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Eugenio Dittborn: No Man's Land Paintings

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10. Wellington
1994

13. Kuangju
2000

2. Berlin
1989

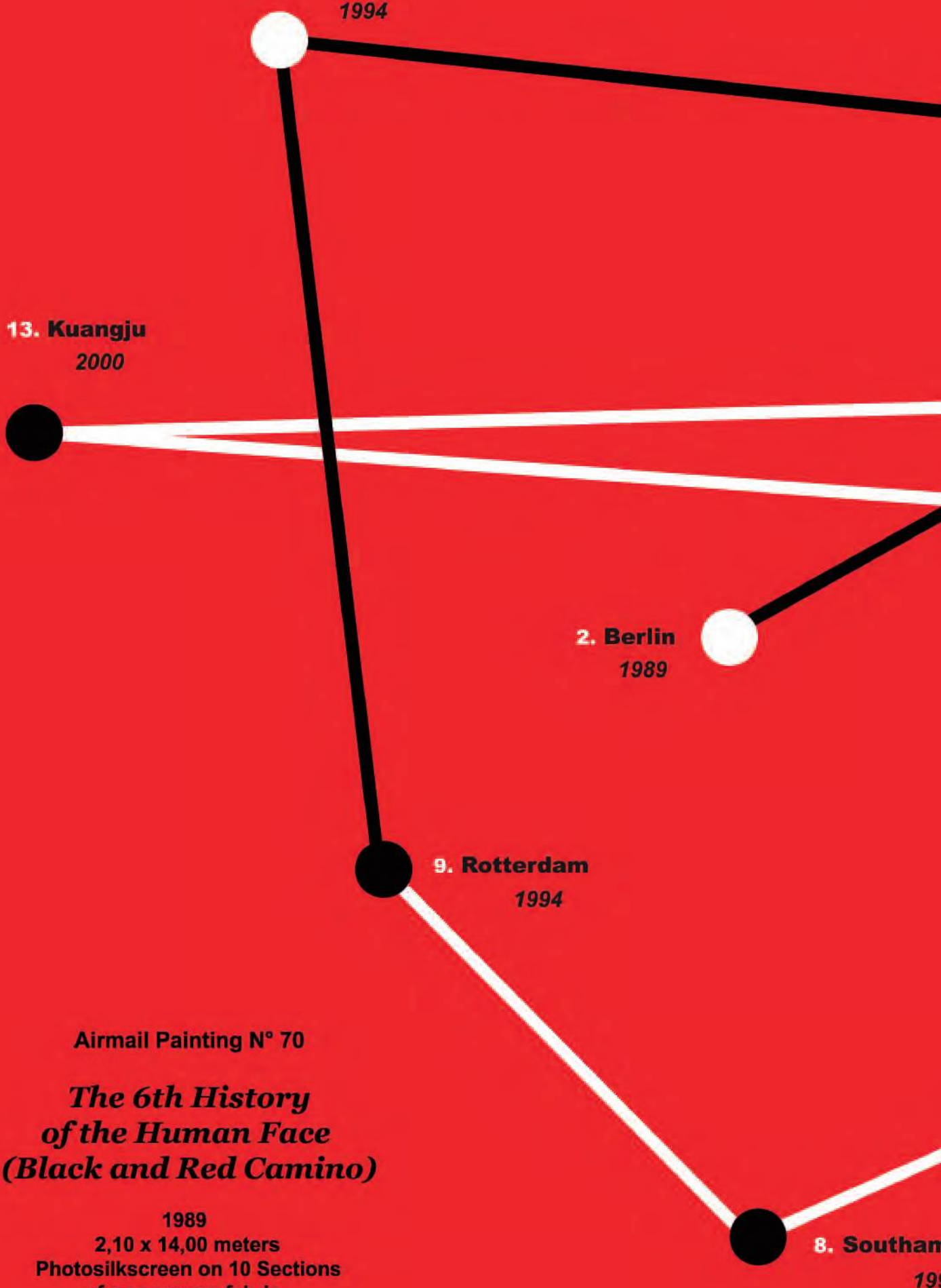
9. Rotterdam
1994

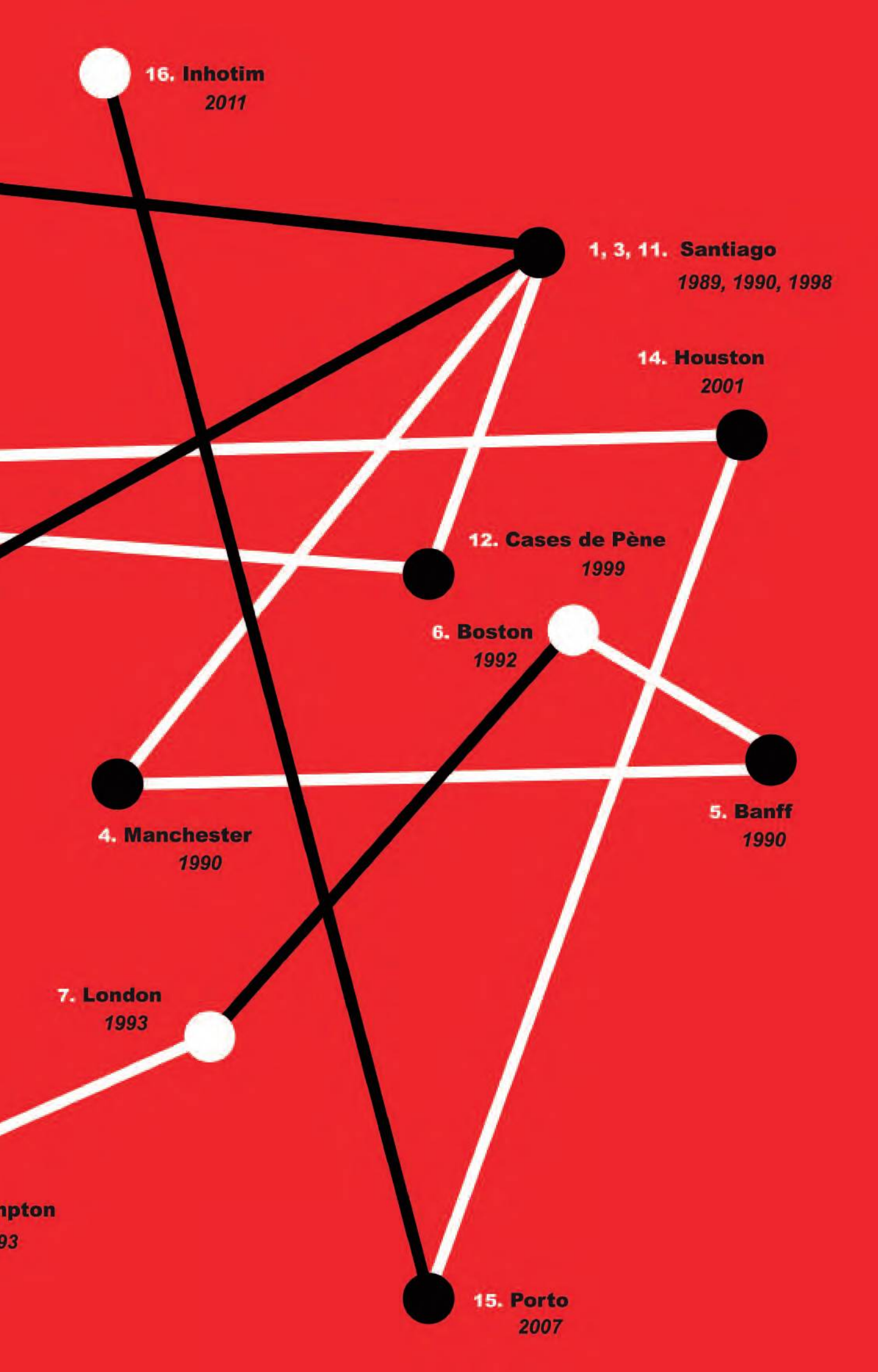
8. Southampton
1994

Airmail Painting N° 70

***The 6th History
of the Human Face
(Black and Red Camino)***

1989
2,10 x 14,00 meters
Photosilkscreen on 10 Sections
of non woven fabric





16. Inhotim
2011

1, 3, 11. Santiago
1989, 1990, 1998

14. Houston
2001

12. Cases de Pène
1999

6. Boston
1992

4. Manchester
1990

5. Banff
1990

7. London
1993

London
1993

15. Porto
2007



Five of Eugenio Dittborn's airmail paintings in envelopes, three months before setting out for the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Photograph taken on a street in Santiago de Chile, December 1992. The five paintings include *Liquid Ashes*

(1992), *To Travel* (1990) and three *Histories of the Human Face* (numbers 6, 11 and 13 (1989–91)), which arrived from Kassel, Rome, Boston, Seville and Antwerp between May and November 1992. Photograph: Jorge Brantmayer. Courtesy the artist

Previous spread:
Eugenio Dittborn,
Itinerary of airmail
painting #70,
*The 6th History
of the Human Face
(Black and Red
Camino)*, 1989.
Courtesy the artist

Eugenio Dittborn: No Man's Land Paintings

– Willy Thayer

It is never the beginning or the end that are interesting. What is interesting is the middle.

– Gilles Deleuze¹

Airmail painting has been conceived for that paradoxical space that is transit ... not the beginning, nor the middle, nor the end (Dittborn), beyond all fixity, finality and rigidity.

– Guy Brett²

To see an airmail painting is to see *in-between*, in a turbulence in which it is impossible to locate points of origin, sojourn and destination.

Willy Thayer investigates the implications of the movements that Eugenio Dittborn's airmail paintings make on their global itineraries.

