

TRANSLATING LIGHT: BRAZIL AND SENSUALITY IN WORKS OF P. K. PAGE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation gives a reading of the Canadian poet P. K. Page. What especially interests me is how Page engages with being in the world through language. I inquire into how she articulates the body and its qualities in words; her different relationships with the embodied life and her reflections on sensuality. From selected literary works, I argue that she approaches lived experience primarily through visualization, an approach which creates a sense that something is missing, due to the transformation of sensuality into visual representations. My argument is that the writer, despite her successful strategy of translating the world into images of light and colour, also searches for the additional participation of her other senses. I explore her difficulty in finding ways to express other senses than the visual, her struggle to relate embodied sensations to one's ownership of a physical body.

To support my argument I focus on Page's books *Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram: A Book of Glosas*. My aim is to retrace examples of visual sensuality as key elements that allow one to understand her quest for the world of the senses and the physical body, while fleshing out the natural elements of particular environments in contexts that are both human and non-human, urban and natural. My intention is to demonstrate how the writing of physical bodies and their sensorial qualities in Page's work is urgent and vigorous, beginning from *Brazilian Journal*, where she constantly battles with her own defences against her desire to feel the world and translate its light. Her struggles continued into *Hologram*, where the visual poetics take over all other possibilities of exploring sensuality. My point is to show that the representations of physicality demand a corporeality and vigour that P. K. Page consistently sought in her work.

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## Introduction

### The Sensuous and the Writing of P. K. Page

My relationship with P. K. Page began with my arrival in Canada, as my physical being in the country was reinforced by my contact with her writing. In the following years, I decided to attempt the translation to Brazilian Portuguese of a few of her poems from her collection of *Hologram*, as well as some excerpts from the book *Brazilian Journal*. This experience increased my interest in learning more about Page's writing sensibilities and led me to the challenge of writing this dissertation.

My main desire was to prove how the contact between this talented writer and the blank page presupposes a sensuous connection that is established through a perceptual field embodied in words; a need to identify, through examples collected from P. K. Page's work, how this dynamic is constantly affirmed through, often, visual metaphors. I affirm that the poet, while creating presence out of initial emptiness and void, consistently searches for other senses that could increase the experience of being in order to address the lack and anguish that this very engagement implies.

Two main works by the Canadian poet P. K. Page — *Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram: A Book of Glosas* — I chose them particularly because of their relationship with the foreign — support my argument and intention: to identify examples whereby the encounter of physical bodies are constructed within a visual narrative that searches for other ways to testify the very experience of being in a body; how these excerpts affirm the existence of embodied worlds, yet

also struggle to incorporate the feeling of living in an unpredictable organic matter such as a body through other senses. Personally, the task of writing this dissertation is my singular attempt to address three of my passions: poetry, P. K. Page, and the place of Brazil in my life. Being Brazilian, and having spent twelve years in Canada, both subjects attracted and incited my curiosity. More than an intellectual endeavour and a critical exercise, this project tries to express my individual relationship with literature, poetic spaces, writing in general, and the relationship between Brazil and Canada.

Having met P. K. Page a number of times, and saddened by her recent death, this enterprise has taught me a number of lessons, particularly in relation to the delicacy and attentiveness that are involved in the poet's creative powers and urges. Beyond my intention to contribute to the scholarship that converses with Page's work, my project is also a personal journey into Brazil and its endless possibilities of articulation; how I see Page as a translator of Brazil, and how I identify in writing elements that speak to my own experience of growing up in the country.

In addition, my life in Canada has contributed and led me to reflect back on my own origins, and a number of questions which I try to evoke here are a result of that: from how the body is manifested in writing, and how Brazil becomes a place of narrative and sensuality to Page's intuition. I am critical of Page's work, but I also try to show my admiration and respect in regards to her voice and energy when writing.

The importance of embodied language, I argue, is to connect both reader and writer to the physicality and consciousness that writing is able to provide, to make language an instrument of experience, and to address sensuously the life in the body.

I present an example from *Brazilian Journal* that shows how Page negotiates her emotions in regards to her trip to Brazil, refusing to accept her destiny. In the narrative of displacement, she compares her desire with that of an edible plum, in an ironic move:

“Brazil,” A. repeated.

“Oh, no,” I said. I wonder why it seemed so impossible?

“Send a letter to Jules,” I offered, “refusing. I’ll draft it:

For some

It is surely a plum

Give it to thum.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 1)

The section explores a playfulness regarding the subject of Brazil. One notices how Page jokes about Brazil and cloaks it as unknown while hiding her anxiety about being in a place she knows as a tropical thing, in this case a “plum.” She wants to deny this fruit, to say the desire to travel is “impossible,” so she prefers to “give” it to someone else. The impossibility described in this passage is softened by an understanding that gives up on any human desire, even though its flesh is included in the perception of a plum. There is a clear understanding of Brazil as something distant from her, as though her words could not yet permeate this new territory of being. Another example where one can find a struggle between her emotional feeling and ways to embody it occurs in *Hologram: A Book of Glosas*: “It was astonishing, larger by far than we could imagine, larger than sight itself but still we strained to see it.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) In this case, words seem to ask what lies beyond this vision, how could one address the present sensation of wanting to know more?

The efforts are contained in the act of perceiving the event as something “larger by far than we could imagine.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) In the case of P. K. Page’s writing, these moments explore the visual presence which constitutes the possible embodiment predominating in the narrative. Usually, as I try to demonstrate in this dissertation, the narrative is a quest to find other means to experience sensuality beyond the sight and the eyes. It is as though the writer feels and elaborates the world through her vision, often an elaboration which echoes the same thoughts she has about those feelings. It is a mastery accomplished by delimiting the perceptual field and the very sensuous aspects of the surroundings through visual representations, which become her working tools, yet also limit the atmosphere, since the movement, and the actors that she is orchestrating in order to complete the enactment, sometimes beg for other means to express their emotions.

P. K. Page, in both works, tries to be in control of this self-imposed task, in the first case, by creating a journal out of her personal letters and diaries, managing the urge to explore sensuously the very subject that drives her to write it: in this case, the monumental task of addressing Brazil, and secondly, by creating a set of poems out of excerpts of poems by poets whom she admires, changing them into a *glosa* form, while expanding on thoughts and concepts she visually reinstates. The reflection on ideas becomes her metaphysical goal, the urgency of the flesh and of the words embodied addressed as her main challenge. I show here a passage from *Brazilian Journal* that demonstrates this naming of a Brazilian scenario. The passage struggles to connect one’s embodiment to the presence of reality, utilizing superficial considerations regarding the familiar in relation to her sense of belonging.



The aim is to create a sense of mystery, of anticipation of the life ahead, conveying an intellectual frustration and impotence towards the fact that Brazil, at that moment, dissolved into a collection of gramophone records and the Portuguese language's challenges.

This passage reveals the preparations that Page makes before departing to Brazil, and her knowledge about it:

During the preceding weeks we had tried, not very successfully, to shop for cottons and learn the rudiments of Portuguese from gramophone records. In spite of books, the post report (a confidential report on conditions in the post), and endless talk about "the residence," I could form no very clear picture of the life ahead. Leaning on the rail of the S. S. Brazil and watching the skyscrapered skyline of New York recede, diminish, fade into the horizon, I felt that everything familiar was receding with it. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 2)

The feeling of the narrator is her lack of understanding of a particular reality. Her perception attunes to an imagined sensation of what recedes, disappears, and cannot be verbalized. She lacks the knowledge of Brazil and knows it. The alternative is to delimit it into a self-made scenario, as though the sensation of separation were simply a boat departing a shore. The reader can sense her intimidation before that which she cannot yet visualize.

On the other hand, metaphysics and the naming of realities are part of her mastery. In my reading, Brazil for Page is this place where the possibility of the visual enters into contact with the other senses, which she aims to achieve yet self-consciously seems to claim as an impossible task. Writing is the place of work where feelings occur and are acknowledged through the body, Page seems to say, despite her apparent complaint of an inability to accomplish the task fully.

Likewise in the poem “Hologram” the narrator sees Frank Kafka’s castle in a “dream of wonder,” and this fantasy is related to an “astonishing” view experienced when witnessing the scenario of a citadel, and the light being reflected from it. The narrator feels everything being transmuted. This sensation is felt by the narrator, who cannot help but to watch and perceive the moment, transfixed: “...and we, watching it, interlocked in a strange dimension – that neither your heart nor mine could have invented.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14)

It is a sensation that sometimes language doesn’t seem to suffice to express all feelings, the notion that what the eye can see cannot always be explained. Expressions such as “dream of wonder,” “citadel,” “Kafka’s castle,” are forms to address this sophisticated and introspective reality, yet aim only to reside within an intellectual body. It is clear that emotions are explored by their impossibility of being fully addressed. What the reader witnesses is a passage that acknowledges the limitations of writing, at least on the level of vision alone. At the same time, what Page seems to want is precisely this impossibility of the world of feelings. Connections can be, for P. K. Page, one way in which sensations can be perceived and become transformed, and evolve from one state to another. The strength of her writing lies in this imagined existence, as though thoughts were one’s best protection, “as though one could simply take a line for a walk.” (Page, “Questions and Images,” in *Canadian Literature*, Summer 1969: 17-22).

This illustration of this imagined world is echoed in the essay “Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman,” (Page, *Canadian Literature* 46, 1970: 35-40) where Page foretells her deep desire to find crucial connections between painting and writing. The path, she believes, is to go to a “dimensionless point,” in order to bring out any feeling that can be associated with that point. (Page, *Canadian Literature* 46, 1970: 35-40) Page is concerned with how intersubjectivity occurs, how spontaneous behaviour and associations evolve, a strategy to work through life and

feelings. These trials of imagination are noticeable in the book of *glosas*, *Hologram*, where the reader can see Page's expertise for dealing with the demands of a foreign form such as the *glosa* while knowing how the very words cloak a lack of understanding.

While *Hologram*, a book of *glosas*, brings, as does *Brazilian Journal*, the perceptual experience Page manages to create from her experience, both of these works demonstrate how Page's effort is to become an observant, never challenged by the extremes of her own body, fleeing from pain and allowing for simplistic explanations to appear as though they were associations which were intuitively conducive. *Hologram* is an attempt to give her thought a body, rather than her body a true voice.

It is a book that explores ideas, rather than placing feelings into embodied scenarios. And it is this ability to move from ideal worlds to reality, to explore each event as though it were unique, that constitutes Page's tool to work her feelings through words, as though, when placed in a phrase, they were to have simply two possible directions: towards one magnified picture of an idea represented in a poem or in a short story, or, directed to selected regions of a poem or short story, which, then, would act as a set of pillars that allows the reader to understand the capacity of words to regenerate life and energy by association.

This ability to feel the world through visual and written language is reflected in the essay "Questions," where Page explains how she began to suspect that drawing and writing were "not only ends in themselves, but possibly means to an end" – a method, perhaps for tracing "a small design." In a poem, she says, questions or answers should not be addressed. Her choice is to use the medium to "expand and create space, moving furniture." (Page, *Canadian Literature* 46,

1970: 35-40). In *Hologram*, Page constructs a kaleidoscopic world that is never flat and where the effort to find places that echo her thoughts in the world are constructed.

Page's commitment to the written page as a perceptual world is demonstrated in the following passage, whereby the writer's desire is to establish a sense of belonging, despite her being "appalled" by it, as though, once again, her intention was masked by an avoidance, a delicate politeness that refuses to emit her own felt sensations about things related to this new world she does not know:

. . . I was appalled by the grandeur of the house we were to inhabit. As it had only recently been acquired by Ottawa, we were to be the first Canadians to occupy it. We learned that it was beautiful, that it had been built by a wealthy Portuguese and modelled on his *palacete* in Portugal; and that its private chapel had been deconsecrated with the intention of leaving it empty (although Brazilians in Ottawa complained they had heard we were going to use it as a bar!) (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 2)

It is important to address Page's interest in knowing, even if that implies not acknowledging her inner wisdom, and thus approaching every possible subject with a rational mind, in this case, the size and dimension of the house as a criticism regarding Portuguese colonization and culture.

The whole episode is directly related to this immersion in Brazil, setting up a relationship that is not without a certain distance, perhaps suggesting a colonial view, or even a fear of the tropical when she addresses the initial horror of learning about the size of the house. She is "appalled" and horrified, but we don't know why from the passage, we can only infer.

From *Brazilian Journal*, there is another example that relates to her arrival in Brazil. It seems to produce a mix of emotions that begin to attest to her uncertainty about the future, her disconnected approach to it, and her historical additions to enliven the sensation of not knowing:

Further intelligence: there would be workmen in the house when we arrived; the embassy had hired a Spanish couple to keep the place clean until we could hire staff; the gardener who worked for the original owner was still in charge of the grounds; and – crowning touch! – Brazilians were so fashion-conscious that when the ladies of the Portuguese court had arrived in Rio in 1808 – heads shaved because of the lice they had caught on the voyage out – the ladies of Brazilian society, thinking it was the latest European fashion, had lost no time in shaving theirs! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 3)

Although everything seems to surprise her in nature, she does not necessarily address why, except by its cultural or historical quality and the differences this new world brings to her life, while at the same time avoiding feelings, despite her remarkable capacity to identify ideas relating to her being a foreign inhabiting this new space.

Her death in 2010 is a sad opportunity to inquire into these subjects, since, despite her difficulties in addressing issues of the body, her work offers endless entries to the subjects she struggles to achieve, since her curiosity, I believe, is one of her greatest strengths. It was this insistent passion for the world, demonstrated in *Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram*, which made me begin this investigation, particularly because of her capacity to expand on life's occurrences and its manifestations. In this passage, Page's first impressions of Brazil reveal these interests: the temperature, for instance, in *Brazilian Journal*: "...although midsummer, it was overcast the

day we arrived. From the ship, Rio lay before us like a dog's vision of it – monochromatic – the grey light making it two-dimensional.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 5)

In this excerpt, the poetics of Page is to paint a landscape that is inert and still, without words, passive and raw, as though her vision was animal-like, simple, unsophisticated and non-imaginative; a complexity not possible to be aimed at or recreated, perhaps due to a type of intimidation before Rio. It is a simplistic rendition of the scene which lacks an instinctual perception of this place, for what one gets from the passage is a commonplace feeling of arrivals and departures that this moment would try to reproduce. It is a poetic version of Brazil in her thoughts, which could only be translated as the liveliness of the moment experienced through imagined concepts and light and colour. The same suggested universality can be seen in the poem “Hologram,” and what connects the narrator to the essence of the experience is “unscrupulous,” as the light that reveals it but is not possible to be lived, since the passage does not indicate the steps that one needs to engage in order to survive these emotions. She writes: “...but that was later, after we had made the passage/from the faint light of morning star and pale moon/to unscrupulous noonday with its major chords...” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14).

Often, criticism of Page's work also take various life events too much into consideration, her marriage to Arthur Irwin, her trips to Brazil, Australia, and her return to Canada, and not enough of Page's attachment to sight as the entry to other aspects of the body. In my view, critical reflection on her work simply echoes her own sympathy for this visualized world, not acknowledging her effort as a writer to materialize the real through other means. I argue that perhaps Page holds a strong intuition of the lack that accompanies the beauty and desire she strongly felt manifested in Brazil. As though, ultimately, through her, the flesh feared its own embodiment.

For John Orange, Page's prose became more colloquial as she reached her middle age, very attentive to the emotions she conveys through physical narratives and their concrete verbal expressions. (Orange, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 1989: 15)<sup>1</sup> In this section of *Brazilian Journal*, one notices the concreteness of her vision, and how this awareness of buildings and the city of Rio comes at the price of how she feels in the face of this new place.

The various images enact Page's effort to write her own prospect of beauty and harmony into a country that does not adjust to her standards. The dirt and the ugliness, the unsophisticated, become for Page a marginalized line at the end of the excerpt, when she compares the astonishing buildings with the shanty towns at their feet. One cannot tell her emotions, except by her stylistic observations; the city is simply an image, and not a lively entity. She writes:

We had been told that Rio is the most beautiful city in the world, and it *is* beautiful. As tropical as New Guinea or Singapore, with carefully tended parks. But mildew and wet-rot eat away at its modern buildings – more modern than anything at home – buildings which rise, daring and astonishing, pastel or patterned, into the soft air. Often, too often, from shanty towns at their feet. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 5)

It is a frustrating experience for her to be shown something and have it called beautiful and not, in effect, feel it experienced as beautiful. It is an aesthetic reaction, an experience simply visual, and not organically felt. There are no visceral reactions, simply the observations of a writer/painter who sees this new world as a painted canvas ready to be depicted in words.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this justifies one criticism that John Orange applies to Page's reliance on too many images, which, he argues, is fitting to the restlessness present in her earlier poems and the proliferation of images that merge into one another in unexpected ways (Orange, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 1989: 26).

Along the same lines, the book *Brazilian Journal* addresses the question of naming Brazil, whereby Page exercises her mastery of writing by playing with sounds, images and portraits of the country trying to allude to and to incorporate the sense of the foreign, the exotic and the unusual in the reader. However, the irrationality and the naturalness of the landscape, a pair one often encounters in her writing about Brazil, appear from a visual perspective in general.

Often, when the inexplicable emerges in the writing, Page manages to organize the event into a comedy, something to be laughed at, an effort to recognize one's incapacity to control a given scenario wilfully, as one can notice in this example from page 8, which demonstrates her uncertainty over being in this place:

But we did have one eventful night when we were wakened by what I thought were pistol shots ringing out in the garden. Silence. Then they rang a second time. As no voices were raised and there was no further noise, we presumed the revolution had not really begun. But about five we were wakened again by another volley, and this time I could see flashes through the curtains. Peering over the balcony, A. reported that our personal policeman was marching imperturbably up and down the terrace. Then we heard the drums and strange singing in the nearby hills and realized, with a mixture of relief and disappointment, that pistol shots were the fireworks of a *festa* in the neighbouring *favela*.  
(Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 8)

Either Page is extremely confident about her surroundings and faith of being in the world, or she is completely detached from the event that is actually happening. The occurrence only affects someone out there, not the writer, who is indifferent to what her body is feeling. This argument is not a forceful demand for more emotional reactions, but rather a reflection on how



sparse and rare the body is in these passages, how difficult it is to read the above passage and not feel, in one's body, the feeling of being lost, perhaps preoccupied, and extremely tense from the beginning and the ending of all these circumstances.

Even if Page were completely unsure about her life in this foreign country, it is reassuring to see her body inserted in the action, as the sounds, the facts, and all the surroundings call for a more incisive drive to open and reflect on one's emotions. When corporeal absences populate *Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram*, we see Page dealing with a narrator who is face to face with an unidentified language that she sets out to uncover, though not often successfully. At the beginning of the *Brazilian Journal*, even though she claims space and abundance in her new inhabited house, there is often a separation between the paradisiacal vision and her emotions:

Our *palacete* – and it is indeed that – is in one of the city's western suburbs on Estrada da Gávea (Street of the Square Sail), on a valley slope facing two mountains known as Os Dois Irmaos (The Two Brothers). For three days after we arrived, low cloud and a relentless rain made it impossible to see over the tops of the trees at the bottom of the garden. But now, like a backdrop, the two blunt brotherly peaks are unveiled against a blue sky. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 5)

The effect of the trees covering the mountains, the smells of the air, the new temperature, and the new house; all these elements trigger Page's visual perception, everything is described as if projected on the screen, the other aspects of the body become a challenge for her to construct in the scene. In *Hologram*, Page creates unidentified territories and new worlds, which, in turn, accentuate even further how her body visualizes the scenes, as though visual thought could fill

the shape of poetic narratives. She utilizes a precise conceptual argument, and develops them into light, translating the images onto the page.

Even though the scenarios are full of darkness and light, which, as conditions of space, allow for the narrator to include the body in her emotions, it is not enough to experience them fully. She accentuates the brightness of a room, the darkness of a shadow, positioning herself in space, yet does not incorporate the nuances that aren't visually composed, for example, the heaviness of weather and how that affects one's perception of place. As an event is displayed, we are introduced to the conception of a feeling rather than the touch and the nearness of one's skin. One example is in the following passage, from the poem "Hologram":

Brave of us to begin in darkness. Or was it wisdom

That made us prepare ourselves for that radiance

Little by little? A Jurassic age must pass before even colour

Could enter the scene – dawn's grey being so infinite... (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15)

All one can infer from this passage, despite the poetic and visual impact Page obtains by working with themes such as courage, wisdom, and the expression of colours, is the sense that this narrator is deprived of light and finds knowledge out of disembodied air. There is a sensation of free flight, which, in turn, makes it even more difficult to enter into the text. With *Brazilian Journal*, Page attempts to trust her emotions in new ways, in different situations, and tries to cope with unexpected sensations, while with *Hologram* the scenario is already predisposed and predicted by the writer, a very visual poet, who sets out to build another major poem. The poem is about visual experience, as the title suggests. In both works, Page is constantly placing her

vision at our disposal, arguing on presence, home and of foreign places. The mystery and the choice of the experiences remain open, they create a sense of intimacy and trust; yet the experience of the reader is that of an onlooker who is not invited to feel but to participate in the reproduction of images into thoughts and ideas. Above all, it is an intriguing and beautiful visual-conceptual work.

In *Hologram*, the norms of the poem delimit the content of the page, while in *Brazilian Journal* the unknown country is transformed into a narrative as if photographed from afar. Similarly, Page explores her desire and passion for the word in action, as a manufacturer of visions and images, yet distances herself from the other possibilities of verbalizing emotions, such as taste, smells, and particularly touch. In both works, Page obscures her sense of anxiety and instinct; her disconnection is evident in what relates to embodied partnerships.

This contrast between full presence in the text and complete distance from the language utilized in the process of naming and perceiving spaces is one of P. K. Page's most important characteristics to deal with as a reader and a critic. In the poem "Hologram," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) Page creates a split between the colour green and its effect on the body; she makes the colour feel as though it "pierced us like a spear," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) creating a sensation that is synesthetic in the depiction of the real world. The violence of the act forces the reader to understand the narrative as intense and fully embodied, the word "pierce" connects the effect that the green light might truly produce in the body, as though the universality of this narration required a particular tone, a subjective stance, in order to produce a fuller description of how this piercing effectively works itself into the body.

What comes from her writing is the sensation of a natural placement, as though this type of emotion and the quality of the light on the body were a normalcy to be described and felt: "...but to the cones of our eyes that green was shining/and pierced us like a spear." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) This exercise echoes the particulars of working with words and considering how the reader feels the writing in her own being, it is an attempt to elaborate on how space is inhabited by the poet. In the essay "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," in *Canadian Literature* 46, 1970 (35-40), Page suggests one should go to a "point, dimensionless, in the centre." "One longs for an art that would satisfy all the senses," she writes. (Page, *Canadian Literature* 46, 1970: 38)

The statement reinforces her search for a synesthetic realm in writing and how the senses could aid the search of embodiment, as David Abram's book *Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, explains: the environment is one of the main reasons why the relationship between writer and reader is conflicting, and how the perceptive field can be controlled by the writer as a consequence. In this work, Abram reinforces how the process of physicality, or embodiment, in texts is an essential element to enter into the world of any writer. Abram suggests that one of the most important characteristics of the sensuous world created by a writer is the perceptual entrance that the reader can physically experience, in other words, how he can feel that environment through language. (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 49-52) In the case of P. K. Page, in the entry dated "January 21<sup>st</sup>," from page 5, in *Brazilian Journal*, the house and the landscape reveal her sense of disorientation and discomfort in the country, particularly in her relationship with others and their mutual interaction.

While Page plays with the reader's perception by evoking the landscape and its various details, she also manufactures harmony. Yet out of this effort, there is also a sense of separation,

a connection with the environment that is alien because of her inability to access other sensuous aspects. Page makes Brazil a world of unmoving objects and constructed landscapes, not ready to be physically felt; an aesthetic experience, like a painting or a wallpaper:

From street level, the house is hidden behind a high wall – hot pink, and stained with continents of mildew and mould which flourish in this steamy climate. Approaching from the city, if you drive in through the second of the two street gates you pass the gatehouse where the gardener lives; peer through the garden’s fretwork of tree ferns, the ruler-straight trunks of palm trees, and the intense black of their shade; cross a little stream over a bridge; and there – beyond a lotus pond and a stretch of quite extraordinary lawn, stands the equally extraordinary house: rectilinear facade, hot pink again with chalk-white trim, three-layered, with two tiers of rounded arches. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 5)

Expressions such as “hot pink,” “continents of mildew and mould,” “steamy climate,” and “intense black of their shade,” portray a physical interrelationship that Page masters in the book *Brazilian Journal* by alluding to the senses visually, and searching, in the meantime, to include the very body that feels these images. In this passage, the reader is invited to see the house and its entrance, thereby establishing a relationship that is cinematic but somewhat disconnected from feelings. Page’s sensuality is grounded in the writing of things that are beautiful for their aesthetic quality rather than their embodied being: the previous words and sentences recreate Page’s relationship with the house as a visual construction that expresses her insertion within the environment.

Similar experiences can be found in another excerpt from the book *Hologram*: “. . . and yet in a flash, from infra-red to ultra-violet/we saw the hologram glittering above us/glistening the air...” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) In this passage, expressions like “the hologram,” “glistening the air,” create a perceptual field for the reader to experience and feel, the “ultraviolet” lights sensually connecting the writer’s point of view with the reader’s perception, the air and the colour recreate this visual field and a subjective reality where Page tries to situate herself in the poem. Page, in *Brazilian Journal*, sublimates the natural, the raw, and the instinctive quality that permeates everything called “Brazil.” Her strategy is to slide quickly into intellectual renditions of instinct. For Page, the sensation in the body is always suspected because it leads one to unexpected emotions, unpredictable. Page’s focus is an elaborate philosophical conceptualization of the world, and I would argue, one of her greatest strengths. It is perhaps this predominance of the intellect, or conceptual thinking in writing, which leads to the absence of the sensuous, or else she seeks to use the intellect to make sense of sensuality.

It took me this entire project to be able to read through *Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram* in order to identify the difficulty presented by the world of the sensuous, and how Page struggles to produce it. *Spell of the Sensuous*, by David Abram, is a critical reference that has informed my method while reading P. K. Page’s works. Through the concepts from Abram’s study, particularly in regards to the lack of the sensuous in exchange for a rationalization of the world, I learned to analyze Page’s texts and notice how the sensuous was often replaced by a detached, descriptive view of what the intellect is seeing, rather than what the narrator, and her physical body, might be feeling. The inclusion of tastes, smells, of even skin touch seems to be an articulation that is sought by Page, through her visual insertion, but not usually encountered, due to her preference for images.

In this process I found ways to interpret, in Page's writing, how the present moment and the sensuous intersect in embodiment through visual metaphors that allude to other senses; the physical experience Page engages by crafting a body that aims to feel what she is thinking, yet lacks ways to address her sensations in writing. It is an ongoing learning of how to touch the world, where we are led to interact with the possibilities of inhabiting a body that has colour, shape, and sensation, even if only for a moment.

According to Abram, every phenomenon we do not explain rationally is called "supernatural," due to our difficulty in accepting unknown forces of the universe or mysteries we cannot explain. Consequently, he says, "humans have effectively detached themselves from their sensual capacity and also from their relationship to life and the living earth."

For it is likely that the "inner world" of our Western psychological experience, like the supernatural heaven of Christian belief, originates in the loss of our ancestral reciprocity with the animate earth. When the animate powers that surround us are suddenly construed as having less significance than ourselves, when the generative earth is abruptly defined as a determinate object devoid of its own sensations and feelings, then the sense of a wild and multiplicitous otherness (in relation to which human existence has always oriented itself) must migrate, either into a supersensory heaven beyond the natural world, or else into the human skull itself – the only allowable refuge in this world, for that is ineffable and unfathomable. (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1997: 10)

For Page, this relationship with the earth in Brazil is discovered through her desire to see more and more, to explore the world before her, and to attempt, through her gaze, to describe the materiality of this realm, sometimes only alluding to other senses.

Brazil seduces Page with its colours, and the response is a sophisticated rendition of an ever-present sensuous environment, a constructed narrative that appeals and magnetizes the eye with embodied qualities that try to unite the narrator and the reader with “the sound of water – running, dawdling, or rushing, depending on the rains.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 6) The same method occurs in *Hologram*, where the occurrences of the sensuous are tempting, and enclosed in intimate moments, yet mixed with felt impressions described by the narrator, conducive to sensual attempts that call for the body, even if separated from the living earth.

For example, in the following excerpt from “Hologram,” the poet is not sure when she feels pain or joy, but she knows it hurts her somehow: “. . . but to the cones of our eyes that green was shining/and pierced us like a spear. (When joy is great enough)/how distinguish it from pain?.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) In the book *Hologram*, the multiplicity of realities suggests a perceptual world embodied by the metaphor of the hologram, demonstrating Page’s engagement with visual exchanges which calls for a body that is hidden and veiled.

The poem “Hologram” shows the aspect of being and of living in the world in search for a body. From descriptions such as “the sea, green without brilliance,” “Kafka’s castle,” “cloud and azure,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14-15) Page begins to expand her kaleidoscope of images, trying to recreate a disembodied world as effective as the physical reality it contains, in a visual depiction. Abram, quoting Edmund Husserl, suggests that “the roots of our detachment from the unpredictable dynamic world begin with a separation from the thinking mind, the subject, and the material world of things, or objects.” He advocates a turning toward “things themselves,” as they are felt in their immediacy. “It would not seek to explain the world but rather to describe it thoroughly,” in particular the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, “the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience.” (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 35) This



transition between mental images and articulated constructions that derive directly from our sensual experience is Page's ultimately difficulty; hers is an attempt to achieve the sensuous contextually, without the need of a body.

Page writes about Brazil indirectly, relying, perhaps, on historical facts to justify some of her observations. She is not discovering Brazil within it as she lives in it; it is rather a pragmatic and quite methodical approach to the environment. Likewise, in *Hologram*, the reader inhabits Page's multiple and endless worlds that exist only in poetry. At moments in the *Brazilian Journal* when Page is commenting about her difficulties in dealing with the routine of hiring and firing employees, as well as with her lack of the Portuguese language, one notices how these situations contain an internal narrative that is defensive and negative, perhaps because of her inability to fulfill her desire to articulate a body that is fully present in language, or perhaps due to her understanding that language may not be capable to capture it all.

These are the conditions she enunciates as she turns to matters of fact and polite digressions on how to make her experience of Brazil workable. Due to these restrictions, particularly the official ceremonies she has to attend, the text is also populated with moments of intellectualization and the disappearance of the natural and the supernatural, along with any form of surprise or awe.

The actual interaction between these two worlds, the sensuous and the rational, is always imbalanced. The present moment, the immediacy of an event, is not allowed to be sampled or felt. In an entry from February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1957, in *Brazilian Journal*, she debates whether the house is controlled by a poltergeist. Things are disappearing and breaking down. There are lost keys, elevators being mended, and lights suddenly failing to work. We do not know how she feels

about these situations, nor do we know if they ever get fixed. We only assume these problems are something the mind cannot accept, perhaps through anxious commentaries.

She describes an appointment with a plumber and the amount of time it takes to show him the jobs that need to be done. This is not the first time she had to do this, and she is not pleased. She writes, in a pragmatic, knowledgeable and masterful voice, superior and more effective than the males she is trying to address: “I am amazed at the number of times I have demonstrated the deficiencies of a bidet for the edification of strange men!” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 14)

There is no escape from the problems of the house, yet she manages to control the situation. Page is there to attest that this world is imperfect. The descriptions confirm her impatience towards the cultural and social characteristics of the place, and her voice aims at constructing an argument that wants to file and organize this environment into a categorized existence. The strangeness of all types of figures and entities, of colors and smells, of sounds and silences, shows how Page sees Brazil but cannot risk inventing ways to recreate it fully embodied, making preconceived thoughts part of her life, which accentuates Page’s impatience from these events; her writing is attuned to the very urgency and presence of her needs in her world.

It is as if her body were a voice searching for other ways to represent her very feelings, a speech filled by a stacked compilation of rights and wrongs, sometimes disavowing the very supernatural and sensuous element she likes to cite and colour the pages of the *Brazilian Journal*. At the same time, the supernatural is part of her daily life. Constantly, she is challenging the forces one can’t explain but feel. In an entry of February 18<sup>th</sup>, in *Brazilian Journal*, she mentions

the firing of a laundress who has a rare condition. She writes: "...Today I fired the laundress with elephantiasis. Hated doing it but she was not a very good laundress and eighteen sugar bananas and five kilos of beef unaccountably disappeared on Saturday. Unfairly, perhaps, I suspect her. Yet I am sorry to see her go." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 14)

For the first time, her emotions are sharp and clear, despite the rudeness of the decision: she hates, she suspects and she is sorry to see the maid go. The laundress with elephantiasis occupies the same realm as the sugar bananas and the five kilos of beef; she is out of sight, unpredictable, unknown. It is a "sad situation," she says, being without a laundress is intermingled with the fact that she has an emotional and physical attachment to the situation. The laundress disappears, just like the food in the house. Page addresses this scene according to her own senses and sensibilities, her feelings of disappointment. It is felt, and she finds ways to express her emotions through the contact and intimacy of another body.

She adds: "It is unlikely that I shall ever again employ a grotesque: elephantiasis of the legs and breasts and a strange little beard which hangs straight down under her chin and curls only at the end." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 14) An ordinary event, the dismissal of an employee, is transformed into the naming of the grotesque, and we are introduced to a moment when a body appears and the sensation associated with it is explained in detail: "It is unlikely that I..." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 14) Immediately we can grasp the rationalization of the supernatural, the shape, and the reality of this woman named Lourdes, along with the irony of the physical impact with which the appearance and presence of this body affects her writing.

As Abram argues, "it is the immediacy of how an event makes itself into awareness," and particularly the awareness that this new situation brings to the senses, that produces the vivacity

and presence in a text, and unites the writer and reader in the experience of the sensuous world, so denied by the rational mind. (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1997: 74-75) In itself, the scene is a promise for an open window of sensations and perceptual possibilities. It carries a level of bodily awareness that allows readers to understand the associated neglect between the subject and this other body, which is not frozen in the rationalization Page often makes, and is alive on the page, despite the writer's superior stance towards it. Abrams, quoting Merleau-Ponty, writes:

Communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective; it remains rooted in the sensual dimension of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole. Linguistic meaning is not some ideal and bodiless essence that we arbitrarily assign to a physical sound or word and then toss out into the "external" world. Rather, meaning sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation. (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1997: 74-75)

I believe Page searches for this encounter between flesh and the word, yet is not always satisfied with the result, perhaps preferring to explore the visual aspects of language. Firing the laundress recalls the grotesque sense that this fact produces, and the gruesome tone increases through Page's description of the laundress's body in full detail. She writes how, "ready for the clothes-line, her great brown arms full of white sheets, rows of clothes pegs clipped to her dress like rows of nipples on some gargantuan sow, she was a truly awesome figure." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 14) This embodiment is, as Abram attests, referring to Husserl, the place of interaction amongst the bodies, one's own and the other's, and by "an associative empathy, one comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects." (Abram,

*Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 37) “The life-world is thus the world as we organically experience it in its enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness, prior to conceptually freezing it into a static space of facts.” (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 40)

Page’s encounter with the grotesque reveals the writer’s ability and sensibility to depict an awareness of dealing with the phenomenology of this rising event. Page cannot help but to embody the laundress: since the feeling of the grotesque demands embodiment, it cannot exist without a body. She explores the sensuous more deeply in this section. Different from previous passages, it is the embodiment that increases this Brazilian experience of the grotesque, subsequently transforming her narrative into a full-body experience. In *Brazilian Journal*, Page describes many subjective encounters that try to recreate the sensuous and enigmatic world of Brazil through her own experience. In turn, characters come and go, as, for example, the German housekeeper who speaks seven languages. Similarly to the case with the laundress, Page controls her feelings, and they do not follow an unsettling line of emotions. She says, “I can see that she will have to go.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 7)

Page cannot rely on fate, so all she can do with this situation of having too many employees, is to organize her wish rationally as that belief that “the correct manner of staffing the place will, I hope, sort itself out in time.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 7) The uncertain nature of this knowledge is demonstrated by a rational thought that justifies her intense need to organize everything according to her pre-acquired knowledge, when she speaks like a true scientist, since she relies on previous and empirical experience. Page states that “considerably more staff is needed here than in non-tropical countries, partly because the heat slows everyone to a crawl and partly because, with the high humidity, everything has to be aired and brushed every day.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 8) She cannot cope with the heat on her body, it is

often someone else's body that is affected by it; hers is just a voice observing the whole scenario, abstracting and avoiding certain feelings, rejecting the reciprocity Abram suggests, quoting Merleau-Ponty, as being "an ongoing exchange between the body and the entities surrounding it," constituted in a kind of "silent dialogue." (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 52) Page's qualities are that of an observer, a voyeur, and a spectator, like a photographer of the mind.

Following Page's effort to capture the Brazilian experience of the grotesque in the *Brazilian Journal* entry of February 18<sup>th</sup>, the reader is presented with the writer's relationship with this tropical environment, of how the vegetation in Brazil seems to have a force of its own. The garden she describes "has four sprays of tree orchids growing from it – white with purple centres; another has a yellow orchid with a rust centre; still another, an indescribable flower of bright cerise with cerulean blue tips on its large heather-shaped flowers." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15) Hers is a sensuous view, simply painted. Page's sensuality, I argue, is visual, like a painting, and one-dimensional: "Every tree puts forth some flower in clumps or sprays or showers of yellow, purple, pink, white, or red – and almost every trunk bears orchids." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15)

Her exploration of the experienced world is a picture of it: Page seems surprised by her lack of words, she states that she is without words. The difficulties in addressing smells or tastes, and how they affect her, are clear in the writing. The experience of meeting and encountering these new objects, when it is met by an emotion, creates body on the text: "Nature doesn't seem to know how to control itself!" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15)

It is important to mention that she does address the colours, the visual spectacle of Brazil, yet is shy in incorporating the life-world one cannot explain or grasp intellectually, what would

require an engagement that incorporates the embodied senses. This labour is related to what Abram calls, quoting Merleau-Ponty, a “perceptive attunement” or “synchronization” with our rhythms and the rhythms of things themselves; “a sensuous dance between the carnal subject and its world; an active voice, alive.” Citing Merleau-Ponty’s main work, *Phenomenology of Perception*, he writes, about the book: “The sensible world, in other words, is described as active, animate, and, in some curious manner, alive.” (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 55) Remarkably, on the other hand, Page attests her ability as a writer by grasping the sight of nature in its full embodiment, as a separate entity, knowing the truth of nature by seeing it in its liveliness, and reflecting on it conceptually and intellectually.

Page’s words exist within this context; her struggle with language in Brazil produces a country that searches for its embodied language. Her carnal voice and the world she encounters in Brazil sometimes are mixed with judgments that replace the physical perception of the environment, leading the reader to experience these trees, this vegetation, and this emotionally indescribable Brazil up to a point. This naming, because of the very impossibility of being named, becomes stiff and unrealistic; as though Page could not find herself before so much vivacity and joy immersed in the nature that is everywhere, and does not seem to control itself.

In *Brazilian Journal*, while attending a Brazilian party, Page observes Copacabana beach, glistening with “the lights of a distant shore” while “thirty people sat down for dinner.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 7) The interaction restates the connection between the city and nature; the lights go off and Page writes:

Half-way through dinner all the lights of the city went out. Darkness everywhere – inside and out – except for the myriad points of light on the bay, floating now in so vast a night.

But how afraid we still are of the dark! At once all footmen fumbled through the blackness in their white gloves and returned with lighted candelabras. Beautiful too. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9)

Slowly, something begins to change in Page's relationship with Brazil: natural events have their effect on her body, she feels afraid, the reader is able to interact to this scenario that is at once embodied and mysterious. Page introduces the reader to her feeling of insecurity provoked by the natural world. For her, this beautiful darkness brings fear that is also beautiful. It is this notion of a dialogue between evolving ecosystems, between the writer and the reader's common landscape, which strengthens the impact of this narrative in comparison to previous ones. In a later passage, Page discusses her neighbours, who sing "their Aves in the totally dark convent." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9) She goes on:

The other night we heard the giggles of a host of small girls, and leaning on the balustrade in what must surely be the classical Brazilian pose, found – instead of a children's party as we had thought – the Sisters themselves, those whom we have seen at dusk, silently reading their breviaries under the cassia trees, now swinging on the swings, black robes flying. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9)

The same feeling of adventure can be found here, where the reader's landscape becomes populated by the joyful description of this world, this darkness which, slowly, like nature, is transformed. Day becomes night; darkness and dusk are suddenly illuminated. The previous fear is no longer there, and now we hear the laughing, the child-like activity of these "Sisters." Page escapes and denies us her feeling about the event, yet the embodied language is involved; the "Sisters swing," "their black robes flying."



Page is being playful through observation, interacting with other subjects in the environment. In *Hologram*, it is harder to find a sense of naturalness in the narrative. Light is often present, and it seems to give birth to several reflections. In the poem “Hologram,” the gold sun is the metaphor addressed, when Page asks “how to rid the gold sun of all its otherness?”<sup>2</sup> (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19) Another beautifully depicted example, from *Brazilian Journal*, begs for some feeling, for some reaction, for some calling that interacts with this urban and rural intimacy that the vision of the narrator brings but that her writing, lacking embodiment, avoids engaging with:

Around and around the driveway the armed guard in his sand-coloured uniform strolls like a succession of men. In the darkness between the pools of light shed by the lamps he is totally lost. The frogs sound like dogs, like hens, like drums, like strings, and when they stop – which they do occasionally, as if obeying a conductor – one hears other drums and the weird singing of the *favela*. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 10)

Here nature and the urban landscape intersect, demonstrating Page’s ability to notice and narrate the closeness between the two. Yet one cannot escape being affected by that which is not in the text: the magic, the brilliance, and the energy that the noise of the frogs, like music, creates. This absence, one could argue, is stylistic; it conveys something that is left for the reader to create alone. Page’s style is to follow the rhythm that she sees nature exhibiting, and how that

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<sup>2</sup> In the introduction of *Ecopoetry, a Critical Introduction*, J. Scott Bryson attempts to differentiate nature poetry from ecological poetry, the first often being associated with nineteenth century Romantic poets, who saw poets as a manifestation of the divine, and the second to twentieth century poetry, who saw poetry as rhetoric for social change. I will not comment on the understanding of nature poetry and the context of nineteenth century poets, since it addresses a subject that this dissertation does not approach. At the same time, it is important to mention how Page occupies a certain place in the writing of ecological poetry, when she deals with natural events in her writing of *Hologram* and *Brazilian Journal*.

rhythm leads the armed guard from darkness into light, as well as new sounds to a supposedly quiet landscape.

In Page's *Brazilian Journal* environmental transformation gains momentum throughout the book, even though it was set in the fifties, and published in the eighties, examples such as the alarming temperatures that "soared above the century and no breeze, moved among the smallest leaves of the maidenhair." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11) She writes:

But, dramatically, Sunday night, a storm blew up and the house seemed to rise like a flight of wooden eagles, wooden wings flapping, as every shutter banged and swung. You could almost see the cooler air as it streamed through the rooms overturning photographs, riffling papers – a manic housekeeper on the loose. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11)

The house embodied in this passage appears to embody a feeling of disorientation, of fear, transposed and transfigured into the shape of on an eagle, which impersonates the chaos that the passage is trying to convey, added the inclusion of a mad maid who acts as the loose element in this scenario, violent and urgent in its natural conditions. In *Brazilian Journal*, another common subject is the relationship between progress and the natural landscapes. The following passage provides a good example of this:

Last Sunday, a day as sunny as looking through a topaz, we set off for Corcovado (The Hunchback) – one of the highest peaks in Rio – to which we climbed through forested mountains by a series of switchbacks. Brazilians are great road-builders. They think nothing of going up mountains, down mountains, or even through mountains, where necessary. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11)

Page does not mention ecology in regards to Brazil. Instead, she creates passages about nature that reveal her enthusiasm when near natural landscapes. There are only a few moments where concern about the natural is revealed, which I won't focus on here. In *Brazilian Journal*, Page avoids discussing the environment, or our internal relationship with the movements of the natural world, and how that affects our consciousness. Perhaps her avoidance of the environment is also a search for the environment, as with her treatment of the body, an absent presence in the selected works here discussed.

In this Introduction, I demonstrate how John Orange's remarks on Page's writing give a gentle overview of her work. I introduced David Abram's approach to the relationship between embodied language and writing, and how the reader, through this sensuous connection with the written page, becomes connected to the living earth, the act of writing and the feeling of this immediate life-world. Another important topic of this section is the neglect of an organic awareness in P. K. Page's work, from inside out, including her own body in relation to the natural world, as well as the "associative empathy" and "silent dialogue" that is necessary to address when relating to living entities; when, for example, Page engages with the reader in her reading of Brazil in *Brazilian Journal*, as well as of poetry in *Hologram*. I also want to stress Page's careful eye when observing Brazil, carefully placing her words in contexts which allow the reader to visualize and almost touch this new territory she inhabits. Through conceptual arguments and painted descriptions, Page recreates this foreign place as though she were experiencing it for the first time.

On another note, I think it is relevant to give a brief overview about the methodology I use in this dissertation, since I am aware that this project doesn't utilize the usual structure applied in a conventional literary criticism manuscript. Instead of producing a dissertation with

an overview of the scholarship involving P. K. Page, and the historical implications and references to her writing, thus aiming for a specific Canadian literature audience and readership, I opted to fill a gap that I understood as being lacking in the research regarding this writer.

My intention, ever since I began my work, followed by many meetings with P. K. Page, was to be faithful to my relationship with the writer and how she saw her work, which thus echoed also how I perceived her writing. Page never saw herself as an academic, having verbally expressed surprise and curiosity towards those who would be interested in her works with pure academic purposes. With that in my mind, I began my research focusing in my interests, Brazil, language, poetry, and embodiment, always taking into consideration what I thought was lacking in the scholarship I read about Page. I felt that there was an important aspect of Page's work that wasn't acknowledge by recent criticism, and my goal was to work with concepts such as language and embodiment to make my claim.

I also didn't feel comfortable in labelling Page in any one school, since it felt counterintuitive to Page's own thinking. I felt new scholarship was necessary, and thought my project could open up new possibilities of seeing her work. John Orange is a specialist on Page that I quote in this dissertation and who also argues about the difficulties in categorizing the writer in any particular school. However his work contextualizes and informs the reader on Page's several inter dialogues with Modernists, Surrealists, among others, and how that might have shaped her writing. I think such scholarship is important, and relevant, but I felt I needed a different type of discourse in order to articulate a dialogue with P. K. Page.

Being part of a department such as Comparative Literature allowed me to express my concerns and my questions towards the work of P. K. Page. In this environment, I was able to

write a dissertation whereby my own subjectivity was also at stake, which allowed my own phenomenological experience of Page's writing to be represented in my work. I think this department allows one to relate and converse with different types of subjectivities, and that was essential to the development of my argument. Overall, I hope my dissertation can contribute to the realm of Page's scholarship, and allow of a new type of dialogue to occur, in particular where the body and language intersect.

## **Part I: Chapter 1: *Brazilian Journal* and the Writing of Brazil**

As I have discussed in the previous section, P. K. Page's writing is an attempt to experience a perceptual world, rather than a simple recording of facts. Part I, Chapter 1, of the dissertation is an investigation into this exercise, focusing on how the physical body is featured in this process of revealing the world through sensuous circumstances; what I intend to show here is how Page, through *Brazilian Journal*, attempts to reproduce the experience of physically living and feeling Brazil on its pages. In the Introduction I provided a few examples regarding Page's arrival in Brazil, which was filled with surprises and unexpected visits by unfamiliar insects, weather, and employees.

Even though she controls her behaviour like a prepared tourist, the scenario is often a challenge for her writing. She wants to understand everything, and in one way, writing down the experiences is a concrete method for providing or assessing some of the questions. She writes, on February 6<sup>th</sup>, about a bird in the garden: "Notes on flora and fauna: in the garden a bird like a yellow-bellied flycatcher. Trying to find it in the inadequate bird books we have acquired, I discover Brazil has a marsupial duck! Why baby doesn't drown while mother swims, I don't know." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11)

Birds populate *Brazilian Journal*, as though the novelty of them incited Page's curiosity and desire to replicate them into images. Also, Page finds pleasure in discovering the country through books, as though the natural, with its immensity, wasn't possible without official knowledge. Thus she expresses her initial interest in Brazil and its nature and how she has been approaching it so far. She sees a bird in the garden and immediately associates it with a flycatcher. Yet what really informs her about this reality is contact with a book, as a form of

mediation with the land. She still has questions about the birds: she does not know how they survive without their mothers in nature.

This scenario is a perfect representation of how, metaphorically, the passage could suggest the despair and loneliness of the writer in being alone in an unknown country, and like the birds, not knowing how to survive without some guidance, without the help of their mother, showing how both instinct and survival are two important topics in the new world she is about to discover. What this country seems to require of her is an internal reflection of the sensuous embodiment she is witnessing and that she slightly acknowledges; her survival depends on this self-questioning, which she only theorizes.

Page's intentions to name Brazil according to her own tastes and impressions grow more intense as her time in the country grows, which causes her incorporation of more historical details. Moreover, her curiosity about the feeling this country provokes in her comes with an inability to access her own truth in regards to the meaning that "sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation" which, according to David Abram, quoting Merleau-Ponty, should occur in the writing of the sensuous world. (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 75)

By avoiding this encounter, Page refuses to accept what she is witnessing as a reflection of herself, and despite addressing Brazil as a place that could be found anywhere, the embodiment of her own self is lacking. In another example that introduces this curiosity between human and non-human elements, one notices, instead, a type of silent dialogue between herself and the Brazilian experience, when she writes:

Yesterday, when Maria, the Spanish maid of all work, was cleaning the veranda, she found a very blond frog asleep on the lintel above the door to the *sala*. Giving it a good

peasant swipe with her broom – the kind she would in affection give to her husband – she brought it to the marble floor with such a resounding smack I’d have thought it dead. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

Page describes the mastery of the Spanish maid over a non-human being, and how these skills and embodied nature echo in her. She thinks the frog might be dead, after such a “smack.” The absence of her own voice is noticeable, and the interaction between this scene and her being remains unsaid. Often, in these Brazilian exchanges, Page resembles a child, as though the world were a quiet surprise and not perceptible through inner associations in which embodied language, subjective writing and the sensuous intersect. Such possibility seems impossible for Page, which, in turn, restricts the participation of the reader in the aesthetic rhythm of things-in-themselves and the writer’s visual sensibility.

Page’s interest, though, is present, one can tell she wants to know more about the violent act that drives the maid to hit the frog, yet she adds: “Instead it leapt through the door to the sitting-room and straight onto an upholstered French chair, with all the authority of a transformed prince. Finally, finding Maria’s persistence with the broom too much for it, the poor thing clung with both forearms to a veranda railing and gave a great wail like a Siamese cat.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

Her interpretation of the event is Romantic, almost literary, transforming the frog into a “prince,” and losing the connection between this sensuous, lively world, and the world of her body; what does the very body feel, seeing that natural being fighting for its life? Page still resists the natural world with intellectual fantasies; her own survival in this environment is an



impossibility of speech. She finds it nearly impossible to embody her own experience in language, and that's why the body appears absent in its presence throughout the narrative.

In the beginning of the *Journal*, passages like the previous one are very common, and Page admires the skill of those who live in the house with her. She is shy to include herself near this Brazil she is curious about; she does not seem to recognize inside herself the world of the sensuous, the naked body, the unpredictable sensations of desire and want and lack. Page revisits this theme frequently in the beginning of her *Journal*, especially because she is trying to find ways to cope with her own circumstances. She writes:

For the first and quite unforgettable time, we have seen a Brazilian blue butterfly – as large as a flying hand – the upper surfaces of its wings an iridescent Mary-blue, the underside soft as the colour of snuff. And these are the butterflies that are made into pictures for souvenir hunters! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

As with the frog's episode, Page is ironic and versatile in giving citations or comments about what she sees in reference to intellectual matters: butterflies as artifacts for hunters, rather than an expression of the living world. Her eyes search for this intellectual reference, which the text itself seems to negate, as the butterfly is expressed in full colours and embodied language. Page, on the other hand, tries to describe the scene not only as an event experienced with a physical, emotional response but rather as a scenario that could be painted. She translates the light which surrounds the event and frames it into images, inserting herself conceptually in the context.

She is enchanted by the colour of the butterfly, and knows the type of blue it has. She also compares the colour and its light with a material element; the butterfly has an underside soft “as the colour of snuff.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

Despite her artistic observations, the reader does not have access to what she feels when experiencing all these colours, the language of the image visualized cannot translate the feeling she might be experiencing.

The predominance of the visual in Page’s work, I argue, is an impediment to the way the language can be embodied, particularly with Brazil and sensuality, a pair that brings a synesthetic experience to the surface. Instead, the supposition is that, by expressing the quality of a perceived object in comparison to another, it would force the reader to experience the feeling of the butterfly, and not just imagine it, with both colours and entities.

This tendency interrupts the act of embodiment, which would truly take the reader back to his or her own body, lacking and witnessing presence and absence, creating a layer of meaning that is beyond superficiality and aesthetically conducted expressions. For Page, there is often an act of redemption and happy endings before the incompleteness of life and art itself, and that is why, perhaps, she is interested in the rendition of harmony in the natural world. It is an idealized world of framed moments which she crafts and observes in Brazil.

