A Trip Through the Mind Jail
A Textual History of raúlrsalinas’ Magnum Opus

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Abstract
This essay attends to the poetry of Chicano activist raúlrsalinas (1934–2008), specifically his most transgressive and innovative works which appear in A Trip Through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursions. I approach Salinas’s poetic works as textual events following Joseph Grigely’s reflections in Textualterity: Art, Theory and Textual Criticism where he conceives of texts as works in motion that frame the work of art as polytextual and comprised of multiple iterations.

A brief biography: the poetic-politics of raúlrsalinas

Chicano poet and activist Raúl. R. Salinas [raúlrsalinas] was born in San Antonio, TX in 1934. He grew up in the multi-racial working-class neighborhoods of Austin where he started to develop his sense of artistry, poetry, and solidarity. At the age of seventeen, Salinas joined a seasonal workers’ caravan departing for the strawberry fields of California. In 1957 he began his long and painful cycle of imprisonment. Salinas spent the next 15 years surviving the brutality of the carceral state; his sentences were mostly due to low level drug offenses. These years of torment and torture cannot be downplayed and yet his stay in four federal penitentiaries (Soledad in California; Huntsville in Texas; Leavenworth in

1. Salinas went by several names throughout his life. The nicknames of his youth were Roy and Tapón. When he started publishing, he signed his work raúlrsalinas. This use of the lower case was inspired by American poet e. e. cummings. Later in life when he was doing activist work for the American Indian Movement he was given the name Autumn Sun. In his poem On Being/Becoming he writes, “Naming ceremonies / Autumn Sun / Speak to many nations / for red nations” (2007, 5). During the 1970’s and 1980’s Salinas worked closely with the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, which advocated for the release of political prisoners.
Kansas; Marion in Illinois) created the circumstances for the radicalization of his political consciousness and for his artistry to develop and sharpen.\(^2\)

Upon his release in 1972 and with the help of scholars and activists in Seattle, Salinas was admitted to the University of Washington as a student and shortly after hired as an instructor of Chicano literature. Throughout the 1970's Salinas became an important member of the Chicano Movement, both in its literary and political manifestations. His poetry was published in anthologies and chapbooks, and he dedicated himself fully to the internationalist revolutionary politics arising from the Chicano, Black, and Indigenous lived experiences. By the early 1980's his parole issues were resolved sufficiently to allow him to return to his hometown of Austin, Texas. Back in Austin his political, literary, and activist lives converged with the founding of Resistencia, a bookstore for working class people in East Austin. This bookstore would eventually become Red Salmon Arts, an Austin cultural institution that operates as a bookstore, a local archive, a printing press, and a community arts center for the Chicanx, Latinx, and Native American communities.

Salinas died in 2008 as a recognized and celebrated poet and activist.\(^3\) He left behind a rich legacy both material — a bookstore and printing press — and literary: his poetry is valued as a vital contribution to the canon of Chicanx and Latinx letters. His life was a genuine ‘trip’ through the politically charged hemispheric context. His poetry reflects the solidarity work he did on Indigenous reservations in North America, his visits to socialist Cuba, Nicaragua, and Chiapas as well as his constant demand for Black and Brown liberation. It is no surprise, then, that his best known,

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2. Salinas’s posthumous Memoir of Un Ser Humano: The Life and Times de raúl sa- linas (2018) is a vital biographical resource. It also includes unpublished poetry. For selected interviews, articles, and documents see raúl salinas and the Jail Machine: My Weapon is My Pen: Selected Writings by Raúl Salinas (2006) edited by Louis Mendoza. Salinas’ published poetry can be found in Un Trip Through the Mind Jail (1980, reprint 1999), East of the Freeway (1995) and Indio Trails: A Xicano Odyssey through Indian Country (2007). Salinas’s papers are archived at Stanford University’s Special Collections; the guide can be found here: https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf7m3nb2j4/. Lastly, for in-depth interviews with Salinas that touch upon his life, politics and poetics see: https://search-works.stanford.edu/?f%5Bcollection%5D%5B%5D=9083941&page=1&per_page=20&q=Ra%C3%BA+SALINAS&search_field=search&utf8=%E2%9C%93.

3. To understand Salinas within the context of Chicanx poetry, see Bruce-Novoa 1982 and Candelaria 1986. For foundational articles of Salinas scholarship, see Olguin 1997 and Mendoza 2003.
most cited and widely anthologized poem is titled *A Trip Through the Mind Jail* (1969), a nostalgic reflection on the Chicanx neighborhoods of his youth and his painful memories of prison life.

