

THE MECHANICS OF TEXTUALITY AND THE FIN *DE SIGLO CRÓNICA*

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Abstract

This study positions the fin *de siglo crónica* in its material context on the newspaper and magazine page. As Latin America underwent dramatic economic liberalism during the period, textual and visual cultures responded with their own tensions between aesthetics and mass reproduction. This often resulted in an intermedial expression with text beside artistic representation and photography. Commercial advertisements in these publications used this same image text format to attract consumers. Often newspapers and magazines printed essays detailing this material context of mechanized print and visual reproduction. Reading the fin *de siglo crónica* with its technical reproduction in mind highlights the gap between aesthetic expression and the progress that sustained the cultural movements of the period. This study shows that mass reproduction facilitated visual expression that enhanced the artistic expression of the *crónica* genre while this same visuality symbolized a mechanical reproduction that defined the economic expansions of the *fin de siglo* that allowed the print industry to expand and progress.

Key words: textuality, *fin de siglo*, *crónica*, progress, print

Resumen

Este estudio posiciona la crónica de fin de siglo en su contexto material en la página del periódico y de las revistas de la época. Al pasar América Latina por un período de dramático liberalismo económico, las culturas visuales y textuales respondieron con sus propias tensiones entre la estética y la reproducción masiva. Esto resultaba en la expresión intermedial de textos junto a representaciones artísticas y fotografía. Los anuncios en estas publicaciones usaron este mismo formato texto imagen para atraer a los consumidores. A menudo, periódicos y revistas publicaban ensayos que detallaban este contexto material y la imprenta mecanizada y la reproducción visual. Leer la crónica del fin de siglo pensando en su reproducción técnica ilumina el espacio entre la expresión estética y el progreso que sostenía los movimientos culturales del período. Este estudio muestra que la reproducción masiva facilitaba la expresión visual que destacaba la expresión artística del género de la crónica, mientras esta misma visualidad simbolizaba una reproducción mecánica que definía las expansiones económicas del fin de siglo que permitieron el crecimiento y el progreso de la industria de la imprenta.

Palabras clave: textualidad, fin de siglo, crónica, progreso, imprenta

The *crónica* of the *fin de siglo* was produced in an assortment of textual formats and journalistic structures. Newspapers and magazines positioned the genre among classified advertisements, editorial announcements, news reports, poetry, serialized novels, and a myriad of visual elements. The periodical press as the principal *crónica* mode of publication represents a montage of textual and visual modes. For instance, the 1908 text “Una visita a la tumba de Paul Verlaine,” written by Argentine journalist Juan José de Soiza Reilly and published in the famed Buenos Aires magazine *Caras y Caretas*, includes photography and artistic sketches of varying shapes and sizes along with textual captions, a title header, *crónica* text that meanders around the images, and two examples of autography.

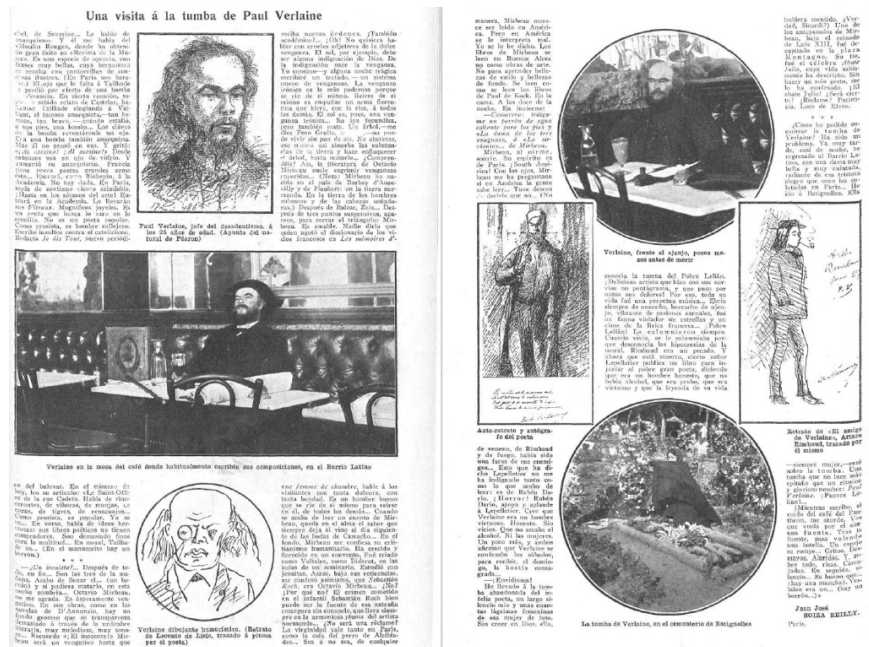


Figure 1. Juan José Souza Reilly, “Una visita a la tumba de Paul Verlaine”. *Caras y Caretas*, 21 mar. 1908, s/p.