1. Dittborn writes that in 1983, happening to fold a large piece of wrapping paper four times upon itself, and then unfolding it again, he accidentally invented the airmail painting. Where the marks reticulated the paper, he discovered folds that would traverse his works and would be heterogeneous to them. The find, he continues, provided him with what he had long been searching for in his work.³ In late 1983 the first airmail painting reached the world. From 1983 to 2011, Dittborn 'produced 181 airmail paintings and put them into circulation between faraway points on the globe'.⁴ The multi-kilometric lines 'of paint suspended from the sky in an airplane that never ceases to arrive'⁵ trace the geo-poetics and cartographic geo-politics of the airmail painting over a wide scope of the Earth's surface.⁶

2. But it is retrospectively in 1998 – when the airmail painting, its techné and gymnastics have matured over the course of fifteen of the earth's trips around the sun, flying over the earth's surface on routes thousands of miles and hours of navigation long – that Dittborn writes that *in 1983 he accidentally invented the airmail painting*.

3. Might the *accidental* invention, the *find* that in 1983 *provided him with what he had long been searching for*, be what posthumously, starting in 1998, is projected on the immediacy of 1983, transmitting to it the temporalities and developments of the fifteen succeeding years? Will moments previous to the prolonged search be projected back onto the invention? Is it possible to devise a simple present for the discovery of folds that traverse his works and are heterogeneous to them? Could 1983 not be the chronological mask with which the temporal turbulence, the *untimely* present, an inopportune and out-of-step time, shows itself? Is it possible to invent, in 1983, something that in 1983 occurs in 1998 and before 1983 occurs as a *prolonged search*?

4. Many different moments converge in that multiplicity of scenes that is the scene of an *invention*: the immediate presents and co-presents, the absents and co-absents, that which promised itself in the wrapping paper's grid and that which was seen nearby and askance, that which was seen before so many times without being noticed and suddenly appeared. And all of this as though they are a meeting of materials, technologies, billiard balls of affect, turbos of

1 Gilles Deleuze, *En medio de Spinoza* (trans. Equipo Editorial Cactus), Buenos Aires: Editorial Cactus, 2006, p.37.

2 Guy Brett, 'Dust Clouds', in *Mapa: Pinturas Aeropostales/The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn 1984–1992* (exh. cat.), London and Rotterdam: ICA and Witte de With, 1993.