In this essay I will present the textual history of Salinas’s *magnum opus*, and, through this textual history, track Salinas’s evolution from prison poet to canonical poet. A textual history of *A Trip* shows the long and complex path from marginality that Salinas has to take to establish himself as a representative voice within a Chicanx/Latinx cultural context. As will be made apparent, the multimedia nature of this poem demands that its textual history be understood as a complex artistic network that expands beyond the page and that sends reader and critic in multiple directions.

**Textual history of *A Trip Through Mind Jail***

*A Trip Through the Mind Jail* was ‘born’ in the magazines and newspapers that Salinas and other Chicanx inmates edited and published inside Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary in Kansas. However, there is some confusion in the scholarship regarding the first public iteration of this text due to some inconsistencies between Salinas’s bibliography and the epistolary accounts from this period of his life. Salinas’s letters, like most his papers, are housed in his archives at Stanford University. Most scholarly sources maintain that this poem was first published by the newspaper *Aztlán de Leavenworth* on May 5, 1970 in broadsheet format (see Figs. 1–1a). However, the epistolary record mentions a few other publications in which this poem appeared at about the same time.

In a letter to Dorothy Harth dated August 12, 1972, Salinas states, “It [Trip] has appeared in 1 general prison magazine and 2 Chicano prison papers; in 2 national Chicano magazines, 2 anthologies and 1 Chicano press paper” (2006, 154). The general prison magazine he refers to is *New Era Penal Magazine* (Leavenworth, KS) for which Salinas was co-editor. One of the two Chicano prison papers he references is the above mentioned and cited *Aztlán de Leavenworth* (Leavenworth, KS) and the other may refer to *Penal Digest International* (Iowa City, IA). The two national Chicano magazines may be *Con Safos Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA) and *Entrelineas Magazine* (Kansas City, MO). The two anthologies mentioned

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A Trip Through the Mind Jail

“A Trip Through the Mind Jail” is a major work by S. Vidales Martínez. The excerpt provided is from this work. The text discusses the historical context of the period and the impact of certain events on the subjects. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the past to appreciate the present, suggesting that mistakes and lessons from the past are crucial for future endeavors.
A Trip Through The Mind Jail

LA LONA

Neighborhood of my youth,
domesticated, served forever from
the universe.
You live on, captive, in the locally
calledblocks of my mind.
Neighborhood of endless hills
saddled streams—all charmed lined
that never found in a café;
rope raisers generated
from the Ashram revolution.
Neighborhood of dilapidated community hall,
1909 Classic Spanish Revival,
recently (May 5–Sept. 16) gathering
of the families,
concerned pride on
these two significant days.
Spun by the elders
patricians with activeness of oppression
frightening attached upon mass faces.
"Some of the Independents"
Exhals in allegiance to the lei-caller
shibboleth names Sueton & Shiloh
their heroic deeds. Nostalgia tales of war
under Williams’s command. No one listened,
no one seemed to really care.
Afterwards, the dance. Robert Mccain
dancing prancing horses
across splattered wooden floor,
they never danced to dance with boys.
The careful meeting by barbecues one-pota
& 1 9 years old. "Wide's horse-lagged,
so we know she’s done it, huh?"

Neighborhood of Sunday night jamming
at Garland Church.
Figments for any occasion
holidays holy days happy days
round and round the prouncing
sake snow cones—frosted—& caramels
the game—things come and go
wheel missing eyes at girls from cleaner neighborhoods
the marathons burned
who remembering all giggles and excitement.
Neighborhood of Tongue down to Bema Vista—
with 50% of Lepe projects—neighborhood
wasn’t reborn as the rooftops, causing peaks
in people’s private nigh time haunts
bearing gifts of Juicy Fruit gum for
the Project girls/dancing them in adolescence
juggling skinned knees & being run off for the right
dimensioned taking home afternoons spurred
stepping stay-at-home clinics in search of
neighborhood joy
who seem to remember
the cream-town streets were more than mere fancy
embarrassed when acquaintances or friends or relations
were sent home excluded from class
for having clothes in their hair?
Did only Neighbors have clothes in their hair?

Gosh gosh!