The reproduction of a variety of textualities contextualizes *crónica* production as intermedial, where the journalistic attributes of the text correspond with art, literature, photography and hand-written text.¹ Mass print and image reproduction bring the *crónica* into being in this complex textual construction. *Fin de siglo* journalism was inherently intermedial not only because of its hybrid textual structure, but the *crónica* is a genre spanning nonfiction and storytelling, explicit didacticism and the poetics of the period. *Crónica* textuality expands this intermediality as the genre was published in daily newspapers, literary magazines published weekly or monthly, and then, subsequently, in book form. The *crónica*

¹ For more on intermediality in the field of comparative media studies see Elleström and Uricchio. For the study of intermediality in Latin American media history, see Arellano and López.

was often published alongside advertisements far different from the text's theme, in other instances such as the Souza Reilly text, it was produced with its own accompanying artistic illustrations or photographs, or even less common, without any visual elements at all on the page. It is within this media intersection that the *fin de siglo crónica* is born. Because of this technologically rich mode of production, a consciousness of its textual existence is repeated over and over again visually and textually in *crónica* metatexts. This essay not only encourages reading the *crónica* in these intermedial contexts, but also seeks to consider how *fin de siglo crónica* production represents itself at the crossroads of textual and visual mechanical progress.

Social transformation, guided by mechanical and economic progress, is archived by the textual and visual representations of the change in century. At the turn of the 20th century, discourses on visual production reflected the understanding of social evolution and the construction of a new aesthetic regime.² Responses varied, though, on how new textual technologies should have been incorporated into the modern experience. Nevertheless, one thing was certain, inevitable change brought new forms of perception and consumption. This study explores the rhetoric of progress in relation to visual cultures and argues that the movement from the artistic origins of mechanical reproduction to the industrial shift in the representations of the visual in print altered the relationship between Spanish American culture, aesthetics, and textuality. The *crónica* became a space for reflection on this shifting mechanization both in terms of its content and its increased interaction with visual elements. The intersection and tensions between market forces inherent in the journalistic enterprise and literature in the *fin de siglo crónica* have been forwarded by different scholars since Ángel Rama's classic 1970 text, *Rubén Darío y el Modernismo: circunstancia socioeconómica de un arte americano*. Perhaps Julio Ramos put it most succinctly when he said: "within the very confines of the newspaper and in opposition to it, the literary subject brings himself into being, and this at the precise moment of confrontation with the antiaesthetic zones of journalism and mass culture. In this sense, the chronicle was ironically a condition of possibility for poetic modernization" (Ramos 87). Writers, editors and advertisers of the period grappled with the expansion of material progress and its interaction with literary and artistic expression. Canonical texts like Ruben Darío's "Bourgeois King" and his declaration "Cerraréis la boca. ... Pieza de música por pedazo de pan. Nada de jerigonzas, ni de ideales," position art directly within the values of commerce and economic expansion (Darío, "El rey burgués" 30). This textual and visual modernization also correlated with state-based progress exemplified both discursively and through real material change.

Latin American governments at the *fin de siglo* were closely aligned with economic expansion and industrialization. Many of these countries were heavily

² Here I am alluding to Jaques Rancière's concept of "aesthetic regime" found throughout his writings but especially in his books, *The Politics of Aesthetics and Dissensus*. Generally speaking, for Rancière the aesthetic regime sees art as a form "of cancellation or reversal of the opposition between high and low" (32).

impacted by positivism and technological advancement. Perhaps the most explicitly aligned with the discourse of progress was Mexico's Porfirio Díaz, as he established policies that centralized government power over industry and contributed to an open-door approach to foreign capital.



Figure 2. “La mejor noticia del siglo”. *Caras y Caretas*, 28 oct. 1911, pp. 113.

Central American governments were influenced by American banana companies that worked closely with leaders such as Guatemala’s Manuel Estrada Cabrera and Honduras’ Terencio Sierra. These export-based economies, highly controlled by multinational corporations, exerted their force on Central American states in relation to labor and land policies. Nicaragua and Panama, due to their strategic geographical locations, became prizes for the United States to continually invade, subjugate, and colonize according to its political and economic will. North American Hispanic countries were shaped over and over again by those with economic authority.³ Venezuela passed through decades of instability and multiple presidencies through the turn of the century. Colombia’s intermittent civil war and loss of their Panamanian territory caused economic stagnation and an enduring cultural conservatism.⁴ Ecuador and Peru stayed heavily tied to U.S. investment

³ Greg Grandin adds up American intervention succinctly in this way: “By 1930, Washington had sent gunboats into Latin American ports over 6,000 times, invaded Cuba, Mexico (again), Guatemala, Honduras, fought protracted guerilla wars in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Haiti, annexed Puerto Rico, and taken a piece of Colombia to create both the Panamanian nation and the Panama Canal” (3).

⁴ See José María Rodríguez García’s important text *The City of Translation* on the discursive control of the state by *fin de siglo* Colombian president Miguel Antonio Caro as a resistance to liberal and modernizing transformations.

during the period and continued to subjugate indigenous populations due to liberal economic policy. Chile retained a highly centralized government focused on economic expansion at the cost of proletariat instability and increased public anger towards wealth inequality.

This limited overview is meant to express the overarching sense of financial progress in Latin America at the turn of the century directed by governments and foreign influence that sought to expand economically, whatever the cost. Nowhere was this commercial boon heard and seen more than in the extensive periodical publications of the *fin de siglo*.

