressive tactic, no challenge of transformation (poetic and political) should fail to take into account the non-visible.' Luis Bagué Quílez expresses a similar sentiment, stating that "[l]a función de resistencia de la poesía sólo puede hacerse efectiva con la desaparición de la subjetividad y la localización de la actividad lírica en una zona de sombras, como un *negativo* del mundo perceptible" (155) 'the function of resistance in poetry can only be made effective with the disappearance of subjectivity and the location of lyric activity in a zone of shadows, like a *negative* of the perceivable world.'

Elaine Scarry's discussion of similar theoretical issues highlights the almost inherently invisible nature of pain. Beginning with the assumption that more visible phenomena receive more attention than those that are less visible, Scarry goes on to say that

> the sentient fact of physical pain is not simply somewhat less easy to express than some second event, not simply somewhat less visible than some second event, but so nearly impossible to express, so flatly invisible, that the problem goes beyond the possibility that almost any other phenomenon occupying the same environment will distract attention from it. (12)

As Scarry notes, "ordinarily there is no language for pain," because

"it (more than any other phenomenon) resists verbal objectification. But the relative ease or difficulty with which any given phenomenon can be *verbally represented* also influences the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be *politically represented*" (12). The verbal representations that appear in the poems that make up *Trasluz* do not satisfy the usual expectations regarding the political representation of social injustice and inequality in poetic texts, but as Bagué Quílez argues, in this work "el compromiso se desplaza al terreno de la forma, a través de propuestas específicas de escritura que se hacen eco de una realidad en quiebra y que inciden en la capacidad que tiene la palabra para expresar una conciencia revolucionaria más allá de los límites de la ideología" (156) 'commitment is displaced to the terrain of form, through specific approaches to writing that echo a reality in ruins and that focus on the word's ability to express a revolutionary consciousness beyond the limits of ideology.'

As critics have pointed out, *Trasluz* relies on references to the natural world and paints an abstract picture of reality, which on the surface could be read as apolitical (Morales Barba 413). This reality is made up of natural elements like rain and snow, not unlike the work of Paul Celan (1920-70) or José Ángel Valente (1929-2000). Darker elements like pain and violence also play a crucial role in these texts and are linked to the visibility and figuration of pain. Precisely how we either see or do not see things is an integral part of the text, as evidenced by the numerous references to light, shadow, and windows and other filters through which objects are seen, like the photographic negative referred to by Bagué Quílez (155). When and for how long they are seen also plays a central role in these poems. This combination of translucence, visibility, and duration creates a similarity between this poetry and the theoretical underpinnings of filmic representation, thereby engaging with issues like the "out of frame" necessarily implied by film and the politics of representation entailed by this dynamic.[2] The cinematic gaze employed in these texts and this collection is a critical and self-reflexive one that draws attention to the theoretical and political implications of representing social reality and injustice.

Primarily fragmentary in nature and built upon linguistic ambiguity, these unsettling texts rely on sketches of reality and

draw attention to the act of looking and representing rather than seeking to craft totalized, verisimilar representations of reality. Such representations obscure the symbolic violence necessary for their construction and hide the political machinations that give rise to them. Paradoxically, one could argue, as Alejandro Krawietz has, that this discursive stance is in fact more realist than practices that typically define themselves as such (23). As Bagué Quílez mentions, for Méndez Rubio

> la realidad no es una entidad preexistente o un apriorismo teórico que el poeta debe ilustrar, sino más bien una construcción lingüística creada por el propio autor. De esta forma, la crisis de la realidad se traduce como crisis de la representación, y su plasmación es indisociable de los efectos connotativos que proyecta el lenguaje (155)

> reality is not a pre-existing entity or a theoretical *a priori* that the poet must illustrate, but rather a linguistic construction created by the author himself. In this way, the crisis of reality is translated as a crisis of representation, and its shaping is inseparable from the connotative effects that language projects.

Méndez Rubio himself has expressed a similar idea, arguing that for him reality "no es un punto de partida ya seguro, ya dado, sino un punto de destino, de asalto y de cuestionamiento mediante el lenguaje (que socialmente la constituye)" ("Tener lo claro" 146) 'is not an already secure point of departure, already given, but instead a point of arrival, of assault and of questioning by way of language (that socially constitutes it).'