Neighborhood of Caragom Park
where scary stories interspersed with
intergenerational outrages were exchanged
waiting for midnight and the haunting
image of La Llorona—the weeping lady
of our myths & folklore—she wept nightly
along the basins of Shaggy Creek,
for the children she’d lost or drowned
in some river (depending on the version).
I think I heard her once
and cried out of sadness and fear
running all the way home nearb hair at attention
swallow a pitch of table salt and
make the sign of the cross
sure cure for frightened Mexican boys.
Neighborhood of Spanish Town Café
first grown-up (11) hangout
Andreas,
talent manager, proprietor, took
victim ofougling mayburgers
your food: Primo de Rey/Usual—save our gain

SUPPLEMENT – PBO. INC. – ATDA. – LEADERMOUTH
2 DE MIJO IN 1970

you put up with us and still survived
You too, are granted immortality.
regiments of great and smaller
enlisting gone, drinking mascara
tiedly.
who family the neighborhood the gang
Recollect motions instead sessions on their hands
"Just doing things different"
"This one, for all troublesome kids will
be sent to Gatesville for 9 months."
Sure done far in career
whale was too low—believe the visit
the storm, the girls, we all die-tall

via:

Neighborhood of old-time artists
who please their talents on the pool’s
bathwater wells’ intimate adorned
with ancient symbols of their cults;

charly’s club
charly’s "hi." club

our very own conservation now big bang Johnny De—

neighborhood of chosen
where Lain abandoned
Pete Evans because of some
an unattainable stars
family, too, and his life easily sliced
by prison breaker’s razor.
Diana’s grocery & gas station
where crumpled bucket incidents
arguing over who drove home
and got 22 years for his crime.

Baruto 20 years a kind of burdock of weed. In that color,
no lawyer so why no trial its guilty.

Indian mothers, too, so unsure
of courteous trained-cucumber
filled arms across their bosoms
saying, "See pet pig."

neighborhood of my childhood
neighborhood that no longer exists
same dies young—fortunes—some rest in prisons
the rest drift away to be conjured up
in some distant world.
For me: only the how of Y2K journey is real
neighborhood that is no more
YOU ARE BOTH SUSPICIOUS OF MY PISHER!!!

Therefore, you ARE.

LA LONA—REBTSL—mellow
I hear you so grudge
I need you then, identity, a sense of belonging.
I need you now.
So essential to adult days of imprisonment,
you keep me safe from DEATH’s hungry jaws.

Crying/Smiling/Laughing.

I respect your being best,
My house of Austin
My house of Los Angeles
My yard of San Diego
My yard of Houston
My yard of San Juan
My yard of El Paso
My yard of Alburque
My yard of Denver

I Fields, Los Nacos, Avandilla, Calle Galaportia, Magnolia
Sueno Vista, Reina, La Salia, Chiquita, El Sur and all
Galaportia neighborhoods that now exist and once
existed; somewhere, someone remembers...
are Aztlan: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature (Valdez and Steiner 1972) and Literatura Chicana: Texto y Contexto/Chicano Literature: Text and Context (Castañeda-Shular, Ybarra-Frausto and Sommers 1972). I cannot speculate as to the Chicano press paper Salinas refers to.

I can only assert with confidence that A Trip Through the Mind Jail was published in Aztlan de Leavenworth because copies of this newspaper survive and are archived at Stanford’s Special Collections. It has been impossible to track down the other newspapers and magazines; none of them are archived at the Special Collections or available online, at least not to the best of my knowledge.

To set the record straight, Salinas’s posthumous Memoir of Un Ser Humano: The Life and Times de raúlrsalinas (2018) includes a detailed bibliography outlined by Lilia Raquel Rosas. By combining Rosas’s comprehensive bibliography with Salinas’s partial record as mentioned in his 1972 letter, it is possible to reconstruct the public iterations of A Trip Through the Mind Jail.

Known and accessible public iterations of A Trip Through the Mind Jail

Anthologies:


Chapbooks and books of poetry published by Salinas:

Newspapers:


*Iterations mentioned by Salinas but not accessible, available or archived:*

- *New Era Penal Magazine* (Leavenworth, KS)
- *Penal Digest International* (Iowa City, IA)
- *Con Safos Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA)
- *Entrelineas Magazine* (Kansas City, MO)

**First public text: the carceral iteration**

I will assume that the version of *A Trip* published in *Aztlan de Leavenworth* on May 5, 1970 is the first public iteration of this text given that this is the earliest available text and that the other contemporaneous ones are at present time out of reach. With that caveat and demand for future research, let us begin an analysis of the textual history of *A Trip Through the Mind Jail*. This poem was published on a newspaper broadsheet with the dimensions of 29.5 y 23.5 inches. The bilingual newspaper in which it appeared was edited and published by inmates at Leavenworth. In 1972 Salinas explained,

> A newspaper, which bears the name Aztlán, meaning “the lands to the North”, assumed to have been the point of origin for the Aztec nation, came to existence with the first issue printed in May 1970. To date, there have been four issues printed. With rare exception, the material for the paper is strictly Chicano convict work. We do not solicit outside material, and only on one occasion have we featured an article by someone other than the Chicano population of Leavenworth. In this manner we try to stress the importance of originality and the nurturing of unknown hidden talents in the arts, poetry, journalism, publication work, and public speaking.