Argentina in particular had exceedingly positive economic growth as the “granero del mundo” and climbed its way to the third highest exporter of wheat after Russia and the U.S. and 12th highest GDP in the world in 1900 (Fernández and Rondina 250). This Río de la Plata modernization can be traced textually, in the region’s cultural and literary magazines. The “Instituto Universal de Artes Modernas” placed a full paid advertisement in Buenos Aires’ *Caras y Caretas* in 1911 (figure 2). In the center of the page, in large bold font the notice proclaims: “La mejor noticia del siglo” (113). The opening paragraph reads: “Con el fin de hacer conocer en Sud-América nuestros trabajos artísticos, regalamos a título de reclame, gratis y hasta el número de 1000, una hermosa y artística ampliación fotográfica inalterable 50 x 60 retocada a lápiz a todas las personas que nos remitan de cualquier punto su fotografía o la de algún miembro de su familia” (“La mejor noticia del siglo” 113). The language of the photographic replication announcement signals a shift in the art world towards mass audiences, consumption and mechanical reproduction. In this case, beauty lies in photographic amplification “retouched” with the “artist’s” pencil. At the center of the publicity is a machine-based aesthetic that purports to be the “best news of the century.” With the home at the center of the image, the illustration depicts domestic felicity founded on the news of the art of photography. The artistic product is additionally defined by its focus on exact enumeration and the dimensions of measurement echoing Walter Benjamin’s proclamation: “Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality of the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception” (Benjamin 223). The company or “artistic institute” is giving away one thousand copies of enhanced photographic duplicates. The pieces are “inalterable,” and all possess the same exact and uniform size. There exists a clear differentiation between the world of traditional plastic arts and the ad that is aimed at consumers and wide readerships of the popular magazine.⁵ The construction of this “good news” is partly in the transference of artistic creation and consumption from a lettered sphere to a growing middle class interested in the decorative, family-centered functions of photographic reproduction. Art, as a repeated theme of the

⁵ It is no surprise that this “Instituto Universal de Artes Modernas” is found on Calle Serrano in the “Sección Industrial” and not on the more bohemian sections of Buenos Aires such as Palermo or San Telmo.

advertisement, has been transferred from a consecrated sphere to something that comes in groups of 1000 and given away free if consumers include a stamped envelope.

Whence the literary was only marginally interested in mass readerships, statistical analysis, numerical order, and scientific discovery, these were positioned at the center of the transference of textual power towards the visual. This shift was apparently a threat in essays and *crónicas* such as José Martí's "Prólogo al 'Poema del Niágara'":

No hay obra permanente, porque las obras de los tiempos de reenquiciamiento y remolde son por esencia mudables e inquietas [...] alarmado a cada instante el concepto literario por un evangelio nuevo; desprestigiadas y desnudas todas las imágenes que antes se reverenciaban; desconocidas aún las imágenes futuras, no parece posible, en este desconcierto de la mente, en esta revuelta vida sin vía fija, carácter definido, ni término seguro. (Martí 62-63)

Martí and his rather conservative imagination of human progress visualized a new evangelization of the image where once precious artworks are now exhibited in their bare form, moldable and transformed through processes of reproduction and a "disorderly life" where permanence does not exist. Old images also lose their inspirational character, and are overlooked by other, newer forms of inspiration that, for the likes of the poet, do not carry the same canonical weight as the old "gospel." The character and even the vocabulary of art and literature are taken out of their consecrated environments and then fail to be formalized works at all. Perhaps nostalgic for what seem to be more stable times, the prologue is a lament for the visual transformations of the period, when the images of the day were renewed and remade over and over again.

Rubén Darío remarked that progress was actually leading society backward: "Al paso en que va esa cosa que se llama el Progreso, tendremos, para entrar en el siglo próximo, que alistar el haz de flechas y el taparrabo" (Darío, "La ley Lynch" 49). In another *crónica* he laments, "El progreso es el enemigo de lo pintoresco, y su nivelación no va dejando carácter local ni original en ninguna parte" (Darío, *Tierras solares* 46). This leveling out erases originality and local expression in the name of progress. Nevertheless, marketing-savvy inventors are creating "The best news of the century" through the technics and implements of reproduction. Julián del Casal speaks of the intense labor in extracting literary treasure from the journalistic commercial maelstrom. In a *crónica* on Cuban artist José Arburu Morell, del Casal laments: "Fuera de algunas frases compasivamente laudatorias, la prensa habanera, esa gran mercenaria que vive en el más repugnante contubernio con el comercio y la industria, ofreciéndoles a bajo precio sus vergonzosos favores, no ha hecho resaltar, como debiera, sus grandes méritos Densa bruma se extiende todavía alrededor de su nombre, que intentaremos desgarrar" (Del Casal 487). Industry clouds art and *modernismo* sets out to respond through the same mechanized textual infrastructure. The act of negotiating the smoggy mazes of

commerce was a central aim of the *fin de siglo crónica* and defined its formal qualities.

The increase of the mechanical reproduction of the arts resulted in a furthering of what Samuel Weber calls an “unraveling of form.” Weber discusses Kant’s definition of aesthetics as an object of study “of the Beautiful and the Sublime, or rather, of judgements concerning them” (16). Yet in making such a judgment, one clearly falls into the trap of over-determination because “Aesthetic judgments are inseparably bound up with singular appearances and events” (Weber 17). Kant writes that representation “is bound up with such a multiplicity of partial representations [...] that for it no expression that designates a determinate concept can be found; such a representation therefore allows much ineffable thought, the feeling of which animates the cognitive faculty, and to language, as mere letter, adds spirit” (Weber 29). Weber retranslates Kant in that it “is not that aesthetical ideas are ‘ineffable’ but rather that they are unnamable [...]. Aesthetic ideas are by necessity ‘overnamed’” (Weber 29). Hence, an “instituto universal” that reproduces “trabajos artísticos” is part of a tendency to transform the aesthetic to whatever form effectively increases capital and consumers. The reproduction of art as part of a corporate “institute” results in the erasure of aesthetic judgment and meaning. The over-naming or excessive appropriation of art in this advertisement is symptomatic of the effects of reproductive technologies at the *fin de siglo* and the impetus of global capitalism more broadly.