3 See Eugenio Dittborn, *Mundana*, Santiago de Chile: Pública Editores, 1998, p.152.

4 Quoted from text on one of the airmail paintings sent to the 8th Bienal del Mercosul, Brazil, September–October 2011.

5 E. Dittborn, *Mundana*, *op. cit.*

6 See the graphic itinerary of *The 6th History of the Human Face (Black and Red Camino)* (1989), reproduced in this issue, pp.78–79.

imminences, as is any scene of invention, of writing or painting — as is any scene of ‘attachments, crossings, intersections and fastening of technical methods, great and small, mechanical and manual, contemporary and outdated, public and private,’ writes Dittborn, ‘of voluntary and involuntary discoveries of prefabricated images subjected to movements [...] that hasten an end, one moment after another, so as to transform it, or that dizzily travel the same distance to find and undergo catastrophe with it, and in that catastrophe, through travel, produce a certain *unknown*.’⁷

5. Did Dittborn have enough knowledge of airmail paintings before 1983 so as to recognise in 1983 that he had invented them? And how did he know this if at that time there were no airmail paintings? And if he did know, what sense did it make to investigate them? Does Dittborn invent all of airmail painting at once, *ex nihilo* or miraculously, or does he go from finding to finding, from chance to chance, impregnating an emptiness with associations in a lapsarian fashion, plastic fictions that little by little endow the as of yet unborn with body, reality, language, in such a way that that multitude of origins suddenly settles like something that is not there, producing another language in the same tongue, until achieving singularity, gradually mutating the vicissitudes, contingencies, babbles and gropings of the investigation in the montage that eventually arose headlong and whose final result retrospectively showed itself to be incompatible with a history of gropings and babbles?

6. Before inventing the airmail paintings, Dittborn worked for four years on the Mail art network. The network’s precursor was Ray Johnson, who had posted more than 300 collages with the instructions ‘Please add to and return’.⁸ In 1952, Dittborn received letters from his mother folded in envelopes that he unfolded to read. In their creases, the 181 airmail paintings summon

those letters crystallizing the heterochrony that converges in the multiplicity of *scenes* that is the *scene* of its invention.

7. The paragraphs above seek, with their delay and circumlocution, to hurry things, to get to the point, to the *in-between*, to the *fold* of the airmail painting (announced in the epigraphs to this text). An *in-between*, a *fold* in which the airmail painting balances itself, balances its *transformational* politics, its kinematics, the continuous variation of its body, its way of dealing with space and time, with the faraway proximities and the contiguous distances, the borders and limits, according to different patterns of movement, folding many without stabilising in any, persisting in their midst at their junction.

8. One day in 1983, the *Hostage*, the *Deserter*, the *Tramp* and the *Castaway* gathered in Santiago, Chile, and founded Airmail Paintings, Inc.⁹ What (who) are these arcana in relationship to the airmail painting? Might their common denominator be *to never be where they are, to always play away*, even with respect to themselves, to invariably reside away from home? Might Dittborn be the common denominator of the four? This can be supposed to be the case only on the condition that Dittborn is taken as nothing more and nothing less than the rubric for an inquest that is set and sets itself in motion via a simultaneous three-part connection: a) the connection to a determined geographical-linguistic, historical-cultural, economic-political condition, characterised by ‘isolation’, ‘deprivation’ and ‘solitary confinement’;¹⁰ b) the connection with the multiplicity of technologies and systems of painting (printing) belonging to all eras and places, Western and Far Western, alphabetical and non-alphabetical, historical and natural, manufacturing or industrial, Neolithic and post-industrial, primary and secondary, cultic and exhibitory,

7 E. Dittborn, ‘Bye Bye love’, *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, no.13, 1996, p.28.

8 The airmail paintings depart from some of the basic principles of Mail art — for example, from the principle that ‘artistic practice must remain in a certain state of extra-territoriality in respect to any institutional form ... The airmail paintings also circulate within the network of museums, galleries and exhibition spaces dedicated to art ... They depart from the small format used by Mail art for its circulation. Composed of parts folded inside envelopes, once unfolded and assembled onto the gallery wall the airmail paintings momentarily join the class of paintings that, throughout history, like Claude Monet’s *Water Lilies* (1914–26), for example, attempted to stay out of the eye’s reach, functioning instead on an architectural scale’. E. Dittborn, *Fugitiva*, Santiago de Chile: Fundación Gasco, 2005, pp.167–68.

9 *Ibid.*

10 G. Brett, ‘Dust Clouds’, *op. cit.*, p.76.



Eugenio Dittborn, airmail painting #112, *La Cuisine et la Guerre*, 1994, tincture, cotton fabric, stitching and photo-silkscreen on 24 sections of duck fabric, 4.2 × 16.8cm. Installation view, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago de Chile 1998. Photograph: Jorge Brantmayer. Courtesy the artist

initiated or inexperienced, dominant or submissive, resistant or translatable; c) the connection with art's international-planetary circulation and its circuits.

9. 'Whenever an electron is confined in a small space it reacts to this confinement by moving around excitedly. The smaller the space of confinement the more dizzily the electron fidgets within it.'¹¹ The airmail paintings are the electrons that 'allowed Dittborn to communicate beyond Chile without depending on the existence of an elaborate cultural infrastructure', writes Brett.¹² But the journey from the Far West that is Santiago de Chile, to international circulation, is not only a reaction to the confinement. It is also an act that opposes

the 'tremendous certainties with which Europe came to America', opposition more productive than reactive, a desistance more than a resistance.¹³

10. Airmail painting erodes any *fixity*, *finality* and *rigidity*, without establishing a new stability, becoming more worldly, more remote, more fugitive, more deserted (nomadic) with each moment, varying its 'public, skies, routes, meridian, parallel, addressee, airport, hemisphere, trajectory, continent, direction, address',¹⁴ displaying itself 'as a painting in order to continue circulating as a letter',¹⁵ designing multi-kilometric maps, painting itself over with the 'surfaces and peripheries that it traverses',¹⁶ acquiring much