My analysis in this essay will focus on five poems from *Trasluz*, exploring a range of ways of engaging with light, visibility, duration, and disappearance. Unlike the majority of Méndez Rubio's work, the sixty-one poems in *Trasluz* are not divided into distinct sections, nor do they have individual titles. The poem beginning with the verse "Sobre la superficie" 'Upon the surface' implicitly alludes to the second definition of "trasluz," thematizing the gaze and illumination as they affect objects. The poem centers on the role played by perspective, the gaze, and duration as they contribute to the construction of a limited view of a world. The final result is a

text that draws attention to efforts to illuminate without being seen as well as efforts to erase and un-know what has been visible.

> Sobre la superficie
> de las cosas,
>   la luz
> hace de su materia
> imagen sin memoria
> por fin desconocida. (*Trasluz* 21, 1-5)

> Upon the surface
> of things,
>   light
> makes out of its material
> an image without memory
> finally unknown.

According to this first stanza, light makes, out of the matter of things (or perhaps the matter of their surfaces), an image without memory, finally unknown. Visual images, then, are the result of light's actions upon objects or their surfaces. Since the image in this case is one without memory, it cannot be known or remembered in the present, that is, recreated in the present based on the past. That this image is "finally unknown" suggests that there has been some sort of process of "un-knowing" taking place to finally reach this current state.

As is the case with much of Méndez Rubio's work, ambiguity plays a crucial role in this poem. The presence of so many singular, feminine nouns (*superficie* 'surface,' *luz* 'light,' *materia* 'material,' *imagen* 'image,' *memoria* 'memory'), makes it difficult to determine which of these is modified by the adjective *desconocida* 'unknown' and shows the extent to which this poem is permeated by a lack of knowledge. Serving as an active agent in this poem, light plays a central role in the composition and construction of the world: "Hay un mundo entrevisto / que ahora cambia con ella" (21, 6-7) 'There is a glimpsed world / that now changes with it.' The world does not exist in a clearly defined manner independently of the light, however, but is instead somehow dependent on light for its existence. Nor is it the only world; it is "un mundo entrevisto" 'a glimpsed world,'

suggesting the potential existence of multiple worlds. It is also only partially seen, further circumscribing the scope of this world.

This world, then, is only one of multiple possible worlds; it is one version of reality originating from a specific and targeted perspective. It is also a fleeting world, one that does not fully appear: "Se ve a la vez / que no se ve. Se va" (21, 8-9) 'It is seen at the same time / that it is not seen. It leaves.' Absence is further highlighted in the next two verses: "Encuentra en cada ausencia / huellas de lo que no se escribe / sin movimiento" (21, 10-12) 'In each absence it finds / traces of what is not written / without movement.' Rather than striving to merely present a world, then—even an alternative one—, Méndez Rubio's poem focuses on the process by which worlds are constructed and presented, but also deconstructed and made invisible. Such visual constructions are inevitably bound up with issues of time. Keeping in mind the temporal indicators included in the text, the use of *ahora* 'now' suggests that the situation used to be otherwise. A similar indicator is found at the end of the first stanza, with the words "por fin desconocida." Beyond merely identifying the current state of affairs, as *ahora* did, "por fin" 'finally' incorporates a sense of satisfaction, or perhaps the idea that this is a long-awaited outcome.

The poem's final two verses cause a significant change in the effect on the reader; up until now the text had presented a description from the perspective of a certain gaze, that of the poem's speaker. There had not been any direct references to this gaze so far, but this absence does not change the fact that it is a particular gaze, despite strategic word choice seeking to mask this perspective. In the first verse there is just a preposition, *sobre* and later verbs like *hace* and *hay* place emphasis first on the action of the light, and then on the existence of a world, rather than a verb like *ver* 'to see' or *mirar* 'to look at,' which would emphasize the positionality and perspective of the viewer. The final stanza does include the verb "ver," but by using the impersonal or passive form it is unclear who simultaneously sees and does not see the light (or world). The only element of the poem that truly alerts the reader to the presence of this original gaze in an explicit way is the presence of another gaze: "Otra mirada tiembla / hasta que significa" (21, 13-14) 'Another gaze trembles / until it signifies.' Little is known about either gaze within the poem,

except that the second gaze trembles, indicating uncertainty and instability. Even less is known about the first gaze, though, as it has no positively-attributed qualities, instead possessing only relational qualities and an identity defined exclusively by way of the opposition of the two gazes. Although this poem includes no direct references to any concrete social reality, it does call the reader's attention to the situated nature of representations and visual constructions.