(2010, 49).

As can be seen below (see Fig. 2), the team in charge of *Aztlán* was made up of Albert Mares (correspondence), Rubén Estrella (publicity), Alfredo Arellanes (reporter), Ricardo Mena (Vice-president), Raúl Salinas (editor) and Beto Palomino (programming). The editorial team found political and
artistic inspiration in Aztec iconography and history. The name of the newspaper is 'protected' by two images of Mexico King Tizoc (1436–1486). Also, the title and these figures are framed by a running design inspired by Aztec tiles and artwork on ceramic pottery. A slightly less elaborate running design also appears on the bottom of the page where the poem is published. These Indigenous patterns and figures are taken from the Stone of Tizoc, a basalt monolith measuring 26 ft. in diameter. This monolith resides at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.5

The same Serif type is used for the editorial on the front page as for the poem, except for the title of the poem, which appears to be in a stylized Helvetica type. The poem proper is dated September 14, 1969 and signed by the poet in all lower-case letters, a nod to the American poet e. e. cummings (1894–1962). The poem is dedicated to Eldridge Cleaver (1935–1998), a political activist and leader of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. As will be noted, Salinas withdrew this dedication years later.

5. For more on this see issue, see López Austin and López Luján 2010.
when Cleaver’s own political commitments changed. As can be seen, the poem’s first iteration is presented on a broadsheet broken up into two columns made up of 164 verses. Note that all words in Spanish are underlined as an educational tool.

Without a doubt the most appealing and engaging aspects of this poem are the three visual elements on the right-hand side. These placas (‘placas’ are Chicano shorthand for graffiti or tags) are considered by Salinas as stanzas fundamental to the poem. In a 1994 interview he states, “In our modern times of Chicano writings it is one of the first poems that utilizes graffiti as a stanza, that’s a stanza inasmuch as I understand the construction of the poem”. These graffiti stanzas will not always be published in future iterations as we will see shortly. Another noteworthy comment is that no subsequent iteration reproduces this poem in two columns on a broadsheet; rather, all future texts appear in books and ‘break’ the poem onto multiple pages.

**Subsequent anthological iterations: Valdez-Steiner 1972**

In 1972 Salinas’s poem was published in two anthologies. In *Aztlan: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature* the poem appears not on a broadsheet but broken up across six pages. All Spanish underlined words in the original are italicized in this anthology. The only major difference is that the Valdez-Steiner iteration does not include the graffiti stanzas that make this poem such an innovative and disruptive work of art. The editors and publishers at Knopf may have had difficulties in adding these images, which speaks to the creativity and ingenuity of the editors of *Aztlan de Leavenworth*, who edited and published this work behind bars and under duress.

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7. I refer here to the interview mentioned in footnote 2. This interview conducted by Olguín and Mendoza is also partially transcribed and published in *Salinas* 2006.
Subsequent anthological iterations:  
Castañeda, Ybarra-Frausto, and Sommers 1972

The other anthology from 1972, *Literatura Chicana: Texto y Contexto/Chicano Literature: Text and Context*, includes the graffiti stanza and also chooses to italicize rather than underline all Spanish words. Furthermore, this iteration expands the dedication to Eldridge Cleaver, which in previous iterations simply states, “For Eldridge”. This iteration reads:

[A Trip Through the Mind Jail is dedicated by a Chicano poet, raúlsa-linas, from his little room at Leavenworth, to his camarada wherever he is, El Eldridge (Leroy) Cleaver de Rose Hill, barrio Con Safos]

The editors of this anthology were the very scholars at the University of Washington who, through activism and advocacy, facilitated Salinas’s release from prison and his entry to the University. Given this close relationship it is fair to assume Salinas participated in elongating this dedication.