11 Quoted from text on one of the airmail paintings sent to the 8th Bienal del Mercosul, Brazil, September—October 2011.

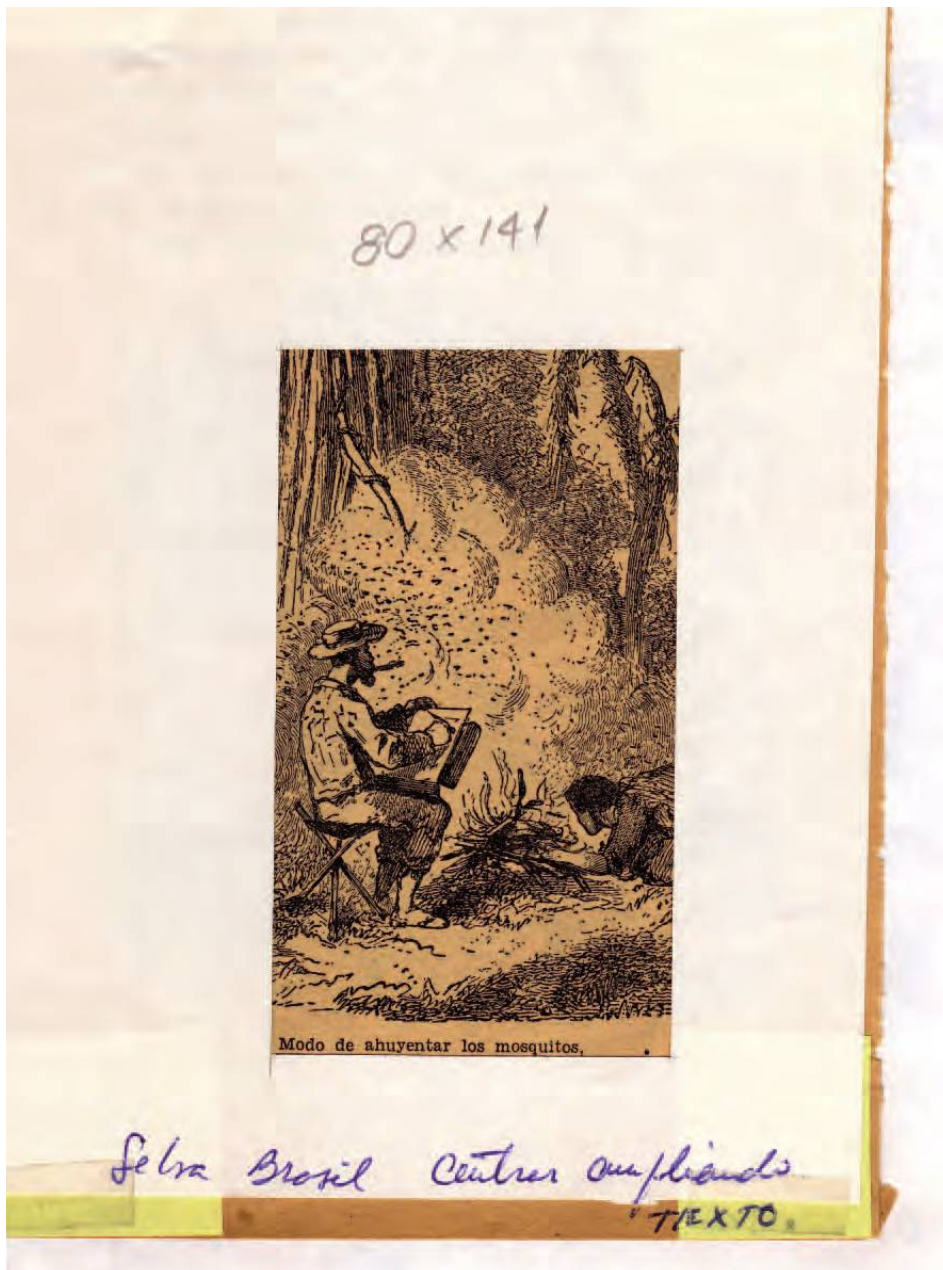
12 G. Brett, 'Dust Clouds', *op. cit.*, p.71.

13 Sean Cubitt, in *Remota: The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn* (exh. cat.), Santiago de Chile: Pública Editores, 1997, p.88.

14 E. Dittborn, *Correcaminos VII*, *op. cit.*, fragment 20.

15 G. Brett, 'Dust Clouds', *op. cit.*, p.105.

16 E. Dittborn, *Correcaminos*, fragment 4, in Justo Pastor Mellado, *El fantasma de la sequía*, Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1988.



Printed engraving found in *Selvas del Brasil*, date unknown. Image reprinted in Eugenio Dittborn, airmail painting #112, *La Cuisine et la Guerre*, 1994, tincture, cotton fabric, stitching and photo-silkscreen on 24 sections of duck fabric, 4.2 × 16.8m. Courtesy the artist

from these but without making itself at home in any, as a continuous metamorphosis of character that undoes any identity.

11. The movement involving transfer presupposes a uniform space through which a body travels over continuous moments. That movement is carried out by each airmail painting on the carefully planned routes they travel from one point to another depending on the trajectory's direction, return, take-off and landing.

12. In addition to fuelling the figurative manoeuvre by making its own the pre-

existent planetary networks of circulation (international postal networks, airline routes, airports, telecommunication and satellite devices, museums and art galleries), airmail painting sheds light on the paradoxes of translation (translocation), of not finding oneself where one arrives, not arriving where one is located, not *being* where one is located, as it is designed for that non-place, that place of infinite virtuality that is the *in-between*, impossible to pin down at one point, a flash of presence. Hence the airmail painting's pan-topia and a-topia formulated by Dittborn: *all destinations are home*.¹⁷ The prerogative to interpose an interval that defers its

17 Roberto Merino, 'Marcas de Viaje', in *Remota*, *op. cit.*, p.83.

presence in the infinitesimal makes the airmail painting a swirl of nearness and remoteness for any point or dimensional moment, a pure imminence of *the stay*, the *arrival*, the *departure* and the *voyage*. To reach *anywhere*, the departure, for example, would require covering the infinite, that which cannot be covered: Achilles does not reach the tortoise. The translation (translocation) fails in the infinitesimal. And nonetheless it is translated.

13. Point of departure, points along a route, point of arrival, *beginning-middle-end*. The pretension to universality of this particular technology of movement – *constant translation (translocation)* – is interrupted by the airmail painting at the same moment that it is exercised, not only by making its paradoxes visible in turning arrival into departure, the middle into arrival and departure, and the departure into middle, but also by connecting it point to point with another technology of movement, the *continuous metamorphosis* of character. The airmail painting does not just go from point to point in constant passage. It mutates, at the same moment, in a continuous transformation of its character.

14. If vector C is considered abstractly in movement between points A and B, why vector C makes the trip remains unknown. But if the vector in movement is a singular *fold*, supposed to be an animal, then we already know that the movement has been made from A (the nest) so as to eat, or to migrate, or to reproduce, or seek protection, or for many of these things at once and others. Having arrived at *fold* B (supposed to be food), and with its need satisfied, the animal has not only moved, but also changed its body qualitatively, just as it has changed the body of A, of B and of the state of things ‘as a whole’ (*fold* D) that included the *folds* A, B, the shift C and the metamorphosis C, along with the metamorphosis of A, B and D, through which the movement took place.