In her quotidian life in Brazil, particularly upon her arrival, she has to deal with several common-place obstacles, which accelerates her desire to learn about the country, while on the other hand, driving her close to her own fantastical Brazil, more literary than natural or urban. She writes:

Reports received before we arrived told us that the water pipes are corroded and that there would be “inconveniences as regards hot water and the use of toilets on the third floor.” Too true! Also, as Canada was moving in with more electrical appliances than had been used previously, the electrical wiring was overloaded and would be another problem. Still is. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

The contrast between a progress-driven country like Canada, with an abundance of resources, and the undeveloped world encountered in Brazil is clear in this passage. It is also suggestive of how Page brings with her a whole array of changes that force this house to be transformed into something of her liking. All this is written, but she doesn't seem to have a critical view of the forceful impact her arrival has provoked on this natural environment.

Measurements need to be taken, at any cost. In nature events resolve themselves often with a great deal of violence, while in the urban and human environment challenges also have to be dealt with a different type of force: for example, the electrical appliances and the whole make-over the house is undergoing. For Page, the obvious is that her presence in this world needs to find a pattern in the house, and that is order, and new conditions. She continues:

The lift containing our pictures, books, *objects d'art* – sent from Canberra, via Durban – arrived before us and was unpacked to prevent its contents from mildewing. I have been finding a place for them in this vast green and white house. Thank goodness we have the paintings. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12)

Page describes how she establishes her place in the house through the act of unpacking, and how, despite the diversity that this natural world provides, she is thankful to have her paintings. Her body is perhaps too vulnerable in this new environment; she needs her material

artifacts to keep her safe. And she seems to be thankful for everything that brings a sense of belonging. It is a fearful experience, for everything needs to be watched over, since in this environment, the powers of nature are merciless. In this case, she has to unpack her things to prevent them “from mildewing.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 12) She writes about the patience required to move into a house of fifty-seven rooms, and her life is orchestrated by the equipping of the house, and the materials she has to acquire. Another aspect of this new life in Brazil is her relationship with language; the frustration that speaking brings forth. She explains:

Then there are the difficulties of language. I spend an enormous amount of time trying to communicate with the servants and an almost equal amount trying to disentangle the misunderstandings I have created. “Don’t buy any more young girls,” I say to the cook. Hours later I realize I meant maçãs (apples), not moças. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 13)

The confusion with words is one of the elements of Page’s experiences in the country. The very act of speaking, of interacting with this world of Brazil, seems to require the mastery of a language that would go beyond Portuguese. Even though she does not say it clearly in the passage, claiming her mistakes are related to the idiom, it can be inferred from previous moments how these resistances come from an experience that goes beyond purely visual expressions. Perhaps she is defensive and anxious in dealing with an aspect of life that is unknown, and not easily articulated by her, such as other senses.

It is an effort to communicate sensuously through the embodiment of one’s self, as the very language that feeds these obstacles as they cohabit with her in the country. It is not an easy task, she writes, to communicate with the servants as she counts on them for everything. At the

same time, she is trying to define what Brazil means to her, even though she is pessimistic and filled with apprehension. She conceptualizes what her body can feel and perceive in contact with the environment. In Page's description of her experiences in the *Brazilian Journal*, one notices her effort to write about these others. She writes:

I wish I had been able to see the ceremony. I was only allowed a second-hand view, as it were. At 10.30 a.m, four members of the embassy staff assembled at the residence, not unlike a comic chorus in their variously tailored morning-suits. Having not yet acquired a *copeiro* (waiter), we hired one for the occasion, and he arrived handsomely attired in white jacket and Mickey Mouse gloves. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 13)

Page finds this other ironically by explaining how the embassy staffing appears and how the hired waiter is perceived in reference to a cartoon character. The contrast is forced, and it is an attempt to humanize this self-created Brazil between a recognizable natural world, real and enigmatic, and the urban, residential environment, which becomes a performance turned into irony by her narrated perception. Just like the previous section, where she compares Brazil to a plum. This linkage is created, and it is the representation of the form that she can grasp of this place called Brazil. By dressing the scene with irony, she catches the attention of the reader and places herself as the sarcastic narrator who dwells between the inanimate and the fantastic that this natural realm possesses.

It also appears, I argue, that Page prefers writing through visual impressions, which, in Brazil, seems to be reinforced by the overwhelming presence of nature. Brazil, I believe,

threatens her own ability of embodiment. In this passage, Page elaborates on the act of writing, from her verse memoir *Hand Luggage: A Memoir in Verse*:<sup>3</sup>

And poems. The pattern of vowels in a poem,

The clicking of consonants, cadence, and stress –

were magic and music. What matter the meaning?

The sound was the meaning – a mantra, a route

to the noumenon, not that I'd thought

that through absolute pitch I'd repattern myself.

What I'd thought? What I'd felt. For me feeling was thinking.

I thought with my heart – or so my heart thought. (Page, *Hand Luggage: A Memoir in Verse*, 2006: 10)

In this excerpt, Page argues that feeling is thinking, and embodiment of sensuality not an emotional labour but an intellectual task. At the same time, she reinforces how her heart thinks, understanding feeling in alliance with conceptual thoughts, as though one depended on the other.

In this dissertation, I defend the idea that feeling is not thinking, and that Page, by thinking what she feels and bringing that to writing, separates the reader from the emotion she is trying to

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<sup>3</sup> Published in 2006, the verse memoir *Hand Luggage* was well received by the critics. Stan Dragland writes, for the back cover of the book, how the piece is a “wonderful long poem nobody else could have written,” which “carries a plenitude of penetrating observations and probing questions arising from richly varied cultural experience frankly and lovingly examined.” The memoir, besides registering her permanent feeling of “a borderland being, barely belonging, one on the outskirts, over the perimeter,” according to Stan Dragland, also narrates her becoming a woman, her becoming her own voice and writer, her aging, or, in sum, her being in “preparation for a life of paradox”. On the same subject and in contrast, in *Brazilian Journal*, Page addresses the Brazilian women as the personification of beauty, referring back to herself as inappropriate and lazy. Being a woman, in this case, requires a new stance in regard to what the feminine and landscape writing can truly signify, or which she never comes to address in *Brazilian Journal*, neither in regards to her own embodiment as a woman and a writer.

convey through visual images. On the other hand, I believe that Page knows how to highlight her emotions through her words, since her ability to conceptualize her feelings are what captivated me as her reader in the first place. Even though it is a limited way to perceive the world, it is her way, and one that is very successful. The only aspect of it which can be noted is its limitation towards certain aspects of representation.

Page is fascinated with sound, but does not explore how she feels it in this passage. For her, the experience of listening is a given. The meaning does not resonate back on her being. It is the thought that counts, not how the sounds reverberate as embodiments. The thought of the sounds becomes the center of the poem. That is her way of thinking, yet another possibility the text seems to address is how does that reverberate in the body, in the reader's body? This transition between word, sound, and body is what seems to trigger Page, even though she argues that her focus is the thought of feeling.

For Page, the process that reveals a poem is not only constructed by consonants, vowels, music and magic alone, but above all, and prior to all, to the questioning that occurs before it begins to happen. What does the meaning matter, she asks; or, perhaps, implicitly, what among all forces can disturb the perfection or shape of a poem?

From this particular point of view, which makes feeling into thinking, *Hologram*, a book of *glosas*, exceeds its formal attempt by establishing Page's poetic identity in her ambition to translate the essence of another poet's voice into a structured form. Long and sometimes overwhelmingly wordy, the book succeeds in the production of well-engaged images, yet avoids grounding these very images in a fully embodied matter. Page, in an often surrealistic manner,

tells the reader how this or that object, when placed under a specific scenario or background, can be remade into a new thing.

The result is a multi-layered world of possibilities which go from the conceptualization of life to the nuances of sentiments; of how they converse with a particular place, character or object. Once again, the question of feeling is taken for granted, and assumed as thought. Several critics, in fact, praise her intellectual capacity to produce visual imagery.

When Linda Rogers writes in the essay “P. K. Page, The Alchemist,” that Page’s mastery is that of a “jeweller because of her ability to craft poems taking into consideration their every angle, individually carrying a brilliance that is only comparable to light and precious metal,” it is clear that the reader can feel this precious jewel purely through the visual appearance. The magnificence of a precious stone is also intimidating, or: “crystallizes human experience. “Reflection, in her poetry,” affirms Rogers, “is insight;” “images are randomly picked, it exists in the phenomenal world for poets to examine.” (Rogers, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 2001: 15) <sup>4</sup>

A similar view is held by Barbara Colebrook Peace and Kelly Parsons in their essay, “Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart: Praise, Shadow and Dimensions of Eternity in the Poetry of P. K. Page.” (Peace, Parsons, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 2001: 43) In this essay, the authors consider Page to be a “visionary,” who sees deeply into the heart of things; someone who sings praises, after the poets of ancient Greece. For Peace and Parsons, above all, in order to understand Page’s writing it is necessary to incorporate her need to write the “shadow,” or rather, her ability to deal with all kinds of loss by acknowledging the relationships between things. They believe that Page’s vision of the world is interconnected; her writing carries an interior

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<sup>4</sup> For more, see *P. K. Page and her Works*. Edited by Linda Rogers and Barbara Colebrook Peace. Toronto: Guernica, 2001, pg. 15.



luminosity “reminiscent of certain medieval women mystics.” (Peace, Parsons, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 2001: 43) The essay also calls attention to Page’s “spiritual ecology,” an awareness that opens one’s eyes and induces the reader to see beyond the surface. “Page does not turn away from suffering, grief and loss;” she has a “heart that knows that tears are part of love,” affirms Peace and Parsons. (Peace, Parsons, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 2001: 47) Yet the meaning of spiritual ecology, and its relationship with the matter of the bodies, is never addressed. Another characteristic of her poetry, they write, is her ability to extract “a thing only felt” from invisibility, and transpose it into a “seen thing, a heard thing;” (Peace, Parsons, *P. K. Page and Her Works*, 2001: 54) an understanding that acknowledges the transmutation of an idea, a thought, or even a spectre of light, yet does not transit into the very embodiment this verbalizing proposes, the communion into word, of making this perceptual reality and fantastic realm into an integral element that embodies her world as a poet. What Page’s *oeuvre* does accomplish is an entry into open spaces; as if, by reading her verses, one is able to feel the atmosphere of a particular place.

In the poem “Autumn,” from her book of glosas *Hologram*, Page takes an excerpt from Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem “Autumn Day,” and reworks it within a new structure, the *glosa*. It is a controlled exercise, poetically creative, and the Spanish form it produces carries within it an accordion effect: it expands and contracts as it goes, allowing the theme of time and seasons, once explored by Rilke, to be revisited by Page under a new light. Part of the struggle with poetry, Page affirms, is to have the poem itself become an “awakening,” “surfacing, presenting my small sea-dreanched island to the sun.” (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 6) Page’s role in this challenge equals her desire “to emerge,” to comprehend a stonecrop, a vegetable marrow, a grove of palms. “How could I foresee the use I would put it to?” she asks.

(Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 6) The actual battle, Page explains, occurs within one's mind: "...from this vantage point, I would say that the right hemisphere of my brain – the dreaming, intuitive, creative hemisphere – was battling with a system of education intent upon developing the rational, logical, lineal left." (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 6)

While the body is still absent in Page's work, it is important to acknowledge how the writer desires to fight her rational mind, and becomes detached from academic interpretations for that reason; her entrance into public life as a poet happened after her return to Canada in 1967, when she began to re-emerge in the publishing venue and share her experiences after years abroad. The process of spending "roughly ten years in a Latin culture," (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 15) and how she reacted to her return in North America, are explained in the essay "A Writer's Life." There she details the impact of a reading in the life of a writer; in her case, with initial joy and easiness despite her "terrified" (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 16) sensation.

She writes, on page 16: "I loved the chance to meet fellow-poets, talk to students, and make new friends. On the debit side, I was disappointed by the academe I had so greatly respected partly, I suppose, because I had not been to university – it was often inflexible and doctrinaire." (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 16) In this passage, one notices that, at least from Page's point of view, the academic world is associated with final and rational arguments, while for her poetry writing has nothing of that quality, reinforcing her interest in matters of feeling and intuition. Her insight into the makings of poetry is demonstrated in *Brazilian Journal* by her ability to sense the environment and paint her impressions on daily entries during her two years of stay there.

Hers is a method that incorporates the poetic experience of writing as a trial. This fits her life in Brazil, due to the uncertainty of her daily routine and everything she experiences there. As Page explains, it is necessary for the poet to take everything into consideration, including dreams. This aspect – to include the implausible and indefinable sources in her work – should be accepted despite the temptation to conduct a scientific analysis or psychoanalytic interpretation of her vision. She details, in “A Writer’s Life,” the poet’s capacity to filter the increasingly incongruous influences of the world and predict what is already evident but unspoken.

I wrote a long short story, “Unless the Eye Catches Fire” based on a dream. Or was it? Some of it was. It is a story of an ordinary woman who suddenly sees her world transformed. At the same time, barely noticeable at first, the temperature is increasing. My short story was written in the late 70s, before any talk of global warming had reached the press. I am not trying to suggest that I have prophetic powers. I haven’t. But it does make me ask myself something about dreams. What are they? Where do they originate? Surely they are not merely the garbage pails of our lives, as some psychologists would suggest. I suspect that all of us here know the qualitative differences between dreams. Some are patently rubbish. But others . . . ? How can one help but wonder. Are they perhaps an escape hatch to a higher realm? (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 18)

In this passage, Page associates global warming with the destiny of a woman, attempting some kind of embodiment that would intersect both conditions in the same environment, constructing an associated empathy between the two. Moreover, she explains that she does not know where her stories come from. She follows her intuition and that of her characters. Page pays attention to what is going on in the world and this is the perceived world that is exposed

through her stories. She trusts dreams, and they become part of her perception of reality. One can never assure that the other knows what is real and what is not, and her creative process is to be opened through these mediums as well as through the writing itself.

P. K. Page explains, in “A Writer’s Life”: “The beauty of folk/fairy tales is that — like poems, or like *anything*, when it comes right down to it — what you see in them is what is in them for you. I try to tell students this — and so run counter to the prevailing analytical methods of teaching.” (Page, “A Writer’s Life,” in the *Filled Pen*, 2007: 19) Even though Page does not necessarily apply this thought to her writing of *Brazilian Journal*, she argues for the principle that what goes on inside the writing is a reflection of what goes on inside of you. Like many other writers, for Page the body is only a thought, and not a corporeal quality expressed in writing. One could argue that Page sees the body as how she understands the inexplicability of poetry, a series of found images; a saying that, since as it is shared by many poets, from many ages, becomes ingrained in one’s collective understanding of the craftsmanship; the composition and effort needed to construct a poem and thus to articulate feelings in a body. While in Brazil, she would not write, and behaved like a mute observer, an inarticulate listener; drawing replaced writing, as though her life were revealed by it. Drawing embodies her world in Brazil, as Page tried to make peace with each blade of grass or tree, to give them a life of their own. (Page, “Questions and Images, in *The Filled Pen*: 37)

Page’s narrative exposes this conflict, between embodying the world in writing and painting it on a canvas. The efforts of the writer remain on learning how to translate the quotidian, while the perceived world constitutes an entry for Page’s embodied experience, as we see in the following passage, where Page confesses her apprehension of staying in the house, keeping her body still. She writes:

During the day sometimes I feel I am under house arrest. Our personal car has not yet arrived and first thing in the morning A. leaves for the Chancery. Despite its formal name, it is in a modern office building in downtown Rio on Avenida Presidente Wilson. It houses the embassy's political, trade, consular, and cultural offices. At this particular period it is also, in effect, a properties office, trying to cope with the problems of the residence – problems which range from contaminated wells and malfunctioning pumps in the basement to leaks in the roof, not to mention the more domestic matters which are my responsibility. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15)

The narrative demonstrates how Page does not see herself outside the problems of the house, as though they were a necessary distraction from what is going on in her body, in this intimate contact between herself and Brazil. What we witness is the narrator's frustration in the face of the problems in the residence and the ongoing fixing and readjusting, as though the house, with its concrete problems and solutions, were a necessary diversion from her own transformation. The challenges of the house create an embodied condition and this ongoing constraint makes her feel "imprisoned," under "house arrest," (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15) as though tied to her own body, forcefully. It is a physical sensation, which is also affected by the amount of responsibilities she has regarding the very house she cannot leave.

It is a cumulative feeling, as though the fact that there are a lot of broken and damaged materials in the house consisted in her own feelings about her body. The sense of mounting frustration is clear, and it consumes much of her life in Brazil. Her duties, she describes, are firing and hiring. She writes:

They come and go, an itinerant population, moving beautifully and dreamily through my house, my life, often leaving chaos behind them. One black-skinned boy we employed as a cleaner was so affected by my difficulties with Portuguese that he became totally mute – able only to point and gesticulate. The first day that he actually *did* understand something I said, he underwent a vocal catharsis – releasing a great flood of mellifluous speech. This was accompanied by a kind of ballet in which he mimed – of all things – his love for the Canadian flag! He hung his duster from the top of a closed patio parasol, then saluted it with immense gravity. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 16)

Despite her ordinary daily life, of hiring and firing, Page experiences strong interactions with the locals, as portrayed by the writer in this passage. This description explores the embodied feelings of another being, and how these affect her. The fact that the young Brazilian becomes mute in front of her difficulties with Portuguese reaffirms the primacy of the body in intimate exchanges and how it reacts to communicative struggles. He becomes fully expressive when he does understand something she says, and that, she narrates, provokes an immediate reaction, embodied through a flood of “mellifluous speech.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 16) It creates an entire scene, and one can feel his apprehension by the manner Page embodies the character and her own being in face of this exchange.

It is an important moment in the narrative when compared to other features in the *Journal*: we notice the importance of the body in her writing, and how it constitutes the core of her experience of Brazil. When she associates the events of the previous passage to her own being, however, she describes them “beautifully and dreamily,” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 16) as though not being able to disassociate herself from the ideal of harmony and perfect shapes; orderly, as though these moments weren’t extraordinary for the efforts of language, but

rather, a given, something that she herself was experiencing yet felt constrained by their emotional impact.

The fact that someone was able to have an embodied reaction to her imperfections of language doesn't seem to resonate with her as a response to her own struggle as an embodied being, which might have affected the other who was in contact with her. She does report the occurrence yet does not reflect back on herself, or how this very impossibility of speaking and interacting is in itself a learning experience of negotiating the body and the words that we produce in a different and challenging realm. The body is a thought and events are perceived by Page, words describe her sensation, but the relationship between the bodies remains separate, delicate, beautiful and dreamy, not chaotic or unpredictable.

The effort of the employee to communicate demonstrates how linguistic challenges are part of Page's life in Brazil, yet remain off the page. Others notice her struggle, and they make an effort to communicate with her. She reacts to these encounters with astonishment and admires other people's efforts to speak and express themselves; exactly what she, herself, is having trouble doing. What occurs, instead, are unemotional moments on her part, like the one she describes in the following passage, between the second cleaner, Andre, a Russian, and herself. She writes: "Yesterday, when he arrived for duty, he rushed at me and kissed my hand! Today he is getting about his business. He and Guillermo working together are a comic act." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 16)

Page remains a passive receiver of constant emotional responses from the staff in the house, which she constantly complains about and worries over. In the meantime the workers seem to be enjoying life, discovering her presence, trying to interact with her. All she reports in

exchange are surprising responses, as though liking another human were an unthinkable condition, as though everything became an irony to be analyzed rather than actually felt, and reciprocated. She observes every sentimental expression through a comical stance, she uses irony to distance herself from the situations, in a common defensive argumentation before an emotional situation, perhaps because she is unable to react naturally or differently, perhaps because the behaviour of the employees does appear out of place and too instinctual to her.

In any case, this laughing matter becomes a challenge of interaction, and probably triggers the staff's behaviour even more, since they don't let her go, as though forcing a reaction, somehow uniting her to the house and these characters, even if unconsciously. What one can infer from the passages she describes in the *Journal* is that she cannot control the behaviour of others in the house and deals with them in writing, embodying them without the self-knowledge of her own disembodiment, which is evident on the page. This immediacy of feeling, I argue, was her biggest obstacle while living in Brazil. Most of her attempts to make emotional progress in herself come masked by the continuous repairs in the house, whereby she feels something but does not reflect upon her internal changes. As she explains, in the following passage: "So we continue our one step forward, two steps back. Lavatories, record-player, telephones *não trabalham* – don't work yet. But is it all lovely and, praise be, we have had a reprieve from the heat." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 16) It becomes, instead, a challenge filled by machines that no longer work. Consequently, she is constantly frustrated, sorry, questioning herself, acknowledging her inability to know the right way to conduct or behave in this scenario. She writes:

What a terrible fate to have no interior interest or conversation other than with servants.

For the time being it seems to be mine – although I have made a solemn vow not to talk



about them unless asking for specific advice. But it is exactly like having a house full of monkeys. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 17)

The anger and the dismissal of the employees as a bunch of “monkeys” demonstrates Page’s unconsciously colonial attitude in this situation, as though she were the master, trapped in this world of ordinary emotions, of simplicity, that she refuses to accept. She wants her order back, she wants the functioning of the house in control, she cannot be the hostage of her own embodied feelings, let alone have exchanges with other fellow beings. It appears as though being in a house surrounded by employees was a fate she could no longer stand, as though it posed a threat to her well-being, as though speaking with them again were a forceful act, as though the embodied exchange were not to be experienced or enjoyed. She is alone in this house, and the animal and instinctual qualities of others’ behaviours annoy and destroy Page’s ability to perceive and explore the realm fantasized in regards to perceptive occurrences. All she knows is that she cannot avoid others in Brazil; unfortunately it becomes her own fate in the country, and that appears to challenge her existence at this moment. She feels observed, and somewhat constrained by the very employees that she dismisses as funny and comical. She explains:

Maria, the Spanish girl who now looks after the upstairs, has been told, every day since we arrived, to do my room as soon as I am out of it, so that I can get back to my desk. Yes, she understands, finish it first. But she is there all day. Short of locking my door, I cannot keep her out. She returns like smoke. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 17)

Page is not pleased with the way people, or more specifically, her employees, behave in Brazil. She cannot describe them except in the way they execute their duties, and in this case the maid becomes smoke, as though she were some unavoidable air Page had to breathe. She has no

privacy, and she has no sense of personal space in the house. There is only the sensation of others around her, surrounding her life. It is an enclosed sensation, which makes it difficult to perceive other possible realms. Page is constantly thinking of her language in relation to her body as a thought, as if she needed to be alone and separated from Brazil and Brazilians, as though feeling the company of another being were a constant nuisance.

The resistance to the physical and sensuous articulations on literary texts is an important reference in the work of Elaine Scarry, which helps us understand part of the challenges encountered in the interaction between physical bodies and their sensorial qualities in the works of P. K. Page. In her book *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Scarry elaborates “on the challenge of expressing physical pain in writing and the perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty, pointing out the nature of this verbal expressibility or human creation.” (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 1985: 3) Usually, she argues, “when one hears about another person’s physical pain, the events happening within the interior of that person’s body may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth.” (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 1985: 3)

“Pain resists language, and contemporary philosophers,” Scarry explains, have argued that “our interior states of consciousness are regularly accompanied by objects in the external world, that we do not simply “have feelings” but have feelings *for* somebody or something, that love is love of *x*, fear is fear of *y*, ambivalence is ambivalence of *z*.” (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 1985: 5) Similarly, this is what happens to P. K. Page in her descriptions in *Brazilian Journal*, where she is frustrated with the employees but not only frustrated. She is also in conflict with this place that she inhabits and that never seems to find its own balance. The sheer abundance of

Brazil drives her to silence. She sometimes draws, and finds distraction in that experience. Also, she continues painting Brazil in her annotations, which, despite her frustration, is filled with notes on flora and fauna. She writes:

Notes on fauna: yesterday, flying over the lotus pool, dragonflies of bright cerise with blue wings. A friend once said that cerise was hideous and not a true colour. When I asked what she meant by “true” she said it was not found in nature. She had certainly not observed nature in the tropics, where bougainvillea and dragonflies deck themselves with it. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 18)

Once again it is the aesthetic qualities of the natural world that resonate in her writings, the quality that distinguishes the wings of the dragonflies, the colour; it becomes a whole subject for Page. The discussion almost becomes a philosophical one; Page and her friend discussing whether the colour cerise could be found in nature, and this experience, suggest that the reality of the tropics was the proof of their existence.

It is this encounter, the mystery of it, that Page takes for granted, even though she acknowledges it with aesthetic observations. Scarry argues that:

...physical pain has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language. It, instead, begins to approach the realm of physical pain, and pain is transformed into an objectified state. A great deal of effort is done, then, to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate this area of experience normally so inaccessible to language. (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 1985: 5-6)

What often occurs, she says, particularly in literary texts, is that physical pain is usually associated with psychological suffering. There is not, per se, physical pain in the narrative of *Brazilian Journal*. On the other hand, there is a type of psychological, perhaps even philosophical, pain that Page explores in this passage. She writes:

Curiously, I speak of the house as public, at the same time I wonder about its “emptiness.” For it *is* empty, psychologically. Built for de Braga, reported to be a cousin of the King of Portugal, on a dramatic site, with imported marble for the floors, imported artists to paint the ceilings, it is architecturally beautiful. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 18)

Despite the aesthetic observation, Page still feels as if it were empty and it produces a type of psychological pain, or emptiness. Yet does she feel the emptiness? Or is it a visual observation? She fills this emptiness with historical facts, and adds ghosts to the house:

Here in this *palacete*, set in a jewelled garden, de Braga lived with his beautiful wife until one day she was missing, then found dead. Sometimes Maria, eyes large, says, “The *senhora* walks tonight, Madammy.” And occasionally, when I’ve been wakened by the heat and unable to sleep again because of the drums from the *favela* or the frogs or the tree-toads, I wonder if the *senhora* does walk. But I have never felt her presence. If anything, it is her absence that I feel – a sense of having walked out, taking the essence of the house with her. And it is this emptiness that the walls guards, as if it were a trust. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 19)

Page is captivated by the history that surrounds the house, as though the memories of previous tenants took hold of her and became part of her own being, even if through a

supernatural condition. It is striking that Page can connect with historical data but not with the living employees who surround her in her own time. It is the absence of time, of existence, of death, that seems to attract her. As though that character, in her time, with her own life, knew what to expect from the house. It is a matter of presences and absences, Page writes, of reconnecting to someone who is only there through memories. She wakes up and feels the house, this world, the heat, the frogs, the drums in the *favela*; yet she reconnects with a disembodied being, a dead person, who has walked out of the house but is no longer here, as though acknowledging states of mind such as absence and emptiness could only occur through supernatural beings, both of which she believes are part of the house's treasures. Therefore, the house Page inhabits in Brazil becomes the source for her creative ideas and perceptions of the world, rather than her own body. She enjoys making notes about it, and the next passage demonstrates her enthusiasm towards the magnetism and the dynamics of this tropical world. She writes:

Fauna continues to be interesting. Tonight a small lizard, five inches from nose-tip to tail-tip, scurried about importantly with a green leafed insect in its jaws. The lizard was naked and pale as a plucked chicken. Yesterday, out of our jungle, walked an altogether different fellow – a lizard too, but two to three feet long, black and green, with a head so shiny it looked armoured, and perhaps was. Large insects shaped and coloured to resemble leaves – flat and brilliant green – join us after dinner. And the other morning a long, pale green slug – three inches of suction – clung to the wall over the chesterfield. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 19)

The difficulty of addressing issues of beauty, of the natural, of the unpredictable, of life, in writing is clear in this passage. Even though one gets the sense of easiness and magic from it,

the insects and reptiles, all from a place that is “our jungle” appear and disappear, as though from a surrealist realm, yet Page cannot address how she feels, only what she sees, and the diversity she witness. The appearance of the lizard in this passage reinforces a certain type of interaction with the environment that is mostly cinematic, and how she watches this spectacle from a distance. She does not belong to the jungle, along with the large insects that, in their appearance, resemble leaves and somewhat enchant her eyes. This interconnection between non-human and human elements is something that Page attempts to construct aesthetically in her writing.

When Page writes about the act of writing, she is always negotiating this characteristic present in the craft. The fear of addressing the body is in itself a challenge that would take her to question whether it is possible to embody certain feelings, rather than understanding why she stopped writing when in Brazil. The matter of interacting with language is not an easy one to address, particularly when it is a foreign language and she has the experience of living in one, as she did in Brazil. She says that there are changes in the personality that accompany it. She explains that one feels like a doll, or a toy, then a child.

The same, one could argue, can be applied to the craft of embodiment, which, I argue, makes the whole idea of language possible, no matter where one resides. Embodiment, then, would become the means for change, for understanding one’s subjectivity and overcome these terms, identity and personality, which would lose impact, since language would find its place, evolving into expressive means. One’s means to articulate the body implies, in my view, turning the body into matter, rather a simple thought or a conceptual idea. It is a process often taken for granted, and which consists in slowing down our understanding of the world, not taking the senses for granted. In Page’s view, though, the way one deals with the opposite spectrum, where

wordlessness could lead, is through insight, shock, and astounding sudden barriers. (Page, “Questions and Images,” in *The Filled Pen*, 2007: 36)

In other words, the lack of writing or embodiment would lead to a deeper reflection of this very state of mind, even if it did not necessarily mean embodying them. Brazil forces Page to deal with these spaces, even if by denying them through a refusal of the very embodiment and the real feelings that beg to be symbolized. Language enters her *Journal* in several ways, she attempts to describe the culture in detail, observing and experiencing it as an outsider, sometimes a master, someone who is always curious about the meaning of national behaviour, community, and nation, but is also in control of that knowledge, commenting on it constantly. As, for example, with the *Carnaval*, which Page engages in the following passage:

All of Rio is sleeping off the orgy of Carnaval. Nothing now but hangovers and fatigue – hospitals and prisons bulging. For the rich there was a series of balls, all fancy dress – a ball a night, we are told. The Municipal Ball had a mere 7,400 attend! Many thousands of *cruzeiros* are spent on costumes and the dancing goes on all night. For the poor in the *favelas*, this is the event of the year. Months in advance they join “samba schools” and practice night after night. Just what they practice I am not sure, because their “dances” to the samba beat are a kind of mass walk, arms in the air. Each school has its own group attire – one group of about forty were all in diapers and bonnets, and sucking bottles. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 19)

Page doesn't seem to attend to any of these local, cultural events, as though they were a community interaction and expression of nationality that she did not share. She uses data, and qualified information about the events, to digress on her incongruity in relation to the event. She

doesn't have a subjective view on the event, except by the end of the passage, when Page criticizes the dance and the practice of carnival, which she sees as a mass walk, as an expression, perhaps, of joy, which she cannot feel. It is a very direct, detached, and somewhat incongruous feeling one can sense from this passage.

Overall, this is how Page learns about Brazil, through her own preconceived and perhaps prejudicial view in regards to life, and how her feelings relate to living in general. That is how she evaluates her Brazil, never questioning that, perhaps, her own beliefs might come from a judgmental, defensive and uncertain place. Nevertheless, she seems to enjoy the exercise of naming Brazil, for as she goes on living in the country, everything seems to catch her attention, from the jungle to the urban events. The previous passage expands on the meaning of Carnaval, which, for Page, is translated as a cultural enigma, as though she couldn't share the humanity or the feelings involved in its practice, where people dance every night prior to the event. She writes about how everyone virtually dresses up for it, carrying "the golden spray bottle of scented 'ether' which is said to provide the energy to keep going." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 20) She writes on people's behaviour in a way that addresses her perception of that world, as we see in the following passage:

Below, one of the most extraordinary sights I have ever seen: a wide river of people samba-ing up and down the Avenida Rio Branco, thousands of them moving in such a way that if you half-closed your eyes you lost entirely the sense of them being people at all. A great illuminated multicoloured pattern, pulsing to the beat of the samba. As far as we could see, there was nothing but people – the tropical night sitting fat and black on herds of zebras, families of leopards, tiny ballerinas no longer on their points, and other enthusiasts who had done nothing more than sprinkle talcum powder on their heads. One



indefatigable equilibrist whom we had seen in the afternoon, standing on a narrow sloping ledge and knitting a red woollen garment with frantic speed was still there three hours later, knitting with the same frenzy. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 20)

Page's experience is more mundane, more down to earth, and she actually places herself in the scene, as it was one of the most extraordinary events she has ever seen. We don't know what the scene provokes in her, once again an inability to translate the emotions conveyed from the "river of people," "moving together." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 20) The intensity of the passage is in the carefully constructed scenes Page elaborates, proving her talent for reproducing images in a very crafted manner. However, the lack of the passage stays in her absence of the scene witnessed, as though all those people, pulsing to the beat of the samba, didn't bring her insights into her feelings. Instead, the event recreated by her directs our attention to the unreality of the moment, with the form and shape of the episode, the power it might have in the first place.

It is a deep experience, and the reader feels what Page doesn't say. Nevertheless, her embodiment is essential since it implies a stronger subjectivity and personal emotions to the writing, allowing the reader to identify or compare.

Her phenomenological world lacks body, lacks representation of the physical body, as Scarry critiques in her book. Page is not able to make this transition; if at all, only through drawing. Yet it is through this exercise of denial and allusion to sensation felt in the body that Page elaborates the country in *Brazilian Journal*, in an act of reflection, on meditation, on all things Brazilian. She is always surprised and gratified by this world, despite the everyday obstacles and the fear of the embodied other. She writes:

Nature notes for the day: after one of the worst days domestically I have ever been through, I went out to get flowers for the dinner table and something moved in the high branches of the trees. I promised to forgive the whole day if it was a monkey. And it was! But the wretched little thing swung away from me into the jungle. It was small, only slightly larger than a squirrel. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 20)

What appears to be another nuisance in her day reveals itself as an unexpected visitor. This passage demonstrates how Page is curious, and always hopeful to experience new events in her daily life in Brazil, and to be surprised by the country. The perception of the world around her is always her primary interest, and what she witnesses is what matters and regulates her emotions. In this case, there is surprise, and the need for a closer contact, as one can infer from the passage. She is blessed by a natural event that makes her forget the domestic nuisances, as though this house had two different worlds: the natural and magical, and the urban and complex. In the following passage from *Brazilian Journal* we see more of the same:

Trees: in the garden there are varieties of what the Australians would call rain-trees – with composite, finely fretted leaves, and clusters of flowers, pink, red, white or yellow. There are numerous palms: one with a pointed, bladelike leaf and a massive tower of white blossoms; one like a feather duster, which throws its old leaves down – feathers shed from a giant bird. We have the elephant-ear tree, of which no more need be said, and one that grows smooth and straight as a young telephone pole, no branch below twelve feet. Then there is the dense and darkly massed foliage of the jack-fruit tree, and a spreading tree with large, deeply indented leaves and green fruits which look like mangoes. Feathery stands of susurrant bamboo. And both nearby and, as it were, echoing off into the jungle-clad hills, the *quaresmas* (the name means Lent, which is the season

when they flower, blooming now with vibrant purple. And beside them, trees of pure silver, broad-leafed, and others with small clusters of flowers as yellow as gorse. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 21)

Beyond the diverse and detailed description of the natural world, through details that stretch from colour and shape, to the dimension of the trees and the vegetation, one does not know how Page feels to experience all these trees, alive, full of presence, in her life. It is a well written and carefully thought out narrative, yet one wonders what Page wants from it, what can the reader draw from it beside the diversity of colours?

The long passage demonstrates how varied this world turns out to be, and how Page is impressed by its heterogeneity. The growth and magnificence of the trees enchant the writer, who likes to accentuate the green foliage and the density and profundity of each type of vegetation. It is a report on the complexity of this world. Sensation does not stand in the place of experience; the pure impression of this perceptual experience is unachievable, but suggested just as it is avoided.

Page tries to disentangle the world of trees by discovering their properties, by signifying their colour, by weighing their appearance, and by creating a perceptual field for the trees without embodying her own sensation by bringing life to the materiality of the vegetation. The connection, the missing link between the two realities, remains missing. In trying to understand P. K. Page's writing from the challenge of embodiment, I attempted to introduce and demonstrate her inability to overcome the unknown path that this very practice implies, since her feelings in Brazil tend to resist representation.

For Page, her two-dimensional being lives on a sheet of paper, and it has length and breadth but very little body thickness. She is always attentive to a description that will better convey certain objects, but not her own body. This is where I try to bring Page's writing into the spotlight, to demonstrate how she deals with perception, but overlooks the body, its emotion, and its discovery through the insertion of language.

The way Page deals with the sensation is the same as the way she questions her practice as an artist: aesthetically and detached from the raw world of emotions. Instead, the world is there for her to describe. In the case of *Brazilian Journal*, the annotations become a register of her activities, of how she sees but not how she feels. Thus she translates light, and fleshes it out with the experiences of those years lived in Brazil.

The novelty of the experience is empirical, since each day she seems to become a master of her own emotions in this unpredictable world. Perhaps that is why it is so difficult to trace the sensuality and its qualities in the work of Page. This section contains my attempt to introduce the subject and begin to point out the reasons why Brazil, in its physicality and sensuality, appears so impossible to render, either because of a resistance to representation, or due to an absence of verbal articulations that take feelings and their immediacy into consideration.

Despite the lack that the embodied world might produce in her writing, it is her curiosity for all things of the body, and her quest for articulating it, which makes her writing a pleasure to read and imagine. The passages are so well pointed and developed, that one undergoes the sensation of being within a process of transformation, where images are developed and demonstrated by the writer's capacity to filter light into represented images. Her works points to

the place where her body would meet the world, but she translates this into light. The body disappears into the play of light and shadow.

## Chapter 2: Exchanges Between a Disembodied Narrator and the Quotidian of Brazil

In the previous section, I discussed how Brazil enters P. K. Page's world and her relationship with her own human body, and how this encounter with the physical and natural realm is characterized by visual illustration. Her effort to describe Brazil becomes a cultural and intellectual endeavour, as though Page's struggle was transformed into a search for a knowledge that would give her safety in this house and in this environment, safeguarding her experience in the country.

Her life among the employees is mixed with displeasure and indifference, while she seems to enjoy describing her separateness in relationship to them. Her perceptual capacity does not include touching, but rather depicting the scenarios as though they were an aesthetic piece of art, as if the here and now were to be revealed through ordinary order, rather than more sensuous awareness. It is this disconnection between an embodied language that connects one's flesh with that of the world lived and the thought of this in action which distresses Page's writing in the country. She chooses then to draw.

Corporeality and movement are two of the most important themes of *Brazilian Journal*, since it is with her body that Page seems to experience the country in the first place, even though she does not embrace that experience. Most of the first scenes and annotations negate this notion, as though she participated in the scenes only with her artistic, philosophical and intellectual attitude or point of view. In a section titled *Foretaste*, we read about a body lying in bed, nothing else moves in the room but the heat. The other person in the room is Arthur, who seems to be able to focus on his work, while Page surrenders to the daily activities, pressing a dress, and resting, listening to the new noises in the room.

Even though the body is lying on the bed, as though to allude to a certain intimacy, it does not seem to react when her husband announces “we’re posted to Brazil.” Does it sound exciting? No, “give it to someone else,” she briskly says. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 1) Page has preconceived ideas about the tropics, prejudices that accumulate and become obvious as one follows her depiction of her Brazilian experience.

Page’s need to express everything in terms of her rational mind leads to the hiding of the physical body, as though its perception had a limit and an order. In this case, the narrator is disembodied and challenged by the liveliness of Brazil; it traverses moments where it stands as a separate entity that observes and represents.

What threatens Page’s discourse but doesn’t quite make her change her narrative throughout the book, I notice, is usually the relationship between one’s skin and the surrounding world, as though she knows about the captured feelings of each lived moment in the country, yet acknowledges it by disembodiment through sayings that reinforce how difficult it is to embody feelings into language.

A good example is found in the passage that follows: “There is a flavour in Brazil I have not yet touched on – let alone come to terms with it! It might be called drama. Newspapers report libellous stories, seemingly with no fear of charges being laid. Police officials are accused of corruption and perjury, and a note of despairing mockery is directed at persons in authority.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 21)

Page is aware that Brazil has a flavour, yet she admits she does not know how to represent it. She questions and imagines how one could interpret its sense of drama, which she understands as part of the Brazilian’s constitution. Drama is on the newspaper pages, yet the

descriptions are not enough to recreate the experience of this world. At the same time, she doesn't explore deeper what this flavour could be outside drama, and how that resonates in her. Page is a disembodied narrator, without answers about her own emotions in reference to the lack of language that expresses her. The next passage touches upon the same theme, a search for the meaning of drama as an embodied word, which is part of the culture and the people's expression in Brazil. She writes:

There has been another type of story in the papers lately, too – about falling skyscrapers. According to one report, a ten-storey office building collapsed in a mass of rubble six hours after an engineering professor from the University of Rio inspected it and professed his certain belief that, despite its fissures and cracks, the building was completely safe. His assurances, however, meant little to the occupants – all but five who vacated at once. Since then various other buildings have come tumbling down, and some hopeful is predicting the downfall of twenty-three more! When I spoke to a Brazilian lawyer about this he said, “Why do you expect a beautiful thing to last? Do you ask a flower to live forever?” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 22)

The previous scenario could be described as dramatic and fantastic, according to Page's description of drama in Brazil. Yet, when one reads the passage carefully, the excerpt has more to do with greed and corruption than anything else. It is sarcastically depicted, with a touch of irony, yet it is not simply dramatic. The fact that it engages in a sense of drama, making it more unrealistic if it were not supposedly true, is what increases the theatrical qualities of it. Page describes the absurdity of the incident, and the resolution of the problem of falling skyscrapers



from the point of view of a lawyer. One does not know how Page feels in these moments besides a sense of awe, which can be inferred, since it is not expressed.

The same passage demonstrates how Page tries, through different sources, to find meaning for the drama inherent in this reality. The assurance of the engineering professor, who guarantees that the buildings are safe, is an example of the challenge within the dramatic language of Brazil, which she must learn to decipher, even if it does not resonate in her. She is still disembodied, producing passages that are outside and separated from her own being. Page admits not enjoying talking about herself, being more interested in immersing herself in Brazilian culture, even if that means not addressing the impact that the culture has on her:

Shortly after our arrival, I was interviewed by a young Brazilian reporter who is also a writer of short stories. I am not much good as an interviewee, I fear – due partly to inexperience, I suppose, but mainly to the fact that I am much more interested in learning about Brazil than in talking about myself. However, at pen-point I did manage to tell him that I had worked as a scriptwriter for the National Film Board, where A. had been Film Commissioner after years of being editor of *Maclean's*, and that I have published poetry and short stories. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 23)

Page confirms her reluctance to talk about herself, which reinforces her interest in Brazil and what it represents for her outside her embodied experience. The conversation includes her life in Canada, as she tries, even if shyly, to conceptualize herself as she is interviewed. Page reinforces her eagerness for new learning experiences, and her description of life in Brazil points out how the country is a source of inspiration for her ideas, rather than feelings. Ever since her

arrival in Brazil she writes her thoughts, and the place enables her mind to explore this intellectual aspect of creativity to be manifested, as the following passage shows:

Over a *cafezinho*, he told me that in Brazil national's anthem there are words to the effect that the "giant is resting." "Once," he said – indignant and nostalgic both – "there were Brazilian heroes. Now, they are resting." And I saw famous generals resting on their swords, explorers resting mid-landscape, politicians resting in Congress – and all in that position of upright rest so noticeable here: solitary figures quite simply leaning on air, as if propped by it. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 23)

Page is unable, in this passage, to elaborate further what the journalist says about the Brazilian anthem, its lack of heroes, and the depreciation of nationality in a general sense. The passage becomes a play on words, rather than an exploration of how these words affect her feelings and what these symbols portray. What Page can see and echoes in this section, is a mental image of a Latin American ideal, of a series of "generals resting on their swords," (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 23) losing their battles, bureaucratically arrested in their own sense of power.

In sum, discussing the Brazilian national anthem creates for Page a fabulous image of the country: "famous generals resting on their swords, explorers resting mid-landscape, politicians resting in Congress." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 23) These conceptions only reinforce Page's consciousness regarding Brazil as a disembodied entity, as though she were trying to conceptualize Brazil through historical symbols. She focuses on pictorial or sculptural representations to capture her sense of the country.

The narrative is very descriptive, overall, in the book. She writes about how her departure from Canada takes place on a “bright, sub-zero morning, in snow-packed streets, with friends in attendance, serving as an audience.” She writes in *Brazilian Journal* about the exaggerated garments to block the cold, the hidden bodies. “We seem to be inhabiting a Russian novel,” she says. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 3) Despite all the preparatory effort of shopping for Portuguese language instruction records and books, she still is unable to picture anything of her life ahead, displacing its experience to preconceived ideas of the tropics. At the same time, even though she doesn’t explore this feeling personally, with subjectivity, she does know that all that “she thought she knew began to recede”, as though a new life, devoid of form or pretence, were to be expected. “Did she fear going to Brazil?” No, she says. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 2)

She had doubts, especially with regards to the language. But what exactly were the doubts? How did they develop during the journey? She never returns to these questions. And there was the issue of the residence, another entity that occupied her consciousness in the first hours of her journey to Brazil. Beauty, wealth, luxurious interior decorations, a large staff, and a fashion-obsessed culture seemed to be what Page considered mentally, before departing for the country. It is difficult to try to find out what Page truly feels during her stay in the country, since she seems to avoid questioning or even considering a sense of despair during the narrative. At the end of the book, the experience of the country has to do with the fact that language is unable to describe it all.

Page appreciates historical notes. While she informs readers about the actual conditions of inhabiting this particular space, her narrative struggles to locate meaning in the telling of this particular story, about this foreign place, since she never reflects on how these images resonate

in her. It is a battle which recalls the difficulties that Elaine Scarry faces in the resistance of representation in verbal articulations. One salient aspect of Page's narrative is that she is not able to move successfully between having a body and experiencing the environment, to being disembodied and possessing a narrative voice that is informative but also inclusive, participant.

Page delivers a performance that, while it still allows for an appreciation of the environment she experiences and describes, is filled with absent spaces which allude to the difficulties of representing the body in language. She writes:

Went, for a treat, to the Museum of Modern Art – one room only! – and found, to our disappointment, a show of European non-objective painters. Disappointing because of our hunger for knowledge of Brazil. There is a new building under way which should be completed while we are here. Maybe then we shall see. All was not lost, however, as we bought a book on Portinari, probably the most famous Brazilian painter, containing good reproductions. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 23)

At first, one can suggest that her hunger for Brazil is a physical desire to incorporate the country within her own mental experience. In this passage, Page explains how her knowledge of Brazil, initially, came from cultural expositions and events not without some type of disappointment. Here, she describes her surprise visit to the Museum of Modern Art, which turned out to be one room only and her subsequent frustration at not finding as much as she expected. Page enjoys to observe what others have or have not, how they behave, and to inhabit “a body of land struggling to emerge from an infinite surround of ocean.” (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 5) It is a contingency of sorts as defined by Michel Serres, a writer

who is critical of narratives that lack the embodiment of the senses and fear the presence of contact, since skin considered by him the sixth sense:

Contingence veut dire tangence commune: monde et corps se coupent en elle, en elle se caressent. Je n'aime pas dire milieu pour le lieu où mon corps habite, je préfère dire que les choses se mêlent entre elles et que je ne fais pas exception à cela, je me mélange au monde qui se mélange à moi. La peau intervient entre plusieurs choses du monde et les fait se mêler.<sup>5</sup>

This embodiment, which consists of seeing the world and the skin as one possibility, as a caress and a watchful sentiment that is always in question, is a way of challenging P. K. Page's world of poetry or fiction as idealized and intellectual. Even if she tries to evoke this mingling between the reader's skin and the writer's through concepts, it lacks the physicality to enable the reader to engage with a humanity that attempts to address this synesthetic world or its materialization in word. It is an effort for words to elicit physical sensations, where the skin is the ultimate and common border between one's body and the written world, or according to Serres, a necessary effort for the acquisition of knowledge or a threading together of tissues.

P. K. Page's poem "The Dreamer," from a collection of her poems entitled *The Hidden Room: Collected Poems, Volume I*, is an important example to demonstrate how the poet's mind is always in control of one's hand, and how the character's feelings are interpreted before they are felt, making the transition into an embodied body an impossible yet ongoing act. In this

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<sup>5</sup> "Contingency means mutual tangency: in it the world and the body intersect and caress each other. I do not wish to call the place in which I live a medium, I prefer to say that things mingle with each other and that I am no exception to that, I mix with the world which mixes with me. Skin intervenes between several things in the world and makes them mingle." (Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, 2008: 80) Also, see Michel Serres in *Les Cinq Sens. Les cinq sens / Michel Serres*. Paris: Grasset, 1985, 82.

example, she narrates the story of a dreamer and his stage, his interaction with the stage and the chair, the surroundings. She writes:

The dreamer walks like a conjurer onto the stage,

He promises a formula,

Sleight of hand

Silvers the air and the band

Sounds like a piper band —

Different and sharp and near. (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 94)

In this excerpt, Page does not offer a contingency or interaction between bodies but instead a contact between the dreamer and stage that happens at once, as though time were a magical construct, with no ambiguity, or uncertain notion of space. There are no uncertainties; there is only a masterful hand with a disembodied knowledge. She adds:

Nothing is hard but the present chair —

The tricks

Click and snap and float like ballons and fill

Nebulous eyes with colour

While the band

Plays in the pit of the inner and outer ear. (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 94)

It is supposed to be a dreamer's reality, where nothing is embodied, except, in this excerpt, the said chair, which gains consistency by being hard. Yet in this section, one can observe how Page flees from finding a body with her characters and their sentiments, into sounds and abstract ideas: "click and snap and float." (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 94) At the same time, there is the realization of a mental space that is populated by new words and music and how they can, somehow, suggest this abstract interplay between the reality of body and matter, a chair and its hardness. It is a vain attempt, where one disassociates from the body of the dreamer and its reality on stage as the narrative continues. "The Dreamer" ends with the actor in question, the dreamer, being exposed to his extreme form, which is thin as a string:

Strip him, audience,

Turn out his pockets, tear

His crazy clothes from his back

While the band continues

Fainter now in a tent of paper streamers.

Expose his tricks

And the muscles of his hands

And see him, pink and blue as litmus paper,

Clutching at cardboard or a piece of string. (Page, *The Hidden Room*, 1997: 94)

The insistence in comparing the dreamer to a litmus paper creates a surrealist realm that perhaps suggests a feeling of presence. But "presence" here is not as a human body; rather, the

dreamer is transformed into paper. Page wants to see the body there, but only sees paper. The relationship between the audience and the dreamer is not at all clear, and one does not know how to find this dreamer sympathetic except by what Page says of him. Hers is the orchestrating voice, which somehow limits and controls our access to her notion of a dreamer. It is a difficult narrative to explore, since one cannot get away from her metaphors and suggestions regarding his position on the stage and what he is doing there in the first place. In this excerpt, Page stresses that what occurs in this dynamic of being a dreamer, with stage and audience, is merely constructed to allude to an intrinsic quality of being, the poet's.

Matters of the world are often constructed ideals in Page's works, contrived scenarios where an intrinsic world of connections are conjured: Page very rarely addresses the alienness that she suggests when describing separate beings from the gardens, from the landscape, from the cities she visits. In Page's reading of the world, a sense of separation is never addressed as part of this world but replaced by an outside source, which can be traced from a single point that reveals itself, completed, recreated by the poet in her conceptualized images. This illusion or totality does not necessarily explain its meaning. In a poem titled "From Uncertain Ground," in *The Hidden Room: Collected Poems, Volume I*, Page writes:

And though all this was nowhere there were planes

Above that flew upon a course

And drew our eyes to them;

Some, swooping low, sailed over our flat faces

And gave us sound, like a present;



In some we saw the daring pilots' profiles

Different from ours.

It was a tense and visionary moment when they came

For those of us who did not sleep or run

Back to the womb. (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 36)

Page elaborates on several issues here, yet one that is important to address is the return to the womb, and how all the other elements revolve around this ideal, this union. In this poem, one perceives how Page's world is always searching for this "visionary" place or "moment" which will allow us to see better, to comprehend better. And the discovery of this world, the first vision of the sky and space, in this poem, demonstrates P. K. Page's insistence on finding unity and separating from the decay of the body, the ongoing feelings that work within: the origins and the womb. In the poem "From Uncertain Ground," we get closer to the unknown through abstract conditions that are supposed reflect an ideal place where music and sounds will bring us a vision of certainty. Page writes, in the second stanza:

Lately they must have found a shorter route

From where they started from to where they went

And now the skies are a disappointment, more

Endless and open like ourselves. But one

Among us thought the problem out,

Declares we are to follow; from above

The certainty of east and west will come. (Page, *The Hidden Room*, 1997: 36)

Page once again sees a solution for the problem of life, as though there were ways out of suffering which could be thought rather than felt. The main characters in her poems often know what to do, and if they don't, they are rescued by an ideal world, which is given, rather than struggled for and experienced. In the poem "From Uncertain Ground," one gets the impression that the world has a predictability that is able to be understood through thought and history, the possibility of interpretation beforehand. In the last and final stanza Page seems to suggest that the answer, or alleviation, for this feeling of loneliness, must exist in the interaction between you and the other. Yet when she writes about this touching and feeling, it only happens in a future action, to occur outside the page, as though the knowledge were the goal of this experience, rather than the feeling. On the other hand, her knowledge allows her to question her own feelings, even if she doesn't know how to articulate them. She writes, in the third stanza of the same poem:

Two figures beautifully entwined,

Who withdrew as we approached

And left us behind.