Subsequent anthological iterations:  
Ortego y Gasca 1973

The 1973 iteration in *We are Chicanos: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature* does not include the graffiti stanza, italicizes Spanish words, and replicates the simple dedication while including the last name “For Eldridge Cleaver”. A pedagogical addition made by this text is explanatory footnotes. For example, there is a footnote explaining that the Spanish term ‘tricolor’ refers to the Mexican flag, that the date May 5 celebrates the expulsion of the French Empire by Mexico, and that September 16 is Mexican Independence Day. These footnotes are directed at an audience that may not be bilingual and/or bicultural. As an interesting ekphrastic addition, this anthology includes a small painting within the pages of this poem by artist Salvador Valdez. Valdez’s painting has the same name as the poem and is a surrealist representation of the psychological suffering of inmates.
Subsequent anthological iterations:  
Gilb 2006

The most recent anthology, *Hecho en Tejas: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, includes the graffiti stanza, omits the dedication, and chooses to neither underline nor italicize any Spanish words. At the bottom of the first page of this poem, this anthology adds a brief biographical note about Salinas, explaining that Salinas was editor of *Aztlán de Leavenworth* “whose inaugural issue contained Salinas’ most famous poem, ‘Un Trip Through the Mind Jail’” (Gilb 2006, 286). There are several errors in this anthology: first, the poem is called *A Trip*, not *Un Trip*; second, the poem is erroneously titled *La Loma*; and lastly, the “Contents” also uses this erroneous title to refer to Salinas’s *magnum opus*. Neither Gilb’s “Introduction” nor any other part of the anthology explains these changes to the title.

Subsequent book iterations:
The chapbook *Viaje/Trip* from 1973

In 1973 Hellcoal Press published Salinas’s five-poem chapbook *Viaje/Trip*. This collection included *A Trip* as well as the poems *Los Caudillos*, *Ciego/Sordo/Mudo*, *Journey*, and *Journey II*. Hellcoal was a small, student-run press that received a small amount of institutional support from Brown University. The co-editors of Hellcoal were Jaimy Gordon and Bruce McPherson, who were in epistolary contact with Salinas and worked closely with him to make this his first published poetry collection. In 1972, Gordon was at Brown studying for her Masters when she took the class “American Poetry since 1900” with professor Glauco Cambon. Cambon had received one of the carceral newspapers, either *Aztlán* or *New Era*, had been fascinated with Salinas’s poem, and had decided to include it in his courses. Through these particular circumstances and the friendships that were thus formed,

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8. Jaimy Gordon (1944– ) is a writer and professor. In 2010 her novel *Lord of Misrule* won the National Book Award. She was Hellcoal’s point person for communicating with Salinas. Their letter exchanges are archived at Stanford and some of them are transcribed in *Salinas* 2006.

9. Glauco Cambon (1921–1988) was an Italianist with specialization in European and North American poetry. He started communicating with Salinas while he was still in prison and developed a friendship with him. Cambon would go on to write and publish an article on Salinas’s work: see *Cambon* 1971.
Hellcoal Press published 291 chapbooks, which were distributed to bookstores and amongst friends and academics (Salinas 2006, 189–207). Salinas, who by now lived in Seattle, received 30 copies, one of which is archived (see Figs. 3–3c). As can been seen, this iteration includes the graffiti stanza and the simple dedication to Eldridge Cleaver. Spanish words are neither underlined nor italicized.
A TRIP THROUGH THE MIND JAIL

for Eldridge

LA LOMA
Neighborhood of my youth
demolished, erased forever from
the universe.
You live on, captive, in the lonely
cellblocks of my mind.

Neighborhood of endless hills
muddled streets—all chuckhole lined—
that never drank of asphalt.
Kids barefoot/snotty-nosed
playing marbles/munching on hein tacos
(the kind you’ll never find in a cafe)
2 peaceful generations removed from
their abuelos’ revolution.

Neighborhood of dilapidated community hall
—Salón Cinco de Mayo—
yearly (May 5/Sept. 16) gathering
of the familias. Re-asserting pride
on those two significant days.
Speeches by the elders,
patriarchs with evidence of oppression
distinctly etched upon mezcal faces.
“Sons of the Independence”
Emphasis on allegiance to the tri-color
obscure names: JUAREZ & HIDALGO
their heroic deeds. Nostalgic tales of war
years under VILLA’S command. No one listened,
no one seemed to really care.
Afterwards, the dance. Modest Mexican
maidens dancing polkas together
across splintered wooden floor.
Neighborhood of Sunday night jamica at Guadalupe Church. For this for any occasion holidays holy days happy day round and round the promenade eating moonberries cupcakes & candies in the panes-histe el cedillo quisquialteth making eyes at girls from cloudy neighborhoods the amunisicki who responded all giggles and exccitement.