A quick glance at the first of the three epigraphs that preside over *Trasluz* demonstrates how Maurice Blanchot's words regarding light's act of hiding itself could be connected to the strategy employed by the poetic speaker's gaze. The epigraph reads: "La luz ilumina; esto quiere decir que la luz se oculta, tal es su carácter malicioso. Sólo vemos claro bajo esta condición: no ver la claridad misma" (7) 'Light illuminates; this means that light hides itself, such is its malicious character. We only see clearly under this condition: not seeing clarity itself.' While illuminating and presenting the objects and elements referenced in the poem, this gaze simultaneously hides itself from view and avoids revealing itself as a gaze and as such the product of a limited perspective. Illumination shifts the focus from the object effecting this illumination onto the illuminated object, in the process eliding the perspective from which this illumination originates, as well as the necessary selection and exclusion this entails. The presence of another gaze, like the possible existence of other worlds, makes the reader aware of the original gaze presiding over the poem. This scenario could inspire a re-reading of the poem, a search for references to this dominant gaze or a search for its characteristics. This poem could also lead to a re-reading or more critical reading of and engagement with other phenomena.

Light and its complex interaction with objects also takes center stage in the poem entitled "De palabra a palabra" 'From Word to Word,' which further explores the temporal nature of the gaze and illumination and explores the consequences of moving beyond the accepted paradigms of the visible. The relationship between language and the visible highlights the poem's focus on both what is seen and how it is written or spoken. The poem is preceded by an epigraph from Bernard Noël's novel *Le Syndrome de Gramsci* (1994) 'The Gramsci Syndrome': "Ilusión e ilusión se entretejen tan bien que cualquier referencia al mundo visible nos sirve de realidad" (31)

'Illusion upon illusion string together so well that any reference to the visible world will do as reality.' This paratext establishes a dialogue with the poem that follows it, as the sequencing of illusions in the excerpt from Noël's text parallels the linking up of words depicted in the poem's first verse.

As this verse asserts, "De palabra a palabra / entrevive sin miedo / la pasión más oscura / de la luz" (31, 1-4) 'From word to word / interlives without fear / the darkest passion / of the light.' Unlike the epigraph, then, the poem's first stanza does not cover up reality, but instead highlights the darkness residing within such constructions that seek to create homogeneous totalities. This "darkest passion / of the light" resides in an interstitial space, between words, not unlike the "mundo entrevisto" of the poem "Sobre la superficie." Its mode of inhabiting this space ("sin miedo" 'without fear') suggests that there exists some sort of antagonist, also indicated by the positioning of darkness within the light. Light is therefore problematized in this poem as it was in "Sobre la superficie" and seems to also be the subject of the poem's second stanza: "Hoy, despacio, pronuncia / un despertar que dura / lo que dura un encuentro" (31, 5-7) 'Today, slowly, it pronounces / an awakening that lasts / as long as an encounter does.' The insistent alliteration of "d" sounds in this poem links time and sound in this text. This first verse also mimics the use of the word "despacio" through the use of commas that slow the reader's pace.

The third stanza begins with another verb linked to time, and in this case what stands out is a more concrete reference to duration: "Aguarda todavía / al trasluz la ilusión. / Tras la luz" (31, 8-10) 'It still awaits, / against the light, illusion. / After the light'. The verb *dura* adds duration into the mix, and then *aguarda* highlights this concept, specifically in terms of anticipating something. The poem ends with a lone verse, "La ilusión" (31, 11) 'Illusion.' In this case, *la ilusión* is waiting for the *trasluz*, that is, what may or will take place after the light. This final verse of the third stanza thus presents another potential reading of the term *trasluz*, specifically "*tras* la luz," or after light. The materialization of *la ilusión* is seen at the end of the poem, in its own verse, positioned visually after the light referred to earlier in the text.

Negation and duration are the focus of the poem beginning

with the verse "Noche sin viento" 'Night without wind.' The poem begins by describing this "Night without wind" in negative terms: "Noche sin viento / es lo peor. Su ausencia / se está quieta" (26, 1-3) 'Night without wind / is the worst. Its absence / is calm.' Calmness is presented as a negative element in these verses and this night is even more paradoxical, for in it "Luce una oscuridad / que aparece en los nombres / más ajenos del día" (26, 4-6) 'A darkness shines / that appears in the most alien / names of the day.' While in "De palabra a palabra" darkness invaded light, in "Noche sin viento" light comes out of darkness. The subject of the verb in the poem's next verse seems to be darkness, which cares for the names mentioned in the previous example: "Los cuida con calor. / Se acuerda de ellos / aunque no los conoce" (26, 7-9) 'It cares for them with warmth. / It remembers them / although it doesn't know them.' Darkness also "Llega como regalo / a concebir la trama / de lo que ciega" (26, 10-12) 'It arrives like a gift / to conceive the plot / of that which blinds.'