By contrast, Mexican artist Marius de Zayas writes: “The reality of Form can only be transcribed through a mechanical process, in which the craftsmanship of man does not enter as a principal factor. There is no other process to accomplish this than photography. [...] The more we consider photography, the more convinced we are that it has come to draw away the veil of mystery with which Art enveloped the represented Form” (de Zayas 128-129). Photography marks a shift from a seemingly aestheticized *modernista* movement towards an Avant-garde opening up of the concept of art. At times, as is the case with de Zayas, this aesthetic reformulation hails technological advances in visualities as the essence of formal representation and signals a complete integration of art and mechanical reproduction. Noé Jitrik applies the metaphor of the literary machine to *modernista* poetic production. He writes: “bien podría ocurrir que la riqueza y la amplitud del vocabulario así como esa presunta ‘orientación’ o ‘tendencia’ constituyan un punto por de donde se pueda ingresar a una poética o, lo que es lo mismo, a un sistema productivo” (Jitrik 11, my emphasis). Mirroring the emergence of capitalist machine-based production, Jitrik enunciates a symbolic relationship between the literary and market systems. The progression from antagonism to acceptance and use of technology in literary and artistic works is evident in *modernismo* as movement writers in their *crónicas* continually railed against technological progress while also taking advantage of emerging industry.

Maurice Blanchot remarks that the newspaper, a symptom of the nothingness of the everyday, “everything is announced, everything is denounced, everything becomes image” (243). The newspaper and magazine images are manifestations of everyday life in both content and reproduction. Periodical images

are first representations of objects, visual depictions of a catalog of things for purchase: purchase both in the literal advertising sense and purchase by the consumer of the text. They are meant to attract the gaze of the buying audience and lead them to purchase more. This is still the case when the subject of the image poses in portraiture, and the image converts the subject to an object of merchandise, stripped of its subjectivity. Even the text itself becomes image due to the design and specificity of format. The decisions of typeface design and size, column and article configuration all contribute to constructing the visual perception of the newspaper. The reproduction of these elements, day after day, copy after copy, commodify the images further. Blanchot extends the image to the everyday as the temporality of it leads to disinterestedness and then an “empty but fascinated look” (Blanchot 240).

Argentine cronista Joaquín González comments that, “La prensa es un monstruo que devora en un día enormes cantidades de ideas, que luego arroja revestidas de formas multicolores al seno de la sociedad” (67). The colored imagery of the newspaper and magazine format is an act of condensation and the transformation into multicolor effects. The metaphor of the newspaper, taking ideas and then tossing them to the breasts of the public, showcases the format's dependency on public consumption - the newspaper actually drinks from the public's interest and buying power. The more colorful, the more accepting by the periodical readership. He continues that life's order is at the mercy of the newspaper's power: “para ser fundidas, purificados, metodizados por el periodista” (González 67). The conversion of ideas into the factory of the journalist is done through these three elements that all possess highly visual connections. The idea of molding, of the industrial foundry, shaping metal into something without form into a definite shape. Then the concept of purification connotes taking something visually and materially corrupt and making it clean and consumable. Finally, the methodizing of ideas into something orderly and easily understood is foundational in the construction of visual representations in newspapers and magazines of the *fin de siglo*.

The journalist's job is transferring life to a visual realm, before any of the textual content is taken into account, “como si tratara de una fábrica” (González 67). Factory-based industrialization is a specific form of economic production that lies in the creation of the material. The factory is a site where things are made from raw materials disparate from the final production of the factory. The conversion of materials to tangible objects is a process of visualization. It is taking of abstract materials and converting them into a visible object ready for consumption that is also highly visual. The act of quality control is central in this process as it assures a correct image, free from blemish and visual corruption. The design process is also key to the factory, the creation of a thing that has aesthetic merits according to consumer demands. When more demand is desired, visualization design of the factory item is rethought and recreated by a team of engineers so that the object can be more visually pleasing or more visually suitable for its increased sale. Factory machines are a dedication to the visual transformation of material goods and can be adjusted and fine-tuned to create a different visual outcome. The factory

object is also produced *en masse* as equal and identical objects. The visualization of factory objects must be uniform or rejected unless adjusted by factory experts for more effect. The transformation of the abstract to something founded, purified and expressed methodologically corresponds to Latin American newspaper production as essentially a visual concept.