But now,

The knowledge imminent, we must

Stand close and touch each other,

Lean upon

Each other's shoulders gently. (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 37)

It is easy to notice how this unity and union, of being “firmly as one,” is a pattern that never gets completed, since it remains in the impossibility, in the reality that never gets revealed, since it is often presented as an idealized fantasy evident in many of her works. “Knowledge is imminent,” (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 37) and her ability to identify the absence of it — often associated with the understanding of the very meaning of origin and its subsequent emptiness — only reinforces how embodiment is in her search. Yet it is lacking, since that one thinks in order to feel. In this poem, the connection of bodies which asks for subjectivity never occurs or is felt by the reader. In an essay titled “Question and Images,” from *The Filled Pen*, she explains, with regard to why she stopped writing in Brazil:

Why did you stop writing? I didn't. It stopped.” “Nonsense, you're the master.” “Am I?” Who would not, after all, be a poet, a good poet, if one could choose? If one could choose. Most of one's life one has the illusion of choice. And when that is removed, when clearly one cannot choose . . . Blank page after blank page. The thing I feared most of all had happened at last. This time I never *would* write again. But by some combination of factors — coincidence, serendipity — the pen that had written was now, most surprisingly, drawing. (Why did you start drawing? “I didn't. It started.” “But why start something you know nothing about and chuck up all the techniques and skills...?”) Why, indeed, why? (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 36)

Page talks about herself, pondering her experience of not being able to write, about how that feels. At the same time, through this passage one hears Page say that poetry and writing are uncontrollable mediums, which she cannot master, and that happens also with life. Wouldn't this

unexplained event, which leads Page to abandon writing and to switch to drawing, have something to do with her own body, as an embodied entity, and how she relates to the country as a human being? Wouldn't her incapacity to express herself or even feel Brazil have something to do with her sudden halt in writing? She never seems to think of herself beyond a conceptual body, or question where that parallel between not writing and Brazil comes from. On the other hand, her experience of the senses seems to initiate in her a visual capacity to understand the world, which would explain her shift to painting and the skill and strength of her poetic images.

She admits that one cannot predict what will happen; she seems to imply that in this passage. One can only speculate on the kind of feelings not writing could have produced in her body, and how they might have affected her embracing the world through painting. Even more important would have been to know how Page felt regarding the writing itself, its lack, these unpredictable forces that acted on her while she was in Brazil.

Not being able to do that which one thought one could is a tragedy that becomes part of Page's life, but we don't hear about it through suffering, only through a peaceful and somewhat forceful acceptance that she does not complain about. She simply accepts, as though not wanting to delve into the mystery of her own self and why she was facing this situation. Page's need to engage with the uncertainties of a chaotic and creative world is present in her philosophical response to such ideas, which she does with precise ability and confidence.

In *Brazilian Journal*, it is true that Page wants to learn more about Brazil, and she wants to learn how to transfer these impressions to the page. However, her sources for her enlightenment, mentioned often in the pages of the *Journal*, are books – in this instance, a book on Portinari, a Brazilian painter. It is difficult not to want more absences and presences in her

work, to demand for the writing of the body on the page which does not claim to be right or wrong and that could be felt in many ways. This displacement from the world can be troublesome in Page's case. Nevertheless, her writing seeks to transform her embodied experiences into knowledge, history, and textual sources.

P. K. Page's account in *Brazilian Journal* is mostly disembodied, containing a body that feels and perceives the world through thinking. Often, nature is present, but as a place of meaning, not so much as space for touching and recognizing the world through the hand or the body. Page writes:

Two beautiful red finches – I think – in the garden yesterday. Like two ripe fruits on a tree. A beetle, dead on its back among the leaves, larger than a humming-bird. Humming-birds in the orchid like blossoms of the hoary old tree near our balcony – such an old grandfather of a tree, so covered with parasitic growth, I would not have thought it had the heart or the energy to flower of itself. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24)

One gets a strong sense of Page's connection with the life of the vegetation, yet she does not reflect that energy back onto herself, and what all this flowering means to her. What one notices is her amazing capacity to describe the environment, to paint it in its intricacies as though with a magnifying lens. Hers is a visual poetry, idealizing, and a sublimation of the world. Perhaps she might want to avoid talking about herself in order to make the world stand out more sharply.

The relationship established between writer and the narrative does not occur between an embodied voice, an object and the skin, but rather between the eye that narrates the scene and the image it perceives. It is an act of visual, perceptual expression, not necessarily an interactive

event, as Serres points out in regards to literary texts and the absence of embodiment. Page's writing aims to establish the very distance between the parts, as though their beauty did not provoke other experiences besides an aesthetic sense of wonder. It is a conceptualized type of experience.

For, in the previous passage, "two beautiful red finches rest" by themselves "in the garden," and are seen as "two ripe fruits on a tree." Page's description is visual and it does not lack astonishment and completion, since the birds are associated with two beautiful ripe fruits on the tree and beside them, "a beetle, dead on its back." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24) And she goes on, describing a natural landscape, which she does not touch, but only paints with words and perceptual qualities. Even what Page mentions as an old tree "covered with parasitic growth," which manages to gather energy and produce flowers, does not impress her or make her feel any different before such natural events, as though the conjunction between bark and flower did not move her in any articulated way.

Page continues her description of the red finches in the natural landscape; she writes about waking up in Brazil, and her perception of it. The old tree is once again the main subject of the scene. She writes:

Awoke this morning to an immense chittering in its branches and struggled from sleep onto the balcony. Through the field glasses saw, among the cerise flowers, six different kinds of small brilliant birds: one pair, finchlike, of every conceivable shade and colour from turquoise through the jade - and yellow - greens to yellow. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24)

Though Page is supposedly present in the passage above, her relationship with the environment is that of a distant viewer, a sleepwalker. She sees “through the field glasses,” as though she needed to be precise about her vision, in order to watch the birds in the garden. One can only wonder what she feels when witnessing this population of birds at her balcony. The words, “every conceivable shade and colour,” indicate that she is mesmerized by the variety brought forth by the event, yet we don’t know how she receives this message from her point of view. She observes it, watches, notes it, like a biologist, an observer, and a note-taker.

The relationship of contingency that Serres describes, (Serres, *The Five Senses*, 2008: 80-81) between one’s hands, the skin and the universe, between that which knows and is trained to know, and that which does not and discovers through the condition of touching and not touching, between one’s left and right hands, between one’s self and the world, is absent in this passage, even though Page uses the glasses to interact with what she sees. It is the act of desire, of moving towards something, that leads her towards the balcony. Yet we don’t know, for instance, if listening to the birds or watching their various colours means something to her, if she wishes something out of that encounter. Also, it is necessary to highlight her desire to see, to know through sight. She wants to see, perhaps to be a voyeur, simply.

According to Serres, it is this ability to move between places and conditions which constitutes a possibility to deal with contingent events that surround oneself and the world. (Serres, *The Five Senses*, 2008: 80-81) In Page’s writing, we don’t know how she gets what she desires, what we know is that she does things in Brazil in order to get acquainted with that reality, yet often what appears to be underlying her motivation is a sense of duty, rather than an ability to deal with her own emotions and what appears before her.

In *Brazilian Journal* one witnesses a constant process of attempting to conceptualize the five senses, of exploring them through perception, yet the consequences for the body are rarely discussed. Page is always ready to meet new objects, and interact with them through the narrative, but separately from them. In the next passage, for example, she is confronted by a new scenario, and once again, her understanding of drama, and how it can be embodied, is segregated from her own experience:

Yesterday, on the swimming pool terrace, we found a huge moth which one of the cleaners pounced upon, claiming that it was *muito perigoso* (very dangerous). When asked why, he replied that if the powder from its wings got into your eyes . . . ! An Englishwoman to whom I was later talking suggested he was having me on but, having seen no evidence of a propensity for teasing in Brazilians and every evidence of their great sense of drama, I am prepared to think he believes it. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24)

This passage reveals how Page is unable to differentiate or integrate her own beliefs with those she experiences in the other, in this case, the cleaner's preoccupation with the danger posed by a moth. We don't know whether Page believes in it or not, she asks for the opinion of an "English woman," who then has a view of the event. Page herself does not mention whether she believes the moth is indeed dangerous, if she fears or if she believes it a superstition; what she wants to know is how to read the other, yet she is unable to do it. Her efforts are often towards this aim, to read the other, to understand what his or her beliefs are, and often she turns to English speakers to interpret Brazilians for her.



There is a separation between herself and the other, which is clear in her writing. Yet we don't know how this culture affects her and actually challenges her own truth, whether it is through what she calls "dramatic" or for the difference the country offers her. She tries to locate this drama in Brazil, and she transforms it into knowledge. Whether or not the presence of the moth is dangerous to one's health, Page is unable to tell, though she suspects it is not. But the lack of irony and sarcasm in Brazilian culture, overrepresented in dramatic expression, argues Page, makes the scene an important piece in her quest for the meaning of drama in the country. Serres posits that language alienates us from the body and its sensation (Serres, *The Five Senses*, 2008: 154) a claim that echoes Scarry's argument of the difficulty of physicality in representation (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 1985: 5). The point is revealed in Page who doesn't even engage in the battle, admitting she is unable to write. She intellectualizes her experience, and copes with the strange by transforming it into knowledge. It is as if she were practicing cultural anthropology.

Instead, she searches for other ways to cover this lack, this cultural disembodiment and the reality of the world, as though it were an intellectual challenge. She writes about the diversity of the environment:

Two additional bird events. One, the arrival of a pair of robins – larger than ours, and different in that the upper breast is grey. And two, the incredible sight of jumping birds. Four not very distinguished, large, sparrow-like birds with striped heads, stamping about on the lawn in the manner of robins, suddenly began jumping quite high into the air, beaks upraised – I suppose for low-flying insects, but it looked absurd. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24)

Page's view of nature is clearly expressed in this passage, as though the expression "looked absurd" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 24) could reveal what nature, in itself, in the embodied bird, could not, in itself, explain. Page does not question the freedom of these birds, or their behaviour, she quickly makes a rational observation to convey, perhaps, her feelings. She is clearly obsessed with registering every new event that the natural world offers her, yet one does not know how these notes reveal part of herself, or her journey in such a diverse world.

Page constructs this scene carefully observing the properties of each bird, qualifying their colours, as being different from the kind she is used to see in Canada, with a grey upper breast instead of a red one. She is practicing cultural anthropology, like a field-worker or a bird-watcher. The "culture" is embodied in the "birds," and she watches them. It is appealing for her eyes to do this, and she goes on describing other birds, with a sense of aesthetic pleasure, mainly intellectual and visual. She recounts their dance, and the way they move and jump in the air is explored in the narrative; their motivation for jumping is considered absurd, as she tries to understand the mysterious scenario before her as though she were a painter with the reflective mind of a writer, or a biologist collecting specimens.

Page's task is not to discover the world through bodies or to try to interpret the sensation that arises from their awareness. Nevertheless, the impact of her impressions of Brazil is vividly and extraordinarily narrated. She does find herself more in love with the country as time goes by, and her voice aims for the most graphic design she can create. She writes:

The house continues on its immensely complicated course. One thing is solved and another raises its head. But for all that, I adore it here and hope the Conservatives don't decide that somebody else would like the post; they so easily mightn't. I am one of the

few diplomat wives who do. Most get swamped with the problems. Heaven knows, I do too, but some indefinable element in the air gives me a happiness I have never known before. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 68)

It is a dramatic shift from the beginning of the book, when she compares Brazil to a plum, and makes fun of the idea of being sent there. Even though she cannot name the reason why she likes the country, after being there for a while, she addresses it as being in the air, as something unnamed that gives her “happiness” that she has “never known before.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 68) It is an intriguing and captivating passage, for it reveals how her body has never felt these sensations before, and how, directly, this addresses her relationship with Brazil as that of a place of inauguration, of the birth of a desire for living that she hasn’t encountered before. “Living,” for her, may mean to “observe,” to “watch,” and to take notes.

She admits having difficulty with problems such as the lack of order and the heat, yet we don’t know how she incorporates these feelings or how the coping worked. All we know are the challenges, which she describes carefully throughout the book, yet the process of transformation is left out and we only meet it again when she has it resolved inside herself, already incorporated in her routine.

In other words, we are told that her perception of this world has changed, and her intimate self does not detest living there anymore. It is interesting to observe how, similarly, her writing becomes more attuned to the sensuous qualities of the country, even if she does not include herself in the descriptions. Her sense of feeling at home in Brazil increases and her self-discovery becomes a veiled translation of how challenging it remains for her to pursue her own embodiment in writing.

The fact that she finds Brazilians warm and physically affectionate, loving, yet who have no recollection of it the next day, reveals her interest in physical contact, though she never asks for it or places it as part of her subjective desire. Still it is very noticeable how Page's happiness spreads throughout her life.

She draws *cestas*. She sees the favelas and shyly realizes their social implications, while admitting that she is more concerned with their aesthetic beauty. There is not often a feeling of mutual contact. Her goal is to materialize her impressions on intellectual renditions of her perception of this world, confirming the primacy of her vision, of her capacity to see, in her being in the world: "My eye operates separately from my heart or head, or at least in advance of them, and I saw, first, the beauty"; or "I grow to love Brazil more each day, even the wide flat corner with some rather awful houses and no vegetation but grass cover." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 70-72) It demonstrates how her eyes, often, take precedence over her emotions, of any other aspect of her being, which is demonstrated in her writing.

Page's love for the country appears one day, and all of a sudden it is realized in her, as though the sentiment didn't grow or become engaged through a process of embodiment. This is the crucial problem of *Brazilian Journal*: the feelings Page wants to convey about the country suddenly become words associated with the narrator at one point in the narrative, as though there were no process that the reader can witness by perceiving their natural growth inside the writer's body. It is rather an evolution of the mind's observations about the world and how that translates into feelings and words.

Instead the feelings are embodied through intellectual argumentation, in a state of mind that is summarized as being in love with a country. It is like a mental game for the narrator, who

insists, often, on perceiving the world with a positive attitude that is acceptable to her mind. The other side of it is the rejection of naming sensations that might unsettle the body and its sensorial qualities; she is not often challenged by the physical realities of the world around her. Reinforcing the idea of the outside world as the source of feelings, everything she loves she wants to draw. For example, an Ipe amarelo, in Teresopolis; “Words cannot describe it, which is perhaps why I draw.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 75) For her, words break off, they are insufficient, not capable of embracing all that her eyes see. And so the limits of words, for her, create an inability or unwillingness to articulate the body. And they lead to the disappearance of words, literally, into pictorial space. Her eyes want more than words can give, so she turns to pictures instead.

The collection of essays entitled *The Language of Poetry*, by Philip Wheelwright, revalidates the importance of nature for the construction of a poetic discourse.<sup>6</sup> The desire to know viscerally how a poem works is directly associated with the desire to transcend the meaning of a word, perhaps embodying it fully from within. In *Brazilian Journal*, Page is able to describe the birds, lawn and insects while still doubting her Portuguese vocabulary. It is noticeable how Page’s concern with language goes hand in hand with her difficulties in adapting to Brazil, as though the knowledge of an idiom would guarantee her entrance in the country. It is as if conceptual, observational knowledge shaped her experience.

She does not question her own feelings of uncertainty or segregation, instead blaming it on the language. Her two years in Brazil display a selection of activities that require her personal adaptation, either through a desire to find the right word to describe the new natural aspects of

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<sup>6</sup> *The Language of Poetry*, by Philip Wheelwright. Edited by Allen Tate. Princeton, Princeton University Press; London, H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942.

this new world or her appearance and performance in official affairs. The other challenges, more internal, of loneliness, separation, and distance, sentiments used to describe her personal feelings, are rarely discussed with deep attention. Her complaints are constant, since she doubts the functionality of this new place.

On March 14, 1957, she writes: “Our lawn has sprouted, here and there, tall grass stalks with seed heads. Are the birds jumping for the seeds? Ricardo is scything the lawn. We shall see.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 26) In this passage, Page is learning how to witness nature’s desires while considering the passage of time, the movement of the seasons. Yet she does not acknowledge this movement in herself, often it is someone in the house who takes care of the natural elements that by reflection makes her wonder why things are the way they are.

This demonstrates how Page is always an outsider, and does nothing to investigate the motives of her desire on nature; she simply watches it. In Brazil, and in her house, this sense of a viewer seems to increase every day; while it might represent her curiosity, it also demonstrates her growing separation from things felt and touched. Despite her sense of constant surprise and awe before the Brazilian social world, nature’s events and personal opinions about life are always a point of reference in *Brazilian Journal*. She learns from these outside sources. She never seems to describe how this learning occurs. All she does is to repeat what others’ have said, while sometimes echoing their opinions. Her interior, deep, emotional self remains a mystery.

Bit by bit, this process translates into a confidence that Page begins to feel about this Brazilian culture which is slowly integrated through observation and familiarity; all the codes and strategies that lead her in this foreign land are materialized by her imagination into a

narrative that oscillates between emotions she can recreate through someone else's voice. She becomes a ventriloquist for herself. Both the poetry and the painting works as mirrors, surfaces for her to articulate her experiences to herself.

At the same time, Page's perceptual experience leads the reader further from her own sensibility and how she interacts with this unfamiliar Brazilian tropical world, as though her state of otherness is imbued with a separation that fights with the sensuality of language which Octavio Paz also alludes to in his writings. In his book *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*, Paz, eager in establishing a relationship between love, sex, eroticism and poetry, writes on the importance of feelings and embodiment.<sup>7</sup>

For him, sexuality is the original fire that raises the red flame of eroticism and the blue flame of love. Poetry, on the other hand, is the testimony of the senses, allowing us to see palpable, visible, and audible images which show us the impalpable. It is a fusion of seeing and believing: "...aquello que nos muestra el poema no lo vemos con nuestros ojos de carne sino con los del espíritu." (Paz, *La Llama doble: Amor y Erotismo*, 1993: 9) Or: "What the poem shows us we do not see with our own carnal eyes but with the eyes of the spirit." (Paz, *Double Flame*, 1995: 2) He believes the senses are servants of the imagination, and they let us hear the inaudible and see the invisible, which is similar to an erotic encounter, "abrazamos fantasmas." (Paz, *La Llama doble: Amor y Erotismo*, 1993: 9) He explains: "Nuestra pareja tiene cuerpo, rostro y nombre pero su realidad real, precisamente en el momento más intenso del abrazo, se dispersa en una cascada de sensaciones que, a su vez, se disipan." (Paz, *La Llama Doble*, 1993: 9) Or: "the person is there but their real reality, as the most intense moment of the embrace, disperses in

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<sup>7</sup> Paz, Octavio. *La Llama doble: Amor y Erotismo*. Barcelona, Espana. Editorial Seix Barral, 1993.

a cascade of sensations which disperses in turn.” (Paz, *Double Flame*, 1995: 2) For him, poetry is a bridge between seeing and believing, where “los sentidos, sin perder sus poderes, se convierten en servidores de la imaginación y nos hacen oír lo inaudito y ver lo imperceptible.” (Paz, *La Llama Doble*, 1993: 9) Or: “imagination is embodied and bodies into images.” (Paz, *Double Flame*, 1995: 2)

He sees the relationship of poetry with eroticism like so: eroticism is the poetry of the body, while poetry is the eroticism of language. Language names the sensation while the body, through eroticism, represents or performs the sensation. And the key to connect these elements is the imagination. Poetry for Paz eroticizes language, and it is erotic because of the senses. Sexuality, for Paz, is related to procreation, eroticism with pleasure. For him, it has everything to do with imagination. The embrace is not of physical bodies, of the contingency of the hand Serres alludes to when he speaks about the importance of the skin and the relationship between touching and being touched. For Paz, we embrace phantoms: the bodies aren't present in language in their full physicality. What is concrete are the images, which are embodied by the imagination. The sensations, for Paz, dissipate in this encounter promoted by the senses, in this revelation made truth in poetry. It is all contained in the image, in the language that names the sensation. Language transforms the body into images.

For Paz, poetry enables a different kind of communication and it uses everyday language to say things out of the ordinary. Poetry is the other voice, and always confronted with the social aspect of its expression.<sup>8</sup> For Paz, poetry a testimony of a poet's sensibility, a testimony of her or his senses, which wants to be authentic and go beyond the social and cultural codes of one's

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<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for Paz, poetry and eroticism originate in the senses but do not end there. The meaning of the erotic metaphor always speaks of death and pleasure; it is a desire and a “thirst for otherness.” (Paz, *Double Flame*, 1993: 15)



place in the world. The voice of the senses that Paz argues for is what lacks expression in *Brazilian Journal*, for what we have there is an oscillation between knowledge, information and experience, not sensuality and presence; Page reports to the reader that Rio is a tropical place and how she has been affected by it aesthetically: everything is ornamented, the churches are elegant and colonial, “delicately symmetrical,” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 5), and are all set among forested mountains. Her feelings remain covered, hidden, undisclosed.

Later she writes about a night in Rio, at a small party between several authorities, amongst them Chateaubriand, a newly appointed ambassador to London, a prime mover in the São Paulo Museum of Art, and a senator and owner of a chain of thirty newspapers as well as numerous magazines and radio stations:

When the party broke up, Chateau asked A. and me if we would care to see the Cruzeiro Palace, the plant where *O Cruzeiro*, Brazil’s most widely circulated magazine, is published. It seemed obvious that we should and so we drove off through the rain and darkness (nights seem doubly dark in Rio by virtue of a by-law forbidding the use of headlights; only parking lights are permitted) down into the old city, where the streets are narrow, and the buildings warehousey and undistinguished, to come at last to an enormous multi-storeyed cube, as light as foam rubber and glowing as if phosphorescent. Designed by Niemeyer, probably the leading Brazilian architect, the building is raised on pillars and the glass of its external walls is protected by a *brise-soleil* pierced with a repetitive pattern of punch-holes two to three inches in diameter. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 25)

Page recreates the interchange between herself and the Brazilian Chateaubriand. Her description is once again embellished by brush strokes of urban reality, drawn with precision yet detached from any feeling, except, perhaps, her observations about the dark nights in Rio. In this scene, Page distances herself from what Paz encourages, in reference to one's testimony of a poetic sensibility, a testimony of the senses, which seeks to be authentic and go beyond the social or cultural codes of one's place in the world. Her aim is to translate the sensual into light, images of light, which compensate for her lack of embodiment.

The satisfaction Page has to paint the light she sees in Rio is shown in the images of the rain, how she describes it, and the darkness as it is felt by her, affecting her, giving special attention to a particular building which she says is "glowing as if phosphorescent." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 25) Hers is an observant but quite enclosed examination by one's eyes, impressed by the darkness and light in this foreign scenario. Her visual attention is that of a photographer. Later on, in a disembodied manner, this time comparing herself to a character in a movie, Page continues describing this scene, and how these men impressed her, and what she learned from them. She continues:

As I think of the three of us – the two men black and white in summer dinner jackets, me in black and white dress with streaming black ribbons – Chateau small, stocky, ill-tailored, talking execrable English, pulling us by force of will across the cobbled streets in the black rain to the cool martini of a building – it seems more like a sequence from a black and white movie than an actual experience. And Chateau talking on, yawning through his yawns, of his masters – Caesar and Nietzsche – of the ugliness of the world, of his great marble hall in São Paulo "for the people." The photo of him in the front of the

book about the São Paulo Museum is a wonderfully good portrait. It is a snapshot of a small, squat man in a crumpled suit, wearing on his head a child's newspaper hat. The accompanying wooden sword is not there. He doesn't use one – of wood. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 26)

Page does not say what she truly feels in regards to this Brazilian character; instead, she associates herself with a movie scene, and how the actor portrayed himself through ideas and thoughts. One does not know how she engaged in a conversation with them, or how she might have desired to be seen as a woman between two other men. Instead, she describes her night out and the interaction among these three individuals, herself included, through mental and intellectual argumentation. The darkness, the rain, the riding through Rio at night, in spite of being so well described and detailed, still appear to Page like a scene outside of reality. It resembles a movie. This is part of her perspective as an observer, as a voyeur, as a spectator of life. She pictures it with a description of the man himself, and how authentic he appears.

Once again, this reality fails to secure a real body for Page, presenting this man within a surreal landscape that is difficult to define or interpret. Within this passage, Page brings us closer to her own perceptions as they are directly reactive to the environment, and do not grow from a process of internalization. The subsequent examples in the *Brazilian Journal* echo this same type of immediate emotion, which are sudden realizations depicted from another's action, used to qualify this world by constantly readdressing it in space; how the light of the city is manifested also on the beach, in the buildings, and in everything she walks by.

Her depiction of embodiment does not attune itself with what is really occurring in herself, within her desire to know tropical places more intimately. It becomes the other's voice

and their know-how, and not her need to feel and know. The space becomes the goal of the narrative, which explores how the *palacete* is situated in a valley, facing two opposing mountains in a quite private space. The illustration at the opening of the book, featuring the mountains known as the Two Brothers, is an example of this space. She writes about her life in the house:

Manuel, our gardener's assistant, has planted a new lawn at the side of the house. This is done in the manner of planting seedlings: a little hole is made in the earth and a small shoot of grass popped in. The effect, at this stage, is of a candlewick bedspread, brown with green tufts, the whole as if measured and ruled. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 26)

Manuel, the gardener's assistant, treats the land which becomes occupied, filled in, through Page's narration. The use of metaphors is carefully placed, as though her most important affect in this passage is to demonstrate her careful eye in relation to the world lived. It is an observing, translating eye. She describes the activity of the gardener as though she had a movie camera in her hands, explaining to the reader what he is doing. Through the act of description, she learns about this new world, and she embodies it through her eyes, rather than her feelings. Slowly, as one gets to know Page and her life through the narrative, it is possible to notice how the house gains the sole attention of the reader, for it implicitly begins to translate her feelings of absence lived with her employees and the difficulties with language. It is a worded silence, for she talks about it through the eyes of others, as though she cannot address her isolation embodied in herself. She continues, in another passage, about her difficulties with language. She writes:

How crippled one is by the lack of language! Not only do I talk a kind of baby talk, with an appalling accent, but the things I actually say are often quite different from what I meant to say. This confuses the household no end. I give orders to the staff and yes, yes,

they say, and I feel fine, on top of things, in control. Then nothing happens. Yesterday, listening to A. talk to the *mordomo*, I began to understand some of the reasons. With great thought and care A. said, clearly and slowly, “Salvador, I think I have been two keys,” And, “Yes, Excellency,” said Salvador solemnly. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 27)

This exchange, revealed in this passage, demonstrates how Page wishes to be in control, but also feels like a child, out of control. And how she embodies this sensation in this section, as she narrates her difficulties with her lack of language. The purpose is to give orders, to be understood by the employees, which she fails to do. The same happens to her husband, and from that dialogue Page infers that it is because of the submissive behaviour of the employees that nothing gets done, since they don't seem to understand what is being told and don't seem to be as concerned about it as Page would have wished. At the same time, the humour plays an important part in this articulation of events.

One learns how Page feels frustrated with a language that serves no purpose, as though the perception of this lack embodied an even more difficult task: to let go of the wish to maintain control, as though the house and its functioning depended on that ability. The “kind of baby talk” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 27) causes nothing to be accomplished. The employees use language differently than Page, trying to escape from her orders, while she, trying to be functional, exercises her desire to control by blaming it on language; while they, in turn, do whatever is in their bodies and hearts.

What this passage reveals is how the Brazilian culture intersects with and torments Page's existence in the country from the level of communication to the unspoken feelings of her body,

with anxiety, frustration, anger, among other negative emotions that may be inferred from this passage. Irony, as well, is a constant. It is known that she receives formal Portuguese instruction, three times a week, and it continues to be insufficient to cover her need to grasp Brazil and explain it to her readers through language. In another trip to the Museum of Modern Art, on a hot day, she writes how she:

Went, in intense heat, to see the Museum de Arte Moderna in the process of construction. It is being built by private subscription and will cost in the vicinity of three million dollars. The building committee consists of Senhora Bittencourt, wife of the owner of one of the largest newspapers; Ambassador Nabuco, whom we met at dinner, the elegant young chief of the Department of Tourism; and Henrique Mindlim, architect and editor of an interesting and well-produced book about modern architecture in Brazil. We know his book, and I had noticed among his acknowledgements the name of Elizabeth Bishop. When I asked him if she was still in Brazil, he said yes. The next thing is to meet her. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 27)

We gain an understanding of how Page spends her day and the ways she learns about Brazil, not only through her description and interaction with natural and urban sites, but also in terms of the social events she is asked to attend. One knows how she values books and everything that they teach her. She also desires to meet Elizabeth Bishop, who was also living in Brazil. The two never met, and their similarities of shared appreciation for Brazil, their embodiments, require a deeper study, though in terms of their writing and sensitivities about the country they will be later analysed in this dissertation. The incorporation of Portuguese words in the diary is an example of how she finds in language a solace for her difficulty in embodying

Brazil in feeling. In this passage, the actual theme is how she has felt during the week, and she reveals very little, as though she were observing herself from outside herself.

“Have felt *mais o menos* for a week but now have managed to keep going and today, I think, I am on the mend,” she affirms, in another example of her feelings and her focus in Brazil as being the body of her narrative, even if avoided. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 66) A contrast to her perception is how the North American community perceives Brazil, as if they had no eyes for the country or even noticed the smell of the streets and its people. Page writes, on page 67, in *Brazilian Journal*: “Very, very tiresome. It’s as if they have no eyes. For them Brazil is nothing but a series of smells – all unpleasant!” Even though Page does not like the dismissive comments about the country, she does not realize that these comments also belong to the same scenario she describes as beautiful and amazing, for it is through the contrast between the two realities that Brazil can be found.

Yet Page seems to have difficulty in recognizing the polarities of good and bad, of life and death, of clean and dirty, within one’s narrative. I am not suggesting that I agree with the North American’s comments about Brazil, yet it is interesting how she does not question herself whether there is some truth in those very comments, or even the prejudicial qualities embedded in them. Everything is extraordinary, almost too large for her eyes to grasp. Everything, from the palm trees to the hot in the pink coloured walls of the house, has an impact on her being, even though it is not there completely, embodied in the writing. She does not write from the position of a being who feels, but rather from a writer’s point of view who observes in order to lament a lack of control, a disorder of sorts, a disconnection, which is also a type of feeling, even if translated as criticism. It is not that Page does not feel entirely, she does in parts, and she believes she has only to be conscious of being ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ in relation to some unseen center.

(Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 44) Sometimes, the narrative appears like a higher voice, as though she were talking to herself, or at least to someone very close, who follows her, and is constantly making sure things are in order. This detachment, or doubling of perspective, allows her to maintain order in her descriptions.

It is, I believe, a habit acquired in her civilized Canada and her ancestral England; walking around the house, sightseeing in Rio, all these activities gain a functional purpose other than the feelings of the body; they gain an intention based on a sense of direction, of future and construction, which detach Page from the contingency between hand and the skin that Serres mentions in regard to the relationship about our being and its sense of embodiment:

As you proceed up the U-shaped drive, you round the now empty chapel at the corner of the house and arrive at the main entrance of the front door, if a door at the back can so be called. Only the width of the driveway away, a forested mountain rises steeply. Its trees we have never seen before and its floor is covered – the way an English bluebell wood is covered – with a low, red-flowering plant, *Maria sem vergonha* (Shameless Mary – for it will grow anywhere). (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 6)

This is a very lonely passage, where the house locates and embodies the absence that all these natural elements try to cover and illustrate, as though Page were trying to explore how this vast space could be expressed in writing. She is also detached from the passage, as though her body could not participate in the description of this world, of this house, of this vegetation that represents her home, and her location in Brazil. Not much is said about this subject, though; most of it has to be inferred by the reader in relation to her feelings.



We don't know how her body is feeling; all we know is that by moving around, she is able to describe what she sees from a place of silence. All we can understand from the beginning of her experience is that, by listening to nature, as well as by tasting the food in this part of the world, P. K. Page attests to her difficulties of expressing herself in a place which is at once lovable and exciting, but also mysterious in its variety — which at once frustrates and challenges her to write about these moments of uniqueness in the quotidian and to explore the singularity and emptiness of unknown spaces.

Every phenomenon we cannot explain rationally, David Abram argues, we label supernatural, due to our difficulty with accepting unknown forces of the universe or mysteries. (Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 10) Page is often struggling with this concept, even if it is through others, by watching her Brazilian employees delivering another note of the inexplicable. In her Brazil, she demonstrates wonder before trees or even feigns surprise at Brazilian mountains. Page's phenomenology, however, fails in finding a body that differs and echoes what Abram suggests as being the roots of our detachment: the separation of body from mind. In the case of Page, she becomes more conscious of Brazil as a visual experience that must be written with all its nuances:

The furniture consisted of a small two-seater Victorian sofa and matching chair, occasional chairs and a glass cabinet of spindly gilt, and a flowered rug with a table in the middle of it. All flat surfaces, cabinets, tabletops, were covered with badly made plaster casts of the Virgin and Christ Child, and the walls with ugly oleos. Propped against one wall was a wicker basket containing some rather formal greenery and two large evil-looking purple orchids. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 29)

One can infer how she is displeased with the visual scenario that is displayed before her through the words “badly made plaster” and “ugly oleos.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 29) Yet she is very superficial and detached from her own feelings, not exploring what a word like “evil-looking purple orchids” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 29) could be suggesting in such an excerpt. This visual disenchantment that turns into embodied displeasure knows no process, it is all in the passage yet the reader has to interpret it on his or her own, just as in previous passages where the love of Brazil was made visible but through visual commentaries and compliments. It appears that, in the same way the country enchants her, it also causes her a great sense of anxiety and displeasure, as this passage attests. In this excerpt, Page goes to an appointment and arrives at this ugly decorated apartment without knowing who she is about to meet or how her feelings will be, since she doesn’t appear to have any expectation. She only knows the wife of a senior Cabinet member who does not speak English.

Page’s attention to the fabric, to the patterns of the rugs, and to the room’s furniture translates how she might be feeling inside. These are aesthetic qualities which catch her attention, demonstrating how contrived she feels. She describes this concrete world, and without any easiness, tries to argue in favour of her displeasure by showing how contrasting cultures and tastes integrate Brazil and its society. As she says later on in this passage: “All this was contrary to everything I have come to expect. The Brazilians we have met all have been chic and contemporary and their houses – whether modern or baroque – elegant, so I was totally unprepared for this tasteless apartment.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 29) Page has created a mental prejudice about how Brazilians must be, and is in shock to find difference and otherness in this regard.

In this same event Page carefully explores her surroundings, and we learn that the host is “pear-shaped,” or speaks with a voice like “wind in pine needles – high and soughing.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 29-30) Page’s comments are demeaning and similar to how she sees the apartment: ugly and without taste. The same disembodiment she feels in relation to Brazilian employees, she employs in her analyzes of this host, as though the aesthetic ugliness affected her emotions to an extent that couldn’t be expressed without a sense of horror. Page does not admit it; it is another visual rendition where the narrator tries to be indifferent while dealing with cultural nuances at every instant. She dismisses the situation and never questions her own reasoning, as though her opinion was the only and right one. She describes this defensive quality of being in the next excerpt, where a hug is offered and rejected by Page in an awkward moment which demonstrates how embodied language is presented in her writing through dismissive affects that are quite aggressive towards others, as though her own being could not stand being touched or felt. She writes:

We left with great protestations of thanks and appreciation. As I shook hands, our hostess gave the kind of tug that precedes a kiss. Unprepared, my mind rejected the possibility, and my body the tug. With Henriette, who I had not met her before either but who is an older hand at Brazilian ways, the kiss was exchanged. This too is a language. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 30)

As one notices in this passage, her mind is always alert, always protecting her body from her feelings with a shield of intellectual defences. What Page calls language, or how bodies communicate, can also be translated as an exchange of emotions, of affects, that the writer seems to lack in this passage. She is prepared to analyze that the emotions, when they rise naturally as

in this passage, are seen with sudden shock or surprise. She says the mind rejects the possibility and the body refuses it consequently. Yet what is noticeable is the dismissal of feeling. Page seems to believe that feeling is inappropriate, mediated by thought.

What occurs in this excerpt is a translation of her feelings into depicted thoughts, whereby the sensations get lost and the gestures are artificially embodied. In this passage, Page, for the first time, addresses her difficulty in exchanging physical contact, particularly in social situations. The physical contact in this case appears to be a natural thing to do; it does not appear to be cultural or social but rather a human comfort. Yet, for not having a reason to be, the act becomes difficult for her to feel or engage in, since it is simply based on emotions. She does not feel like hugging the other person, let alone kissing them. And she is conscious of this emotion, she depicts it. With that in mind, I want to close this Chapter 2, by reinforcing how Page, when close to her own feelings and emotions, resists presenting them in writing. Perhaps she even resists having them.

As the earlier Chapter shows, this Chapter aims to reveal how Page's Brazil remains primarily visual, through observation and analysis; a name and a place that avoid the sensuous affects of the body. Page's solution is to name this world from the point of the view of the mind and its conceptualizations, detaching itself from the entity that Michel Serres promotes and lies in the hand that is a function of contact, or of feeling. Also in this Chapter, I address how *Brazilian Journal* features a narrator whose embodiment is sacrificed by her visual and mental organization of the landscape, as though through order her embodiment and naming of Brazil would become clearer. Instead, I conclude that Page's writing of this country is anxious,

uncertain and separated, despite her colourful renditions of the tropical world, of her experience of the country's daily living and habits, and what it means to her.

On the other hand, Page's achievements in this book are pointed and well-depicted moments of her experience as a foreigner in an unknown language. Her ability to translate into images what she sees, and to touch the environment through her revelation of shades, darkness, and light takes the reader closer to her impressions and feelings. She is also curious about everything that relates to Brazil, and this spectator's gaze is what transforms all her observations into anthropological knowledge.

This Chapter demonstrates how Page struggles with oppositions, between sensually embodying the world in writing and neglecting her voice and sensibility at the same time, tends to cultivate the eye of the other instead. In Page's writing of Brazil, there is rarely space for discovering feelings, or for not knowing how to name them precisely because they are unknown, enigmatic, and perhaps suggestive for that reason. There is an ongoing preoccupation with naming the feeling of Brazil, without actually exploring the sensations the writer feels when being in the country, except for the visual imagery of nature and culture. At the same time, one gets to know in detail how to live in a foreign country: the methods, the routine, and these become translated as "the experience of Brazil." This Chapter concludes by addressing Page's avoidance of sensations and feelings in regards to the unknown mystery of human beings, particularly in a foreign situation. The vulnerability, the fear, the impotence of not knowing is masked by the self-sufficient and organized methods of survival in a distant land, which introduces the reader to a very colourful and visual world, but also separates them from the actual physicality of being in a place called Brazil. We get the feeling she is there, but we rarely

glimpse who or where she is. It is as if she were a disembodied vision in a disembodied place. She translates the experience into light and dark, learning to reveal herself a bit through this mysterious combination.

### **Chapter 3: *Journal Writing and the Painted Description of the Lived World***

*Brazilian Journal*, as the previous Chapters have argued, is an attempt by P. K. Page to explore Brazil according to her own perceptions and subjectivity. One of her constant subjects is the Portuguese language in the context of her life. In this Chapter 3 I further explore and expand on the last section of Chapter 1 and 2, and how the writing of *Brazilian Journal* materializes the body in a narration that is visually perceived, worded, and allegedly painted from a bare canvas into its primary and secondary qualities.

In the case of P. K. Page, I want to show how she oscillates between being an anthropologist, who believes that every experience contributes to her consciousness, where she can perceive and create, and an empiricist who is governed by her rational mind, whereby the world gains structure and experience through its verifiable and constructed word-image or picture. She is a kind of geometrist of the imagination, for whom life can be clarified in shaped images.

From this perspective, Page gathers colour, shape and sensation as she continues her descriptions. It is a disembodied perception departing from the world that is seen, and not felt; without the contingency of the senses that Serres alludes to and the sensibility that lives, as Paz argues. In the following passage, one learns about the Portuguese language through a play of words and concepts that neglects the cultural implications they imply. Her subjective views remain outside meaning, as she relates the drama of Brazil. She writes:

Portuguese is fascinating. In a country which, to us, seems to place small value on life, there is little difference between “to live,” *morar* and “to die,” *morrer*. So far I have been unable to find any expression for “how funny” – perhaps because the Brazilian finds

everything funny. One learns  *muito bom* – “very good” – immediately; it is used about almost everything that is not  *muito bem*, “very well,” or  *muito mau*, “very bad.” And the ubiquitous  *muito* is said with such feeling that the most ordinary events become dramatic. (Page,  *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 30)

Page does not elaborate on her play of words, hiding her own opinion behind pluralized examples of drama and idiomatic expressions of Portuguese. She stresses the fact that there is barely any difference between the expressions for “to live” and “to die.” The comparison is obscure and witty. She enjoys commenting on a joke about how Brazilians find everything funny, as though the happiness they possess was the antidote for the supposedly low status of life in the country. It is clear from this excerpt that too much feeling for Page is translated into drama; thus the capacity Brazilians have to embody feelings is reduced to the word “drama” for the writer. She is not affected by it.

Her reactions are pragmatic and objective. In this passage, language is the tool Page employs to suppose an entrance into the world of reality, when in truth what she says exposes her inability to understand Brazilians on a human level, beyond culture or social constructs. The maximum emotion she can express is that she discovers that Portuguese is fascinating, for it can express so much drama. She doesn’t explain how she reaches the comparison between the expressions “to live” and “to die,” and her line of argument leads her to associate Brazilians with amusement and entertainment. One can feel her distancing herself from the people, and from her own feelings.

Through this process she makes a philosophical assertion, and also a cultural one, about the meaning of life and death in this country, and how that knowledge has affected her, taken her



back to the source, to language. If living and dying have any meaning in Brazil, being funny is not the answer to this condition, but rather a capacity to embody and live the emotions Page calls drama. Yet again, the writer insists on depreciating one's capacity for feeling by labelling it as drama; how everything seems to be played out for Brazilians as though in a staged scenario; how acting has the power to transform one's reality, making the most ordinary events dramatic. Yet she fails to acknowledge precisely the contrary and does not offer an alternative. She adds:

Interesting the differences between language texts and the spoken language. Servants are no longer *criados* – a word originating with slavery, when a small child would be brought up in the house of the master and, in effect, “created” – but *empregados* or “employees.” But they are still addressed as *você*, the second person, as a child or an intimate would be, and not with *o senhor* or *a senhora*, the more formal third. As to the small value placed on life, one has only to read the newspapers to learn of the number of people who carry guns and fire them. Just the other day a member of the Chamber of Deputies fatally shot a traffic policeman who had stopped him for speeding. This is but one of many such incidents. If one can believe what one is told, the law itself places a low value on life. In a traffic accident, for instance, responsibility for the injured lies with whoever calls an ambulance or obtains medical help – with the inevitable result that a victim may lie neglected in the roadway for hours. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 30-31)

In this section, Page embodies the judge herself, analyzing and interpreting Brazil from the point of view of the law, and how its reality is violent and oppressive. In the beginning of the section, she also elaborates on the usage of the word employee, once again focusing on language and how it possesses its own history. Page's view of Brazil is linguistic and connected to social

and cultural elaborations. She exhibits her deductions of language: how a spoken word can mean something entirely different than when written; in this case, employees are no longer servants.

Bluntly, she adds that the meaning of life is a nonexistent reality in Brazil, offering an example that would reflect this displacement in the country at large. She goes on to draw large conclusions from small examples, which appear to embody all that Brazil conveys to her, as though it were an entity, rather than a place of endless possibilities that might resonate in her bodily contact with it. Page is intrigued by the ways culture manifests itself in this country, and in this manner, makes large claims about matters that, perhaps, are too complex to be explored from the point of view of newspaper clips. At the same time, she has her own life and responsibilities, which gives the reader the impression of a detached view. Her Brazil is “other” in comparison to this country she reads from the news.

The world of feelings, which enlives the body, is detached from both realities. In fact, these are several realities without a body, a grounded feeling, to justify the narration and the exploration of the emotions embodied in words such as “living” and “dying.” She writes on a completely different subject, demonstrating how her life is entirely separated from that world she draws from the paper: “There are more than fifty diplomatic missions in Rio and we have to call on all of them – A. on the ambassadors, I on the wives – nor can they entertain us until we have so announced our presence. Then they have to pay return calls!” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 31)

Page’s duties, she writes, consist of maintaining contact with the diplomatic missions in Brazil to socialize and receive return calls from them, emphasizing how getting in touch with several embassies and letting them know about their activities in the country is referred in her

daily living. This entrance into Brazil through diplomatic exchanges is P. K. Page's experience of the country, which in turn, informs her experience of the knowledge that crystallizes her concept of the country. The perception of this world in the narrative is transformed into a generalization of what Brazil is, linking this idea to what the writer reads in the paper and witnesses from a distance in sightseeing trips through Brazilian cities.

Her process of gathering data in order to know becomes a common habit in the *Journal*, as though this diverse world of peoples and nations from the diplomatic missions, all foreigners, could make it real for her. On the other hand, she goes on avoiding the exchanges with real Brazilians, with the exception of a few friends who offer her the experience of closeness to the so-called Brazilian drama, better translated as feelings. Two parallels can be quickly drawn from her practice of acceptance or avoidance of the felt world as word.

Page, in her quest to understand Brazil, conceptualizes wilderness and nature, giving attention to its parts in the process of shaping this Brazilian personality she wants to develop within herself; yet the process of embodiment fails to be conceptualized outside the world of ideas. For that reason, she surrounds herself with art, literature, and artifacts. My purpose with this dissertation, so far, has been to demonstrate how Page plays with the sensual world in order to reaffirm her thoughts rather than her feelings. Yet Page's treatment of Brazil also does not recall the idea of Latin America and its culture, as Walter Mignolo writes in his book *The Idea of Latin America*. (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 7) In his account, Walter Mignolo questions the geopolitical structures concerning the notion of Latin America and its territory for the past 500 years, which, he claims, come from Christianity and St. Augustine's concepts articulated in *The City of God* about the division of the world. He affirms how the Americas exist

today only as a consequence of European colonial expansion and the narrative of that expansion from the European perspective, the perspective of modernity. The perspective of modernity derives from the perspective of Europe and its narration when creating the idea of America.

This is something that Page only briefly alludes to when she mentions Portuguese colonization through her travels throughout the country, her visits to the Amazon and other nature-surrounded areas. Overall, what she overlooks is how the new paradigm of knowledge is a de-colonial paradigm that takes into account narratives from peoples without history.

In this context, coloniality is constitutive of modernity, and so is the discovery of America. Mignolo affirms that this colonial matrix of power originates in the sixteenth century and is a component of the discovery paradigm and European modernity. He argues for a utopic dialogue, a double movement composed of a critical take on the past in order to imagine and construct future possible worlds. "Dialogue can only take place once modernity is decolonized and dispossessed of its mythical march toward the future," he says. It is not a claim for despotism but a call for the end of rule by one civilization. (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 7) Moreover, he says that:

discovery and invention are not just two different interpretations of the same event; they belong to two different paradigms. It is the same line that distinguishes the two paradigms: the line of a shift in the geo-politics of knowledge; it is the changing of the terms and not only the content of the conversation. The first presupposes the European perspective of world history, its modernity, while the second reflects the critical perspective of those who have been left behind, who have the feeling of not belonging. The very idea of America cannot be separated from coloniality: the entire continent

emerged as such in the European consciousness as a massive expanse of land to be appropriated and of people to be converted to Christianity, whose labour could be exploited. Coloniality, as a term, is much less frequently heard than modernity and many people tend to confuse it with colonialism.” (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 7)

“Colonialism,” for Mignolo, refers to specific historical periods and places of imperial domination, while “coloniality” refers to the logical structure of colonial domination and which attempted to control and manage almost the entire planet. (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 7) Another consequence of this modern/colonial expansionism is the conditions for border thinking created in the twentieth century, shifting previous structures of knowledge: theopolitics, in the sixteenth century, and the ego-politics of knowledge, in the nineteenth century.

In other words, this was a type of thinking that could not be suppressed by theology. “Border thinking is exploding now in the Andes under the name of *inter-culturalidad* and all over the world as well, including the parts of Europe that are becoming the dwelling place of African, Asian, South American and Caribbean migrants” (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 9). Another aspect of the idea of Latin America and the discovery of the territory is the marginalization of certain knowledge, languages, and beings, according to the idea of “the barbarians” and the ranking of humanity into races and ethnicities (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 15); those who, as Mignolo attests, “lacked literal locution, and the study of letters, of poetry, rhetoric, logic, history and every aspect of knowledge called literature.” (Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005: 18)

Page, in her *Brazilian Journal*, is not interested in the inferiority complexes and disadvantages that certain groups and communities carry in the country, as discussed by Mignolo. In addition, it is possible that because of the restrictions present in the genre, the journal writing is often filled with short prose and events of the day. Also, hers is not a social analysis; she is more interested in the aesthetic aspect of the country than in its origin. Disparities and injustices populate the narrative but are never addressed as such, perhaps only with a trace of irony and detachment. Parallel to her own development in this Brazil, there is also the construction of a new capital, Brasilia, with the new government of Kubitschek, during the 1950's. She writes:

Arrived in Brasilia to a brilliant day – blinding sun and the red earth of Brasilia orange in the light. Deplaned into that great heat and waited endlessly with no idea as to why. Various people had referred to Nossa Senhora de Fátima during the day, but it was some time after our arrival that it dawned on us we were waiting for her. Finally an air force plane arrived from Belo Horizonte and Fátima, life-size and looking as if made of plaster – actually she was made from Brazilian wood carved in Portugal – was removed from the body of the plane and placed erect on a large float decorated with bunches of everlasting flowers and streamers of crepe paper. A group of children began to sing, voices were raised in “Viva Nossa Senhora de Fátima, viva!” and there were flags and people dressed in their best and the wonderful, warm, friendly, good-natured quality of a Brazilian crowd. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 152)

In this passage, Page sees the sun, the religious artifacts, and addresses her feelings in regards to the other, the “warm” Brazilians. We can infer from the passage that she is enjoying the brightness of the day, and that she is watching the scene evolving, yet we are not so sure

about how she feels in relation to this event. What occurs, in regards to the reader, is a type of guessing game, where one supposes that she feels a sense of integration through association as she notices the warmth of Brazilians at the end and opens the section with a beautiful sunshine. The warmth of a brilliant day can act as a barometer of what is to come: the wait, the arrival of a saint made of wood, Nossa Senhora de Fátima, “life-sized, as if it is made of plaster.” She rectifies and explains that it is actually “made from Brazilian wood carved in Portugal.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 152) All this is detailed and surrounded by the voices of children and the “good-natured quality of a Brazilian crowd.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 152) In this excerpt we see how Page takes possession of the sounds and her sense of hearing in order to illustrate a type of happiness she actually feels. It starts with a blasting vision of a brilliant sun, the arrival of a wooden saint, and certainly these seductive passages produce a sense of liveliness which only occasionally occurs in the *Journal*.

Like Page, with her translating aspects of representing reality, Gilles Deleuze, in *L'Image-temps*, explains how neo-realism tried to reproduce the perceptual environment of a live-action as something not to be represented but envisioned, to be deciphered and ambiguous in its roots. For some, neo-realism is the art of the encounter – fragmented, ephemeral, interrupted, and failed. In similar ways, Page avoids physical encounters through her ongoing trials and attempts, which reveals the nature of her perception, in itself afraid of failures, sending the message that one never knows how she truly feels when confronted by another body. At the same time, the tactile becomes rejected; hers is a given and premeditated sensorial image, satisfying itself through pure visual pictures and intellectual exchanges. In the following passage, one learns about how this dynamic of encounters affects Page personally, and what her impressions are. She describes making and returning calls:

The first one on my list – for no particular reason – was the German ambassadress. (A misnomer, this; she is simply the wife of the ambassador. But it’s a Brazilian custom to make us all *embaixatrizes!*) She is Swiss, I think, and prettyish. She speaks English quite well but I suspect understands it less well, as she looked deaf whenever I spoke and made a point of doing most of the talking herself. I know the signs. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 31)

One can grasp from this passage how Page quickly creates personal thoughts about others, and how the behaviour of another affects her personally, though she doesn’t say how that makes her feel and only that she knows the signs of the other. She is not satisfied by how the German ambassadress addresses her, and complains about it in the text. She is focused in her speech, she argues, about the woman in question. In this excerpt, whatever the other limitations are, Page interprets it against herself, as though the other were actually avoiding the exchange with her.

Here there is a call for embodiment, since she says she knows how to read the other, yet does not address her own feelings, only the understanding of this other as someone who avoids listening because she lacks knowledge of the language. In this passage, the very language is the subject of communication, and Page emphasizes once again the struggle of exchanging with others, particularly in private conversations. Page is attentive to the visual appearance of this woman, who is “prettyish,” and that she does not listen to English very well; these clues inform Page about how to behave and why; in her mind, this conversation is imbalanced. She does partly embody a sense of dissatisfaction, but does not simply express it, arguing and complaining



about the other, who acts and forces her to feel something she can't address in herself, only in relation to the other's behaviour. In another moment, she writes about the same meeting:

The German embassy is large, with attractive gardens and patios which overlook the harbour. They employ fourteen servants, and when I asked what they all did her cynical reply was that each was employed in watching the others to make sure they did not work. They keep three dogs who sleep by day and roam all night, as they don't trust the guard supplied by the Brazilian government, and – more to my taste – a toucan with an electric blue eye, a bill like an idealized banana, a body of sculpted soot set off by a white onyx collar and gorgeous red drawers. Splendid fellow! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 31)

Page is confronted by the discourse of another woman who, like her, complains about the situation of the employees in Brazil, their slacking at work, and how that translates into a feeling of mistrust in relation to the services provided by the Brazilian government. Page qualifies this woman's commentary as sarcastic. These reflections are rare in Page's narrative, she does not separate herself from her own vision of herself, and the behaviour of others doesn't act on her as mirrors. At the same time, she is always surprised by the other's life.