Neighborhood of forays town in Buen Vida. Buses Rita Count in Picojito-street neighborhood cops n robbers on the roadways smoking Perkins in people’s private night-time bedrooms hearings girls of Juicy Fruit gum for their broken grills hanging there in adolescents heads causing shocked faces & being run of for the night disenchanted wailing home affections (guimel) stopping smoke sincerity chicks in search of Modern Roman lovers, who always stood them up small to have their world is the magazine’s yours. Angry finger’s grabbing, squeezing, feeling, bunch loves implored close locally sisters, sigh & belly rubbish under shawls of Cristo Rey Church.

Neighborhood that never saw a school bus the cross-town walks were much more fun embarrassed when acquaintances or friends or relatives were sent home excused from class for having羽毛 to sell hair! Did only Mexican have stories in their hair? Quit gahah!

Neighborhood of my childhood neighborhood that no longer exists some said your sugar-fattened music is set in prisons the rest drifted away to be conjured up in minds of others like their For me only the NOW of THIS journey is REAL!!!

Neighborhood of my adolescence neighborhood that is no more YOU ARE THE PIECES OF MY FLESH!! Therefore, you ARE.

La Loma—Austin—Al Barrido.

I hear you no grudge i need you then . . identity . . a sense of belonging i need you now. So essential to adult days of imprisonment, you keep me away from INSANY’S hungry jaws. Smiling/Laughing/Crying.

I respect your having been:

My Loma of peace
My Rose of Angeles
My West Side of San Anto
My Queen of Roosevelt
My Jackson of San Jo
My Segundo of El Paso
My Battles of Albuquerque
My Weeby of Denver
Flies, Los Barrios, Barrio del Cielo, Guadalupe, Magnolia, Bornita Vista, Manor, La Soo, Chiquita, El Sur, and all Chico neighborhoods that now exist and ones existed somewhere . . . someone remembers . . .

September 1989

Locomagical
Subsequent book iterations:  
The poetry book published by Editorial Pocho-Ché

Editorial Pocho-Ché was established in the 1970’s in San Francisco by its founders Roberto Vargas and Alejandro Murguía. In his book *The Medicine of Memory: A Mexica Clan in California* (2002), Murguía explains that it was very difficult to find books about the Chicana experience and there were few or no Chicana or Latinx presses. By founding Pocho-Ché, their aim was to break the publishing industry’s monopoly and find ways to publish the works of up-and-coming Chicanx and Latinx writers. As an artists’ collective, Pocho-Ché published poetry and photography books and also magazines and newspapers covering revolutionary and radical content such as the guerrilla wars in Nicaragua and the FBI attacks against the Oglala people at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (Murguía 2002, 124).

Salinas was by now an active member of the Chicano Arts Movement, and thus his poetry fit well ideologically with the politics of Pocho-Ché. He did not live in San Francisco, but he was part of Pocho-Ché’s editorial board and in 1980 published his first book of poetry titled *Un Trip Through the Mind Jail y Otras Excursions: Poemas de raúlrsalinas*. This book contains 68 poems including the five from *Viaje/Trip* (1973). This iteration presents the poem *A Trip* with the graffiti stanza, with no words underlined or italicized, and is the first text in which Salinas withdrew the poem’s dedication to Eldridge Cleaver. By 1980 Cleaver had become a conservative evangelical; he had also registered as a Republican.

Subsequent book iterations:  
The reprint by Arte Público Press

In 1999 Arte Público Press, an academic press for the University of Houston, published a reprint of *Un Trip Through the Mind Jail: Poems*. This reprint was part of their series “Pioneers of Modern U.S. Hispanic Literature”, which is part of a larger project of recovering and disseminating Hispanic culture in the US.10 This reprint in a prestigious academic press signals Salinas’s canonization and the general recognition that his work is an important contribution to Latinx and Chicanx letters. This 1999 itera-

10. For more information on this project, see https://artepublicopress.com/recovery-program/.
tion of A Trip is identical to the one published by Pocho-Ché in 1980: it includes the graffiti stanza, it does not underline or italicize any words, and it excludes the dedication. The only major difference between these two books is that the 1999 reprint includes one more poem [Untitled] Lightning Steed Immaculate.

**Access to these texts and the process of Salinas’s canonization**

The chapbook Viaje/Trip published by Hellcoal Press (1973) seems almost impossible to track down. It has not been reprinted, it is not sold online, and it is not in circulation within academic libraries. The archives at Stanford do hold a copy, previously cited and referenced, that belonged to the poet. Salinas’s first book of poems, Un Trip Through the Mind Jail, published by Editorial Pocho-Ché (1980), is out of print but available online from small bookstores even though most university libraries do not hold this edition. The 1999 reprint of this book by Arte Público Press is widely available online and in print as well as in university libraries. The four anthologies in which this poem appears are available for purchase online and can be found in circulation in university libraries.