While *literatos* purported to be on a higher cultural and spiritual plane than the masses and the market, cultural producers of the period were also immersed in the throes of technology and industry. For instance, in 1900 Darío wrote the following statement in a *crónica* published in perhaps the most commercialized and industrial of Latin American newspapers of time, Buenos Aires' *La Nación*: "La muchedumbre, la foule moderna no posee ese sentido de comprensión, envenenada de democracia, de charlatanería libresca y trabajada por todos los apetitos" (Darío, *Peregrinaciones* 92). This tension between art, artist and the sensibilities of the masses is on full display in literary and cultural magazines of the *fin de siglo*.⁶ Viewing examples from Uruguayan funded, Paris based, *Mundial Magazine* and Argentinian publication *Éxito Gráfico* will establish that textual production, focusing on technological advances was an important touchstone in the cultural discourse of the moment and put into question the often-reactionary stances towards progress that many writers of the period expressed. This aesthetics of the machine, then, calls into question the *modernista* maxim of "seeking out a form" and the conceptualization of artistic freedom through the beatification of industry through the same mediums and artistic venues populated by Spanish American *literatos*.⁷ The machine as a cultural object becomes a competing factor, then, in the struggle for cultural authority and discursive supremacy as visual culture gained prominence in the artistic production of the period.

Mundial Magazine embodied the print modernization of the *fin de siglo*. Published between 1911-1914, with Rubén Darío serving as literary director, the publication's first issue said this regarding its artistic mission: "Lo ingenioso, lo elegante, lo risueño tendrán, en lo exclusivamente literario, su consiguiente cabida. Y todo trabajo irá ilustrado por la fotografía o por el talento y la habilidad de especiales dibujantes. Para ello la dirección artística procurará el mayor esmero" ("*Mundial*" 5). Visual processes were just as high a priority as literary style in the

⁶ Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, in her book on Mexican visual discourses at the turn of the twentieth century, discusses the shift in societal sensibilities that took place partly due to the emergence and expansion of visual advertising: "La publicidad, como parte de los mecanismos de la sociedad de consumo, ha impulsado en gran medida la diversidad iconográfica que se dio en las artes visuales, dentro de los procesos de cambio de sensibilidad de cambio y ruptura que la modernidad y las vanguardias históricas propiciaron. Este proceso de cambio de sensibilidad y percepción condujo, entre otras causas, a transformaciones conceptuales de fondo que se han dado en el terreno de la estética y el arte" (18).

⁷ This foundational idea comes from Darío's "Yo persigo una forma." Its first lines read:
Yo persigo una forma que no encuentra mi estilo,
botón de pensamiento que busca ser la rosa;
se anuncia con un beso que en mis labios se posa
el abrazo imposible de la Venus de Milo.

magazine. This goal was fulfilled by first class artists featured on each issue cover, dozens of highly illustrated and artistic commercial advertisements, photographic work of the highest journalistic order, and original art and illustrations that accompanied every literary work.⁸ In the 1911 special Christmas issue, the editors speak of the mechanic modernity and aristocratic material format of the publication:

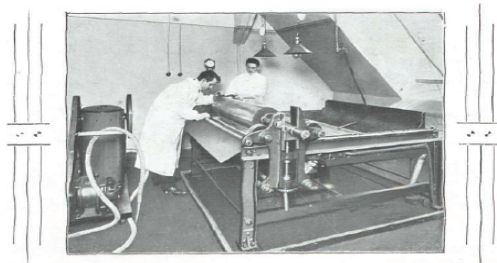
empleando los medios de reproducción más modernos, haciendo todos los días ensayos de color hasta llegar al resultado esperado, luego la mise en page, y por último la impresión, que tan gran importancia tiene en la edición moderna. Agregar a esto la combinación de los tonos y las diferentes clases de papel couche y mate que hemos tenido que buscar y encontrar [...]. Es verdad que hemos estado admirablemente secundados por escritores, artistas grabadores, impresores y fabricantes de papel. (“He aquí el número de navidad” 100)

The intentionality of the material textuality of the issue points to a comprehensive effort in constructing the magazine artistically and using elevated forms of paper and the newest print modernization. Entire teams of workers labored in the publication’s production and formatting. The staging of the *Mundial Magazine* page, its design, materiality, typography, visuality, and technological and modernized production is truly a pillar of the magazine.⁹ In a 1912 issue of *Mundial Magazine*, long time Darío friend, El Salvadorean engineer Agustín de la Rocha, writes a long-form six-page article titled “La industria artística: Aplicación del fotograbado a los periódicos diarios.” In the text, de la Rocha discusses the recent invention of a cylinder-based intaglio printing process by German Eduard Mertens that finds a solution of “La aplicación del fotograbado a la impresión en papel ordinario de periódico” (de la Rocha 456). He begins describing the universal interest of this technology: “La solución de tan importante problema, en cuyo estudio han fracasado tantas inteligencias y energías, durante larguísimos años de constante labor, no podía menos de despertar un interés palpitante en el mundo civilizado” (de la Rocha 456). For the author, questions of efficiency, mechanics and increased profits then, are assumed to be at the forefront of the minds of *Mundial Magazine* readers (figure 3). “Desde ese día, la prensa diaria quedaba colocada al nivel de las lujosas revistas ilustradas, teniendo además, aquella, en su favor, la velocidad de impresión de las rotativas” (de la Rocha 456). Periodicals are no longer stuck in a world apart from high-cultured illustrated magazines and

⁸ Ana María Hernández de López has brought together extensive economic, historical and literary context on *Mundial Magazine* in her book *El Mundial Magazine de Rubén Darío: Historia, estudio e índices*. For additional important scholarship on the publication and its importance in the literary field and technological modernization of the *fin de siglo*, see Mejías López and Pineda Franco.