From this excerpt, one sees the similarities of perception in regards to the understanding of Brazil, and wonders whether this is a truth or an inability of both women to see the country for what it is: different in colour, taste, and behaviour. In this passage one cannot doubt Page's need to reaffirm herself in Brazil through the eyes of the other, another ambassadress living in the country in a large house with many employees. After the first year in the country, however, her complete immersion is evident. She writes about an evening in Rio de Janeiro, in an entry dated August 19th:

This wild Rio wind is tearing at the house again. Last night it blew and blew and blew. Blew through my dreams. Awakened as if I had been tossed about all night. It dropped in the morning and I drew with Helena, after lunch, in her garden. Did a view of the lagoon, mountains and palms and apartment blocks visible through an opening in the trees. And then I looked through a ravine and saw a tile-roofed house with shutters and banana trees and a jacko towering overhead. Helena's style is quite different from mine – curlier. Her house and grounds still astonish me with their beauty. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 73)

One sees that Page is interacting with a friend from Brazil, Helena, also a painter. In this excerpt, she is affected by the night storm in Rio, its winds, and feels the aesthetic beauty of the landscape through painting. Even her friend's house seems to have an impact on her in relation to its beauty, one of the few sentiments that seem to provoke feelings on Page. She draws the lagoon, the mountains, and the palm trees, demonstrating how her perceived world is constituted of brushes of colors, shapes, and forms which she then recreates in her writing. And while writing about drawing, she reveals more of herself than otherwise.

In fact, beauty and intolerance are among the few sentiments that get embodied in her narratives about Brazil, the first in relation to the natural scenario and the second in regards to the employees and their behavior. It is clear in the previous citation how slowly the elements of this scene come to fruition: the violence of wind breaks through the routine of another day; the wind is "tearing at the house" again. It is dramatic, and we are introduced to the sounds of the wind, implicitly, in the movement the verb "tear" suggests, as well as the effects it has on the house. In a few phrases, we understand that her ears are dominated by this sound, by this unseen intruder that has interrupted the normalcy of another day. Her body is affected, she cannot sleep. Yet all of a sudden we are taken to a different scenario, to the garden, where she draws with

Helena. Her presence is captured in snapshots of images which reveal how the body feels, even if its mediate through pictures of natural events, which are reproduced in her interaction with Helena.

Through an opening in the trees, she is able to make her drawing a reality. In the end, we are not sure if she is happy with the drawing; it is still the world around her that seems to be the most beautiful, and it is what makes Page feel astonished. The scenario and its ambience make an impact on her, to the extent that she is always carefully attuned to the landscape and the weather conditions, which are part of the way she is able to experience in order to portray and draw. On the other hand, it is as though she does not embody anything outside her orderly processed thoughts, even if she says that “beauty” astonishes her. She is prepared for beauty, and she seems to control that sentiment with tools such as drawing and writing. The contrast is also true, since she reacts very negatively when in the presence of an ugly surrounding, feeling unsettled. What is lacking in this dynamic, however, is a sense of presence, whereby Page is able to separate herself from what she does in relation to the world, and really experience it as a living entity, in her body.

When Page first arrives in Brazil, she struggles with writing. Beauty becomes overwhelming; smells intriguing. *Brazilian Journal* is an answer to that sense of awe, a type of description which, slowly, reveals the impact this world of sensation has had on her, even if outside the body and purely visual. She does not discover emotions, she discovers objects and aesthetic forms. We do not know how she feels when her body interacts with the wind, but we know she has been tossing around in bed, demonstrating that she is present, doing something in that world, but not living it as a carnal being. Carnality, like sensuality, is only barely glimpsed, rarely shown.

Page attempts to comprehend the depth of every object, and to allow us to be inspired by the qualities they produce in her. This results in a mechanism that allows for the sensorial to enter writing as a disembodied but revealed quality, an aspect of Page's writing that is rarely discussed yet it is more accentuated in *Brazilian Journal*, since she strives to capture many objects and situations while separating herself from them at the same time.

Page's annotations in *Brazilian Journal* reveal sudden openings in the tropical world, yet her easy-going attitude towards bodily things, such as nudity and tanning, along with other sensual interactions such as eating and smelling, give a superficial sense of feeling and touching the world. My objective so far has been to identify where these gaps occur due to the writer's technique of reproducing feeling as though visually experienced rather than bodily constituted, and the weight that this ability constitutes by leaving a sense of separation in the narrative. Page recognizes her detachment from the social and intimate scenario. She may simply have chosen to show a different aspect of Brazil, which is not so focus on sensuality.

Her meeting with ambassadors continue, and she visits Argentina's. Her social commitments are many and she is very critical of these encounters, as though the writer in her couldn't accept the role performed outside her artistic competence. She calls on the Argentine *embaixatriz*, whom she describes as an attractive, intelligent, "rather brittle American who met her husband when she was *en poste* in Washington. Their residence is a square wedding cake, icing-white and very formal. Inside are marble statues, gold leaf, and tapestries. I am incapable of knowing whether or not I like it – probably not. Our house is a bare shack compared with this museum." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 31) Clearly she compares herself with the others, perhaps even competes with them, steadily.

In this passage Page begins to address her feelings, which, once again, like her inability to write Brazil, are lightly shown. Page continues her exposition on meeting the Argentine ambassadress and comments on how the woman has found Brazil to be one of her hardest posts, partly because she cannot find good servants. The thematic of the subject returns to the question on employees, and how they behave; these women revolve around the same universe of tidying up and maintaining order in the household. In her case, we learn, she has twenty employees, including the police guards.

These characters populate her narrative with news about life in Brazil and how difficult it can be to live there. One of the major complaints is about staff and the other is the houses themselves, which are often in need of repair. These reports, somehow, appease Page's anguish with the country, even though she does not address it. In another passage typical of *Brazilian Journal*, Page offers the reader a description of the atmosphere: "Many calls and *muitas dificuldades* since last writing. The temperature has been in the eighties, the humidity close to a hundred for weeks now. Everything is mildewed, damp and smelly. Shoes, books, gramophone records suffer most." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 30) Page uses description to capture her emotions; the outside world acts as a kind of projection of her internal experience.

One can infer that Page is not pleased with the damage caused by the weather, and one can understand from the passage that she is suffering with difficulties, though we don't know what they are. Indirectly feelings begin to arise in face of the lived reality and the impact it has on her being; they surface through small commentaries in the narrative. In an encounter with Greece's ambassadress, the only means of communication between the two is the Portuguese language, and they exchange notes on how to be a better housewife. These daily activities, though apparently trivial, ground Page in Brazil, and her reaction is a mixture of confusion and

displacement. For that reason she writes about them, even though she does not often know how to embody them. She adds:

Two nights ago we gave a dinner for the air minister, who is about to leave for Canada – all Brazilian guests, with the exception of an embassy couple. I was apprehensive of a hundred things beforehand. Various diplomatic wives have told me of their first dinners, when they sat down eleven at a table set for twenty-four. Brazilians often don't turn up or bother to let you know. On the dot, however, the guest arrived: the air minister and his entourage, the economist, the banker, etc, - everyone, in fact, but one man from the Protocol Division of the Foreign Office, who turned up punctually at 8:30, twenty-four hours late! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 32)

This light note of apprehension over hosting an event for the air minister demonstrates the degree of etiquette and ritual she has to undergo in order to perform and engage the social activities that comprise her life in Brazil. Very different from the natural and sensuous world described in previous passages, in this excerpt Page talks about her own uneasiness, particularly when compared to others' experiences about the same subject.

The fear of not having the right house to receive and welcome these guests would provoke a sense of failure that Page would not seem ready to accept. Moreover, she rarely sees herself in the role of an ambassadress, only referring to her duties in relation to others. Yet she often performs her duties quite well, while not acknowledging them. The lack of a subjective voice that incorporates both characters, the writer and the ambassadress, is a very important element in the *Journal*. Nevertheless, a consistent perspective emerges: detached, ironic, detailed, aesthetic. Hers is the eye of a photographer.

The reader is informed that Page's life in Brazil consists in getting to know the country through the Brazilian society, and through these dinners, fulfills her duties as a housewife and ambassadress; at the same time how, as a writer, she does not know how to negotiate them very well. She is pleased with the experiences, even if it all appears overwhelming, or "apprehensive." She gathers impressions, as she writes: "Called this morning on the Israeli ambassador's wife. She is young and pretty. She said she found Rio difficult at first, but now, after nine months, she finds it easier. (Like a pregnancy?) Her husband is a painter – Arie Aroch. And a good one." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 34) Once again, it is the other who echoes her difficulties, emphasizing a type of bond she seems to desire to have with the other women who live in a similar reality. In this same entry, she questions herself about the destiny of her writing, whether it is dead, and if she would ever go back to it. Like Brazil itself, she never gets to find the answers about her own silence: why does she feel the way she does in the country, why do these experiences affect her life so intensively? Through absence, these dilemmas are reflected in her intimate relationship with the body and its manifestation; Page's understanding of Brazil comes from literary sources, from art expositions, and from visual trips to museums and cultural events. It is as if she did not trust her own body to tell her how she was doing.

Several events are documented in *Brazilian Journal*, and this knowledge fills the lack Page engages when talking about Brazil in her writing. She writes: "Went with A. to see some contemporary tapestries by a young man from Bahia – Genero de Carvalho. Very sharp, as if seen through some medium other than air – in glass perhaps. Colours brilliant. A great sense of the flora and fauna of Brazil, abstracted." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 33) In this passage, the reader is presented with her aesthetic appreciation of the work of art, which matches her own

knowledge of the flora and fauna in Brazil, another one of her intellectual interests in the *Journal*. Other events she participates in are literary ones. She writes:

Just returned from a luncheon where we met a number of press, radio, and theatre people, plus one poet – Cecília Meireles. A biggish party, and enjoyable. The men and women were seated separately at the table. Not a bad idea as the sexes will *not* mix – they are worse, if possible, than Australians. I had thought, at previous parties, it was perhaps because the women had no intellectual interests, but in this group that was not the case. Odd that in a country where sex plays so large a role, there is this kind of segregation. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 34)

Page indulges in the pleasure of parties, and this one seems to please her intellectual interests, since it was filled with artists and writers. However, she does mention a light note about sex at the end of the excerpt, regarding the “segregation” of genders in the event, but does not explore it further. One does not know what she means about Brazil and sex, or how these two ideas mingle together. She also does not explore the feeling that this segregation has on her, she simply accepts and acts on it. In this excerpt, Page compares Brazil with Australia, in the manner in which men and women behave at societal events. Her relationship with the foreign is accentuated in this excerpt, and how, through trial, and experience, she learns about herself through the other.

At the same time, she also observes everything from a detached point of view, and the personal tone this note could possess is left outside the narrative. It is a passive form of writing that informs rather than gives a testimony of feelings. She transcribes the event onto the page, like a faithful reporter. She writes, also about Brazilian culture and sexual behaviour:



Likewise the other night, at an immense dinner for us given by the Gallottis – he the senior executive in Brazil of the Brazilian Traction Company – all the women sat together before dinner. I am told that this group is the very cream of Rio society and I can well believe it. The women are a cross between flowers and jewels – beautifully made, perfectly groomed, extravagantly dressed. “But where,” one asks, “are their handsome brothers?” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 34)

Page’s style echoes her feelings about the event; she seems impressed at the beauty of this group of women, embodying them as “flowers and jewels.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 34) The neatness of the excerpt equals her impression of the society that participates in this gathering. Page is easily touched by the social world she encounters in Brazil, yet she does not include herself in the picture, as though she were simply observing the whole event unfolding in front of her. She is an observer, gathering data for her report.

What she feels near these women is not said, yet one notices a separation between her view and the event, as though she didn’t initiate any contact with these women who appear so attractive to her. At the same time, she seems to desire this interaction with the women from Brazil, and in several passages like the previous one she mentions their appearance. There is a need to be close to beauty, and to search for perfection in her observations.

*Brazilian Journal* gathers a number of phrases about what Brazilians think of themselves in order to convey an embodiment of the country for Page. She needs to define the people, and the resource is Brazilians themselves. She writes:

They tell me there is no point in trying to get to know Brazilians – that the rich live in a rarefied world that is out of reach and all the others within a bourgeois concept of family

that is impossible to penetrate. When I say, “But...,” I am met with ominous noddings and “You’ll sees.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 35)

She seems to feel separated and detached from the others as a result of her status, her position in society, as the wife of an ambassador, appears limiting. Yet, she wants to know Brazilians; she does not know how to discover their intimacy naturally. Everybody else becomes her source, and in this passage Page reveals her struggle to penetrate a culture that appears to her detached and indecipherable. She doesn’t seem to trust her own intuition, and in this passage, the superstition about the natural and the supernatural, the horror and the threat of the jungle, become the truth of Brazil for Page. Page writes:

On the other hand, her Highest Serenity the Princess Mechtilde Czartoryska, resident for seventeen years, tells me that she adores Brazil and that its people open under your approval, like children. She also offered me a piece of advice – everyone who has been here a day longer than I is full of advice – which was never, never to pull up plants in the jungle “because your fingers will be painful, filled with pus, and next day you will find a beast under each fingernail.” Shades of Gulliver! I shall take her advice, certainly! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 35)

She uses literature to keep herself apart. Page writes about other people’s knowledge being more accurate than hers, as though her own body couldn’t feel the truth about what she experiences, as though the next one’s opinion were always better than hers. This uncertainty populates the *Journal*, and in this excerpt, she seems hostage to the terror about the jungle told by this woman and her understanding of Brazil. And for the sake of the narrative, Page says she believes everything she hears about the country.

As Page arrives in Brazil, everything appears large, excessive. It reminds us of the *saudade* of Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* and his depressing conclusion about the current state of our society and its prodigious mass of noxious by products which now contaminate the globe. Page's vision, however, is not terminal, but merely detached: Rio de Janeiro is still "a cidade maravilhosa," its sugar mountains covered by a silver plate, its avenues full of high rises and cars. For Page, the country is a daily mystery waiting to be depicted in images, not feelings; or rather, the images are meant to capture and hold the feelings she can't yet express.

Her house is another world waiting to be discovered: exotic, strange, inciting, with the marble-floored patio, the changing rooms, their length, the kitchens, the cloakrooms, the storage rooms, and the servant's bedroom. The first room is described as cold, and white-walled. It is expansive; it contains beautiful glittering chandeliers, and French chairs covered in green silk. Upon her arrival, the room was filled with so many flowers that, she says, she "couldn't help looking about me for the coffin" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 6). Flowers become fluorescent, artificial-looking flowers, unnatural, forcing their way to the light.

The arrival of the flowers brings back memories of her childhood signs of deathly entombment, from her observation of their artificiality. The description of the house continues, and her writing takes us through three open French doors; everything becomes pale green, a library, two washrooms, a pantry, all as though we are carried by a moving camera through the hallways of this marble-floored house. She seems not to miss anything, and upstairs she informs us that the only ugly thing she found here was the family sitting room, which was dark and furnished rather in the manner of a second-rate German liner. Once again Page's sensibility opts to focus on the outside world, yet it doesn't resonate in her, as though she were capable of

looking but not of interacting with what she is looking at. It is an oblique gesture, indirectly she is wearing a mask, or a pair of binoculars, to observe this world.

It is above all a painted world that fills the book until the end, when Page is finally comfortable but still intrigued with the discrepancies of this place, between the natural and the urban, the real flowers and the artificial flowers, the lit rooms and the dark rooms, that create in her unnamed, oblique, barely felt sensations she describes in this narrative. The form of the *Journal* is also limiting, and does not allow Page to expand her impressions on the body. If, as Lévi-Strauss posits, our own “filth” replaced the sixteenth century visual and olfactory surprises of Brazil-woods and pepper carriers, Page’s impressions are unnameable outside the preconceived notions and judgments she hears about the country. (Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1997: 38)

Whereas the first seems to reflect a *saudade* for a paradisiacal and abundant time, Page finds herself lost in naming her own feelings; whereas Lévi-Strauss misses the “genuine primitive encounter” and regrets the future and new age of communications, Page is afraid to touch this place in order to make it concrete within. The country of Brazil featured in *Brazilian Journal* is alive yet separated from the inside, not felt in one’s body. The diary begins with a description of the house, which has many staff, at least seven or eight workers. She often uses irony to fill the emptiness and maintain the separation in relation to this world she does not know how to engage directly. Like a child, a voyeur, before the unknown, she is afraid of Brazil, does not touch things, only looks, and rarely initiates a moment where touching could occur. Page experiences with this uncontrollable world, in a September 24th entry from *Brazilian Journal*:

Our little river is suddenly a river of blood. Unaccountable and extraordinary. The swallows are here. We can't keep them out of the house. They fly in and out of the bedroom and bathroom windows before we are awake. Looking for a place to nest, they talk it over between themselves perched on top of doors — arguing, rejecting. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 83)

One notices the liveliness of Brazil through the birds, through the river, through the pulsation of nature. There is a closer intimacy between Page and the country; one can feel this passage as though a potentiality for feeling, yet Page does not include herself in the scene. Only her eyes seem to tell about the extraordinary. In the end she uses a metaphor to relate to the insistency of the birds in deciding to stay inside the house. It is true, in fact, that this quality of sensuality authenticates P. K. Page's works, yet the feeling of separation between herself and this world somehow affects the complete engagement between the reader and the written page. There is a distinctive kind of engaged detachment in her writing, though. Some would disagree with this commentary.

Several opinions about Page's works praise her artistic talent. In "The Alchemist," in *P. K. Page: Essays on her Works*, by Linda Rogers,<sup>9</sup> Page is considered a "jeweller" because she sees her poems being crafted from every angle, exhibiting a brilliance that is only comparable and resonant to light and precious metal. "Reflection, in her poetry, is insight," Rogers affirms.<sup>10</sup> She adds that images, for Page, are there in the phenomenal world for poets to select. In both works analyzed here, Page uses this method as a way of conceptualizing the body into her visual images.

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<sup>9</sup> In *P. K. Page: Essays on her Works*, edited by Linda Rogers and Barbara Colebrook Peace.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 15.

In the beginning of *Brazilian Journal*, Page informs the reader about her preparations for the trip she is about to take; and has many preconceived ideas about how to live in a foreign country, though not this particular society. In my view, her distance from Brazilian history and her closeness to Brazilian society misinformed her own self-discovery process, distracting her original voice from becoming established spontaneously; what she lacked was a capacity for feeling the many levels and realities that are present in the experience of living in Brazil. Her lack of language, I assume, drives and detaches the bodies, the daily quotidian, the small accidents of life in *Brazilian Journal* into her personal phenomenology narrated through a world of appearances.

P. K. Page is constantly in touch with “o jeitinho brasileiro,” “the Brazilian way,” as described in Sérgio Buarque’s de Holanda’s *Visão do Paraíso* (“Vision of Paradise”), a very controversial theory that ended up in the concept of the luzobrazilian colonial experience. In this book, Holanda comments on the material quality, the concrete aspect of the first Portuguese accounts about Brazil, which theoretically Page would have experienced by dealing with Brazilians themselves. This concreteness, for Buarque, means an “adhesion to what is real and immediate,” which, he affirms, is a mentality still connected to the Middle Ages, already in progressive decay (Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso*, 1959: 3).

“These were not very imaginative men,” writes Buarque. Instead, they possessed a “pedestrian realism,” typical of the medieval tradition — and it kept their thoughts close to the ground and allowed them to have the “immediate experience of “the man of the sea,” isolated from everything else and the center of its own reality (Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso*, 1959: 8). Page, like the Portuguese in their descriptive abilities, allegedly has contact with the real material world, and like them, explores emotions through the visual images, mainly.

As for the first Portuguese who arrived in Brazil, Buarque argues, the image of a paradise, of Brazil as an island, is challenged by a new textual concept: “olhos que enxergam, as mãos que tateiam,” (eyes that can see, hands that can touch) and who, consequently, gain their knowledge by physically relating to the land. (Holanda, *Visão do Paraíso*, 1959: 14). It was a scientific approach to the Brazilian experience that Buarque associates with being Portuguese, a qualification which sets the ground for what would be known as the “lusobrazilian theory.” Page’s approach is similar to them in the aspect that her language in the *Journal* explores the possibilities of what is touchable in Brazil through the description and veil of what is primarily visible in the land.

Buarque affirms that the Portuguese colonization and experience of Brazil were different than from other colonizing attempts, precisely because of their capacity to “understand” Brazil better than other colonizers, and for being tolerant to mixed races due to their African and Arabic roots. This theory, contested and criticized, perhaps indicate what Page negotiates as she deals with the citizens and the actual land, during the 1950s. She writes, in an October 8<sup>th</sup> entry, about a trip to Minas Gerais and its present situation:

We *did* manage to get off to Minas Gerais (General Mines. Imagine Ontario being so named!) Left on Sept. 29th. And now we are back. Flew to the new capital of the state, Belo Horizonte (Beautiful Horizon), population 550,000 — 270 miles north of Rio — in a Convair. The hotel, also new — indeed what is old in so young a city? — is modern with the kind of ugliness to be found in Australia. Hard to understand in Brazil, where there has been a long tradition of beauty. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 85)

Like many Portuguese writers, Page accentuates the beauty of the Brazilian landscape, and finds it strange to encounter dissimilarities and ugliness in this world. In this passage, Page compares Brazil and Australia in order to understand this subject, since she seems disturbed by the contrast she finds in Brazil, lacking words to describe the ugliness inserted into the beautiful landscapes. A few instances later, she comments on its people, the “mineiros,” or literally miners, the inhabitants of Minas Gerais:

How easily one jumps to generalizations! Even accepting the fact that one cannot know Brazilians on the basis of knowing a few, I find I continue to assume that I do. Why, otherwise, was I so surprised by the people we met in Belo Horizonte? My mental picture of Brazilian women perfect as jewels, smart as Parisiennes, was badly damaged when, at the governor’s banquet, I met twenty Brazilian women — fat, frumpy, and full of imperfections. Like bourgeois Belgian or Dutch. But all charming. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 87)

Here she reflects on and admits her own tendency to generalize, to see Brazilian women as “jewels.” But then her idealizations are offset by more realistic encounters, or more varied ones. She is learning by experience. Page admits her own inability by naming her fear of embodiment as a basis for generalizing Brazil; for how is it possible to know Brazilians on the basis of knowing a few, even though she acts as though she does, and indeed reaffirms it in this excerpt? To address Brazil, for her, becomes associated with knowing Brazilian people, even though she is an outsider. The embodiment of Brazil is outside her view, since she does not allow herself to feel the country from within. Nevertheless, the picture she develops of Brazil gives a remarkable sense of someone struggling against their own inadequacies.



Her experience of beauty in Brazil becomes a generalization that she continues to confront, just like the encounter with plump women she discovers in Minas Gerais, which contrasts with the image of women as jewellery. Her daily exchanges with Brazilians are often met with the determination of figuring out who they are: Page's additional insights come from the destruction of the country's habitats, in the historical "depreciation" of the house they move in, an abandoned heritage. These activities inform Page about the meaning of Brazil; the construction of this country is realized through material artifacts and elements, rather than an internal questioning of the meaning of these discourses and habitats. Page, by contrast, is a traveler fascinated by Brazil who is afraid to internalize the complete abandonment and desertion she encounters there. Hugh Raffles, in *In Amazonia, a Natural History*, would call for a book of intimacies.

It is important to mention Hugh Raffles' understanding of intimacy and contact found in his book, *In Amazonia: A Natural History*. Raffles' attempts to challenge the empirical discourse of scientific research, which has been predominant in Amazonia ever since the sixteenth century, by adopting a model that focuses on local knowledge: an embodied intimacy. He has an interest in local histories, and how information rapidly is exchanged and subsequently lost in this environment. His intention, therefore, is to bring "an account of the differential relationships of affective and often physical proximity between humans, and between humans and non humans," (8) thus creating a book of intimacies.

Page, in her experience of Brazil, does not explore this possibility, since the source of her knowledge is limited by class issues and social boundaries. She is not faced with encounters with knowledgeable, local people who might bring a new understanding and local histories to address her curiosity of Brazil. Often the meetings are with people alike, ambassadors or their wives. The

encounters with the staff are a possibility of local intimacy, yet Page does not explore the frontiers of those relationships beyond her household, since she is more concerned with the findings and running of the house inhabited by her.

Historically, the discovery of Brazil carries within itself an amalgamation of dark medieval tales, enigmatic monsters and fantastical visions of Paradise depicted by the Portuguese sailors who literally reinvented this territory of sun and plenty across the Atlantic. Through documents, treaties and cartographical impressions, there was a seductive calling to the Europeans of an Old World who sought prosperity and dared to embark to this recently “discovered” land. For that reason, as the literary historian Silviano Santiago explains in *As Raízes e o Labirinto da América Latina*, it is important to recognize certain values and readings in order to better reinterpret this cultural heritage, particularly the interplay of opposites, which is only possible if individual experiences of Brazil are incorporated. And as relevant data that takes into consideration the mutational aspect of this very place, particularly when compared to other countries.

In *Imagining the Earth*,<sup>11</sup> John Elder explains how the recreation of places in one’s imagination calls for an ecological awareness that takes into account the “cultural dividedness” of man and nature, past and present, intellectual reflection versus sensation. Elder posits that American poetry, particularly after the 1970s, has been constructed through an intellectual understanding that views with hostility the rise of Western civilization — and how ignorance and carelessness towards nature translate as an intrinsic condition of human beings who, on one

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<sup>11</sup> For more, see John Elder in *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

hand, consider the destruction of natural landscapes as negative but cannot let go of the desire to dominate and prosper.

For Elder, poetry, through its various forms, acts as a dialogue between one's sense of place and one's awareness of self in an arena of world experience. Page describes Brazil in her work through her own placement in that world, using visual metaphors and life experiences. (Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, 1996: 2) According to Elder, this conversation is initiated by metaphors of reconciliation between the divided parts which generate a new understanding of life as a "process of tidal exchange, of decay and renewal." (Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, 1996: 22) John Elder states that our understanding of culture is a construction which participates in this "circuit of mutual dependency" (Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, 1996: 22) whereby all factors are engaged when the biophysical landscape is taken into account. Elder trusts that poetic discourse can benefit from this understanding.

Page's Brazil lacks in embodiment but becomes an imagined place of experience and artistic education through the reconstruction of the biophysical landscape. In her work, this transformation occurs by her observations and notes on the abundant natural world encountered in Rio de Janeiro as well as in the hinterlands of this country. Poetically speaking, the aftermath of this Brazilian experience is effectuated through the writing of what is outside, through this country *Brazilian Journal* names in the notes of her diary, as we see on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1957:

The beach yesterday so white and blue – beach umbrellas of every color, as close together as space allowed. And all the boulevards full of balloons and kites. We stopped and bought a kite like a large eagle. They are called *papagaios*. By the time we returned to

our green garden, though, there was not enough wind to lift a postage stamp. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 35)

Page describes the biophysical landscape as though her sensibility was filled by this understanding of the white, the blue, and the umbrellas. It is a statement of the reality in front of her, and how it resonates in her perception. A week later, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Page writes:

Our personal car has arrived – a great relief. I can now, if I wish, get away from the house. Took off for Copacabana this morning – my first shot at Brazilian traffic. Eight lanes. Fast! Such a morning . . . the sea beautiful, and miles of beach. I swear every child in Brazil has a kite and manages to get it airborne no matter how tiny the piece of ground on which he is standing. The sky jerks and bobs with them. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36)

In this excerpt, Page experiences the freedom of driving in the city, which comes with a feeling of beauty. She is observing the beach, the blue of the ocean, the kites: these provide a contrasting feeling to the containment of being at home. She reveals her feelings; she is relieved to finally have a car. This feeling has many implications. It is a relief because, with its arrival, she gains mobility and access to the landscape, to nature, and even to urban sites. She adds, about the same event of driving to the beach, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>: “I walked among the shops, just looking. Prices high, even for tropical fruits – custard apples, *caquis*, and *mamãos* (papaya). In a workman’s shelter on the side of the street a group of men was solemnly playing dominoes.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36) In this passage Page is impressed by simple things, and attracted by the price of fruits. Dominoes catch her attention, and the day becomes an

investigation of the beautiful, of intellectual reflection on life, and what liveliness Page daily experiences in Brazil.

While there is a great sense of the city of Rio offered in the *Journal*, its traffic, its citizens, its cultural and social scene, Page also gives an insight into the interior of the state, its scenery, and offers the reader a sense of how the natural intercedes with the cultural and social. She writes, about a trip to Petropolis:

Saturday and Sunday of Easter weekend we drove to Petropolis. Elizabeth Bishop lives there and I understand why: it is a small hill town set in beautiful country with a wonderful climate, and light-hearted enough to make you light-headed. We were there for the São Paulo-Rio Golf Meet – an annual event that Canadians from both cities participate in. Pretty dull, too. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36)

In this event, Page reveals her interests: her trip to Petropolis is something that she finds curious, due to the fact that the American poet Elizabeth Bishop lives nearby, but also inconsequential, because of the reason for making the trip, for the golf tournament. Nevertheless, she describes Petropolis “as a small hill town set in a beautiful country with a wonderful climate,” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36) and goes on to describe the place where they will stay:

We stayed at the Quitandinha Hotel – an extraordinary structure – half Swiss chalet and half seven-minute frosting, blown up to vast dimensions. It’s the largest hotel I have ever seen. One section is domed, and the span of the dome is said to be greater than that of St. Paul’s. When first built, it was the world’s largest gambling den. Now that gambling is abolished it is run, after a fashion, by the state. It is sleazy, dirty, bereft. Small parcels of

dwarfed people move about in it like groups of tourists in a museum without exhibits. Pretty Brazilian girls, following the fashion, show off their sensuous, hippy figures in toreador pants. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36)

Page marvels at the space, at the construction of the hotel edifice in this area. Other interests visible in this passage are the Brazilian girls, described as “pretty,” with sensuous bodies. Page craves these experiences; her eyes photographing everything. Her ability to visualize is one of the accomplishments of the *Journal*, even if it lacks a more sensual participation of the writer in it. In this passage, the site of Page’s vacation affects her sensibility. She describes the physical attributes of the extraordinary structure, which is large in all dimensions. But what strikes her more are the contrasts between the young women and the shapes in the landscape.

It seems to sadden her that the site was first used for gambling, and that function destroyed its initial qualities. Although Page is not fluent in or able to write Portuguese, she still manages to paint Brazil with a type of precision that counts on visual embodiments of others, which are featured in the *Brazilian Journal*. She also paints, using a “nibbled” pen, which she explores in the language of the *Journal* as a type of expression that is filled with emotion for landscapes, both urban and non-urban. Page writes about checking in at the hotel in Petropolis:

We had barely arrived in our room, which was far from clean and very cold, when the desk called to ask if we were satisfied with it. I replied that we were without linen. They said they only provided that when they knew the guests were satisfied. Very circular. The altitude and cold air made us sleep. Fourteen hours! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36)

One can grasp Page's feelings and how they are verbalized. When asked how she feels as she arrives in the hotel, whether she is satisfied or not, she doesn't reply directly, but simply responds that they were without linen. From this exchange, she is told that the services are only provided in case the guests are happy, which appears as a contradiction in itself. Yet she is very stoic about it, never complains, never expressing her doubt. She basically names the conversation "circular" and changes the subject. It is a very detached way of experiencing an emotional situation. Yet she notices the car, the temperature, the altitude. The details of the experience are made secondary to the logic of the hotel staff and her ironic, stoic response to it.

Page makes her point by narrating the event in a separated manner, as though she were simply demonstrating Brazilian attitudes in terms of managing a hotel. At the same time, she seems to forget the incident minutes later, open to whatever situation comes her way; she takes every moment as it comes, learning how to observe the situations she initially does not understand. Hers is a segmented, detached way of seeing. Each event is kept apart from the others, like a series of snapshots, moments visualized in time capsules, easy to store.

The weather is a force to consider, and in her case it is a beneficial one. The episode and the trip end on a very favourable note and bring to Page a few things about the Brazilian landscape and its ever-surprising cultural costumes. She writes:

Strange and wonderful parasitic plants for sale at roadside stalls on the way back. Dozens of different kinds of bananas – from tiny and smooth to large and angled – varying in colour: yellow, green, white or even red. And behind the stalls, blue and mauve *hortências* (hydrangeas) apparently growing wild. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 36-37)

A marvellous landscape picture is registered by Page, who paints its nuances in her *Journal*. What attract Page in the passage are the natural beauties she finds in the every day life, and how variable, colourful, and productive these elements are for her writing. The variety seems to inspire her to see and encounter new cultural elements in this environment. Bananas are something that catches her attention, as are the flowers that she encounters on the road returning to Rio. These are the apparently insignificant moments that fill Page's life with colour, content and meaning. It is as if she were developing an impressionistic series of painted photographs, a record book of assembled images, a museum of still shots or painted moments.

She observes the wildness, and how this "quality" seems to exist peacefully with the urban. She adds sensual notes on Brazilian workmen, recognizing them from the return trip to Rio; a trip to the hinterlands, staying in a magnificent hotel, for a Golf tournament. She writes:

Incidental intelligence: the Brazilian labourer usually wears wooden clogs – a wooden platform with toe-strap. You can hear him approaching from a great distance. Those who wear oxfords and loafers cut the backs out so the shoes can be donned and shed easily. All workmen leave their shoes outside and enter a house barefoot. Despite the heat, I have never known them to smell. This, I am told, is their inheritance from the Negroes or Indians – I've forgotten which! – who taught the Portuguese to wash. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 37)

Page's interest in bodily functions and its smells is clear in this passage, and the attention given to the habits of Brazilian labourers demonstrates how Page often does not know why she is interested by certain subjects, except by the surprise they provoke in her, the novelty of it. Yet what is the meaning of this encounter, or this note, personally to her? The reader does not know,



since all she shows are its cultural notes and historical commentaries. Is she interested in them all, or are these notes just every day experiences? These events represent the painting of her life in Brazil.

Perhaps the notion of the *Journal* itself is never addressed by Page, and in this dissertation, I want to prove that her desire was to name Brazil, even if through a lack of the body. What one notices from this passage, among others, is simply that Page makes meaning out of these extraordinary experiences by extrapolating them in language and allowing the reader to notice her desire to learn more about the country. In this passage, one realizes how Page is tuned to the historical background of the cultural aspects of Brazilians, whether they wash or how they take care of themselves, as she adds that this a cultural inheritance, and describes how the ritual of washing was previously neglected before. Does she have a sense of herself as superior? Is she “better” because she doesn’t smell? There is a strange moment of condensation here in relation to these subjects, but she rarely clarifies or explains her observations.

These images summarize Page’s impression of Brazil, and how she views these comments about natural life as a discovery that entertains her during her trip to Petropolis. This dissertation stresses the importance of recognizing the private spaces of a poet’s individual interchange with the public, but also with a publicized territory, and how the outcome is revealed. In other words, Brazil and its absurdities are a contrast to the other experiences of P. K. Page, and a challenge to her understanding of embodiment. What is hidden or kept from view maybe just as telling as what is made visible.

This awareness is what governs part of my reading of P. K. Page’s works: an interpretation that is not definitive but inclusive of the eccentricities of history and the oddities of

the every day; an exercise of observation on feelings and affects, which aims to pinpoint that which cannot be seen, yet is made real through the associations and connections lacking in the *Journal*. By following Page's writings closely, it is easy to observe that the constant challenge to her sensibility is that of home, of origin, of belonging, yet it does not suffice to explain why she avoids embodying these lacks, as though cultural and natural notes were sufficient to address the empty spaces within her. On the other hand, perhaps the spaces, the gaps, are simply a function of her use of the *Journal* form.

By remaining faithful to her imagination Page demonstrates how the task of writing or painting is contained within a continuous act, which is ongoing: an endless trial of improving one's language, talent and expertise in order to identify and address the unfamiliar or familiar within cultures and traditions. On the other hand, Page does not like to feel out of control, writing aimlessly, or painting vague notions of a sensation in order to arrive at a feeling. She prefers abstraction, for it seems to offer her a clarifying connection with an underlying feeling of disorientation and questioning. Such feelings are nurtured in the realm of the abstract, far from a concrete embodiment into words. Her home is a constant resource for inquiry in the *Journal* and the details of its maintenance are indulged by Page: an elevator stops at the main floor and appears to be like an elephant, due to its size and manner of functioning.

Page's writing as portrayed in the *Journal* follows an agenda; she offers a sequence of events and attempts to delve into the personal and the subjective, placing most of its efforts in the necessity to report these facts in a journalistic or detached manner. From the *Journal* one notices how she barely shows herself in the *Journal*, appearing only in fleeting glances, in phrases like "I have done little since arriving except unpack and inspect and try to get things working. And study Portuguese. And draw long breaths" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 8). Her shyness is

expressed in her fear to go out in Brazil, to experience life through the contact with exterior objects, and the environment, which is revelatory. Page is detached, since feelings are not predictable in this place she inhabits and embodies, even if partially. She writes, after returning from Petropolis and settling down in her residence again, about the unexpected events that occur in the house:

*Episode of the goat:* Yesterday Morel, the cook – who is slim and rather effeminate with a peroxidized streak in his hair, and who looks absurdly young in his white uniform and chef’s hat – asked if he might bring his goat. He is, he said, an orphan with no relatives, and Negrinha is his only family. I agree on one condition: that he obtains the consent of the gardener. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 37)

Page introduces a man who “looks absurdly young” and has a goat as his sole family. His condition affects Page, and she is ready to accept his request, on one condition. The house has rules, and she does not dismiss her responsibility towards them. But these events demonstrate how Page eases and increases a type of connection with her staff and to those who are around her in Brazil, perhaps creating a sense of community that had not yet developed at the beginning of the *Journal*. Still she does not address her feelings. The episode unfolds, and she writes:

Today the goat arrived. I was taken up the hill at the back of the house to meet her. Negrinha. She is indeed black and female, as her name implies. And she is most comely. She was tied to the little abandoned house up among the wild mango trees, safely beyond the reach of all valuable plants. If she was excited by the sight of me, she was nothing like as excited as Morel was with the introduction. I asked if she was noisy. He assured me she was almost mute. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 37)

Page's enthusiasm is clear in this passage, which is in contrast to her usual frustration with the employees. The question of embodiment becomes more tangible in this excerpt, as though the excitement of the goat provoked a reaction from Morel, who is proud to have a mute goat at the house meeting Page. Even though Page doesn't seem to have an emotion regarding the animal, she does find it comely, and describes its qualities in the passage. In the narrative, Page introduces the goat by indulging herself in the reasons behind the goat's name. Page likes this strategy, of analyzing and observing. She adds:

When I suggested to Morel that she was far from the mute animal he had described, he assured me, "It is only because she feels strange here. She will soon get used to it and then you will never hear her." Returning from an ambulatory tour of the garden before dinner we caught a glimpse of a slim dark silhouette by the kitchen door and catapulting through the same door as if shot from a cannon, José, our *mulato* cleaner, and Morel in his chef's hat. The chase had begun. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 38)

Page's exchange demonstrates the paradox of her situation, where the employee says one thing in reference to the goat, and the animal acts in a contrary manner. The story is pointed, and embodies the feeling of immediacy that the situation demands. In it, we notice Page's ability to read the landscape and report it through a more grounded feeling. Page, despite her good manners and easy going nature towards her employees, does not fully trust their judgment, as the situation with the goat proves. In this passage Page seems to know that the animal, in contrast to Morel's assurances, is not domesticated and has a mind of its own. She feels it cannot be accommodated in her home like a visitor, something that the cook seems to believe as well. The result is instinctual behaviour from an animal let loose. Page is not surprised, and notes how a

chase after the goat ensues. The adventure goes on for two more pages in *Brazilian Journal*, until its conclusion:

*Conclusion of the episode of the goat.* Wakened again this morning by Negrinha's song to the dawn. Mary, bearer of breakfasts and the latest news, told us that what is now known as "the goat of the embaixatriz" had twice escaped during the night to the convent next door, and twice been returned by two unamused Sisters of God. Too much, too much, I complained to Morel. We wanted no more songs outside our bedrooms, at five a.m., no more chases, no more . . . But as we were discussing her, Negrinha escaped again...After a long time they returned, flushed and goatless. This was the moment for which Ricardo had waited – the moment when Morel, nonplussed, worried, fed-up, would be willing to be rid of Negrinha. It is a point, reached in human relationships – when the scale finally tips, the situation can no longer be borne . . . Later I was told that Ricardo, by some alchemy, found and caught Negrinha without delay and led her straight away to his weekend shack on the outskirts of Rio. Peace reigns once again on Estrada da Gávea. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 40)

After such a long narrative, it is intriguing to see how Page's intention was once again to relate her frustration and recognition of limitations in regards to human relations, in particular the ones established in Brazil. She does not want her peace disturbed; she does not want to participate in Morel's excitement with the goat. Even though embodied, the goat provokes in Page frustration similar to what we notice in the beginning of the book; the only difference is that she seems to position her feelings more strongly in these pages. Though she is still amused, ironic, detached in her remarks.

Often Page experiences life in terms of immediate feelings, which become part of her technique in writing. Moreover, vital communication with the world is what becomes absent in the *Journal*, where events are selected according to what pleases the writer's mood in regards to the routine of that familiar place. This relationship is effectively demonstrated with the goat episode, since, even though she does not feel or question why, Page often returns to the phenomenon, to the living world, to the immediacy of life, as though desiring it in silence and from a distance. The natural landscape inspires her, and causes her to paint scenes as if they were still images, as we find in the following passage. She writes about a trip to the beach:

The beach was beautiful – slightly hazy. Black, brown, white Brazilians in *futebol* sweaters, kicking the ball about in the thick soft sand; the curving facade of apartment buildings – whites, pinks, blues; the odd-shaped mountains – how to describe their shapes? Elongated cones? The top joints of thumbs? – making the sea look like a surrealist painting; and the waves tumbling in – riding in green and high, their plate glass cracking and breaking and pulverizing into crystals and white powder. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 40)

The desire here is to see the bodies, the colours, sensuality intrinsic in every moment embodied. Everything seems to gain a type of skin, and even the apartment buildings gain that quality. This visual attraction is explicit in the descriptive quality of the images Page seems to produce when speaking about Brazil, where she will name the sensations yet not address them personally and reflectively. If she fears nature and its instinctual quality, she also respects its beauty and perfection. Perhaps it is this mixture of desire, fear and respect what makes her work so tantalizing.

Nature inspires Page, and in Brazil, it makes her describe everything in terms of their properties, their perceptual qualities. A hazy beach, colourful Brazilians dressed in *futebol* clothes, the “soft sand,” everything has a quality that allows the reader to feel closer to the scene, even though she does not relate to them personally. The apartments have a curving facade, and the mountains are hard to describe. Too literary sometimes and quite descriptive, she recreates nature through perception in order to bring us closer to objects and their constitution, to give a foundation of her experience with them.

Yet the excess of visual expressions, even if sensual, sometimes is overwhelming, and like the episode of the goat, one wonders what, with so much beauty, is the effect on the writer. In this passage, she positions herself, and the effect is embodied. She writes:

Our room was full of those extraordinary baskets of flowers – *cestas*, they are so called, and I hate them. Each flower head is cut off and wired. Within a day they are all dead. One *cesta* was of camellias – six dozen, I should think – and one of incredible flowers like pale mauve anemones with a great brush of striped stamens. Orchids and red roses from the wife of the governor. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 42)

Page hates the flowers, and proves why: they are cut in half, and are often dead within a day. Very rarely one observes these expressions in her writing, and in this excerpt it gives the writing strength and impact. She expresses the feeling and explains why. Right away the reader is presented with a type of emotional expressiveness, and can feel it by reading it on the page. In this passage, Page is describing a hotel room in São Paulo, after their arrival in the city which she sees as more like a “Scandinavian city than a Brazilian one.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 41)

The hotel and its room do not immediately please her, and her impression of the objects, particularly the *cestas*, demonstrates how Page is disturbed by an environment that lacks harmony. In this case, it is a group of flowers which, when placed in a *cesta*, are dead in less than a day. In the process, Page is explicit with her emotions and examines the contrast between beauty and ugliness, and how that analysis accentuates or disturbs her internal sense of joy. Page writes, on another occasion:

An immense lunch at a company house on the edge of the escarpment, with Brazilian fruits for dessert. A. and I both chose *caquis*. These must be persimmons, but so different from the ones that find their way north. Marvellous to be confronted by fruits you know nothing about – taste, texture, whether they have stones or small seeds, are soft or hard. Advised by Sr. Lutz, I cut mine north and south. A., unadvised, cut his east and west. “A natural error for a citizen of an east-west oriented country,” was Lutz’s comment. After lunch we plunged down the escarpment in the front seat of an incline-railway car with a plastic awning and nothing but a knee-high barrier between us and space. It was like being in an oversized roller-coaster that went on dropping straight down from the top of a mountain. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 43)

Page acknowledges the wonders of being confronted with the unknown, unfamiliar fruits, and how one feels in these situations. She cuts her fruit “North-South” in length, and her husband does the opposite, slicing it “East-West.” This commentary indicates her awareness of geographical boundaries that separate the experience of Latin America from that of North America, though she does not elaborate on the matter. Instead, they embark on a train journey down the mountain, which seems to please, if not appease, her senses.



In this case, Page is surprised by the unfamiliar persimmons, opens and eats the fruit, which pleases her physically. For Page, in *Brazilian Journal*, to have a body is to be united to a definite field, to interact continuously with a particular project, like the description of these worlds, inside and outside the house she inhabits, and how these events become part of her experienced world. She gains consciousness of this world through her body, even though she does not acknowledge it. She writes:

We drank a Brazilian cocktail – made from *pinga*, a sugar-cane liquor – which tasted very like a daiquiri. Then lunch. On the dining-room table, and running its entire length, was a narrow, flat dish crammed with every kind of yellow, red, and orange flower the garden produces – flowers only, no leaves. Brilliant, startling. The meal began with what looked like a bowl of potato soup with a poached egg staring from its centre. (*Bem te vi!*) This was *cará* soup, the *cará*, I would guess, is a variety of yam. It was followed by roast pork and black beans mashed and made into a roll – garnished with little sausages and sitting on a bed of what looked like cooked grass and tasted bitter and pleasant. For salad, sliced cucumbers and cold, sliced marrow. Dessert was candied pumpkin and fried bananas served with fresh cream. And coffee. Everything a product of the *fazenda*. Everything traditionally Brazilian. And very good indeed. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 44)

The passage is a reflection on Page's visit to a Brazilian *fazenda* from the early nineteenth century, and the effect the experience has on her being. Page's pleasure with food is controlled; she lists the dishes prepared in her visit to the farm, yet does not seem too impressed by their ingredients as much as by their colours, which she enjoys and describes. It's the collective gathering of food, flowers, drinks, and everything "traditionally" Brazilian that seems

to bring her joy. The naturalness of the cooking also seems to draw her attention. One notices how Page places value on the way things are prepared, how cooking follows rituals.

Another subject this dissertation is attentive to is how, at the end of the narrative in the *Journal*, Page begins to question her own capacity to address her vision of Brazil, perhaps because, after visiting several *fazendas*, and having several curious interchanges with Brazilians about subjects ranging from divorce to cultural customs, she feels: “Disturbed and excited about Brazil. Why? What is it all about? Does place alter person? It’s like falling in love – with the country itself.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 46) Even though she has a profound and constant interaction with things of the land, with its citizens, Page still experiences conflict, uncertainty, surprise, and lacks the embodiment of the country itself, as she testifies in the previous passage. Page becomes more aware in the country, yet still fails to secure a definition for what life in Brazil might be about. She does not know whether or not she has been altered, but she knows that its effect is similar to the type of change that occurs when one falls in love – in this case, when one falls in love with a country.

At the same time, Page is still dealing with conflicts in the household, and returns to the duty of hiring and firing again. She writes:

Two days ago I gave notice to Salvador, the head servant, and his wife. The house feels like a powder keg. I am sorry about it for all our sakes, but perhaps most especially for her. This must have happened to them before: he beautiful and lazy; she efficient and madly in love with him. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 58)

Page’s experience of Brazil is embodied in her exchanges with the employees, and how she administers her own feelings in these relationships. It is a social experience. Even though she

does not address it fully, Page, in this excerpt, learns to let go of guilt and suffering to communicate her intentions without shyness. She has compassion, but she is fully devoted to maintaining order in the house. From this excerpt one can sense the frustration and disappointment while, at the same time, she is dealing with her own challenges with the language, and how to express the Portuguese idiom with confidence; how both situations coincide. She writes:

Have been drawing with a felt-nibbed pen. A totally new concept in pens; I bought one in Ottawa to mark our boxes and trunks, and duly unpacked it here and put it on the desk in the library. It was on the desk when I gave Salvador his notice. My Portuguese still leans heavily on the dictionary. I was nervous. He was grand. It took me a long time. I doodled as I talked and I fell in love with the nib, which is very black and totally indelible. “What’s all this?” A. asked later, picking up the doodles from the desk. “That’s me firing Salvador.” “You could draw,” said A. “Surely, if I’d been going to draw, I’d have drawn by now.” “No,” said A, firmly. “You could draw.” And the next day he returned with a roll of drawing paper so beautiful in itself that there was no way I could put a mark upon it. But since then I’ve been trying to draw, to recreate the wonderful shapes of the leaves and the intricate patterns of mosaic tiles. I think I might be able to draw if only I could ... what? If only I *could*. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 59)

Hers is a progressive discovery, of unearthing feelings and internal processes, which constitutes Page’s engagement of Brazil. In this passage, Page interrelates, unknowing, perhaps, her need to speak to her employees and her desire to express herself, to draw, to engage with the Portuguese language. The suggestion of drawing from her husband does not take her by surprise, yet she knows she cannot draw except by trying it.

It is her insistence and curiosity that develop into sentiments throughout the narrative, and engage the reader with Page until the end of the *Journal*. She trusts the unknown, and she confronts her desires. In this passage, one can witness how an apparently easy task, to fire an employee, becomes a greater challenge, since Page has to negotiate in a language that she has not fully mastered. Her body language announces her insecurity while he, on the other hand, stands firm, as though challenging her face to face. At the same time Page plays with a pen and considers drawing. Initially she does not take these thoughts seriously, until she is faced with paper and pen.

It is an interesting reflection on creativity, since she had, one realizes, the desire to draw but feels paralyzed by the act itself. Her drawing happens almost accidentally, as though she, as with language, both attracts and avoids the physical on paper.

On another occasion, Page is present in an immense apartment on Avenida Atlântica, which opens on Copacabana beach, when it is alive with its lights, while thirty other people are being served by twelve men in white gloves. A dialogue ensues, between Page and her host, a pale and cerebral young man from Brazilian External Affairs. The pair analyzes the difference between Brazil and Australia, which, she says, can be most agreeable. Page does not seem to know how to conduct herself in this discussion; it is as if she still has no opinion whether one place would affect her impressions of another.

Nevertheless she listens, attentively, perceiving the world quietly. She develops a factual narrative, informing us that the rest of the conversation was concerned with sex. In this scenario, something unexpected happens, and once again, the outcome is unknown. The lights go off, and darkness reigns. The landscape, then, predominates: “the myriad points of light on the bay,

floating now in so vast a night. How afraid we still are of the dark!” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9) Immediately her body recedes to allow the entrance of the twelve footmen, with their white gloves and lighted candelabra. Beauty remains, she resumes. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9) The other side of this scenario is the seduction this lively world instigates.

Brazil has heat, it has constancy, and it is as fascinating “as the smell of musk.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9) The communication between Page and the world is connected to the lazy rhythm of this type of living, which causes her to feel as if she is “under warm greenish water.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9) After she discovers drawing at the end of her first year in Brazil, *Brazilian Journal* becomes filled with notes on nature, descriptions of the country, and detailed recreations of her sensations. She explains the process:

The rain has stopped, after two days, and today is a dream of a day. Sun drawing the moisture upwards makes the air diaphanous, as if the earth were breathing. I have spent all of it, felt pen in hand, attempting to draw the garden and the mountains. Difficult in black and white. And how can I catch that texture of the air? (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 62)

It is noticeable that Page’s increased reflections on the page about the texture of the air and how it could be translated echo her difficulties in embodying Brazil in words, as though her efforts to draw began in the same place as her attempts to write. Page wants to embody the natural landscape under an even more sensual truth, yet finds difficulty in imagining not only the meaning of the things she describes, but also the qualities of their perceptibility. How can an artist capture the texture of this air?

The very posing of this question expresses, perhaps, her inability to access the feelings and knowledge that the body and its sensuous qualities contain. When Page addresses this place of feeling that is closer to her skin, she doesn't realize why it is beyond her ability to catch it: in other moments, she mentions how the jackfruit leaves a smell in the air and how it looks like a black porcupine, when fallen. It is not only the natural world that affects her body. The buildings, built in the canyons of this mountainous city, attract her to this environment, to become more and more of a participant, which she struggles to be. Page watches the streets, sees everyone walking in pairs, fully embracing or half embracing, demonstrating affection, despite the unrelenting heat. Her body behaves, and reacts: "a thought is barely born before it melts," "drowns our wetness in a greater wetness" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 9), or the body of A, who "is spilled on his bed like warm milk, and the frogs, treetoads, cicadas, and whatever else cut, saw, bang, and hit the black tropical night," intersect (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 10). The bodies in contact make us more aware of what Page is feeling, the heat and the wind are a constant: "you could almost see the cooler air as it streamed through the rooms overturning photographs, rifling papers – a manic housekeeper on the loose" (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11). She is, at one point, completely attracted to drawing:

Almost totally preoccupied with drawing. It is like an illness – anything beyond its radius is blurred. I tell A. that before we leave he and I will have a show at the Cultura Inglesa and, for the *vernissage*, serve fig biscuits and cocoa. The only show we have seen there – dismal premises smacking of the "Y" – depressed me utterly. Work by an amateur – a large woman in wrinkled stockings. A good object lesson for all us other amateurs. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 63)

To be completely engaged with an action such as drawing becomes an obsessive act for Page. At the same time she plans to have a show, and acknowledges her disappointment with amateur art in Brazil. From this passage, one notices a shift in the writing of *Brazilian Journal*, whereby Page grows more connected to her desires, and drawing becomes the center of this movement. She engages in the practice, she takes lessons, she studies the art form.