The subject of the poem's final verse, "No dura lo suficiente" (26, 13) 'It doesn't last long enough,' could be read as darkness, if one follows the rest of the poem, or pain, if one links it to the epigraph preceding the text, which asserts that "el dolor / no puede / durar lo suficiente" (26) 'pain / cannot / endure long enough' (Berger *And our faces* 58). These verses from John Berger (1926-) come from a poem included in *Páginas de la herida* ('Pages of the Wound' 1995), a Spanish edition of his poetry. The notoriety of texts like *Ways of Seeing* (1990) and *About Looking* (1992), among others, attests to the undeniable impact and influence of Berger's work on those who study visual phenomena and how we engage with them. The particular verses cited in Méndez Rubio's text come from "La partida" 'Leaving,' the third poem of the sequence entitled *8 Poemas de emigración* '8 Poems of Emigration' (Berger *Páginas* 129-30). It is interesting to note how Méndez Rubio effectively integrates the epigraph into his text, although not without ambiguity. The word *dolor* 'pain' does not appear in the poem itself, so the interaction between the epigraph and the poem exploits and cultivates ambiguity, because it is unclear whether the subject of the verb *dura* in the poem's final verse is *una oscuridad* (mentioned in the fourth verse) or *el dolor*, following the epigraph from Berger's poem. One

could even argue that these two options are in fact the same thing.

"De repente la luz" 'Suddenly the light' synthesizes references to light, darkness, violence, disappearance, and pain. Pain and disappearance are closely linked, with pain remaining invisible. These elements are also tied to violence. The poem begins with light's movement away from the speaker. This leaves the speaker without light and simultaneously signals the presence of multiple lights: "De repente la luz / que no puede buscarse / va sin mí hacia otra luz" (23, 1-3) 'Suddenly the light / that cannot be sought out / goes without me towards another light.' Disappearance is connected to violence in the poem's next stanza:

> Porque les falta origen
> se esperan sin saberlo
> decir:
>   con la violencia en sombra
> de la desaparición.
>   Donde
> más dolor crece
> no hay nadie. Nada
> cesa. No hay memoria
> que pueda poseerse. (23, 4-11)

> Because they lack an origin
> they are expected without knowing how
> to say it:
>   with the shadowy violence
> of disappearance.
>   Where
> the most pain grows
> there is nobody. Nothing
> ceases. There is no memory
> that can be possessed.

The "shadowy violence of disappearance" leads to a combination of absence and pain in which nobody inhabits the space where the most pain is found. Nor is there a memory (of this) that can be possessed. Violence and pain are thus invisible; the violence of

disappearance (a disappearance with clear political connotations that exceed a mere extinguishing of visibility) takes place in the shadows, and is not fully visible. Equally invisible is the space where the most pain is found.

The poem's final two verses seemingly come out of nowhere, with a declaration regarding what words are not: "Las palabras no son / la juventud del mundo" (23, 12-13) 'Words are not / the youth of the world'. A closer look at the poem while keeping this reference to words in mind, though, brings out ambiguities already present in the text. The poem's second stanza ends up being just as shadowy as disappearance when the reader tries to determine the referents of the first few verses. It is unclear who or what is lacking an origin and who or what is being awaited. The indirect object pronoun *les* indicates that it is something plural. At this point in the poem, however, there has been no explicit appearance of a viable candidate for this pronoun. One could propose that it is the combination of the fleeing light and the other one towards which it goes. Once the reader reaches the text's last stanza, another option appears. In spite of the disappearance of words, though, meaning still remains.

"Words" is the only plural noun appearing in the entire poem, meaning that a retroactive re-reading of "De repente la luz" would likely posit this as the ambiguous referent of the poem's second stanza. Such an account also signals another ambiguous element of the second stanza. Precisely who does not know how to say "it" remains a mystery. While positing words as the subject of the passive action *se esperan* would fit well with the verb *decir*, this does not clarify who is speaking. Words lacking an origin could certainly lead to an undermining of communication, and perhaps their lack of an origin is reflected by their parallel lack of a clear grammatical subject of enunciation for these words, explaining why this absent speaker does not know how to say "it," another absent referent. The "shadowy violence of disappearance" thus permeates this entire stanza, hollowing out speech and poetic expression, reaching even basic, fundamental levels of linguistic referentiality.