15. Why would the airmail painting constantly travel from point to point if

not to continuously vary its character by causing the character of the whole (open), in which it varies, to change? Leaving a particular context of intentionalities and transferences such as Santiago de Chile 1992, and journeying to another, Kassel 1992, London 1993, New York 1993, Rotterdam 1993–94, Wellington 1994, Glasgow 1994–95 and Santiago de Chile 1998, *Liquid Ashes*,¹⁸ like the quote, ‘in each case erodes all ownership’,¹⁹ always delivering itself otherwise than it was written, saying one thing in its original context and something else upon arrival, and thus always varying as if it were *written with magic ink*, ceaselessly undoing the characters of its origin, point of arrival and journey. In each *fold*, the airmail painting does and says what it could not do nor say in any other, constituting itself in translation (translocation), in the *passion and death* of the *Same*.

16. The *fold* is not a simple cut that creates binary poles: same/other, beginning/end, before/after, right/left, cause/effect, up/down. It is rather an effervescence that activates unstable coordinates by breaking down their topologies. Before cutting and producing bilateralisms, the *fold* re-launches these terms, built upon each other, by triggering their mutual infection in such a way that they are born without the possibility of topologically anchoring themselves as themselves, barred from identity and presence. The *fold* institutes qualitative disturbances of heterogeneous in-differentiation, not quantitative sequences of homogenous differentiation, as with translation (translocation).

17. In addition to travelling through time and space arranged chronologically and geographically according to fixed itineraries, as it appears with the itineraries mapped in *The 6th History of the Human Face* (1989) in the artist’s book *Mundana*, the airmail painting travels in a time and space produced by the clash between the archives that inhabit it and those that it traverses and that see it pass, taking their glances with it. The airmail painting is time’s self-generating intensity itself.²⁰

18 The title of *Pintura Aeropostal No. 96*.

19 Walter Benjamin, ‘El origen del *Trauerspiel* alemán’ (1963), *Obras* (trans. Jorge Navarro Pérez), vol. 1, Madrid: Abada Editores, 2006, p.268. For the English translation see W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (trans. John Osborne), London and New York: Verso, 1998.

20 Nelly Richard, ‘Nosotros/los otros’, in *Mapa: Pinturas Aeropostales/The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn 1984–1992*, *op. cit.*, p.97.

18. The airmail painting is a manner of dealing with different technologies of space, of time, of the totality, of the fragmentary, of painting, of printing. What is crucial to this manner is the disruption of permanence and stable settlement, the disturbance of the *Same*.

19. Far from the currents but in their crossroads, the airmail painting vibrates in the *instantaneous anachronism*,²¹ the polytechnic synchrony, the heterochronic simultaneity of its ingredients. The latter arrange themselves in the paintings in a fashion similar to how the ingredients of a *small banquet* are arranged: 'none is self-sufficient, none is alive or dead, none has an age or specific weight, nor is its scope agreed, nor the effects of its position upon the whole; none is smooth, harsh, soft or watery; all are ready and available, waiting to be connected and thus relinquish their original inertia'.²² The character 'of each ingredient, instead of blending with the others, interferes in them [...] Is not the History of Painting a cookery book?'²³

20. As for the temporal montage, in 1980, three years prior to the *invention* of the airmail painting, Ronald Kay wrote about the heterochronic simultaneity of Dittborn's painting and graphics: 'Each of the materials arranged ... according to specific use and applications, in a datable period, bears the memory of its uses and applications. Each technique carries with it ... a way of relating to the world ... Working simultaneously with different techniques ... implies working ... accompanied by a group of memories. The convergence of memories leads each one to think and reflect upon the others, and induces them to exchange their recollections. What they express as a whole is the view that each one has gained of the others ... To refer to a photo from *Stadium*²⁴ with serigraphs (silkscreen prints), through photomechanical methods, is to expose a great number of techniques superimposed and mounted upon one another ... a body constructed and regulated by sport ... the snapshot taken by the photojournalist ... a specific camera ... the opening of the lens ...

a film with a corresponding sensibility ... silkscreen's manual printing, carried out with photomechanical methods, through the elected silk with a specific number of points, a different medium, with an extension, a colour ... the print in the magazine after having been diagrammed, widened, trimmed and plotted ... the mechanical multiplication with a predetermined ink on predisposed paper ... To the reality extracted by the photograph, to which must be added all the works that have been done with in, in addition to each one of the glances that each technique brings about ... the era deposited in the photograph ... the temporal quality of the graphic interventions, reproduction and translation (translocation), as well as the materials used, which stage an allusion ... The exegeses of space (social) put into work by Dittborn's oeuvre, the same precision that must be invested in the temporal breakdown, would have to be applied.'²⁵

21. The airmail painting is not defined by any particular technology. It calls upon and assembles various technologies of movement, just as it calls upon and assembles different printing technologies and other things, intercepting its archives' vicissitudes. This summoning, the clash of technologies, makes up its primordial scene. One could speak of a machine that synchronises techniques major and minor, current and outdated, public and private, expired and recycled. In such a way one past tense is exchanged for another, one present for another and one future for another, writes Dittborn, until they form a means of production without method, a patchwork of means of production.

22. The airmail painting does not just contain Kraft paper; non-woven fabric; cotton tussah; sailcloth; coloured wool; needle; embroidery; back-stitch; mending; touch-ups; rolling pins; feathers; ink; paint; drawing; printed, handwritten and waxed-seal writing; Monotype; photomechanics; photo-silkscreen; photo-silkscreen photocopies of magazines, newspapers, personal and press photos;

21 See E. Dittborn et al., *Desierta: pinturas aeropostales, videos*, Santiago de Chile: Museo de Artes Visuales, 2010, p.38.

22 E. Dittborn, 'Fugitiva', *op. cit.*, fragment 15.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Stadium* was a Chilean sports magazine. It was published between 1941 and 1982, reaching a total of 2,043 issues.

25 Ronald Kay, *Del espacio de acá*, Santiago de Chile: Editores Asociados, 1980, pp.44—45.

photographic studies; photographs of the tribes Selknam, Yamana and Alakawulup taken by a German anthropologist who lived in those communities in 1920, of drawings made by schizophrenic patients; Identikits and spoken portraits made by the Chilean police; children's drawings made by computer; printed and basted faces. It incorporates that which incorporates it. Its body is not just the patchwork that folds into the envelope and unfolds onto the wall. It is also the envelope that holds it, the plane that carries it, the integrally computerised Airbuses or Boeings, the airline, the network of airports, the aerial superhighways, the atmosphere, the planet as envelope. It traverses, gazes and takes along the glances of the landscapes and places that look at it.

