

Rojo is the Colour of Memory

Sebastián Oreamuno

Abstract “Rojo is the Colour of Memory” is a multi-media project about my immigration experience and my identity as a 1.5 generation Chilean immigrant to Canada through the colours red and rojo (the Spanish word for “red”). In this project, I focus on a memory: encountering the colour “red” when I was eight and had just moved to Canada, and the disorientation of that experience. For me, red did not look like rojo: red was more pinkish in hue and rojo, more orangey. Rojo is what I had grown up with in Chile. It had been my favourite colour. But red was not rojo, and that was a confusing and enlightening insight. Through these colours, this project explores the bodily shiftings that occur in the context of im/migration, and what gets lost in translation, which is not necessarily always a linguistic loss. Red and rojo is composed of 77 abstract drawings and written fragments that return to that memory to recuperate and rediscover. This project has been grounding and has allowed me to understand my in-between identity, which emerges between two cultural horizons.

Keywords: red, memory, in-between identity

Rojo es el Color de la Memoria

Resumen “Rojo es el color de la memoria” es un proyecto en multimedia sobre mi experiencia migratoria y mi identidad como inmigrante chileno de generación 1.5 en Canadá, articulado a través de los colores *red* y *rojo*. En este proyecto, me centro en un recuerdo: el encuentro con el color *rojo* cuando tenía ocho años y acababa de mudarme a Canadá, y la desorientación que produjo esa experiencia. Para mí, *red* no se veía como *rojo*: red tenía un matiz más rosado y rojo, uno más anaranjado. *Rojo* era el color con el que había crecido en Chile. Había sido mi color favorito. Pero *red* no era *rojo*, y esa fue una revelación tan confusa como esclarecedora. A través de estos colores, el proyecto explora los desplazamientos corporales que ocurren en el contexto de la im/migración y aquello que se pierde en la traducción, lo cual no siempre constituye una pérdida lingüística. *Red* y *rojo* está compuesto por 77 dibujos abstractos y fragmentos escritos que regresan a ese recuerdo para recuperarlo y redescubrirlo. Este proyecto ha sido una experiencia de arraigo y me ha permitido comprender mi identidad del “entre”, que emerge entre dos horizontes culturales.

Palabras Clave: rojo; memoria; identidad liminal

Rojo é a Cor da Memória

Resumo Rojo é a Cor da Memória” é um projeto multimídia sobre a minha experiência de imigração e minha identidade como imigrante de geração 1.5 do Chile para o Canadá por meio das cores *red* e *rojo* (vermelho em inglês e espanhol). Neste projeto, concentro-me em uma memória: o encontro com a cor red quando eu tinha oito anos e havia acabado de me mudar para o Canadá, e a desorientação dessa experiência. Para mim, red não se parecia com *rojo*: *red* tinha um tom mais rosado e *rojo*, mais alaranjado. *Rojo* foi a cor com a qual cresci no Chile. Tinha sido a minha cor favorita. Mas red não era *rojo*, e essa foi uma percepção confusa e reveladora. Com essas cores, esse projeto explora os deslocamentos corporais que ocorrem no contexto da i/migração, e o que se perde com a tradução, que não é necessariamente sempre uma perda linguística. O projeto *red* e *rojo* é composto de 77 desenhos abstratos e fragmentos escritos que retornam àquela memória com o intuito de recuperar e redescobrir. Este trabalho tem me ancorado e me permitido compreender minha identidade híbrida, de entrelugar, que emerge entre dois horizontes culturais.

Palavras-chave: vermelho; memória; identidade híbrida

Sebastián Oreamuno is a queer, disabled artist-academic who was born in Santiago, Chile, on Mapuche territory. I grew up on Skwxwú7mesh territory and I’m currently based in Tkarón:to, which has been care-taken by many First Nations, including the present treaty holders the Mississaguas of the Credit. I’m grateful to (study) dance on this land and to be completing a doctorate on the relationship between movement and memory with a focus on cueca, the Chilean national dance.

“Rojo is the colour of memory” is inspired by my immigration experience and my identity as a 1.5-generation Chilean immigrant to Canada through the colours red and rojo (the Spanish word for “red”). This project focusses on a specific memory: encountering the colour “red” when I was eight years old and had just moved to Canada, and the disorientation of that experience. For me, red did not look like rojo: red was more pinkish in hue and rojo, more orangey. Rojo is what I had grown up with in Chile. It had been my favourite colour. But red was not rojo. Through rojo and red, I attend to the bodily shifting that occurs in the context of im/migration; as well as what gets lost in translation, which is not necessarily always a linguistic loss. The collages and poems that follow are informed by 77 drawings and written fragments that return to that memory—a practice that allowed me to recuperate and re(dis)cover.