⁹ Beatriz Colombi uses the “pillar” metaphor when discussing the material format of *Mundial*. She writes: “El otro pilar de *Mundial* es su presentación tipográfica, de una riqueza inusual y poco corriente hasta entonces en revistas de lengua española. La tapa está resuelta en passe-partout, con las letras del título en relieve y una lámina pegada con los bordes sueltos; la retirada de contratapa es de carton decorado” (237).

for de la Rocha their one advantage over the more artistic productions was print speed. In addition, photography can be mass-produced on the page and is no longer limited to artistic privilege: “Ya el fotograbado no era más el privilegio exclusivo del papel fino y lustroso. Los periódicos diarios entraron en una nueva era, pudiendo a voluntad adornar sus textos con finos y elegantes grabados” (de la Rocha 456). Grace and elegance are no longer confined to prestigious magazine publishers with their fine papers as these have moved on to other spheres; those of the mass-produced newspaper page. Able to dominate visual forms, Mertens method will position the newspaper in a higher aesthetic space, a new era of authority in artistic representation. This is “La Industria Artística,” after all, where art now comes into existence by men in scientific laboratory clothing, metal rollers, complex machinery, chemicals, numbers, calculations, automation, diagrams, levers, belts and motors.



La Industria Artística

Aplicación del fotograbado á los periódicos diarios

Desde el invento de Gutenberg, la imprenta ha llegado á prodigiosos grados de perfección. Sin embargo, en los periódicos diarios no se había podido, hasta ahora, reproducir con nitidez y con belleza las fotografías. Esto puede hacerse gracias á un descubrimiento hecho en Alemania, y del cual hablamos á continuación detalladamente.



Un gran problema de vital interés para la prensa diaria, ha sido resuelto y llevado á la práctica con éxito asombroso por el sabio alemán Dr. Mertens: *La aplicación del fotograbado á la impresión en papel ordinario de periódicos.*

La solución de tan importante problema, en cuyo estudio han fracasado tantas inteligencias y energías, durante larguísimo años de constante labor, no podía menos de despertar un interés palpitante en el mundo civilizado.

Con tenacidad admirable, digna del mayor elogio, el perseverante inventor consagra diez años de su vida al estudio del problema, y durante ese lapso de tiempo, las diferentes soluciones que se van presentando á sus investigaciones, van sucesivamente ensayán-

dose, poniéndose en práctica, desechándose las, volviéndolas á considerar, poniendo nuevas á prueba, y sin desalentos y con inquebrantable confianza sigue trabajando incansable, sin pararse en sacrificios pecuniarios, hasta que al fin, el éxito más brillante viene á premiar sus desvelos, faenas y quebrantos, y en los primeros meses de 1910, por medio del Diario de Freiburgo, anuncia al mundo la buena nueva, ilustrándola con los primeros grabados obtenidos por su nuevo sistema.

Desde ese día, la prensa diaria quedaba colocada al nivel de las lujosas Revistas Ilustradas, teniendo además, aquella, en su favor, la velocidad de impresión de las rotativas.

Ya el fotograbado no era más el privilegio exclusivo del papel fino y lustroso.

Los periódicos diarios entraron en una nueva era, pudiendo á voluntad adornar sus textos con finos y elegantes grabados.

Voy á ensayar de hacer una descripción

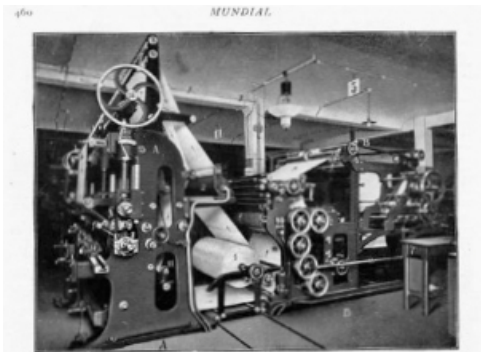


Fig. 6.

esta cuchilla automática es la que ha realizado la aplicación del nuevo sistema, á la impresión del fotograbado en la prensa diaria de gran tiraje.

Una de las más importantes ventajas del nuevo sistema es, sin duda, la completa ausencia del retoque del cliché, á esto se agrega la economía de tiempo en la preparación necesaria para la impresión.

Puede también compararse entre las mismas, que en un mismo cilindro se pueden hacer también al mismo tiempo, con poco gasto de color y con un solo y sencillísimo trabajo, los grabados necesarios para cuantos ó más páginas del periódico. Y si á mano viene, se intercala algún texto que convenga.

La construcción de la máquina de imprimir Mertens, no deja que desear respecto á sencillez, solidez y larga duración, mientras que las rotativas son todas pesadas y de complicados mecanismos.

La grandísima importancia de esta invención puede apreciarse en todo su valor, si se recuerda que, entre el procedimiento de grabado en buco y el de relieve, existe una diferencia completa é ineludible en la manera de hacer la impresión, porque es harto sabido que una plancha grabada en buco, en modo convencional, directamente con un

texto tipográfico, sino que la impresión debe ejecutarse separadamente.