These authorized texts published by Salinas in various presses over four decades reflect the canonization process of his work and the way his poetry has gained prestige. The 1973 chapbook is a text that is almost lost to time but is very important since it is the first Salinas publication outside of prison. It also indicates the kind of literary networks that existed between academia and prison print culture in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The 1980 poetry book published by Pocho-Ché locates Salinas at the flourishing of the Chicano Arts Movement and demonstrates his commitment to the revolutionary politics of the Civil Rights Movement. The 1999 reprint by Arte Público canonizes this work (academically) and gives this book a much wider audience. Given that this book was published within a series called “Pioneers of Modern U.S. Hispanic Literature” and as part of a wider recovery and dissemination project, it also signals that Salinas is recognized as an exemplary voice of Chicanx and Latinx letters.

**Toward a multimedia textual history**

Arguably the most innovative and appealing aspect of this poem is the inclusion of the graphic stanza (see Fig. 4). As has been shown, the inclusion of this vital part of the poem has not always been prioritized in all
iterations. It is also noteworthy that there has been rather little critical engagement with the importance of this multimedia poetic innovation. Cordelia Candelaria in her 1986 *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction* engages at length with the poem and its relation to Salinas’s wider poetic project. Absent from her detailed and informative analysis is a deeper reflection on these placas. She does allude to Salinas’s originality by stating that his “experiences [. . . ] have produced a multilayered style of striking individuality” (1986, 109). Her main takeaway is related to Salinas’s multilingual poetics and implicit in her statement is the originality of this poetics.

Prior to Candelaria, Juan Bruce-Novoa critiqued Salinas’s poem in his 1982 *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*. Bruce-Novoa engages at length and in detail with this poem and provides a robust literary analysis of its themes, motifs, and characters. When analyzing the placas he states: “The graffiti included in the poem center the image of the cross, flanked by the number 13, marijuana and the protective-aggressive symbol are joined and placed at the heart of what the poem reveals as the sign of frustrated aspirations” (1982, 43). This is a rather superficial reading of these placas since each one of those images has a history, emanates from a semiotic Chicano tradition, and expresses an important part of Salinas’s life.

Pushing against this superficial reading Ben Olguín emphasizes that this graphic stanza “historicize[s] [Salinas’s] corpus by grounding it in the lived experiences and corresponding Chicana/o political unconscious” (2010, 134). Following Olguín it is thus possible to understand that the central placa of this triptych is a biographical inscription: Tapón is the nickname Salinas used in his youth; La Loma names his childhood neighborhood; the musical note at the bottom reflects Salinas’s love for jazz and his role as a prison saxophonist; and the cross framed by the number 13 alludes to a tattoo that Salinas carried on his right hand. These tattoos serve as signs of solidarity amongst Chicanx people and have historically been seen by Anglo America as symbols of crime and violence (Olguín 2010, 287). Notice the artistic multiplicity and circularity that unfolds: the poem has a placa embedded in its text and the embedded placa was partially tattooed on the poet’s body, thus creating a poetic dialectic between body and text.

This kind of multimedia circularity and artistic multiplicity also applies to the placas that flank the triptych. The note on the right, “Love La Carrie”, refers to an unknown lover of Salinas. Given Salinas’s five-year sentence for purported “possession of five dollars’ worth of marijuana” (Olguín 2010, 132), the marijuana leaves and joint that frame this message are also biographical symbols. Here the placa on the right is con-
Neighborhood of groups and clusters
sniffing gas, drinking muscatel
solidarity cement hardening
the clan the family the neighborhood the gang
NOMAS!
Restless innocents tattoo’d crosses on their hands
"Just doing things different"
"From now on, all troublemaking mex kids will be
sent to Gatesville for 9 months."
Henry home from La Corre
khakis worn too low—below the waist
the stomps, the gores with duck-tail
—Pachucos Yo—

Neighborhood of could-be artists
who plied their talents on the pool’s
bath-house walls/intricately adorned
with esoteric symbols of their cult:

[Image of a drawing]

the art form of our slums
more meaningful & significant
than Egypt’s finest hieroglyphics.

Neighborhood where purple clouds of Yesca
smoke one day descended & embraced us all.
Skulls uncapped—Rhythm n’ Blues
—Chalie’s 7th. St. Club
loud music/wine spodee-odees/barbecue grass
our very own connection man: big black Johnny B—

Neighborhood of Reyes’ Bar
where Lalo shotgunned
Pete Evans to death because of
an unintentional stare
and because he was escuadra,
only to end his life neatly sliced
by prison barber’s razor.