The poems and collages signal the performance of an in-between migrant identity. Technically, I am considered a 1.5-generation migrant: I immigrated with my parents but as a child. This means that I had little choice in the matter and likely had no understanding of what was to come. As a 1.5-generation immigrant, I grew up between two or more cultural horizons. My in-between identity emerges in “the borderlands,” as Gloria Anzaldúa¹ (1987) called that place, space and the circumstances that induce movement through negotiation; circumstances through which one is continually emerging as the negotiations change and the borderlands shift.

The first collage, “rojo used to be my favourite colour,” situates me in Chile as a child, where my senses were first shaped through reading, writing, colouring, math and familial gatherings. The ribbon that weaves around me is rojo, the colour that tethers me to and reminds me of Chile; and the medallion that it holds has the emblem of the Catholic all-boys’ school I attended while I lived there, Notre Dame. This is where my migrant journey began.

The second image, “migrant mathematics: rojo ≠ red,” relates to that “strange encounter” with red, once I arrived in Canada. Sara Ahmed² (2000) asks that we attend to the surprise in strange encounters and allow those surprises to take us on journeys. The difference in hue between red and rojo in this collage speaks to that surprise; however, together the crayons are colouring an emergent subject with tentacular reach, a being not yet figured. There may be loss here, but there isn’t negation, only multiplicity.

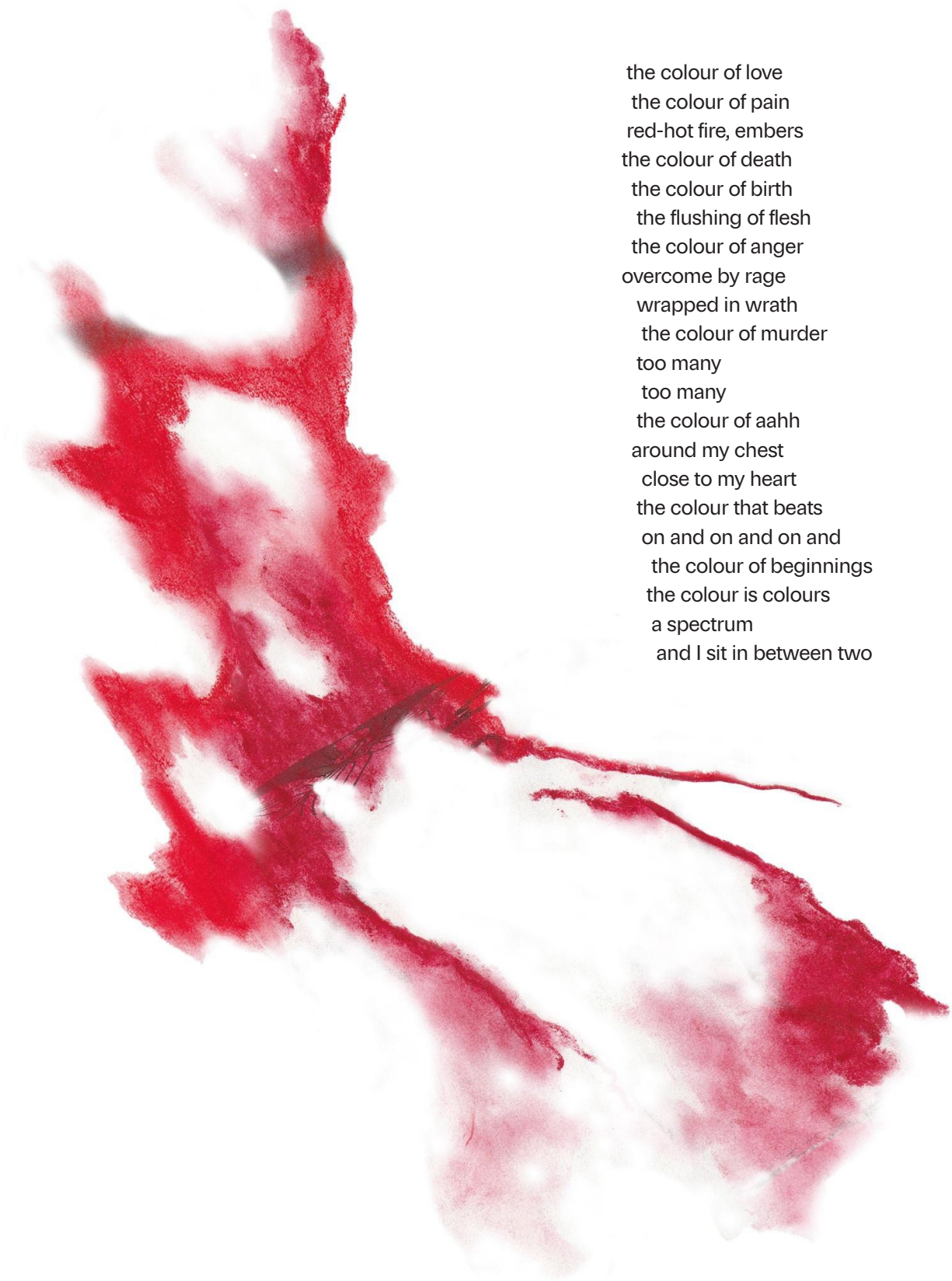
Unlike the second image, the third collage focusses on a central figure: the apple—that fruit that has been associated with knowledge in the Judeo-Christian tradition. C. Nadia Seremetakis³ (1994) asserts that the senses, those faculties that help us perceive and make sense of the world, emerge from within cultural contexts. “Pinta la manzana roja/colour the the apple red”, a pedagogical instruction, illustrates how my sensorium, how I encounter the world, has been shaped by Chile and Canada.