In this Chapter 3, I have tried to show precisely how the entrance into the world of drawing occurs in Page's writing; how a fearful embodiment of feelings, characteristic of her writing, shows initial signs of emotions when the descriptive aspects of drawing come into place; an evidence of how the art allows for the internalization of her own sentiments onto the page. Later in this dissertation I will return to the importance of drawing for Page in order to discuss how the concept of embodiment in the *Journal*, allied to this partnership between body and drawing, allows one to gain access to the feelings of her work.

*Brazilian Journal* is a fascinating journey into the heart of a country loved and idealized by Page, who, by acting as a translator of light, creates settings of snapshots, or pictures which illustrate and guide the reader deep into Brazil. My account of the book attempted to highlight the conflicted aspects of this enterprise, and inquires into Page's difficulty in containing her desire to know and articulate Brazil, which often appears disembodied or detached. On the other hand, she does reinforce her involvement with this place by picturing and painting it with detailed eye. Her encounter with the other, the foreigner, is reinforced by her trials with language and its impossibilities to containing all feelings or a totality of this place called Brazil.

Part I of this dissertation deals with *Brazilian Journal*, and the genre of *Journal* writing. Page's usage of the genre is journalistic, detailed, and explanatory. Part I articulates Page's

struggle to depict the body, embodied emotions, or feelings in general, but also with the *Journal* form as inherently self-limiting. Her journalistic, snapshot style was in part a conscious decision by Page to adhere to the *Journal* form, but also to explore its potential for creative visualizations. It is like a scrapbook, a collection of photographs, which she gathered to store her memories and understandings of her time in Brazil.



#### Chapter 4: Page, Bishop, Brazil and Sensuality in Writing

Page is a sensualist preoccupied with landscape, geography and the exotic otherness of differences. As in the case of Brazil, for example, in the critical essay by Kevin McNeilly entitled “Toward a Poetics of Dislocation: Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page writing Brazil,” in *Studies in Canadian Literature*, as an example of exoticism. In it, McNeilly writes that, by turning inside, Page manages to create a poetry of displacement that deals with the difficulties of translating and reading another’s culture, as well as one’s place in the particular space. In the case of Brazil, he affirms, the place does not become a determinate space in her poetry but an indeterminate other who demands their own particular set of responses (Mc Neilly, “Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page Writing Brazil,” in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.2 (1998): 85-108)

In *Brazilian Journal*, the reader learns that Page is living in the country at the same time as Elizabeth Bishop and it is interesting to make note of some of the resemblances between her and the Canadian poet, even if they are simply sharing the condition of being a foreigner. In the same critical essay, Kevin McNeilly addresses the issue of writing “Brazil” in both Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page’s poetry by adopting a diagnostic approach strongly influenced by the work of Homi Bhabha, in particular his book *The Location of Culture* in which the theorist emphasizes the necessity for a “third space,” or in between, to locate the articulation of difference in the discourse, particularly when addressing an other. McNeilly argues that both Bishop and Page develop a poetic of difference which plays a decisive, formative role in their particular discourses. (Mc Neilly, “Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page Writing Brazil,” in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.2 (1998): 85-108)

He goes on to say that both writers, upon their arrival in Brazil, dealt with themes of anxiety and expectation and locate themselves, from the outset of this experience, in a negatively negotiated discursive space, which is not only a domesticated version of the country but also a vision that struggles to resist clichés. McNeilly discovers that the geography and the landscape of the country are common features in the poets' works, as well as the sensuality and the "exotic otherness" when writing of Brazil. And this otherness of Brazil, for Page, McNeilly argues, comes to stand as a source for imagistic rejuvenation, the reanimation of language. (Mc Neilly, "Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page Writing Brazil," in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.2 (1998): 85-108).

Other similarities between both of the poets highlighted in this essay are the poetics of displacement and a need to turn inward; a difficulty with the process of translation and reading of culture, particularly with the Portuguese language; a poetic dwelling which questions one's place in space. The conclusion of the essay is that, though Brazil may not be a determinate space in either's poetry, it remains as an indeterminate other that demands its own particular set of responses; it stands as an irreducible multiplicity, a zone of contestation which challenges the processes of tropes as it simultaneously calls those very processes into question. In McNeilly's essay the dilemma of embodiment is once again highlighted. (Mc Neilly, "Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Elizabeth Bishop and P. K. Page Writing Brazil," in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 23.2 (1998): 85-108).

It is important to distinguish Elizabeth Bishop's qualities as a poet, even if only slightly, due to her similarity with Page, and particularly due to the difficulty critics have with categorizing her work by one or another school of thought. Some brief examples of her poetry as a way to recreate the world through an unsettled place of origin, which is also focused on the

experience of the world, can be found in her book of poems titled *North and South: A Cold Spring*, from 1995. The first poem, “The Map,” affirms that topography displays no favourites, speaks about how making relates to the feeling of creating a map, its implications to the land and what it represents; the territory, and the relationship between sensing a place and drawing it on paper.

Another important book by Bishop, which, similar to Page’s *Brazilian Journal*, deals with the questions of language and inhabitation in a world, is *Questions of Travel*, from 1952. The first poem, “Arrival at Santos,” explores traveling and being a tourist, personalizes the landscape, and challenges the idea of whether our demands for a different world and a better life can be answered by being in one country at a certain moment in one’s life. Page asks herself a similar question to Bishop’s: whether “Brazil” could have been anywhere in the world. This theme is touched on by Bishop, too, who contrasts the idea of traveling with the act or experience of it.

Bishop’s next poem, “Brazil, January 01, 1502,” plays with double periods of time in order to emphasize the experience of time itself and how much it affects one’s position in space. “Questions of Travel” is also a poem in the book. It describes how one’s position in time and space is best manifested in terms of bodily movement. What dislocates time and space in this poem is not just a sense of home versus an imagined place, but an uncertainty at this very movement, on what transforms life and challenges our own perception of it. Her poem, “Electrical Storm,” deals with the concept of perception itself, and how the sounds and sights of a lightning storm can create a world of their own. In comparison to Page, Bishop’s work seems more attuned to the body, and its manifestations.

Sensuality is also evident in Elizabeth Bishop's poems about the tropical world, and "Songs for the Rainy Season," from *Questions of Travel*, is a good example of this. The poem explores the sensation of water and the different forms it can take. It is very effective and encourages us to feel the water, smell and listen to it as it transforms itself as well as the environment. Her poem is an expression of movement but also of texture, sound, smell. Another extraordinary example of how movement can create vitality for a poem is featured in "The Armadillo," which aims to mimic the dynamics of life.

As it happens in the poem, fire balloons are launched and fly high, almost touching the sky. The descriptions continues with the theme of constant motion that goes on as the characters fall to the ground and make contact with the owls, who receive the colour of fire through movement and pass it on, even to animals such as the armadillo, who appears reluctant to interact in this circle of life but must participate in it nonetheless. Another poem, "The River Man," is a piece about a man who, after being summoned by a "dolphin spirit," and later a river, is able to experience a dream world of flowing waters and different dimensions, which raises his appreciation of the interconnectedness of the world, of the experience of past and present, of his ancestors and this world, and of how the river provides for everything one may need. In all these pieces, the narrator is constantly interacting with the others, the foreigner, in a more participative manner than one sees in Page's writing about Brazil.

It is a study of how one relates to and physically interacts with the natural world. Similarly, the poem "The Burglar of Babylon" is a long, epic-like poem about a man who used to live in the slum; after a life of criminal deception he returns to the slum and is pursued by the authorities. His tragic death in the poem emphasizes the inequalities of the system as well as its

injustice. Although different than “The River Man,” this is a very detached account, despite its descriptive qualities. Bishop, like Page, retains an observer’s detachment.

Another stimulating work by Elizabeth Bishop, who, like Page, seems to immerse the body in action while writing about the world, is titled *The Complete Poems*, from 1970. In Bishop’s poem “Rainy Season, Sub Tropics,” the narrators are South American animals who introduce us to a different world; here animals think and speak, but also, feel with their skins, experiencing life with their senses. It recalls Page’s tendency to address the animals and the vegetation in *Brazilian Journal*, essential characters for understanding the country.

In Bishop’s work, the prose poem is similar to that of a fable; the displacement occurs with every animal and is very well described: from the exaggerated “giant toad,” to the “crab” with its need to readapt in a new and strange land he was not designed for, to the snail, large and overly oversensitive to the environment that surrounds her.

Other important poems are “Going to the Bakery,” which makes an ordinary trip to the bakery a site of possibility and a perfect meeting place for the unexpected to visit – a tendency to inflate which is also present in Page’s writing about Brazil. The poem “Under the Window,” set in Ouro Preto, describes the city and the ordinary, disconnected events that occur when one goes for a walk in the streets.

In her book, *Questions of Mastery*, Bonnie Costello investigates how “questions of mastery” (psychological, epistemological and political) determine the shape of Elizabeth Bishop’s poems and her way of seeing. Costello does not focus on personal or historical information alone to write this account on Bishop’s work but rather on her poetry itself and additional accounts left by the poet through various interviews. One of the aspects highlighted in

the book, which is similar to P. K. Page, is how travel is often a metaphor for consciousness. Bishop's sense of place is very connected with that of an exile, which Costello believes only contributed to her free and invigorating vision. She goes on to suggest that travel is not only a metaphor in Bishop's writing but "a genre in the broadest sense – an attitude and meaning which find expression in a particular set of representational strategies." (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 128)

According to Costello, Bishop's characters act on contradictory impulses. They seek change and renewal but also seem to be attracted to the certainty of mastering a new world, especially in relation to the old. Such behaviour is unavoidable and illusory; it is part of the experience of traveling which we see in Page's writing, too, a resistance to the unexpected and unknown aspects of life.

In *Questions of Mastery*, Costello asserts that Bishop examines the ironies of excursive vision, the failure to master different worlds with imported attitudes, and the discovery of value in the imagined particular. (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 129) In Bishop's case, it seems, travel is the inspiration for creating reality, and the eye of the beholder is what furthers our conception of reality and reconstructs it. It is this process of readjustment between realities, Costello posits, that is the guiding principle of generation in Bishop's art. Examples of this ambivalence towards home and a foreign land are frequent in her poetry, and her presentations of non-contiguous images are her way of conveying this sense of constant readjustment to new worlds.

It is important to note the changes in scale in Bishop's writing, which are indicative of changes in landscape and space. In *Questions of Travel*, Costello argues, we find a good example

of this tension between the observer's expectations and the reality he or she finds in their new environment. According to Costello, the promise of Brazil as an Eden, which was fashionable among Portuguese conquerors, is challenged by Bishop with the usage of an excursive vision that constantly readjusts "inherited constructions of reality (circus tent)" to the differences of the sensible world. At the same time, recalling Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and the hands-on, but descriptive view of the Portuguese when describing the land of Brazil in the fifteenth century, one notices the similarities between Page and Bishop, in their visual approach to discussing Brazilian themes.

Excursive sight is stretched between past and present, between home (as it is constructed in memory) and foreign lands. (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 139) Costello explores this excursive vision in Bishop's account, affirming that it allows for the formation of transitional patterns of understanding "as it sets up the circus tent." (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 141) One must also consider that nature is not a unified, static, two-dimensional being in Bishop's poetry but an uncertainty that cannot be mastered completely, and that attempt is always doomed to failure – a technique that explores the ambivalence of mastery and failure present in many instances of Bishop's work.

Bishop's vision, with regard to the sensuous, is temporal and local; the poet is interested in the experience of an ordinary person, the vision of the tourist, the passenger, and not only the poet. These glimpses nourish the sense of surprise in an interpretive mind through which, in her "excursive vision," Bishop negotiates reality and expectation. However unsatisfactory her attempts at mastery are, she continues to search for order, despite the unrelenting and ever present movement of life and nature. Memory is also a factor in Bishop's writing and

imagination. Costello posits that Bishop views memory as a thread of life, “a dynamic principle of limited continuity in a world of discontinuities.” (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 175)

According to Costello, Bishop wanted to apply a time sense between the occurrence of an event and its recollection to fictional works. She believed that this readjusting of the time sense, or “experience-time,” was rarely adopted in fiction, except for Proust and not as much as she would like to see it happening. “Memory is never merely repetition for Bishop. It affects and is affected by present events, like the circus-tent reality she described in her travel notes. The mind is no freer of temporality than nature is, nor is either bound by a strictly linear time” (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 177). Experience-time moves away from the nostalgic, repetitious idea of memory into a visually based experience; it is a concept that “involves a radical displacement and disorientation through memory which is akin to the experience of travel.” (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 200)

Even though this dissertation does not intend to explore the appearance and predominance of the sensuous and physical in Bishop’s art, I think her work is important in relation to P. K. Page’s, particularly because both writers attempt to understand the world from a “foreign” perspective. For that reason, I will focus on a few more instances in which this author celebrates the similarities between the two, and finally return to my investigation of Page. Overall, Costello affirms that painting and the visual arts interest Bishop, for “their power to evoke memory” – rather than for their aesthetic qualities. Other features of representation in Bishop’s poetry are maps and mirrors, which are often distorted and allude to the uncertainty and ever-changing aspects of landscape and poetry. By describing events, and prioritizing the sensuous over the mental, Costello argues, Bishop is able to create accounts that are a “record of



consciousness shaping a visual experience.” (Costello, *Questions of Mastery*, 1991: 240) In other words, the body as much of an absence in Bishop’s work as in Page’s.

In “Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Memory, Questions of Travel,” (Kalstone, 5) David Kalstone addresses the important question of how meaning in poetry can be developed from individual and unamplified details. It is also a compelling commentary on poetic criticism and the act of ranking; or how critics, in the case of Elizabeth Bishop, struggled to place her work in one category and failed to do so because “her apparent lack of insistence on meanings beyond the surface of the poem,” and the randomness and disintegration of some of her poetry, posited obstacles to the categorization. (Kalstone, 5).

One consequence of this, Kalstone reminds us, is that Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry has now become known through anthologies and single poems, which can be very deceptive as it creates the effect that her poems are simple and merely descriptive, posing the question whether “her poetry is poetry at all” (Kalstone, 5). Changes in scale are not unsettling in Bishop’s poetry, he argues, but strengthen our perspective. Concrete details are not just meanings with physical presence but become boundaries, suggestive limitations of her descriptive powers in “an effort at reconstituting the world as if it were in danger of being continually lost” (Kalstone, 12). The essay also notes that, besides the changes in scale and temperature of northern and tropical landscapes, her work features themes of exile and travel, memory and loss, all united in a vision which is never finalized or completely controlled.

Another important essay is Bonnie Costello’s “The Impersonal and the Interrogative in the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop,” (Costello, 111) which examines the importance of the impersonal and the interrogative in her work, and of how questions functions as assertion in

Bishop's poetry, building structures for experience and self-awareness. "Questions work as compasses," affirms Costello, (Costello, 111) pointing to something absolute we can neither see nor access, but which shows us where we are. This impersonal world, which refuses to answer, is replaced by the inner world, which has an uncertain relationship with geography, places and things, yet always searches for answers. These feelings of disorientation and disunity are "conditions of discovery" in Bishop's poetry, argues Costello. (Costello, 111)

Travel is Bishop's ambivalent metaphor, a place where constant, yet unsettling change, can coalesce with moments of calm. Observations lead to more inquiries, and answers are not always a final or desired outcome. It is a curiosity constantly nourished by more questions. Costello writes, "There is a pleasure in inquiry and conjecture for their own sake here; we feel no great pressure to resolve the questions posed or to define a single perspective, a legend by which the map can be consistently translated." (Costello, 111)

Costello's major argument is how Elizabeth Bishop's questions work as a mediation between "absolute difference and undifferentiation, between stillness and total flux" (Costello, 113) this is articulated by an impersonal and distanced narrator, who is able to produce poems that put "human confusion and authority" in perspective; a momentary stability that permits characters to speak "out of their limitations" in a world "bigger than themselves" (Costello, 118). And it is this level of intimacy and detachment that allows the juxtaposition of contradictory views in a single poem. Costello's final argument stresses that, despite the fact that travel is the dominant metaphor in Bishop's work, its goal is never to settle down; travel poems are, instead, a way of showing how our thought structure is built into this very search for origins and ideals, ordering our experiences to find ourselves.

The search for origins and names to articulate Brazil are Bishop's as much as Page's rite of passage, a poetic horizon where the possible and impossible can coexist in their creative constructions; a territory that allows them to dive deeply into the relationship between human and non-human associations, leading to an incorporation of the everyday aspects of Brazilian life, and its several realities, into their writing, even if only through visual metaphors and excursions. Page writes, in *The Filled Pen*, about this condition of living in Brazil:

I wonder now if "Brazil" would have happened wherever I was. As to where it pointed I hadn't the least idea, nor, I think, did I ask any questions beyond the immediate ones. But I drew as if my life depended on it — each tile of each house, each leaf of each tree, each blade of grass, each mote of sunlight — all things bright and beautiful. (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 37)

Now, what does this Brazil mean? What has changed in herself? As the ending of the last chapter of this dissertation tried to prove, Page shifts her behaviour in Brazil after she discovers drawing, as though she had a tool to enter her own emotions through the embodiment of shapes and forms from her writing. In this passage, she starts to discover the wonders of this place called Brazil by questioning whether this internal occurrence would have happened anywhere else in the world, as if this questioning had appeared in an unexpected, urgent manner. It is a feeling from within that Brazil captures in her.

The sentiment aroused by painting was one of survival, one of brightness and encounter with the world. From this and other passages about the act of drawing, one notices her need to embody the sensation that drawing causes her, the emotions are portrayed in the language that describes the very painting.

At the same time, one notices how, like the discipline of writing, drawing creates the same challenges of embodiment that are marked by reflections on the meaning of sensations and desires about the world. In writing, what escapes and detaches her body from the process, it seems, is the relationship between the process of thinking and being, and consequently, of embodying sensations in language. In another instance, she writes:

With a poem I am given a phrase. Often when I least expect it. When my mind is on something else. And my hands busy. Yet it must be caught at once, for it comes like a boomerang riding a magical arc and, continuing its forward path, it will vanish unless intercepted. And that phrase contains the poem as a seed contains the plant. (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 46)

She receives a phrase when she least expects it, when her mind is on something else. In this case there is thinking but being is absent, except for her hands, which are “busy.” She doesn’t feel the phrase, “it comes like a boomerang.” Page’s relationship with creativity seems to imply an outside source which provides for inspiration, as though what she wants to say is something from outside, and not a consequence of her own self-reflection. The phrase comes into her mind, and the only connections with the body are the hands. In fact, she states that if she doesn’t catch the phrase in time, she will lose it. Perhaps it is an attempt to grasp words and ideas through her hands. Or perhaps something from the external world has triggered her internal workings, and sparked the arrival of a phrase, like a visitation.

This passage brings to the reader the illusion that she receives ideas from this unknown source, ethereal, and not controlled, not deepened through a process of feeling. Page has an ephemeral relationship with how she receives inspiration, as though it posed the threat of

vanishing unless intercepted. For the writer, the body is not the source, but something vague and uncertain, that comes and disappears as it pleases. This passage enables an understanding into Page's relationship with writing, as though it were a gift, and not a practice. It begins as a gift, then develops through practice.

When Page is in Brazil, she is forced to quit writing, or more properly, she decides to stop — despite the abundance of material. The act of drawing replaces writing and is integrated into *Brazilian Journal*, where she writes, in another moment, about how she has been experiencing the world with painting: “Something mad is happening to me. I seem to be falling in love with the world. And something in me is afraid. It is hard to know joy from pain – just as it is hard to know hot water from cold, if either is hot or cold enough.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 64)

Page admits feelings something, and it recalls madness. Feelings are madness, embodying love is uncertainty. Because, it seems, to love what you can't define, Brazil, is Page's embodied fear. Thus, while she loves, she doesn't know why or how or what it means. It brings fear, and Page's being feels; her life is opened and exposed through its difficulty to differentiate certain feelings from certain sensations. She embodies, she feels, and she fears. This coincides with her drawing practice, which is often accompanied by Dona Helena, who also paints and becomes her companion. Consequently while she is drawing the house, the chapel, and finding it all very difficult, she begins to feel more and more at ease in Brazil, and risks defining Brazilians. She writes:

They are so warm, Brazilians – touch you, flatter you, kiss you, love you. Forget you the next day, of course. But while they are with you, they are whole-hearted. This rather suits me. It frees you from having to know them forever just because you've enjoyed their

company once. I think I could like most people – really like them – if I felt I never had to see them again. At any rate, I greatly enjoyed talking to Maria. Her head is full of poetry and, like the *pau mulato*, she has clearly shed many skins over the years. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 69)

For the first time in the narrative, Page acknowledges the importance of feeling and having physical contact with others, and how love develops from this place of embodiment, of touching. At the same time, she convinces herself that Brazilians are free of intimacy, that they know you one day and forget you the next, which seems to please her. She seems to be afraid of being lost or held in emotions, particularly love. Or perhaps she wanted to leave the rest of her feelings hidden.

And Brazil seems to be the locus of feelings for her, even though she only begins to address it when she is accustomed to the country. Maria, in the passage, is the engraver Page met at some point during her stay in Brazil and whom she invites for dinner. Page shows her drawings to her, who suggests she should have a show. Page declines, and Maria suggests that Page take no lessons, and instead just draw everything she sees. This exchange is what gives Page the impression of Brazilians' warmth, while, at the same time, distance. She continues to make her daily trips to the beach, and integrate herself even more into the country.

She writes that she is growing to love Brazil more each day, “even the wide flat corner with some rather awful houses and no vegetation but grass cover. That to me, now, is so like a Portinari painting that I greet it with a special kind of eye. In fact, I think much to my pleasure is a literary pleasure. Had I read nothing and seen no pictures, what would I see?” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 72) This passage elaborates on the meaning of love in relationship to her life in

Brazil, and how her sensibility is embodied by being in the country, rather than by thinking of it. Her questioning, in this excerpt, seems to address the differences between intellectual knowledge and being, feeling, seeing without the artifice of thoughts.

Page seems to realize, through this reflection, that her understanding of the world is a literary and visual, that without these resources she would not be able to translate the world or apprehend it. Yet the experience of Brazil, I argue, brings her the novelty of love into her body, which posits the question of being and feeling, as opposed to thinking, and forces her to integrate the parts she does not find particularly attractive, opposite sensations, for example. In another moment, she talks about drawing, and the new challenges it presents: “This morning I drew the jacko tree – attacked it like a crazy woman to get it onto paper before we went out. It’s not very good but I shall do it again. And I shall buy a full range of gouaches and see what happens.”

(Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 72)

Once again the question of madness returns to Page’s reflection, as though loving something, or possessing this uncontrollable desire to do things, meant for her to be lost, or to be crazy, in her feelings. She can’t stop herself from drawing, and she needs it for no reason. She learns to paint with her friend Helena, and that becomes a great part of her everyday life. The parties and trips outside Rio continue, but Page seems more focused on her art and how to do it than anything else. Painting embodies the question of Brazil, it materializes it. She writes:

Ended the morning at a shop that sells paints. I bought some gouaches. On reaching home I put some dirty red paint on all those tiles and felt content. Bed time. My first day of paint. As well as the aforementioned red on tiles, I have added putty colour to the facades and laid a thin and mimsy sky. There is now a pale ochre wash on the jack-fruit and the

house is pink. I like these gouaches. The colours are vivid, they mix easily and are what you will – transparent or opaque. But I am overwhelmed. I hardly have time enough to draw. How will I have time enough to paint? (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 74)

Time is not enough for painting, even though Page is obsessed by both. She wants to be taken over by its feelings, and shopping for paints, or drawing night and day, doesn't seem to be enough. She is overwhelmed. How can she deal with her desire to paint while at the same time it consumes her with no end? At this stage of her life, Page seems to experience a desire to interact fully with all entities, human and non-human, as though embodying them in painting sufficed for the lack of real physicality in her world.

This lack is addressed by David Abram in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. In it, David Abram writes about how humans are “tuned for relationship” (Abram, IX). The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears and nostrils — all are the gates from which our body receives the nourishment of otherness.<sup>12</sup> Abram posits that most of our interactions occur between human and human-made technologies, “a precarious situation given our age-old reciprocity with the many-voiced landscapes” (Abram, IX). Page's lack of embodiment in the *Journal* is sublimated by her drive for painting, which accentuates her need for other human relationships while in the country. She draws images and conveys her emotions through snapshots that embody this absent body that is present and working. She writes:

Drawing with Helena in her dream garden. Words cannot describe it, which is perhaps why I draw. Anthuria ranging from white to deep red, those great red rockets bursting out of banana-like leaves; an *ipe* in full flood of yellow, its flowers seen middle distance like

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<sup>12</sup> For more, see David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996, pg. IX.



yellow hydrangeas. Against a blue sky it is unbelievable. Helena says, among other things, that the Brazilian woman lives always in the shadow of her husband. And as lunch time drew near she bore this out, becoming anxious, eyeing her watch to make sure she would not be late. Her husband is a handsome man, a hunter, and his cages are full of birds whose calls he can imitate exactly. “Good eating,” she says. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 75)

Page writes, in this passage, about her need to draw when she cannot describe or embody it in her being. At the same time, the passage is notable for showing how Page relates to Helena and her relationship with her husband, a type of dependency that Page doesn't seem to understand. In both cases there are no words to connect the worlds, the painting and the relationships, and Page is a hostage of her own solitary emotions. This passage also provides a reflection on Brazil as an experience of other fellow citizens. As Page's passion for painting increases, she writes:

Sunday, and the last day of a wonderful month. I have painted all day. Began by doing the great piano with the chandelier over it. Last night did a long view of the dining-room with chandelier, and the other day I did the chandelier alone. I love the chandelier! Then a series of abstractions – more exciting than realism. Realism I do very fast and am only excited when I finish and see how accurately I have drawn. It always surprises me. But in an abstraction, I can hardly breathe. And it is much slower – each line coming from a long distance. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 76)

As painting increases in Page's life, one notices how she craves this contact, touching the world she cannot name and thus draws. Underneath the lines, one can sense a profound need for

personal interactions, intimately. In this passage, one realizes how painting has become the central focus of her life; she perceives and embodies the lack and love for Brazil with the eye of a painter. She writes: “I suppose what I really want to write about is drawing – or painting, or whatever it is I am doing.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 123) Page’s inability to address her feelings is clear in this passage, where she uses painting as her medium to address the sensations she experiences in her body and expresses it through the craft:

And still I write nothing in my journal. Am too absorbed in painting when I have a free minute. Now that I’m working in oils it is much more time-consuming and all the preparations are slow, — although even oils can’t slow me up completely, so on the fire am I. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 160)

In this excerpt, not writing becomes a way of fleeing from her own sensations, while painting becomes her fire, her hands on activity, which integrate her being with her body through the preparations of her work. She uses visual expressions in the *Journal* as it becomes her way to see painting and Brazil at the same time. Page refuses to look within her body, she looks with her eyes, and uses language to name sensations, a contrast to the unknown feelings she experiences when manoeuvring her paints. Her transformation occurs through her painting, which is translated into words as she describes the work in her *Journal*, in a sublimation of language into pictures.

Page argues that she is fully committed to her visuals. Indeed it is fair to say that *Brazilian Journal* is a reflection of Page’s visions of the country and how she interacts with the social and natural world in Brazil. She includes several views in her account, designating, I believe, that particular site where humans and the sensuous encounter one another in writing

about paintings. Hers is a profound and personal insight into the country of Brazil, despite her fear of embodiment. This process of converting perceived things into identified representations is, I believe, what Page fulfills with her recollections. The book becomes a site of memory that is not rooted in the past but in the perceptual experience of the moments. It is very similar to a lively book of photographic snapshots, portraits of revealed light framed into diary entries, and treatises on painting itself. It is a *Journal* straining to encompass the lyric intensity of the poem and the narrative of the novel.

Every day she experiences a new adventure, participates in a series of events, a set of trials and errors, which, I believe, enable Page to identify better her personal connection with the country. It also allows for the sensations and descriptions between human and non-human entities within this territory to occur. And that is when, I suggest, physical contact with Brazil becomes part of the writer's narrative and outlook, even if, overall, it is unknown to her; it enters her senses and is reproduced on the page. She writes, in her last year in the country:

A strange experience a few weeks ago, while I was at the Pioneiras. Suddenly saw one of the very beautiful Brazilian girls with quite new eyes. Saw her as a work of art. From that moment on my whole point of view has changed – become Brazilian. Previously, I had thought one is born with one's face, one's responsibility is to keep it clean and looking as attractive as possible, but that was it and there you were, age altering it, death destroying it. But a Brazilian doesn't think of her face like that at all. For her it is simply the paper on which she makes a poem – changing it when she finds a way of improving it. She stands, in relation to it, as an artist – creating, by whatever means she can, a work of art. And she *is* an artist. The girl the other day had made her hair wide at the sides and formed her eyebrows into wide black wigs and the whole impression, while artificial, was

artificial in the way a work of art is. I couldn't help thinking that, to Brazilians, we who wear our real faces must seem both lazy and without talent. I think if I lived here long enough I too could become inspired to make a face – except I really haven't the temperament. I *am* too lazy. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 164)

Brazilians are artists for Page. She writes about the beauty of a Brazilian girl, and how this art has affected her, the taking care of her appearance. She thinks she knows Brazilians, and this one girl becomes the representation of all others. And in comparison, Page does not think of herself in the same condition, her beauty is not like an art canvas; she cannot place herself in this space of beauty. Clearly Page both admires and feels distant from her “Brazilians.”

Her admiration for this girl reinforces her need not to talk or include herself in the passage; this excerpt demonstrates how Page is attracted by physical bodies, and spends a great amount of time reflecting on the relationship between her feelings and the sensation of beauty in reference to Brazilians. It is a matter of beauty, how beauty is manifested in Brazil. For her, Brazilians are creative. In this passage, Page admires a “beautiful Brazilian woman” who appears to her like a work of art. She also admits she does not possess this quality because she is “too lazy.”

Through her investigations, Page relates her physical contact with the world with to descriptive quality; her reflections can be interpreted as an attempt at contact and interaction, for it is known “that we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human” (Abram, IX). In *Brazilian Journal*, Page recreates Brazil by describing the sensual elements she experiences in the country: its heat and sounds, its coffee and nuts; the colours and radiance of the environment emphasised in small details such as her description of the country's women,

flowers —“bougainvillea and hibiscus against the rank and thrusting green” — and the Portuguese language. Here it is helpful to recall Yi-Fu Tuan’s notion of space from *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. In it, he defines place as a site of security, as an old homestead, an old neighbourhood, hometown, or motherland. (Tuan, 3) Page seems to recognize that she is running out of time, and she writes:

We drew one small side chapel and while we were there the monks came in and chanted, the slow undulations of their voices a counterpoint to the intricate convolutions of baroque carving. Twenty small boys from the São Bento College came in to say a quick prayer and stayed on to watch us. They were full of compliments and humour. One looked at the figure in my drawing and asked who it was. “An old woman who has now gone,” I said. And he, devastated by his own wit and mock wonder, “But she has *stayed* in the picture.” Became really excited working with the new crayons, which are heaven. Wide range of brilliant and subtle colours which can be layered on the paper – light on dark even. Also you can scrape through the layers with a knife blade or pin. On returning home I did the chapel wall again from memory – much higher keyed, more emotional, less literal. If only there were more time. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 167)

Page feels she is running out of time, yet she manages to experience and write about her interactions with Brazil through her paintings. Near a chapel where monks are singing, she is affected by their nearness, and her own drawing becomes the motive that unites their conversation. She draws for memory, and that feels more emotional, more real, for her. In this excerpt, one senses how reality pulsates with life for Page, and she seems to crave this interaction in order to capture these feelings and images on the paper.

Residing in a place for a long time enables our intimate understanding of it, yet our image of it may lack clarity unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience. Another place may lack the burden of reality because we only know it from the outside — as tourists, superficially, and from reading about it in a guidebook. (Tuan, 18).

I assert that Page's reading of Brazil and several other countries is supported by this vision of space, or, the construction of a landscape whereby a complete experience is instantiated and materialized with help from our five senses. She is constantly learning about the country, and her vision oscillates between doubtful and certain. She explains:

I feel I am Mrs. Midas, with this difference: everything I look at turns to beauty. On a rational basis I find it difficult to believe that *everything* is beautiful, and yet, to my eye, it is. The leaves, the beach, the sea. The streets with their lazy people and their racket. The antique shops full of saints, old prayer rugs, candlesticks. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 174)

Even though Page was in the same place for the last two years, it is through painting that Page begins to feel the world around her, considering everything beautiful because now her eyes not only see but feel, and she is able to draw. Page gathers sites from her surroundings and keeps them as mementos of Brazil: its leaves, beaches, sea, streets. The Brazilians and their world are an inspiration to her, and she seems to change her understanding of art itself through this transformation in her creativity, becoming more attentive to the small details of everyday. Page undergoes a transformation in Brazil like many other writers before her felt.

As the diary demonstrates, Page's vision of Brazil expands and her interest in Brazilian attitudes and behaviours increases. Historically, this is not a unique experience. Generally speaking, Brazil was a country discovered by soldiers, or, as Leyla Perrone-Moisés explains in "Alegres Trópicos: Gonneville, Thevet e Léry," a territory constantly challenged by its historical constitution, disputed over since the first letters and treaties out of Brazil were publicized in the courtyards of Europe, after its sixteenth century discovery. In Perrone-Moisés, Leyla: "Alegres Trópicos: Gonneville, Thevet e Léry," in *Revista USP*, São Paulo (30): 84-93, Junho/Agosto, 1996, Perrone-Moisés follows in the footsteps of André Thevet, Jean de Lery, and Binot Paulmier de Gonneville in Brazil, and she explores how their works described and coloured this territory overseas.

All of them, she argues, belong to the heritage of the Renaissance — a period which prioritized curiosity over the scientific discourse of the seventeenth century — and filled the world with curious and unknown names, terrifying secrets which were at once blessed and cursed, and which these travellers had to face with horror, magic, and ambition. As Perrone-Moisés explains, the first exchanges between French explorers and the inhabitants of the land were not just a humane desire to know the new, but rather, an establishment of value and territory. "A descoberta da América foi, assim, um longo período de contemplação mútua, um desfile de modas de lado a lado do oceano," she writes.<sup>13</sup> (Perrone-Moisés, Leyla: "Alegres Trópicos: Gonneville, Thevet e Léry," in *Revista USP*, São Paulo (30): 84-93, Junho/Agosto, 1996).

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<sup>13</sup> "The discovery of America was, thus, a long period of mutual contemplation, a fashion show at both sides of the ocean." My translation.

The “Brazil” revealed by these French travellers is a land of beauty, she argues, fertility, and happiness. It has a pleasant climate, abundant and colourful flora and fauna. It is the evocation of paradise, of the anthropophagic practice, of good versus evil — a voyeuristic experience, after all.

Similarly, P. K. Page witnessed a period of Brazilian history which centred on abundance, the construction of Brasilia, the new capital, to replace the former Rio de Janeiro. During the period that Page was in Brazil, many changes were happening:

new technological advances worldwide were emerging and transforming how travellers such moved between places. The very act of travelling, beforehand was seen as exploratory or necessary, for science or out of duty to Kings and Queens, was now viewed as voyeuristic — a dramatic change that instituted how travellers in their journeys across continents or into the countryside valued their visits to exotic and tropical places as methods to develop a more personal subjectivity, which could then reveal these new worlds in pictures and print.<sup>14</sup>

The aspects of how Page and her husband travelled through the country are spread out in the *Journal*, and she learns a lot from these visits to new states and cities in Brazil. As Casey Blanton affirms in *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, in practical terms, to go to foreign places, especially in the twentieth century, became an attraction that, “introduce us to the other,”

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<sup>14</sup> For more, see Guillermo Giucci, Beatriz Jaguaribe and Karl Erik Schollhammer in “Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes estrangeiros no século XX.” In: Perreira, Paulo Roberto Pereira. (Org.). *Brasiliana da Biblioteca Nacional*. Guia de Fontes sobre o Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação da Biblioteca Nacional. Nova Fronteira, 2001 (99-117).



<sup>15</sup> while its representations act as the engagement between the self and the world. In both Casey Blanton, “Narrating Self and Other: A historical overview,” in *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eye: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, the focus is on how writers and travel narratives, ever since the fifteenth century, have evolved to the present in their efforts to translate how the world can be reconfigured into familiar language. It is this evolution of travel writing as a means of knowing the world which implicates Page and her self-discovery in Brazil and that is expressed in her *Journal*. Or, as Blanton asserts, it becomes a “matter of self-discovery as well as a record of discovery of the others” (Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, 1992: 15).

As Miguel Nenevé suggests, Page’s text relays the author’s experience of Brazil and her attempts to translate the country for a Canadian audience. He explains how for the poet, the “text reveals a respect and a love for the original observed content, which she wants to master and to which she wishes to be loyal.”<sup>16</sup> Page’s *Brazilian Journal* is a foreigner’s account of one’s purpose when living in a country that is not hers alone, and how this very strangeness of being an outsider can become an exploration of sorts; a desire to become part of but also to be separated from, detached. Yet Brazil affords her several passions, amongst them, painting, which she learns in Brazil, and writes: “Hot again. A. has spent all day on a report and I have worked on a large canvas which is not yet finished. I am delighted with the quick-drying white Schaeffer has introduced to me. I really think I might become a painter.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 177)

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<sup>15</sup> See Casey Blanton, “Narrating Self and Other: A historical overview,” in *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, (Pg 1-29). New York: Twayne Publishers; London: Prentice Hall International, 1997. And Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eye: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> For more, see Nenevé, Miguel. “Translating back P. K. Page’s work: some comments on the translation of *Brazilian Journal* into Portuguese,” in *Interfaces Brasil/Canadá*, Belo Horizonte, V. 1, N.3, 2003. pgs. 159-169.

It is a profound transformation when Page comes to the realization that she “might become a painter,” in this passage. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 177) She is not overly surprised, and seems to grasp this understanding as her classes with Schaeffer progress. It is the novelty and the art itself, the practice of it that seems to enchant Page’s sensibility. She works on her painting ceaselessly, when she is not writing about it. Painting becomes another way to encapsulate this sensuous reality, and the colours and textures she chooses seem to work better in dealing with this sensuality than writing itself. The trips around Brazil also inform her awareness about the country, and she wants to describe her sensations about everything and everyone that surrounds her. She writes about a football match she went to see in the Maracana football stadium:

Built of concrete without pillars, it is an enormous, two-tiered, elliptical amphitheatre – its major axis just under a thousand feet – crowned by a narrow fringe of overhanging roof which leaves the playing field open to the sky. The latter, incidentally, is surrounded by a deep moat to prevent spectators, in their zeal, from becoming participants. We were there to see the Rio championship semifinals – as is such is the term for football. I should think all 150,000 persons were present. Pretty to see below us the immense oval of green grass, and above the oval of the night sky with the *Cristo* tinily and miraculously visible on the Corcovado. There was a kind of magic about sitting there, suspended by nothing – rather similar to what one feels when one can keep the hula hoop up – which, *gracas a Deus*, I can now do! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 194)

This long passage demonstrates how every occasion or event becomes an opportunity for Page to describe Brazil, and how she reacts to a football game demonstrates how ready she is to

learn and take everything in. She enjoys different experiences, and she is attentive to all the historical and dramatic background a realistic scene might offer her. She witnesses it all, and is touched by it as though touched by magic. It is a constant journey through new realities that Page experiences in Brazil. She also relates her experience to her new skills she has learned, here, for example, turning the “hula hoop.”

As Karl Erik Schollhammer explains in *Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes Estrangeiros no Século XX*<sup>17</sup>: “...a própria noção de viagem modificou-se num mundo permeado pelos meios de comunicação que introduzem as narrativas do estrangeiro, nesta multiplicidade de registros em imagens e textos, o Brasil do século vinte aparece plural e contraditório, em retratos que vão da elegia ao desencanto.” (Schollhammer, 99-117)

The age of museums and memorabilia, of enclosed boxes full of mementos, became a thing of the past. Page’s narrative of Brazil brings this mix of disappointment and joy, while she trusts secondary sources such as books and the hearsay of friends and colleagues. She can’t access the country without the language, she argues, and the contradiction present in the culture is noticeable through the voice and ears of others who surround and inform her. In the Brazil of the 1950s, these transformations and transitional moments heightened the value of the tropical as a site to be reinvented and reinstituted. P. K. Page, like many other travelers, tried to use images and popular landscape spaces from Brazil to express her personal relationship with this place.

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<sup>17</sup> For more, see Guillermo Giucci, Beatriz Jaguaribe and Karl Erik Schollhammer in “Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes estrangeiros no século XX.” In: Pereira, Paulo Roberto Pereira. (Org.). *Brasileira da Biblioteca Nacional*. Guia de Fontes sobre o Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação da Biblioteca Nacional. Nova Fronteira, 2001 ( 99-117). “...the very notion of traveling changed in a world permeated by communication media that introduce foreign narratives, in this multiplicity of registers in which images and texts, the Brazil of twentieth’s century appears plural and contradictory, in photographs that go from elegy to disenchantment.” My translation.

Não chegava o viajante estrangeiro ao Brasil, nas primeiras décadas do Século XX, em busca de antiguidades, museus ou lugares sagrados. Tampouco necessitava preparar-se com antecedência, lendo a literatura normativa existente...A Baía de Guanabara, o Corcovado, o Pão de Açúcar, o Morro da Tijuca são imagens que se repetem nas descrições do Rio de Janeiro, então capital da República, e considerada a cidade dos jardins. A visão da cidade desde o Corcovado deslumbrava o visitante estrangeiro,” Schollhammer continues.<sup>18</sup>

Page’s sense of awe, or “deslumbramento,” deals with her attraction to and repulsion from the corporeal perspective of things, even when mediated by her art and translated on to the page or canvas. Page’s admiration for Brazil originates with her need to embody, even if it resists representation. Such a journey, Schollhammer concludes, “constitui uma experiência que supõe o estranhamento do ‘não estar em casa’ mesmo para os que permanecem no país em longas estadas.”<sup>19</sup> Her efforts constitute the context of Page’s writing of *Brazilian Journal*, her desire and love for the landscape, starting with the Portuguese idiom. Always in motion, the intermingling of languages and codes constitutes the ambiguity of what will define Page’s otherness as a poet and painter living in this new country.

As Roberto da Matta explains in the *O Que Faz do Brasil, Brasil?*,<sup>20</sup> to understand this cultural world, it is necessary to circulate among its peers and citizens, slowly learning more about its festivities and traditions. “O Brasil é um ser parte conhecido e parte misterioso, como

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<sup>18</sup> “The foreign traveler who arrived in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century was not looking for antiquities, museums or sacred places, nor had she or he to prepare himself with the normative literature of the period. Guanabara Bay, Corcovado, Sugar Loaf Mountain and the Tijuca Hills are images which are often repeated in the descriptions of Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil and considered a *city of gardens*. The vision of the city from the Corcovado area astonished those who arrived here.” Ibid, pg 100.

<sup>19</sup> “The journey consists in the experience which presupposes the estrangement of the ‘not being at home’ even for those who remained in the country for long periods.” Freely translated by myself. Ibid, pg 104.

<sup>20</sup> *O Que faz do Brasil, Brasil?*, by Roberto Da Matta. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986.

um grande e poderoso espírito,” he summarizes.<sup>21</sup> While in Brazil, Page takes constant trips to São Paulo and Brasília, participating in diplomatic events, and interacting with the beauty and curiousness that every new scenario brings her.

The obstacles to overcome are clear: how is it possible to be present in this land and maintain a capacity to discern the real from that which is alien and ingrained in one’s culture? Several possible answers to this question can be suggested, one of them being the construction of an anti-tourist sentiment inside Page’s imagination during her stay in Brazil from 1957 to 1959.

As Giucci, Jaguaribe and Schollhammer write in “Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes estrangeiros no século XX,” during this period “surge, então, o ‘antitourista’ que busca a viagem individual e a avalia seu sucesso em termos do improvisado e dos contatos espontâneos, off-schedule, conseguidos quando se arrisca a perder o controle do ‘pacote’ com o gesto de abrir a mão de sua própria cultura para ir ao encontro do autêntico, normalmente fora do alcance do visitante.”<sup>22</sup>

Both Bishop and Page could be classified as anti-tourists, who learn by living in the country and exploring the new acquaintances they make in their everyday life and everyday situations. Even the impact of raising a Brazilian flag becomes an inspiring and authentic gesture in Page’s literary understanding of how to integrate herself, as writer and expatriate, in this new realm. She writes:

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<sup>21</sup> “Brazil is a partly known being and partly mysterious, like a great and powerful spirit.” My translation. Ibid, pg 12.

<sup>22</sup> “During this period, there is, then, the appearance of an ‘anti-tourist,’ in search for an individual experience, who evaluates his or hers successes judging from the ability to act in an improvised and spontaneous manner, off-schedule, obtained when one dares to lose control over the ‘package,’ open-handedly embracing the ‘authentic,’ usually out of sight for the ordinary visitor.” My translation.

By lifting the flag in an ungainly upward throw, I unveiled the *Jânio Quadros*, a *bispo* blessed it and threw holy water on it, the band played the Brazilian National anthem. The women cried then a kind of madness took over and nothing would do but I unveil all the diesel, and so — in a dream that was not a dream — I continued to lift the Brazilian flags and find diesel engines.

(Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 57)

As this passage attests, Page participates in cultural events that give meaning to her life, even if she does not really understand them. There is drama present in the description of the celebration, which she does not seem to take part in. Nevertheless she recognizes the importance of these official moments and records them with attention, making them part of her reality, and seriously addresses the event as though there was nothing she could do but perform her duty. Umberto Eco, in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hipereality*, mentions the aspects of language as a symbolic tool beyond the writer's control: something "that is not felt at first and it is 'plural,' legionary."<sup>23</sup> In the case of Page, language comes primarily from visual sources, new words and symbols derive from her daily experience and are transposed into her *Journal*, in a manner to experience life once again in language.

There is also the aspect of perception in Page's writing of her life in Brazil, echoed by Wolfgang Iser in his book *The Implied Reader*,<sup>24</sup> whereby he presents the relationship between literature and performance. Iser explains how the reader can actively recreate his own view with

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<sup>23</sup> "Faith in Fakes" is the original title of a large essay written by Eco in 1975 on the subject of America's obsession with simulacra and counterfeit reality. It was re-titled "Travels in Hiperreality" in 1986 and included as the central piece in a book by the same title. The important aspect of this article for my dissertation is the discussion of language as a means of power and impact in one's usage as a means of communication. For more, see Umberto Eco, in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*. Translated by William Waver. London: Minerva, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the relationship between literature, interpretation and aesthetic response, see Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communications in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*. London, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1974.

each reading or re-reading of a given text, gaining new insights about a textual source in order to explore a blank space where nothing is certain but always up for debate. It appears Page's interest in cultural events is a way of reading Brazil through the eyes of the other, in a performance that informs her of what she lacks words to translate herself. In the same book, Wolfgang, when articulating on the history of the novel in the twentieth century, argues that during this period "the discovery concerns the functioning of our own faculties of perception. The reader is meant to become aware of the nature of these faculties, of his own tendency to link things together in consistent patterns, and indeed of the whole thought process that constitutes his relations with the world outside himself." (Wolfgang, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communications in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, 1974: XIV). The "blank space" is "projected into" the reader.

This theoretical approach — the understanding of a blank space whereby the relationship between writer-reader can reinvent one reality into many — structures the ambiguity of Brazilian culture and challenges how Page negotiates her depiction of this "foreign" landscape. She writes, about her relationship with religion and Brazil:

Have been using my crayons. Have done a Holy Ghost. Before Christmas, when I was shopping for presents, I found three Holy Ghosts – small – from old churches. All very baroque. All very expensive. One, after a five-minute hesitation, I returned to buy and found gone. *It* really must have been the Holy Ghost. The problem, of course, is that they all fail. How can they not? The first had the head of a goose. The one I nearly bought had the legs of a turkey. The third, more gothic, was too modest. I would still like to find a Holy Ghost at a price I feel reasonable (And what would you think a reasonable price for

a Holy Ghost, Mrs. Irwin?) Have completed two crayon works – *Holy Ghost* and one other entitled *Stone Fruit*. But so little time! (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 195)

Page expresses she would like to buy a Holy Ghost at a “reasonable price,” while we learn she is also trying to paint it. She is very ironic in her self-analysis, knowing that she wants a bargain for something she does not know the value or the origin. She laughs at herself and is happy to have accomplished two crayon works. Once again, the topic of a lack of time comes up. I should also point out that she, in her last year of Brazil, perhaps already senses a certain pressure of time. Time and painting seem to fuse in the second half of *Brazilian Journal*, her impression of the world becoming more and more pictorial and descriptive. She writes:

Yesterday was red parasite day! What a succession of “days.” We drove out to Pico de Itapeva. The Paraiva valley, which the Pico overlooks, is the widest and longest of the nearby valleys, and beyond it, a succession of ranges. The last, we think, is the coastal *serra*. The entire stretch of the valley was palest pastel. I have sometimes seen paintings done with that palette and always thought the artist was trying to beautify and merely making the result sugar sweet. But in the flesh it was as remarkable as if your eyes had faded. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 202)

Nature surrounds her in this passage, and she sees it with the eyes of a painter, acknowledging the “palest pastel” of the valley. She compares this raw reality with that of the painting, and the impression it gives her is as though her eyes had faded. The comprehension of art and artistic sensibility, of colours and textures, is a subject that always interests Page, who spends her time making comments to portray a certain reality.



In addition, when one speaks of Page and her relationship to Brazil, it is crucially important to highlight how she often attempts to alleviate the destructive and negative aspects of Portuguese colonization<sup>25</sup> into poetic images that appeal to the sensorial and bodily aspects of the environment. As an example of how this so-called destructive view of the Brazilian territory and colonization affected the constitution of Brazilian identity, it is good to recall Darcy Ribeiro, in *O Povo Brasileiro*. In this book, Ribeiro describes the European colonizer as the ferocious ones, rather than the Indians, applying an inverted analysis from those applied by others such as Claude-Lévi Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques*. His is not a melancholic view of the Portuguese colonization, but a vision of violence and exploration. “Frente à invasão européia, os índios defenderam até o limite possível seu modo de ser e de viver. Sobretudo depois de perderem as ilusões dos primeiros contatos pacíficos, quando perceberam que a submissão ao invasor representava sua desumanização como bestas de carga,” writes Ribeiro (Ribeiro, *O Povo Brasileiro*, 1995: 49).

In regards to this same topic, it is important to recall some poignant aspects of Brazil’s history in *Exiles, Allies, Rebels: Brazil’s Indianist Movement, Indigenist Politics, and the Imperial Nation-Station*, by Dave Treece, which examines how most of the texts written during the historical arrival of the Portuguese Court in Brazil, — particularly those authored by Jesuit priests such as *Caramuru*, by Frei José de Santa Rita Durão (1750), and *A Muhuraida* or *The Triumph of Faith*, by João Henrique Wilkens (1785), and that were later to inspire the Indianist literature written from the 1800s onwards —carried a detailed description of an Indian’s life and habits but also expressed a strongly stereotyped version of this Brazilian republic. Treece

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<sup>25</sup> See Darcy Ribeiro in *O Povo Brasileiro: A formação e o sentido do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1995. “Before the European invasion, the Indians defended their way of being and living up to the possible limit. Especially after losing the illusions of the first pacific encounters, when they noticed that the submission to the invader represented their dehumanization into beasts of burden.” (Ribeiro, 49) My translation.

explains that this Jesuit tradition was hybridized and constituted of mythological and theological concepts of an European medieval scenario close to a new world experience that was related to the missionaries understanding of a colonial reality.