Pain, duration, and distance play a pivotal role in the final poem I will discuss, "El dolor es un punto" 'Pain is a point'. Pain appears in the poem's first and third stanzas: directly in the first and implicitly in the third. The first stanza indicates that "El dolor es un punto /

moviéndose sin aire" (41, 1-2) 'Pain is a point / moving without air.' In the third stanza, the speaker declares that "Este cuerpo, mi cuerpo, / habla en nombre de nadie" (41, 7-8) 'This body, my body, / speaks in nobody's name.' These verses exhibit a technique that appears frequently in *Trasluz*, in which a negative action or lack of action is expressed by an affirmative grammatical expression. The verses in question affirm that the speaker's body does in fact speak, but not in the name of anybody, more specifically, in nobody's name, thus establishing a link with discussions of testimony and the issues surrounding attempts to speak for the other. It is unclear why this body speaks, in particular when the first verse serves to distance the body from the speaker, by initially presenting it as "this body" before specifically designating it as belonging to the speaker. This gesture of affirming a negative serves to highlight the inherently incomplete nature of what is generally considered to be the natural fullness and completeness of conventional notions of reality.

Méndez Rubio's poetry, like his poetic speaker's body, does speak, but does so in nobody's name. That is, it examines the dynamics underlying politics, (in)visibility, and disappearance, rather than alluding explicitly to the plights of particular social agents who suffer in a globalized world characterized by increasing economic and political disparity and one in which totalitarian regimes make those who challenge them disappear. One could certainly consider Méndez Rubio's work within the context of Spain's recent history and the silence following Spain's transition to democracy following the end of Franco's regime. One could just as easily consider this work within a host of other contexts, though, such as that of Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo or the women of Ciudad Juárez. It is up to the reader to fill in the blanks with examples from his or her context and experiences. The range of influence of his work therefore exceeds the limited context of specific cases of injustice (and that of Spain) and extends instead to pain and suffering in general and how contemporary social, political, economic, and aesthetic forces seek to make this pain and those who suffer it disappear. Light in its various manifestations permeates the poems that make up *Trasluz* and draws the reader's attention to the role that illumination plays in constructing and presenting the realities made available to us while simultaneously

excluding both itself and the pain and suffering it leaves behind.

Notes

1 The anthologies and compilation, are, respectively, *Historia del daño (Selección poética 1990-2005)*, published in 2006, *Historia del cielo (Antología poética 2005-2011)*, published in 2012, and *Todo en el aire: Poesía 1995-2005* (2008). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this essay are mine.

2 Miguel Casado has also mentioned the importance of the "out of frame" in Méndez Rubio's work (20).

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis, and Étienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 2009. Print.

Bagué Quílez, Luis. *Poesía en pie de paz: Modos del compromiso hacia el tercer milenio*. Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2006. Print.

Berger, John. *And our faces, my heart, brief as photos*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. Print.

—. *Páginas de la herida*. Trans. Pilar Vázquez, et al. Madrid: Visor, 1995. Print.

Casado, Miguel. "Prólogo: Hazme ver si esto es real." Antonio Méndez Rubio. *Todo en el aire: Poesía 1995-2005*. Mérida: Editora Regional de Extremadura, 2008. 7-28. Print.

Correyero, Isla, ed. *Feroces: Radicales, marginales y heterodoxos en la última poesía española*. Barcelona: DVD, 1998. Print.

Díaz, Susana. *El desorden de lo visible: Introducción a la poética de Jenaro Talens*. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2006. Print.

Iravedra, Araceli. "Radicales, marginales y heterodoxos en la última poesía española (contra la 'poesía de la experiencia')." *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* 31.1 (2006): 119-38. Print.

Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993. Print.

Jiménez Heffernan, Julián. "Las puertas mal cerradas: Intemperie y utopía en Riechmann y Méndez Rubio." *Prosopopeya: Revista de crítica contemporánea* 5 (2006-2007): 145-73. Print.

Krawietz, Alejandro. "En los límites de la representación: *Trasluz*, de Antonio Méndez Rubio." *Ínsula* 682 (2003): 22-24. Print.

Mayhew, Jonathan. *The Twilight of the Avant-Garde: Spanish Poetry 1980-2000*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2009. Print.

Méndez Rubio, Antonio. "Tener lo claro." *Escrituras del desconcierto: El imaginario creativo del siglo XXI. I Jornadas de literatura comparada*. Ed. Virgilio Tortosa. Alicante: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alicante, 2006. 146-50. Print.

—. *Trasluz*. Madrid: Calambur, 2002. Print.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Metz, Christian. *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Trans. Celia Britton, et al. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982. Print.

Morales Barba, Rafael. *La musa funámbula: La poesía española entre 1980 y 2005*. Madrid: Huerga y Fierro, 2008. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004. Print.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.

"Trasluz." *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*. 21st ed. 1992. Print.