El principio del grabado en buco consiste, en que la tinta se ha de dar exclusivamente con una media de estamador, y no con rotillas, á fin de llenar solamente las inclinaciones del grabado, ómicas que deben marcar al hacer la impresión, y como no basta el dar la tinta á la placa, sino que también es de todo punto necesario el limpiar después cuidadosamente la superficie, puesto que ella debe suministrar las partes blancas de la imagen, resulta de esto que, la impresión del fotograbado, no puede hacerse en las máquinas de imprimir, sino exclusivamente con prensas de mano, porque para un trabajo constante en de toda necesidad, tanto la habilidad de la mano como la inteligencia del impresor. Así pues, los grabados debían imprimirse separadamente del texto.

Un tal procedimiento del grabado en buco, además de su desproporcionada lentitud, era completamente innecesario, no sólo á las prensas, sino también á las rotativas, y para la ilustración de algunos diarios, se ha tenido que recurrir al procedimiento tipográfico ó de relieve.

Con pocas excepciones, obreros de la ciencia y de la industria se estorbaban desde hace mu-

Figure 3. Agustín de la Rocha, “La industria artística”. *Mundial Magazine*, mar. 1912, pp. 456.

Figure 4. Agustín de la Rocha, “La industria artística”. *Mundial Magazine*, mar. 1912, pp. 460.

In the remaining pages, de la Rocha goes into laborious detail of the mechanical process. But before he begins he provides readers with a caveat in relation to his study: “Voy a ensayar de hacer una descripción del nuevo sistema, lo más sencillamente posible, para ponerlo al alcance de la comprensión de las inteligencias menos cultivadas, alejándome del tecnicismo científico y echando

mano de los términos corrientes. Si no logro mi objeto, que me sea tenida en cuenta la buena intención” (de la Rocha 456). This, then, is a technical article describing the photoengraving process to an audience not versed in complex industrial machinery, lowering standards for *Mundial Magazine* readers according to the specialized author. de la Rocha titles his description an “ensayo,” a performance in relation to the complexities of the machine, something, despite its simplicity, that does not quite reach the technicality necessary to truly understand what is represented in the images. There is an inadequacy of the text in relation to the rollers, gears and motors of the machine, supplemented by photography, an additional mediating instrument. Nevertheless, the remaining paragraphs, in contrast to the literary style typical of other *Mundial* articles, span 6 pages of diagrammed photos of the presses and their large rotors, and an intricately written description produced in scientific prose (figures 3 & 4).¹⁰ For example:

Este grabado representa el empalme de la máquina Mertens A, con la prensa rotativa B, y el trabajo de impresión, en ambas, se desarrolla como sigue: La banda de papel, tal como puede claramente verse en la figura, parte del rollo 1, y siguiendo por los cilindros 2, 3, 4, y 5, llega a tomar posición entre el cilindro del fotograbado 6 y el cilindro elástico de presión 7. El robusto cilindro de contrapresión 8, comprime el elástico de goma, y este a su vez la banda de papel contra el cilindro 6, que le trasmite el grabado. La banda de papel provista de su grabado, prosigue su camino, pasando primero por un cilindro que en la figura no es visible, y siguiendo el recorrido indicado por el sentido de las flechas, se dirige por los 9, 10, 11 y 12, y entra en la rotativa por el 12 en busca del texto correspondiente, que recibe en su lugar y tiempo con la precisión requerida. (de la Rocha 456)

This technological mapping provides a visual breakdown for the machine depicted in the image. The connection between a highly technical instrument and its prowess to reproduce visual images and the use of photography in the article to guide readerships attests to a formulaic representation of artistic reproduction. The “required precision” of the text reproduced on the rollers and belts extends to the diagram of the machine. The photograph is a precise reproduction of the reproduction machine. Elements such as arrows and letters that diagram the process help readers to comprehend the technology with exactness. The image’s precision breaks down the written representation. In order to understand the machine, readers would need to alternate their views from text to image, back and forth, as they follow the paper’s path through the press. Unlike the realist photographic image, the text cannot approximate either the mechanical process of the machine nor the actual outline of the image itself. The text relies on the image as it decodes what is seen and not seen. This is anti-ekphrasis, one that does not

¹⁰ Other article titles in this issue are, for example, “Arte-Pablo Antonio Béjar,” “Las famosas ruinas de Yucatán,” “El capitán proteo (novela)” etc.

achieve an elevation of the image or thing, but that collapses in on itself in its convolution in the face of the machine's reality.¹¹

As de la Rocha proclaims, he strives for simplification for the less cultured readers yet his essay is tedious and highly technical. Nevertheless, he concludes by laying out the artistic achievements inherent with such technological progress: “La sensación que produjo la noticia del nuevo invento fue grandísima [...] toda publicación diaria podrá, según sus facultades, ilustrar sus columnas con artísticos grabados llenos de expresión, sacados cotidianamente de la realidad de la vida, o de las bellezas que presenta la naturaleza en sus múltiples manifestaciones” (de la Rocha 461). The movement from consecrated art to public sensation and expressionism in mass reproduced images justifies the processes and technics so minutely described in the article. Additionally, the success of the machine is not necessarily decided on its artistic merits, but on public sensation. It is the news of the machine, consumed by the reading public, that made it a success. The invention causes textual expression is to be supplemented and even subsumed by the visual, machine-based creation that can even position nature's multiple manifestations onto the page. This assessment, published in *Mundial*, divulges the shift in the mechanisms of art and literature as well as the self-interested nature of the literary sphere in compliance with these transformations.