*Brazilian Journal* is a clear example of how Page wants to participate physically in the quotidian of Brazilian life yet includes in this attempt the challenges of embodiment. *Brazilian Journal* represents her physical desire to touch the landscape, what is directly related to her urge to embody sensually, even if it is reflected in a disembodied language. Suggestively, her ability to explore the sensual skin of this foreign land recalls the ordinary practice of singing “the national anthem,” or even to observing the reaction of a crowd at a public event. For Page, those events become an inspiring event cloaked under the “foreign eye.” In other words, as Guillermo Giucci, Beatriz Jaguaribe and Karl Erik Schollhammer explain in “Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes estrangeiros no século XX”:<sup>26</sup>

...o olhar estrangeiro se concretiza no limiar das possibilidades expressivas, diante de elementos da realidade cotidiana que aparecem em forma de fronteira impenetrável, às vezes dolorosa e frustrante para um conteúdo enigmático e distante, cuja conquista, ironicamente, não possui qualquer promessa utópica. (117)<sup>27</sup>

Despite the difficulties of subjectivity and embodiment, *Brazilian Journal* is also a written representation of Page’s encounter with “real” beings: an imaginary and holographic world made concrete in the multiplicity of encounters, both human and non-human, which she

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<sup>26</sup> See Guillermo Giucci, Beatriz Jaguaribe and Karl Erik Schollhammer in “Retratos do Brasil: Viajantes estrangeiros no século XX.” In: Perreira, Paulo Roberto Pereira. (Org.). *Brasileira da Biblioteca Nacional*. Guia de Fontes sobre o Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação da Biblioteca Nacional. Nova Fronteira, 2001. (117)

<sup>27</sup> “The foreign eye is structured on the edge of possibility and something that can be materialized before the elements of an apparently impenetrable quotidian reality which is painful or frustrating at times, even before an enigmatic and alien subject — a conquest, which, ironically, does not possess any utopic promise.”

has had to face since her arrival in the country, transforming not only her artistic and creative drives, but also her personal life. This non-fictional “I” — which allows herself the time to reflect and share her impressions in letters to friends and family — enables the poet to institute a series of rules and conditions, which she then elaborates in each of her daily entries in *Brazilian Journal*. She writes, several days before her departure from Brazil:

In less than a week we shall be gone. I have no wish to go. Yesterday and the day before we returned to the valley to paint. My canvas is the size of the world, and now, after two days, I ache from the physical labour of it. Difficult to work in constantly changing light (I think of Monet), with sudden and violent storms driving us back to the car. A. worked on a very, very pale painting. So strange. To me the hills are all raw with the red earth and black clouds hanging full of thunder and throwing a kind of bruised light over everything. But A. saw an innocent blond landscape. Or did he? As I’ve noticed before, he is not the slave that I am. Before a canvas, he is God. I would like to paint every day – six hours at least! I’ve never known such madness. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 205)

One notices how Page’s sensibility is now open to what she sees, and experiences, with the process of painting. She does not seem sure of what will happen. She is still considering the fact that they will be leaving in less than a week. The composition of a large new painting, which is difficult to work on, seems to catch Page by surprise. It is a realization of what the act of painting means to her. The lights and how they change become a theme for Page, who tries to replicate the sensation in her writing. She compares herself to her husband, feeling as though she behaves like a slave before her art. And she laments the fact that there is never enough time, even though she wants to paint everything. It is an inner desire, and her relationship with painting intercedes in her contact with reality. She deals with light as she deals with the weather, and

learns about the intricacies of the craft as she paints it. She seems to know what she wants to get from painting, though she can never achieve it. She writes:

Painting – but disappointingly. Started a largish canvas – *Room with Black Objects* – but can't stand its literalness. I don't understand why, if I have a model, I am so locked into it, as if I have taken an oath to change nothing. I don't want to paint that way. Want to be much freer. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 213)

Page reemphasizes her need to learn the language, to increase her painting ability, and to be freer with her expression. Page does not seem to like rules, though she understands that the creative process is a journey, something one craves, and challenges in every instant. Her perception of the craft is that of freedom, of liberation.

In addition, her writing of Brazil doesn't question “the set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning” which Judith Butler alludes to in *Giving an Account of Oneself*.<sup>28</sup> The poet also reads Brazilian culture in a subtle and unique manner by understanding that “norms are there, at an exterior distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriating them, taking them on, establishing a living relation to them.” (Butler, 9) As the wife of a Canadian ambassador, Page is conditioned by the “bureaucratic and diplomatic” norms of conduct.

As the Canadian poet émigré she embodies a life that is a world of poetic otherness to be reinvented without fixed rules or conditions. The “You,” as addressed by Page in *Brazilian Journal* is not an account to be tested or challenged by an inquisitive “I” but rather an incorporation of an all-inclusive other, which is always in translation. To become a “Self-

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<sup>28</sup> For more, see Judith Butler in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, pg. 7

Narrating being” (Butler, 11) is to be able to remain permanently unsatisfied with the right way to describe Brazil regardless of motives behind the hand that writes it, paints it or asks it why. As Homi K. Bhabha affirms in *The Location of Cultura*,<sup>29</sup> one’s knowledge is constituted through the understanding of “that which is and isn’t represented.”

This attempt of representation recognizes not only the historical connection between a subject and its critical object but also examines the inclusion of one’s personal history for the interpretation of a world — and this concept, consequently, is crucial to follow the interpretation of Page’s writing, since several examples of her daily life experiences portrayed in *Brazilian Journal* show how she struggled to negotiate between the stereotypical visions of the idea of an imagined Brazil versus the actual living in this place; as though this new language, Portuguese, was itself a second skin. The country of Brazil is non-imaginable, she affirms, because it is a surrealist and seductive world. The heat, the smells, every colour seem to sharpen her senses. This same practical approach is found in the poem “Brazilian Fazenda,” from the second volume of her collection *The Hidden Room*.<sup>30</sup> In this poem, Page contemplates the incessant interaction between things human and nonhuman and the challenges this universe of possibilities offers to the artist. She writes:

Oh let me come back on a day  
when nothing extraordinary happens  
so I can stare at the sugar-white pillars  
and black lace grills

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<sup>29</sup> For more on Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of culture and its adequate translation, see *O Local da Cultura*. Tradução de Myriam Ávila, Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis, Gláucia Renate Gonçalves. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> For more, see *The Hidden Room: Collected Poems* by P. K. Page, Volume 2. Erin, Ontario: Porcupine’s Quill, 1997.

of this pink house. (Page, *Hidden Room*, 1997: 123)

One is nearly able to practically experience her exhaustion due to her admiration of the extraordinary quality of life, in the sense that she does not seem any longer to know how to deal with her own emotions in this world that is always full of surprises. One has to be ready to experience joy and pain, she seems to say. She just wants to sit and observe the colours, the setting, the place.

The ordinary, simply, is a difficult state to be in, and in this perceptive quality, she understands Brazil as a world of surprises, always present. “Brazilian Fazenda” invokes a particular day when – Page affirms – all the slaves are freed from their manacles, all the coffee ripens “like beads on a bush,” when all cows, calves, birds, saints and children experience this life simultaneously, in an unexpected series of events. Page does not challenge these notions, she just wants to observe, and experience new things.

In Brazil, Page is introduced to a world which allows her to consider other possibilities of experiencing her creativity and personal freedom. In an excerpt from a section about Brazil in her long poem *Hand Luggage*, she writes: “...fewer clothes. I felt free. Some connection between/ the salt and the tropical sun and the strange/ objectivity found through the nib of my pen, / the knowledge of papers, the knowledge of inks...” (Page, *Hand Luggage*, 2006: 60). In this passage, one realizes her body is present, and free. She is warmed by the sun, by the strange comfort that her writing seems to enable.

It is almost a suggestion of warmth and craftsmanship, of how writing or painting becomes that which fulfills Page, and causes her to expand. Similar to what Michel de Certeau suggests in the importance of quotidian practices in the relationship with one’s unity and

individualization. “Para ler e escrever a cultura ordinária, é mister reaprender operações comuns e fazer da análise uma variante do seu objeto,” writes Certeau <sup>31</sup> (Certeau, *A Invenção do Cotidiano*, 1990: 35). These unpredictable snapshots of personal experience are neither passive nor fixed but flexible and open to new revalidations. Once again, it is not an attempt to focus on the individuals alone but to unify and reestablish the relationship between them, since “cada individualidade é o lugar onde atua uma pluralidade incoerente (às vezes contraditória) de suas determinações relacionais” (Certeau, *A Invenção do Cotidiano*, 1990: 38) <sup>32</sup> This mix of awe and surprise before unexpected events of everyday life are marks not only of foreign accounts but also of domestic ones.

Paulo Mendes Campos, a well-known Brazilian journalist who wrote several articles exploring the *meaning* of being Brazilian, also argues that what intrinsically integrates the people to the territory is their physical relationship to the landscape. In *Brasil Brasileiro: crônicas das cidades e do povo*, Campos writes on themes ranging from soccer, women, and popular music, to the landscape and its features. Just as previous writers, Campos is also critical of the increasing disappearance of villas and small cities in the interior of Brazil and the fast urbanization of its seashores. His account suggests a sense of Brazilian identity as *being* the landscape, *fertile* and *mutable*; a concept which gains momentum as he travels across the country and loses tracks of what was once demarcated territory.

In “The Easygoing Brazilian,” Campos explains how his friend, after spending a period overseas, is happy to return to Brazil and find himself once again inserted among people who can

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<sup>31</sup> “In order to understand one’s general culture, it is necessary to relearn typical and habitual tasks to better understand the variations of a particular object or situation.” (My translation). For more, see Michel de Certeau in *A Invenção do Cotidiano: Artes de Fazer*.

<sup>32</sup> “Each individuality is the place where a contradictory, incoherent plurality acts, often uncertain of its relational certainties.” (My translation)

still be “gracious within a perfect disorganization.” (Campos, *Brasil Brasileiro: crônicas das cidades e do povo*, 1950: 11) The very unpredictability of quotidian life is also emphasized in passages which describe the “diabolic transit chaos of Rio” and how its inhabitants should “already have gone mad due to the aggravating quotidian.” Another example is when Campos describes “Brazil as a very Brazilian place...the only country like that in the world. It is only those who truly get to know us well that will be able to understand what I mean.” (Campos, *Brasil Brasileiro: crônicas das cidades e do povo*, 1950: 15) Campos affirms that to be Brazilian is to ground one’s feet on the territory and to accept all its chaotic possibilities of experience; to be able to deal with the uncertainties of the quotidian, with its challenges, but also taking into account one’s intuition about the natural world and how it contains and regulates itself according to its own unpredictable rules and determination.

This chaotic world is what proposes challenges for Page in her stay in Brazil, alleviated with the entrance of painting in her life, which replaced her lack of words and embodiment in relation to Brazil. Language is filled with painted images. In this section, I have attempted to introduce painting as a means of expression and embodiment for Page and how it constitutes the main language that unites P. K. Page’s experiences in Brazil. Moreover, her perception of this world becomes more pointed as she begins to paint, demonstrating how her writing of *Brazilian Journal* shifts particularly with her ability to translate the sensual into painted expression. I should also add that perhaps the greatest challenge in this process lies not only in learning new forms of landscape articulation but in letting go of older ones. The focus of this Chapter 4 was also to demonstrate how painting and the quotidian life in Rio de Janeiro affected and motivated Page to produce new creative works, to transform her own personal experience into phenomenological snapshots of poetic possibility. The understanding of P. K. Page’s sensual



talent to describe Brazil in poetic terms goes hand in hand with her active depiction of her day-to-day life in the country.

There is a struggle which, as Page affirms in *Brazilian Journal*, we all have to come to terms with, if we want to understand the cycle of life and death, of arrival and departure, with everything we do. Painting becomes a new way to experience reality, and the challenge is to reproduce the feeling of sensuality and liveliness that she finds in Brazil. She writes: “It will be hard to turn my back on luxury. I expect never to have so much again. Hard to leave so much beauty, so much sun, so sweet a people. And to leave this house, which I have come to feel is mine.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 238)

One encounters the subject of endings and beginnings, of learning experiences and how the whole process of living in Brazil, learning about the culture, together with studying painting and practicing it, does affect her. It would be humanly impossible not to be affected by so much feeling, Page seems to say. She ends the *Journal* on a melancholic note, although quite a realistic one. She writes, about the future:

Hard to believe Brazil has gone...Already it is part of a past which will blur more and more, until it is as pale as the aquamarines and topazes and beryls mined from Brazilian soil. Already the very special quality that was “Brazil” for us exists only in our memories and no words can recreate, for us or for everyone else, what was golden, perfect, complete. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 241)

Through a type of idealization of Brazil, Page is transformed, and argues that her change has to do with a perfection that is replicated in her writing. Page offers an eloquent passage to convey how time passes according to one’s own perception of it, and that there is no way of

making it pass faster or slower. Memory has its own process, and one's experience is one's own. Her perception of the experience is that it is indescribable, and that language is incapable of translating it. It is a sense of uniqueness, of unity, that, for Page, language cannot capture. In that sense, she seems to say that Brazil is gone, but its memory remains in her heart forever. The embodiment of Brazil resists representation but it echoes strong feelings of love, which Page tries to elaborate as she goes on with the *Journal* and the book of glosas *Hologram* in homage to those poets she loves. In addition, her relationship with the feeling of love seems to be one of hope for transformation through the arts, and her craft.

In Chapter 4, *Page, Bishop, Brazil and Sensuality in Writing*, I have tried to show Page's effort in writing the senses and elaborating on the importance of language in her craft. By introducing other authors such as Elizabeth Bishop, my intention was to compare and analyze other examples that also address the existence and importance of Brazil in their writing. In the case of Bishop, the relationship with the senses in relation to P. K. Page, her being more subjective and argumentative than the latter, though also allusive towards the body. In any case, the same struggle to understand one's feeling in relation to this country is demonstrated in both writers, Brazil begging to be named and expressed in its very sensuality and mystery. Moreover, Page's body is idealized versus a feminine depiction of the body, as though she were writing through a female body. Mostly, her approach towards the body is that of an idealized entity.

I have also introduced the topic of genre and its relationship with thoughts and feelings, particularly how Page articulates sensations in the body of her work. The confusion between thoughts and feelings is demonstrated in this section and the consequences for the reader this distinction imposes. Moreover, I argue that the need for embodiment in writing is a demand shared by the reader, who wants to experience the senses and the subjectivity of the writer in

order to understand the whole spectrum of the living experience, including death. The ups and downs, the resistance of language, the fear of addressing the spectrum of emotions are highlighted in the history of the country, which is populated with writers and moments in history which lack embodiment and expression.

The challenge of this dissertation is to make clear the importance of feelings in the knowing process that implies articulating life and being in language, and how that differs from the process of thinking. The latter is never enough and sufficiently present to grasp the attention and heart of the reader, who becomes a secondary aspect in many cases. The attempt to control the aesthetic experience, which occurs in many moments of Page's writing, is also explored in this Chapter 4, which focuses on language, Brazil, and the articulation of sensuality in writing. In the next and last Chapter of Part, I will close with the insertion of Page's work in the context of many other attempts to capture "Brazil," dating from the 15th century.

## Chapter 5: Page's Brazil and the Context of Others

In this Chapter, I would like to present a brief overview of testimonies about Brazil made by contemporary, and earlier, creative Brazilian writers such as Antonio Torres and Paulo Mendes Campos, who, among others, have physically “discovered” Brazil with their hands, and touched and demarcated the land with their feet. My objective is to show how the diversity and distinctiveness of these creative expressions converge towards one shared question: the challenges of imagining the quotidian in practice, and the engagement of the five senses as sensory tools.

For P. K. Page, the strangeness of the place seems to deterr her from investigating further, she counts on the other's response to this same environment. Moreover, the whole environment seems surreal: for example, in one instance, while she is painting, one of the employees attempts to practice an accordion in his room:

It is almost as if the instrument has gone mad. Never was there such a muddle of notes, rather he is striving for chords, for whole orchestrations, and all at a speed as if he will die tomorrow. More interesting still, he began playing that way and so he continues. I have never heard him play a scale or a melody that was in any way even remotely recognizable. His is a kind of virtuoso performance of musical gibberish and it tumbles, cascades, falls like a crazy plant out of his bedroom window – fast, faster, faster – and as suddenly, stops. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 164)

These out-of-control events surprise Page and are characteristic of her experiences of Brazil. She doesn't seem to know to understand how the unexpected event occur except by descing it beyond reasoning. Page merely narrates what the experience enables her to see, for she doesn't report feeling anything in particular, and that we notice this more and more as we

peruse *Brazilian Journal*: a disinterest to express her feelings except that of love, which she associates with painting, with the pure sensation of being there, even if language doesn't rescue her from her ignorance. Embodying the world, as Paz posits, through the body, with sensation, is a challenge for Page. Animals like the Arara, the colorful Brazilian bird, and a small dog, as well as a monkey, help Page to interact with her emotions at the end of the period spent in the country.

With the Arara, in particular, she learns about the unexpected, who seems to surprise even her companion A. who questions about the bird's climbing on a pole. Is that bird meant to be doing that? he asks, as though, like Page, he wanted a rational explanation for an instinctual behaviour.

He was slowly waddling up the wrought-iron handrail to the steps and coming to join us, having eaten his way through his leg chain. He is a real addition to the household – decorative and funny. I wouldn't have thought a bird could have so human a face – I suppose it's that flesh-coloured skin. I am told you can teach them to talk but their memory is not as retentive as a parrot's. Neither is mine. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 168)

She demonstrates a complete need to understand the existence of this bird and her relationship with it, affirming it could have an almost human face. Page's writing about Brazil belongs to a tradition of landscape writing which takes into account the physical experience of *moving* through the land in order to *learn* about it and articulate ideas creatively. It is this process of dealing with the challenges of the quotidian and expressing it through personal and creative means that we can examine in the treaties that introduce the reader to this land called Brazil.

In *Diálogos sobre as Grandezas do Brazil*, written by Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão in 1618, we are presented with six conversations between two characters, Alviano and Brandonio, who, through various angles and subjects, consider the qualities and possibilities of living in this new Portuguese colony called Brazil. Whereas Alviano is suspicious of the possibilities of this land, which embodies the true façade of the Empire, Brandonio is the voice of the Portuguese settler who arrived in 1583 and remained on the continent, making it his home thereafter. During the sixteenth century, after the discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese, several other treatises about the country began to circulate overseas and increased the attention of the Portuguese towards the territory – which, up to the 1550s, was still officially ignored.

It was only through documents such as *The Letter*, written by Pero Vaz de Caminha, in the 1500s, or *História da Província de Santa Cruz*, by Pero de Magalhães Gandavo, written in 1575, that Brazil started to materialize in the chambers of Portuguese authorities as a possibility of becoming a colony in practice. The imagination of the sixteenth century Portuguese colonizers, even if tamed and reflective of a mentality still attached to their medieval roots, reflects the day by day of living in this new place, of discovering and tasting new fruits, vegetables and naming them accordingly.

Even though these earlier examples do not acknowledge the materiality and relationship of all human and nonhuman entities present in the environment, they do document the travels of these writers. They also emphasize the importance of physical movement in this process of conceptualizing and articulating new ideas and entities encountered in a new land. More contemporary accounts such as Antonio Torres' *My Dear Cannibal*, Paulo Mendes Campos' *Brasil Brasileiro*, and P. K. Page's *Brazilian Journal* document the mentality and practice of Brazilian life. It is impossible to address the writing of Brazil without taking into account all of

these manifestations; it is important to have them at least mentioned here: each in their own particular time, yet all relating to the question of how to apply the conception of the everyday in practice and the use of our five senses to increase our awareness about the territory.

These earlier treatises show how the Portuguese chroniclers really discovered Brazil, materializing it as a metropolis. By convincing Queens and Kings to physically occupy the land, treatises such as Ambrósio Brandão's *Diálogo Sobre as Grandezas do Brasil*, should be understood not only as an ideological construct or an articulation of power, but also as a creative attempt to describe the land and its potential for habitation. The major difference between now and then, as Sergio Buarque de Holanda suggests in *Visão do Paraíso*, is associated with what he calls the "pedestrian realism" of the Portuguese chroniclers, a reference to their archaic and medieval frame of mind.

The main characteristic of these treatises, for Buarque, is their "adhesion to what is real and immediate," a mentality still connected to the Middle Ages, but already in progressive decay. These were travellers who, Buarque affirms, "were not very imaginative," in contrast to the Renaissance writers who would prove to be. They had a pedestrian realism which never allowed their mind to take off in thoughts. (Buarque, *Visão do Paraíso*, 1959: 4) In Brandão's *Diálogo*, this certainty towards what is concrete is materialized by the description of daily activities, as well as the process of naming: the characters, as well as the flowers, fruits, and vegetation. The primacy of the visual is also present.

This assurance of names visually conceived comes after the experience and practice of *the thing in itself*, which, sometimes, is a concept without body, and at other times, a body without a concept. This multiplicity of meaning is also present in the unknown authorship of the

text and the place of writing. Some believe it was written by Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão, a Portuguese scrivener and one of the characters within the text, who lived in one of the North Captaincies in the country, since the Southern Captaincies are never mentioned. As Alviano, the recently arrived traveller, unsure of this new land, debates with Brandonio, the settler who has been in the colony since its early foundation, about whether Brazil has the potential to become an important asset for Portugal. We learn details about this new territory, as follows: there are six dialogues, and the movement of people and knowledge in between Captaincies is not explained but suggested, since we *travel* through them in the text. The first is a discussion of what makes a place productive, whether the land or the people, and Brandonio seems to think it is the land, suggesting the inhabitants are the ones who are *lazy*. But can the land be *lazy*? This question is never addressed.

Instead, Alviano thinks the land is infertile, which is strongly contested by Brandonio, who goes on to describe all the greatness of the rivers and plains. The second dialogue speculates on the origins of Brazil's peoples, the distinction of races, and the influence of environmental factors such as weather in determining these physical differences. The third dialogue expands on this issue and lists all the natural resources of Brazil, including those which potentially could translate into economic gains such as Brazil wood and cotton.

These discussions are not only articulations of power but, above all, they are a creative struggle to manufacture, in writing, what can be experienced in practice. The need to be pedestrian, as Buarque asserts, is echoed in every passage, even if the characters lack form. The classification of things into categories had a practical side to it; how all these items, once classified, were to be actually utilized in the daily quotidian.



In 1618, most Portuguese settlers that recently arrived in Brazil inhabited the Captaincy of São Vicente, in the northeast of the country. Between one Captaincy and the next there were great distances. The passage and movement between places are not acknowledged but present in the text, as these characters try to describe the world to the metropolis.

These examples are an interesting contrast to Page's account of the country, in the twentieth century. Her work demonstrates how Brazilian sensibility and the country's context have changed. Like many other travellers, P. K. Page tried to express her newfound Brazilian self in the work *Brazilian Journal*, making it her experience of this country. She faced a number of challenges, particular when the issue was her own feelings in regards to living things, and corporeal entities, which, it appear, became heightened in Brazil, even if she didn't know how to name them.

Page's experience in Brazil, on page 238: "I expect never to have so much again. Hard to leave so much beauty, so much sun, so sweet a people." Page finally leaves by ship: the SS. Brazil. It is very clear from this passage the same frustration in relation to words that Page has felt in her entire stay in Brazil: they don't suffice to express what is going on in her body, even though she tries, as we notice in one of the final passages of the book, in the statement: "Already it is part of a past which will blur more and more, until it is as pale as the aquamarines and topazes and beryls mined from Brazilian soil. Already the very special quality that was Brazil for us exists only in our memories and no words can recreate, for us or for anyone else, what was golden, perfect, complete." (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 241)

For Page Brazil symbolizes a direct experience with sounds, tastes, touches and smells. She is encouraged, even if gently, to explore all her senses, and attempts to write a description of

life that will make her more demonstrative, more hands-on, like her own definition of her Brazilian self: more aware.

Yet the fear of embodying these qualities permeates the work. Now, in relation to earlier accounts, *O Diálogo* would later serve as a model for other narratives such as Frei Vicente Salvador and his account titled *História do Brasil, 1627*, as Buarque explains, in regards to the Portuguese curiosity and its practicality:

Desde Gândavo, e melhor, desde Pero Vaz de Caminha, ate, pelo menos, Frei Vicente Salvador, é uma curiosidade relativamente temperada, sujeita, em geral, à inspiração prosaicamente utilitárias, o que dita as descrições e reflexões de tais autores...é a experiência imediata o que tende a reger a noção do mundo desses escritores marinheiros, e é quase como se as coisas só existissem verdadeiramente a partir dela. (Buarque, *Visao do Paraiso*, 1959: 8)<sup>33</sup>

As Buarque explains, the first Portuguese who arrived in Brazil were not concerned with what was not real but with what was empirically knowable. The images of a paradisiacal place, sometimes described as an island, were not, as Buarque explains, the Brazil described by the Portuguese chroniclers which had “olhos que enxergam, as maos que tateiam”<sup>34</sup> (Buarque, *Visão do Paraiso*, 1959: 14), finding their names by physically interacting with the human and non-human forms present in the land.

The problem with Buarque’s account, a controversial matter too long to be expanded on here, lies in the fact that he defines this realism as an aspect that differentiates the Portuguese

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<sup>33</sup> Since Gandavo, or rather, since Pero Vaz de Caminha, until, at least, Frei Vicente Salvador, it is a relatively tempered curiosity, subjected, in general, to an ordinary utilitarian inspiration, what guides the descriptions and reflections of such authors...it is the immediate experience what tends to rule the notion of the world of these sailors writers, and it is almost as if things only truly existed departing from this experience. (My translation)

<sup>34</sup> “Eyes that can see, hands that can touch.” My translation.

colonization in Brazil from all others, making it unique. As it is understood by Buarque, the Luso-Brazilian experience in Brazil was more tolerant and “understanding” towards mixed races, due to their African and Arab roots.

Without getting entrapped in such discussions, the relevance of Buarque’s account are his observations about the quotidian and the immediate in the Portuguese writings of Brazil, of how “até o incomum parece fazer-se prontamente familiar e os monstros exóticos logo entram na rotina diária”<sup>35</sup> (Buarque, *Visão do Paraíso*, 1959: 120). In *O Diálogo*, all Captaincies produce a different quotidian: in Porto Seguro, the fifth Captaincy, the living revolves around the extraction of sugar cane, while on the sixth, Rio de Janeiro, life revolves around the extraction of Brazil wood, making the region one of the most fertile in the country at that time. Other centers are São Vicente and Santos, both strategic areas in terms of commerce and geography.

These details are important because if, up until now, these elements had been interpreted as discourses of power and ideology, currently they can also be addressed as the foundation for a quotidian which leaves traces in Brazilian daily living. From the distribution of lands, to major products such as sugar cane and cotton, we learn about Brazil as it becomes known to them; how most colonists sleep in hammocks, how most people have slaves in their houses to help with the work, and how all these elements, in daily practice, start to establish a quotidian which gradually becomes more complicated as new human and nonhuman forms were identified and the landscape itself started to change through the centuries.

An important aspect of these accounts is how they go beyond the utilitarian description of items from the fauna and flora of the country to the mobility in terms of the concepts of “normal”

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<sup>35</sup> Even the uncommon seems to make itself promptly familiar and the exotic monsters soon are part of the everyday life. My translation.

and “strange:” what were initially strange spectacles occurring in the quotidian become natural events and a signal to the land itself. *Tratado Descritivo do Brasil*, from 1587, by Gabriel Soares de Souza, asserts that although the fertility of the land equals the potential of constructing a Portuguese Empire, one of the distinctions of this treatise is how it depicts different native tribes spread throughout the continent and implies a *mobility* in the acquisition of knowledge as it pertains to how to live and think the territory.

This very mobility, suggested in the earlier sixteenth century accounts, becomes an official mandate with the institution of the Bandeiras Movement in the seventeenth century. The movement originated in the Vila Piratininga, in the Paulista Plateau, where today São Paulo lies, and spreads itself to the interior of the country, was initially utilized to discover new routes for gold and precious stones. An important aspect of the Bandeiras movement to the landscape and identity writings in Brazil is the relationship and implication between at least two codes of information and practice of the quotidian: that of the natives and that of the settlers.

While the final goal of the settlers was to settle, the demarcation of the territory and the conquering of land and slaves, the native, guiding the Portuguese into the land, had to deal with the day-by-day reality of the jungle. This capacity to move and travel around the land by foot implied a physical and mental readiness of those involved, and which, as Manuel Pacheco Neto elaborates in his Master “thesis,” “Palmilhando o Brasil Colonial,” became an important aspect of Brazilian life since its foundations.

As Pacheco writes, this movement through the territory presented not only corporeal obstacles but geographical ones such as the Serra do Mar, a large mountain that separated the coastal region of Brazil from the interior and which is absent in most of the accounts in the

period, which takes for granted this imposing physical wall. Yet, as Pacheco explains, this was one of the first elements which naturally selected those who would be allowed to move into the unknown and mobilize opportunities in the interior, in contrast to those who were destined to live a sedentary life on the coast.

The relevance of this historical mobility to Colonial Brazil and to the overall scope of my project is to demonstrate how initially Page feels trapped inside the house and later, with her increased knowledge of her surroundings, she also begins to rediscover her body in the landscape differently. It is a different type of mobility, yet it is a transformative process of incorporating the absent body into her writing, and in her life in Brazil.

Similarly, during the seventeenth century and the Bandeiras Movement explains this, it was the South American who taught the Bandeirantes how to move about the territory, through long periods spent in the dense jungle. These teachings included hunting, gathering food and water, as well as a corporeal sense of orientating oneself in relation to the territory itself. A notion that echoes what David Abram writes in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* in reference to the writings of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the understanding of the body as the subject of every experience.

The corporeal is no longer a predetermined entity, but “an active and open form, continually improvising its relation to things and to the world.” (Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*, 1996: 49) The conciliation between an idea of perception as an ongoing exchange between one’s body and the entities surrounding and the practice of it was a quotidian task that endured several trials, and which, until today, challenges every non-Brazilian and foreigner who arrives in the territory.

For Page, the most important element of any artistic endeavour is not the 'I' but the 'eye,' her intention being to offer her individual perception and vision of the world. At the same time, she recognizes the importance of words in the essay "Questions and Images," in *The Filled Pen*, she explains:

My first foreign language — to live in, that is —and the personality changes that accompany it. One is a toy at first, a doll. Then a child. Gradually, as vocabulary increases, an adult again. But a different adult. Who am I, then, that language can so change me? What is personality, identity? And the deeper the change, the profounder the understanding — partial, at least — of what man is, devoid of words. Where could wordlessness lead? Shock, insights, astounding and sudden walls. Equally astounding and sudden dematerializations; points of view shifting and vanishing. Attitudes recognized for what they are: attitudes. The Word behind the word...but when is there no word? (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 36)

Though not necessarily addressing how embodiment works in her practice of writing, this excerpt elaborates on the question of language, as an intrinsic rite of passage that can change one's personality or even identity. Language, for Page, nurtures men, and in lack it brings shock, insights, and astounding walls. It is the surprise of feeling, of the anterior moment that comes behind each word that this passage tries to address.

And it is this process that Page seems to experience while in Brazil, a lack of words and an excess of feelings. In this passage, Page refers to the Portuguese language, which is the first foreign language she lives in practice. As we see in *Brazilian Journal*, she learns ways to use this language; she describes the feeling of existing without words, the walls that it raises, the sense of

being lost in presence and space, and the immediacy that this living in language produces. This blank space, particularly when living in a foreign language, appears to be a constant in *Brazilian Journal*.

Her experience and experimentation with new artistic forms are evidence of this search. It was not a coincidence that upon returning to Canada, in the late sixties, after spending years in Brazil as well as Mexico and Guatemala, Page becomes interested in Eastern poetry, particularly the Sufi Poets. From reading them, she manages to move from the uncertainty of this and that to a poetic experience that is various and receptive to personal and multiple realities. It is in Brazil, where she is exposed to the heat and its unpredictable rules that Page begins to acknowledge the limitations of language, particularly in her testimonies on the uncertainty and otherness present in daily, quotidian activities.

This experimentation of life, of taking into account its uncertainties and fluidity, a challenge in Page's *Journal*, are David Abrams' insights in *The Spell of the Sensuous*. According to Abram, our first learning experience comes from contact with the world through our physical senses. These motifs — body, sensation, exploration of space, geography and landscape of the imagination — are forms constantly evolving, a *type* of emotion, which, when it comes to writing, often manages to achieve points of convergence that are neither failure nor successes, but different ways to embody the body in images.

Page writes, in the first three stanzas of the poem "Black and White" about the contrast between light and dark, life and death, trying, even if slightly, to promote the success of vitality and youth. Despite her interplay of opposites, which are frequent events in Page's work and

vision, she somehow succeeds, even if only slightly, to expose the naked body. From a poem in *The Hidden Room*, she writes:

My bare face feels egg-naked, eyeball-pale

After the figures in the tomb.

Strange that to meet them in the buried room

We had to climb those white-hot steps to heaven

Sun hammering us like nails

The sunwhite stone

Striking us blind.

Sweating,

Our wire legs shaky from the climb,

The time for climbing short,

Breath scant,

Had then to start that trembling descent —

A steeper gradient, and a narrower stair

Black as the pupils of our sunblind eyes.



Icedamp. (Page, *Hidden Room, Volume II*, 180)<sup>36</sup>

Here, Page elaborates on the sensation of the sun and the emotion it produces. In this poem, Page elaborates on the transition one undergoes with one's own emotion, beginning with a "trembling descent" and moving towards the feeling of the sun on their faces, and coming to the sensation of "icedamp," surprisingly arriving to newly-discovered feelings of touching and exploring this introduced world. The end of the climb promises all sorts of change, because the body finds itself in a challenging situation, and the all-too-righteous sequence of calculated steps turn into a sudden rush of emotions, expressed in stanzas four, five and six. She writes:

Touching the walls for guidance I forgot

The purpose of our climb

As must not fall

Became the purpose.

Sight was vertical.

I stared at a black hole in

That black descending wall.

A black hole stared me back.

All senses were awake.

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<sup>36</sup> For more, see *The Hidden Room, Volume II*, by P. K. Page. Erin, Ontario: The Porcupine's Quill, 1997.

Death's delicate faint scent.

Royal as Parma violets was a thread

That led meticulously down the black.

My whole skin surface was a fingertip. (Page, *Hidden Room, Volume II*, 180-181)<sup>37</sup>

In this passage, Page asserts that every moment is precious, unique, present. Death lurks nearby, and the future does not exist, because one has to pay attention to their own moves and keep themselves alive. Death has a “delicate scent,” and it directs Page’s sight to a black hole. Everything is felt at the level of skin, and she is very careful when describing her fears. This passage is, above all, a new form of inquiry which truly takes into account the processes and set of trails present in our interaction with each other and the planet.

The poem is a mode of questioning which is not fixed, which welcomes all disciplines, whether the other is inside of us, as Julia Kristeva points out in *Strangers to Ourselves*, or whether it implies an ethical responsibility and understanding of the “otherness of the other,” as suggested by Emanuel Levinas in *Humanism of the Other*, it also requires a new awareness of our physical relationship with the world; a new interaction of human and non-human forms with the surrounding environment. And it is only through this process of once again learning and remembering how to touch and name the world that new meaning can be generated. In this poem, one sees how Page understands the passage of time, and its perception constitutes the reality of the poem, the now.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

This project aims to speak about the now, and the understanding of the world which is inseparable from the notion of the body as a “hand and phonetic organ,” a creative activity inspired by gesture and language, as suggested by Levinas; how the construction of locality and place is constituted by discourses grounded on experiences, and transformed through action, as Hugh Raffles writes in “Social Minority and the Politics of Place-Making in Northeastern Amazonia.” As individuals embody and travel with their stories, they go on narrating placed natures and creating associated histories.

It is this aspect of the construction of the Brazilian landscape and identity which I attempt to discuss here as I analyse how Page sees Brazil and replicates it in *Brazilian Journal*. My objective is to discover how these multiple constructions can coexist in parallel spaces once our attention turns to the physical world; how these narratives of nature and person can be drawn from our understanding of the lived immediacies. In *Imagining the Earth*, John Elder writes how the “attentiveness to nature” distinguishing current American poetry is usually expressed as hostility toward Western civilization, a response to a “cultural dividedness” of man against nature, past against present, intellect against sense.

For Elder, poetry, through its various forms of expression, acts as a dialect between these extremes, exploring not only a sense of place but also an awareness of the body as a world of experience. (Elder, *Imagining the Earth*: 2) This dialect, for Elder, is constituted by metaphors of reconciliation between the divided parts and those which allow us to understand life as a “process of tidal exchange, of decay and renewal,” (Elder, *Imagining the Earth*: 22) Culture, he affirms, by participating in this “circuit of mutual dependency” between all factors at play in the biophysical landscape, should be considered a process that “grows rather than being manufactured.”

Moreover, for Elder poetry is the mediator between these two dividers, nature and civilization, informing our learning how to balance ourselves with the “natural order.” For Elder, this multiplicity forces the artist to “break down nomenclature, as well as tone and grammar.” (Elder, *Imagining the Earth*: 47) And it is this very relationship between poetry and one’s perception of life through the physicality of the body in the landscape which John Elder’s *Imagining the Earth* fails to acknowledge. Despite affirming “that nonhuman life transmits precise information without recourse to human languages...because nature is demonstrably *there* in its own terms...neither inert nor a fabric of poetic conventions: earth’s culture and human culture include and nourish one another,” (Elder, *Imagining the Earth*: 34) Elder does not elaborate on the possibilities of this encounter.

In fact, the book takes as *given* the processes of how the physical body actually *perceives* all these events, considering only differences in language. The only moment when physical contact between poet and landscape is mentioned is when Elder refers to our connection to “gravity” and our “filial bound with the physical world.” He writes how “gravity, as experienced by a person and its effects on his body, is after all the most basic of feelings.” (Elder, *Imagining the Earth*: 115) In sum, Elder does not elaborate on the possibilities of perceiving the world through the body or the senses, often referring to the “poet” and his or her relationship with the “universe of his own body;” it is an account which once again ignores the physical body as an important tool for creative processes.

It is this very quiet conversation or mute observation that unveils the world of P. K. Page and her understanding of poetry as being intrinsically connected to the experience of life, found in several examples from *Brazilian Journal*. She writes, in an entry from August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1957, as she reproduces what she thinks should be the sensation of living: “This seems to me what life *should*

be like and as if something in me has always known it – just as one knows, before one has ever been in love, what love is like.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 68) In this passage, Page seems to reach a level of internal satisfaction that she had never acknowledged in writing before, which leads her to recognize the site of internal satisfaction, and how that should be constant, rather than a rarity. It is an intuitive process, similar to love, that is internalized in each of us.

This is the recognition of that center, from where life should shine, and gather force. She writes, in another entry, from August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1957:

Home by the beach road again – the pounding sea on one side, the lagoon on the other, and an evening mist giving the impression that spume illuminated the dark land. Earlier it had been bathed in a smoky blue, translucent and luminous. I grow to love Brazil more each day – even the wide flat corner with some rather awful houses and no vegetation but grass cover...How do I write my love song? It is as if I were wired and someone (Someone?) had a finger on the buzzer all the time. *Can* one fall in love with a country? (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 72)

In this passage, Page mentions the expression being wired. As though, in Brazil, she had a constant sensation of being in feelings, or feeling everything all the time, and that created the sensation of love and of beauty she felt in the country. At the same time, she was able to recognize in her daily living, landscapes that led her into this emotion, as though it were only waiting to be released.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This mix of awe and surprise before unexpected events of quotidian life are marks not only of foreign accounts but also of domestic ones. Paulo Mendes Campos, a well known Brazilian journalist who wrote several articles exploring the *meaning* of being Brazilian, also argues that what intrinsically integrates this people to the territory is their physical relationship to the landscape. In his book *Brasil Brasileiro: crônicas das cidades e do povo, 1950* Campos writes on themes ranging from soccer, women, and popular music, to the landscape and its features. Just as previous writers, he is also critical of the increasing disappearance of villas and small cities in the interior of Brazil

This corporeal experience is well articulated in the feature film *Brava Gente Brasileira* (Lucia Murat, 2000) which focuses on actual events from 1778. The movie was part of the artistic celebrations of the five hundred years since the discovery of Brazil and describes the taking of Fort Coimbra by the Guaiacus Indians, today known as Kadiwéu, who occupied and killed all the Portuguese settlers in a surprise attack. The Fort was located in the central area of Brazil, near Goiás, and the movie takes place in a period when the Bandeiras murder and domestication of all living and non-living beings was already a quotidian practice.

In the film, we witness the violence of these attacks, particularly when one of the characters, Pedro, representing the simple minded Bandeirantes, of mixed origins, teaches the “pure” Portuguese settler, Diogo, how to behave on this land. On one hand we have the Brazilian Bandeirante or mameluke, embodied in the figure of Pedro and “agent of colonization,” as Darcy Ribeiro affirms in his book *O Povo Brasileiro*, and on other hand we have the Portuguese Diogo, who is influenced by the ideas of Rousseau, of the noble savage, and cannot cope with the disconnection and unsynchronized movement between the idea and practice of all these concepts in the quotidian.

According to the director of the film, Lucia Murat, her intention was to present the logic of the Indian versus the logic of the white men; how both have physically and mentally informed the Brazilian quotidian as well as physically reconstructed the landscapes and cities. Overall, the

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and the fast urbanization of seashores. His account, though passionate and superficial at times, suggests a sense of Brazilian identity as *being* the landscape, *fertile* and *mutable*; a concept which gains body as he travels across the country and loses track of what was once demarcated territory. Not without sadness, Campos affirms that to be Brazilian is to ground one’s feet on the territory and to accept all its chaotic possibilities of experience. In “The Easygoing Brazilian,”<sup>38</sup> Campos explains how his friend, after spending a period overseas, is happy to return to Brazil and find himself once again inserted among people who can still be “gracious within a perfect disorganization” (Campos, *Brasil Brasileiro*, 1950: 11). This very unpredictability of quotidian life is also emphasized in passages which describe the “diabolic transit chaos of Rio” and how its inhabitants should “already have gone mad due to the aggravating quotidian.” Another example is when Campos describes “Brazil as very Brazilian place...the only country like that in the world. It is only those who truly get to know us well that will be able to understand what I mean.” (Campos, *Brasil Brasileiro*, 1950: 15)

film offers a very flexible approach to the progressive idea of time and history because it attempts to show the several layers of constructed reality and mentality that constitute the Brazilian identity, including the natives'. Moreover, it also introduces a documentary aspect into the fictional narrative of the movie, as it ends with a testimony of one the few remaining Kadiweus, a tribe which was the subject of research by anthropologists Claude Levi-Strauss and Darcy Ribeiro and to artist Guido Boggiani — the latter describing his adventures in the region of Chaco and Mato Grosso do Sul, near the border of Paraguay and Brazil, in his book and diary titled *Os Caduveo*.

As an Italian landscape painter, Boggiani initially traveled to the region for business but ended up living among the Caduveo (Kadiweu) Indians for almost three months in 1892, recording his experiences and daily activities.

The interesting aspect of these notes is not just their ethnographic value but also their practicality. Certainly his observations are not always self reflective, since his mentality is still linked to an anthropocentric vision of the world, and being European means to stand two feet higher than the primitive. At times his tone is one sided, he writes that the Indians are beasts and ignorant, basically drunks. The description of heavy drinking done by the Indians is a constant in his diaries, where Boggiani accuses the Indians for “not doing anything besides partying and dancing” but does not implicitly acknowledge the fact that his people provided the very alcohol consumed by the tribe.

Yet the important aspect to mention here is the gradual change in his behavior towards life and art. As time passes and he experiences the habits of this tribe, even dressing, eating and sleeping like them, dancing and living the daily activities of the community, his articulation of

quotidian shifts from theory to practice. The idea of the Indians as beasts is no longer apparent, which does not imply it is no longer there. However, the practice of the quotidian already institutes a change in Boggiani's capacity for imagining the quotidian as it is articulated in his diary and reproduced in his paintings.

From his diary, we learn about all the trials he has to undergo before he finally settles in the village; from moving long distances in the territory to hunting and dealing with challenges in the environment such as a lack of food and drinking water. And though, after settling in the village, and transcribing his experiences in the village, he still maintains his "airs of European superiority," and acknowledges how his painting has improved due to his experience in the community. By tracing the physicality and movement of several artistic expressions in Brazil, it becomes evident how the idea of Brazil, when not applied in practice, is quickly transformed into exoticism or strangeness. As the seventeenth century Bandeirantes were soon to learn, one of the tricks for survival was to keep moving and constantly change place, carrying one's home wherever one went.

These teachings of the quotidian begin to suffer consequences which, still today, echo in the establishment of Brazilian life, when the Bandeirantes use these tactics for survival against the Indians, surprising the natives with unexpected attacks, as was common during the seventeenth century. I suggest that today's Brazilian chaos and quotidian is not only a consequence of a disorganized Portuguese Colonization, as Darcy Ribeiro and Buarque de Holanda demonstrate, but also a counterstrategy of these very Brazilians, descendants of the natural land, who, now dispossessed of their land, have to live in chaos in order to keep strange visitors always away from its quotidian.



In contemporary accounts about Brazil, characters and stories reveal difficulties and surprises in the quotidian life of the country, in big cities such as Rio de Janeiro, where the main challenges are, in this order: how to think, walk, defend yourself from the enemy, make decisions, and remain creative (and alive) at the end of the day (or the tale). It is an urgent call for balance between thinking and acting in the Brazilian quotidian; a box of surprises at every instant where older concepts infuse into newer possibilities or remain the same, but are all part of daily life. Published in 2002, *My Dear Cannibal*, by Antonio Torres, is a novel which deals with the annals of history and the quotidian aspect of negotiating the rescue of this data from the libraries and archives in the chaotic city of Rio de Janeiro.

This voice, without name or body, only purpose, is, as Latour affirms *We Have Never Been Modern*, a victim of modernism, someone who, despite his struggle to fight the categorization of time as a progressive arrow, finds himself immersed in. The novel is divided into three parts; the first summarizing bits of records taken from “official history,” attempting to explain Brazil in time as well as the “disappearance” of the natives from this land. The second part of the book is another attempt by the narrator to spin the wheel of time and speculate on the religious aspects and implications of this “native disappearance,” bringing into discussion fragments from Jean de Lery, Andre Thevet, Hans Staden, and other sixteenth century writers who described native life as they “saw it.”

The third and final part of the book focuses on the present era and life of the narrator in Rio de Janeiro, as he prepares to embark on a journey to physically retrace these “invisible” trails.

Perception is the play between empty and filled spaces, a relationship that is very well developed in Page's writing of *Brazilian Journal*. As the days progress, Page is more and more overwhelmed by the world of Brazil, as we have seen in the previous passage and the "good-natured" Brazilian crowd. Page is immersed in the scenario, she can hear the Brazilians, and is almost able to touch that world.

The empty house, the disorganized world she encountered at the beginning of the narrative, matters little now that the field that was once abundant is presently a creative potentiality for her to experience and act, to translate and transpire, with all her being. Brazil is no longer so overwhelming that it defies description; it is no longer unbearable to write for Page, even if it is still difficult. Deleuze affirms that a pure aural and visual situation can give birth to the function of vision and which can stand almost anything, due to its literality, its excessive horror or beauty, and that no longer needs to be justified by actions or movement. (Deleuze, *A Imagem-Tempo*, 2007: 30-31).

It is an attentive recognition which leads us back to the object in question and emphasizes its borders, that obliges us to start all over again; it is not an automatic or habitual recognition of movements. The unexpected is what gives the flavour of novelty and immediacy to the senses in the writing of *Brazilian Journal*, as we see in a passage from page 155. She writes:

In the garden – illuminated by the lights from the house – we were shown a *pau-brasil* – the red-wooded tree after which Brazil was named and which has now practically disappeared. A pretty tree with delicate acacia-like leaves. In the morning, before breakfast, I picked a pomegranate and ate its red crystals – crystals which so startlingly break to bitter-sweet juice in your mouth and leave you with nothing but tasteless woody

pits. The tree is small and lacy, with slender whiplike branches at the ends of which hang the heavy fruits. The *bicos de papagaios* (poinsettias) were in flower, salmon-coloured and red, and the garden was filled with the smell of sweet grass that had followed us everywhere on our holiday in Minas. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 155)

The cinematographic effect of this passage is strong and alive. The images are sequential: the red-wooded tree representing Brazil in matter and that one can almost touch through the delicate leaves she emphasizes, the pomegranate and its red crystals in her mouth, bringing “a taste of tasteless woody pits,” and also the poinsettias, in bloom, filling the garden with smell. Page describes the scenario but not the feeling, yet the sensations can be inferred from the passage. In this excerpt, the focus is on the environment and how it surrounds her being as embodied in this place. She notices the tree while eats the pomegranate and balances both experiences in bitter-sweet juices to nothing.

Later, Page describes her encounter with a “metal animal” in a trip to Volta Redonda. It is strange, it is alien, but Page does not seem to find the subject odd. She accepts and even creates a concept for it. It is the unfathomable and the mysterious in life that can permeate works of art. It is that foreignness in all languages. Page writes, on two similar occasions, about the sensation of not knowing something but nevertheless describing it with all abnormality. In these moments, expressions like “atomic weight” being necessary and participant in the description of an animal that she knows not how to name, and yet, through the body’s depiction, tries to perceive and express in writing:

And that reminds me of an experience I had at Volta Redonda. We were standing outside the mill, the men talking and I not listening, when I saw, moving on its course through

the grass, a metal – what shall I call it? Animal? It was not, of course, like animal, having neither head nor legs nor feet nor the usual animal characteristics. It was about a foot long and moving as metal moves, with that kind of atomic weight. It was some little time before my mind rejected the concept. And I felt a certain *saudade* for the metal animal when I realized it was merely some man-made mechanical object, moving on a track. Strangely, during the period of thinking of it as a metal animal, there was nothing foreign in the idea. I accepted it as naturally as I would have accepted a rabbit or a bird. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 156)

This surrealistic image of a “metal animal” suggests, in this excerpt, a need of interaction, perhaps, an explanation or embodiment of things foreign. When it doesn’t materialize, Page affirms her naturalness in accepting the bizarre, and even a desire for it. Yet it is simply a product of her imagination, leaving a sense of emptiness and disappointment, though not stated. In this passage, one notices how Page elaborates on her feelings, bringing out her own conception of the alien and strange.

For her, it is as though it would have been easier to accept a metal animal than realizing that, in truth, it was a man-made object instead. It is as though the strange in life, the unexplained, for her perception, functions in a much more curious and surprising way. And her perception, somehow, accentuates this interest, as though her desire is drawn to the unexpected, even in a place like Brazil, which naturally seems to offer the unknown and the surprising on many occasions. The extraordinary is Page’s confirmed fascination for the indescribable, a need to embody the impossible feeling. She affirms, on the same page 156:

The experience was akin to the time when, in a room with one other person, I gradually became aware of a third being with us. Nothing changed with the awareness of that third person, who sat in a chair on the other side of the room and was as closely with us as I was, myself. It was only when the third person left that the full realization of its having been there broke upon me. Although in no sense unnatural or unknown, it had no sex and no form. It was an entity as natural to me and as much a part of me as was the man who was with me at the time. And with its going there was a kind of absence, an emptiness in a trinity that had had a totality. A sense of loss. I felt a similar loss when the metal animal became a metal object. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 156)

This passage mentions several feelings, amongst them those of absence and emptiness. It is embodied through the body of a third person, not present in the room but in consciousness since it has no sex or form. This unnamed and shapeless man is compared to the living experience of a metal animal, which takes Page to deal with a sense of loss in her quotidian. Lack of embodiment, in this excerpt, is representative of an impossible desire to name the feelings that have relationship with the unnatural and unknown. This previous passage affects Page in the body, even though she cannot understand why the feelings come up, since she relates them to a bodiless man.

The fact that a third person can elevate her senses embodies the whole absence of this being; it is the full realization of its presence. In this way, it becomes an entity that is as natural to her as part of her. It is an all inclusive experience, which, as intense as it can be to her senses, also provokes a sense of emptiness, and loss. The same feeling, she says, that she experienced when she realized that the so-called “metal animal” was not to be an animal but a simple metal object. These events demonstrate how Brazil is not only an abundant world but a place of

understanding about language. It is death and it is life, all in one. And Page deals with it at every moment, including her capacity to feel and describe this world of events that is not always expected and predictable.

She is dealing with the unknown, and her disappointments are fostered by events like the previous ones, which Page deepens. These are the trials of Page when in Brazil. Her relationship with her painting becomes, like writing, a struggle. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 159) It is constantly changing, she moves from egg tempera to oil, and seems to spend more time painting and less time writing. As mentioned previously, after her arrival in Brazil, Page experiences what she calls a “temporary pause from poetic works,” often wondering whether this gift of writing would ever come back. Her separation from poetry, however, does not stop her from writing letters and searching for new artistic mediums to explore. Her desire to meet new people, and artists of all sorts, slowly becomes a routine for the poet. As we see in her diaries, one strong aspect of her stay in the country is to study new crafts such as painting, thus learning how to describe the landscape visually, rather than with simple words. Moment after moment, Page’s desire is immediately grasped by the enigma of Brazilians, “impossible to penetrate.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 35)

Like Elizabeth Bishop, who also lived in the country during the 1950s, Page adopts Rio de Janeiro as though it was her own port of entry into this possibility of sensations. In his article “Elizabeth Bishop Como Mediadora Cultural,” Paulo Henrique Britto reinforces the fact that, for the American poet, privacy was the only law that mattered. She didn’t like to be seen as the spokesperson of humanity, despite her capacity to pay attention to things apparently of no importance. For Britto, “Elizabeth Bishop foi a mais inábil (e relutante) das mediadores culturais; no fundo, tudo o que queria do Brasil era um lar — um lugar onde fosse amada e

compreendida, e onde pudesse escrever em paz.” (Britto, “Elizabeth Bishop como Mediadora Cultural,” 2003: 152)<sup>39</sup>

The surroundings of Brazil inspire Page’s loving devotion for the country, inspiring her creatively; hearing, tasting, and touching this unknown world becomes her best tool to overcome the challenge of being constantly in between languages, of learning new words to describe this New World.

As Maria Candida Ferreira de Almeida affirms in her book *Tornar-se Outro: O Topos Canibal na Literatura Brasileira*, fictional texts which attempt to celebrate the five hundred years since Brazil’s occupation such as *Meu Querido Canibal* still deny access to the Indian of these narratives, repeating an idealized version of the native from the nineteenth century Indianist Movement in Brazilian Literature.

During this period, as David Treece affirms in his *Exiles, Allies and Rebels*, the Brazilian Indian was not only a central character in the fictional accounts that idealized this Indian as an important element in the consolidation of Brazilian national identity but also in the making of the nation’s Indigeneous policies. Treece points out how the dream of peaceful assimilation of the native person into Brazilian society as an active participant citizen, with a strong indian identity, is crucial to Brazil’s national and cultural self-image.