23. Undergoing no variation itself, the airmail painting continuously changes places, dividing space infinitesimally. At the same time, its character varies without changing places, always *being* something other than itself. Bringing these two movements together, the airmail painting turns constant translation (translocation) into continuous metamorphosis. Much more a turbulence than an essence.

The airmail painting's body is not just the patchwork that folds into the envelope and unfolds onto the wall. It is also the envelope that holds it, the plane that carries it, the computerised Airbuses or Boeings, the airline, the network of airports.

24. When Dittborn pointed out that the airmail painting is the paradox of 'containing an abyss',²⁶ that which cannot be contained, he alluded to the *continuous metamorphosis* of the airmail painting as a virtuality that never finished becoming or *unbecoming*, destroying any recognition in the imminence of a revelation that never manages to manifest itself, but which never ceases to emerge. Insofar as it is *continuous*

metamorphosis, the airmail painting consists of 'being no longer what it is', 'not-yet-being what it is', 'indefinitely deferring its conditions of legibility',²⁷ rupturing the finished work as fetish upon which designs — of museum value, the curatorial circuit, cultural patrimony, the object of aesthetic science and the privileged metonymy of a historical era — are built.

25. 'What an airmail painting wants to say is never to be asked, there is nothing to understand in it. One must ask how it works, how its connections do or do not produce intensities within which multiplicities introduce and metamorphose their own ... An airmail painting does not exist but for the outside and on the outside. It does not have an object or a subject, it is made of materials fabricated in multiple ways, from diverse and varying data and velocities. From the moment an airmail painting is attributed to a subject, the materials' work and the exteriority of its relations are neglected. In the airmail painting ... there are connective and divisive lines, strata, territorialities; but also lines of flight, de-territorialising and de-stratifying motions. The comparative velocities of movement, of flow along these lines, lead phenomena of relative delay and viscosity, or, to the contrary, of precipitation and rupture, to interlace ... There is no difference between what an airmail painting says and the way it is made.'²⁸

26. The airmail painting's artistic coefficient and its political coefficient are produced upon *fitting together, blending, fastening, producing* materials, fibres, technologies, methods, on top of each other, so that between them they produce *catastrophe*. That small *catastrophe* is the key, the *fold*, the *in-between* that brings about the airmail painting's journey, *constant translation (translocation)* and *continuous metamorphosis*.

27. It is in the chapter 'Itinerarios'²⁹ in *Mundana* that the structural assembly of *constant translation (translocation)* and *continuous metamorphosis* become explicit. On the one hand, it is a question

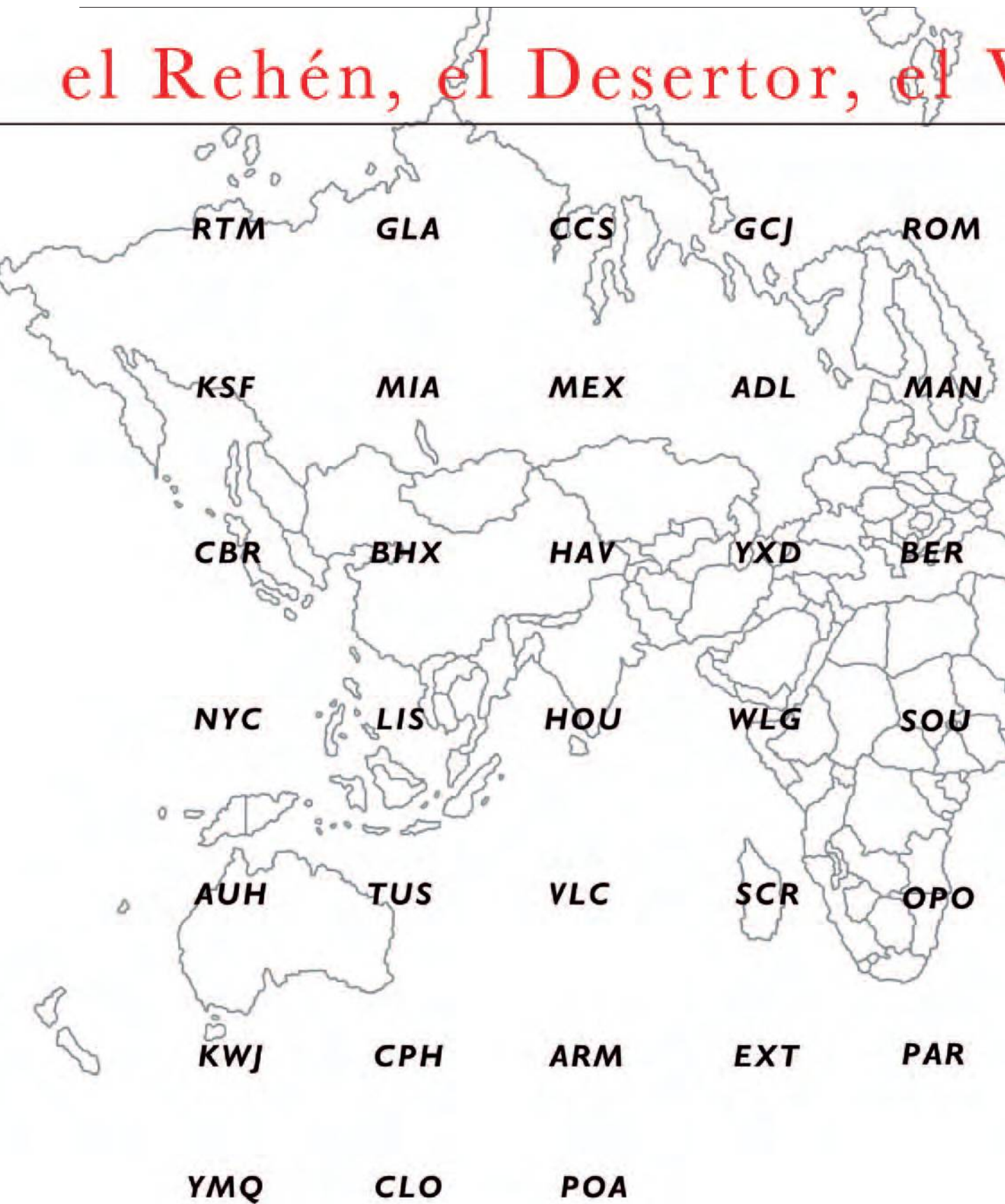
26 E. Dittborn, *Mundana*, *op. cit.*, p.46.