Facing, Figure 4. Raúl R. Salinas Archives, MO774, box 1, folder 21. With permission from Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries.
nected with the central placa’s representation of the number 13: “M”, for marijuana, is the 13th letter in the alphabet. Again it is important to note that this placa is also a tattoo that Salinas carried on his body, thus continuing the text-as-body and body-as-text dialectic.

The placa on the left may be the most hermetic and complex of all to untangle. The outside perpendicular script “Lower Eastside” refers to Austin’s La Loma neighborhood where Salinas grew up. The bottom script “2-timer” refers to his time in prison, though it is not clear if this refers to how many times Salinas had gone to prison or how many times he had spent in isolation. The central part of this placa highlights the abbreviation “C/S”, meaning Con Safos. C/S is a Chicano homegrown, intellectual copyright create to safeguard Chicanx work (graffiti, paintings, poems, letters) and reassert Chicanx identity as part of a larger culture. It connects the writer with previous generations and indicates their participation within an artistic community. Lastly, the script above this copyright, “El Nufo”, may refer to another of Salinas’s nicknames, though I have been unable to find confirmation for this interpretation.

Conclusion

Salinas’s most cited, anthologized and celebrated poem A Trip through the Mind Jail has had a long textual life. In tracking the various publications of this poem we can trace Salinas’s rise as an exemplary voice of Chicanx and Latinx letters and thus also glimpse the wider artistic development of the Chicano Movement. Each public iteration of this poem, each different material manifestation of the poem, adds to its life as a work of art. The variance in textual manifestations of this poem demonstrate Salinas’s evolution from prison poet to canon poet and the growth of the Chicano Literary Movement itself. Here the theoretical contributions of Joseph Grigely are useful by buttressing the aforementioned textual history:

The work is a series, and the series is comprised not of acts of production compliance, but acts of variance. In this sense a literary work – be it a poem, a play, or a letter to Auntie Em – is an assemblage of texts, a polytext of seriated texts and versions. This formulation can be expressed by the equation:

\[ W \rightarrow T_1, T_2, T_3, \ldots T_N \]

Where $W =$ Work and $T =$ Text. It is important to note that the work is not equivalent to the sum of its texts [. . . ], but instead is an ongoing – infinite – manifestation of textual appearance, whether those texts are authorized or not.


What I have put forth in this essay is a seriated textual history that attends to the variances of this poem in its many different textual manifestations. In assembling a finite series of public texts that are more or less accessible, my aim has been to contribute to and clarify the passage of this poem in print. However, the open question that remains is how to understand and assemble the multimedia iterations of this work of art. Two projects, therefore, remain outstanding. As mentioned previously, the dialectic that the graphic stanza creates between the body of the poet and the text of the poem remains understudied. In an act of radical poetic innovation Salinas inscribed his body, via his tattoos, into the textual manifestation of this work. His body thus becomes a readable extension of the poem. Following Olguin’s detailed study of Chicano carceral tattoo culture it is possible to read Salinas’s tattooed body (there is a significant photographic archive of Salinas’s tattoos) as part of the assemblage of this poem. The tattooed body of the poet becomes a vital extension of the poem, which in turn connects his tattoos with the graffiti and murals of his youth.

A second project that must be undertaken concerns the iterations of this poem that were performed at open mics, rallies, readings, and other kinds of live presentations. Salinas referred to himself as a “performance oral poet within the oral tradition”, which indicates that *A Trip* would have been recited by him.12 A number of video recordings exist in the archives, and it will be valuable to analyze these performances and track the variances that an oral performance brings forth. Furthermore, it will be fascinating to observe how such a performance deals with reading the placas, how the poet references (or not) the dedication, and if there is an explicit connection made between the tattoos on the page and on the body.

Lastly, as has been shown, the study of *A Trip Through the Mind Jail* remits the reader to multiple texts, spaces, media, and bodies beyond the singular textual iteration. The wider project on which I am embarked to study Salinas’s poetry seeks to create an open-source digital platform where the multiplicity of Salinas’s creative productions can be accessed in a fluid

12. See the 1994 interview conducted by Olguín and Mendoza. This specific assertion is made at minute 23. https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/qy544qy8912.
manner. The end goal is to have a digital project that facilitates access to the texts, images, and histories that Salinas references. A radically innovative poet like Salinas deserves a radically innovative hermeneutics that does justice to his artistic ingenuity.

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Work Cited

Archival Material


Printed Works

S. Vidales Martínez: A Trip Through the Mind Jail