In the third and final part of the book *My Dear Cannibal*, the history written by European travellers is replaced with the possibility for a new articulation, in the present, by the narrator. It

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<sup>39</sup> “Elizabeth Bishop was the most unable (and reluctant) of the cultural mediator; truly, all that she wanted from Brazil was a home – a place where she was loved and comprehended, and where she could write in peace.” My translation. For more, see Paulo Henrique Britto. “Elizabeth Bishop Como Mediadora Cultural.” In: *Nenhum Brasil Existe: Pequena Enciclopédia*. Ed. João Cezar de Castro Rocha. Rio de Janeiro: Universidade Editora, TopBooks, 2003.

is in this section that the author offers several potential possibilities for articulating ideas into practice, for deciphering the Brazilian quotidian and its landscape, and yet is only partially fulfilled. As the narrator takes a cab to Rio de Janeiro's bus depot, where he will embark to his journey to Angra dos Reis, once the land of several native tribes, including the Tamoios and the Tupinambás, we discover this "marvellous city" full of social injustices and breathtaking landscapes which several artists have attempted to capture.

One of the limitations of the narrative is the complete negation of the corporeal experience as a tool of understanding the challenges of the quotidian. In several passages, the narrator complains about the heat, about crowded places, about the impossibility of thinking and acting at the same time. And even though the recourse occurs in ironic moments, it nevertheless emphasizes the difficulty of learning the lessons of the natives from the land.

The difference between this new twenty first century character and other narratives is the realization of the need for change and movement, even if it is by recognizing an inability to move due to a traffic jam, or a car that cannot go up a very steep mountain, or any obstacle that implies a physical action.

This is someone who feels and thinks the landscape as he physically travels through it, even if his conceptualization of his sensations are child-like, particularly in comparison with his elaborate language when it comes to historical or philosophical concepts. All his actions and thoughts are immobile precisely because of his metaphysical understanding of life detached from a physiological strategy of action. Only then he would be capable of, creatively, testing these very concepts in quotidian tasks. Torres' narrator experiences the immobility of *his* quotidian as



he travels through the landscape and cannot secure meaning in all that he sees, either as a historian, fiction writer, or narrator.

The chaos of experience is present in each moment, as new challenges arise whether in the figure of homeless kids selling drugs on the corner of his street, or in a traffic jam. Moreover, his biggest disappointment comes when he cannot find the lost trails and blames progress and “civilization.” Once again it is the battle between the civilized and the uncivilized which has destroyed his idea of the native which, in practice, does not exist. As Almeida affirms, it is the lost idea of the native that is a recurrence in all of these narratives and which still denies the real practicality of what being a true descendent of the natural land implies. In *My Dear Cannibal*, despite the narrator’s efforts for pasting the historical records into a hybrid mosaic, of denying the grand histories and narratives by deconstructing and sarcastically addressing them, he still cannot escape the grand questions: why time and why history? His temporary solution is a return to history, to the elaboration of new forms of understanding time, even if they are through fictional accounts.

To say the least, the book does demonstrate the conceptual capacity of the narrator to acknowledge his need of letting go certain conventions and certainties of life, just like Page seems to do when she encounters events in Brazil that she cannot categorize. Different from others, she enjoys the mysteries of the unknown, and immerses herself fully in the act of description. And this is what this dissertation is trying to demonstrate, how Page deals with writing as a fertile and creative activity that is constantly being challenged by the trials of language and embodiment.

In Part II, I will introduce another example of Page's interaction with the foreign, as portrayed and explored in the *glosa* form, in *Hologram*, as well as her conversation with other poets, some foreigners, in a conversation that is explored in the poems of the same book. This attempt is to show a similar relationship with the absent body, and this new form.

## **Part II: Chapter 6: *Hologram*, the Embodied Sensibility, and its Manifestations**

In this Part II, Chapter 6, my intent is to reintroduce the engagement of this dissertation in identifying how Page introduces the sensual world in a selected collection of poems. I cite sensibility as an allusion to Octavio Paz's notion of poetry, as that which does not say and is the embodiment of the poet's sensibility, his or her senses. Page's narratives in the book of glosas *Hologram* is married to that of other poets, from whose excerpts she selects and expands into a "glosa" poem. My research does not forge into the history of the original work for the same reasons that Page began her investigation: like her, I became interested in *Hologram* because of the sounds and the images these verses produce. I also see *Hologram* as another example where we see Page's encounter with the foreign other, through the Spanish form *glosa*, as well as her conversation with foreign poets that inspire her writing of the poems featured in this book.

My decision was to devote enough time and attention to the verses created by Page, rather than to the poems that inspired her. I focus on the excerpts as part of Page's construction of the "glosa" poem, but I do not challenge her writing of the "glosas" or the effect of history on this form. What I intend to show is how Page positions herself and other physical bodies in sensual manifestations, how it occurs or not in the environment of the poems, and how they are manifested in the relationship between textuality and physicality in a written text. My intent with this investigation is to determine how the sensual environment eases the entrance of the reader into a text, and how this accessibility promotes the affects that work as a tool and a resource for the act of interpretation.

Page avoids speaking about feelings directly, often appealing to the use of abstract images. Yet at the same time, by adopting it, she considers the sensual world as an important

aspect of a writer's equipment. Page announces in the beginning of *Hologram's* introductory foreword that she's been introduced to the "glosa" form via the ear. "Its form, half hidden, powerfully sensed, like an iceberg at night, made me search for its outline as I listened," she says (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 9). In this passage it is easy to recognize how elements of sensuality are accentuated from the start of Page's project: it is a form that is half hidden yet is nevertheless powerfully sensed. As though it were an "iceberg at night," invisible but perceptible, "floating its immensity into the night as though searching for eyes that were to discover it, or find its outline, or hear it pass by, with its powerful presence." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 9) The form of the glosa, hidden like the body, remains active despite its absence.

Similarly, Page sees the "glosa" form, which she calls powerful to the senses. In the meantime, she puts emphasis on how the eye perceives it: at a glance. It is not immediate vision, even though the actual object can be sensed by the ear. What attracts the eye in the glosa form, Page argues in the introduction, is the opening quatrain written by another poet. What comes next are four stanzas, each with ten lines. In each stanza, the last lines end with the lines borrowed from the excerpt of another poet, respectively. In addition, the sixth and ninth lines of each stanza rhyme with the borrowed tenth. In my understanding, the difference and the foreign present in this form present a challenge to Page's sensibility in understanding the foreign other, and in exploring the internal dialogue this encounter provokes.

To review, Page's glosa is a four-stanza poem, initiated by a four line stanza taken from another poem, with each subsequent stanza ending with a line taken from a borrowed excerpt, the sixth and ninth rhyming the borrowed one. Page sets up, defines and anticipates the project *Hologram* from the start, sensually perceiving the "glosa" outcome as an iceberg, whose outline has to be revealed, and not memorized or predicted. It is an act of open interpretation, which can

be perceived by the ear and sensed in its presence. The very name of the book, *Hologram*, reveals the promise of these poems as that which features more than one way to look at a particular scene, demonstrating how the perception of a *hologram* functions the main idea present in the interpretation of these poems.

Page says she picked up the first book nearby, by George Seferis, one of the most important Greek poets, when searching for the first four suitable lines. And surprisingly, the first “glosa” was created naturally, “with beginner’s luck.” “I won’t say I wrote it in a flash, but in a near-flash. The words that controlled the rhymes were *angle, sea, peacock, and it*. It was immediately clear that full rhymes would be difficult. Any rhymester knows that English is not Spanish,” she explains. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 9)

Another important aspect of this project is the origin of the form, from “the Spanish court, which dates from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries and has not been very popular in English.”<sup>40</sup> It was also related to the Renaissance tradition and its concept of art as imitation, as well as with the balance between form and talent as a unique and poetic representation of reality. The reading and assimilation of former poetic influences stem from the Renaissance tradition; during a time when the practice of imitation was a complex exercise comprised in the learning of poetry by way of studying the classics and emulating them, by improving their form with the conjunction of personal talent and skill, creating a harmonic, effortless, and natural style.

For Page, the task of drawing into form this invisible outline of melodies began by sensing it through the ear, by allowing the rhymes and the sounds to sync her inner sense of

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<sup>40</sup> See Birch, Robert. W. 2004. *Not to the Letter of the Law: Poetry in the Spirit of the Glosa*. [http://www.poetry-nut.com/glosa\\_poetry.htm](http://www.poetry-nut.com/glosa_poetry.htm)

balance. Page's usage of the form is a modern adaptation of this traditional Spanish version. In earlier times, "this medieval metric called mote or retruécano," common amongst the "cancioneiros" of late fourteenth century, the poets of the Spanish court who adopted the form to sing about love and the joy of life, "composed in a line or a short cabeza, followed by one stanza for each line of the opening cabeza which would explain, or gloss, that very line and incorporate it as an explanatory stanza."<sup>41</sup> My interest in this section, however, is not to concentrate on the form or its rhyming potentiality; this analysis aims to address, rather, the same issues that I investigated in *Brazilian Journal*, Page's relationship with the foreign other, the similarities and differences that occur in her interpretation of the other's voice in the *glosa* poems.

My intention is to trace the corporeal aspects of the body. In *Hologram*, Page practiced and became proficient in the form, and her footsteps are introduced in the opening of the book, where she explains in detail the process:

For some reason I found it challenging...At first I had no clear understanding of what I needed from the borrowed lines...Finally, and vitally, they had to parallel in an intimate way my own knowledge...or some other factor I could recognize but not name. Anyone who has ever attempted to match fabrics will know what I mean — it is not color alone or texture or weight but all of them in combination. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 10)

P. K. Page's version of the "glosa," the rules are different from the old "cancioneiros," though somewhat stricter: featuring an opening quatrain, then a four line cabeza written by another poet, followed by four ten-line stanzas, each stanza ending consecutively with a line taken from the quatrain, with their sixth and ninth lines rhyming with the prior verse.

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<sup>41</sup> Clitheroe, Terry. *Autonomous Poetry*. May 24, 1998. See <http://www.thepoetsgarret.com/autonomous.html#glosa>

It is not any knowledge, but intimate, profoundly personal. Her analogy of matching fabrics is an allusion to the physicality that embodied and paired sentiments produce, and what is crucial to make the concept of intimacy between the works function. The questions of how to write a body, or how does physicality occur in a written text, are implicit in this enterprise, since the sensual is adopted as a guiding source to identify the iceberg that Page names as being the metaphor for the glosa. Page speaks of poetry as a struggle to fit the real into the sensory; it is not an end but a process.

In *Hologram*, Page faces the obstacles of writing poetry in the “glosa” form; it is a matter of familiarizing herself with the form but also with the final images preformed beforehand through the selected quatrain. On one hand, the effect it creates when you read the glossed poems is very similar to that of a prism of light, reflecting various nuances of one set image through different angles, and always circling within a predetermined form; a time-consuming process. She explains, in the foreword:

I enjoyed the idea of constructing the poem backwards – the final line of each stanza is, in effect, the starting line. You work towards a known. I liked being controlled by those three reining rhymes – or do I mean reigning? – and gently influenced by the rhythm of the original. I felt as if I were hand in hand with Seferis. A curious marriage – two sensibilities intermingling. Little did I know how obsessed I would become by the form and how, as with all obsessions, it would have to run its course. And little did I know what hazards would lie ahead. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 9)

As in the narrative of *Brazilian Journal*, in *Hologram* she is not in control, yet the form of the poem becomes her goal, her obsession. She insists on seeing the whole project as an

obsession, and as one gets to know the book of “glosas” intimately, one understands why. From the first poem to the last, Page executes a carefully handcrafted performance in order to mimic what she finds in the opening quatrain.

She says her main focus were the rhymes, at least generally, a constant learning process of allowing herself to be controlled by the said rhymes. This relationship of control, rhymes, and a “marriage sensibility,” are effective to an extent, particularly in the impact of individual images. Yet overall the poems lack a body, or a fully embodied narration, as if the images were individually selected but not fully developed. At the same time, in the hands of another poet, this project might have turned out to be a disaster, which it didn’t. Page is the right person and has the ability to concentrate on the present moment, and on the journey, rather than on an end result.

The first poem, “Hologram,” begins with an excerpt from the poem “The King of Asine,” by George Seferis. The quatrain by George Seferis introduces the main cues of the “glosa” poem:

All that morning we looked at the citadel from every angle

We began from the side in the shadow, where the sea,

Green without brilliance, - breast of a slain peacock

Received us like time that has no break in it. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14)

The difficulty of embodiment is clear in this excerpt, which might work as a fruitful creative source for further elaboration but lacks in corporeality, since it introduces a citadel, its shadow, and the metaphor of a peacock, an ocean, in order to let the reader see what the narrator wants to embody, that being a vision of this world. The senses of the narrator are barred by his own effort to see this citadel, covered by shadows, a peacock and its sea corresponding



greenness. That said, it is important to review the opening quatrain before we observe how Page decides to fill the spaces and match it with her sensibility. Seferis says, “the citadel” is not seen from one angle, but “from every angle.” It happens that they are “in the shadow,” near “where the sea,” which is “green without brilliance,” receives them. It is continuous, “like time that has no break in it,” and similar to the “breast of a slain peacock.” The images of the sea and the citadel are the most important ones, since they attract and retract the movement of this quatrain, despite their lack of light. They are “in the shadow,” and the citadel can be seen “from every angle.”

We do not know yet what to do with these entities, but we know that they have a life that starts from the shadow, and it has colours that shine “without brilliance.” Like in *Brazilian Journal*, Page is painting the landscape as a photographer. Green is not any green, it is “without brilliance.” Yet we understand how one can see the world from every angle, and how the perception of this world is directly related to the positioning of the sun and its effect on the material world. It gives light; it reveals the “green without brilliance.”

We also notice that the sea is stronger than all of the above, since it receives them without pause, continuously, like time without an interval. It is the motion of nature that overcomes the stillness of the citadel, which seems to be washed by the game of light and shadows that the permanence of day imposes upon it. The light is also an important aspect to perceiving how this world comes to fruition, and the vision learns to see from every angle, learning how to deal with time, which, in this case, resumes in all that morning and a time that has no break on it, or continuously. Also, it is a replication of the observer which we see in *Brazilian Journal*.

As this long exposition demonstrates, a simple action, to see, becomes complicated and elaborated. In Page's world, this spectacle turns into something astonishing, larger than anything that could be imagined. Page tries, at her best, to express the brilliance Seferis refers to in the opening quatrain. Here the sensual world seems to be overtaken by light, by a magnetism that the poem suggests. As we move to the second stanza, we are introduced to the next aspect of this poem, which refers to time and its relationship with our senses. But from the beginning, entities are sublimated or translated into visions of light.

The transition of this stanza from the previous one is somewhat brusque, and Page has to use the resource of memory to allude to the passage of time and how light can transform a particular landscape, and in particular, one's perception of it. The first stanza exaggerates everything that is astonishing and too much for the senses.

The second stanza is similar in its effort to make the transition from the sensual to the physical in the text, alluding to the passage from the darkness to light as a passage that traverses "synesthetic layers and lengths of space-time." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) Before we move to the third stanza, it is interesting to mention how the role of memory, particularly with regard to time and how it is manifested in writing, and how it was also a recurrent theme during the Renaissance, in particular in the educational treatises of Erasmus.<sup>42</sup>

The act of remembering and recalling the classics was a subject that brought a great deal of anxiety for writers during the Renaissance, which in Page's case, it does not. For her, the past is not necessarily a source of anxiety but a way to understand the present to recognize what has formed in herself. Reviewing the foundations of her early poetic years is one way to address the

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<sup>42</sup> For more, see Thomas M. Greene, *Light in Troy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pg 31.

past and memory itself. In the third stanza of the poem “Hologram,” we learn about the relationship between darkness and wisdom; and how, out of darkness come wisdom and the radiance of natural light – or what Page calls “dawn’s greys being so infinite and infinitely subtle – transparencies, opacities.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) There is no reference to corporeal bodies, only the awareness that out of a shadowy place one can find the wisdom to look further, into the infinite light that cannot be easily explained. The poem has become a study of different kinds of light and shadow.

It is, above all, a shock before a particular picture of reality, once experienced, and could not be easily imagined or predicted beforehand, so consequently remains as a “new range of experience.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) And it is from this space that could not be dreamed of that we reach the closest definition of what this narrator, bodiless, experiences through her or his senses when before this earthquake, this “Jurassic age” which “must pass before even colour could enter the scene,” is completed in the poem. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) The situation is defined as an earthquake but also as “green, without brilliance, like a breast of a slain peacock.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15)

At this stage of the poem, Page is able to convey the same sensation that passages from *Brazilian Journal* are able to produce: the unexplained in the natural world, the beautiful, the awesome, words that portray her feeling towards the physical and the touchable, even if the body is absent. In other words, in this poem, as in others this project will demonstrate and analyze, Page is mesmerized before the unexplained light and the magnificent scenario of the citadel.

She does not want to define it in one way or another, and avoids what the body of the narrator feel. It is a vicious circle, for she knows what she sees but doesn’t know what it means

in terms of the absent body. The opening makes it clear: “they looked at it from every angle,” and, still, cannot articulate the sensual perception of the experience. In the same way we encounter the sea, which conjures up an array of feelings that writing alone does not seem sufficient to translate, at least not at the level of the physical body.

What emerges is more of a definition than a description of what is felt. We know what is being seen, not what is being felt. We know how beautiful this world is, but we do not know how that affects the narrator’s senses except in its magnitude and expansive quality. This is what we learn in the third stanza, due to difficulties the poet has in finding the right expression for sentiments such as awesome, as “earthquake,” which translates as an experience of the “we” that is surrounded by the presence of this citadel. And out of this whole scenario comes the natural world; the sea, “green without brilliance,” and the light that shines over the citadel. It is a visual picture of the scenario.

In the fourth stanza, however, things change from what is seen to the act of seeing. For the first time in the poem, we gain access to the eyes and the sensation it is experiencing: “But to the cones of our eyes that green was shining and pierced us like a spear. (When joy is great enough how distinguish it from pain?)” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) The final scenario is ultimately revealed, and what was once as awesome as an earthquake becomes something so beautiful that it is almost painful to experience in person. Page’s emphasis is clear: the light is so bright and the green is so intense that the vision “pierced into their eyes like a spear,” and the joy, greater than expected, is received by the narrator as a painful experience, perhaps due to the very magnitude.

Despite the difficulty at the beginning in translating a sense of surprise before the natural world, Page concludes the meeting point between the thing seen and the experience is perceived through the eyes: it is extreme, it is intense, and it is painful to experience it. It begs the question: “. . . after the frugal greys and the near-invisible shafts of no-colour that had stained us, how could our eyes adjust to so full a spectrum?” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) The end of the poem seems to take solace in the restful dynamics of light itself, which, after being exacerbated by the poet herself in the opening quatrain and initial two stanzas, decreases in emphasis in the third and fourth stanzas, becoming a tremendous aftershock that, in a flash, from “infra-red to ultra-violet,” becomes a “hologram glittering above us,” and “glistening in air we could suddenly enter like swallows, as the whole citadel, rainbowed, immediate, received us like time that has no break in it.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) It is an elevated, sublime, transcendental moment.

Even though we do not have any description of this particular citadel, we understand that the bodies that are living this experience are in tremendous shock, and their eyes are strained, they see it all and are stunned by it. It is so intense of an experience that the whole atmosphere can be felt by the poet, and the light only intensifies this feeling. It affords them momentum, as though they could enter into life as swallows, flying into the light, spectrums of rainbows lighting the city, in a matter of an instant. It is the experience of eternity, “like time that has no break in it.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14)

Page starts the book *Hologram* with a poem of the same name that manages to address the relationship between time and light. Initially she describes the great troubles one has to traverse when retranslating these images, and the opening quatrain, borrowed from George Seferis, seems to reveal the matter at once, while her task is to slow the pace down,

demonstrating how strenuous it can be to feel and write the sensual as experienced by a physical body. To suggest a transcendent sublimation of the moment.

The main preoccupation of the said poem is the aim to demonstrate how light can be overwhelming, and how certain images can make an impact on one's perception to the point of blindness – and what sometimes surpasses one's ability to translate it into words. Page shows that the eyes suffer as much as the skin, due to the impressions it receives on the body.

This encounter with time demonstrates how Page honours the past, Seferis' poem, and expands on the beautiful aspects of the citadel. She takes the four lines and the spectacle it presents to the reader. She enters deeply into experience, showing how much more difficult the whole issue of beauty and sensation can become when one gets near the physical body and its sensation whenever she tries to address it in writing; how the whole spectrum of sensations change when one departs from the position of a passive spectator to an active one, that feels and is mesmerized by what they are seeing.

The aforementioned fear or anxiety towards the past, so frequent during the Renaissance, according to Thomas M. Greene in his book *The Light in Troy*, was in some cases associated to the deeper sense of inferiority writers had when comparing their own culture to the idealized classical tradition, a fear that Page does not seem to possess.<sup>43</sup> As a symptom, a sense of anxiety is important to mention here since it is a common part of our literary discipline from the Renaissance to the Romantic period and up to the present. As Harold Bloom explains in his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, “all quest-romances of the post-Enlightenment, meaning all

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<sup>43</sup> See Greene, pg. 32.

Romanticism whatsoever, are quests to re-beget oneself, to become one's Great Original."<sup>44</sup> This is not Page's case. At any rate, I think it is an important point to make, since Page does engage with a very difficult form in order to address and reach for an even more evolved understanding of writing, that of a physicality that becomes almost like a hologram when sensually addressed and experienced. It is as if the whole body transpired sensations, she is sublimating the human body into light.

In this sense, she overcomes this need for the original in the poem, accepting the authenticity she calls for in the opening foreword, when she asserts that her intention was to find her own voice through these borrowed quatrains. As she is different from the Renaissance, I believe Page is not fixed in a mandate or a treaty, even though she is attached to a form. What I notice in this group of "poems" is an attempt to uncover the feeling behind the extraordinary in real life, and discover how it can be translated into writing, or translate the ordinary into light.

For that reason, the body is a very important element in these "glosas" poems, even though hard to trace because it is much more sublimated than before, as I intend to continue showing with the following poems. As for the Renaissance, and now it differs from Page's intention, conceptually, the period is filled with theories and treatises on how to achieve the best imitation — recalling the fact that all art, at that time, consisted in the complex platonic (and neoplatonic) concept of the form as an imitative form, of art as an imperfect copy of an ideal object in nature.

Among all the differences the many treatises contained, they had two elements in common: a love for the classics and an understanding of art as a process of imitation. As Thomas

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<sup>44</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1979: 64)

M. Greene explains in his book *The Light in Troy*, the topic of imitation became one of the most debatable subjects during the Renaissance, and it varied according to which school of thought it was based upon.

He explains that the topic became a kind of storm center drawing its vortex debated from the ancients and the moderns, over the *questione della lingua*, over the psychology of literary creation, over the property of rules, over the value of a single classic as a model rather than many, over the relation between the classics and “nature” as an object of imitative endeavour, and over the usefulness of imitative exercises as a pedagogic method. (Greene, *Light in Troy*, 1982: 171) Despite the many disputes that occurred over the period, the Renaissance artist understood the act of imitation as a way to achieve perfection and a process to improve one’s soul.

As mentioned before, the treatises varied, and Horace’s *Ars Poetica* does not copy Aristotle’s *Poetics* but certainly resembles it aesthetically and philosophically. Nevertheless, what is important here are not the differences between treatises but the attention these scholars dedicated to the study of the classics and the art of imitation as part of the creative process. Their contribution to an understanding of this very creative process is detailed in each one of these treatises; how they managed to define art as an imitative form in their own particular way, and how it became an obsession during the period. In addition, it is important to say that the Renaissance man had no ambitions to be mere “original,” as the later Romantics did, and that their relationship with originality had a different purpose: to attempt perfection.

For the Renaissance artist, poetry was not an end but a means to achieve an ideal form which they recognized in the classics. To imitate nature, to make art, was to become a better



individual by way of following in the steps of the masters. Therefore it was necessary to study the canonized works carefully, but not for the purpose of copying; their intent was to emulate, to imitate the form in order to improve it, and to use technique and personal talent to help the process.

Perhaps here we can find a resemblance between Page and her attempt to marry her sensibility with selected poets that in part helped her find her own voice during her formative years; it is, in the end, a type of homage to canonized poets who, at some point, were able to find the same artistic expression that Page, or any Renaissance poet, was striving for. The difference, I believe, is in the treatise and the faithfulness to the content, which, in the case of Page, is not so strict as that of the earlier Renaissance poet, since his objective was for perfect imitation, while Page's is to pay homage and marry her sensibility with other poets and therefore her perceptive capacity to experience the poem the same way, or close to, what the original poet would have accomplished. She is transformative in her task.

It is similar to an act of translation, of discovering the unknown in language, and revealing it. It is an ability to unveil aspects of life which perhaps are not noticeable to the eye, implying a craftsmanship with language. Moreover, for the Renaissance poet, education was allied to reflective thinking, to hard work, love, and a profound admiration for the classics. For Page, that was the solution to improve oneself and achieve an ideal poem. As Ángel García Galiano notes in his book on poetic imitation during the Renaissance,<sup>45</sup> though humanistic thinking was marked by a great syncretism, it also had one central belief: the poetic genius, who

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<sup>45</sup> For more on poetic prophecy and genius, see Ángel García Galiano, *La Imitación Poética en el Renacimiento*. (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1992: 32)

was presumably a very extraordinary being, and in contact with the mysteries of life, and capable of having both an understanding of the past and an awareness of the future.

The other side of this picture, and of imitation, is that this habit of imitation as a part of the creative process can be oppressive or, depending on how the writer deals with the concept as part of his or her *own* creative process, it can be liberating. In P. K. Page's case, to be inspired by older poets is a motivational and creative tool which she adopts to harmonically compose the "glosa" poems in *Hologram*. What synchronizes the fourteen "glosas" together is the fact that Page understands on a rather intuitive level the degree of affinity each glossed writer has to play in the larger picture of the book.

In the preface, she explains her process of selecting and how each quatrain had to have the right combination of beats to create the right frequency to her poem: "At first I had no clear understanding of what I needed from the borrowed lines — gradually I learned. They had to be end-stopped, or give the illusion of being; as nine of my lines would separate them from each other, they had to give me nine lines' worth of space; as well their rhythm had to be one I could work with, *not* from the level one does an exercise — one can do anything as an exercise — but from that deeper level where one's own drums beat" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 10).

Page's level of imitation is not guided by a linguistic purpose alone; her aim is not to write a perfect "glosa" on the level of the syntax and rhymes only. Her exercise is to go beyond the model, to allow movement, to understand the quatrain in its aesthetic integrity and imagery, and to begin from there. The result is an original and integrated combination of four ten-lined stanzas, instead of a mere copy or extension of the initial image and selected quatrain. It is a filling up of the spaces of their sensorial possibilities.

Evidently this task requires more than just hard work. It demands an understanding of the balance between technique and talent, between what the poet wants to say and how he or she will say it. Above all, it requires a mobility that shifts the gaze and attention from an observant position to an interactive being, in contact with the world, with all its physical and perceptual potentialities. Or, in other words, perhaps closer to what occurred during the Renaissance, to demonstrate how the artist contemplates nature and translates it through art, how he learns the craft by studying the great masters — the very archaeological foundation which characterizes the period and builds its unique foundation on the understanding of imitation as an inevitable part of the creative process.

Page's purpose, however, is to "marry the sensibilities," rather than to achieve a perfect model – which would then equal her attempts to the attempts made by the Renaissance poets. When Page takes her time to carefully select the quatrains to be glossed, she is doing more than just conversing with older poets;<sup>46</sup> Page is actually matching tones, fabrics, or, as she explains in the preface, "marrying" energies. On the other hand, during the Renaissance, a sense of 'better' or 'worse' was replaced by a greater sense of respect for literary tradition. Poets and artists of that time had a great passion for what was classical, for the great canonized works of Greek and Roman literature. And though all was not completely positive in this practice as was mentioned previously, with the feelings of inferiority expressed and fear felt by some writers who regarded the classics as something to obey rather than be inspired by.

In any case, despite the divergences, the respect and admiration of the Renaissance artist for the classics was part of a much larger humanistic agenda which saw art as a means to

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<sup>46</sup> For more on *Hologram*, see Rosamary Sullivan, "Hologram," in *The Malahat Review: P. K. Page - A Special Issue* (December 1996): pgs 121-128.

improve one's soul, to reach God. This notion shifted and changed and the knowledge of former times lost its appeal; what the Renaissance saw as learning a craft by imitating a model, publishers today would see as stealing intellectual legal property. In retrospect, art as an imitative form runs the risk of being misunderstood as plagiarism.

And without getting into the particulars of publishing rights, it is important to point out, however, that the reduction of imitation practice during the Renaissance is in fact a very limited and post-Romantic tendency which tends to contrast the term imitation with that of originality, as if those same words were opposites, separated by what concerns the very act of creation. In other words, the shadow cast over the Renaissance *imitatio* by the Romantics *originality* is very similar to what Harold Bloom asserts to be the central problem of poetic consciousness after Romanticism, that of influence. The anxiety of influence, Bloom explains, is a shadow, an influence cast upon modern poets which causes melancholy and has a “desperate insistence upon priority.”<sup>47</sup>

If on one hand the Romantic motto was to be original, on the other this motto produced a counter-effect: the images, in their endless search for an original meaning, became blurred and confused by what their reflection really meant. By seeking clarity, the Romantics blinded themselves. And this blindness was not only in relation to the images, but in relation to their own perception of time and of what came before or after them, causing an unconsciousness which Bloom clinically denominates as an obsession with priority and naming and which still permeates the minds of contemporary writers, poets, and artists whose understanding of the creative process is solely characterized by the need to produce something ‘original’.

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<sup>47</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a theory of poetry*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1979: 13)

As for the Renaissance, imitation was a device, but it did not act alone. As it happens with P.K. Page's book of "glosas," the poet had to demonstrate his or her ability to digest the form beyond its technicality and insert his point of view within the set form. The imitation was beyond just plagiarizing the classics, as Ángel explains: "...la *imitatio* nos ensaña a evocar nuestra propia naturaleza, a configurar y dar sentido artístico a eso que constituye nuestra efectiva individualidad creadora; y en este postulado básico veremos que coincidirán todos los grandes teóricos de la *imitatio*..."<sup>48</sup>

In *Hologram*, Page's ingenious talent is evident in the balance of the poems, in how the "glosas" thematically oscillate between the light and the dark, day and night, death and rebirth. The harmony in Page's poems is the consequence of a dedicated attention to the work by matching the technique of art with her ingenious capacity of vision.

Perhaps because of this reason Page's work is constantly addressed by the critics as being difficult and a challenge to decipher, as A. J. M. Smith affirms in his reading of Page's poetry,<sup>49</sup> or interpreted with limited scope in categorized anthologies, like Marilyn Rose explains in her essay about the subject of anthologizing Page.<sup>50</sup> These critical attempts to define Page's creative work are considerate to her complex trajectory in life, part of a varied universe which constitutes her being.

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<sup>48</sup> For more, see Angel Garcia Galiano, *La Imitacion Poetica en el Renacimiento*. (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1992: 48)

<sup>49</sup> For more on the essay, see A. J. Smith, "The Poetry of P. K. Page," in *Canadian Literature* 50, Autumn 1971: 17-27.

<sup>50</sup> For more on anthologizing Page, see Marilyn J. Rose, "Anthologizing P. K. Page: The case of a Protean Poet," in *Journal of Canadian Studies - Extraordinary Presence: The Worlds of P. K. Page*, Volume 38: Number 01:154 – 165.

Moreover, to be a poet is not necessarily to be a critic but, as Page defines it herself, to understand the work “for the sheer of joy of doing it; for the discovery, invention...pleasure.”<sup>51</sup> The emphasis on joy in writing can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, which saw imitation and the writing of poetry as a source of education and pleasure, understanding that all art during the Renaissance was an imitative form, as Ángel explains: “...el fundamento del arte esta siempre en los modelos de la antigüedad...los clásicos son los maestros insuperables de todo arte o discipline...Por tanto, quien quiera llegar a ser poeta no tiene más que leer, meditar, y assimilar las creaciones, los versos de Homero, Virgilio, Catulo y Horacio.”<sup>52</sup> Joy is part of the writing process, but so is hard work. As we just saw in the opening poem of *Hologram*, joy can be excruciating for the body, just like the light that illuminates the citadel recreated by Page from the verse taken from Seferis’ poem titled “The King of Asine.”

In the second poem of *Hologram*, entitled “The Gold Sun,” Page again deals with the question of light and its sensual implications. The title of the poem is self-explanatory: it is gold, and it is the sun, and it allows a radiance that the title itself does not suffice to address. The borrowed opening quatrain comes from a poem entitled “Credences of Summer” by Wallace Stevens:

Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky

Without evasion by a single metaphor.

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<sup>51</sup> For more, see Page’s “*Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman*”, in the *Filled Pen*.

<sup>52</sup> “The fundament of art is always in the models of antiquity...the classics are the insuperable maestros of all art or discipline...Thus, who wishes to become a poet has but to read, meditate, and assimilate the creations, the verses of Homero, Virgilio, Catulo and Horacio.” My translation. For more, see Angel Garcia Galiano, *La Imitacion Poetica en el Renacimiento*. (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1992: 41)

Look at it in its essential barrenness

And say this, this is the centre that I seek. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18)

It is an interesting excerpt that certainly expresses Page's feelings about poetry, and writing in particular. Here again we are dealing with the center that Page writes about in *The Filled Pen*, and how it grows and expands in order to address that place where a center that is dimensionless can be found. In the excerpt, Wallace Stevens writes about the difficulties of language to demarcate the sensual feeling that matter brings to fruition in the relationship between living beings.

The sun, if traced "about the whitened sky, without evasion by a single metaphor" or excessive language, will sum up an "essential barrenness" that culminates in the very center that the poet seeks, and finds, in this luminous star. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18)

Page, on the other hand, decides to use "the whitened sky" as the opening image, matching this color with that of the snow, and then a swan, to indicate its brightness, its fullness of white. Nothing can be distinguished but the "sky whitened like the blank page of a book, no letters forming into words unless written in paleness – a pallidity faint as the little rising moons on nails." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18)

Then all of a sudden, out of this whiteness, comes two blue eyes, dark as lapis lazuli, and the first line of the quatrain, "trace the gold sun about the whitened sky." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) The action is somewhat sudden, it emerges from the white day, the white scenario, out of which two blue eyes manage to trace the sun into this picture. From there onwards, the narrator addresses the reader in a *type* of assertiveness that resounds in positivity which stands out due to its level of promise about the impact of this event.

The second stanza opens with an assurance: “You’ll see the thing itself no matter what.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) And this certainty recalls the difficulty of embodying what is seen: for even though it may blind you, the experience is only possible through reference, not real corporeality. In this second poem, once again, we see Page’s type of obsession with the sensual world yet still lacking in matter. The effect is once again a need to see in order to feel, rather than to experience the sun in one’s being in full effect. The sensation of feeling the sun is not addressed though suggested in a absent manner, for the idea is that the sun, by being the center and the source of light, encompasses everything, including feelings.

Anything else will give you additional elements, but not “the thing itself,” the very sun. Not even language, it seems, can fully translate the sensation of witnessing the sun, and if it does, it may blind you, which translates itself as an impossibility of being with the sun on peaceful terms or embodying sensations; as though the image of the sun were stronger than the body’s capacity to contain it.

Only a photographer, she says in the second stanza, can grasp the sun through his or her lenses when mixing the thing itself with the thing it has become; in what, for Page, the image is superior than its embodiment and that her language cannot recreate in the poem except for this suggestion: the sun, without evasion of a single metaphor. In the third stanza, the question of experience in being in its barrenness is addressed. Surprisingly, Page does not engage five senses to their maxim potentiality: what is known is that you can see the sun, it can blind you, and it can be traced by blue eyes.

The third stanza remains an explanation for the rising of the sun. It becomes a spinning coin, moving across the great parable of space; a heroic principle, the heat and light reigning for



us. Gold, as an adjective, is no “less a metaphor than sun,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19) she writes, since the trouble, in this stanza, is to determine how the poet can eliminate the gold sun of all its otherness and embody it. The solution, for her, is to examine its “essential barrenness” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) through language. It is a repetitive cycle that plays with the act of embodiment knowing the impossibility to accomplish it.

The result, from the start of the poem, lies in the fact that the poet is mesmerized before the sun in its essentiality, and decides that the photographer is better than the writer to grasp the full existence of this being, superimposing the quality of pictures over written language in the act of embodiment. The fourth stanza expands on this:

Make a prime number of it, pure, and know

It indivisible and hold it so

In the white sky behind your lapis eyes.

Push aside everything that isn't sun

The way a sculptor works his stone (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19)

This excerpt also explains itself, similar to the “gold sun” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19) from the opening verse. It says, “push aside everything that is not sun” and you will know the center that Wallace Stevens stresses in his quatrain. Its impossibility lies in the materiality of the entity, in its embodiment in language; its warmth, its lively matter: nothing seems to convince Page of the validity that the word conveys. “The thing itself, deific,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19) is the ideal center that the poet seeks. In this poem, which is different from “Hologram,” the narrator does not feel or embody the sun, he or she wants to understand and to explain the sun.

Descriptions are not the solution; still she tries to define the sun by excluding all that is not “the thing itself.” The dilemma of the writer, and poet, lies in this hopeless struggle to understand this source of light outside and separated from one’s body, as though reality were at stake. The human body is not allowed to be near the sun with its sensation; what the poet wants to understand is the force that lies behind the sun itself, and which, as we witness in “The Gold Sun” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 19), is only possible through the art of exclusion, through elimination of “all that is not the sun.”

In the following poem, “Autumn,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) based on Rainer Maria Rilke’s excerpt from the poem entitled “Autumn Day,” Page once again focuses on the magnificence of nature, and how that affects the life of this poet narrator. The opening excerpt, from Rilke’s poem, begins with an ultimatum of sorts:

Whoever has no house now will never have one

Whoever is alone will stay alone

Will sit, read, write long letters through the evening

And wander on the boulevards, up and down... (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22)

Once again the question of presence is addressed in this poem, as it was in “The Gold Sun.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) Also the question of loneliness is addressed. It is interesting how this poem intrinsically reveals the state being lonely conveys, and how one can simply walk the sensation out, living one’s life closer to one’s sentiment in the best possible way. The moment is now, which defines the motion of the poem. No matter what, “whoever has no house

now will never have one,” and “will stay alone.” and “read, write long letters through the evening, and wander on the boulevards, up and down.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22)

The motion is ongoing, it is living, and it signals a time that has no end, just like the presence of the sun in “The Gold Sun” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) or the image of the citadel in “Hologram.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) The light permeates both poems, and in this case, the subtlety of an autumn afternoon and light comes across the stanzas as the initiator of every image that the poet is trying to address. “The day has a stain: it is in the sharpening air,” she says, while “the afternoon has the colour of tea.” The painting of the day continues in a tempo that emulates the changing of seasons, the passing of summer to autumn, perhaps a coincidence from two super lit poems, “Hologram,” and “The Gold Sun,” to this fall similar to verses in “Autumn.”

“The leaves, which were once glycerined green, have been burned by the summer sun, becoming brittle and ochre” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22). “Night steals the day,” and “children are taken by surprise with its disappearance.” The first stanza of the “glosa” poem ends with the same ultimatum, the day is over, and “whoever has no house now will never have one.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) In the second stanza of “Autumn,” the narrator takes us inside a house, or a room, where all inhabitants warm themselves by a fire, though the sensation of heat is not mentioned, nor of the body being comfortably protected by concrete walls. All we know is that “everyone is laughing,” in the safest place possible.

From an undisclosed interior to a minimalist approach of the world: this is the realm of the second stanza – right after a first stanza which opens and expands on the reality of an autumn day, with its light oscillations that center the attention of the poet. The middle of the second stanza goes on to explain how the “whole world is a cup one could hold in one’s hand like a

stone warmed by the same summer sun,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) a verse that attempts to describe the warmth produced by this season known as autumn, with its intensity created by the light and intensity of the previous summer months. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) The magic of this “best and worst time,” that is “nowhere and anywhere,” but also a place that is aware that “whoever is alone will stay alone,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) captures the feeling Page wants to create: an ongoing occurrence of facts, that never stops, which follows the cadence of the seasons, and the vital energy of life.

The poet, here, is a mere spectator. In the third stanza, this awe before what is not under our control is evident in the phrase: nothing to do, because we do not control anything. And more: “toast and tea are nothing. Kettle boils dry.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 23)

In the meantime, night continues and the day ends: “a black thing with its implacable face.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 23) It offers something one might want to avoid, and by encountering it, one finds something to occupy their mind: “will sit, read, write long letters through the evening.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 23) While in “Hologram” the poet tries to see it from all directions, in “The Gold Sun” the poet wants to trace the sun, to describe it beyond all metaphors. In “Autumn” the poet does not want to do anything but accept the fact that days pass, and that they can be nothing. The poet seems to give a warning about preparing for winter, for loneliness, of finding a home.

At the same time, the sensation of warmth can be found inside houses, where one can “read, write long letters,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 23) experience nothingness, and still exist, while the world continues and the seasons pass. In the fourth stanza, the poem ends with this sense of fertility: “for even though there is bounty, a full harvest that sharp sweetness in the tea-

stained air is reserved for those who have made a straw fine as a hair to suck it through.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 23) It is a state of mind, of being, of conquest. It is as though, to reach this feeling of plenty, one had to experience the finest of gold hair which symbolizes the face of God, and knows that the mystery is always present if you allow it to be manifested through yourself.

The fourth poem to be considered here is Page’s “Poor Bird,” written with an excerpt of the poem “Sandpiper” by Elizabeth Bishop. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) It refers to a bird that is “looking for something,” obsessively. His territory is made of “a million of grains” which “are black, white, tan and gray, mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) With such an introductory quatrain, Page goes on in the first stanza to explain why the poor bird acts as it does. The poem begins with a type of history: the poet explaining that the bird, from birth, which is not a simple event but an “astonishing moment,” came into the world to experience all it can with its full potential.

The poet is precise, and describes the movements of the bird. Page writes about the animal’s birth: “...when he pecked his way out of the shell, pure fluff.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) The bird has a body, it is made of “pure pluff,” and it is alive. The sandpiper is courageous, and if “pecked its way out of its shell.” It is no ordinary bird, as we are about to read. “He was looking for something” at that moment, at his birth, says the poet. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) And that, she affirms, is what unites me and you to this poor bird: the fact that we are all made of the same stuff, and that we are all “looking for something,” be it warmth, food, love, or light or darkness.

This is a powerful statement, given what is about to follow. The first stanza continues to describe the characteristics of this unusual bird, which is alert to the immediacy of life from its

birth. It also mentions the creature's dilemma: whether to be part of a flock or to stand alone. He is also searching for something, perhaps like all of us: in his case, the search is a vocation through the years, always "looking for something," insatiably. This motion continues in the second stanza: the bird, also has duties. He builds nests; he has too short of a life-span to plan an intelligent quest. His obligation is simply to exist, day in, day out: the bird has "delicate legs and spillikin feet." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) Page humanizes the bird to the extreme in that he possesses intuition, and a need to "know what he's almost guessed." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) This is his obsession: to search that stretch of sand like a "molecular physicist." All this to say, at this point, that the bird is human-like; it wants, and it lives its life according to the rules of survival.

The poem marries his existence to a realm that is never predictable: all we know is that he is alive, and that he is looking for something. The sensual experience this poem offers to the reader is Page's attempt to reproduce the motions of the bird's body to a point where we can put ourselves in the bird's position, searching that stretch of sand continuously and with a purpose that exists without thought, being purely instinctual. In the fourth stanza Page offers the search as fruitful by having no time frame: all the bird has to do is follow the track of the sand, "the suck of the undertow, the line of shells." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 27)

If there is something else, it is not his responsibility. What the sandpiper has to do is focus on the millions of grains that are "black, white, tan and gray." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 27) And that is when the magic occurs.

In the fourth stanza, Page offers the unexpected, the delicacy of the moment, to the reader's attention: after so much searching, something occurs that is out of his or her control and

that, somehow, justifies or increases the magic of existence, his, mine, and ours: "...in the glass of a wave a painted fish, like a work of art across his sight reminds him of something he doesn't know that he has been seeking his whole long life..." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 27)

Like Bishop in many of her poems, Page's bird also has an unexplained wisdom awaiting him in nature, in encounters with the magic of the natural world. And the bird, it remembers. Through his eyes, through his sight, he realizes how "quotidian unexceptional sand" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 27) this is, and how it is all mixed with "quartz grains, rose and amethyst." Once again, Page wants to address the extraordinary in existence, and she uses a bird to convey this beauty in the world.

In Page's "Poor Bird," we witness the birth and survival of a bird which learns how to accept his lot without struggle, and he executes his duty with obedience and faith. She follows his motion, in order to demonstrate how he is surprised, just like we are: the world is indeed magnificent, and the sea, and the sand, with its millions of grains, is something difficult to grasp rationally. The whole poem becomes an ode to this obsession, this ability that the bird has to perform its task simply without questioning why: simply looking, searching for something.

The events of the world reflect, up to this point, Page's particular interest in the writing of the "glosas." As we progress through the book, we notice that the fourteen poems featured in *Hologram* comprise a selection of excerpts that need to be regarded as a constellation of poems<sup>53</sup> which inject their unique light into a larger picture. In the book of "glosas" *Hologram*, Page

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<sup>53</sup> For more, see Robert David Stacey, "Looking at 'The Gold Sun'; or The Glosa's Glasses", in *Journal of Canadian Studies* (Volume 38: Number 01: 108).

redirects a type of backlight towards sensual possibilities that coexist in prismatic moments which function as part of her vision, but are not limited or attached to one reality.

In every poem in *Hologram*, the reader experiences an array of moments that open in a citadel of rainbows that in a flash, travel from “infra-red to ultra-violet,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) offering the hologram that glitters above us, glistening in the air that we suddenly enter like swallows as the whole citadel, that appears rainbowed, and immediate, “receives us like time, and that has no break from it.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 15) Page’s poetry has not only been considered for being difficult but also alchemical, carrying “motifs or themes of transformation, self-knowledge.”<sup>54</sup> This magical ability to transform and recreate is constant in *Hologram*, and the light that shines within the book is noticeably active, despite the ambiguity regarding the embodiment of feelings in the body.

One could even imagine that the first seven “glosas” of the book are somewhat celebratory, praising the discovery of the world as we see it in “The Gold Sun,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) which speaks of the poet’s ambition to understand the center of everything. Similarly the poems “Autumn,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) and “Poor Bird,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) which reflect on existence and living one’s life with the knowledge that it coexists within a larger universe.

This harmony between form and content, between rhyme and rhythm, is uniformly present in the first seven poems of the book. Moreover, the last seven poems of the collection are not necessarily a conclusion of the first seven but are also a possible mirror image which may or

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<sup>54</sup> For more on the alchemical elements in Page’s work, see Farouk Mitha, “Catching Fire: Allegories of Alchemical Transformation in the Art of P. K. Page,” in *Journal of Canadian Studies*. (Volume 38: Number 01: 118-128).



may not marry the first seven poems in a holographic sequence of unexpected insight. In my view, as a poet, Page's task is to be meticulous: not only with the placement of the poems in the book but also with the selection of the quatrains.

From Elizabeth Bishop's excerpt, found in the poem "Sandpiper," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) which Page transforms into the abrupt poem "Poor Bird," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) about a bird with human like qualities, who is always looking for something, a grain of salt in a stretch of sand, the fifth poem departs from the quatrain of Leonard Cohen's "I have not Lingered in European Monasteries" and is called "Inebriate." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) The body is present and alive in the first quatrain, as an entity which knows how to survive, how "to clean and repair itself;" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) it is a routine, like the daily meals, like waking up and sleeping and preparing one's meals.

Yet for some reason, this ability to be fluent with life is met with a form of sarcasm by Page, who understands this dynamic as containing perfection, as if by allowing laughter in this situation, the main character mentioned by Cohen is an exception, beautiful, and perfect. In another way, the poem is also a recognition of perfection and beauty at this stage of life, whereby the sun "falls upon the steep slope of the hillside where the children play." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) The slope is an idealized place, where time does not exist.

This appears to be Greece, and innocence permeates the idea of self-healing. The abstract side of the poem occurs in the third stanza, where the poet admits to having no demanding tastes but alludes to the notion that the "sparkling air is my aperitif." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 31) The glamorous aspect of this scenario extends to her "undemanding tastes: spring water, olives, cucumber and figs and a small fish on a white plate." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 31)

The body is present, and drunk. But the scenario is staged, and everything appears to be perfect, and beautiful, and designed for the structure of the poem. And like the poem, Page stands within the circle of Leonardo's man, his cosmos. It is not that simple, the organism that consists in the human body and the multiplicity of cells are evoked in the last stanza. At that moment, we jump to a different realm of the poem, where the actual functioning of the organic matter comes into place.

Then we are told that writing is not an easy matter. While we can be like a poem, beautiful and perfect in rhyme, we can also be human, with human cells, and a body that needs food in order to survive. While we can eat and digest what we are fed, we can also fail to achieve perfection. If that happens, her work will not go well. But like the quatrain taken from Cohen's poem, this option is not possible, since the body knows "how to clean and repair itself," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) and everything is looked after by "cooks who prepare meals." In Cohen's quatrain, the scenario is contrived but well established: this is what it takes to make a body function and healthy.

In Page's expansion of the quatrain, the irony is present: how does this perfection of maintaining a body healthy exist in the real world? Page does not answer this question, but she does make a strong point regarding the intricacies of the human body, and human cells, and how a sense of perfection is just one aspect of this scenario. What is important to recognize is the state of fullness of this organism, which she achieves through irony.

In the next poem titled "In Memoriam," (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) the body revolts. At this point in the book, the body is directly addressed. At times the body is idealized, as in Cohen's poem, and at other times, it is quite the opposite: it is real, and contains the possibility

of living and dying. From the light of the citadel, which is distant and untouchable, and felt only through the sun that is at the centre that we all seek, to the subtlety of autumn, the presence of the poor bird, the story of the book of “glosas” in *Hologram* trespasses the inebriate body in order to arrive at this poem. “In Memoriam,” is based on a quatrain by W. H. Auden and his poem “In Memory of W. B. Yeats.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) In this poem, the body is revolting and the current of his feelings are failing.

The body, in this poem, is capable of shifting from a peaceful state of mind to a kingdom where looting and great bonfires coexist. The aftershock of this situation is a disarray of emotions which terminate with the phrase “the provinces of his body revolted.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) In the second stanza, the moment is emptiness, and after the rush that occurred in the first, while troops overran his palace, this being becomes a “vacant lot,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) an exemption, with the “squares of his mind” empty. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) This realm is difficult to predict. It is a sensation of uproar that the poem conveys, yet this world cannot be perfectly experienced except through metaphors.

We only know that this is a body that experienced a lot of emotions, and is different from the body of “Inebriate,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) because it does not know how to repair itself properly. There, for some reason, the cells of that body were able to recompose themselves, emotionally speaking. In this poem the emotional aspect of cells is affected, and the evidence is contrasted with the silence of the world he inhabits. Death is present.

The third stanza of the poem describes a place where light snow falls in summer, and “lakes are frozen over;” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 35) where the unexpected happens. “No forecaster had foreseen such unseasonable weather. Even his birds migrated.” (Page, *Hologram*,

1994: 35) Likewise, his verbs disappear, and this character becomes muted by emotions and also by the “silence that invaded the towns.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 35) In this poem, the man becomes the town, and his body becomes the place of his words, his own country, which, in quiet death, is betrayed by his own feeling, which fails.

The most captivating aspect of this piece is the presence of death and dying, with the snow and with the silence of this man, who behaves as if he is out of control, and only affected by the motions his body affords him. Death was uninvited, and “when his crown fell and his sceptre and he was no longer consulted, the provinces of his body revolted” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34).

From the raw reality of “In Memoriam,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) we shift to “Presences,” a poem inspired by T. S. Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38) The quatrain talks of a set up scenario, where a group of people, orchestrated in a single motion, move in a formal pattern towards a drained pool in order to observe the event in question. They are, Eliot affirms, “accepted and accepting,” walking “along the empty alley, to look down into a drained pool.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38)

From this quatrain Page creates a world dominated by extraordinary presences, including the accepted and accepting guests addressed by Eliot in his quatrain. Page affirms these beings are illuminated from within: the body is filled with sunlight that is extraordinary, that has flames, that is motionless, and that produce shadows “like chlorophyll, like leaves, like water slipping from a silver jug, reflecting grasses, the long pliant stalks of willows.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38)

The light of these beings is not just an ordinary light: “their brightness spilled over our skin and hair.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38) In this poem, the body feels through light and all the natural elements that Page recalls in the first stanza of the poem. It is this extraordinary part of “our golden selves” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38) that went to greet these guests, in all its presence; it is that part which feels neither pain nor grief, “the part that senses joy in a higher register and moves through a country of continuous light” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38).

This illuminated encounter is shared with the presence of the sun, in a place, where the third stanza stresses, “our feet barely touched the earth.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 39) This movement of bodies is staged by Page, who recreates the moment of encounter between the bodies and the natural world as a whole; a place where, from memory, one can at least recall the “arc of our lives,” or the “distant stars we came from,” the miracle of existence. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 39)

The fertility and magic of life are finalized in the fourth stanza, where this world of mystery, where bodies meet, remembers, and recalls a distant life, and is re-enacted in forking paths which is like a map, or a yellow rose, “opening in the unreflecting air...every atom accurately aligned,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 39) and where innocence and royalty are once again reborn. It is a transcendental, mystical, illuminated enterprise.

In “Planet Earth,” the next poem in *Hologram*, inspired from a quatrain by Pablo Neruda, from his poem “In Praise of Ironing,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 42) Page expands on the relationship between living and non-living entities and how it affects our understanding of the world.