27 Pablo Oyarzún, 'Protocollage de lectura', *Pinturas Postales de Eugenio Dittborn* (exh. cat.), Santiago de Chile: Francisco Zegers Editor, 1985, p.11.

28 See E. Dittborn, *La feliz del edén*, Santiago de Chile: self-published, 1983.

29 E. Dittborn, *Mundana*, *op. cit.*, pp.69—117.

el Rehén, el Desertor, el V



Vagabundo y el Náufrago



of the assembly of the lineal and teleological trajectory, consisting of the points of departure and arrival that the airmail painting constantly *practises*, and on the other hand, of the *continuous metamorphosis*, the *permanent variation* in character that the airmail painting carries out in a turbulence of nearness to and distance from itself.

28. With each airmail painting's graphic itinerary, 'Itinerarios' makes the structural assembly of these two technologies of airmail painting movement clear by bringing together the *geonomastics*, or the origins of place names, that encode the names-cities-points of its voyages around the globe.

29. 'Itinerarios' takes off with the *geonomastics* of the airmail painting:

Rotterdam (RTM), Glasgow (GLA), Caracas (CCS), Johannesburgo (GCJ), Roma (ROM), Seville (SPO), Wollongong (WOL), London (LHR), Buenos Aires (EZE), Perth (PER), Kassel (KSF), Miami (MIA), Mexico City (MEX), Adelaide (ADL), Manchester (MAN), Cuenca (CUE), Saint Louis (STL), Sydney (SYD), Chicago (CHI), Amsterdam (AMS), Canberra (CBR), Birmingham (BHX), Havana (HAV), Edmonton (YXD), Berlin (BER), Banff (YBA), Madrid (MAD), Boston (BOS), Vancouver (YVR), Santiago de Chile (SCL), New York (NYC), Lisbon (LIS), Houston (HOU), Wellington (WLG), Southampton (SOU), Melbourne (MEL), Lima (LIM), Brisbane (BNE), Castelló (CDT), Washington (WAS), Abu Dhabi (AUH), Tucson (TUS), Valencia (VLC), Scranton (SCR), Porto (OPO), São Paulo (SAO), Turin (TRM), Hamilton (YHM), Philadelphia (PHL), Gran Canaria (LPA), Guangzhou (KWJ), Copenhagen (CPH), Armidale (ARM), Exeter (EXT), Paris (PAR), Trujillo (TRU), Antwerp (ANR), Hobart (HBA), Cologne (CGN), Boston (BOS), Montreal (YMQ), Cali (CLO) and Porto Alegre (POA).

30. This constellation of names is not organised by taking into account the series of translations (translocations) that each airmail painting has accomplished

according to geometric and chronological sequences that form determined aeronautical routes and schedules, as might first be imagined and as is manifest in the graphic itinerary of *The 6th History of the Human Face*.

31. The onomastic constellation is a cipher of *continuous metamorphosis*. For this very reason, the names are arranged according to logic very different from that of the diagrams of translation (translocation) that encode the constant movement. The names, in accordance with *geonomastics*, are organised in a fashion similar to that used to arrange the ingredients that make up a *small banquet*, not according to a consecutive itinerary's sequential logic of fixed and predetermined locations, but rather according to their graphic sympathies, the number of phonemes, the harmony of sounds, the quantity and quality of power symbolised by the name, bringing closer together locations ontologically distant from one another, and distancing nearby territories, according to idiomatic turbulence, historical density, the airs and affronts of family, orohydrography, immaterial similarities — some colliding with others through nearness, or over distance through electrical synapses, in a way that in its combinations of influence *none is self-sufficient, nor is its scope agreed, nor the effects of its position upon the whole, all are ready and available, waiting to be connected and thus relinquish their original inertia, none blends with another though it interferes in and disrupts it.*³⁰ In the *fold*, in the *in-between* or joint that brings the names together and takes them apart, they are displayed just as they are in preparation, and they become indisposed just as they are prepared.