The final collage returns to me as an adult: a 1.5-generation immigrant, the child of contradictions that understands and perceives with mixed senses, sitting in between two (or more) worlds. I have resisted calling myself Chilean-Canadian, a hyphenated identity. It feels too neat, too uncomplicated, too static... I prefer to think of myself as a node—the hyphen, that sign that links and connects, that space—emerging with and within. This is the in-between migrant identity I perform and why I am “proudly in between.”

¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books

² Ahmed, Sara. 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge

³ Seremetakis, C. Nadia, 1994. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press



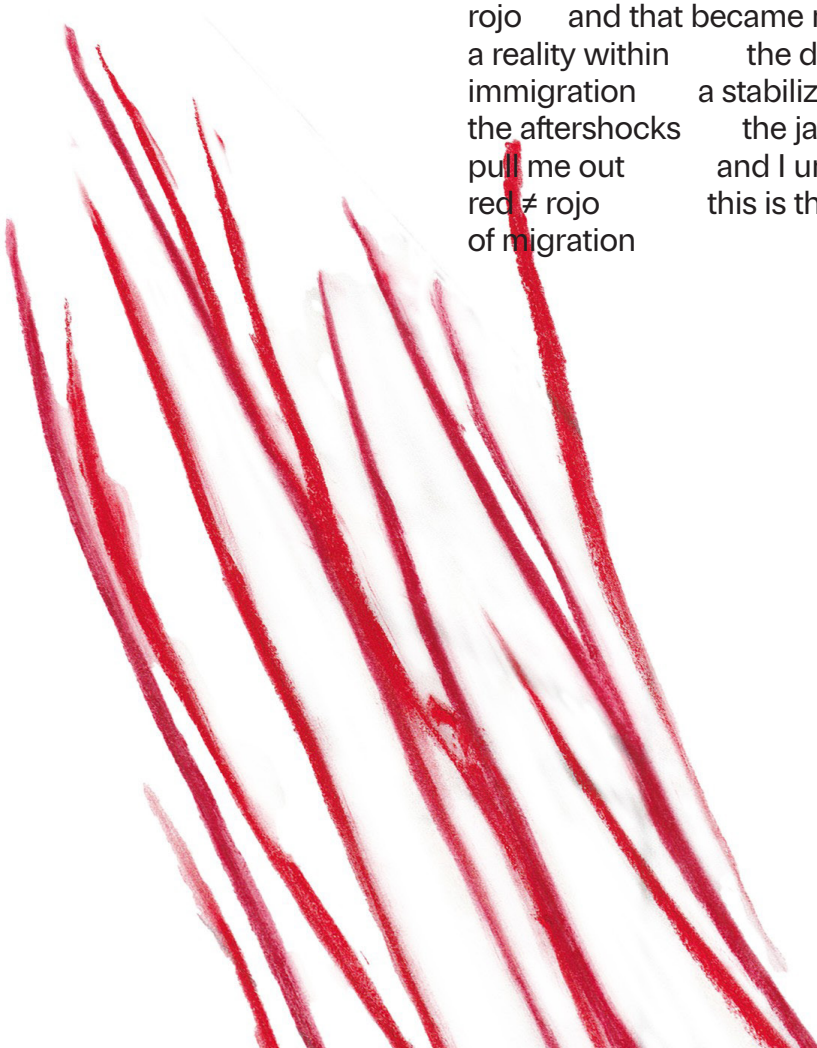
the colour of love
the colour of pain
red-hot fire, embers
the colour of death
the colour of birth
the flushing of flesh
the colour of anger
overcome by rage
wrapped in wrath
the colour of murder
too many
too many
the colour of aahh
around my chest
close to my heart
the colour that beats
on and on and on and
the colour of beginnings
the colour is colours
a spectrum
and I sit in between two