While Neruda, in his words, wants to “spread out this skin of this planet,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 42) ironing it in its whiteness, “smoothing the holy surfaces,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 42) Page wants to show love with care, like a “laundress loves her lines,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 42) or like one who examines birds and flowers. The first appears more sensuous than the second, since Page is more concerned with the ecological status of the planet than with its feeling capacity, and its human relationships. For her, the planet earth must be loved, and caressed, and that is how this world is described in the poem. She longs for “an art form that would satisfy all the senses.”

In the essay “Traveler, Conjuror, Journeyman,”<sup>55</sup> Page writes about possible connections between painting and writing, suggesting that in both cases, the artist needs to go to a “point, dimensionless, in the center,” and from there, move forward. A good example is portrayed in Page’s poem “Traveller’s Palm,” featured in her book *The Planet Earth*.<sup>56</sup> In this poem, Page compares a “plaited tree” and its “slanted branches” to “aqueducts/end-stopped/for tropical rains” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57) and sets up the entrance of a “fabulous foreign bird” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57) into her being, silently “lodged into my boughs.” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57)

The metamorphosis of trees and human bodies structures how Page sees the act of travelling as an individual capacity to move between worlds and environments, incorporating human and nonhuman elements into her abstraction of a material world. Tree branches are metaphors for human shoulders and a nest for a visitor “intricately merged.” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57)

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<sup>55</sup> For more, see “Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman,” in *Canadian Literature* 46, 1970. (Pgs 35-40).

<sup>56</sup> For more, see P. K. Page’s *Planet Earth: Poems Selected and New*. Edited and with an Introduction by Eric Ormsby. Ontario: The Porcupine’s Quill, 2002.

The scenario of this poem is revealed in the first stanza, as “tropical rains,” on a hot day, are cooled by an unexpected yet natural move on the part of the omniscient narrator, who takes “a sharp and pointed knife” and plunges it into “my cupped mouth” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57). Immersing into this action, the poet elaborates on how “old water/ tasting green, / of vegetation and dust, /old water, /warm as tears,” (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57) is capable to instantiate elements such as water and air into a free bird, that is void of ties, yet courageous enough to pause and admire the very scenario that triggered the thirst of this stormy day.

According to Gordon Johnston, in his article titled “Out of the Painted Grove, My Buck: The Escape from Irony in Avison and Page,” “The Traveller’s Palm” is an “unexpected and revelatory” poem, “a gesture of the imagination itself,” that is “not visible but tasteable, as well.” However, beyond the “anecdotal” and “violent gesture of piercing,” which releases “meaning in a temporarily non-metaphoric and plain” language, as Johnson affirms in this piece, there is a conscientious continuity of events, on the part of the narrator, which leads this very anecdotal act into a process of “merging identities.”

On the similar note, while in Johnston’s view this “creature of the imagination” implicates just the separation between the narrator who observes the bird and the relationship of this animal as a mute spectator of the scene representing a larger reality, another possibility to interpret this poem is to see this very amalgamation of elements, bird and narrator, as the mystery of the poem: the unification of two universes, one and the same.<sup>57</sup>

The same example can be applied to the excerpt found in *Brazilian Journal*, in an entry dated 1957, June 17<sup>th</sup>. In the passage, Page associates “royal palms” with the “elephants among

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<sup>57</sup> For more, see Gordon Johnston in “Out of the Painted Grove, My Buck”: The Escape from Irony in Avison and Page.” *Journal of Canadian Studies. Extraordinary Presence: The Worlds of P. K. Page*. Volume 38. Number 1.

trees.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 59) She writes: “Their trunks are to the trunks of other trees as the elephant’s leg to all other legs.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 59) The magnificence and abundance of nature are something that inspires and strikes the poet, who, in both cases, levels herself with the undecipherable schema that maintaining a participatory “I” who is active and aware of new possibilities of meaning — despite such stunning images. This technique is a good example of what Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place*,<sup>58</sup> alludes to when he elaborates on the perspective of experience in the fabric of a constructed space in relationship to the understanding of a conceptual schema.

For Tuan, “the life of thought is a continuous story, like life itself,”<sup>59</sup> yet human environmental experience, which is heterogeneous by nature, delimits the categorization of actions to solitary and constricted definitions, forcing the critical analysis of any particular situation to conditions of space and place as the opportunity for possible interpretations to any given human event. He explains:

Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other. There is no place like home. What is home? It is the old homestead, the old neighbourhood, hometown, or motherland. Geographers study places. Planners would like to evoke “a sense of place.” These are unexceptional ways of speaking. Space and Place are basic components of the lived world; we take them for granted. (Tuan, *Space and Place*, 2007: 3)<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the Yi-Fu Tuan’s concepts on space, home, neighborhood and nation, in relationship with one’s construction of place and space affectively, see *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, v.

<sup>60</sup> For more, see Yi-Fu Tuan’s in *Space and Place*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.



In poetry, writer's experiences can set up the mood and the sentiment to be evoked by a reader, yet they can never predict the outcome in a "right" or definitive manner. To constrict P. K. Page's works in the same vein would be nonsensical, almost contrary to what she exercises in every creative construction. For that reason, words such as "space" and "spaciousness" help to visualize and "feel" Page's sensorial work, yet always produce other questions.

In this scenario, Page is led to incorporate a new human landscape in order to find a different point of view to express this sentiment of comfort and rest that the bird in the poem "Traveller's Palm" (Page, *Planet Earth*, 2002: 57) represents. In an essay entitled "Questions and Images," Page elaborates on her understanding of knowledge as unstable and insecure condition, always mutating into new forms. She explains how her incessant asking of questions through art, "of taking a line for a walk," of being a "mute observer," is "a way to create space," to "move furniture." For Page, to draw or write is not an end in itself "but possibly the means to an end which Page could barely imagine – a method, perhaps, of tracing the small design." (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selection of Non-Fiction*, 2007: 35-42)

One of the aspects of her work, even though not often accomplished, as seen in *Brazilian Journal*, is how she reinforces the necessity to understand life beyond intellectualization. As she writes in her *Hand Luggage: A Memoir in Verse*,<sup>61</sup> the unpredictability of life requires acceptance but above all the cultivation of creativity, even if the possibilities are *actual* impossibilities, a conundrum she experienced when living in Brazil:

I was happy enough. Ecstatic at times,

but my pen wouldn't write. It didn't have words.

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<sup>61</sup> For more on P. K. Page's memoirs, see *Hand Luggage: A Memoir in Verse*. Published by The Porcupine's Quill. Erin: Ontario, 2006.

(No English vocabulary worked for Brazil.)

I stared at blank paper, blank paper stared back.

Then, as if in a dream, the nib started to draw.

It *drew* what I *saw*. It was fearless – a child

approaching a fire not knowing it's hot

yet not being burned – a miraculous child. (Page, *Hand Luggage*, 2006: 59)

The pen that “wouldn’t write” and that “didn’t have words” (Page, *Hand Luggage*, 2006: 59) begins to draw, and that is how Page learns to deal with the silence of not knowing what to write, or embody, while in Brazil. Her drawings, featured in *Brazilian Journal*, are simple poetic images of quotidian objects and scenarios, which, like her poems, revolve around her daily routine. Page’s poems become objects that share one or two layers of this multiple experience of being in Brazil, an approach that views art as a process in development, rather than a goal to be achieved; objects that belong to the same world of discovery that Brazil offers to Page.

Similarly, the book of “glosas” *Hologram* trespasses on this same world of discovery, which decreases in momentum as we arrive at the last poems. “Hologram,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 14) “The Gold Sun,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 18) and “Autumn,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 22) are poems which celebrate the splendour of nature and the effect natural light produces on our eyes and perception. In the poems “Poor Bird,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) “Inebriate,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 39) “In Memoriam,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) and “Presences,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 38) one is invited to participate in the highs and lows of human emotion, traversing back and forth into the realm of experience.

With “Planet Earth,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 42) as in “Poor Bird,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 26) Page tries to address the planet’s humanity, this bird, and its non-human elements that unite and separate our experience of living. It is an interesting parallel, particularly in regard to the permanence and decay of our emotions and our perceptual capacity to understand and reason with the world around us. In the eighth poem of the book, “Love’s Pavilion,” Page selects a quatrain from Dylan Thomas’ poem “And Death Shall Have no Dominion” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) to write her “glosa.” In it, human emotions and their extremes are addressed by Page:

Though they go mad they shall be sane

Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;

Though lovers be lost love shall not

And death shall have no dominion (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46)

In this excerpt, madness is always present and humans “might sink through the sea,” losing themselves: death shall not win over life. It is an excerpt that examines the oscillation and extremes of human emotion; and how one can go mad and sink because of, let us say, love, and thus arrive at a moment near death. It talks about one’s capacity to rise up and challenge adversity, to be stronger than the act of love, and to know how to find the same center of vitality that Page experiences when writing her poems. Given this message, one enters the first stanza with a warning that “death shall have no dominion,” despite it being the only truth. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46)

In the first stanza of the poem “Love’s Pavilion,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) Page explores the darkness of death, graphically exploring images such as “broken brains,” “the dark

hole of their sleep,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) wondering who will be able to “discover a path through unmapped terrain?” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) This road of self discovery but also self-sacrifice is at the core of the poem, which also addresses the futility of everything, of all processes, when one knows that, eventually, “the unpretentious air” will “fall like rain on the ache of their skin.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46)

And then reality will arrive: “what is the price they pay for pain?” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) It is the madness that one must experience in order to be sane again. It is the near-death experience of transformation through pain and light (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) In this stanza, the body experiences aching pain and one must confront it with all their capacity. Page is not shy to address the miseries of self-transformation, and as in the previous poems “Inebriate” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 30) and “In Memoriam,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 34) she wants the reader to perceive the experience of turning metal to gold through their senses, and in this poem pain occurs near the skin. Death is the only truth.

In the second stanza of “Love’s Pavillion,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) the extremity of human experience and perception is directly addressed to the reader in the first verse: “What is the hope of those who drown,” she asks (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) Does pain have an address, a direction, or will they, who have no tongues, finally speak? What does one do without a body? Can you feel yourself, reader, she seems to be asking. For what does one become when one has no body? The answer maybe found in Dylan Thomas’ work, for the hope is that those who sink will, yes, rise again.

And then “the heart will be like an empty cup,” Page writes in the third stanza. And love will be gone, it will be dead, and “the reins to their chariot” cut. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 47) It

does not matter, she says. The poem wants the reader to understand the journey of transformation, of overcoming adversities that the individual, when self-conscious of himself or herself, will experience. This implies taking possession of one's body, before death does its part. Because death can be carved in stone, but life cannot.

In the last stanza, "love's pavilion" will persist, "and we shall say Amen." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 47) For what remains, along with the body, is persistent and brave love. Not the lovers, who take ownership of this sentiment. What the poet wants to learn, and understand deeply through this journey of self discovery, is how to maintain light from within, "with love for companion." Only then, Page asserts, "death shall have no dominion." (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) In the book of glosas *Hologram*, Page issues a desperate call for the body, transcending it, suggesting that without one's self-consciousness and developed perception towards human sensibility, one might not be victorious over the battle against death and insanity (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 47).

The same conflict over the body and its relationship to how humans perceive and lead loving lives is explored by Page in one of her earlier publications, which came out in 1941. In this book titled *The Sun and the Moon*, a short novel which Page considers raw and somewhat undeveloped, the poet describes the relationship between a young couple who fall in love and are set to get married. The important aspect of this work is the way the body must cope in order to deal with the obstacles provoked by a loving exchange and relationship. The curiousness of this story is that the main character, a woman named Kristin, turns into stone at every full moon. It is an act of transmutation: her insides become petrified, as if she were unable to move or communicate her feelings during these episodes, perhaps a fear of childbirth or menstruation.

The plot of the novel, thus, revolves around this attempt to create a new channel of communication for the couple, and the relationship this implies: on one hand, with the forces of the earth, and the moonlight, and on the other with her inner body, the hardening which acts inside Kristin. In this novel, the images and the situations are not separated, they act in a continuum that requires an understanding of life as a package of uncertainties which are revealed at every moment, and are always there to surprise us.

Like the poem “Love’s Pavilion,” Page’s first novel is a curious inquiry into the matters of life and death. It is an attempt to understand how a particular moment in time, when framed and instantiated in the presence of one or more actors, both human and non-human, can best translate the essence of human relations and corporeal interchanges by placing emphasis on how a particular situation, and the transformation of their primary and secondary qualities, can affect the relationships and interconnectedness with the world. In other words, the novel promotes a creative act that demonstrates how random natural events, like the moonlight, when immersed in recurrent acts of daily life, the marriage of this couple, can embody an otherness that provokes new sensations and perceptive capacities to the reader. In this case, it brings a new understanding of the human body and how it plays a part in our capacity to communicate with each other.

In “Alone,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) a poem from *Hologram: A Book of Glosas*, based on a quatrain by Sappho, the main character lies alone, and the sun has set. In this relationship with the world around her or him, perception reveals to us the delicacy of summer and “the honeyed air,” which rises and falls, like a lover breathing. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) Reality of the world mingles with that of the poetic world, whose air of summer is linked to breathing. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) Through blindness, once again, one makes a journey of

understanding in the world: it is a poetic world containing one solitary sound: breathing, “from the high branches of the pines.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50)

It is such a sensitive moment, the one that the poet experiences, that blindness itself becomes an issue: the poet second-guesses his own intuition to a point where he does not recall whether he is blind or not; all he knows is the moon and the Pleiades, and the breathing, the dark night, eyes that perhaps might have atrophied “for seeing you.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) The world of reality is mixed with that of the poet’s perception; eyes that are no longer required, because the moment is dark, the air sweet, and it breathes like a human.

The second stanza of the poem “Alone” continues with this exploration of the relationship between the real world and the poetic world, the world of the senses and the world that is felt or imagined, which sees “the light fade overhead, fade all around me.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) That means a transformation of the body, whether it is exaggerated or not; it is a feeling that must be experienced throughout the whole body, “eternity enter my veins, slow drip of an intravenous needle, that drop by drop anaesthetizes greys me” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50). This feeling, which is internal, and enters the vein, provokes another transformation that departs from the poet’s body to the body of the world, and “turns the night to ashes.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50)

In the meantime, time passes and words cannot heal or block out what the poet is experiencing. It is only a matter of time. And what is time, in the realm of perception? Time passes, one is told in the third stanza. And the poet goes further: what does it mean to have time passing? Like the character Kristin in *The Sun and the Moon*, the poet in this poem knows that to pass can be to move forward, but also to find the reality of stasis, at once.

It is these unbelievable, unpredictable situations in the world of the senses that *Hologram* masters; for the same way that this air of summer, which is “honey-like,” can blind one and atrophy the eyes, it can also lead the main character to understand the passage of time as one’s own understanding of the world, and in this experience, meaning can be reversed. In the fourth stanza, this perception evolves and is revealed by the poet as time passing but that does not pass.

It is being stopped and concluded. In “Alone,” the experience of life is not as easily understood as in previous poems; (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) here the body takes a physical beating; and without vision, the reader is forced to imagine that love begins where God ends, in its very arrival there. When darkness reigns, says the author, and God is gone, “I lie alone.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 51) It is you, me, him, her and all of us with our own bodies, alone, in the world. Perception might fail, but it all comes down to the body, and one’s capacity to decipher the materiality of the world through perception.

In the following poem, “A Bagatelle,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 54) the reader is invited to occupy a garden, and to experience the “buzz” of its blossoms. The sun is hot, the sun is oiling and waxing, the sun is corporeal and it almost has a skin that rubs, that is there, resplendent. In all this, there is the character of the poem, “Princess Hibiscus,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 55) “rolling her pointed Chinese petals.” The poem “A Bagatelle” is inspired by a quatrain from D. H. Lawrence, in a poem called “Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 54) In this poem, Lawrence invites the reader to look deeply into a blossom, to perceive it with all its might. Page’s intent is so strong that she stresses, in the second stanza, the need of the flower, and of the poet, to demonstrate how dazzling, her “blue blood,” “rose-of-China,” blossoms can be. These flowers, “Azalea and Camellia, single Peony,” blossom and “burst into bright caresses” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 55).



It is a description of the experience, the ascension of these flowers to the perception of the reader. And also to “Princess Hibiscus,” “in summer residence,” “blowing among the ginkgos, bamboos.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 55) In this world and in this poem one shifts from the corporeal experience of being human to a watchful observant of this world of colours, and how this experience unfolds. It is a small relief when compared to the darkness of death in “Love’s Pavilion,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 46) and the experience of solitary existence in “Alone.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 50) In the next poem from *Hologram*, titled “Exile,” there is a shift in matters of perception when the poet announces that “there will only be yesterday.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) It is an announcement that surprises but also prepares the reader for what is to follow: how will Page manufacture her “glosa” from this opening quatrain excerpted from a George Woodcock poem entitled “Imagine the South”:

There will only be yesterday, only the fading land,

The boats on the shore and tamarisks in the sand

Where the beautiful faces wait, and the faithful friends.

They will people your mind. You will never touch their hands. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58)

From this excerpt we understand that while “there will only be yesterday,” there will never be a direct contact between peoples. Yesterday, in this poem, refers to a time when you can never touch someone’s hands, and “the fading land, the boats on the shore, the tamarisks in the sand, the beautiful faces,” all will only “people your mind.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) This is a true emotion, since it sets up the title of the poem, “Exile,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) as the existential condition the main character and the reader are about to experience, despite the

“beautiful faces” and the “faithful friends.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 59) The fact that “you will never touch their hands,” makes the perception of this world into an exile of sorts, where the body will suffer, and the result is that “you will never touch their hands.” Or even, perhaps, “the fading land.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994:58)

In the first stanza of the poem the reader is told about the meaning of tomorrow, which, will then have altered the past. It is through a change of lens that this mutation will occur, a phenomenon that will make the “edges” of this experience “smudge and blur,” and “its embroideries and its subtleties disappear.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) It will be generic, unlike “today, which is bright as a name brand,” familiar “as the palm of your hand.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) The first stanza offers a number of time concepts, while Page tries to set up a sense of time that justifies the last line and the presence of yesterday as the everlasting sensation, which means, for the poet, a tomorrow that will alter the past constantly, with its ordinariness.

In the midst of this perception of tomorrow, though, one will be squinting and shading one’s eyes in order to “peer back through time,” with a “longing for what has been left behind,” the fading land,” and “yesterday.” It is as if, in an unknown sensation that the poet is unable to name, that yesterday is victorious over the present, which exists only to reify the generic and unparticular feeling of today from a comparative perspective. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58)

“Exile” is a verbose poem, (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) and demonstrates Page’s insistence for fleshing out time, and the ideal of yesterday. In this endeavour, she defines today as ordinary, and tomorrow as a tool that will forever be altered by the past. Moreover, in the second stanza of the poem, memory plays a part as a “trickster figure,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58) which, as a perceptual generator, often encrypts rather than transforms. The poet’s task in

this poem is to challenge the acts of remembering, and perceiving, by questioning the concept of truth itself: "...that once appeared an end to be sought and found becomes elusive, seems to assume disguises; is finally, and heart-breakingly, diminished to a dim discoloured shot of lowtide" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 58).

And all of a sudden, in the third stanza, one begins to forget names, to forget the meaning of continual remembrance. It is, in this instance, the decay of the very functions that enable your understanding of today and tomorrow, that "filled you with wonder," "any more than your eye can recapture the angle of light as it fell on the valleys and hills of those distant lands" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 59). How does one mourn perception, or yesterday? How does one fool their memory? All these images, these recollections, the fourth stanza seems to say, are like figures from dreams, like "phantom limbs."

And they are "beautiful," the poet tells us, they are like "trees in spring." And memory, or the lack of the senses, and of the full functioning of one's mind, brings pain, "a secret wound that aches in the night, awakens you from sleep, and makes you a child again." It seems as if there is no escape from yesterday except by confronting and giving consent to the presence of these haunted memories, for "they will people your mind." And "you will never touch their hands." In this poem, the lack of a body, and perception of the present, becomes a destiny that is fated, and painful, for it leaves one suffering like a lonely child who does not have the strength to overcome the presence of time and forgetfulness (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 59).

The next poem from the book of "glosas" *Hologram*, titled "The Answer," was inspired by a quatrain from Robert Graves. Page engages with the act of living itself, and what it requires or encompasses. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 62) For whom do you live if not for life itself? And the

experience of living one's life, or perceiving it and feeling it to the core of one's being, begins in the first verse of the first stanza, which begs for you to "tell me every detail of your day" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 62). This experience allows one to understand the life of the other, the experience of the world as perceived by the other: "when do you wake and sleep, what do you eat and drink?" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 62)

It is this interrelationship between the passage of the day from dawn to dusk, and the emotions associated with loving, reading, working, and thinking that awakens the curiosity of the poet: "these are not idle questions, they provide the spindle around which new-spinning wool winds as it dreams its future warp and woof" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 62). In other words, these are the questions that set up what comes next in terms of understanding the world. How does one live life: is it for someone else or is it for oneself?

In any case, the important aspect, the poet seems to say, is to ask these questions, and even, to feel these questions at one's core, on the skin of the body. In the second stanza, feelings are still interpreted in the form of answers, rather than descriptions, and one is told that the answers must be the product of a central-sun, which needs to be revealed. For as answers, they still contain within themselves a code that needs to be deciphered, and still exists for someone else. The truth of the matter, the third stanza seems to say, lies not in the past, in the glories of should have been, but rather, the fourth stanza announces, love "that is."

And this presence of love is not contained in verbal answers but instead "so focussed on its objects that I die utterly, a candle in the sun, a drop of water in the sea" (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 63). The writing here is transient, ephemeral, passing, quickly dissolving.

The message of this stanza, and of the poem, overall, is not to live for the past or the future or a particular prize, but rather to live for a love that is beyond any questions or answers. It is in the living of these questions, “not wealth, not jewels, not sovereignty, not silk, not for the tall, eventual catafalque.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 62) It is for the body that feels, and experiences the world, that praise must be given, and not to those who live life for someone else. In the last poem of the book of “glosas” entitled “The End,” which was inspired by a quatrain from “The End” by Mark Strand, Page elaborates on the four lines below:

Not every man knows what he shall sing at the end,

Watching the pier as a ship sails away, or what it will seem like

When he’s held by the sea’s roar, motionless, there at the end,

Or what he shall hope for once it is clear that he’ll never go back. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 66)

From this opening quatrain, one is informed of the uncertainty that marks the life of a man, whose destiny is uncertain in the end, and whose life consists of watching a pier as a ship sails away while he decides what to “sing at the end, when he’s held by the sea’s roar,” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 66) certain “that he’ll never go back.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 66) It is in between moments that the man stands, and the only motion of the scenario is from the pier as the ships come and go, while he, motionless, decides what he will sing, there at the end.

As Page begins the poem, the reader knows there is a story for him or her, and in this story, there is a high wall. This world is not ordinary; it presents challenges like climbing a wall, with the danger of being struck blind without having the resources or skills of a blind man: such

as a white cane, or dark glasses. It is a transition to the last line of the quatrain, in terms of the sudden change that a perceived reality can afford to the senses of the living. In this case, it involves a girl that the poet once knew and who, when faced with surmounting this wall, “gazing over saw the familiar universe reversed as in a looking glass.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67) In this moment of surprise, everything changed, life became wordless, without music, without sound, for “not every man knows what he shall sing at the end.”

What and how one feels before sudden and unexpected events seems to be at the core of this poem which continues, in the second stanza to explore another similar experience, of someone who, after trying to climb this same wall, told the poet that “it was not *not* everlasting there as once he had assumed.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 66) And he asks the poet to touch him, as though the experience might change him somehow. For one needs to understand, the poet seems to say, that his was “the purest heartbreak.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 66) It is this corporeal experience that comes at the end that poem seems to address, and which, one learns, cannot be guessed before your time.

The contact between the poet and this person is marked in the body, and that is all that remains, as one reads in the third stanza: “...in the darkness I could see, and I was staring at my fingers where they had touched him, staring at my mouth, new where he had kissed it” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67). His fear of drowning is not noticeable beforehand, nor how he will remain, at the end. Yet the poem tells us of his presence in someone else’s body, and how he echoes, in another’s memory, the existence of this man, who is motionless, waiting for the end. The game of perception lies in the relationship between now and then, and how, in the poem, one needs to overcome an anxiety of the future in order to live well in the present.

In the fourth stanza of the poem entitled “The End,” the reader learns that the man belongs to the sea. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67) And like him, we stand with “our hands tied, deluded, seemingly earthbound,” and wondering why we belong to the land. (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67) In this poem, the poet wants to address how the connection of the waters, the wave, the sea, and this man, creates an ending that, even though it is predictable, can only be known in the “sea’s wrack,” and in the experience of this tumult. Only then, once it is clear, the experience that he will never go back becomes conscious, and one is able to understand and perceive the world as it is, for “we are the water within the wave and the wave’s form.” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67) It is in this mutual participation, and in our ever present perception, that one can understand the existence of the world and the strength and power in its ending for this man, once “it is clear that he’ll never go back” (Page, *Hologram*, 1994: 67).

To summarize, the collection of poems *Hologram* allows the reader to experience the full spectrum of Page’s ability to surprise with her corporeal addresses. Most poems offer the subtlety of having a body and what that means in return. This experience is not only sensual but emotional, since most poems elaborate on the kind of journey one has to make in order to understand the mystery of life and death. The latter part of the book, in particular, speaks of this dark place, for what one lives, and it needs to be revealed and exposed by the poet.

This alchemical response is characteristic of Page’s voice, in poetry, and emblematic of how she marries her sensibility with those poets she has decided to honour. A person is often alone at the end, despite the many encounters one has to face. The main challenge, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, is to encounter the moment where both poets are aware of the importance of the sensual and the emotional in the exploration of life, and moreover, in its

experience. The perception of the world, thus, becomes a corporeal activity, which we can recognize in many of the poems I analysed.

Stronger and more focused in relation to corporeality than in *Brazilian Journal*, *Hologram* explores the play of feelings and bodies. She addresses the vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Her characters respond to her calling as though they were surprised by the very experience of being alive, not always knowing how to react. It is this sense of awe in the face of the world that characterizes the body and its sensual capacities in this work. On the other hand, *Hologram* also brings poems which are visually dominating, in reference to its primary images. The body is addressed secondarily, and rarely from the point of view of the narrator, who is always a voice, or a reflection of a particular scene. This Chapter tried to demonstrate Page's ability as a visual poet, and her approach in relation to the body in writing.



### **Conclusion: Unpredictability in the Hand-Made, Crafted Writing of P. K. Page**

It is not rare to find and identify sensuous moments in literature. According to Jean Baudrillard, in *De La Séduction*, “un destin ineffaçable pèse sur la séduction.”<sup>62</sup> He argues that “la séduction est toujours celle du mal. Ou celle du monde. C’est l’artifice du monde.”<sup>63</sup> I would like to end this project by recalling why P. K. Page, in the foreword of her *Brazilian Journal*, reaffirmed her decision to write this period piece, and throughout it, echoed the reasons for doing it. She decided to write these memoirs in order to remember, and to, as she says in the foreword of *Brazilian Journal*, to “flesh out what were merely notes,” and thus create a world that could exist once again as if anew. In this dissertation, I tried to review and reconstruct this “fleshing out of notes” and focus on the challenges of embodiment, repeating the analysis with Page’s poems; the attempt, I conclude, reaches the understanding of how sensuous aspects in her writing resist embodied representation through her own feelings.

As Jean Baudrillard argues in his book *De La Séduction*, “nous vivons toujours dans la promotion de la nature – que ce fût celle d’une bonne nature de l’âme jadis, ou celle d’une bonne nature matérielle des choses, ou encore celle d’une nature psychique du désir.”<sup>64</sup> I trust that this dissertation’s conclusion is a tentative gesture to understand the writing of presence in the works of P. K. Page, and how the physical body and its emotional sensations are portrayed in the selected works; how she creates and establishes emotional fields in writing, and how this path is

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<sup>62</sup> For more, see Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, 9. Or “A fixed destiny weights on seduction,” from *Séduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg. 1.

<sup>63</sup> For more, see Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, 9. Or “It is always the seduction of evil – or of the world. It is the very artifice of the world,” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, 1.

<sup>64</sup> For more, see Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, 10. Or “We live today the promotion of nature, be it the good nature of the soul of yesteryear’s, or the good material nature of things, or even the psychic nature of desire.” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg. 1.

revealed to the reader. In this dissertation, I argued that Page's writing carries an element of performance in which the reader is induced to feel a certain type of perceptual experience, whereby the five senses play a major part and incite the full experience of embodiment.

In my argument, I affirmed how Page is not afraid to experience with this seduction in writing while avoiding the deepness of embodiment in her narrative, and the feelings this subjectivity creates. As Baudrillard argues, "or la séduction n'est jamais de l'ordre de la nature, mais de celui de l'artifice – jamais de l'ordre de l'énergie, mais de celui du signe du rituel."<sup>65</sup> It is a construction that, while neglecting the being in the body, it transfers its power into the natural world as the only unique and immediate experience. Page elaborates in *Brazilian Journal*, as well as *Hologram*, the world that is always being readdressed through perception and vision, never to be second-guessed or predictable. This was this dissertation's Introduction goal: to bring to the fore Page's attempt to decentre the question of the body with images of vision, through a seductive style of perceptual experience.

In Part I, *Brazilian Journal* and the Writing of Brazil, as well as Chapter 2, Exchanges Between a Disembodied Narrator and the Quotidian of Brazil and Chapter 3, *Journal* Writing and the Painted Description of the World Lived, I introduce the narrator who is often searching for a name, for a middle point, a center, from where Brazil would be defined. In this search, I argue, the vulnerable position of being in the body is shadowed by the living experience of seeing the perceptual moment as a vision; Page elaborates on this aspect of life and is able to reproduce the disembodied relationship with the environment.

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<sup>65</sup> For more, see Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 10. Or "Seduction, however, never belongs to the order of nature, but that of artifice – never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals." from *Séduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg. 2.

On one aspect, it is, as Baudrillard posits, a feminine writing, in the sense that “cette puissance du féminin est celle de la séduction.”<sup>66</sup> He argues, in relation to the feminine: “Dans la séduction, le féminin n’est ni un terme marqué, ni non marqué. Il ne recouvre pas mon plus une “autonomie” de désir ou de jouissance, une autonomie de corps, de parole, ou d’écriture qu’il aurait perdu, il ne revendique pas sa vérité, il séduit.”<sup>67</sup> This seduction as an artifice, as that which “représente la maîtrise de l’univers symbolique,”<sup>68</sup> represents one aspect of Page’s writing as she rediscovers in outskirts of language the sensual elements she can’t embody in a written body.

In this sequence of chapters, Chapter 4, Page, Bishop, Brazil and Sensuality in Writing, and Chapter 5, Page’s Brazil and the Context of Others, I argued that the place of the writer in an embodiment process requires the understanding of loss and lack, as well as visual explorations of the absent body. I also pointed out Page’s rationalization of life versus a direct sensuous representation and embodiment within. I concluded that the physical sensations and the textuality of the body is replaced and ignored for an ideal and aesthetically pleasurable reality. The presence of love as an affect in relation to Brazil is a constant in Page’s writing, particularly a love that is related to hope for transformation through the arts, and not often shared by other writers who engaged in the same thematic, who emphasized in the usual aspects of tropicality and sensuality. When it comes to emotion and how the body feels, Page places emphasizes in the

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<sup>66</sup> See Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 18. Or “The strength of the feminine is that of seduction .” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg 7.

<sup>67</sup> See Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 18. Or “In seduction the feminine is neither a marked nor an unmarked term. It does not mask the “autonomy” of desire, pleasure or the body, or of a speech or writing that it has supposedly lost (?) Nor does it claim to some truth of its own. It seduces,” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg. 7.

<sup>68</sup> See Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 19. Or “...seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe.” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg. 8.

description of things possible to be touched and felt, but never actually embodied in the language of the body itself, of being. In the following section, Part II, Chapter 6, *Hologram*, the Embodied Sensibility, and its Manifestations, I highlighted the moments in Page's writing where the body is privileged, either through sensuality or through the poet's sensibility, even if slightly. The other aspect of this section is the focus on sensible embodiment and its relationship with light and darkness.

I also address how, for Page, objects are available to be touched and felt but are not always touched or felt. The actual experience of the things themselves occur with certain difficulty, since the appearance and the occurrence of these entities often enter writing first through description rather than hand or skin.<sup>69</sup> My approach to understand these passages was to focus and trace body excerpts in writing, to the foreground of the text, and how this earthly quality of writing, of earthly centering, brought up affects that resonate emotions in the body. The poet's subjectivity is an idealized construct, I affirm, developed through the cataloguing of bodies, rather than felt experiences. In sum, it is not often that Page trusts her own sensuous journey. I analysed excerpts that echoed this struggle behind Page's perception, regarding the diversity and personal vision of this world she describes. She writes:

In my bedroom at this moment there is a flying creature about two inches long. A cricket? A locust? Black lace wings and a green brocade head and a noise like a DC-3

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<sup>69</sup> From the book *The Necessary Angel*, in the essay entitled, "Analogy of words," Wallace Stevens argues that a poet uses emotional analogy to truth to repeat or reproduce the feeling of an emotion through words, using similar images to produce this 'emotional analogy.' For Stevens, the most unassuming an analogy is, the better the effect. Basically he says that the poet tries to achieve the nature of the image in order to create something analogous to the nature of the emotion from which it springs." (STEVENS, *The Necessary Angel*, 1951: 111). This is an ideal condition, since it does not explain how these images can spring from the realm of the sensuous and arrive at the nature of images themselves, recreating or reproducing a sensation in representation. All he does is to point out the importance of emotions and sensations in writing, and the difficulty this process implies. For that reason, he justifies the effort by pointing out that the poet's imagination is part of a larger imagination, and that the poet lives on the verge of consciousness.

revving up. Just as the crisp air, the warbling of magpies, and the smells of gum smoke and daphne will for ever conjure up Australia for me, so will immense wet heat and thousand of night insects – *bichos* – conjure up Brazil. (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15)

This passage conjures up the surprise that *Brazilian Journal* produces in the reader, and what this book, despite the lack of embodiment and specific affect in the narrator, tried to portray in regards to Page's life in Brazil. In this excerpt, Page sees and is unable to find the right terminology to attest that there is a flying creature in her bedroom. It is two inches long, and it has an indefinite nomenclature. It represents a country, or the remembrance of a country. The smells and the insect mean expose how the physical body is used by Page in her rendition of the living experience in writing, which is something that the eye can see, but the body doesn't feel.

This dichotomy is what I tried to illuminate throughout this dissertation. Even though I mention only a selection of Page's selected works, one can sense the immediacy and strangeness in relation to embodiment and the effort Page reproduces on paper. For instance, returning to the previous passage, the *bichos* are what, she says, will always "conjure up Brazil" for her. It is an interaction with wordless beings which constructs how Page's consciousness and attention occur in Brazil.

Moreover, Page's gaze in the country is that of a tourist, of a stranger. As John Urry argues in *The Tourist Gaze*, there is a sense of going away, of being a tourist, and that is what we feel when "we go away, we look at the environment with interest and curiosity."<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Urry argues that "there is no universal experience which is true for all tourists at all times. Rather

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<sup>70</sup> For more, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage Publications, 1990.

it is constructed in relationship<sup>71</sup> to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of experience and consciousness.” (Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 1990: 2) Page’s gaze is always constructed with the help of locals, since her experiences in Brazil, or even her descriptions in *Hologram*, are augmented by other experiences which are not directly related to hers. Page’s intention in these places is to describe them.

An additional example worth mentioning in this conclusion is the testimony contained in *La Force des Choses*, by Simone de Beauvoir, which she writes during her travels through Brazil, which was also during the 1950s. De Beauvoir writes about her personal experience in the country. It is very close to Page’s work in terms of content and enthusiasm, and Beauvoir also concentrates her efforts on describing the body of things, demonstrating how Brazil, as a place to be experienced, alludes to these images of liveliness in one’s imagination. Beauvoir writes:

La beauté de Copacabana est si simple que sur les cartes postales on ne la perçoit pas et qu’il a fallu quelque temps pour qu’elle me pénètre. J’ouvrais ma fenêtre, au sixième étage; dans ma chambre entrain une chaude vapeur, avec une fraîche odeur d’iode et de sel, et le roulement des hautes vagues.<sup>72</sup>

De Beauvoir learns as she travels to the country, as did Page, and she reproduces her impressions in an autobiographical style, as we see in the previous passage, where Brasilia is a novelty that everybody is talking about. Brasilia does not impress de Beauvoir either, but Rio

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pg 2.

<sup>72</sup> “The beauty of Copacabana is so simple that it doesn’t show on the postcards, and it took some time before it got through to me. I opened my window on the sixth floor, a warm vapour wafted into my room. Carrying the fresh scent of iodine and salt and the noise of the ocean breakers.” See Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des Choses II*. Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963, pg 332.

does. De Beauvoir writes, about her first impressions of the city, and its beaches and the emotional feeling it causes. Brazil for De Beauvoir, as for Page, conjures up smells, scents, and sensuous experiences that she cannot identify immediately; even through this passage, it takes note of how language struggles to find the right voice to describe the sensation. Experiencing Brazil is overwhelming for both writers, who made several friends and learned to decode the country with the help of others. She writes:

L'hôtel était à peu près desert. Au contraire de Belem, on gelait dans les chambres, on transpirait dans le bar et dans le restaurant. Dehors, on devenait une loque gluante. A six heures, quand le soleil s'éteignait comme une bougie, une nouvelle vague de chaleur montait du sol, aussi dense que la nuit qu'aucune lumière ne perçait: pas d'électricité à Manaus (l'hôtel, tout de meme, possédait un groupe électrogène). La salive séchait dans nos bouches, impossible de manger.<sup>73</sup>

In this passage, I notice how the experience of the body, of the sensuous, is not always pleasant, yet it does give the reader an idea of what the narrator is experiencing, particularly in regard to pleasure. De Beauvoir identifies Brazil through a visit to this hotel, but also through her impressions of the natural world. Beauvoir adds, about Brazilian women:

La condition des femmes brésiliennes est difficile à définir. Elle varie selon les regions: dans le Nord-Est, une jeune fille — meme si elle vit dans une *favella* — n'a aucune

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<sup>73</sup>“The hotel was near desert. Contrary to Belem, we froze inside the rooms, we sweat inside the bar and the restaurant. Outside, we became a sticky rag. At six o'clock, when the sun went out like a candle, a new heat wave came from the sun, also dense as the night in which no light made a hole in: no electricity in Manaus (the hotel, all the same, had a generator) The saliva dried inside our mouths impossible to eat.” Ibid, page 383.

chance de se marier s'elle n'est pas vierge; elle est étroitement surveillée par son entourage.<sup>74</sup>

Like Page, Beauvoir enjoys observing the cultural and social traces of Brazilian society, and expanding on the topics. In the previous passage, we see how the writer seems surprised in acknowledging the condition of Brazilian women, just like P. K. Page. De Beauvoir writes, on the aesthetic aspects of Rio's beauty, emphasizing the visual, just like Page:

Le soir, Rio resplendissait: colliers, sautoirs, chaînes, ceintures de pierreries s'enroulaient autour de sa chair sombre. Je préférerais encore, dans les fummées gris-bleu du crépuscule, les petites rues aux échoppes closes. Il y a dans Rio quelque chose de fatigue et de fané — les trottoirs en mosaïque noire et blanche sont crevassés, l'asphalte se gondole, des murs s'écaillent, les chausses sont sales — que cachent le soleil et la foule.<sup>75</sup>

The reader is confronted by two contrasting images, that of a city being resplendent but also tired and faded, as though the two realities cohabited the same environment of little streets and shops. The details, the author includes, the necklaces, the notes on pavement, help to recreate the perceptual field that the narrator experiences while in Rio.

For De Beauvoir, as for Page, Brazil is reproduced in words that meticulously describe a scene, an animal, as though the enigmatic in itself had to partake of that description, as though the surprise Brazil conjures up for both of them had to be contained in the sensuous experience and unpredictability described in the world.

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<sup>74</sup> "The condition of the Brazilian women is difficult to define. It varies according to the region: in the North-East, a young woman – even if she comes from a favela – has no chance of getting married if she isn't a virgin. She's closely watched by her surroundings." Ibid, page 354

<sup>75</sup> "In the evening, Rio was resplendent: necklaces, belts, bracelets of brilliant stones encircled her sombre flesh. Still more, I loved the little street with their shops all closed in the blue-grey falling light of dusk. There is something tired and faded about Rio – the black and white mosaic sidewalks are full of cracks, the asphalt is warped, the walls scaling, the pavements filthy – that is hidden by the sun and the crowds." Ibid, pg 335.



This dissertation tried to show how these sensations play a part in Page's writing, how the simple act of describing an affect can be an endless act, as though the sensations immersed in the living experience of an event were so overwhelming that the embodiment only came forth as an idealized possibility. Overall, my intention was to analyze P. K. Page's usage of writing as a corporeal experience, how specific sounds and sound-shapes echo and contrast in her work, what impressed Page in relation to the body in language. She writes:

...the tremendous length of sand, blinding white sun; the façades of white buildings which, for all their contemporary design, look somehow like the ruins of a John Piper painting; pedlars with eagle-shaped kites under a barrage of bright balloons on the boulevard by the sea; black-eyed children in pony carts with coloured nurses in starched white; the faded patchwork of the favelas; women balancing parcels on their heads; crowds at the beaches in the midday heat, minus sunglasses, minus hats, beating out samba rhythms on the blistering hot radiators of their cars. This Barbados and Paris. But there is more – and other – as well... (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 15)

I selected this passage to demonstrate and reemphasize what Page's strategy in writing is: to highlight the sensuous in the environment, the blinding sun which resonate the whiteness in the buildings, creating a free association of images that echo with sensuality. However, the kites, the children, the women and the hot weather does not affect her personality, it is simply a performance of aesthetic beauty. This issue permeates Page's writing, where her faithfulness to the materiality of the sensuous diminishes the impact it actually has on the physical and human body.

Page had to overcome several stages of adaptation in order for her to settle down in her house in Brazil. One of the adaptations she had to make is described in an entry from February 6<sup>th</sup>. She explains that the “heat is over for the moment,” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 11) and that seems to appease her senses. We are told that during the weekend “the temperature rose above the century and no breeze moved among the smallest leaves of the maidenhair.” Page is not pleased with what she feels, but this displeasure does not increase, it becomes instead a pure and raw impression of the heat. The heat is met with exaggeration, and a perception of the environment which comes nearer to an unrealistic and improbable, truth.

During these moments, Page’s aesthetic narrative focus on the body but not on the feelings it has in relation to the sensuality emanated from it. It is rather the frustration of this moment that remains for the reader to experience. It is a static heat that paralyzes everything, including her senses. It is not uncommon in Brazil, as we learn from the pages of *Brazilian Journal*, to have a continuous heat wave. However, for Page, the heat is always something that disturbs her but is not explored on an intimate, personal questioning. Page’s mood only changes when we learn about a storm, which, in contrast, recalls the intensity of the heat and the paralyzed leaves of the maidenhair, still hanging in the narrative as are Page’s complaints.

Page writes the senses well, complains in a dramatic voice and narrative, exaggerating things in order to avoid addressing the consequences of the embodied sensuality in the very body, particularly in terms of affects and their relationship with the natural world. Page’s attention to the indescribable is due to the intensity of the sensuous possibility, which, in itself, could be addressed but isn’t, since Page seems to insist on the attempt of registering full reality in language, always ending on frustration.

Page's essay "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman," from *The Filled Pen*, argues it is from a dimensionless centre that she can translate her feelings. She writes:

...that diminishes to a dimensionless point in my absolute centre. If I can hold it steady long enough, the feeling which is associated with that point grows and fills a larger area as perfume permeates a room. It is from here that I write – held within that luminous circle, that locus which at the same time a focussing glass, the surface of a drum." (Page, *The Filled Pen: Selected Non-Fiction*, 2007: 43)

One can infer that Page writes from a place of narrative that seems to be separate from her body, even though it is in an absolute centre that she searches for inspiration to write. On the other hand, it grows outside of herself and it expands, as though mimicking an insight of consciousness. There is a perceptive quality that does not limit itself to one room. She has to witness this procedure in order to write, as though she knew the place of this very center as an embodied matter.

This is particularly strong when I take into account what lead me to write this dissertation: the lack of embodied affect in relation to sensuality in Page's writing in relation to her ability to reinstate the world in several ways, manners, and shapes. It is not an act felt by the physical body, the sensorial meaning a vision that Page identifies and recognizes in herself through the world, and not the other way around it.

Writing about "sensuous pleasure," or "spontaneous involvement which is its own reward," and also "the discovery, the invention...manipulating sounds, rhythms" (Page, *The Filled Pen*, 2007: 43), is Page's choice of vision. In this same essay, Page argues that, when writing from this center, she has the feeling of copying, or attempting to copy, "exactly

something which exists in a dimension where worldly senses are inadequate - as if a thing only felt had to be extracted from invisibility and transposed into a seen thing, a heard thing.” (Page, *The Filled Pen*, 2007: 43)

The struggle is to transform an imperfect reality into a perfect one, which turns out into the impossibility of embodiment and of living realities. For she seems to want to capture that which can be imagined in a different dimension and thus reproduced as something felt or sensed, which consequently creates difficulties, as she affirms, later on, in terms of how “already I have lost yesterday and the day before.. My childhood is a series of isolated vignettes, vivid as hypnagogic visions. Great winds have blown my past away in gusts leaving patches and parts of my history and pre-history.” (Page, *The Filled Pen*, 2007: 44)

On the other hand, as Jean Baudrillard argues in *De La Séduction*, “toujours il est question du corps, sinon anatomique, du moins organique et érogène, du corps fonctionnel dout, même dans cette forme éclatée et métaphorique, la jouissance serait la destination et le désir la manifestation naturelle.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the pleasure in the body and the desire it provokes cannot be ideally projected or imagined. It is a reality ingrained in the body. It is not just a seductive call; it is an understanding of how the world is made and embodied.

In this dissertation I examined how Page deals with this problem in reference to her emotions and her address to the body, which is often superficial and ideal, delimiting her definition of her own sense of being, left to the seduction of the senses inhabiting language. Or, as Baudrillard argues in the same work, “si la séduction est une passion ou un destin, c’est plus

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<sup>76</sup> For more, see Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 21. Or “It is always a question of the body, if not the anatomical, then the organic, the erogenous body, the functional body that, even in fragmented and metaphorical form, would have pleasure as its object and desire its natural manifestation,” from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg 9.

souvent la passion inverse qui l'emporte: celle de ne pas être séduit. Nous luttons pour nous fortifier dans notre vérité, nous luttons contre ce qui veut nous séduire. Nous renonçons à séduire de peur d'être séduit."<sup>77</sup>

I also observe how Page writes as a "two dimensional being. I live in a sheet of paper. My home has length and breath and very little thickness. The tines of a fork pushed vertically through paper appear as four thin silver ellipses." (Page, *The Filled Pen*, 44) This conjunction of embodiment and subjectivity is not simply a matter of being in a sheet of paper but rather of feeling it inside. Instead, she writes:

I may, in a moment of insight, realize that it is more than coincidence that four identical but independent silver rings have entered my world. In a further breakthrough I may glimpse their unity, even sense the entire fork – large, glimmering, extraordinary. Just beyond my sight. Mystifying; marvellous. My two-dimensional consciousness yearns to catch some overtone which will convey that great resonant silver object. (Page, *The Filled Pen*, 44)

For Page, it is often the intellectual realm that feeds her sensibility; it is the moment of insight, which enters her world, and in an extraordinary manoeuvre, makes her see beyond her sight, and recognize a new object. It is purely mental, no connection to the physical body whatsoever.

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<sup>77</sup> See Baudrillard, Jean. *De La Séduction*. Editions Galilée, 1979, pg. 164. Or "If seduction is a passion or destiny, it is usually the opposite passion that prevails – that of not being seduced. We struggle to confirm ourselves in our truth. We fight against that which seeks to seduce us," from *Seduction*, by Jean Baudrillard. Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1990, pg 119.

It is a capacity to reproduce what the senses manage to visualize, and how her senses recreate other realities, and how she finds and constructs worlds that are expressed and transpose from the invisible to the visible through sight.

With that thought in mind, I end this dissertation by reinforcing the precarious situation between humans and the world as embodied affects tend to disappear in common language; how this lack of feelings transpires in writing, and how this effort was analyzed in the works of the Canadian writer P. K. Page. To transpose the sensuous onto the page is certainly a merit, yet this project aimed to discuss why this exercise is necessary if the intention is to reproduce in the body an idealized version of the world. Most critical analysis of Page accentuate her diversity and interest in things which are sensuously appealing, but none really try to explain or give a brief account of how this textual sensuality can relate to the interpretation of her work from a affective perspective or from a reader's point of view.

I think addressing sensuality in terms of embodiment is crucial in addressing the writing as a place of grounding, an earth center that enables one to describe what is felt and lacking to be revealed in expression.

*Brazilian Journal* and *Hologram* carry the difficult relationship between a disembodied narrator and a materialized world, which is often dissociative to the emotional and physical contact of embodied consciousness of the body. In this case, the process of recreating life experience as an embodiment relationship between living entities is Page's absence, since her writing actualizes the living entities but does not address the feelings generated by their embodied relationship other than a sense of dissatisfaction. It is a feeling that something has been disrupted from an ideal aesthetic goal of beauty and harmony. Light, sounds, taste, smells, and

the senses feature strongly in both works but sometimes are empty of a sensible interior, whereby the reader knows that this thing called a body feels and exists. In Brazil, as Page affirms, she lived a privileged life from 1957-1959. The *Journal* portrays this journey accurately: the newness and brightness foreground of the narrative, making each expression afresh – as though just out of the writer’s skin.

On the other hand, this sensuous promise often makes claims to an illusory reality of perfection that does not exist in the physical realm, and that textually dominates this research. *Brazilian Journal* brings a sense of immediacy that *Hologram* also reproduces with “glosa.” Her greatest strength, it explores writing as an embodied practice, even if it does not acknowledge it as such. Page writes: “I draped the warm dress over my arm and returned to the bedroom. A. was opening the mail. An electric fan whirred. I lay naked on the bed listening to the noises – new noises: the fan, the gecko creaking somewhere in the room, the green throb.” (Page, *Brazilian Journal*, 1987: 1) As with many of Page’s writings, this passage carries the feeling of one’s body, the temperature rising close to the surface of one’s skin. It is in this proximity to the skin, even if not subjectively addressed, that is located Page’s sensuous capacity or phenomenological stance.

Page deals with the subtleties of perception in writing, and the challenges the sensuous implies to the writer herself, whether the subject is Brazil or the “glosa” form. The revelation of a world and its sensuous possibilities is one aspect of her writing; the other, what I tried to demonstrate in this dissertation, instantiates a lack of embodiment, particularly of feelings; all related to the very sensuality and beauty that are constantly articulated in both works but fail to encounter a subjective narrative that encounters in the body a source of feelings. This was the aim of this project, to articulate the differences and contrasts of both views.

Overall, it is also possible to conclude that the articulation of Brazil, over the centuries, is a major undertaking, since it deals with the possibility of embodying the sensuous in writing, and how that affects one's relationship with the environment as an affective being, rather than a thinking being only. In this dissertation, I argue that P. K. Page longs for an art that would satisfy all the senses but also oscillates between feelings and thoughts, sometimes confusing the two and even arguing that they are one and the same. The task of embodying the essence of Brazil is still mystery to be further researched and studied, yet I believe that it cannot be distinct from the challenge of understanding and feeling the sensuous in one's skin.

In addition, the inclusion of the reader in the act of reading requires an embodiment of the senses that Page not often is able to fully expand on, since she is constantly preoccupied in rationalizations about her own feelings and how that can be displayed visually. The unknown and unfelt is still a quest and a fearsome theme for P. K. Page, who displayed a great passion and engagement when writing both works, *Hologram* and *Brazilian Journal*.

The most gratifying moment in the writing of this dissertation was truly identifying the aspects of this writer's desire for the written body, and how the sensuous can be translated through words. Even though Page partially dismisses the sensuous, she is also captivated by it, and that is why Brazil plays such a strong role in defining her relationship with her own feelings in relation to the act of writing and its embodiment. Even though she is shy in the task of embodying the body, she is constantly addressing its difficulty, exploring the challenges that Brazil as a being offered her as a writer.

In my personal experience, Brazil has always been related to the unexpected and the unknown, often forcing us to look deeper than what is initially perceived. My purpose with this



work was to engage in a conversation with this talented writer, and to begin discussing issues of the body and sensuality and how that plays a part in the writing of Brazil. Considering that we live in an age permeated by technological artifacts, as well as the Internet, one could wonder whether Page's work is dated, or if the discussion on the absent body, the presence of the five senses, has any relevance to today's context. For me, the entire project has been an attempt to return to the body, to encounter in Page's struggle with the body a type of hope for today's persistent engagement with virtual reality, so present in our understanding of language and the world.

Translating Light: Brazil and Sensuality in the Selected Works of P. K. Page has been a research which opened up possibilities of understanding the importance of the physical body in today's world, and how its lack and absence may be related to the struggle that Page already senses when attempting to engage with the five senses and the embodied world. As a final note, this dissertation, already stated at the beginning introduction, has been a personal journey to the intricacy of rediscovering my own roots and sensuous calling through the works of P. K. Page. The fear of the body, the challenges of embodiment, all these characteristics I also find in my own relationship with poetry and literature, and this project has allowed me to explore and deepen my understanding on these matters. My intent was to broaden the scope of Page's readers, and allow for new research to be developed in relation to her writing and craft.

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