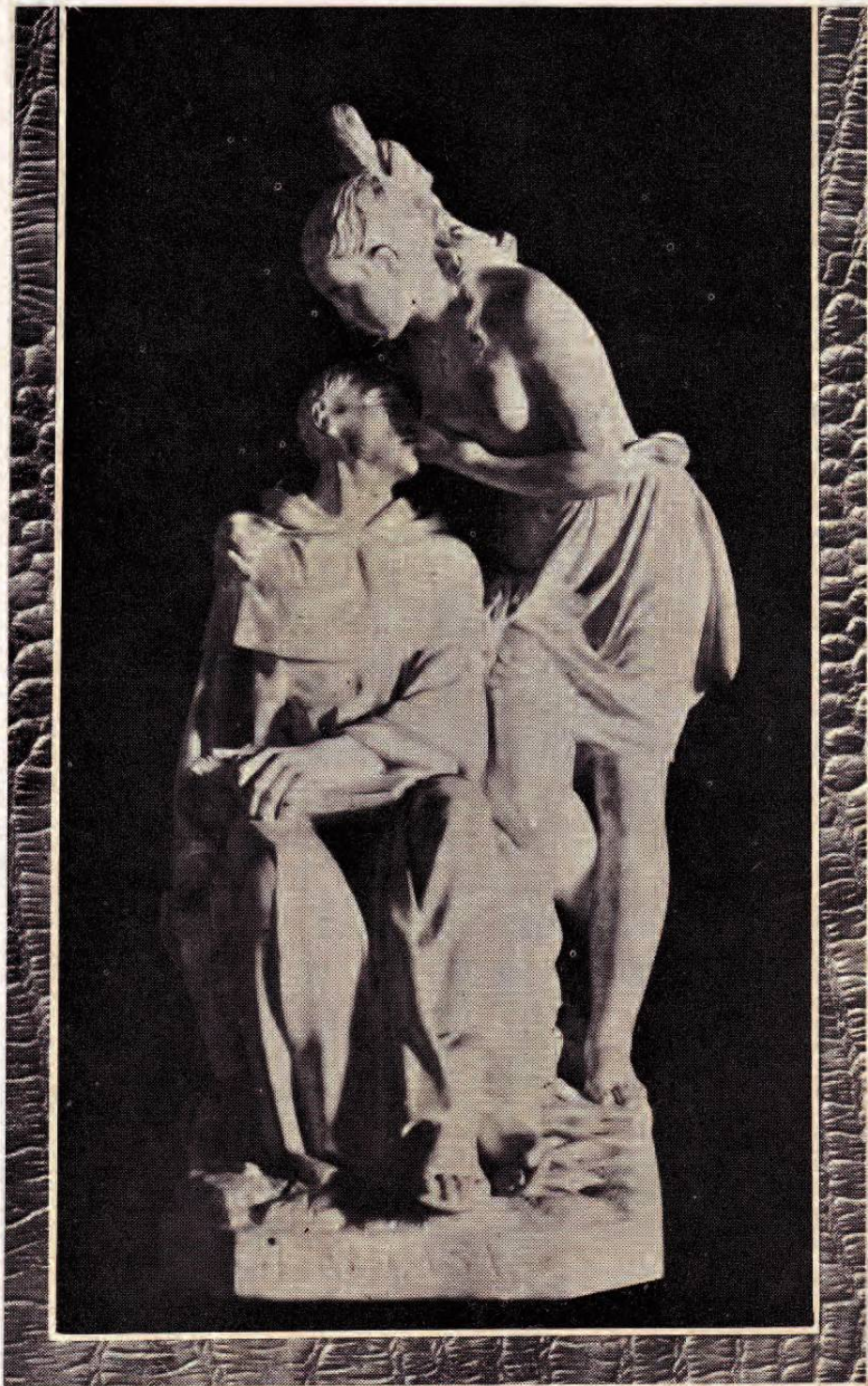
32. It has been said that airmail paintings are 'kinetic metaphors'.³¹ Etymologically, 'kinetic metaphor' translates as 'mobile transport'. The translation's idiomatic deficit brings into view a precise concept that alludes to two of the movements that an airmail painting carries out: 'metaphor' as the aforementioned movement involving translation (translocation), and 'metaphor' as exchange.

Previous spread: Eugenio Dittborn, *The Hostage, the Deserter, the Tramp, the Castaway*, 2012, schematic diagram with airport abbreviations, 29.7 × 38cm. Specially made for this issue of *Afterall*

Printed photograph found in *Las Fuerzas Armadas de Chile*, date unknown. Image reprinted in Eugenio Dittborn, airmail painting #112, *La Cuisine et la Guerre*, 1994, tincture, cotton fabric, stitching and photo-silkscreen on 24 sections of duck fabric, 4.2 × 16.8m. Both images courtesy the artist

30 E. Dittborn, 'Fugitiva', *op. cit.*, fragment 15.

31 G. Brett, 'Clouds of Dust', *op. cit.*, p.104.



Bellísima escultura del padre Bartolomé Las Casas, infatigable y cristianísimo misionero de la Araucanía, que se hizo amar de los indios por su inagotable caridad y por ser el más ar-



Printed engraving found in Théodore De Bry, *Grands Voyages*, c. sixteenth century. Image reprinted in Eugenio Dittborn, airmail painting #112, *La Cuisine et la Guerre*, 1994, tincture, cotton fabric, stitching and photo-silkscreen on 24 sections of duck fabric, 4.2 × 16.8m. Courtesy the artist

33. Metaphor is also, then, a trope for *qualitative exchangeability*, a type of metamorphosis that activates the airmail painting, which from ‘volume and letter’ is transformed into ‘paint and surface’; from folds in an envelope to display on a wall, again to folds in an envelope, to the deployment of the journey, as has been repeated on many occasions. From rise to the wall, to immobile suspension on the wall to descent from the wall (*pietá*). It is thus that Posada’s ‘hanged man’ becomes, for Dittborn, a *matrix* for airmail paintings: ‘in spite of being hung – suspended – the hanged man has both feet on the ground; hence he is a bridge, the connection between the sky – the airmail painting in a plane, in transit – and the earth – the airmail paintings unfurled and exhibited in their destinations: they travel in a plane that is suspended from the sky and then they are suspended from a wall just as the hanged man is suspended from a rope’.³²

34. In *continuous metamorphosis* the airmail painting does not go from one fixed form to another, from envelope and volume (sculpture), to surface and paint, to letter and route. It does not go from one recognisable link to another. It does not become, as an exchange, letter, seam, painting, sheet, wall, feather, raft of the Medusa, boomerang, Noah’s ark, castaway’s bottle, etc. It is located faraway from each of those pauses, eroding topological snapshots through the middle where several of them intersect. *Continuous metamorphosis* undoes the connective back-stitch in a changing without seasons that characterises the metamorphosis’s allegorical undoing as the artistic creation of a flow of images without starting point or ending point, without orientation toward a result or foundation – more than the representational exchangeability of the metaphor. As *continuous metamorphosis* the airmail painting does not use metaphor. Its character as painting does not become that of sculpture, letter, etc.

35. The co-implication of the assembled elements, folded upon one another, but above all the co-implication of the limit, the *in-between* in them, erodes the gender

contracts that language safeguards. During *continuous metamorphosis*, the airmail painting remains unsteady in the virtuality of the cross-road, in the Hamlet-like zone of indecision and the systematic destruction of identity and position.

36. At the same time, as *continuous metamorphosis*, the airmail painting does not represent one thing (a reality) before another (a spectator). It testifies on itself before itself. But this ‘itself’ must be taken *cum grano salis*. Because if the airmail painting’s code is exempt from something it is *Sameness*. It is nothing more and nothing less than its materials. Its content is its form and vice versa, *undecidably*, and in this sense, it coincides with its *thing*. But the thing with which it coincides is always something else: not ‘that which becomes of what has emerged, but rather that which is emerging in the passing [...] it is to be found in the flow of *becoming* like a whirlwind that swallows the material relating to that genesis in its rhythm’.³³ It forever testifies beyond its testimony *in each case*.

32 S. Cubitt and E. Dittborn, ‘Una Entrevista Aeropostal’, in *Remota*, *op. cit.*, p.28.

33 W. Benjamin, ‘El origen del *Trauerspiel* alemán’, *op. cit.*, p.297.