rojo used to be my favourite colour



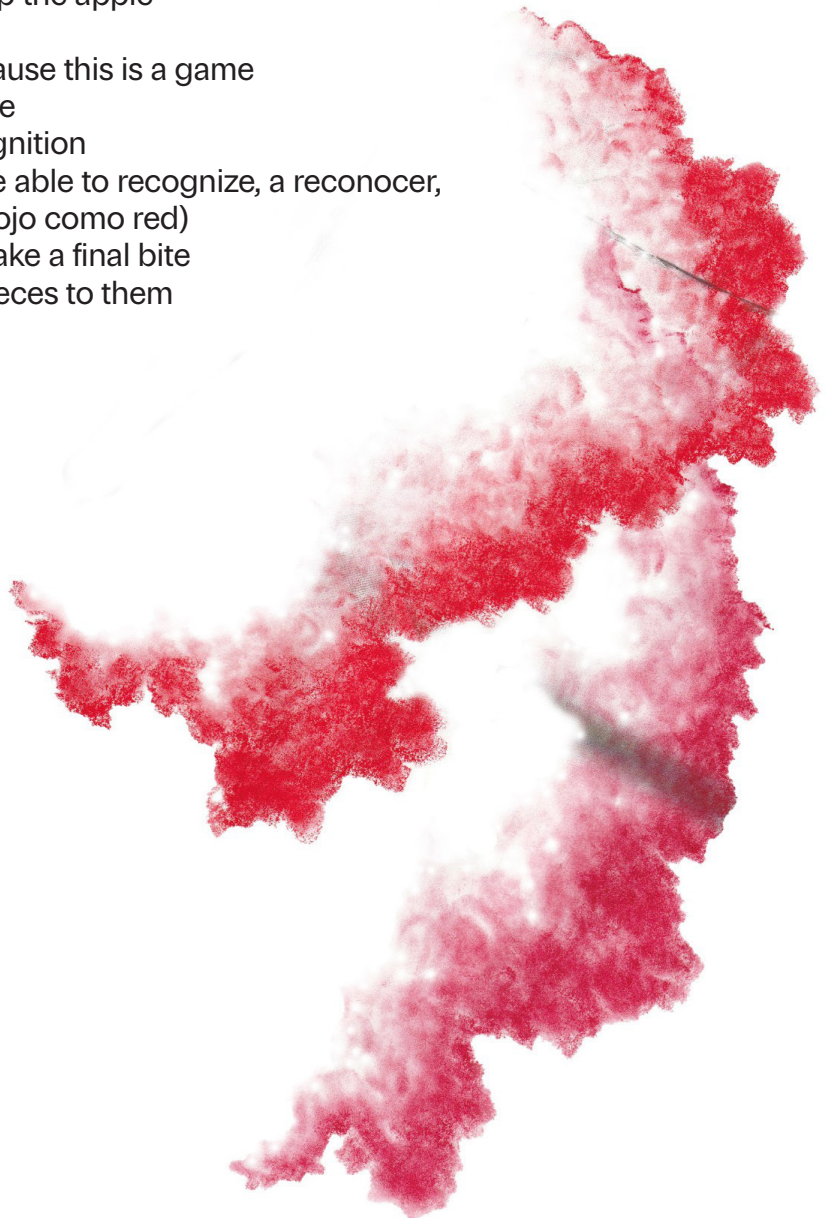
there are claws but also sometimes it feels
like a dream how could my senses sense
a difference? how could my senses
become disoriented? it's as if I had to go
through that disorientation to re-orient
myself to ground myself in a
different certainty the equation was
broken red was not the same as
rojo and that became my new reality
a reality within the daze of
immigration a stabilization following
the aftershocks the jaws of life
pull me out and I understand
red $\neq$ rojo this is the mathematics
of migration





pinta la manzana roja / colour the apple red

I colour inside and outside the borders of the apple
the red apple, la manzana roja
la pinto roja, red
then I take a bite and leave that piece to the side
I'm asked to colour the apple with red
pinto la manzana con el color rojo como me han enseñado
they've taught me this, they've taught me this colour's name
the apples are not to blame but I take another bite
they never asked to be painted red, I take another bite
I leave the pieces on the side
sigo pintando la manzana roja pero me salgo de las lineas
the lines, the borders, make up the apple
the red, el rojo, le da color
I take another bite because this is a game
I put the piece to the side
this is a game of recognition
and I'm supposed to be able to recognize, a reconocer,
red as rojo (and rojo como red)
I lose and I take a final bite
I give the pieces to them





proudly in between

por que era rojo mi
color preferido?
el color del
copihue
el color de la
bandera
el color de Notre
Dame, our lady
el color del
Comunismo
el color que
traje a Canadá
the colour I held
in my body
rojo
was met by another
red
the colour of the
maple leaf
the colour of
the flag
the colour of
McDonalds, Coca-
Cola, the Liberals
and Garibaldi
Highlands
el color de los
desaparecidos
the colour of the
missing and murdered
colours change but
aren't replaced
stripped of rojo but
with red and rojo
stripes