The opening article, written in 1905, of the Buenos Aires graphic arts journal *Éxito Gráfico* (figure 5) reaffirmed the machine-based transformations of the art world: “Hoy, que nuestras artes han tomado el majestuoso vuelo del cóndor, impulsadas no sólo por el libre genio artístico, que se manifiesta en infinitas y caprichosas cambiantes de forma y de color, sino por el poderoso esfuerzo del Hércules de la mecánica, que les ha prestado una facilidad asombrosa para su aplicación y desarrollo” (“Nuestros propósitos” 1). Artistic form, albeit one that is grounded in constant change, is one “impulse” behind the conceptualization of the graphic arts field. Yet this is highly overshadowed by the “Hércules” of the machine which has the capability to simplify, amplify and “develop” the arts. The minimization of the “art” function in the field of “graphic arts” is an aftereffect based on the dehumanization of mechanical progress, much to the seeming delight of graphic artists and their guilds. The “Éxito” of the visual field is replicated in the illustration of the industrial smoke stacks serving as a foundation of the rising phoenix surging out of the mechanical progress, (and not so much the disheveled books) on the cover design of the magazine. The manifestations of progress, aesthetics and form, indeed the “unraveling of form” sets into motion the tensions inherent in aesthetic judgment “which perhaps would be conceived more appropriately as an event than as an object [...] always on the move” (Weber 33).

¹¹ Ekphrasis has always been a struggle as the transition from image or thing to text is a symbolic impossibility. Murray Krieger has expressed the problem in this way: “What is being described in ekphrasis is both a miracle and a mirage: a miracle because a sequence of actions filled with before and afters such as language alone can trace seems frozen into an instant's vision, but a mirage because only the illusion of such an impossible picture can be suggested by the poem's words” (xvi). What Krieger describes as language's “before and afters” are absent from the technical writer's work.

This mimesis, concretized in technology, caters to the simulacrum desired by the consuming public.

The editors of *Éxito Gráfico* continue:

En la sociedad actual todo parece moverse eléctricamente, como si el tiempo acabara y no pudiese hacerse mañana lo que hoy no se ejecute: pero en seguida se piensa en imitar aquello tan bello, tan llamativo; el público, los clientes, no preguntan cómo podría hacerse ello, sino que piden, exigen que ello se haga, amenazando con expedir órdenes al extranjero, donde ninguna dificultad se opone, perdiendo el gremio gráfico sud-americano una gran parte de la producción que le correspondería. (“Nuestros propósitos” 1)

Accordingly, threats, demands, professionalism, production, clients, execution, imitation and loss are the new descriptors of the artistic sphere founded on mass produced visual reproduction and consumption at the turn of the 20th century in Latin America. This regionalist union, threatened by foreign product orders, seeks to protect its interests from this new society where temporality is transformed. Yet, all that is desired is the imitation of beauty, regardless of how this is accomplished. Mechanized graphic arts, then, according to the commentators of *Éxito Gráfico*, are challenged by a demanding client base which motivates their work. Thus, the creation of the reproduction of illusion, the mechanization of on demand creative work is produced by the sociality of the period: technology and economic demand. The political demands of *Éxito Gráfico*'s aims as a publication seek to thwart these

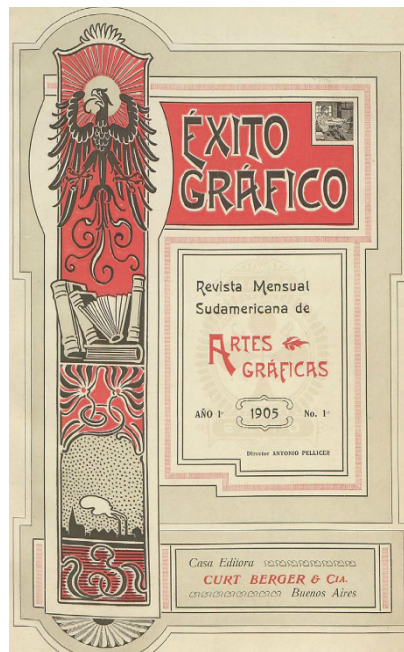


Figure 5. Cover of *Éxito Gráfico*, 1905.

consumer and foreign threats by crossing national borders to confront the temporal and artistic demands of instantaneous imitation. The globalizing function of the information-based publication, as it rises like a phoenix from the ashes of industrialization, is reborn with the new insistence on endless visuality. *Éxito Gráfico* is almost inevitable, then, given the insatiable rise of the visual city that overpowers not only the traditional arts, but all representation henceforth to be created. The public, at least the public with economic means, are they who create the environment of graphic necessity and this resides on a foundation of marketability of business. These demands create a new art that requires the necessary collective labor union unable to be confined by the state.

The *Mundial* and *Éxito Gráfico* examples make manifest the intersections of text and visuality, mechanization, market and aesthetic that corroborated the *modernista* response of the production of a corpus of thousands of *crónica* texts. These took the wide-ranging events of the day and aestheticized them by mechanical means. In a sense, the Benjaminian aura of the *crónica* genre, instead of its aesthetic reduction through journalism, only came into being through the work of mechanized and industrial forces. *Fin de siglo* literature, along with a burgeoning visual culture, represent a Latin America that consistently copes artistically with and through commercial elements. The necessity of reading the *crónica* in these mechanized textual contexts continue to open up spaces of understanding the genre in its diverse and intriguing material environments.

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